

Analysis of Educational Leadership Theories and Practices in Abu Dhabi Schools

Ali AL Hajeri

Faculty of Education, British University in Dubai

Email: 23000433@student.buid.ac.ae

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Abstract

During the last decade, the UAE education system has undergone many reforms to align its outcomes with requirements of the knowledge-based economy adopted by the UAE government. The Abu Dhabi 2030 vision has emphasized on the role of education as a key contributor to youth development and economy growth. Educational leadership plays a vital role in the success and effectiveness of educational institutions. Effective leadership has been linked to various positive outcomes including enhanced students' achievement, improved teacher commitment and overall school performance. There has been a substantial investment in Abu Dhabi educational infrastructure, curriculum updating and professional development for educators. These efforts aim to ensure that the students are equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills to succeed in the era of globalization. Despite the considerable improvements in the education system, there is still an important gap in literature concerning the leadership styles practiced in Abu Dhabi schools. While many studies have examined the educational leadership in various global contexts, the specific socio-cultural and economic landscape of Abu Dhabi educational institutions necessitates a more focussed investigation. Moreover, the existing studies on educational leadership in Abu Dhabi have been focussing on fragmented and isolated aspects of leadership rather than providing a comprehensive synthesis of the educational leadership

practices adopted in Abu Dhabi. This study has adopted a meta-synthesis approach to analyse and understand the educational leadership theories and practices prevailing in Abu Dhabi education institutions based on the previous research studies on the topic. The findings of this study reveal that transformational leadership style is predominant in Abu Dhabi schools displaying many positive impacts in terms of teachers' satisfaction, students' achievement and overall school performance. The study also highlighted the diversified, dynamic and evolving nature of Abu Dhabi educational system which necessitates leadership with a high degree of adaptability and exhibition of emotional and cultural intelligence attributes. Furthermore, the study has identified some of the best leadership practices which include the fostering of continuous professional development culture and the promoting collaborative leadership. The gender dimension was also explored, and the findings show that female leaders have been successful as school leaders. Finally, some recommendations were given in the perspective to explore this crucial topic and to expand the research to all the emirates in order to get a comprehensive picture of the educational leadership situation within UAE schools.

Keywords: educational leadership, meta-synthesis, transformational leadership, instructional leadership, distributed leadership

1. Introduction

The role of educational leaders is crucial in achieving an inspiring educational environment which promotes wellbeing and commitment to teaching and learning. Educational leadership involves various aspects of managing resources, fostering positive school culture, implementing curriculum updating and addressing the diverse needs of students and staff. Effective leadership is found to be the essence of numerous positive achievements in terms of enhanced student performance, improved teacher satisfaction and overall school development (Liljenberg & Wrethander, 2020).

In contrast, the problem statement is the absence of clear direction and support can lead to a lack of cohesion among the staff, poor teaching practices and consequently low students' achievements. The last decades were marked by the growing interest in the application of different leadership theories within educational institutions (Chmer, 2020). Theories such as Transformational Leadership which focusses on inspiring and motivating staff; Transactional Leadership, which emphasizes structures roles; and Distributed Leadership, which promotes shared responsibility, have gained importance in educational research. These three theories provide frameworks for understanding how leaders can effectively guide their schools towards achieving educational outcomes. However, the application and impact of these theories varies significantly based on cultural, social and organizational contexts of the educational institutions (Toprak, 2020).

Abu Dhabi has a rapidly evolving education system reflecting the broader economic and

social development goals of the country. ADEK oversees the educational framework in the emirate. ADEK's mission is to develop a world-class education system that meets international standards while preserving the UAE cultural values and heritage. The education system in Abu Dhabi is known by its diversified landscape. It consists of public schools which offer the ministry of education curriculum and private schools offering a range of international curricula. The Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 has prioritized the reform and development of its education system to align it with the requirements of the knowledge-based economy capable of sustaining a long-term economic growth and social development. Significant reforms and investments have been made to improve the quality of education in Abu Dhabi (Long, 2020). These efforts include updating curriculum, enhancing staff professional development, modernizing infrastructure, integrating new technologies, and implementing new assessment and accountability approaches. These reforms aim to prepare students for the demands of globalized world by fostering critical thinking, creativity and lifelong learning skills (School Leadership Development Plan for Licensure in the U.A.E, 2020) , (Recio, 2021) , (Teaching in the United Arab Emirates: 10 Lessons From TALIS, 2020).

This study is significant as it shows Abu Dhabi School leaders are at the frontline of implementing the new reforms and successfully conducting the management of change. Therefore, shading light on the leadership styles adopted in Abu Dhabi schools will provide valuable insights into how leadership practices influence educational outcomes and how

they can be optimized to meet Abu Dhabi school's needs (Harris, 2022). While numerous studies have explored educational leadership globally, there is still a noticeable gap in the literature regarding the leadership theories and practices used in Abu Dhabi schools. Although various studies have focused on some aspects of educational leadership in Abu Dhabi, they are often fragmented and isolated and do not provide a unified synthesis on the topic (Litz et al., 2016), (ALHAMMADI, 2022).

These limitations of specific studies hinder the ability to develop a cohesive understanding of how educational leadership theories are interpreted and implemented in Abu Dhabi schools' specific contexts. Furthermore, the important reforms in Abu Dhabi educational institutions constitute both opportunities and challenges for school leaders. There is a need to understand how these leaders navigate the complexities of implementing new policies and approaches to enhance school effectiveness (Torres, 2019). This justifies the adoption of the meta-synthesis approach in this study to come out with a clear picture and a deep understanding of the educational leadership in Abu Dhabi by joining together the different pieces of the puzzle through a rigorous analysis and synthesis of previously conducted studies.

This study contributes to the enrichment of literature by providing a broader understanding of how educational leadership theories can be adapted and implemented in different cultural and socio-economical contexts. From the practical viewpoint this study offers valuable insights for educational policy makers to come out with an optimal leadership

mapping for schools in Abu Dhabi. This meta-synthesis qualitative study will focus on existing educational leadership studies conducted on Abu Dhabi schools. It doesn't include previous studies conducted about leadership within universities or vocational training institutions.

The main objectives of the present study are:

1. To investigate the predominant leadership theories and styles practiced in Abu Dhabi schools.
2. To understand the impact of these leadership styles on students' achievement and school overall performance.

Specifically, the research questions guiding this study are:

1. What educational leadership theories and styles are the most commonly adopted in Abu Dhabi schools?
2. What challenges and barriers do school leaders face in implementing some leadership theories?
3. What successful practices have been reported about educational leadership in Abu Dhabi schools?

2 Methodology

The present study uses a meta-synthesis qualitative approach which systematically review, analyses and synthesize findings from existing studies in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the educational leadership theories and practices prevailing in Abu Dhabi schools. The meta-synthesis is a revelatory technique which enables the identification of common themes, patterns and gaps in the existing studies to come out with new interpretations and understanding of the topic This study adopted the guidelines provided by Sandelowski and Barroso (2007) for conducting a meta-synthesis, ensuring rigor and credibility in the research process (Chrastina, 2018). The studies are included on the basis of the study relevance to educational leadership theories, the contextual application in Abu Dhabi schools, and the quality of the theory design.

2.1 Research Question

The first step in meta-synthesis qualitative study is to clearly formulate the research question. This question should be specific enough to guide the selection of relevant studies but sufficiently broad to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives. As mentioned earlier in the introduction, the research questions of this study focus on identifying and understanding the educational leadership theories and styles prevailing in Abu Dhabi schools and their impact on student achievements and overall school performance.

2.2 Literature Search Strategy

The search will use electronic databases such as Google scholar, Academia, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), JSTOR and ResearchGate. The search strategy utilized a combination of key words and phrases related to educational leadership in the context of Abu Dhabi schools. The search terms include: “educational leadership”, “leadership theories”, “leadership styles or practices”, “Abu Dhabi”, “Qualitative study”, “school leadership”, “instructional leadership”, “transformational leadership” and “distributed leadership”. Boolean operators (AND, OR) and other filtering tools are used where possible to refine the search results, ensuring better covering of the relevant studies. Moreover, we considered only qualitative studies that, according to our choice of meta-synthesis approach, provide rich and contextualized data that can shed light on the intricacies of leadership practice. Research into the specific impact of leadership styles on student outcomes and teacher satisfaction was prioritized so that the synthesis would provide the most comprehensive understanding of prevailing leadership theories in the region. This systematic selection process allowed for a robust analysis of relevant literature. To ensure the relevance and quality of the research included, the following criteria were applied:

Inclusion Criteria:

Studies must be qualitative or mixed-methods and conducted in Abu Dhabi schools (primary and secondary education cycles). Also, Articles must be peer-reviewed or from

credible sources such as ADEK reports and must be published in English. The studies must be published from 2010 onwards to focus on contemporary leadership practices.

Exclusion Criteria:

Studies which focus outside the context of Abu Dhabi emirate and cover leadership in other education phases (Higher and Vocational education). It is Purely quantitative studies without any qualitative components and articles not available in full text. Studies without sufficient methodological rigor.

2.3 Data Extraction

A standardized data extraction form will be prepared to extract essential information from each study. The form will include the following items recommended by Sandelowski and Barroso

Citation details: Author, year, title, and journal/source.

Research Aims: Objectives of the study.

Theoretical Framework: underlying theories and models

Methodology: Research design, data collection methods, and analysis techniques.

Sample characteristics: size, participants, setting /context, demographic information

Key Findings: main results and conclusions.

2.4 Quality Appraisal of the Included Studies

Assessing the quality of included studies is a crucial step in the meta-synthesis process. This is ensured by using a systematic methodology known as the Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP). The CASP checklist evaluates the rigor, credibility and relevance of qualitative studies based on criteria such as the clarity of research objectives, appropriateness of the adopted methodology, sampling strategy, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations. CASP checklist consists of ten questions covering the assessment of credibility, relevance and methodological consistency of the research (Long et al., 2020).

2.5 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is used to identify and analyze patterns and themes across the included studies. The process involves the following steps:

1. **Familiarization with data:** the researcher reviews the extracted data to become thoroughly familiar with the content.
2. **Coding:** Initial codes are generated systematically across the data set to be used as significant features of the data relevant to the research questions.
3. **Themes Generation and Reviewing:** codes will be assembled into potential themes and all relevant data extracted are gathered within identified themes. The

themes are reviewed and refined to make sure that they accurately represent the extracted data and answer the research questions.

- 4. Naming and defining Themes:** Each theme is named and clearly defined taking into consideration the fact that themes should be coherent, consistent and distinct from one another.

2.6 Themes Synthesis and Interpretation

In the final stage, themes are synthesized into a coherent narrative that clearly addresses the research questions. This is achieved through the following steps such as combining themes to explain the research topic and provide clear answers to research questions. Also, through developing a new theoretical framework or refine existing theories using the synthesized findings. In last, themes are discussing the different implications of the findings for literature, practice, policy and future research.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

Although this meta-synthesis involves the analysis of previous studies rather than primary data collection, ethical conduct is maintained throughout the research process by ensuring transparency and honesty in data extraction, analysis, and reporting and respecting the intellectual property of the original authors by providing appropriate citations. Furthermore, it maintained by maintaining confidentiality and data security of the extracted

information.

2.8 Implications for Research, Practice, and Society

Future research might further examine the influence of leadership practices over time, in the context of studies studying how they affect student performance, and teacher well-being. From a practical point of view, school leaders in Abu Dhabi can use this synthesis to rethink their approaches to leadership. Indeed, adopting transformational and distributed leadership models implies that collaborative cultures should be encouraged and staff inspired.

There is potential for professional development programs that allow school leaders to be trained in these leadership styles to implement them better. In addition, school leaders should build networks to share best practices and experiences with each other so that the best strategies can be adopted across the educational landscape. The implications of effective educational leadership extend beyond a school's performance to the level of societal implication in community engagement and cohesion of the whole. In Abu Dhabi, leaders embracing inclusive and adaptive leadership styles can better meet the diverse needs of students and staff as Abu Dhabi aims for its educational reform goals mapped towards Abu Dhabi's Economic Vision 2030. By doing so, this helps to build a base of a knowledgeable and skilled workforce that can survive a global economy.

2.9 Limitations of the Present Study

Several potential limitations of this meta-synthesis study should be acknowledged:

1. **Language Bias:** The inclusion of only English research studies may exclude relevant research works published in other languages especially in Arabic.
2. **Publication Bias:** The focus on peer reviewed articles may result on the omission of unpublished studies or those in less credible grey literature.
3. **Contextual Specificity:** the findings may be highly context specific to Abu Dhabi, limiting their generalizability to other regions or educational systems.
4. **Leadership discourse:** In addition, the focus on synthesis gives relatively little attention to the teacher and student voice in shaping leadership discourse. Further research must take a more holistic approach, taking multiple stakeholder's views into account to attain a more comprehensive view of the educational leadership environment in Abu Dhabi. The result of this study underscores the importance of educational leadership in building an effective learning environment in Abu Dhabi.

3 Literature Review

3.1 Review of Educational Leadership Theories

The study of educational leadership has evolved significantly over the past century, reflecting the extensive shifts in societal changes, psychology, organizational theory and

educational practices. This evolution can be traced through several key phases each marked by distinct theories that illustrate the different aspects of leadership in educational environments. The main phases underlying the educational leadership development are discussed in the following paragraphs:

Trait and Behavioral Approaches

The earliest leadership theories often referred to as trait theories, emerged in the early 20th century. These theories considered that certain individuals born with distinctive qualities that predisposed them to be effective leaders. Scholars such as Stogdill (1948) and Mann (1959) attempted to identify specific traits such as intelligence, assertiveness, and Charisma that distinguished leaders from non-leaders. This approach was subjected to criticism for its inability to consistently link specific traits to successful leadership across different contexts. In response to the limitations of trait theories, behavioural theories appeared in the mid-twenty century the emphasis from innate traits to observable behaviours. Fleishman (1953) and liker (1961) conducted important studies to identify key leadership behaviours which are the task-oriented and relationship-oriented leadership. These studies suggested that effective leadership could be learned and developed through specific behavioural attributes (Gumus et al., 2016).

Contingency and Situational Models

During the decade from 1960s to 1970s the contingency theories were introduced. These theories assumed that there is no single best way to lead; rather, the effectiveness of

leadership depends on situational parameters. Fielders contingency model (1967) suggested that leader's effectiveness is contingent on their leadership style and the favourableness of situation, including leader relations, task structure and leader's position power. A decade after, Hersey and Blanchard (1977) further refined the contingency theory concept, suggesting that leaders must adjust their styles based on the maturity and competence of their followers. These theories argued that there is no one leadership approach to effective leadership underscoring the importance of adaptability in leadership (Tsolka, 2020) , (Amanchukwu et al., 2015).

Transformational Leadership

Created by James MacGregor Burns (1978) and later developed by Bass and Avolio (1994), this theory emphasized the importance of team leaders in promoting and motivating followers to reach their highest potential and to work towards common goals with enthusiasm and commitment. Transformational leaders are known by their ability to create a clear vision for the future, build strong relationships with their followers and encourage personal and professional growth. In the educational context, transformational leadership is implemented through the following dimensions: vision development and articulation, fostering a collaborative school culture, encouraging innovation and creativity, and providing individualized support and professional development (Pawar, 2016).

Many research studies reported that implementing transformational leadership in schools' management was associated with good outcomes, including:

1. ***Improved Teacher Performance and Satisfaction:*** Inez Wilson et al. (2023) argued in their research study that increased staff motivation and fostered positive school environment were directly linked to the implementation of transformational leadership (Heenan et al., 2023).
2. ***Enhanced Student Achievement:*** In their study, Emeanulu and Sayed (2024) concluded that this leadership approach enhances student motivation to learning as well as their overall performance (Emeanulu & Sayed, 2024), (Bunaiyan & McWilliams, 2018).
3. ***Positive School Culture:*** Transformational leaders cultivate a positive school culture based on mutual trust, collaboration and continuous improvement. In their study, John Michael Sasan et al. provided valuable insights on transformational leadership influence in creating a positive school culture that enhances student achievement (Sasan et al., 2023).

Transactional Leadership

This leadership concept was first introduced by Burns (1978) suggesting that the leader-employee relationship is based on an exchange of authority and profits. Bo Dong (2023) reported that the main characteristics of transactional leadership are the rewards and punishments, management by exception and the emphasis on rules, procedures and formal authority maintaining a well-organized and orderly environment. While this leadership style can be useful in maintaining discipline and accountability within educational

institutions, it may lack of flexibility and innovation required for schools' growth and improvement (Dong, 2023).

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leaders focus on curriculum quality, instructional methods, and student performance, aiming to create a motivated learning environment. Instructional leadership is characterized by some core practices such as: the use of data to monitor student's progress, continuous support and professional development of teachers, instructional leader's involvement in some classroom activities. Several studies explored the impact and practices of instructional leadership worldwide.

Philip Hallinger and Joseph Murphy framework (1986) was one of the influential works on Instructional leadership. Their framework highlighted three important areas such as the mission of the school, management and learning environment (Seong, 2019). Another inspiring research was carried out by Leithwood and Jantzi (2008), underlines the significant impact of instructional leadership on student performance. They argued that schools with strong instructional leadership tend to have high student performance. They also reported that the direct involvement of leaders in educational process creates more cohesive and learning focus school environment (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Many recent studies shed light on the impacts of implementing instructional leadership in different schools' settings. Liebowitz and Porter (2019) found that instructional leadership practices especially those involving teacher collaboration and data-driven instruction are strongly

associated with improved student performance (Liebowitz & Porter, 2019).

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership overcomes traditional view of leadership as a role held by a single individual. Instead, it perceives leadership as a collective process shared among various members of the organization. In education it is a model that promotes the sharing of leadership duties among various members of school community, including academic faculty, counsellors, officers and sometimes even students. This approach is built on the idea that leadership is a collective process and should leverage the strengths and expertise of different members to improve the overall school performance. Many recent studies investigated the impacts of distributed leadership implementation in various contexts. Darlene Garcia (2019) reported in his study that distributed leadership had a positive impact on teachers' job satisfaction and overall school culture (Torres, 2019).

Harris et al (2022), explored in their study the practical implementation of distributed leadership in various educational situations. They argued that schools adopting distributed leadership tend to have higher levels of teacher engagement. In these school, teachers reported the feeling of being more empowered and valued which has significantly enhanced their teaching practices (Harris et al., 2022). In their study titled "The effect of Principal's Distributed Leadership Practice on students' Academic Achievement", Daniel Jambo & Lei Hongde (2019) found that distributed leadership has a positive and indirect effect on student's academic performance (Daniel & Lei, 2019).

3.2 Overview on Abu Dhabi Primary and Secondary Education

The education system in Abu Dhabi is a dynamic and rapidly evolving sector reflecting the emirate's commitment to promote knowledge-based growth and development. ADEK plays a central role in establishing policies, standards, and ensuring quality across the different educational institutions. The primary education focuses on core subjects such as Arabic, English, mathematics, science and social education, alongside with moral and physical education. In the secondary education the students are exposed to more specialized subjects preparing them for higher education or vocational training. The schools' landscape in Abu Dhabi consists of a variety of schools with diverse curricula including public schools which follow the national curriculum developed by the Ministry of education and numerous private schools implementing international curricula such as the British, American, International Baccalaureate (IB) Indian and French (Matsumoto, 2019).

In Abu Dhabi, the schools' management structure includes principals, vice principals, department heads and various administrative staff. Principals are considered as the primary school leaders, responsible for the overall functioning and performance of their schools. The role of school leaders is crucial in achieving high academic outcomes. Beside the rigorous management of human and financial resources, School leaders are expected to ensure the following crucial duties such as: setting school vision and goals, ensuring high-quality teaching, fostering student achievements and building strong relationships with

parents and local communities (Private Schools Policy and Guidance Manual, 2014).

Over the past few decades, the education system in Abu Dhabi has implemented reforms aiming to improve the level of education and aligning the system with international standards. The main reforms undertaken by ADEK include the following initiatives:

(Admin, 2022),

Abu Dhabi School Model (ADSM)

This reform aims to improve curriculum, teaching methods, and assessment strategies through the following means: Shifting to a more Student-Centered Learning Approach, enhancing Bilingual proficiency, emphasizing STEM education, and integrating Moral education into the curriculum.

Teacher Professional Development

ADEK has launched many initiatives to enhance teacher professional development. These initiatives include: regular training workshops, mandatory teacher licensing, and implementing evaluation systems that rewards effective teaching practices and support career progression.

School Leadership Development

Recognizing the importance of the effective leadership role in the school success, ADEK has implemented several initiatives to enhance leadership skills among school principals and educators which include:

- a. Professional development programs covering the various aspects of educational leadership.
- b. Providing a clear framework for effective leadership including standards and competencies.
- c. Introduction of mentorship and coaching programs conducted by experienced principals.
- d. Leadership conferences and forums where school leaders can share their good practices.
- e. Performance evaluation and feedback
- f. Encouraging innovation in leadership

School Inspection and quality Assurance

ADEK has established rigorous school inspection and quality assurance framework to assess performance in several areas such as teaching quality, student achievements and leadership effectiveness. The assessment criteria are aligned with international standards.

Curriculum Reforms

The curriculum reforms are crucial in any attempt to improve the education system. To ensure that the content and delivery methods are efficient and engaging, ADEK has initiated important curriculum reforms covering three aspects namely, curriculum updating, integration of modern technologies such as digital tools, and tailoring teaching methods to meet the diverse students' learning needs and styles.

3.3 Educational Outcomes Through Leadership Theories

Over the last few decades, the field of educational leadership theories has come a long way, with scholars placing importance on shaping effective teaching and learning environments. According to Chrastina (2018), transformational leadership focuses on inspiring and motivating educators to realize mutual goals, thereby developing a good school culture that builds student engagement. Leaders who possess transformative traits are linked to improved educational outcomes due to their ability to unite staff commitments and drive creative practices (Long, 2022). Conversely, transactional leadership favors established structures and clear expectations to prevent present instability and inefficiency. Effective in some situations, especially in schools mandated to apply the rule-of-thumb frameworks, the above approach might compromise educators' creativity and imagination (Northouse, 2018). The duality of transformational and transactional leadership underlines the complexity of educational leadership dynamics, as different parts demand different approaches (Toprak, 2020).

In recent years, distributed leadership has begun to take shape as a model in which staff share responsibility for decisions and practice collaborative management (Harris, 2004). Such a model recognizes the expertise of different players in the educational ecosystem so that the way leadership is approached is inclusive to a wider range of individuals. However, setting it up will take trust and open dialogue – difficulties that can be hard to foster in higher educational systems (Kadbey, 2018). Educational reforms carried out in the context

of Abu Dhabi, including the roles of the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEK), can be understood in the light of these leadership theories. For school leaders in Abu Dhabi, the local literature indicates that transformational and distributed leadership models are increasingly introduced. (ALHAMMADI, 2022).

According to research, effective leadership styles help increase teacher satisfaction and student achievement. One example following this is that studies assert that schools with strong transformational leadership better report on both teacher motivation and student performance (Chmer et al., 2020). The present study will significantly contribute to the literature on academic leadership in Abu Dhabi.

4 Results

The scholarship related to educational leadership research within the Abu Dhabi emirate was quite limited. Moreover, Substantial amount of research studies focused more on higher education than secondary or primary education cycles. The literature topics from different research databases were screened based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria adopted literature search strategy. The following table provides a brief synthesis of the relevant studies that were considered for the present meta-synthesis qualitative study.

Author(s), Year	Key Findings
Hanadi Kadbey (2018) (Kadbey, 2018)	Research discussions explore the conclusion that transformational leadership is primarily followed across the schools of AD (Abu Dhabi). Further research into the structure of leadership preferred by educators of AD schools

	reveals information about the predominant leadership style. Findings reveal educators prefer and are more satisfied with transformational leadership.
Ali Aldhaheri (2021) (Aldhaheri, 2021)	The research paper focused on understanding and examining the type and preferred form of leadership in AD school leaders reveals several intrinsic findings about preference, effectiveness, and avoidance of varied leadership styles. Research findings show that leaders primarily explored transactional leadership, transformational and completely neglected the use of laissez-faire. It has been reported that transformational leadership resulted in improved student achievement and the school's overall performance
Asmaa Amin Chmer (2020) (Chmer, 2020)	Research by Chmer (2020) reveals the understanding that leaders in private schools across the city of Al Ain often explore transformational leadership. The data gathered by the researcher reveals that the perspective and preference of school leaders on transformational leadership varies based on several factors, such as their level of qualification, how far they have experience and others. Data reveals no correlation between the perception of leadership style and gender.
Rima Al Hassanieh (2020) (Hassanieh & David, 2020)	The research findings showed that there is a positive impact of the distributive style of leadership on the relationship between governance and the overall performance of schools. It was also noticed that distributive leadership was applied at different levels in the studied schools. Furthermore, the author highlighted the need for continuous improvement in the implementation approaches of this leadership style.
Author(s), Year	Key Findings

<p>Mohammad Sayel Al-Zyoud (2015) (Al-Zyoud, 2015)</p>	<p>Research findings reveal that implementing changes across AD schools has gathered responses from its leaders and led to the integration of new tech measures, higher quality development, and improvement of resource management. Findings revealed that factors such as the availability of leaders and financial resources affect the implementation of changes.</p>
<p>Rida Blaik Hourani, David Litz and Scott Parkman (2016). (Litz & Scott, 2016)</p>	<p>Research findings explore that leaders across AD schools curate and enhance professional aspects of emotional intelligence to manage job challenges effectively.</p>
<p>Ali Al Dhaheri (2019). (Aldhaheri et al., 2019)</p>	<p>Findings from the research paper reveal that AD leaders often enjoy high CQ and leadership adaptability and are more focused on transformational leadership. There is a pre-existing relationship between leadership style, CQ level, and leadership adaptability.</p>
<p>Al Hammadi, Mariam Ahmed Mohamed Ali (2019) (Alhammadi, 2019)</p>	<p>The study's findings are diverse and have several theoretical and practical implications. Alhammadi's (2019) findings reveal increased use of transformational and transactional types of leadership and avoidance of laissez-faire among AD school leaders. Principles across these institutions primarily use transformational styles, and women leaders display transformational features.</p>
<p>Chelsie Weidele Brines (2020) (Brines, 2020)</p>	<p>According to the author's data findings, there are several general commonalities among leaders' practices of developing teacher and student achievements. The researcher gathers that one commonality is the leaders' goodwill to empower their staff toward distributed leadership use.</p>

4.1 Discussions

The meta-synthesis of previous studies on educational leadership in Abu Dhabi schools reveals a diverse and multifaceted landscape influenced by cultural, socio-economic, institutional and educational dynamics. Based on the thematic analysis of previous studies the following key themes were identified:

- a. Predominant Leadership Styles
- b. Leadership Adaptability with Educational Policies
- c. School Leader's Cultural and Emotional Intelligence Attributes.
- d. Gender Effects on Leadership Styles

The following paragraphs discuss these themes based on the findings extracted from the selected previous studies.

Predominant Leadership Styles

The study findings reveal that the predominant leadership style among school leaders in Abu Dhabi emirate is transformational one. All of the studies performed by H. Kadbey (2018), Asmaa Amin Chmer (2020), and Ali Al Dhaheri (2023) highlighted the predominance and preferability of transformational leadership style in Abu Dhabi Schools. They also mentioned to the positive impact of this leadership style on teachers' satisfaction, students' achievement and overall school performance. Ali Al Dhaheri mentioned that transactional leadership style is still practiced in some schools, however the laissez-faire

style is rarely adopted by Abu Dhabi school leaders. Rima Al Hassanieh (2020), reported that distributed leadership style implementation demonstrated a positive impact on both of school governance and overall school performance. Despite its advantages, especially in terms of teacher engagement and job satisfaction, the author strengthened on the need of incorporating more improvements in the implementation of this newly introduced leadership style. Chelsie Weidele Brines (2020), explored the impact of school leadership on teacher development in Abu Dhabi private school. This study revealed the pivotal role of school leaders in developing high calibre teachers and high students' achievement. The author also highlighted the positive impact of distributive leadership approach in enhancing teachers' motivation and student academic achievements. Effective school leaders not only manage administrative tasks but also act as mentors and coaches their teachers, fostering professional development.

Leadership Adaptability with Educational Policies

Abu Dhabi educational system is well known by its diversity and continuous reforms and updating of its policies. According to the previously mentioned studies, educational leadership in Abu Dhabi is characterized by its focus on adapting to educational reforms and policy changes. According to Mohammad Al-Zyoud (2015), school leaders enjoyed a significant response and adaptability with the continuous changes in Abu Dhabi education system. This adaptation was clearly noticed in different aspects such as the use of data-

driven decision making, integration of new technologies, curricula updating and enhancing teachers' commitment and students' achievement. On the other hand, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has issued the "School Leadership Development Plan for Licensure in the U.A.E". Through this licensing process, school leaders prove their readiness and effectiveness in developing and implementing the strategies leading to growth and positive change of their schools. The process of acquiring school leadership license involves a comprehensive assessment of the school leader competencies in the different aspects of school leadership duties. Furthermore, this leadership development plan provides school principals with the required professional development to enhance their skills in school vision elaboration, data analysis, effective communication and staff collaboration (Al-Zyoud, 2015).

School Leader's Emotional and Cultural Intelligence Attributes

Another emerging theme is the role of emotional and cultural intelligence attributes in effective school leadership. Leaders who exhibit high emotional intelligence tend to be more successful in creating positive school climate, managing personnel effectively and fostering strong relationships with the school community. Hourani, Litz and Parkman (2020) investigated the exhibition and use of emotional intelligence among Abu Dhabi school leaders and emphasized that the use of professional emotional intelligence in school leadership successfully address the different job-related challenges. Beside emotional

intelligence, cultural intelligence (CQ) is increasingly recognized as a vital skill for educational leaders, particularly in the diverse and multicultural school landscape of Abu Dhabi. Ali Al Dhaheri (2019), investigated the links between CQ, leadership style, and adaptability. The study findings reveal that Abu Dhabi school leaders who practice a transformational leadership style generally enjoy high levels of CQ and significant leadership adaptability.

Gender Effects on Leadership Styles

The gender of school leaders in Abu Dhabi impacts their leadership styles and their effectiveness in various educational institutions. Al Hammadi (2019) reported that female leaders in Abu Dhabi schools tend to practice more transactional leadership, focussing on structured tasks and clear rewards, whereas male principals often adopt transformational leadership styles, emphasizing vision, inspiration and change. The study also indicates that female leaders in Abu Dhabi schools have shown resilience and effectiveness in their roles. This contributed positively to staff commitment, school development, and student's high achievement.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The present meta-synthesis of previous research studies on educational leadership in Abu

Dhabi schools has revealed several important insights which are summarized in ways such as the predominant leadership style identified is transformational, characterized by a focus on vision, innovation, and motivation which has been shown to foster positive school environment and enhance educational outcomes. Other leadership styles such as transactional and instructional are practiced in some schools especially public ones. Top-down and Laissez-faire leadership styles are rarely adopted in Abu Dhabi schools. The diversified, dynamic and evolving nature of educational system in Abu Dhabi necessitates leadership with a high degree of adaptability and exhibition of emotional and cultural intelligence attributes. The best practicing in educational leadership within Abu Dhabi schools include fostering the culture of continuous professional development, promoting collaborative leadership and utilizing data-driven decision making which is in perfect agreement with to the requirements of ADEK reforms and new policies. Female educational leaders in Abu Dhabi have shown resilience and effectiveness in their roles and scored high school performance and students' achievement.

5.2 Scope for Future Research and implication

This meta-synthesis study opens various avenues for future research in the field of educational leadership within Abu Dhabi. While the current study highlights predominant leadership theories, there is a pressing need for in-depth qualitative research that captures the voices of diverse stakeholders, including teachers and students, to gain a more holistic

understanding of the leadership landscape. Investigating how contextual factors, such as cultural diversity and socioeconomic conditions, influence leadership practices will also provide valuable insights. Additionally, longitudinal studies could examine how leadership practices evolve over time and their long-term effects on student performance and teacher well-being. Future research could also explore the intersection of educational leadership with technology integration, especially as Abu Dhabi's education system aims to align with the demands of a knowledge-based economy.

The findings from this meta-synthesis have substantial implications for educational leadership practices and policies in Abu Dhabi. School leaders are encouraged to embrace transformational and distributed leadership models, fostering collaborative cultures that inspire and engage staff. This approach not only enhances teacher motivation but also improves student achievement by creating a supportive and innovative learning environment. By addressing these gaps, future research can contribute to the ongoing dialogue around effective educational leadership and its implications for policy and practice.

5.3 Recommendations

In order to enhance the understanding of different aspects of educational leadership styles, the following points should be addressed through future studies:

The school should investigate the impact of integrating new technologies in school

management and education activities on leadership effectiveness and school performance. They must explore the specific challenges faced by school leaders in implementing new educational policies to provide insights about the support and resources needed to conduct effectively the management of change. They keep expanding the scope of research by including diverse school types and considering the impact of socio-economic factors on educational leadership. Also, they need to conduct longitudinal studies that track the leadership styles and professional development of male and female leaders over time. In this ways, they can explore more the emotional and cultural intelligence (CQ) impact to develop and validate specific models tailored to educational context in UAE schools.

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