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Lived Experiences of Elementary School Principals in Dubai

Lama Jbara
Walden University

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Lama Jbara

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Lived Experiences of Elementary School Principals in Dubai

by

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MA, American University of Beirut, 2012

BS, American University of Beirut, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

March 2022

Abstract

The research problem addressed in this study is the leadership styles and influences of elementary private school principals in Dubai who identify as transformational leaders. Insights from this study can inform further research into school leadership in the Arab world, as well as how best to share leadership experiences among elementary private school principals Dubai. The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the lived experiences of self-reported transformational leaders in elementary private schools in Dubai. The conceptual framework for this research is transformational leadership. The research question addressed in this study is: How do elementary private school principals in Dubai describe their lived experiences as self-reported transformational leaders? Semi structured interviews were used as the data collection method for this phenomenological research. Twelve self-reported transformational school principals, who met the inclusion criteria of a minimum of 2 years as elementary school principal in Dubai, participated in the study. Following a five-step analysis strategy, 4 key themes (teamwork, empathy, community, and versatility) and 15 codes emerged. The participants shared how engaging in transformational leadership approaches impacts teamwork among stakeholders, allows them to demonstrate empathy towards others, promotes a sense of community within the school, and encourages versatility for the school leaders. The results of the current study can be used to affect positive social change within the elementary private school leadership community by inspiring the creation of platforms within the elementary private school community in Dubai, for principals to share their experiences candidly, and build on best practices.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my son, Joe. You are my love, my light, and my every purpose. I started this journey when you were just a baby, and you have seen me through it every step of the way. I hope my love for learning will motivate you to be a lifelong learner and achieve your fullest potential. Grow through education and be all that you can be my baby boy.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

An elementary school principal's leadership style has a direct bearing on student achievement, staff performance, and satisfaction, and the overall climate of the school (Bellibas & Liu, 2018; Elpisah & Hartini, 2019; Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2019; Gumilar & Munzir, 2018; Kurland, 2019; Romanowski et al., 2019; Simon et al., 2019). Empirical evidence related to elementary school principals in the Arab world, in particular Dubai, is limited (Matthew, 2016). According to Matthew (2016), it is important to engage in research that sheds light on the self-reported leadership practices of elementary private school principals in Dubai to address the lack of documentation related to effective leadership strategies in the local context. This qualitative study aimed to engage participants, particularly elementary private school principals in Dubai, to reflect on their leadership styles and influences as self-reported transformational leaders, by using semi structured, in-depth interviews.

Background

In the context of Dubai, there is little documentation regarding the practice and role of school principals. In 2015, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), in collaboration with the Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB), a formal document was released detailing the requirements and processes for appointing a principal in Dubai. Both authorities confirmed that the first and foremost task of the principal was to propel the school towards the outlined United Arab Emirates vision 2021. According to the ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the

school principal must first strive to assist Dubai in becoming one of the highest 20 performing countries, as rated by the Program for International Student Assessment; and second, strive to assist Dubai in becoming one of the highest 15 performing countries, as rated by the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (Knowledge and Human Development Authority [KHDA], 2015). The KHDA is the governing body responsible for evaluating a principal's knowledge of the National Agenda, international assessments, and efficiency in monitoring curriculum delivery (KHDA, 2015). The effectiveness of a principal in Dubai centers on the ability to perform designated roles and responsibilities. There is no documentation related to effective leadership strategies in the local context. Educational leadership in Dubai remains a novel concept, relatively unexamined, in contrast to the vast research available from Western countries. Most pertinent to the study is the lack of consideration for self-assessment and reflection on the part of the principal. Based on the lack of relevant research in the United Arab Emirates, the relevant education authorities in Dubai may benefit from examining the value that researchers in the Western world put towards understanding principal self-efficacy through lived experiences. While research exists on elementary principals in the U.S. and Europe, there is a gap in the literature concerning the lived experiences of educational leaders in the Middle East, and particularly in Dubai.

Problem Statement

The research problem addressed in this study was the leadership styles and influences of elementary private school principals in Dubai who identify as transformational leaders. Engaging elementary private school principals in Dubai in

reflection on their styles and influences as self-reported transformational leaders was a worthy investigation for several reasons.

Firstly, In Dubai, there are a total of 1,843 Emirati educational professionals employed in K-12 schools. Emiratis are the native population of the United Arab Emirates. There are 13,090 expatriate educational professionals in Dubai. The expatriate community is represented by non-native professionals working at schools in Dubai. This is a significant ratio of 1:8 (Chebbi, 2017). Dubai is developing at an exponential rate, focusing on its international status. In terms of education policy, considerations such as policy origin, cultural context, and impact of expatriate management, have been widely overlooked (Matsumoto, 2019). Dubai hires thousands of English-speaking education professionals each year. These professionals come from countries such as the United States, Canada, England, South Africa, and Ireland (Dickson, 2012). The perceived influences of elementary private school principals in Dubai are shaped by their backgrounds and understanding of the local climate. This is not a commonly explored theme in the available literature on the Middle East and Gulf region, hence making the experience a salient one for investigation (Matthew, 2016). It is important to note that the Gulf Coalition Countries (GCC), including the UAE, all have antidefamation laws specifying punitive actions for publishing content that may paint the country in a less than favorable light. Particularly in the UAE, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority is responsible for monitoring defamation published electronically (Demerdash, 2017).

Secondly, globalization reshapes cultural traditions because of the increased interconnectedness of peoples. However, the “pick and mix approach” to education policy practices in the UAE has resulted in policy for private schools that is decontextualized from culture and practices that do not exist in ecological relationships with one another. The “pick and mix” approach refers to school leaders selecting parts of different policies and practices based on the situation or on the preferences of the school leader at the time (Chung, 2016). According to Burdett and O’Donnelle (2016), educational reform cannot be divorced from societal networks and the cultural context. The UAE continues to shape education policy through the reliance on foreign expertise and western models. Matsumoto (2019) asserted that policy documentation in the UAE reflects a strong reliance on global education reform, such as external assessment and accountability, that is heavily western influenced. A closer look at the tangible and intangible components of day-to-day elementary private school leadership practices can serve to describe the potential influences of borrowed leadership because of the reliance on expatriate education professionals.

Thirdly, according to Al Suwaidi and Schoepp (2015), the multicultural nature of private school leadership in the UAE influences leadership practices and results in a narrow perspective on the part of the school leader. The principal’s communication style, values, religious beliefs, and attitudes differ greatly from those of the students and stakeholders. Consequently, the reliance on expatriate educational professionals, particularly at the managerial level, has the potential to interfere with the school leader’s ability to perform effectively within the cultural context (Hattie, 2015; Kraft et al., 2016).

Given the salience of the proposed investigation, understanding how private school principals in Dubai perceive their experiences as self-reported transformational leaders can enhance and extend the available literature on the practice of elementary school principal leadership.

A systematic review of the available literature on educational leadership in the Arab world by Hammad and Hallinger (2017) highlighted the gap in the literature specifically related to understanding the role of the educational leader in Arab societies. The acquired knowledge of experienced educational leadership in this region remains limited (Arar et al., 2017). To address the gap in the literature, lived experiences were explored. The seminal work of Van Manen (1990) framed lived experience as a synthesis of human experiences, and how actions and choices impact our perceptions of knowledge. Lived experience acknowledged the probity of individual life experiences and how those experiences can relate to a larger audience through common themes.

The significance of the elementary phase is that children at the elementary level are in the early stages of their formative years. The elementary school principal's approach to leadership has a direct influence on student learning and achievement, as well as school improvement (Shahadan & Oliver, 2016). Numerous studies support the findings that elementary school leadership has a dramatic impact on student achievement and teacher satisfaction (Bellibas & Liu, 2018; Elpisah & Hartini, 2019; Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2019; Gumilar & Munzir, 2018; Kurland, 2019; Romanowski et al., 2019; Simon et al., 2019). According to the findings of the Wallace Foundation (2016), Fisher et al. (2016), and Hattie (2015), the role of the elementary school principal is crucial for

developing a school culture of learning and success. Understanding leadership at the foundational stage of formal education is necessary and elementary school principals are in an ideal position to ensure a high caliber of teaching and learning (Wallace Foundation, 2016). Elementary principals who demonstrate effective leadership act as instructional leaders to their staff, influencing the teaching and learning that happens every day. Principals are catalysts for change when promoting a positive and supportive environment, demonstrating successful conflict-resolution skills, and building an atmosphere of trust (Hayes & Irby, 2019). A deeper understanding of how elementary private school principals in Dubai perceive their experiences as self-reported transformational leaders elucidated the efficacy of the actualization of their leadership approaches and strategies.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of self-reported transformational leaders in private elementary schools in Dubai. Insight into how principals in Dubai perceive their experiences as school leaders could inform further research into school leadership in the Arab world, as well as inform how best to share leadership experiences among elementary private school principals Dubai. The education profession is regarded as inferior in terms of career choices in the Arab world (Al Suwaidi & Schoepp, 2015). This may be a contributing factor to the gap in research regarding educational leadership in the Arab world (Al Suwaidi & Schoepp, 2015). Research specific to Dubai is essential to understand the interpretive processes situated within the elementary private school principal's lifeworld (Neubauer et al., 2019).

According to Jones (2018), there is a lack of evidence on effective elementary school leadership, as compared with the available research at the secondary level. There is a need to examine how elementary private school principals work towards creating a culture of success, as well as what skills and leadership qualities are required to do so. The elementary phase is the first phase of formal schooling and the foundation upon which students build their formal, social, and emotional learning. The elementary school principal engages in a pivotal role, guiding all stakeholders towards a vision and mission aimed at building the school culture (Hattie, 2015).

The gap in the literature extends to the understanding of the lived experiences of elementary school principals as self-reported transformational leaders, specifically in Dubai. In addition, investigating self-reported leadership perceptions in Dubai is important because the findings can be used to provide feedback based on the desired outcomes of the Education 2030 Strategy set by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education in Dubai has outlined four main pillars of focus to achieve the 2030 education strategic plan. The pillars are quality, efficiency, innovation, and harmonization (Ministry of Education, 2019). The Ministry of Education has also highlighted 33 main initiatives for the implementation phase. These initiatives include the National Quality Framework initiative which seeks to develop assessment-based standards, while maintaining local needs to achieve an effective quality control system; the Transparent Classification of Outputs initiative which aims to outline well-defined classification mechanisms that can be applied to all institutions. Quality reports will be enforced to maintain transparency; the Expanded Professional Experience initiative

which will focus on training for educational professionals, on-campus work and vocational training for students, job shadowing, and joint ventures with local companies; as well as developing training programs for school leaders in Dubai (Ministry of Education, 2019).

Investigation at the elementary education phase is important because the country has witnessed an overhaul of its education system, with schools implementing globally used curriculums at the national level (Al Basha, 2018). Not only is elementary education mandatory in Dubai; moreover, successful elementary school experiences can also set the tone for students in Dubai to become life-long learners. In addition, the available research on educational leadership in the Middle East uses data collected from multiple K-12 levels, without specifically focusing on elementary, middle school, or high school. Focused research on elementary school leadership can illuminate the need for further educational leadership studies at the elementary level in the Arab world to identify patterns and linkages in burgeoning Arab literature (Hammad & Hallinger, 2017). The study can also serve as a springboard for further research, providing academics with implications for further research. To address this gap, this study used the qualitative approach (Nash et al., 2014) and specifically phenomenology as a methodology. In-depth semi structured interviews were used to investigate how principals understand their experiences as self-reported transformational leaders in elementary private schools in Dubai. The use of in-depth interviews has helped previously in achieving data saturation to the point which no new information is emerging from the interviews conducted (Boddy, 2016).

Research Question

The following research question was addressed:

Research Question 1: How do elementary private school principals in Dubai describe their lived experiences as self-reported transformational leaders?

Conceptual Framework

Transformational leadership is a contemporary leadership theory that focuses on traits fostered by leaders to inspire, motivate, and influence stakeholders (Kouni et al., 2018). Transformational leadership was a suitable conceptual framework for the study for two key reasons. Firstly, the theory lends itself to exploring change and the uncertainties that change can bring, particularly in a multicultural setting like Dubai. Secondly, the analytic capabilities of transformational leadership provide opportunities for elementary private school principals in Dubai to address organizational issues efficiently, transparently, and equitably. The emergent themes were investigated through semi structured interviews to understand the self-reported traits and characteristics of elementary private school principals in Dubai. An elementary school principal who demonstrates the characteristics of transformational leadership motivates stakeholders towards capacity building, focusing on organizational goals, and increasing staff commitment levels through shared instructional leadership (Daniels et al., 2019; Matthew, 2016). Concerning the current study, transformational leadership provided the elementary school principal with the tools needed to lead through empowerment and group decision-making (Matthew, 2016). The seminal work of Leithwood and Jantzi

(1990) legitimized the theory of transformational leadership. Chapter 2 provides a more detailed description of the conceptual framework.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was a qualitative phenomenological study. Qualitative research is consistent with the purpose of the study which is to understand the lived experiences of principals of Dubai. Van Manen's seminal work (1990) defined phenomenology as the study of the linguistic construction and description of a phenomenon. A phenomenological study aimed to capture lived experiences both holistically and analytically while being evocative and precise. Van Manen (1990) employed a phenomenological approach rooted in a combination of both descriptive and interpretive phenomenology. In line with the framework of transformational leadership, investigation using the qualitative lens of lived experiences can enhance the narratives of professional identities, value-informed processes, the understanding of local cultural contexts, and legitimacy as a school leader (Crow et al., 2017). I engaged in a five-step data analysis strategy highlighted by Akinyode and Khan (2018). This data analysis strategy is suitable for all qualitative research and simply represents a more well-defined, step by step procedure for sorting, grouping, and analyzing data. Akinyode and Khan stressed that following this detailed data analysis procedure was crucial to data interpretation that allowed for codes to become categories, and for categories to ultimately converge into higher order themes. Twelve elementary school principals participated in the study. This allowed me to extrapolate themes, link observations, and inform on the essence of the phenomena.

Definitions

The following terms referred to throughout the study may have several definitions depending on context. To avoid misinterpretation of the intended terms, they have been defined below:

Climate: The internal characteristics of a school including interpersonal relationships, health and safety practices, school connectedness, and engagement (De Pedro et al., 2016). School climate relates to the experiences with school life that reflect the organizational structure, norms, and values (Ruiz et al., 2018).

Leadership: The role of and activities engaged in by those who promote student outcomes, teaching and learning, staff satisfaction, learning culture, and positive school climate (Cruickshank, 2017). School leaders are the architects of organizational improvement (Poloncic, 2016).

School culture: The school culture describes the environment that makes a school unique. This includes how leaders support capacity-building and collegiality; evidence-based teaching and learning; professionalism; a culture of learning; and community engagement (Godfrey, 2016). School culture reflects the entirety of the organizational experience (Piotrowsky, 2016).

Stakeholder: An individual or group of individuals having some vested interest in a program, directly or indirectly (Matthew, 2016). Stakeholders relate to an organization in the sense that they somehow share in the project undertaking (McGarth & Whitty, 2017).

Assumptions

An underlying assumption of the proposed doctoral research was that the elementary private school principals participating in the study would be able to engage in meaningful self-reflection. Another underlying assumption was that participants would be able to provide me with open and honest interview responses. A third underlying assumption was that all elementary private school principals in Dubai would have shared experiences. These assumptions were necessary in the context of the study because active engagement in the semi structured interviews revealed common themes among the responses.

Scope and Delimitations

The specific aspects of the research problem that was addressed in the study are elementary private school principals and their lived experiences as self-reported transformational leaders. The scope of the proposed doctoral research included an in-depth, semi structured interviews of at least twelve elementary school principals in Dubai. I did not intend to include all school principals, including those at the middle school and high school levels. The design of the study allowed me to focus on a demographic that is currently under-researched. Hence, the results could not be considered generalizable to elementary private school principals in other cultural settings.

Limitations

The applicability of the results collected from this doctoral research was limited because of the participant pool. As mentioned above, this may limit generalizations unless the context is exceedingly comparable. However, I maintained the importance of

the proposed research because information on elementary private school principals in Dubai is limited in academic works. I did not face any cultural challenges that impacted the ability to collect data, since I have a background in elementary education and vast experience with elementary private school principals. I did have some bias in the interpretation of participant responses. This bias may have been sparked by the varied interactions with previous elementary school leaders. To address this bias, I engaged in reflexivity and member checking. Chapter 3 describes these issues of trustworthiness in greater detail.

Significance

The significance of this study is its potential to affect positive social change in the way that elementary private school principals in Dubai connect and share their leadership experiences. In line with the Education 2020 Strategy set by the Ministry of Education, the proposed research has the potential to contribute positively to the actualization of the local government's goal of developing training programs for school leaders in Dubai (Ministry of Education, 2019). This research is unique given there is minimal literature available which directly relates to leadership practices in the Middle East, particularly in Dubai. Findings from this study may support professional practice by providing first-hand accounts of how elementary private school principals in Dubai perceive their influence on teaching and learning within their school setting. Focusing on lived experiences may allow for an understanding of different aspects of the participants' lives that is rich with reflexive awareness and a powerful first-person animation (Van Manen,

1990). In addition, this research may help gather insights into the contextual or situational factors that can influence elementary leadership practices.

Summary

Previous research has highlighted the influences of leadership on school climate. Effective leaders can successfully impact teaching and learning environments, enhance student performance, and encourage organizational policies that stakeholders can subscribe to (Bellibas & Liu, 2018; Elpisah & Hartini, 2019; Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2019; Gumilar & Munzir, 2018; Kurland, 2019; Romanowski et al., 2019; Simon et al., 2019). The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of self-reported transformational leaders in elementary private school in Dubai. Transformational leadership was employed as a conceptual framework to explore self-reported leadership in the setting of Dubai, and reflect on organizational issues efficiently, transparently, and equitably. This study was a qualitative study, designed using the phenomenological lens to describe and understand the lived experiences of self-reported transformational leaders in private elementary school in Dubai. The data from the in-depth, semi structured interviews with the participants revealed significant emergent themes. There is minimal literature available which directly relates to leadership practices in the Middle East, particularly in Dubai. This study served to fill a knowledge void. It also has the potential to provide a deeper understanding of participants' experiences that demonstrate reflexive awareness and gather insights into the issues that can sway elementary leadership practices. Chapter 2 provides an in-depth review of the literature on leadership theories; leadership influences on teaching and

learning; education leadership in the Arab world; creating a culture of success; skills and leadership qualities of elementary school principals; leadership perceptions; the experiences of Elementary Principals; and the literature gap.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The research problem that was addressed in the study is the leadership styles and influences of elementary private school principals in Dubai who identify as transformational leaders. The way in which elementary private school principals perceive their experiences as leaders could be influenced by their backgrounds and understanding of the local climate. There is a gap in the literature specifically related to the understanding the role of the educational leader Arab societies. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of self-reported transformational leaders in elementary private schools in Dubai.

Educational leadership is a critical tenet of establishing a learning culture that supports success among teachers and students in schools. Fullan (2007) defined leadership as a persuasion process that leaders use to influence others into pursuing similar objectives. The effectiveness of leaders is attainable when they build a culture of trust among subordinates. It has been well documented that effective leadership has the potential to positively influence teaching and learning environments, enhance student performance, and promote organizational policies that stakeholders can endorse (Bellibas & Liu, 2018; Elpisah & Hartini, 2019; Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2019; Gumilar & Munzir, 2018; Kurland, 2019; Romanowski et al., 2019; Simon et al., 2019). Ibrahim and Al-Taneiji (2013) established that group discussions are crucial to decision-making among leaders, and this ensures trust among subordinates. In an academic setting, leadership is a way of life dedicated to inducing professionalism. Profoundly, this entails

how leaders behave towards others; how they interact, engage, and help people achieve their goals.

In their attempt to synthesize the literature on the functional definition of leadership, Daniels et al. (2019) proposed that leadership in the school setting was a process of influence in which all stakeholders partake, having developed a shared vested interest in the outlined vision of the organization. Transformational leadership theory has been linked to upper management success and middle leadership effectiveness (Nazayanti et al., 2019). It remains to date the most closely examined and debated leadership theory (Anderson, 2017). The transformational leader demonstrates idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration to varying degrees with the aim of achieving organizational goals; leader competence is key. The transformational leader inspires and motivates by example, demonstrating the behaviors required of staff. Openness and a nonthreatening work environment allow teachers to participate in problem solving and innovation, as well as higher levels of self-efficacy (Nazayanti et al., 2019).

In the case of the Arab world, researchers identified incongruence between pedagogical approaches from the West and conventional methods that are prevalent in the Arab classroom (Khattab & Wong, 2019). Despite being of the youngest Middle Eastern nations, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has made remarkable progress in the education sector with Dubai being home to 209 private schools. The curricular tracks on offer include the American, British, Australian, Canadian, International Baccalaureate, Pakistani, German, French, Indian, and international hybrid curriculums. Dubai has relied

almost exclusively on Western education professionals (Gallagher, 2019). Further impacting educational leadership in Dubai is the compelling policy transfer that is tied closely to international assistance. Western policies, uncritically borrowed, dominate the leadership discourse (Matsumoto, 2019). These policies, no matter how successful in the origin country, remain decontextualized in the UAE. Chung (2016) compared policy practice in the UAE to a pick and mix, or buffet sampling approach. Matsumoto (2019) highlighted that the cultural influence of expatriate leadership in the UAE was a gap in the literature and warranted further investigation.

The current literature review is divided into eight sections, explaining each tenet of the topic, including leadership theories; leadership influences on teaching and learning; education leadership in the Arab world; creating a culture of success; skills and leadership qualities of elementary school principals; leadership perceptions; the experiences of elementary principals; and the literature gap.

Literature Search Strategy

Several databases were accessed for this study through the Walden University Library page including Academic Search Complete, ERIC, Sage Premier, ProQuest, Taylor & Francis, and EBSCO Host. Google Scholar was also used to provide a broader search base. Key search terms used for the literature review were *school principal, elementary, leadership, leadership theories, perceptions of leadership, transformational leadership, qualities, principal, Middle East, Gulf countries, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Arab, and Knowledge and Human Development Authority*. The literature was reviewed with a focus on alignment to the problem, the purpose of the proposed study,

and the research question. The search parameters were set to dates ranging from January 2015- January 2020, peer reviewed, and full text. I also accessed the reference lists of all the articles and dissertations for additional relevant materials. Additional literatures were gathered until reaching saturation.

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of self-reported transformational leaders in elementary private schools in Dubai. To further the purpose, transformational leadership has been selected as a framework for the study.

Transformational leadership is a contemporary leadership theory that focuses on traits fostered by leaders to inspire, motivate, and influence stakeholders (Kouni et al., 2018).

Transformational leadership is a suitable conceptual framework for the proposed study for two key reasons. Primarily, the theory lends itself to exploring change and the uncertainties that change can bring, particularly in a multicultural setting like Dubai.

Secondly, the analytic capabilities of transformational leadership provide opportunities for elementary private school principals in Dubai to address organizational issues

efficiently, transparently, and equitably. The emergent themes that resulted from the

proposed semi-structured interviews were analyzed to understand the lived experiences of self-reported transformational leaders in private elementary school in Dubai. An

elementary school principal who demonstrates the characteristics of transformational

leadership motivates stakeholders towards capacity building, focusing on organizational goals, and increasing staff commitment levels through shared instructional leadership

(Daniels et al., 2019; Matthew, 2016). In relation to the current proposed study,

transformational leadership provides the elementary school principal with the tools needed to lead through empowerment and group decision-making (Matthew, 2016). The seminal work of Leithwood and Jantzi (1990) has defined and detailed the theory of transformational leadership.

Review of Empirical Literature

In the following sections, I offered a review of educational leadership theories with a particular focus on transformational leadership; leadership influences on teaching and learning; an overview of education leadership in the Arab world; the factors that promote creating a culture of success; skills and leadership qualities of elementary school principals; leadership perceptions; a review of the literature on experiences of elementary principals; and the literature gap. The topics covered below have the potential to impact the lived experiences of elementary school principals.

Leadership Theories

In a rapidly changing world, many leadership techniques appear to contradict and impact practices on a daily routine. In an information-driven world, these changes are facilitated by new findings offering suggestions and recommendations to processes that have existed for centuries and as a result tension arise and there is not clarity yet as to what is the most effective leadership strategy. Shaya and Khait (2017) identified issues affecting the adoption of a strategic leadership model to be inclined to variations in social and economic empowerment of women in the Middle East. The findings of Shaya and Khait amplified the existing conflicting ideas hence making it difficult to agree on the specific issues influencing educational leadership. Nevertheless, institutions and

individuals in leadership positions have taken an interest in building relationships between different leadership practices and cultures to create a balanced environment.

In a study by Huber and West (2002), they coined a four-stage development process for the leadership theory. The first stage focused on individual characteristics and qualities that foster traits of leadership and personality. The primary focus was to identify how unique backgrounds could shape leadership skills and attitudes that new leaders could gain insight from. However, not all leaders exhibited acceptable characteristics that can be copied by others; therefore, Popper and Lipshitz (1993) suggested a definition of traits people were expected to adopt from inspirational leaders.

Huber and West (2002) focused the second stage on capabilities, and skills leaders use as well as the behaviors they apply that are associated with effective leadership. According to Mostovicz et al. (2009), inquiries about individual skills laid the foundation for behavioral theories similar to trait theories. However, the challenge with both theories is that they failed to offer empirical evidence to support effective traits in leadership. With the first stages in mind, understandings about task and people-centered paradigms provoked situational as well as generalized theories about leadership. In the third stage, Huber and West declared that focusing on isolated properties of a leader offers a more comprehensive behavioral idea about the effectiveness of an individual in deducing path-goal perspectives. Due to the collectiveness of learning settings, Hein and Chavez (2016) explained that theories based on individual abilities could transform moral and social responsibilities to foster personal success.

In the fourth stage, the connection between organizational culture, leadership style, and ideas about improvement and change are considered vital to the process. Hein and Chavez (2016) reported that the need to align individual interests with those of an organization called for a shift from transactional leadership to transformational leadership because people need leaders capable of paying attention to their needs. In-learning has become acceptable in educational settings where leaders participate and focus on ideals and ethics that are universally accepted. Huber and West (2002) found that continued use of transactional leadership emerged in centralized systems, while transformational models have taken over a decentralized system where people have different backgrounds and traits. That is why transformational leadership is congruent in managing multifaceted environments with the prospect of considering modern changes to facilitate efficient learning. Therefore, these discussions present various approaches adopted by previous researchers to explain the notion of leadership. It is evident that the authors used different frameworks in exploring a similar concept of educational leadership, leading to disagreements in their conclusions.

Transformational Leadership in Education

At the helm of effective change in educational settings is transformational leadership, which is efficient in helping students and teachers change the learning climate. In most cases, the challenge school leaders find is that they operate in environments with different individual backgrounds, cultures, and perceptions about how things should be done (Huber & West, 2002). This leads to the realization that at different levels of education, various skills are required to overcome issues in the

learning process. In that regard, transformational leadership is pertinent to the requirements of principal leadership among schools with different relationships between teachers and students. Kim (2019) emphasized the significance of transformational leadership in influencing the learning process and the attainment of the desired outcome among the subjects. The author mentioned that leaders should be visionary and inspirational to their stakeholders to effectively assert the required change (Kim, 2019).

Transformational leaders inspire others to be better, which makes them exceptional role models. In learning, teachers are expected to surpass job expectations to ensure classroom success. According to Shaya and Khait (2017), achieving success among teachers was related to motivation from leaders towards their subordinates, which became a norm when working in a conducive environment. Transformational leaders were influential in group-focused organizations because being effective meant that outcomes were shared, which improved performance. Wulffers et al. (2016) contended that leaders become extraordinary when they remain genuine and transparent, which helps them command admiration and respect. Due to this, fellow individuals in an educational setting will strive to copy similar personality traits to continue an organization's culture. However, increasing self-clarity is attainable through self-awareness that must be complemented by introspection (Wulffers et al., 2016). Therefore, school leaders in Dubai can enhance their legitimacy by improving the skills of fellow teachers and encouraging introspection and reflection.

The prominence of transformational leadership in the school system is associated with the demand for improved standards and educational outcomes by increasing the

accountability of leaders. Kim (2019) made a critical observation about transformational leadership as being member-focused; thus, associating ideas of organizational performance within the learning setting to achieve specific goals. An increase in the demand for transformational leaders by the public has contributed to the school systems adopting measures to transform how members interact and develop as a team.

Observations made by researchers indicate that the learning environment considers different aspects of leadership development; group, individual, and organization (Shaya & Khait, 2017). These are expected to facilitate a model that ensures the transfer of experiences and skills to teachers capable of becoming principals. Therefore, discussions from the literature suggest that competent leadership and learning processes in schools can be achieved through the incorporation of a transformational framework for inspiring students, instilling vision, and encouraging them to imitate the traits of their teachers.

Leadership Influences on Teaching and Learning

Harsoyo et al. (2019) examined the impacts of wisdom-based leadership on improving the competence of middle principals to show conditions that contribute to learning settings. Many variables that impact the experiences of school principals have been documented to show strong influence from school districts and management. Shaya and Khait (2017) studied the conditions of Arab states and found that the dire economic conditions have a human impact on the development of individuals in their capacity to assume the responsibility of leadership in learning environments. In addition, the charisma and vision of female leaders have been found to crucial in managing environments with different individual contexts (Shaya & Khait, 2017; Noman et al.,

2017). There are substantial indicators that while school principals envision their experiences of being transformational leaders, much of this is associated with teacher quality, which has an indirect impact on school success and effectiveness.

According to Sun et al. (2017), an increase in accountability led to educational leaders being besieged by the need to produce better students, through building on past experiences. Due to changes in the restructuring process of schools, scholars have suggested that leadership models improve student outcomes while contributing to the standards of teachers. Aldhaferi (2017) re-enforced the legitimacy of leadership in UAE schools because it comes with organizational cultures that can improve the knowledge of students and teachers to obtain better outcomes. In line with the expectations of schools, principals are tasked with building an inclusive environment where skills can be transferred to future generations. In many ways, this has become certain through training and skilling of teachers in leadership styles. Therefore, school principals can use their positions to empower and inspire others to become better leaders in an evolving education environment. The literature in this context suggests that educational leadership in Dubai can be boosted by embracing inclusivity and cultural diversity in learning environments. In essence, cultural knowledge should be inculcated in students to accept female leadership and harmonious interactions. Teachers should also demonstrate competence in leadership by empowering learners to overcome social and economic obstacles encountered in their institutions.

Influence of Leadership Styles

Mattar (2016) conducted a study to analyze the impact of leadership style

influence on the effectiveness of principals in schools. Many professions considered effective leaders as individuals with an ability to efficiently influence individual morale and satisfaction. Mattar (2016) found that transformational leadership with democratic traits improves the morale of employees when their input is considered. Specifically, providing employees with professional development goals is a role that principals must enforce to align organizational vision and mission with those of the teachers. On the same note, Rojratanavanit and Charoenkul (2018) analyzed the education sector and found that having reward systems empowers staff members because of the acknowledgment they get. The authors found that principals who encourage engagement democratically achieve positive results in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development among staff and students (Rojratanavanit & Charoenkul, 2018). Engaged leadership was also preferred by the authors due to the cumulative organizational change experienced by schools following this model (Rojratanavanit & Charoenkul, 2018). Therefore, principals strategizing for change should consider approaches which encourage the expression of students and staff as opposed to unidirectional commands.

According to Alhosani et al. (2017), leadership in schools should be grounded on a conceptual model that promotes the academic achievement and productivity of other stakeholders like teachers. The authors also found that employee dissatisfaction has been associated with autocratic leaders because they limit the input of individuals, which scholars have found to improve morale (Alhosani et al., 2017). Elsewhere, the findings of Sun et al. (2017) confirmed that purposeful leadership in schools enhance desirable values and self-efficacy of students, thereby promoting achievements. The authors

advised that leadership of learning institutions should create a conducive environment for students and teachers based on the antecedents like the desirable characteristics, organizational features, and expected qualities (Sun et al., 2017). In essence, school principals with prior experience about leadership can incorporate skills capable of helping teachers improve in the long-term. These discussions acknowledge the essence of collaborative frameworks in promoting leadership in the education setting. The use of democratic approaches and conceptual frameworks enable principals to understand the needs of both teachers and students making it easy to fulfil the goals of learning.

Education Leadership in the Arab world

Although economic prosperity has been driven by oil production, many of the Arab nations have witnessed a surge in the number of young people entering the public sector for more convenient employment. Across all GCC countries, nationals prefer to work in the public sector due to the high level of employment incentives. On average, a national is paid thirty percent more in the public sector than in the private sector. In addition, nationals working in the public sector have guaranteed job security irrespective of qualifications or performance (Shayah & Sun, 2019). Various studies show that this accounts for the low entry in entrepreneurship and innovation jobs in the public sector. As of 2019, the UAE had the highest percentage of expatriates in the workforce, at ninety-one percent. The private sector struggles to offer Emiratis comparable conditions to the public sector, including liberal leave allowances, significantly better pay, and employment protection of the public sector (Agarwal et al., 2019). For example, Khattab and Wong (2019) attributed this education perspective among young people to learning

approaches that vary due to cultures. The research showed that the situation is an incongruity between imported pedagogical approaches and conventional instructions that are prevalent in Arab classrooms (Khattab & Wong, 2019). Instead of focusing on a western approach in educational leadership, Khattab and Wong (2019) suggested the integration of western and Arabic leadership perspective to learning. It is perceived that the implementation of executive educational practices in the Arab world can inspire changes in school leadership. As a result, this can help reconcile the different leadership approaches among Arab executives. On the same note, Arar and Nasra (2019) supported that there is an indirect relationship between the leadership styles adopted by school principals and organization citizenship behavior observed among learners. The gap between leadership approaches and student's behavior is linked to occupational perceptions (Arar & Nasra, 2019). Therefore, the integration of various leadership frameworks such as transformational or transactional methods can help in fulfilling the goals of education in the Arab world. The findings of Arar and Nasra (2019) also implored teachers to utilize their occupational perceptions in enhancing their leadership competence while also transferring the skills to learners.

The success of educational leadership in the Arab world is associated with a positive influence among teachers and an increase in school effectiveness. Leadership is known as the ability of a group or person to influence and guide others while motivating and inspiring them to aim for a specific goal (Arar & Nasra, 2019). Hence, this demands high expectation levels, commitment, and the absence of coercion (Arar & Nasra, 2019). However, for leadership to prosper, it is argued that education specialists avoid the

adoption of universal leadership models as applicable models (Khattab & Wong, 2019). In the discussions of Khattab and Wong (2019), educators are urged to focus on student assessment to understand their knowledge levels and customize learning programs to skill them in leadership. Findings from different studies, as discussed above, have found gaps in the development of students due to the conflict between western and traditional approaches. In the end, engaging classroom facilitators with an integrated approach can help solve the concern regarding effectiveness in schools.

Although the Arab world is looking for inspiration and encouragement from the west, the issue of social justice remains pertinent when associated with women leaders in education. Research shows that discrimination and exclusion in the education system are prevalent and improving social justice is far from being addressed (Arar, 2018). The study further shows that women are marginalized with the pretext of school policies not offering enough ground to address the concerns (Arar, 2018). Access to educational processes remains imbalanced as schools are demanded to deal with the issue of inequality by embodying the principles of justice, caring, containment, and empathy (Arar, 2018). Similarly, Al Marzouqi and Forster (2011) noted that the prevalence of women leadership in the Emirates is still low due to social and cultural discriminations. The UAE continues to experience rapid modernization which Al Naqbi and Samier (2020) suggested had a relatively unexamined impact on leadership practices and identity facets of women engaged in educational leadership. The literature discussions in this section emphasizes the integration of cultures and embracement of women as equal partners in society. Universal leadership models can encourage foreign students and

teachers to achieve their milestones in the Arab world, while women get the opportunity to apply their proficiency in schools and organizational management.

Influence of Leadership on Arab Educators

In a study by Hawass (2019), it was found that the application of western approaches to investigate the leadership dynamics of Arab organizations does not reflect the empirical extent of the issue. Many of the empirical measurement approaches were criticized by Hawass (2019) because they do not offer validity and reliability of the different Arab contexts and cannot, therefore, provide a conclusive understanding of Arab related leadership. Hawass (2019) found that many Arab organizations schools are inclusive because they focus on cultural-bound behavior, which means that societal parameters are considered when defining learning environments. Moreover, it was documented that personal characteristics differ from one society to another: thus, leading to different levels of effectiveness among leaders (Hawass, 2019). The findings corroborate with the arguments of Arar et al. (2016) who investigated the existence of ethical leadership in Arab schools and found that many institutions have embraced inclusivity despite the school type and seniority. The learning environments encourage interactions, thereby exposing leaders to different cultures co-existing within the same institution (Arar et al., 2016).

Furthermore, Arar et al. (2016) found that centralizing educational institutions and resisting the interference of outside communities in any form would foster better management. Part of the process encompasses educating the Arab population based on their ethnic demands since each community subscribes to a different cultural and

religious ideology. Arar et al. (2016) also advised that leadership skills must be mixed with cultural practices to create awareness about the consequences of limiting society's investment in education. Instead, there should be a bridge that brings into the fold ethical leadership as an integral part of helping educational leaders fulfil the expectations of their societies. The discussions of Oplatka and Arar (2017) supported these sentiments by revealing that the success of educational leadership in the Arab world from the 1990s has been vested on implementation of unique patterns that are not affected by the barriers of Western scholarship. Arab culture has its styles and orientations, which can be explored to train competent leaders. Nonetheless, the inclusion of foreign influence must be monitored closely to avoid the eradication of traditional managerial practices which strengthen the Arab countries (Oplatka & Arar, 2017). These discussions highlight the proficiency of Arab educators and the inclusivity of the education system to integrate foreign culture in a cautious manner that does not threaten the traditional styles.

Creating a Culture of Success

In a study by Arar (2018), it was found that women leaders are driven by the positive attitudes of wanting to change society's perception of education as a rewarding profession. The author explored the association between transformational leadership and perceptions of principals by identifying qualities and styles applicable to different training programs among schools. AlGhawi (2017) noted that in learning environments where students exhibit different capacities, it is the principal's role to inspire success through training. The process requires introducing teachers at the earliest stage of their growth to leadership styles that foster inclusion and eliminate authoritarianism.

Therefore, leadership perception among principals is a crucial factor for developing educational leadership in elementary schools that is supportive and inclusive.

The outcomes of having a thriving culture are also entwined in the school excellence models that help schools self-assess educational effectiveness. Arar (2018) noted that individuals assuming responsibilities encourage staff members to apply similar traits during learning to improve student outcomes. There is a growing evolving concept among schools, whereby success aligns with leadership traits that emphasize holistic development for both teachers and students. This suggests that principals are focused on building platforms to influence systems, which bring synergies of succession and sustainability across school systems. In their study, Kheir-Faddul et al. (2019) cited that fundamental values among principals, including generosity, courage, and protection, are intrinsic factors leading to congenial learning environments that encourage student participation reasonably. Principals must assume the role of leadership through training, but this has become an evaluation tool to assess the impact of school leaders on their subordinates.

Although many studies are spurring the role of principals in elementary schools, the integration of western perspectives and Arab ideologies is found to dominate many Arab schools. Noman et al. (2017) contended that improved quality in schools was associated with the input of leaders with transformational skills that aimed to revamp the education system to foster success. Within the last decade, elementary schools in Arab countries have focused on ensuring accountability among its school principals to foster the production of individuals with the necessary skills to make it in the world (Arar &

Nasra, 2019). The impact of hierarchic and autocratic styles in management are crucial in shaping the perseverance of traditional ideas teachers apply in the learning environment. Moreover, this phenomenon of development allocation of informal education skills is crucial to establishing influential and robust individuals who support high profile students and teachers.

According to Amtu et al. (2019), improving creativity among teachers contributed to several factors that influence the learning environment. The authors found that creative personal beliefs were critical traits that fostered creativity among teachers, and this was a pinnacle for principals when focusing on success (Amtu et al., 2019). Alkutich (2017) found that the sustainability of ethical practices in schools promoted leadership among teachers and quality of education. The study focused on the management of Abu Dhabi secondary schools and found that principals are upholding institutional cultures to create an enabling environment for both leadership and academic achievements. Noman et al. (2017) also recognized the influence of principals by asserting that these leaders adopt practices they believe can influence both staff and students to accomplish their goals. Therefore, the literature reveals how principals can use their leadership positions to influence the general institutional culture as well as the individual output of teachers, learners, and subordinate staff.

Skills and Leadership Qualities of Elementary School Principals

In the study conducted by Alkutich (2017), I explained that school leadership skills have always been critical for school principals. In most cases, principles are required to dedicate their energy and time to understand the needs of their schools, use

the available resources effectively, hire the best teachers, as well as to manage daily activities at school. Alkutich established that school principals were responsible for upholding the organizational culture and inspiring all the stakeholders to embrace such values. Similarly, Matsumoto (2019) acknowledged the role of principals in nurturing good leadership and academic performance in UAE schools. I noted that principals acted as the link between schools and the national policymakers concerned with aligning the quality standards of UAE academics with the standard global metrics (Matsumoto 2019). In this case, educational reforms would focus on how the UAE can uplift its education systems and leadership from the traditional models to globally acceptable levels without subjecting graduates to remedial programs.

Despite the need to improve school performance and maintain desired standards, research shows that being a school principal requires proficiency in multiple tasks like leadership, academic evaluation, the delegation of duties, and academic assessments (Alkutich, 2017). It is a complex job that requires all principals to dedicate their time and offer good leadership. Accordingly, Abdallah and Forawi (2017) stated that principals should demonstrate competent leadership styles for enhancing the success of educational institutions in the UAE. Principals are expected to accomplish administrative tasks, coordinate with external stakeholders, and provide inspirations for institutional culture (Abdallah & Forawi, 2017). In Dubai, school principals should prioritize activities, define positions and directions, and ensure that all barriers are mitigated to allow staff members to achieve the set goals and objectives. Such a position requires people with good leadership skills. Therefore, the literature discussed in this section confirms the

importance of having highly qualified principals in the management of UAE schools. According to the Knowledge and Human Development Authority Principal Appointment Guide published in 2015, school owners aiming to appoint a principal must ensure that the selected candidate has appropriate teaching experience, preferably with a degree in Education; no less than three years of school leadership experience, either in middle management or in the capacity of vice-principal; experience with a similar curriculum as that of the recruiting school; and an attested degree from a recognized higher learning institution. These are the only guidelines with regards to recruiting a principal in Dubai. Principals who can make informed decisions to apply suitable leadership styles and also collaborate with the national government to improve the quality of education are needed to uphold the culture of learning institutions in the UAE.

Collaboration and Teambuilding

As the head of a school, the principal is responsible for leading staff members and students to success. Collaboration involves the crucial step of showing a high degree of development, which is be demonstrated through unity, especially during times of crisis. Tremaine (2016) argued that a principal should be the first person to acknowledge mistakes and work on rectifying them. Through teambuilding, members are given an opportunity of reaching the same height as their compatriots at different levels. Thus, this implies that principals be open to the entire school population when they encounter challenges. Hein and Chavez (2016) supported that principals encouraged collaboration and teambuilding through transformational approaches. Leading an institution requires full commitment to inspire learners and teachers while also defining the values and

missions of the school. Principals who maintain a close association with their staff often get to learn about the areas of management that should be modified to improve performance (Hein & Chavez, 2016). As a leadership skill, collaboration is essential because it allows school principals to work meticulously with other teachers and students to devise plans that foster success; thus, encouraging individual performance. These discussions corroborated with the earlier findings of Thomas (2007), who stated that collaboration was the key to successful leadership in education because of the social changes which have impacted education. Thomas (2007) advised that school leadership was a collective responsibility of stakeholders including board members, principals, and government agencies for policy formulation and higher education. As such, all these stakeholders must participate in the identification of talents, support, and deliberation on the matters of institutional culture and academic performance.

Coordinating Diverse People

The influx of people from different backgrounds has turned schools into multicultural centers due to the global effect in Dubai. Tremaine (2016) posited that it was essential for principals to treat people equally irrespective of age, gender, socio-economic background, or creed. On that note, effectiveness among school leaders is achieved when they forego their prejudices and focus on creating an all-inclusive environment that ensures learning purposes. In that respect, AlShehhi and Alzouebi (2020) established that principals should have the skills to assess individuals from different circles to foster growth. The authors found that principals were not contented with the existing practices involving online application, interviews, and probation

(AlShehhi & Alzouebi, 2020). The leaders want comprehensive training on management and leadership of schools so that they can become acquainted with the necessary skills for monitoring institutional activities. Accordingly, Mohammed and Nadkarni (2011) supported that the coordination of diverse groups in an institution could boost performance and accomplishment of goals within stipulated deadlines. The urgency of deliverables might be compromised where there are multicultural teams that are not properly coordinated (Mohammed & Nadkarni, 2011). Another perspective was discussed by Kalargyrou et al. (2012) about the managerial skills for ensuring fairness in school leadership. The authors noted that inclusive models like transformational or transactional leadership styles gave learners and teachers fair chances of expressing themselves even in diverse environments (Kalargyrou et al., 2012). Therefore, selection of a particular approach by the principals creates consistency and fairness in learning and leadership. Institutions governed by principals who understand the values of team leadership can influence cultural integration, strong relations, and impartiality in schools.

Motivating professional Growth

As discussed by Pollock and Briscoe (2019), school leaders were encouraged to realize that teachers appreciated when they could identify activities or engagements that contributed to their professional growth opportunities. Consequently, it is advisable to avoid coercing teachers and students into taking part in activities that render them confined audiences because these do not add to personal growth. On that note, Arar (2018) emphasized that Arab female teachers, in particular, should be motivated to achieve their potential by utilizing the available opportunities to impart knowledge in

students as well as improving themselves. School principals have a responsibility as community leaders to advocate for social justice. This includes supporting diversity, personal and professional development, inclusion, and empowerment. Wang (2016) also suggested that Arab female teachers may require support from school principals, to become good leaders within the learning institutions and the community at large, due to a culturally institutionalized history of exclusion. Lowery-Moore et al. (2016) added that the professional growth of teachers should be a key consideration in school reforms to enhance identities and partnerships between instructors and school management. The authors also mentioned that professional growth in learning institutions makes teachers more confident and competent in their current roles (Lowery-Moore et al., 2016).

Another study regarding the concept of professional growth was conducted by Oliver (2005) who agreed that teachers should be given opportunities to gain management skills so that they can be assigned as the principals' assistants. The authors mentioned that the job descriptions of principals are increasingly becoming complex, so it is prudent to train regular teachers in readiness for managerial tasks (Oliver, 2005). Professional growth promotes visionary leadership in schools because teachers strive to contribute to the performance of the institution where they feel to rightfully belong (Oliver, 2005). Therefore, these discussions suggest that leadership in schools be a collective duty of the principal and staff members who should be acquainted with sufficient skills before the assignment of managerial duties.

Support and Discipline

School principals have the responsibility of ensuring support for their staff

members and commanding a solid discipline plan adhered to by all members. Eyal and Roth (2011) stated that the success of these skills requires that code is in place to tame unruly individuals and adhere to expected conduct as well as behavior. When a teacher is supported in what they do, it encourages them to focus on the immediate needs of the child. The effectiveness of support systems in school is witnessed when appropriate conduct is implemented when teachers identify uncharacteristic behavior among students, and principals ensure that they are dealt with accordingly (Eyal & Roth, 2011). The perception of discipline and support was also discussed by Pollock and Briscoe (2019), who acknowledged that teachers felt appreciated when they were listened to or engaged in decision-making processes. Skilled principals understand that they are responsible for what happens in the school environment and take affirmative action to foster trustworthy relationships that involve both students and staff members. Rigby et al. (2019) conducted a study about the similar concepts of support and discipline in schools and concluded that principals use discipline-specific instructions such as instructions, facilitation, and delegation to enact desirable values in learning institutions. Nonetheless, all these frameworks are implemented in collaboration with teachers to avoid resistance arising from the negative perceptions of subjective leadership.

Darmiati et al. (2020) documented that teachers required the support of principals to display the desired level of discipline and competency in leadership. The authors stated that principal's leadership motivated teachers to observe institutional culture and values whereas the students also became inspired by their instructors to work hard to attain the expected academic performance (Darmiati et al., 2020). Educational leadership is best

reinforced with the support of the principal and discipline of teachers. Working together with honor and respect of each one's position promotes good leadership in learning institutions.

Management Related Concerns among School Principals

In the United Arab Emirates, the issue of theoretically based teaching has affected the number of male principals in school because they consider education unattractive employment. Kemp et al. (2013) found that as the Arab region, leadership was based on lifetime development, perspectives, and experiences of leaders due to their impact on the education sector. The development is related to integration plans that have brought all genders into contact to focus on future generations. Shaw (1995) further reported that many girls' schools attracted large numbers of female teachers allowing girls to outperform boys because male teachers were refraining from the profession. According to Kemp et al. (2013), females in management positions became skilled in leadership through training to improve and extend services to students and staff members. Even though the findings revealed that women are still underrepresented in leadership, it was acknowledged there is an increasing number of female leaders in departmental leadership, hospitality industries, and pseudo services (Kemp et al., 2013). For example, the same study indicates that the number of female leaders in schools has increased; thus, allowing women to contribute to better leadership in schools. Moreover, this means that due to cultural influences that do not consider certain occupations very important, principals find it challenging to establish the credibility of educational leadership within society.

According to AlGhawi (2017), the decision to implement “School for all,” an initiative aimed at providing equal and inclusive education to all students regardless of their disabilities and abilities, incorporated national expectations to influence future generations into becoming better citizens. Part of this process requires providing individualized support to foster integration into the education system. On that note, Alhosani et al. (2017) asserted that educational leadership involved a process teachers and parents used to ensure positive performance among students. Moreover, education is considered as a pillar in the UAE because it will enable Abu Dhabi to meet excellence standards as those in highly educated nations (Rao & Abdul, 2015). Considering such ideologies from a leadership perspective is an indication that educational leadership has a place in the learning environment, and the duty falls upon principals to lay a commendable foundation.

Research findings by Alhosani et al. (2017) showed that a school environment should involve not only the principals but also the parents and students. In this study, school principals were expected to provide parents with information and demonstrate how the learning environment can have an impact on the relationship between staff members and student success. This showed that many principals performed the oversight duty on behalf of parents to ensure that activities performed in school meet the expected standards. Meemar et al. (2018) found that the impact of globalization on education had forced teachers in the Arab region to adopt technical and problem-solving skills to correlate with global demands. These trends have impacted principals into changing the learning culture to meet standards in highly educated nations for their students. Partly,

this is based on individual exposure among elementary principals, in which case, the impact of western teachers in Dubai is a crucial factor in changing ideologies in schools.

Meemar et al. (2018) found that many principals practiced their technical and administrative roles based on the role of authorities in charge of improving administration performance in schools. The findings suggest that the range of practicing administrative authorities varied between low and high due to specific authority. In most cases, since principals performed at either moderate or high range, the role of authorities in supporting principals was paramount for student success and staff member performance. It was also supported by Alhosani et al. (2017) that good leadership skills improved teachers' abilities in evaluation, monitoring, and observation of classroom practices. Such scenarios allow the portrayal of individual perceptions about educational leadership and the effect it can have on student success. These literature discussions imply that managerial duties of principles are influenced by factors such as school categories, development concerns, and societal perceptions, thereby determining the placement of teachers or leaders in particular institutions.

Capacity Building

Khanyi and Naidoo (2020) considered capacity development as one of the major determinants for successful leadership in schools. The authors perceived that capacity building served the purpose of improving learning through leadership tailored to the principles of collaboration, growth, and professional development. Teachers in Dubai schools believe that students should have skills beyond the classroom to help them become marketable. On the same note, Grunefeld et al. (2017) found that capacity

building in school leadership through the embrace of technology-enabled principles to accomplish multiple roles with consistency and inspiration. Many elementary principals believe educational leadership has the capacity to build better societies by empowering students to aim for better career-driven skills they can apply to implement in development activities. Regardless of the situation in learning environments, Shapira et al. (2010) believed that the role of being educational leaders should be shouldered not only by the principals but also a supporting system to assist them in becoming better individuals. In other words, the burden of helping people realize their abilities should involve different authorities.

Leadership Qualities

Most leaders are considered effective, based on personalities, attitudes, and management philosophies. In multicultural learning settings like Dubai, effectiveness in leadership is determined by the ability to influence how students and staff members achieve success (Aldhaferi, 2017). In reality it is suggested that principals with a participative approach in management engage students and staff members on a personal level, which allows them to identify areas to improve. The ability to reach this level of understanding is based on individual communication, and trust leaders create among their subordinates. According to Stephenson (2010), individuals were bound to develop when they had learning facilities that supported social interactions, which allowed members to share skills. Nonetheless, this view is apparent in Dubai because foreign education and the curriculum help the idea of shaping leaders to address Arab problems.

Therefore, many principals consider personality as being key to their growth and impact on leadership.

According to Aldhaferi (2017), the working environment was becoming diverse, and as such, positive solutions were required to address multicultural needs. In the Middle East, the amalgamation of the West (Europe and the Americas) and the East (Asia) is challenging, which Aldhaferi described as being multinational due to the changing population of the UAE. Nguyễn et al. (2018) stated that the capability of school leaders to fulfill the expectations of students depended on daily engagement by adopting policies that influenced learning processes. Moreover, elementary school principals were inclined to consider themselves effective and productive relative to their subordinates. In their study, David and Abukari (2020) explained that ideas about policies were crucial to foster sustainable leadership, which could be applied at all levels to support development among staff members and students. Therefore, when teachers are motivated, it reflects on student performance, which is achieved through encouragement and investing in professionalizing staff members in leadership practices. Individuals that show interest in the well-being of others are bound to succeed in building learning environments because it becomes a collective effort among teachers to ensure student success.

According to Stephenson (2010), leaders were individuals with the ability to influence other people to follow them towards a common goal or harbor visionary characteristics. The situation of elementary school principals in Dubai has changed due to the internalization of values based on the cultural expectations of the regions. Many

teachers are inspired to identify critical traits they can share with students to achieve a common goal. Shapira et al. (2010) found that high levels of education among Arab women contributed to reducing the gap between male and female teachers, which was an improvement in elementary education. However, the underlying issue among Arab teachers relates to socio-cultural systems that are yet to advance women in managerial positions. Although men may be taking the position of principals and helping others to grow, the cultural habits of Arab countries must change and foster the inclusion of women in active leadership.

In the last decade, educational leadership has been effective in fostering change in schools. To ensure competitiveness, schools are witnessing the impact of hiring and developing skilled teachers. However, Stephenson (2010) contended that teachers were expected to have the training, which could help them impart future generations. Additionally, the need for effective leadership among principals in elementary schools is vital because the global setting is changing and requires technically skilled and gifted students to compete in the international market. In that context, many teachers assume the role of leadership by holding workshops and training programs that are career-driven to identify areas of focus (Maricela, 2019). For some principals, part of achieving their role coincides with the curriculum, which should increase diversity and the development of technologies among students. According to Fitriati et al. (2014), school principals assumed the responsibility of exerting influence and providing direction to school members to attain their goals. They sought innovative, flexible, and adaptive measures to attract qualified employees capable of building future leaders. In essence, leaders should

have the capacity to reconcile people of different ideas that is students and staff members to ensure that they exist in the same environment (Hisham, 2019). Despite the changes in educational leadership, effective and efficient principals retain the power to influence how students perform. Therefore, the role of influencing future generations remains an experience many principals share with others in the learning environment.

The Experiences of Elementary Principals

As the population of school students in Dubai is becoming culturally diverse, principals must be empowered to set up academic excellence standards for students (Hào et al., 2018). With the demand for success among students increasing in Arab countries, principals are focusing on strategies to improve the learning experiences of students. The urgency within the teaching population to include family and community models is high as teachers recognize the penetrating linguistic and cultural changes in the UAE due to the foreign population. As discussed by Sellami et al. (2019), the Arab region was in urgent need of educational leaders that could transform the sector to meet the learning demands that matched with the modern era. Accordingly, Carpenter and Linton (2016) found that there was an increasing demand for education, including EdCamp unconference, which is organized to promote voluntary and informational training. There are many prospective learners who are interested in acquiring the necessary skills and the understanding of cultural diversity which has become a norm in the modern workplace. Therefore, the outcome shows that principals need more professional opportunities to enable them to implement practices that focus on student-influenced developments to enhance their academic success.

Fostering Relationships

Maricela (2019) stated that in learning, the parent-teacher relationship played a crucial role in promoting growth post-education. Their findings portrayed that the current support system expected principals have to implement plans that focused on cultural practices and expanded their knowledge to cover other areas. In another study, the issue of cultural backgrounds in Dubai influences perceptions and understanding of standard practices among principals (Sellami et al., 2019). The results demonstrate that principals face the challenge of illustrating that their ideas have academic purposes for students. Thus, different scholars reveal that social differences curtail principals from showing support to students and teachers because of an intricate understanding of the decisions made about personal experiences. As a result, literature findings show that individual perceptions remain a challenge for society to understand how support is crucial to changing social perceptions.

Leadership in Dubai

According to Harris and Lambert (2003), transformational leaders adopted a reactive and a proactive attitude to foster innovation and create ideas. In most cases, the ability to find solutions equally required intelligent individuals to identify problems affecting people before showing support. Carpenter and Linton (2016) also perceived that leaders in education or training institutions should adopt frameworks that encouraged the participation of learners so that problems could easily be identified among students. This idea can then promote personalized solutions for learners and the facilitation of administrative tasks by the leaders. In a changing world, being open to

new components of learning is frequent because student needs are volatile. While the burden of illustrating experiences is left to the principals, Dubai must adopt an educational system that allows shared ideas and perceptions to embrace differences and encourage commitment within the community. As reported by Ibrahim and Al-Taneiji (2013), the UAE created an education curriculum to match its development values and goals. To embrace this national target, integrating Arabic and English as first and second languages can ease the communication issue.

In Dubai, educational leadership focuses on preparing, accountability, improvement, and high professional standards. While this might be the case, Kafa and Pashiardis (2019) believe that offering interactive forms of learning can ease the implementation of experiences by integrating subjects that focus on individual skills and knowledge. The Dubai Education Council (DEC), the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK), and the Sharjah Education Council, as well as the UAE Ministry of Education, retain the task of proposing education reforms that integrating local traditions and cultural identities. On that note, guidance about how principals can initiate their experiences must conform to local principles stipulated by the UAE (Azzam, 2019). Understanding the foundation at the national level is vital for educational leaders because it allows elementary principals to know which actions are impactful to their students and society.

Regardless of the political environment in the Arab region, researchers like Hammad and Hallinger (2017) found that most educational research focused on leadership studies due to the economic and social growth of the region. Their findings

are significant because they correlate with the growing expectations among societies that school leaders should demonstrate high levels of influence on individual activities that can transform communities. The fact that many elementary principals come from deprived backgrounds due to inferior perceptions about education, they have to show the future generations learning and imparting knowledge are pillars to development (Renn, 2012). Thus, this echoes the development values of the UAE that its education sector is developing a curriculum focused on improving professionalism. Attaining the expected professional level depends on the role, and willingness elementary principals in Dubai have to pass on their skills to students and staff members.

In many Arab societies, the roles of principals are increasingly fragmented, resulting in unease. Clark (2013) conducted a survey showing that a large number of teachers lacked basic experience training to help them in the learning field due to failed exposure. Owing to the situation of Dubai, internal exposure from western teachers causes fragmentation since local principals are expected to perform as their foreign counterparts. More so, stakeholders involved in education have set different rules, which impede principals from performing their roles. According to Wulffers et al. (2016), when institutions lacked strategies that encouraged inclusion, they limited interventions, which could have supported the early development of leaders from schools. These reforms imply that many people are uncomfortable due to work-related pressure. In addition, the poor performance of teachers reflects on student outcomes, which impacts efforts by principals to build conducive learning environments to foster success and growth.

Understanding Global Influences

According to Caligiuri and Tarique (2012), leaders with global experience were successful in adopting cross-cultural settings. To acquire this fate, transformational leadership in education empowers principals to design competency-based practices to foster dynamic cultural change by showing students and staff members the influence of principles on individual conduct. David and Abukari (2020) established quality leadership to be critical in ensuring that principals execute their responsibilities. They added that in the first period of their tenure, principals needed the training to produce highly qualified candidates. In a region where traditions are preserved, mentoring and professional development were core tenets of the process required to influence future generations. However, leaders in Dubai must understand that educational leadership shifted from controlling to transforming, implying that principals can influence their subordinates through indirect interactions (Clark, 2013). Many studies summarized in this section such as Clark (2013), David and Abukari (2020), Kafa and Pashiardis (2019), and Wulffers et al. (2016) have shown that the more society becomes complex, the more leaders find more straightforward ways of engaging stakeholders to eliminate struggles. Having a good learning environment is the first step towards elementary principals exposing their experiences to inspire others. Integration between Arab cultures and Western practices can build individual confidence in sharing and personal growth to foster change in educational leadership. Therefore, principals are tailored to foster

development through sharing experiences, but this should entail traditional practices acceptable to stakeholders.

Challenges Within the Elementary School

Elementary principals encounter many challenges when expressing their experiences in a school environment. David and Abukari (2020) argued that when these challenges were combined, it was difficult for elementary principals to create cohesive relationships with stakeholders in the education sector. On a micro level, the challenge involves meeting student, and staff member needs to ensure amicable service delivery at the school level. While exploring the same concept, Maricela (2019) held the opinion that education policies that delayed the implementation of desirable reforms created limitations in delivery among learning institutions and gradually lead to failure. On the one hand, the UAE has developed its curriculum with the idea of attaining its economic development goals and values. Moreover, this is supported by the study conducted by Matsumoto (2019), who identified several reforms the UAE had made to ensure sustainable education. Likewise, the need to compete globally with other graduates suggested that principals were pressured to produce internationally accredited individuals.

The process involves applying change management criteria to match the expectations of international organizations because students must be vision-driven to match market demand. All the issues should be considered to allow principals to succeed at their job because the future of education is based on amicable relationships between students, teachers, and parents (Rao & Abdul, 2015). In the case of Dubai, where the

population is diverse due to foreign influence, principals must assume the role of leadership to guide learners towards effective practices. Moreover, Matsumoto (2019) found that UAE is implementing a wide range of educational programs to allow improved education systems in the region. In that context, Arar and Nasra (2019) stated that institutional structures existed to support principals in making changes to benefit the learning environment. Primarily, this implies that groundwork must be laid to establish dependencies between elementary principals and educational organizations to ensure that students are motivated to engage in culturally influenced activities to enhance their success.

Literature Gap

The articles explored in this discussion has covered a large spectrum of issues regarding educational leadership. However, the sources did not explicitly explain how the aspects of educational leadership are directly applicable to Dubai. Many sources discussed education systems and leadership styles in the UAE while others provided insights about the integration of foreign standards in the UAE's curriculum. Additionally, there were sources covering the entire Arab world and giving generalizations without specific reference to Dubai schools. The literature also covered approaches such as transformational and transactional leadership styles being used in the Arab world. There were discussions about integrating different cultures in UAE schools and encouraging female leadership. Nonetheless, the specific factors applicable to Dubai were not discussed. Dubai is rapidly developing, and many foreigners are settling in the region. There is a need for embracing various cultures and values as well as eliminating

gender disparity in school leadership. The influx of foreign students should be addressed through education reforms and changes in leadership styles, but such has not been addressed directly in the literature. Therefore, this study will build on the existing knowledge to understand educational leadership in private elementary schools in Dubai and provide recommendations for achieving inclusivity in these learning institutions.

Summary

Chapter 2 offered a review of leadership theories, focusing specifically on transformational leadership and how effective leadership can potentially positively influence teaching and learning, improve student performance, and endorse stakeholder support throughout the organization. A review of education leadership in the Arab world revealed the application of western approaches to Arab organizations despite the stark differences in culture and context. Creating a culture of success involves the principal promoting holistic and professional development for stakeholders and showing qualities such as collaboration, team building, cultural competence and integrity, support, and conflict resolution. The literature on the experiences of elementary principals demonstrated that principals identified the need for more professional opportunities to create stronger learning environments and motivate perception changes. In the case of Dubai, the literature revealed that despite making notable advancements in the education sector, Dubai continues to depend mainly on expatriate educational professionals. The influence of expatriate leadership in the UAE is a gap in the literature that has not been addressed. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of self-reported transformational leaders in elementary private schools in Dubai. Chapter

3 will address the proposed research design, rationale, and methodology. It will also detail the instrumentation, data collection process, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of self-reported transformational leaders in elementary private schools in Dubai. This section aims to explain the proposed methodology that was employed when researching this study. This section begins with a discussion on the rationale for selecting a qualitative study methodology. The qualitative approach will reflect the research question designed for the study. Next, I will defend the phenomenological method as it relates directly to the proposed study. Additionally, I will explain the method of data collection: in-depth, semi structured interviews. Finally, I will detail the proposed steps in gaining access, the strategies used for ethical protection, and the steps established for a researcher-participant relationship. The role of the researcher and data analysis procedures will also be outlined.

Research Design and Rationale

The following research question created the basis to categorize information gathered from the semi structured interviews during the analysis phase of the study.

Research Question 1: How do elementary private school principals in Dubai describe their lived experiences as self-reported transformational leaders?

Twelve elementary private school principals were selected and asked to share their experiences as self-reported transformational leaders in Dubai. Following the qualitative research design, data was collected using in-depth, semi structured interviews. As detailed in the first chapter, there is a need to examine how elementary privates school

principals in Dubai work towards creating a culture of success, as well as what skills and leadership qualities they believe are required to do so. The elementary phase is the first phase of formal schooling and the foundation upon which students build their formal, social, and emotional learning. The elementary school principal engages in a pivotal role, guiding all stakeholders towards a vision and mission aimed at building the school culture (Hattie, 2015). Insight into how elementary private school principals in Dubai describe their experiences as self-reported transformational leaders can inform further research into school leadership in the Arab world, as well as inform how best to share leadership experiences among elementary private school principals Dubai.

The qualitative research approach allowed me to gain in depth information regarding the research question, as opposed to statistics. Lune and Berg (2017) suggested qualitative research served to capture the essence or ambience of the issue or problem being addressed. Several factors endorse the choice of a qualitative research design for the study.

Primarily, at the methodological level, qualitative research employs an interactionist perspective that can result in meaningful understandings related to the narratives of the self (Denzin, 2016). Symbolic interactionism is a school of thought with the basic tenant being that meaning is attached to and can be derived from the act of human interaction (Blumer, 1969). All interactionists agree that human interaction is a vital and integral source of data; empathy and exposure to participant perspective are key in the formulation of theory; and how a participant relates to, defines, and behaves in the setting is directly related to their actions and understanding of the setting (Lune & Berg,

2017). The qualitative approach for the study allowed me to engage with the participant while immersed in the setting in which the participant engages in leadership practices.

Secondly, there are 209 private schools in Dubai (Gallagher, 2019). According to Lune and Berg (2017), such a sample size was not large enough to produce statistically meaningful and generalizable results using a quantitative methodology. The research question required additional investigation into the meanings of elementary private school principals in Dubai to investigate their lived experiences as self-reported transformational leaders. This included, but was not limited to emotions, motivations, routines, and experiences in the natural setting. Subjective understandings and apprehensions are qualitative data (Lune & Berg, 2017). The qualitative research approach allowed me to gain a focused understanding of the context, while providing a wider scope of investigation and a higher level of exploratory analysis (Queirós et al., 2017).

Thirdly, the qualitative research methodology allowed for in depth-provoking questioning and room for ad hoc questions, which is essential to the semi-structured interview technique (Queirós et al., 2017). Qualitative research and the use of a semi-structured interview protocol facilitated reciprocity between the researcher and the interviewee. Hence, it is a suitable approach for exploring perceptions (Kallio et al., 2016). It provided the needed flexibility for focusing on the issues that are deemed meaningful to the participant. This was achieved through carefully formulated questions that are open-ended and encourage vivid, participant-oriented, descriptive data (Cridland et al., 2015).

Finally, according to Abrar (2017), qualitative research was considered adequate and contributive to investigating phenomenon linked with the field of education. It allowed the education researcher to gather robust data through prolonged interaction with the participant. As linked to education, qualitative research offers social validity, the applied value to everyday life behaviors. This is furthered by using member checking, engaging participants in the data review process to ensure the accuracy of the reflection of participant views and experiences (Kozleski, 2017). Member checking was used in the study to achieve the results. Qualitative methods illuminate the social and cultural aspects of learning environments (Morningstar et al., 2015; Shogren et al., 2015). Contextualized meanings permeate when the participant assumes the role of storyteller, highlighting issues that may not have occurred to the researcher who is not entrenched in the role of the elementary school principal (Kozleski, 2017).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a qualitative research tradition that allows the researcher to explore a phenomenon from the perspective of the participant who has experienced it. The phenomenology aims to ascribe meaning to experiences rooted in the understanding of what the experience is and how it is lived (Teherani et al., 2015). The work of Max Van Manen has widely contributed to the understanding of phenomenology. Van Manen (1990) asserted that phenomenology obliged the researcher to avoid deceptively interpretive procedures by immersing themselves in the underlying philosophies of the tradition. Robust phenomenological research invites reviewing the data, exposing thematic clusters, engaging in cycles of reflective writing, and constructing deep

understandings of lived experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). Phenomenology is directly linked to a participant's lived experiences (Creswell, 2012). It allows for the emergence of patterns and themes through the interaction of the researcher with a small sample of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher gains familiarity with the context and the natural settings of the participants (Williams, 2018).

Phenomenology was used as an appropriate research tradition for the study for two reasons. Firstly, this research aimed to find commonalities between participants through the investigation into lived experiences as self-reported transformational leaders in elementary private schools in Dubai (Smith, 2018). Relying on semi structured, in-depth interviews as a primary source of data justified the choice of the phenomenological study (Oladimeji, 2018). Secondly, there are currently no phenomenological studies that specifically examine the lived experiences of elementary private school principals in Dubai. This study would serve to fill the gap in the literature. This was achieved through the examination of human experiences as the participants engaged in a detailed description of the phenomenon from their perspectives (Adams, 2018).

Role of the Researcher

I was the only individual engaged in the data collection and analysis process. I engaged participants in the in-depth, semi structured interviews; transcribed, and analyzed the data for emergent patterns and themes. I did not have any direct relationship with any of the candidates. To ensure this, I did not extend an invitation for participation letters to the two schools in Dubai where I previously worked as an elementary school teacher.

It is important for the researcher to engage in the reflective practice of identifying potential biases that may have related to the topic (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). As an elementary private school teacher for 14 years and in three different countries, I have a personal interest in this study. From personal experience, a difference in school climate from one principal to another was perceived, and I aspire in the future to become an elementary school principal. I hoped that the results from this study would improve my leadership practices as a principal in the future. Researcher reflexivity is also a validity procedure (Creswell & Miller, 2000). As a researcher, engaging in reflexivity allows for self-referential thought throughout the study. Reflexivity will allow me to critically examine the knowledge production process; the relationship with different aspects of the research including context, participants, data collection, and data analysis; as well as engage in the consideration of what is valid (Corlett & Mavin, 2018). Measures were taken to address any ethical issues that could arise. The location of the interview was up to the participant. This means they chose the place they felt most comfortable in. The time and day of the interview was also up to the participant. Names and other identifying data were not collected. No potential psychological, relationship, legal, or professional concerns were identified in relation to the study. Finally, Dubai requires all employees to undergo multiple police clearances; hence, it is reasonable to assume none of the participants have prior convictions, for example. The Dubai Health Authority requires all residents to get an annual medical clearance, to renew the residency visa. As a result, it is reasonable to assume that potential participants do not have underlying infectious diseases (specifically tuberculosis and HIV, because these are tested for annually).

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

A fifteen-year systematic analysis of qualitative research by Vasileiou et al. (2018) revealed that saturation was the most invoked justification for sample size. Saturation is achieved when no new themes emerge because of the in-depth interviews. Fugard and Potts (2015) suggested a sample size of at least 12 participants to reach data saturation. The second most cited justification for sample size according to Vasileiou et al. was that of a pragmatic nature. Researchers cited sample size determinants as financial or resource related, time constraints and manageability related, and the availability of respondents. Sim et al. (2018) suggested a particular naïveté in relying on a pre-decided sample size. They found that such an ontological assumption did not lend itself to qualitative research. Deciding *a priori* the number of participants required to understand what unknown is ‘yet’ is illogical (Saunders et al., 2017). While a rough estimation of the sample size may serve as a starting point, the final sample size is an ongoing interpretation on the part of the qualitative researcher (Sim et al., 2018). In line with the available research, and to bridge between the literature, the sample size of the proposed study was set at a minimum of 12 participants. To avoid the ontological trappings of a pre-determined number, I recruited as many participants from those who voluntarily provided their consent, as needed to reach thematic saturation.

Criterion Sampling

The population for the study was elementary private school principals working in private schools in Dubai. Elementary school principals working in public schools were

discounted because they are native Arabic speakers. The sample of the study consisted of elementary school principals who are native speakers of English, who have been elementary school principals in Dubai for at least 2 years. Participants met the criteria through establishing contact with the schools. I inquired on the needed criteria and only extend invitations to those principals who met the criteria.

Invitation for participation letters were sent to elementary private school principals in Dubai via e-mail (Appendix B). The final participant sample was a purposeful sample based on consent from participants who identify as self-reported transformational leaders and met the outlined criteria. Participants were entitled to a clear understanding of how to prepare for the interview, how to interact with the researcher, and what information can be disclosed to others regarding the research (Avila, 2016). Hence, the selected interview participants received a participation letter by e-mail. The letter highlighted the role of the researcher and participant.

Instrumentation

A semi structured, in-depth interview protocol provided relevant data because it allowed for fluid conversation, as opposed to a rigid, structured set of questions. The interviewer can probe for clarification and include follow-up questions when the need arises (Coles-Hart, 2016). The semi-structured interview protocol that was used was based on a modified version of the published interview protocol of Matthew (2016) (Appendix A). The original version was used in a doctoral dissertation study of leadership characteristics in the urban multicultural school setting, specifically the greater Washington, DC area. The case study focused on the in-depth narrative provided by

participants from one multicultural school. The modifications that were made to the existing interview protocol of Matthew (2016) are related specifically to the cultural context (Dubai as opposed to the greater Washington, DC area); and excluded two questions relating to staff perceptions, as this was beyond the scope of the study. The specific modifications to the published interview protocol of Matthew were the substitution of 'multicultural school' with 'elementary school in Dubai'; and the exclusion of the two questions regarding principals' perceptions of how staff view their reputation and leadership. Permission to modify the interview protocol of Matthew was not necessary as per the Walden University Institutional Review Board because the original work has been cited and the changes made to the original interview protocol have been explicitly stated. The modified instrument was considered appropriate because it addressed the research question. It provided the participant with open-ended questions and the room to elaborate on factors that has influenced their leadership style; factors that has influenced the decision to be an elementary private school principal in Dubai; perceived challenges and successes as an elementary private school principal in Dubai; perceived strategies that allowed the participant to shape the school culture and why; as well as the perceived values that the participant demonstrated as a leader and their influences.

Data Collection Procedure

I contacted potential participants that met the criteria using contact information available to the public. The invitation to participate in the study was sent by email or mail to potential participants to volunteer. I then sent by email the consent form to potential

participants and asked them to reply with “I consent” if they wished to move forward. The consent form clearly indicated the participant’s right to withdraw from the study at any time, and for any reason, without liability. This doctoral study relied on semi-structured, in-depth interviews for data collection. The semi structured, in-depth interview protocol was meant to encourage a purposeful conversation to understand what the participant is thinking (Aruguete, 2017). The purpose of the proposed semi-structured, in-depth interviews was to understand the lived experiences of self-reported transformational leaders in elementary private schools in Dubai.

I interviewed 12 participating principals from selected elementary private schools for up to one hour. Interview times and dates corresponded to each participant’s availability. The location of the interview was also determined based on the participant’s discretion. I used an audiotaping device as well as notetaking to record interviews. The interview protocol was printed to facilitate notetaking for analysis. In the instances where the participant opted for a virtual meeting, the interview was conducted using Google Meets and recorded using the recording feature of the virtual platform. In the case where the recruitment process did not yield the necessary number of participants, I extended participation letters to assistant elementary school principals who meet the sample criteria. When follow-up interviews were required for clarification, further reach out to the specific participants were extended. Furthermore, participation in a follow-up interview was entirely voluntary. Participants were debriefed at the end of the interview process. Participants were also recapped with regards to the purpose of the study. They were also asked if they have questions in relation to the study. Each participant was

provided with a transcript of their interview for member checking. Participants were also invited to make corrections if needed. I also provided participants with contact details for any questions or concerns related to the study. In the end, each participant was formally thanked for their participation in the study. Participation in the study was completed after all transcripts were reviewed and no additional interviews were conducted. Each participant was also informed that they would receive a summary of the study results.

Data Analysis Plan

Qualitative data analysis requires extensive and insightful interaction with the data. The data collected from the semi-structured, in-depth interviews allowed for the construction of meaning grounded in the perceptions and interpretations of participants. Coding, using NVivo and manual coding, were used as the main analytic process. I engaged in a five-step analysis strategy highlighted by Akinyode and Khan (2018). This data analysis strategy is suitable for all qualitative research and simply represents a more well-defined, step by step procedure for sorting, grouping, and analyzing data. The first step is data logging. The data collected from the interviews were recorded on a record sheet. Second, anecdotes were taken by me immediately after each interview that was conducted to document generated feelings and facilitate theme building. Third, vignettes were created to assist in the in-depth description of the data in the form of a narrative. Increased depth by using vignettes establishes credibility (Akinyode & Khan, 2018). There is a higher level of interpretation and themes that were captured. Fourth was data coding. A deeper immersion into the themes and nodes that raised from the vignette phase allowed me to further dissect the data in search of contextually relevant keywords.

Each keyword referenced an emergent theme. Finally, a thematic network was created. Global themes were aligned with their corresponding organizing themes based on the data. Each organizing theme was aligned with the related basic themes. Akinyode and Khan (2018) stressed that following this detailed data analysis procedure was crucial to data interpretation that allowed for codes to become categories, and for categories to ultimately converge into higher order themes.

To address discrepant cases or data that was contradicted in the findings, the transcribed interview documents were continuously reviewed for any themes, participant experiences or keywords that may have been missed. Booth et al. (2013) also suggested using an alternate method of data analysis to address discrepant cases. The transcribed data from the in-depth interviews were uploaded on NVivo and analyzed for thematic patterns. The findings from manual analysis of the interview data were compared with the findings using the NVivo software.

Issues of Trustworthiness

For qualitative research to achieve its potential, the researcher must strive for a high-quality and robust product (Morse, 2015). Concerns regarding trustworthiness are heavily borrowed from the quantitative paradigm (Rose & Johnson, 2020).

Trustworthiness is necessary to preserve the standing of qualitative research in the academic world. Finding should be deeply substantiated through systematic rigor, believability, and applicability of method (Johnson & Parry, 2016; Rose & Johnson, 2020). Because I engaged in the coding of multiple interviews, discrepant cases were addressed by engaging in single participant coding at a time. I coded the transcript for the

first participant, and then progressed to the next participant. The subsequent data sets served to refine the recoding process and address divergent data.

Credibility

Member Checking

Credibility with regards to qualitative research refers to the confidence placed in the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I established credibility by way of member checking. The data collected, emergent themes, interpretations, findings, and conclusions was shared with the interview participants. I strived to invite thick descriptions of participants' lived experiences. However, I refrained from asking leading follow-up questions. The purpose of member checking is to allow for the original participants to verify the accuracy of the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Employing member checking operationalizes credibility by way of establishing congruence between participant views and my interpretations. Member checking serves to enhance the level of confidence in the integrity of the study (Nowell et al., 2017). I contacted the participants, by email, for the member checking post transcription and initial coding. In the email, I offered to share takeaways from the participant interview via phone or email (according to the participant's preference). The participant confirmed whether the interpretations were accurate.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity was used to further achieve trustworthiness. I supplemented analytical data with reflexive notes taken immediately after every interview. Using analytical memo writing, utilized the memos to safeguard ideas and reflections that might otherwise have

been forgotten. I did so, using note cards for handwritten notes. The analysis of the notes during the coding phase helped to serve the evolutionary nature of the qualitative study. The purpose of the reflexive notes is to encourage the self-awareness of the researcher, the role the researcher plays at the different stages of the study, biases, and preconceived notions (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Reflexivity is widely viewed as an essential method to develop rigor in qualitative research and provide high-quality work (de la Cuesta Benjumea, 2015; Engward & Davis, 2015; Rettke et al., 2018).

Transferability

Transferability entails the ability to apply the findings of one qualitative study to other settings or populations (Daniel, 2019). Transferability was achieved in this study by selecting participants who can speak to the phenomenon in question. For this reason, specific criteria have been set for potential participants. Participants who have been elementary private school principals in Dubai for at least 2 years have had substantial amounts of interactions with stakeholders to be able to reflect on their lived experiences as self-reported leaders. Thick descriptions of participants' lived experiences were also used to establish transferability.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency of the research from beginning to end (Kyngas et al., 2020). The method used to establish dependability for this study was coding-recoding. The data was first analyzed manually for thematic patterns. To ensure the dependability of the data, I also analyzed the data using computer software, specifically NVivo. Kyngas et al. (2020) suggested that other methods such as peer

debriefing and face validity were of little value if the analysis process was detailed. This was achieved using the five-step analysis strategy highlighted by Akinyode and Khan (2018). It was well detailed and promoted a clear analysis plan.

Confirmability

Confirmability addresses the strength of the connection between the data and the results. The second step of the five-step analysis strategy highlighted by Akinyode and Khan (2018) allowed for confirmability. I engaged in an audit trail. I created an audit trail by systematically documenting the data collection process. The audit trail allowed for reflection on how and why decisions were made while engaging in the interpretation of the raw data. Written notes and memos can also serve to highlight participant response citations. Participant response citations enhance authenticity (Kyngas et al., 2020).

Ethical Procedures

I submitted the study details to the Walden University Institutional Review Board. This review board ensures that any research conducted has been assessed for potential harm to participants and is in line with federal regulations established to protect against human rights violations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This is a crucial precursor to any research involving human subjects. It is in line with Walden University's proposal requirements, as detailed in the Dissertation Guidebook (Walden University, 2020). The issue of transparency was addressed by an informed consent document, developed by me, and signed by the participants, before engaging in the study. The consent form addressed voluntary participation and the right to withdraw from the study at any time; the nature and purpose of the study; potential impacts on participants; the procedure of the study;

the participant's right to privacy and a copy of the interview data results; and the potential benefits of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Matthew, 2016). Voluntary participants in the study were notified, on the consent form, of their ability to discontinue the interview at any time without the concern of repercussion. I collected data using a digital recorder. The interviews were transcribed onto my personal computer immediately after each interview. Once participants had engaged in a member checking of their transcript, the identity of the participant was masked with a number. The research process and findings did not reveal any identifying characteristics of the participants. The informed consent document will only be stored until the completion of the study, as per IRB approval (IRB approval number 06-28-21-0454746). I was the only person with access to the taped interviews. The data has been extracted from my personal computer and stored on a password protected hard drive, kept in my home safe for the duration of the study, and for 5 years after the study. After the five years have been completed, the data will be destroyed.

Summary

Chapter 3 served to identify the proposed research design and rationale for the selection. This study is a phenomenological qualitative study focused on understanding the lived experiences of self-reported transformational leaders in elementary private schools in Dubai. The instrument used to collect the data for the study were semi-structured interview protocol. This instrument allowed me to guide participants and provided participants with the opportunity to give detailed answers. Once collected, the data were coded and analyzed using a five-step analysis strategy. Participants were

invited to engage in member checking to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. They were asked to review the data and findings for accuracy. Chapter 4 offers a presentation of the emergent themes that have arisen from the coding and analysis of the semi-structured, in-depth interviews.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of self-reported transformational leaders in elementary private schools in Dubai. The research question addressed in this study is how do elementary private school principals in Dubai describe their lived experiences as self-reported transformational leaders? This chapter addresses the data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness of the data collected, as well as the results.

Setting

Each interview time and date corresponded with each participant's availability. The location of the interview was also at the participant's discretion. One participant participated in a face-to-face interview process. This interview took place in the principal's office, at the school. The door was closed to ensure privacy. The participant requested the interview to be conducted after working hours, to eliminate the possibility of being interrupted by staff or parent consultations. The interview was recorded using a battery-operated audiotaping device and handwritten notes. For the remainder of the interviews, the participants opted for virtual meetings. The data were collected using the recording feature of the Google Meets virtual platform. Virtual interviews were conducted from my private home office to ensure privacy during the data collection process. To protect the identity of each participant, numbers were assigned to data collected. The same numbers were also used during the coding, analysis, and reporting processes. The use of numbers bolstered confidentiality by making it impossible to trace

data back to a specific participant (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2015). Each participant was assigned a number before starting the interview. The subsequent transcription and field notes were labeled with the same number.

Demographics

Based on the nature of the semi structured interview protocol and the nature of the data collected, it was not necessary to collect or include the description of any demographics. The study did not require for demographic details to be collected, or shared, in the discussion of the findings. The study specifically targeted principals who have been in their role for at least 2 years, hence, there was no need to disclose number of years in the position for any of the participants. Participant name, age, status, workplace name, and marital status were not collected, since they were not relevant to the research question.

Data Collection

Twelve participants voluntarily agreed to share their lived experiences as elementary school principals in Dubai. As mentioned above, each participant was given control over the time, data, location, and format of the data collection process. Participant 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12, opted to participate in the interview process virtually. This had the benefit of allowing the participants to be in a comfortable and safe environment of their own selection. The virtual interviews also served to resolve and geographic dispersion issues that may have arisen between the researcher and participant (Quartiroli et al, 2017). The data were recorded using an audiotaping device or the

recording feature of the Google Meets virtual platform. Handwritten notes were also taken during each interview. The data collection procedure did not deviate from what was originally planned by me and approved by the IRB.

Data Analysis

Akinyode and Khan (2018) detail a five-step analysis strategy appropriate for qualitative research. This well-defined procedure for sorting, grouping, and analyzing data was used to extract codes, categories, and themes from the interview responses. Data logging was the first step using a record sheet. Anecdotes were written by me after each interview for posterity. Vignettes were then developed because of the analysis of the transcripts and to establish credibility (Akinyode & Khan, 2018). Each recorded interview was transcribed and printed out to be used as the record sheet. The raw data collected from each interview was also accompanied by handwritten notes that reflected my feelings and insights from each interview. Through this process of reflexive journaling, the feelings, thoughts, and opinions of the researcher (post-interview) were acknowledged as participatory with regards to the study design, data collection process, thematic analysis, and interpretation of the data (Carcary, 2020). The addition of anecdotes as the second step of the data analysis procedure facilitated the development of themes. The development of vignettes helped me to reorganize the raw data in a manner that allowed for deeper interpretation and better descriptions. Next, data coding was used to group meaningful information into manageable and relevant nodes. The nodes supported the development of themes by grouping relevant pieces and minimizing inconsistencies during content analysis. Contextually meaningful keywords were

essential in the development of themes. Further immersion into the data led to the identification of basic themes, including those that were implicit. As I was able to group basic themes, the groups became organizing themes. The development of organizing themes involved constant review of the data grouped. The immersive process of cyclically reviewing the data ultimately supports the development of 4 common themes: teamwork, empathy, community, versatility.

Table 1*Theme Development*

Codes	Emerged Themes
Positive culture	Teamwork
Teamwork	
Collaboration	
Delegation	
Shared experience as a parent	Empathy
Shared experience as a teacher	
Role-model	
Approachability	
Attitude	Community
Celebrations	
Encouragement	
Visibility	
Adaptable	Versatility
Multicultural	
Support network	

Evidence of Trustworthiness

As laid out in Chapter 3, issues of trustworthiness were addressed during the analysis of data collected. Attention to the systematic rigor of the research design and credibility of the researcher are important components for trustworthiness. The findings also need to reflect believability, and the research methods should display applicability (Rose & Johnson, 2020).

Credibility

After each interview was transcribed, I engaged participants in the process of member checking. The participants reviewed their respective interview transcript and my interpretations, and verified the accuracy of the data, as referenced in Chapter 3. The process of member checking allowed participants to edit parts of the transcript if needed, clarify, or elaborate on responses, as stressed by Creswell (2009). The intention of offering interpretations of the participants' responses was to make sure that I understood what they meant to say. The written anecdotes taken by me immediately after each interview provided reflexivity. I engaged in reflexive notetaking, a self-awareness practice, to maintain the quality of the work. Additionally, I kept a journal to log thoughts, assumptions, and feelings during the data collection process.

Transferability

As stated in Chapter 3, participants who were approached to participate in the study had all been elementary private school principals in Dubai for at least 2 years. The participants had significant interactions with stakeholders and self-identified as transformational leaders. As suggested by Townsend (2018), corroboration in qualitative

research requires rich descriptions of the research process, data collection methods, particularities of the setting, and analysis strategy. I shared such thick and rich descriptions, as well as anecdotes from transcripts to support transferability and to create an immersive experience that allows readers to connect with participants.

Dependability

Dependability was established as identified in Chapter 3 using coding and recoding. Firstly, I started by transcribing the interviews, verbatim. This included pauses, sentences that were started, stopped, and restarted, and filler words. Verbatim transcription allowed for me to include direct quotes from participants when reporting on the findings. Data were initially coded manually using the detailed five-step analysis strategy highlighted by Akinyode and Khan (2018). To ensure dependability, the data was once again analyzed using NVivo. This helped me confidently present the highlighted themes.

Confirmability

Confirmability was achieved by engaging in the taking of anecdotal records. The anecdotal records reflected the thoughts, feelings, and my perceptions. The anecdotes supported the development of codes and subsequently themes. An audit trail was created by carefully documenting the interview notes, observation and interpretation notes, thoughts, and my assumptions. All these components were recorder in a journal that has been kept in a locked safe, along with interview recordings. The careful documentation has allowed me to provide detailed findings for the reader.

Results

For many of the participants, engaging in reflective analysis of their roles as self-described transformational elementary school principals proved to be deeply personal. Many participants referred to how daunting and demanding their jobs are. Generally, there was a consensus that they could not be successful relying only on themselves for decision making, implementing change, and engaging all the stakeholders. Four key themes and 15 codes emerged as a result of the analysis of the data collected.

Theme 1: Teamwork

Table 2

Codes for Teamwork

Code	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12
Positive culture	x	x	x		x		x	x	x	x		x
Teamwork	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Collaboration		x	x	x	x		x		x	x	x	
Delegation	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x

All participants were self-identified transformational leaders and used the term to describe their leadership style. Further description revealed that participants 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, and 11 reported the value of collaboration. Participant 4 said, “my teachers are required to collaborate horizontally, with their teammates, and vertically.” When asked what vertical collaboration looks like, participant 4 said, “we have committees, for all the

core subjects. One member from each grade level is assigned to a committee. That way, teachers from different grades learn to work as a team.” Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, and 11 felt responsible for modeling effective collaboration. This was described as asking for opinions and input from colleagues, maintaining open dialogue, being a good listener, and fostering healthy working relationships.

Participant 9 shared that teamwork in their setting was built on creating a positive culture. Participant 9 said:

We are a smaller setup than most schools in Dubai. Our teachers are a tight knit bunch. We have a ‘validation vase’ in the staff room. Teachers put notes of validation when they want to acknowledge a colleague. It makes us all happy to get a boost of confidence.

When asked how this idea came about, it was disclosed that this was a practice participant 9 had learned from a former principal. Participant 2 discussed a previous positive experience with a leader that helped shape their leadership style:

This principal was always smiling. When we had to go to their office, it didn’t feel like we were students going to the principal’s office. It felt like going down the hall into a fellow teacher’s classroom. There was never any pressure. Even the feedback we received was always gentle. This specific principal taught us what they referred to as the ‘feedback sandwich’- one positive comment, one suggestion, followed by a second positive comment. I have used this method since then and I find it allows me to give direction where necessary but also allows my colleague to save face.

Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, and 12 also referred to delegating tasks, and credited their 'team', be it assistant principals, department heads, or team leaders. They referred to having confidence in their leadership network and recognized that they needed each of those members to help get the job done properly. Participant 5 said, "it's a fool's errand to think that you can be the boss. Even a boss needs to rely on good support." Participant 12 added, "successful leadership means that your teachers know they are valuable and needed." Participants 3, 5, and 6 also mentioned that delegation takes practice. "It was hard at first to step back and have different staff spearhead different tasks, all of us working towards a greater whole," said participant 3.

Delegation, as per participant 7, relied a principal's ability to engage their staff and build the capacity of staff members. Participant 7 also asserted:

Capacity building is the single most successful way, in my opinion, of developing sustainability within a school. It is easier to promote from within, than to hire someone from outside of the school community, hoping they will support the vision of the school and help move things in the right direction. Recognizing the talent, you are surrounded by is an important part of the job.

Participant 8 noted:

Delegating task helps you see who is capable of promotion from middle management from within. There is a certain spark that comes out when a natural born leader is given the chance to take charge. This means we need to have the ability to identify strengths and create opportunities to empower teachers.

Theme 2: Empathy

Table 3

Codes for Empathy

Code	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12
Shared experience as a parent			X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X
Shared experience as a teacher		X	X		X	X	X	X		X		
Role-model	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Approachability	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	

Participants 2, 3, 5, 6, 7,8, and 10 credited their perceived success as self-reported transformational leaders to the understanding that they were once teachers as well. This was expressed through the bond of a shared experience. Participant 6 said, “being a teacher means that you know what kind of school principal you can work well with. You want to be that person for your staff.” Participant 2 added, “if you want teachers to get on board with your ideas, you need to put yourself in their shoes. Think about how changes will affect them. This kind of perspective is easy when you’ve been a teacher for years.” Participants 1, 5, 7 and 9 cited that their leadership practices were influenced by reporting to a school principal they “never wanted to be like”. Participant 9 recalled, “when you

earn 4,000 quid a month, overworked and underappreciated, the last thing you want to do is be responsive to a crummy headteacher.” Participant 1 shared their experience:

I worked at a school where no one was happy. We had a nickname for the principal, and it wasn't a nice one. We were terrified and anything could be a reason for you to lose your job. It was never good being called into the office. I felt like a troublemaker being called in to a meeting with my parents and the principal. I never wanted to be the kind of principal my staff heckles and live in fear of.

Despite having a previous negative experience, these participants said that these experiences help them to maintain a connection with their teachers and help them to be empathetic. Although being a principal requires an inevitable change in professional identity, all participants said that being a role-model to their staff contributed to their perceived success. Participant 4 shared why being a role-model is important to them:

Being a role-model for my staff means that I am responsible for inspiring them to keep growing professionally and keep doing better. That's my biggest job. The happiness of my teachers is tied to the success of the students and the school in general.

Participants 1 and 5 referred to leaning into their previous experience as teachers to manage staff members with low morale or low motivation. They found that in sharing personal anecdotes with these staff members, they were able to be emotionally supportive and create trusting relationships. Participant 1 said:

I remember how scary it is to be a first-year teacher, in your very own class, for the very first time ever. It can be equally isolating when you move from being a team member to a team leader. I like to share my experiences, especially with first year teachers, who may be struggling at a new job, in a new country, away from friends and family. Many of them are surprised to know that I felt the same way when I arrived in Dubai 14 years ago.

Another code that arose in 8 of 12 interviews, was that being a parent supported some of the principals to be successful. Participants 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 12 found that being a parent helped them related to teachers struggling with the work-life balance, but also to the parent community. Participant 11 noted:

It's hard work being a full time working mom. I tell my teachers that their family always comes first. I don't mark time off if a teacher needs to go to the doctor.

We make it a point to let teachers know that admin has their back. Even if we need to go into a class to cover, it's a support network at our school.

These also principals found themselves to be in a unique position to understand a staff member who needed to take time off to care for a sick child, or a staff member who needed to leave early for example to attend their child's school play. Being a parent helped these principals keep in mind that staff have a whole other life outside of school walls. Participant 3 said, "we all have obligations, but we can't always manage when these things need to be addressed. It's always possible for an obligation to happen during school hours." While participants 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 12 indicated that they expected dedication while at work, they also noted that having a family meant that they were at

equal risk of needing to step away to prioritize their family. Participant 12 said, “I would be a hypocrite if I took time off to attend my child’s graduation but get frustrated with a teacher staying home to care for a child with the flu.”

Approachability was identified as another code. Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 asserted that a successful school principal needs to be approachable. “I have an open-door policy,” said participant 7, “I want teachers to come to me at any time. I don’t believe in creating boundaries. Even if a teacher comes for a chat, I like that.” Participant 11 also added, “I am outside at the pick-up/ drop off area, greeting parents, students, and teachers every morning, and saying bye at pick up time. That’s the best part of my day. Parents stop and talk, that rapport is necessary.”

Theme 3: Community

Table 4

Codes for Community

Code	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12
Attitude	x	x	x			x	x		x	x	x	
Celebrations		x	x							x	x	x
Encouragement	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Visibility	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x

Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 used the code visibility when talking about fostering a sense of community. They felt that it was important for them to be seen around the school, to stop and talk to parents, greet students in the morning, and engage

with students during learning opportunities. Participants 2, 5, 6, and 11 noted how they felt that most often, parent complaints could be addressed simply by making the parents feel heard. Participant 2 noted, “being in the lobby to meet and greet allows me to chat to parents. I get to hear their concerns or complaints. I’m also happy when parents have positive feedback.” Participant 6 said, “being visible helps parents to understand that I’m approachable. Not everything needs to happen in a formal meeting setup, or in my office.” Fostering a sense of community through visibility relies on the principal’s ability to communicate clearly to all stakeholders. Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 said that it is important for everyone invested in the school community to feel like their opinion is worthwhile and important. They felt they received much less pushback from stakeholders when prospective plans were presented with an opportunity to receive feedback. Participant 10 said:

We hold a townhall meeting every term. With COVID, it’s a virtual meeting. Parents get a zoom link and an agenda. They know what will be discussed so they can participate. We share budgets for future maintenance or expansion plans, student achievements (especially for things like SAT scores), adjustments we’ve made to how the school operates based on feedback.

Participant 1 said:

We have created a survey system using Google docs. We survey parents for feedback, but we also survey admin staff, and teaching staff. We’re under new management. There’s been a big push for quality control. For

senior leadership, we're being made to take a closer look at employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction.

Beyond implementing change, participants 2, 3, 10, 11, and 12 referred to the diverse nature of students and staff at the school. They reported that it was important to take time to celebrate all the cultures at the school and to make everyone feel included. They felt this was key for community building. All the participants reported encouraging whole community activities such as International Day. Principal 9 described this event at their school:

“Students are encouraged to dress up in their national dress. If they don't have national dress, they can get creative- wear their national colors, bring their country's flag, paint the flag on their face. Whatever gets them into celebration mode. We hold a school wide parade with each country represented by a group of students of all ages. Parents are invited to join. Staff join the parade as well. We have a booth for every represented nationality. These booths are organized by the PTA and run by volunteer parents. They give out food from each represented country, and other bits and bobs the parents put together. It's a great day for the school community. The PTA spends several months organizing this event.”

Participant 10 shared other opportunities to celebrate multiculturalism. “We encourage all celebrations. Diwali, Islamic holidays, Christmas, and Easter, all get the same level of attention and engagement at school.”

Encouragement was also expressed by participant 4, through a different lens:

“As part of our career services, we encourage parents who are entrepreneurs, doctors, SME owners, innovators, content creators, any one really, who is passionate about their profession... We encourage them to come in and give talks to students. You’d be surprised at how many parents are willing to take time out of their day to come speak about their job. Even outside of career week, parents are strongly encouraged to share their work experience.”

Participants 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 11 referred to attitude as being essential to developing a sense of community. Participant 7 said:

“The best accessory is a smile. I’m concerned when I see someone who isn’t smiling. It doesn’t matter who that is, a student, parent, teacher, cleaner... I feel the need to ask. I want to show that I care, and I encourage my middle management to take the same initiative.”

Participant 1 said:

“Our attitudes, our positivity, our want to do better, makes us a stronger community. Our students do better when we are positive. Parents feel better about entrusting us with their children when they know our vision and feel like they are an important part of achieving our goals. One of the ways we foster a sense of community is through safe-guarding training. Staff must take safe-guarding training. Parents are offered the same training as well, for free. We need to all work together to keep our children safe and happy. Parents who participate in the training understand our attitude towards the wellbeing of our students. If you see something, say something. Our safe-guarding champion runs the training sessions.

Even our youngest students know that if they see something, there's a safe person to say what they saw to."

Participant 6 discussed attitude through community engagement:

"At this school, we foster developing attitudes that allow students to see themselves as part of a larger community. Our middle schoolers and high schoolers need to collect credits in relation to community outreach work. We participate as well. We show students that we share the same attitudes towards the larger community."

Participant 2 also shared a similar practice:

"We engage our older students in a 'Week Without Walls' practice. Once a year, for a week, students need to participate in a community outreach engagement. Not all students have to travel, but the ones who do have participated in some pretty special projects. We've helped build schools in African, we've taken students to Cambodia to volunteer at orphanages... Our kids come back awakened; they understand that there's so many opportunities to do good for others."

Theme 4: Versatility

Table 5

Codes for Versatility

Code	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12
Adaptable	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Multicultural	x	x	x					x	x	x	x	

Support	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
network							

Adaptability was a common theme among all 12 participants. There was a consensus that being a successful school principal did not involve locking oneself up in an ivory tower. Participant 5 described themselves as a leader who could “engage where needed, across the board.”

Participant 12 shared their experience regarding being adaptable:

“I am proactive. If I am unable to find a substitute teacher on short notice, I need to be able to cover for that class. I must put the students first. I need to be willing to put my schedule and other commitments aside to address the best interests of the students.”

Participant 3 shared, “I teach P.E. on a rotation schedule, so I get to teach all the elementary kids. It’s always been a passion, and I enjoy it. Being active with the students is a great way to bond.” According to participant 3, maintaining some teaching hours in addition to their leadership role helped them to stay “grounded” with the teaching experience and visible to staff.

Participant 8 recalled working the front of house while the receptionists were away for a training conference.

“My ‘front of house’ receptionists were away, and someone had to step in and answer the phones. The reception desk was my office for two days. I answered phone calls, responded to inquiries, conducted two school tours for prospective

students, and received deliveries. It was refreshing to be out of the office and in front of everyone. You do what you need to do to keep the day moving smoothly.”

Participants 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, and 11 consciously chose to become school leader in a multicultural setting, and to be part of the global expatriate teaching community. Being flexible with leadership approaches when faced with a cultural or climate barrier is an important trait. Participant 10 said:

“I find I adjust my tone and my speech style depending on the nationality of the parent I’m talking to. It’s a part of the world that requires sensitivity with some cultures. You have to watch what you say and how you say it. Upsetting certain parents is not an option.”

Participant 3 added:

“Working in a multicultural environment has made me more thoughtful in my approach. I accidentally made an employee cry, my first year here. It wasn’t my intention at all, but she thought I was telling her off. I realized that what I thought was professional discourse sounded to her like beratement. In her culture, instruction is dressed up with many social niceties.”

Participant 8 recalled being left with their hand sticking out. “I didn’t realize that shaking hands was an issue. So, there I stood, hand out, with the parent just staring at me. It was embarrassing. But I guess that’s how you learn.”

Another code mentioned by participants 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 12 was building a multilingual support system. These participants reported not being able to speak Arabic.

Participant 3 said, “Arabic is the national language, and many of the local families feel more confident expressing their needs or concerns in Arabic.” Participant 4 shared, “our admissions team is multilingual in order to support parents who struggle to express themselves in English.” This sentiment was not exclusive to Arabic speakers.

Participant 10 said:

“The multicultural nature of Dubai means that some parents speak more fluently in their native Spanish, or Portuguese, or Mandarin. It’s not just the parents, we have students who come to us with no English. Having a multilingual staff means that we have the ability to connect with students who don’t speak English. It’s been my experience that such kids are shy. I have seen them integrate faster just by having someone they can speak to.”

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of self-reported transformational leaders in elementary private schools in Dubai. The research question addressed in this study was how do elementary private school principals in Dubai describe their lived experiences as self-reported transformational leaders? Semi-structured interviews were used as the data collection method for this phenomenological research. Twelve self-reported transformational elementary school principals voluntarily participated in the study. All participants met the inclusion criteria of a minimum of 2 years as elementary school principal in Dubai. Following the five-step analysis strategy detailed by Akinyode and Khan (2018), 4 major themes emerged: teamwork, empathy, community, and versatility. With regards to the theme of teamwork,

the participants shared how the creation of a positive school culture, collaboration with colleagues, and delegation allowed them to empower and engage staff. Under the theme of empathy, shared experience as a teacher, a parent, being a role-model, and being approachable were identified as important transformational leadership behaviors by the participants. Their previous experiences in different capacities allowed them to act empathetically towards stakeholders. Attitude, celebrations, encouragement, and visibility were codes that emerged under the theme of community. The participants shared their experiences with creating a culture of community and how that translated to engaging stakeholders. Being adaptable, multicultural, and creating a support network were the codes identified in relation to the theme of versatility. When reflecting on their transformational leadership practices in Dubai, the participants described how they maneuvered the unique environment to make stakeholders feel included and heard. Chapter 5 will address the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications for positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of self-reported transformational leaders in elementary private schools in Dubai. The research question addressed in this study was: How do elementary private school principals in Dubai describe their lived experiences as self-reported transformational leaders? The previous chapter detailed the 4 thematic categories that emerged: (a) teamwork, (b) empathy, (c) community, and (d) versatility. The following section will feature a discussion of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications for social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings from the first-hand accounts of the participants support the available literature on elementary school leadership practices. All participants stressed the importance of working fervently towards creating a culture of success. That was evident in the discussions on visibility within the school community. As noted by Noman et al. (2017) principals can use their leadership positions to influence the general institutional culture as well as the individual output of teachers, learners, and subordinate staff. In the case of the participants, rallying for change within the school requires the support of all the stakeholders. One participant noted that change is not welcome if the people around you do not know who it is coming from and that the school needs to function like one big family, where everyone feels invested, like they belong. Organizational performance

within the learning setting is very much dependent on how members interact and develop as a team (Kim, 2019).

The theme of versatility is also supported by the available literature. Principals are expected to accomplish administrative tasks, coordinate with external stakeholders, and provide inspirations for institutional culture (Abdallah & Forawi, 2017). As highlighted by the participants, the successful transformational leader knows how to quite literally ‘transform’ when needed. The participants discussed engaging in activities daily that do not necessarily align with the more traditional functions of an elementary school principal. The consensus among participants was that adaptability is key to ensuring that the day-to-day functions of the school run smoothly, and most importantly, that learning is not disrupted. As highlighted in the literature review, school principals are in a unique position to empower and inspire stakeholders and creating an enriching and evolving education environment. The findings of the study confirm the available literature by Arar and Nasra (2019), Hawass (2019), and Arar et al. (2016) which suggests that educational leadership in Dubai can be boosted by embracing inclusivity and cultural diversity in learning environments.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the principal is responsible for leading staff members and students to success. Collaboration involves the crucial step of showing a high degree of development, which is be demonstrated through unity. Hence, teamwork is one of the themes that emerged in the study (Tremaine, 2016). Hein and Chavez (2016) supported that principals encouraged collaboration and teambuilding through transformational approaches. The participants of the study felt that being a team player, instead of simply

passing down instructions, creates a more relaxed and collaborative environment.

Encouraging stakeholders to excel through delegation of responsibility allowed for the participants of the study to help stakeholders develop their strengths and find their inner leader. Leading an institution requires full commitment to inspire learners and teachers. Principals who maintain a close association with their staff often get to learn about the areas of management that should be modified to improve performance (Tremaine, 2016).

Finally, the participants of the study noted the importance of compassion and remembering that they were once teachers as well. This is mirrored by findings of Wulffers et al. (2016) who contended that increasing self-clarity is attainable through self-awareness that must be complemented by introspection. That introspection supports the anecdotes of participants who suggested that sharing personal experiences with staff allows them to build stronger connections and trusting relationships. Therefore, school leaders in Dubai can enhance their legitimacy by improving the skills of fellow teachers and modeling introspection and reflection. The participants cited the importance of reminding themselves of their previous experiences, both positive and negative, to develop their leadership practices. This is supported by the findings of Wulffers et al. (2016) who contended that leaders become extraordinary when they remain genuine and transparent. Sun et al. (2017) further supports the findings of the study by asserting that an increase in accountability led to educational leaders being besieged by the need to produce a better environment for stakeholders, through building on past experiences.

Limitations of the Study

As discussed in Chapter 1, the applicability of the findings of this study are limited because of the participant pool. This limitation restricts the ability for transferability, especially when the context is less than exceedingly comparable. As the study is a phenomenological study, the findings are limited to the experiences of the participants in the study. One limitation to trustworthiness that arose from the execution of the study was my need to resort to virtual interviews due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Conducting interviews virtually did not allow for the more natural flow and focus that was experienced in the one interview that was conducted using the traditional face to face interview process. Three of the virtual interviews were interrupted for reasons of parcel delivery and intrusions to the home office setting. My with the limitations resulting from virtual interviews is mirrored by Oliffe et al. (2021) who assert that concession with regards to the ability to observe nuances such as body language and facial gestures are made when conducting virtual interviews.

Recommendations

As this study was a qualitative phenomenological study, the findings present a description of how self-reported transformational elementary school principals in Dubai understand their lived experiences. The participants of this study all had at least 2 years of experience as an elementary school principal in Dubai. One avenue for further research is to engage in a quantitative investigation into the extent to which elementary private school principals in Dubai use transformational leadership skills. Such a quantitative study could be implemented by means of a survey examining variables such

as opportunities for professional growth provided by the principal, mentoring activities undertaken by the principal, and the frequency of incorporation of stakeholder feedback. Such a design could address the limitation of the current study by using the survey methodology instead of virtual interviews mandated by the current COVID-19 pandemic. A second recommendation for further research is a non-experimental correlation study of participants who are newly assigned as elementary school principals in Dubai. Such a study could investigate the relationship between the implementation of transformational leadership practices and considerations made for contextual influences. Such findings would add to the minimal literature available which directly relates to leadership practices in the Middle East, particularly in Dubai. The influence of expatriate leadership in the UAE is a gap in the literature that has not been addressed.

Implications

According to Chebbi (2017) globalization has impacted private schools in Dubai and the kind of leadership that has prevailed in schools. In the case of self-reported transformational leaders in elementary private schools in Dubai, the results of the current study can be used to affect positive social change within the elementary private school leadership community. Social change aims to build on what is learned from scholarly research and find avenues where the application of findings can make a difference. One such avenue is creating platforms within the elementary private school community in Dubai, for principals to share their experiences candidly, and build on best practices. In a case study by Blake et al. (2021), the researchers observed how an EU knowledge sharing project among local stakeholders allowed the participants not only to share best practices,

but also to share the justifications and contexts for incorporating these practices.

Armstrong, Brown, and Chapman (2021) also addressed the positive outcomes that can arise from school-to-school professional dialogue and cooperation. The researchers contend that all stakeholders gain when key players in schools collaborate together, with innovation, workload reductions, financial efficiency, teacher retention, knowledge mobility, and student outcomes being cited as areas that can be positively influenced by work in partnership with colleagues from other institutions.

The findings of this study demonstrate how self-reported transformational leaders in elementary private schools in Dubai understand their leadership experiences and how assuming a transformational leadership approach impacts teamwork among stakeholders, allows them to demonstrate empathy towards others, promotes a sense of community within the school, and encourages versatility for the school leaders. To create positive social change among elementary private schools in Dubai, intentional and structured efforts are required to create opportunities for school leaders to come together.

Conclusion

Academic research related to elementary school principals in the Arab world, and Dubai in particular, is limited (Matthew, 2016). The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of self-reported transformational leaders in elementary private schools in Dubai. Findings from the study provided insight on how as self-reported transformational elementary school principals in Dubai work towards developing a sense of community among stakeholders, foster teamwork and collaboration, practice introspection and empathy, and engage in versatility within the

school community. The lived experiences shared by the participants of this study may influence positive social action towards improving the avenues of communication and knowledge sharing between elementary private school principals in Dubai.

Notwithstanding the different contextual nuances of each school, sharing experiences with transformational leadership practices can help extend the discussion on how best to address developing a school climate that is invested in the success of all stakeholders.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Time of Interview: *Start Time* _____ / *Finish Time* _____

Location of Interview:

Interviewer's name:

Interviewee's name:

How would you describe your leadership style?

1. Please describe your perceptions regarding how your personal, professional, educational, or other factors have shaped your leadership style.
2. Please describe, and elaborate on, your perception of the factors that contributed to your decision to be an elementary school principal in Dubai.
3. Please describe, in as much detail as possible, the challenges you have encountered as an elementary school principal in Dubai. How have you addressed these challenges?
4. Please describe, in as much detail as possible, the factors you perceive have contributed to your success as an elementary school principal in Dubai.
5. What strategies do you use to shape school culture and why do you use those strategies?
6. What are the most important attributes you demonstrate as an elementary school principal in Dubai? Please elaborate on how you perceive these attributes help you as an elementary school principal in Dubai.