

# **Fostering Innovation and Creativity in the UAE Educational System:**

## **Examining the Role of Educational Leaders in High Schools**

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## **Abstract**

Fostering creativity and innovation in secondary education is considered as a crucial element for students' holistic development. However, evidence shows that there is limited research and understanding as far as the relationship between principal leadership styles and the development of creativity and innovation within the context of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is concerned. To contribute to this important area, the paper focuses on assessing the role of education leaders in developing innovation and creativity in the UAE secondary education system. The study is based on a systematic review of fourteen scholarly sources related to educational leadership within the UAE's secondary school system. By collecting and analyzing relevant research from both survey-based and semi-structured interviews studies, the paper looks to identify traces of influence and potential influence of educational leadership on creativity, innovation, teacher performance, and student outcomes. The findings show that, while no research specifically considered the impact of educational leadership on creativity and innovation, several research papers discussed mediating factors. School leaders were cognizant of what innovation in schools meant and particularly acknowledged the creative

problem-solving facet of innovation, however, only about half of school leaders facilitated the implementation of UAE policy on innovation in their schools. The review also found that managerial support for creativity was likely to promote creativity and innovation in teaching and in learning, thus improving teacher performance and student learning outcomes to some extent. The transformational leadership came up as a potential leadership style that could promote innovation and creativity in secondary schools despite the gross misunderstanding of the approach by some school leaders. The paper also identified a number of barriers hindering educational leaders from implementing innovative and creative practices and some suggestions on how these might be mitigated. While the findings are quite useful, the paper has some limitations; especially related to the lack of primary data to understand the role of school leaders in fostering innovation and creativity.

**Keywords** Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, UAE Secondary Education, Creativity, Innovation.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Problem Statement**

In the United Arab Emirates, a nation where innovation and creativity are considered cornerstones of progress, the government is keen on fostering an educational system that cultivates such qualities (Ahmed 2023). The UAE government is particularly focused on making the UAE a knowledge economy to ensure more sustainable and equitable economic development. To achieve this vision, innovation and creativity must be fostered in the youth via the secondary and tertiary education system.

While the UAE has made significant investments in fostering innovation and creativity, the output of these investments has been quite lacklustre. The progress – and also, the lack thereof – is observed in the recent assessment of the UAE in the Global Innovation Index (2022). Whereas the UAE ranks pretty high – i.e. in the 31<sup>st</sup> place – the report on the UAE observes that investments in innovation and creativity are not being effectively translated into outputs. Regarding knowledge creation, the UAE ranks 97<sup>th</sup> amongst the 113 countries assessed, highlighting a dearth of innovation. To fix the situation concerning innovation outputs, it is essential to develop innovation and creativity in the local youth. In particular, educational leaders, in the form of principals, must embrace a transformative approach, shaping institutions that encourage innovation and inspire students to be creative.

## **1.2 The Rational of the Study**

Alas, there is a dearth of research in the UAE with respect to the impact of educational leadership (i.e. principals or administrators) on innovation and creativity to help guide policymakers more effectively. Litz and Scott (2017) observe a mediocre prevalence of transformational leadership in secondary education in the UAE. Ahmed (2023) – in a recent review of educational leadership literature in the Muslim world – observed a high prevalence of articles on educational leadership in the UAE but only two studies that related to innovation and creativity. Overall, there are limited studies on the impact of educational leadership on innovation and creativity in the UAE.

## **1.3 Research Objectives and Questions**

Given the limited research and need for research pertaining to understanding the role of educational leadership in facilitating innovation and creativity, the current study aims to assess to understand the role of education leaders in developing innovation and creativity in the UAE secondary education system. Based on the research aim, the study seeks to examine to understand the:

- Role or influence of school leadership on creativity/innovation
- Role or influence of school leadership on student outcomes and teacher performance
- Barriers hindering educational leaders from implementing innovative and creative practices

In the context of the research aim and objectives, the main research question is “how does educational leadership influence innovation and creativity within the secondary education system?”

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Conceptual Analysis**

Creativity and innovation have quite diverse meanings depending on the context. In a school context, creativity may refer to teacher or student creativity. *Teacher creativity* is defined as a teacher's preference, acceptance and execution of novel teaching methods to address particular student needs or solve particular classroom problems (Amtu, Siahaya & Tilak 2019). Significant factors impact teacher creativity, ranging from individual, environmental, and institutional factors.

From a school leadership perspective, environmental and institutional factors play a significant role. Environmental factors that play a significant role include autonomy, workload and role clarity, whereas institutional factors include policies, curriculum and assessment methods (Amtu et al. 2019). Teacher autonomy, in particular, is an essential factor for teacher creativity (Irfan et al. 2022). On the other hand, *student creativity* is defined as a student's ability to develop new and unique ideas or solutions to problems (Burayeva et al. 2020). Student creativity is determined by the student's motivation, school culture, and teacher support.

Three types of leadership are prominently associated with creativity and innovation in the research literature: (1) transformative (or transformational) leadership, (2) distributed leadership, and (3) instructional leadership. Amongst these three, transformative leadership is most associated with a positive impact on students and staff (Ahmed 2023). Transformative leadership refers to leadership behaviour and actions that aim to inspire followers (which in an educational context would be teachers, staff and students) to collaborate in teams and individually strive for positive change (Al-Khazraji 2022). The concept was first developed in the 1980s, in response to transactional leadership and the belief that leadership is a talent acquired at birth. Transformational leadership contends that by making individuals work beyond their self-interest, leadership can effectively engineer change. The pioneering concept at that time contended that leadership is not just about supervising and monitoring, as claimed by the four primary components of transformational leadership, which are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration.

Transformational leadership is related to Maslow's hierarchy of needs and calls for leaders to move beyond a transactional exchange guaranteeing specific action in return for the fulfilment of basic and security needs (Chaubay, Sahoo & Khatri 2019). The four components of transformative leadership aim to engineer change and innovation in organizations (Gheorghe 2012). For instance, as per idealized influence criteria, leaders should earn the trust and admiration of their followers through consistent action and

values. Transformational leaders work to inspire their followers to a higher goal through inspirational motivation. Transformational leaders also tend to stimulate their followers intellectually, which is the aspect through which most connect transformative leadership with creativity and innovation. Lastly, transformational leaders focus on reducing barriers to enabling change.

Distributed and instructional leadership are other relevant theories in the research context (Ahmed 2023). Distributed leadership refers to delegating leadership functions to followers to further followers' skills and professional development, i.e., distributing leadership amongst followers rather than maintaining central control (Litz et al., 2016, p. 83). Distributed leadership aims to promote a culture of shared responsibility and collaborative problem-solving (Tandon 2022). When several individuals are given the task to lead, it becomes essential for them to take responsibility for their actions and subsequently work with each other. In such a collaborative environment, innovative and diverse ideas are more likely to be tabled and implemented. In contrast to distributed leadership, instructional leadership focuses on goals and standards for students' learning, curriculum development and maintenance, and reinforcing positive student behaviour (Ersozlu & Saklan 2016). Instructional leadership has also been associated with innovation and culture by potentially inspiring intrinsic motivation to learn in students and effective knowledge delivery by teachers.

Apart from leadership models associated with innovation and creativity, two other



prevalent leadership models in educational institutions are transactional leadership and laissez-faire leadership. Transactional leadership comprises outlining clear responsibilities for the followers and providing rewards for achieving these responsibilities (Northouse 2007). In other words, transactional leadership views the leader-follower relationship as one based on transactions where any specific behaviour can be elicited as long as a contingent reward is offered to fulfil the behaviour. On the contrary, laissez-faire leadership refers to leaders being indifferent to the needs of the followers or the organization and letting followers work for themselves (Moss & Ritossa 2007). Laissez-faire leadership is generally associated with incompetence and ineffectiveness.

## **2.2 Review of the Related Literature**

The impact of transformational leadership on creativity and innovation has been widely explored in several empirical studies. Most studies have found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and creativity and innovation. For instance, Khalili (2016) considered whether transformational leadership provided a supportive climate for innovation and resulted in greater employee creativity. After surveying almost 1,200 Iranian employees in various industries, the researcher found a positive and significant relationship between transformational leadership and employees' creativity and innovation. Similarly, Harbi, Alarifi & Mosbah (2019) found that transformational leadership has a significant positive relationship with followers'

creativity and organizational innovation.

Moreover, some studies have examined the mediating effect of other variables on the relationship between transformational leadership and creativity. For example, Arokiasamy, Maheshwari & Nguyen (2022) aimed to identify the relationship between transformational leadership style and individual creativity in higher education by examining the mediating influence of organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB). They found that OCB partially mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and individual creativity.

Shin and Zhou (2007) found that heterogeneity in transformational leadership and educational specialization affected team creativity. When transformational leadership was high, teams with greater educational specialization heterogeneity exhibited greater creativity. Furthermore, some studies have compared the effectiveness of transformational leadership styles on creativity and innovation with other leadership styles. For example, Ebrahimi et al. (2017) investigated the effect of transformational and transactional leadership on the education of employees' creativity by considering the moderating role of learning orientation and the leader's gender. They found that transformational leadership was more effective than transactional leadership in enhancing employees' creativity. Overall, empirical evidence suggests that transformational leadership in educational contexts positively relates to creativity and innovation. However, other variables mediating and moderating effects on this relationship need to be further

explored.

Concerning other leadership styles, the effects of innovation and creativity could be more forthcoming. Indeed, there is significant evidence that distributed leadership positively affects creativity and innovation. For instance, Nguyen, Hooi & Avvari (2021) found that distributed leadership in Vietnamese public organizations resulted in organizational innovation, which was mediated via employee creativity. However, the positive effects on creativity and innovation have yet to be vetted in educational contexts. Recently, O'Shea (2021) observed a clear correlation between the use of distributed leadership in schools and the prevalence of innovative teaching practices.

Menon (2013) observes that most studies on distributed leadership in educational contexts emphasize impacts on student outcomes in terms of performance and the role of the principal. While empirical research concerning distributed leadership indicates a positive association with staff and student creativity and innovation, the same cannot be said of transactional and instructional leadership. For instance, Walala, Waiganjo, & Njeru (2014) looked at transactional leadership in vocational training centres in Nigeria and found only a minor significant impact on creativity and innovation. Furthermore, Ebrahimi et al. (2017) observed no significant impact of transactional leadership on employees' creativity.

A similar lack of effect is also seen concerning instructional leadership. For instance, studying the effect of leadership styles on PE teachers' innovation, Mousavi et

al. (2011) found that instructional leadership resulted in more creativity and innovation in teaching style. However, Kwan (2019) found that instructional leadership's effect on student outcomes, particularly creativity and innovation, is significantly moderated by the degree to which transformational leadership practices have been enacted. Overall, apart from transformational leadership and, to some extent, distributed leadership, other leadership styles have not been seen to have significant positive outcomes on creativity and innovation in the empirical literature.

Different from secondary education, transformational leadership has been evaluated in various organizational contexts in the UAE. As mentioned earlier, Litz and Scott (2017) observed that transformational leadership needs to be modified based on the UAE cultural context in the secondary education system. Namrata (2014) associated transformational leadership in UAE primary schools with higher rates of job satisfaction among teachers. With respect to teacher retention, Abudaqa et al. (2019) observed no significant impact of transformational leadership in the UAE higher education system. Al-Khazraji (2022) evaluated the relationship between transformational leadership and employee creativity in the UAE. The researchers found the transformational leadership aspects of idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration positively related to employee creativity.

Recently, Antalie (2023) looked at the impact of transformational leadership on teacher creativity in UAE's public school system and observed a positive correlation

between the two variables. Oplatka and Arar (2017) conducted an extensive systematic review of studies in the Arab World on educational leadership. They found most studies focused on assessing types of educational leadership or barriers faced by leaders. Generally, studies on the impact of educational leadership on students in the UAE are notably lacking.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Approach**

The relationship between educational leadership and student creativity and innovation in the UAE secondary education system is investigated through a systematic literature review and thematic analysis. The systematic review methodology followed by Ahmed (2023) and Oplatka and Arar (2017), given their use in the Arab World context. In particular, a thorough search of academic databases and government research pertaining to transformational leadership, distributed leadership, instructional leadership, principal leadership, student creativity, student innovation, and innovative behaviour was conducted. A systematic literature review differs from a general literature review as it specifies the process and the criteria through which sources are identified, making it possible to replicate the literature review to an extent (Xiao & Watson 2019). A systematic literature review also allows for a more nuanced understanding of a research question than other methods (Gough, Thomas & Oliver 2017). A systematic literature review is also akin to mixed methods research in terms of benefits as it does not limit

researchers to using only qualitative or quantitative studies (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2017).

### **3.2 Search Strategy**

The search strategy for this systematic literature review will involve a comprehensive search of electronic databases, including Google Scholar, ERIC, ScienceDirect and JSTOR. Also, the databases of local universities – such as Zayed University, UAE University, and The British University in Dubai – and local think tanks – such as Dubai School of Government – were also utilized to identify relevant research. In order to ensure that the complete scope of educational leadership research in the UAE was taken into account, the following keywords were used for searches “educational leadership”, “educational leadership styles”, “distributed leadership”, “transformational leadership”, “school leadership”, “principals”. In addition to focusing on leadership keywords, keywords focusing on the scope of the study and the dependent variables were as follows: “innovation”, “teacher innovation”, “student creativity”, “creativity”, “UAE”, “Emirati”, “secondary education”, “high school”.

### **3.3 Search Criteria**

Whereas the aforementioned parameters resulted in a large number of results, strict inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied for identified studies. First, only studies published after 2017 were considered, given the high pace of change in the UAE. Second, only studies published in English were used to ensure ease of analysis. Third,

studies that were not specific to high school education were not considered at all. Fourth, the study had to be related to educational leadership and student outcomes. With respect to educational leadership, the study should be based on one or more of the leadership styles identified in the conceptual framework section. Fifth, the study should have used some form of empirical or exploratory research method providing novel or unique insights. As such, studies that were literature reviews or meta-analyses themselves were excluded. With respect to the type of source, peer-reviewed journal articles, edited chapters, white papers, unpublished journal articles, and dissertations were included for analysis. Textbooks and news articles were not considered.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

The information from the collected studies was analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis with respect to systematic literature review consists of identifying broad themes and categories in the research literature and then categorizing findings of the identified literature into different categories (Gough et al. 2017). The thematic analysis also allows multiple perspectives to be explored. Given the diverse impact that different leadership styles have on student outcomes and the different mechanisms through which they work, thematic analysis can help ensure a holistic approach in the analysis (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2017). For the purpose of this paper, thematic analysis was done firstly by the different types of leadership styles (i.e. transformational leadership, distributed leadership) and subsequently by their findings. With respect to

findings, the general theme and pattern concerning how different leadership styles evoke positive or negative effects on creativity and innovation were also explored and discussed at length. Further, thematic analysis was done in terms of direct effects and effects via moderating variables similar to Ahmed (2023).

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

As the research does not involve any particular participants, per se, the research does not need to deal with issues of confidentiality and anonymity. Also, concerns related to the safety of participants are not appropriate for the proposed research. Regardless, the study makes an extensive effort to ensure ethical best practices by attributing all research as accurately as possible. Also, extensive efforts have been made so that reviewed research findings are understood and represent the original work as closely as possible. In discussing the findings of other researchers, the systematic literature review also ensures that confidentiality and the anonymity of other researchers' participants are not violated in any way.

## **4. Result and Discussion**

### **4.1 General Overview**

The scholarship pertaining to educational leadership research in the UAE – specific to the effects of educational leadership – was quite limited. Moreover, a significant amount of research focused on higher education, more so than secondary or primary education. Interestingly, vocational education received as much scholarship as



secondary/primary education, whereas vocational education usually receives less scholarship worldwide than secondary/primary education. Overall, a total of fourteen sources were identified based on the search strategy and eligibility criteria. Among these, four were doctoral dissertations, one was a conference paper, and nine were peer-reviewed journal articles. All studies were either based on survey research or semi-structured interviews.

In the limited research found, no source looked at the impact of school leadership on creativity and innovation in secondary education in the UAE. Many studies focused on school leadership's impact on teacher performance and student outcomes. A few studies even considered the impact of teacher leadership on student outcomes. The studies that qualified only tangentially discussed the impact of school leadership on creativity or determinants of creativity. In the subsequent sections, the tangential findings from the various sources are described and discussed in prior literature.

#### **4.2 School Leadership and Creativity/Innovation**

While no research specifically considered the impact of educational leadership on creativity and innovation, several researchers discussed mediating factors. For instance, Webb (2018) conducted semi-structured interviews of twelve school leaders and teachers across public and private schools in the UAE to assess factors restricting and enabling innovation in schools. The researcher found that the situation pertaining to developing innovation at schools by leadership was mixed. While half of the schools were found to

be working toward following the UAE government's innovation agenda in schools, the other half had implemented no measures to promote innovation in schools. All school leaders were cognizant of what innovation in schools meant and particularly acknowledged the creative problem-solving facet of innovation. The evidence of some school leaders working towards innovation was also mired by the fact that lack of strategic focus on innovation was the key issue in all schools in the study.

The research relating to transformational leadership in UAE public schools also indicates that there are generally a lot of restrictions towards innovation. Alhammadi (2019) looked at how gender affected the leadership styles employed at public schools in the UAE. The researcher primarily found that male school leaders exhibited a greater propensity towards transformational leadership – i.e. leadership likely to inspire creativity/innovation – than female school leaders. However, the overall propensity towards transformational leadership was low. The male propensity to transformational leadership noted by Alhammadi (2019) contradicts broader literature that notes that women are more inclined towards transformational leadership (Shaked et al., 2018; Shah, 2023). Shaked et al. (2018) observed that women are more likely to utilize participative decision-making and individualised consideration than men. In this context, Alhammadi's finding potentially could be attributed to a difference of culture in the UAE from western contexts. School leaders, in Alhammadi (2019), mostly employed transactional leadership and therein also exhibited passive management by exception as the key leadership

strategy. School leaders generally only addressed problems when they became critical. Such a leadership strategy is not conducive to creativity and innovation in schools.

Blaik, Litz, Azaza & Smith (2022) conducted a study to evaluate how school leaders in Abu Dhabi public schools evaluate themselves as transformational leaders in terms of emotional intelligence. The researchers found that there was a generally high perception amongst school leaders of themselves as transformational leaders; however, the researchers also found that school leaders recognized that bringing about change and innovation in schools was inherently a difficult task. The findings were not much different from the systemic review conducted by Ritz and Scott (2017), which indicated cultural barriers as a factor restricting innovation in public schools in the UAE. Overall, research concerning school leadership largely indicated a restrictive role played by leaders in promoting creativity and innovation in secondary schools.

### **4.3 School Leadership and Student Outcomes**

The research on the impact of school leadership on student outcomes also provides some insights into the impacts on creativity and innovation. Alsuwaidi (2021) carried out an assessment of how managerial creativity itself impacted student outcomes. The researcher collected data from 246 school employees via structured questionnaires. Furthermore, Alsuwaidi put forth a conceptual model wherein managerial creativity and innovative leadership resulted in teacher professional development, climate for innovation, support for creative teaching, action-oriented behaviour, confidence,

emotional intelligence, low-risk aversion, improved openness for discussion, and greater domain expertise. Ultimately, Alsuwaidi hypothesized all these factors resulted in greater school performance. The researcher found that the proposed model held statistical significance and had a medium impact on school performance. In other words, the researcher found that managerial support for creativity was likely to promote creativity and innovation, which was found to be positively associated with improved school performance. Ibrahim and Mahmoud (2017) observed the impact of school leadership's communication style on school performance. The researcher, in their analysis, found support for the potential of specific leadership factors leading to greater creativity and innovation in schools.

In our previous literature review, we found that environment support was the most significant factor contributing to teacher creativity. Ibrahim and Mahmoud interestingly found evidence that a supportive communication style was prevalent in Al Ain public schools and that it was also the communication style that had the second-highest positive impact on school performance. As supportive communication style is a component of transformational leadership under the idealized influence criteria, it can be said that there is evidence that transformational leadership in the UAE could lead to greater creative teaching practices that result in improved school performance via supportive communication styles. Regardless, there is a need to take the results of Ibrahim and Mahmoud with some scepticism as the results were not entirely triangulated through

subsequent interviews in which interviewees claimed that most teachers were pandering to school leadership and hence gave favourable answers.

#### **4.4 School Leadership and Teacher Performance**

The role of school leadership in improving teacher performance and fostering creativity and innovation in teaching practices is acknowledged in research to some extent. AlQahtani (2019) for instance discusses a case study of Ali Bin Abi Talib School in Al-Ain, illustrating how a new school leader was able to improve school evaluation from satisfactory to excellent. Amongst many changes the new school leader implemented, AlQahtani observes regular discussions between the new school leader and teachers about latest pedagogical techniques for instructions and teachings, and encouragement given to teachers to use novel teaching techniques. Overall, the case study illustrates the use of a transformational leadership style resulted in significantly improved teacher performance by facilitating creativity. In contrast to AlQahtani, Brines (2020) observes that the use of distributed leadership model can significant lead to improved teacher performance and creativity and better overall school performance. In an extensive evaluation of six different private schools in Dubai, Brines specifically tried to ascertain school leadership best practices that were resulting in improved school performance. The key best practice was ensuring quality teacher development and distributed leadership was found to have a significantly positive impact on teacher development. Brines additionally found that transformational leadership alone did not result in greater teacher

development. In particular, the research found that whereas transformational leadership allows for teacher autonomy, distributed leadership allows for greater teacher autonomy and in a more deregulated manner.

While distributed leadership may allow for greater autonomy, most research specific to the UAE secondary education system indicates that transformational leadership is better for bolstering creativity and innovation in teachers. For instance, Radhwan (2020) carried out a multi-stakeholder analysis of the impact of teacher's leadership style on student learning. The researchers found that charismatic leaders exhibiting idealized influence on students were more likely to result in better student outcomes and also nurture creativity and innovation in students themselves. Ibrahim (2020) surveyed 361 teachers from different UAE schools and found that teacher performance is significantly influenced by teacher collaboration, which in turn depends on transformational leadership from school leaders along with providing teacher with time and resources. Ibrahim concluded that secondary schools in the UAE do not have a good environment for teacher collaboration because teacher autonomy is severely lacking due to top-down nature of educational policies. Finally, Shaker and Saleh (2020) in a study of eleven different schools found that school leaders could allow for greater teacher retention through providing teachers with individual consideration and allowing them significant autonomy. The researchers particularly found that in the current environment, teachers feel constrained with respect to exercising any creative freedom with respect to

teaching practices. Overall, there exists widespread evidence that transformational leadership could lead to better creativity and innovation in UAE secondary schools; however, the implementation of such leadership is limited by top-down nature of policy prescriptions and limited autonomy provided from school leaders to teachers.

#### **4.5 Barriers hindering educational leaders from implementing innovative and creative practices**

Some insights into the impact of school leadership on creativity and innovation can be deduced from research on teacher behaviour in the UAE secondary education and student outcomes. Almarzouqi (2015) provides significant insights with respect to leadership factors that may be restricting teacher creativity. The researcher provides the findings of an in-depth study that consists of a survey of ninety-five teachers, in-depth interviews with ten teachers, and a comprehensive documentary analysis of three related education policy documents. After analysing all collected data, Almazrouqi observed that the key issue with respect to their role identified by teachers was the lack of autonomy due to the top-down nature of the current policy prescription for secondary education schools in the UAE.

The teachers also noted the lack of cultural support for the teaching profession and the consideration of the profession as a stepping stone or a part-time career path. Once again, a lack of autonomy indicates a lack of support for teachers from educational leaders. Lack of support is indicative of a transactional leadership style where teachers

are expected to follow through on responsibilities based on contingent reward. Almarzouqi shows a dire picture concerning support provided to teachers in the UAE and the potential to instigate teachers to be creative and subsequently develop creativity in students. Ajayi and Proff (2021) also arrive at similar findings as Almarzouqi while considering the views of high school science teachers in UAE private high schools. Ajayi and Proff particularly carried out six in-depth interviews with high school science teachers at six different private high schools in the UAE. The research aimed to evaluate the lived experience of secondary school teachers that leads to positive student outcomes. The researchers found that policy addressing teacher needs – i.e. providing teachers with autonomy and support – was likely to result in improved student outcomes, including greater student creativity. The researchers also acknowledged that current rote-based professional development training offered to teachers had an adverse impact on positive teacher behaviour and also restricted positive student outcomes.

The research on teacher leadership in the UAE indicated the significant potential that distributed leadership in schools could have for creativity and innovation. Eltanahy (2018), for example, found in a comprehensive online survey of teachers that secondary school teachers in the UAE had significant leadership potential. The researchers also found that providing teachers with leadership and autonomy could have significant benefits for teachers' ethics, proficiency, self-learning, emotional stability, interpersonal skills, collaboration, and initiative. The researchers also observed that if teachers were



given leadership and autonomy, they were likely to implement innovative teaching practices.

In fact, the two strongest behaviours participants said they were likely to implement after being provided leadership were “use different resources to innovate” and “upgrade teaching skills consistently” (Eltanahy, 2018, p. 42). While Eltanahy indicates the potential of distributed leadership for greater innovation and creativity in secondary education, Hefnawi (2022) documents the above via research conducted pertaining to distance learning in secondary education in the UAE. Hefnawi provides a personal critical reflection on teacher leadership in distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hefnawi observed that distance learning provided teachers with significant autonomy with respect to how they could deliver instructions and carry out lessons. Teachers also were faced with the task of maintaining student engagement in virtual environments. The result was that teachers implemented innovative techniques, and Hefnawi found that overall engagement by students was increased. Hefnawi’s accounts lend credence to the fact that developing teacher leadership alongside distributed leadership models could lead to significant positive effects.

## **5. Conclusion**

Overall, the systematic review indicates that a transformational leadership style could lead to greater innovation and creativity within the secondary education system in

the UAE. While the creativity benefits of transformational leadership were ascertained, the systematic review also indicated significant hindrances with respect to the implementation of transformational leadership in the UAE. The emphasis on transactional leadership and a cultural preference for risk aversion were among the two main barriers. Additionally, teacher behaviour also showed that teachers themselves emphasised on instructional leadership more so than pursuing creative teaching to ensure better results.

### **5.1 Implication of the Study**

The study is quite beneficial for the overall educational leadership research in the UAE. The study provides collective insights into the state of research on the impacts of educational leadership in the UAE context. Additionally, from a policy perspective, the study provides insights into what else needs to be done to improve creativity and innovation in the UAE secondary education system. The study also provides an understanding of the role played by different leadership styles in the UAE education sector.

### **5.2 Limitation of the Study**

While the study offers significant insights, the study does suffer from significant limitations. First, the effectiveness of the systematic review is limited as the amount of prior research answering the research question specifically was non-existent and hence tangentially relevant researches were taken into account. Second, the study is based on prior research and does not attempt to provide novel information based on primary

research. Third, the systematic literature review method also hinders complex insights from being gained pertaining to the contextual factors of specific findings.

### **5.3 Scope for Future Studies**

To overcome these limitations, future studies may focus on verifying the broad findings of the current systematic literature review through qualitative methods to gain more contextual and novel insights.

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