

Investigating the Role of School Leaders in Nurturing Middle Leaders to Enhance their Performance: A Study among Leaders and Teachers in Private Schools in Sharjah

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Abstract

The competence and cooperation of school leaders at all levels are crucial to the efficient operation of educational institutions. This study focuses on the critical role of School Leaders (SLs) in developing Middle Leaders (MLs) to improve their performance in private schools in Sharjah. The study uses a mixed-method research methodology, using questionnaires and interviews to gather information from teachers, SLs, and MLs at the selected private schools. The results demonstrate how important it is for SLs to nurture MLs and support them to improve their performance. School administrators understood how critical it is to provide MLs the chance to develop their leadership abilities, and foster teamwork. SLs must provide a supportive climate that facilitates the development and effectiveness of MLs and assign them decision-making tasks. The study also emphasized the significance of open lines of communication between SLs and MLs. The study suggested potential techniques used by SLs, like developing mentorship programs to offer advice and assistance, setting aside time for ML development, and fostering a culture of collaboration and shared leadership. The results highlighted the necessity of continued professional development programs and encouragement for MLs. Educational institutions may build a strong leadership communication channel that supports a positive school culture, increases teacher effectiveness, and ultimately improves student outcomes by realizing the value of ML development. The study's findings add to the body of knowledge on educational leadership and have applications for private schools in Sharjah and elsewhere.

Keywords: Middle leaders, School leaders, Performance enhancement, Sharjah

1. Introduction

The introduction provides a comprehensive overview of a research study focused on the role of school leaders in developing and supporting middle leaders in private schools in Sharjah. The study aims to address the knowledge gap between international research on educational leadership and the specific role of private school leaders in Sharjah in nurturing middle leaders to enhance their performance. The introduction outlines the background, motivation, and purpose of the study, emphasizing the critical importance of effective leadership in educational institutions. The significance of middle leaders in driving educational improvements is highlighted, and their responsibilities, challenges, and the need

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for support from senior leaders are discussed. Lipscombe et al. [1] claim that middle leaders have a direct and indirect impact on teachers' practice and educational institutions. The study emphasizes the growing importance of academic middle leaders and the effects of their competence on overall school achievement. The research is set against the backdrop of the educational environment in the UAE, specifically the private school industry in Sharjah, which has experienced significant growth.

The statement of the problem emphasizes the pivotal role of school leaders in shaping the quality and efficacy of middle leaders in educational institutions. The study seeks to explore how school leaders in Sharjah's private schools contribute to the development of middle leaders and, consequently, enhance overall school performance. It underlines the lack of empirical data on the experiences of private school leaders in Sharjah and aims to bridge the gap between international research and the local context. The purpose and objectives of the study are outlined, focusing on examining the influence of school administrators on nurturing middle leaders, understanding the techniques used for their support and training, and exploring how school administrators contribute to the professional development of middle leaders. The research questions are articulated to guide the study, with a primary question and sub-questions aimed at understanding the strategies and practices employed by school leaders to develop middle leaders.

The rationale of the study emphasizes the significance of effective school leadership in fostering a supportive environment for middle leaders and staff. The role of middle leaders is explored in depth, highlighting their potential impact on overall school performance when given proper support. Harris et al. [2] claim that middle leaders and leadership continue to be of interest to scholars all over the world. The study aims to contribute to existing knowledge on educational leadership, particularly in the context of Sharjah's private schools. The structure of the dissertation is outlined, with five chapters covering the background, literature review, research methodology, data analysis, and conclusions. Each chapter's content and purpose are briefly described, providing an overview of the entire research proposal. In summary, the introduction sets the stage for a comprehensive study on the role of school leaders in developing middle leaders in private schools in Sharjah, addressing a critical need for research in the local context and contributing to the broader understanding of educational leadership.

2. Literature review

This chapter provides a comprehensive literature review focused on leadership in educational institutions, with a particular emphasis on the role of school leaders in nurturing middle leaders in private schools in Sharjah, UAE. The chapter begins with an overview, stating the importance of leadership in enabling middle leaders to effectively carry out their responsibilities as they are given responsibility for leadership [3]. The significance of private schools in delivering high-quality education in Sharjah is highlighted. The conceptual analysis is divided into several sections, exploring key concepts related to school leadership, middle leadership, and performance enhancement. According to Gear and Sood [4], the phrase "middle leaders" refers to practitioners who have obligations for the entire school in addition to their classroom responsibilities. The discussion on school leadership emphasizes the challenges and skills required for effective leadership, including the development of communication channels between senior leaders and middle leaders, continuous professional development, and the impact of leadership guidance and mentorship. The section on middle leadership delves into the roles, responsibilities, and challenges faced by middle leaders.

Zhou [5] claims that it is crucial for principals to support middle leaders with potential roadblocks.

Performance enhancement is a central theme, examining the methods, tactics, and assistance programs employed by school administrators to create a conducive learning environment and improve the outcomes of middle leaders. Merenkov et al. [6] claim that senior leaders must persuade middle leaders through verbal and practical means. The importance of addressing the knowledge and skill gap between middle leaders and senior leaders is highlighted, emphasizing the need for collaboration to enhance student and teacher performance. The chapter then presents a detailed theoretical framework, incorporating several leadership theories relevant to the study:

1. Transformational Leadership Theory: This theory suggests that competent school leaders can positively influence and inspire middle leaders through characteristics of transformational leadership, leading to improved performance. The emphasis is on follower transformation, and the chapter references a proposed model illustrating the positive impact of transformational leadership on middle leader performance.

2. Distributed Leadership Theory: This theory emphasizes shared leadership and the involvement of various stakeholders in decision-making and leadership processes. The study explores how school leaders delegate authority and responsibility to middle leaders, aiming to empower them and enhance their effectiveness. Collaboration and teamwork are central to this theory.

3. Social Exchange Theory: This theory explores the interpersonal interactions between school leaders and middle leaders, focusing on factors such as trust, commitment, reciprocity, and power. The study investigates how these interactions contribute to better performance and career advancement for middle leaders.

4. Translation Theory: Suggests investing in training middle leaders in improvement techniques and translation theory to support the growth of school organizations. Nehez et al. [7] state that over the past three decades, translation theory has been employed to comprehend organizational change. The role of middle leaders as translators in advancing organizational development is emphasized. For Skerritt et al. [8], middle leaders carry out high-profile policy work in schools and give policy life.

5. Instructional Leadership Theory: This section explores how understanding instructional leadership theory enables school leaders to support middle leaders in implementing pedagogical change, thereby strengthening their leadership skills and reputation. According to Tang et al. [9], a variety of factors impact how middle leaders exercise their instructional leadership.

6. Middle Leadership in Schools (MLiS) Model: Introduced as a model that summarizes essential roles played by middle leaders, including student-focused, administrative, organizational, supervisory, staff development, and strategic roles.

The chapter concludes by highlighting the importance of support, professional growth, communication, and collaboration in fostering the effectiveness of middle leaders within educational institutions, especially since more teachers than ever before hold middle-leading posts [10].

The theoretical framework provides a robust foundation for understanding the critical role of school leaders in developing middle leaders in the context of private schools in Sharjah. The study discusses various aspects related to middle leadership in schools, including their contributions to school improvement, challenges they face, elements affecting their performance, communication with school leaders, empowerment and decision-making authority, techniques for developing middle leaders, and leadership practices and behaviors.

The study explores the role of school leaders in nurturing middle leaders in schools, emphasizing their significance in achieving organizational objectives and improving overall educational performance. Nurturing middle leaders is very important as they serve as a vital link between upper management and teachers, responsible for tasks such as guiding professional development, organizing teaching schedules, and ensuring curriculum quality. Murphy [11] mentions the crucial role of middle leaders in enhancing teaching and learning, supporting performance management, and fostering creativity among teachers. Despite their pivotal role, middle leaders encounter obstacles such as ambiguous job definitions, conflicts with colleagues, and resistance to educational reforms. Challenges include difficulties in defining their roles, handling staff, and balancing administrative tasks with leadership responsibilities.

The performance of middle leaders is influenced by their ability to balance their specific responsibilities with the broader goals of the school. Adames [12] claims that the school environment affects middle leaders' performance. Issues like trust, cultural responsiveness, and effective communication impact their effectiveness in shaping a positive learning environment. Butler [13] claims that a lack of confidence is a symptom in some educational institutions between the senior leaders and the middle leaders. Effective communication and collaboration between school leaders and middle leaders are essential for success. Support from senior management, access to information, and positive experiences with informal backing contribute to the effectiveness of middle leaders' (2023) claims that the influence of middle leaders depends on the setting.

Middle leaders view themselves as educators and innovators and guide colleagues' professional development [14]. Limits need to be improved for them in professional advancement within the educational system. Empowerment and decision-making authority are crucial factors affecting their ability to lead effectively. Training programs, professional development opportunities, and collaborative strategies are identified as essential tools for developing middle leaders. Case-based learning, networking, and mentorship are preferred methods for preparing middle leaders for their roles. Lillejord and Borte [15] add that middle leaders perform some tasks that need to be revised in order to advance their competence. Transformational leadership significantly impacts organizational commitment and job satisfaction. The effectiveness of middle leaders under transformational leadership is evident in their ability to create a positive work-life balance and promote better student outcomes. Vale et al. [16] mention that the activities that the middle leaders participate in range from inside the classroom to outside it. The study underscores the importance of collaborative efforts between school leaders and middle leaders, effective communication, and strategies for professional development. The role of middle leaders in enhancing student outcomes and contributing to educational reform is emphasized.

The contextual analysis (of the UAE) may provide a relevant background to the study, as the study was conducted in a private school in the UAE. The educational sector has been expanding in the UAE [17] steadily, and it has also addressed excellence relatively [18], making the UAE an academic hub for learning mobility [19]. The UAE strives to innovate curriculum [20] and instruction [21], paving the way for instructional leadership. Eltanahy and David [22] showcase that the middle leader's role in curriculum enhancement is a key factor in influencing teaching strategies. Al Husseini and David [23] suggest that instructional leadership supports teacher's professional growth. Daraghmeh and David [24] highlight that middle leaders play a pivotal role in technology integration. David and Abukari [25] observe that contextualizing leadership practices is important. Albasha and David [26] indicate that the role of middle leaders is vital in involving teachers in curriculum design and is essential

for effective instruction. Mansour and David [27] highlight that middle leader's support teacher's organizational commitment. Abbasi and David [28] insist that middle leaders support the professional development of teachers. Haque and David [29] recommend that effective curriculum implementation to achieve instructional outcomes in all subjects is largely ensured by middle leaders. Yahya and David [30] suggest that middle leaders' support is crucial for teachers to teach in all teaching modalities. Alzarouni and David [31] highlight the impact of middle leaders on imparting value education in nurturing students' positive behavior. These and other local studies inform the trends on the role of middle leaders in schools in the UAE that will help explore the impact of school leaders on developing and supporting middle leaders in schools.

3. Methods

This chapter provides an in-depth overview of the methodology employed in the study, focusing on the critical role of school leaders in developing middle leaders in private schools in Sharjah. The research design involves a mixed-method approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods to comprehensively explore the experiences and perspectives of teachers, middle leaders, and school administrators. Data collection involves interviews and questionnaires to understand various aspects, including middle leader support systems, leadership styles, communication patterns, professional growth opportunities, and professional development offerings. The chapter details the data collection process, ethical considerations, population, sampling, instruments, and the validity, reliability, and sensitivity of research tools.

Due to the complexity of social processes, a mixed-method technique is chosen, with a sequential approach for a thorough examination. Both qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (questionnaires) methods are employed, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the role of school administrators in developing middle leaders. Qualitative data is collected through purposeful sampling, while quantitative data involves a larger, stratified random sampling technique. Semi-structured interviews are used to gather insights into middle leaders' performance and the strategies used by school leaders to support them.

Key variables include school leadership, middle leadership development, and communication and collaboration. These variables serve as a framework for understanding the relationship between school leaders' actions and the performance of middle leaders. To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, strategies like triangulation and member checking are employed. The study emphasizes the continuous process of maintaining validity, reliability, and trustworthiness through rigorous analysis and improvement of methodologies. Semi-structured interviews and questionnaires are used to gather information from school leaders, middle leaders, and teachers. The interviews are recorded and transcribed for analysis, while the questionnaire data is collected through an online platform.

Participants include leaders and teachers from Sharjah private schools, selected through purposeful sampling for qualitative data and stratified random sampling for quantitative data. Thematic analysis is employed for qualitative data from interviews, while descriptive analysis is used for quantitative data from questionnaires. The results from both methods are triangulated for a comprehensive interpretation. The study follows ethical guidelines, ensuring voluntary and informed consent, participant privacy, confidentiality, and institutional ethical standards. Ethical approval is obtained, and transparency is maintained throughout the research process.

In conclusion, Chapter 3 outlines a robust methodology that integrates qualitative and quantitative approaches, providing a comprehensive understanding of the critical role of school leaders in developing middle leaders in private schools in Sharjah. The study employs ethical practices to ensure the integrity and reliability of the research findings.

4. Results and analysis

The chapter begins by outlining the research's objective to explore how school leaders can empower middle leaders in Sharjah's schools to enhance their performance. A mixed-method approach, incorporating quantitative analysis and qualitative methodologies, was employed. The study involved three responder groups: teachers, middle leaders, and school leaders. Key data analysis stages, such as data pre-processing, are explained, including techniques like data integration, transformation, reduction, and cleaning. The survey results, based on a Likert scale, indicate that 65.1% of participants agreed that school leaders provide appropriate support to nurture middle leaders. Demographic profiles of respondents are detailed, including gender, age, and teaching experience. Most respondents were female (79.5%), aged 30-39 (42.2%), with teaching experience of 6-10 years (31.3%). The frequency distribution of respondents' characteristics provides a comprehensive overview.

The second section focuses on how school leaders' support enhances middle leaders' performance. Graphical representations illustrate responses on various aspects. Notably, 47% strongly agreed that middle leaders play a crucial role in driving instructional improvement. Furthermore, 70% agreed that middle leaders provide effective guidance and support to teachers.

The chapter explores middle leaders' involvement in policy development (50.6% strongly agreed) and their role in creating a positive school culture and fostering collaboration (81.9% agreed). Additionally, 62.7% agreed that middle leaders participate in decision-making processes. The study emphasizes the importance of distributed instructional leadership and a supportive learning environment for both students and staff and the importance of trust between senior leaders and middle leaders, which agrees with the findings of Edwards-Grove et al. [32] and Edwards-Groves and Grootenboer [33] who emphasized the importance of relational trust creation and collaboration for the continuous success of educational institutions.

School leaders' roles in providing clear expectations (55.4% agreed), regular feedback and guidance (68.7% agreed), and opportunities for professional development (72.3% agreed) are discussed. Recognition and appreciation of middle leaders' contributions were acknowledged by 66.3% of respondents. Furthermore, 67.5% agreed that school leaders create a supportive and cooperative environment. The final section addresses the impact of school leaders on middle leaders' motivation, continuous learning (69.9% agreed), and the positive effects of support and guidance (77.1% agreed).

In summary, the chapter provides a detailed analysis of the survey results, shedding light on the perspectives of teachers, middle leaders, and school leaders. The findings underscore the significance of school leaders' support in enhancing middle leaders' performance and the interconnectedness of various leadership aspects in fostering a conducive educational environment in Sharjah's schools. The research conducted a mixed-method study to explore how school leaders' actions influence middle leaders' performance and, subsequently, teaching and learning outcomes in Sharjah schools. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches, with a structured questionnaire administered to 83 respondents and

eight individual interviews conducted. The qualitative data obtained from the interviews was analyzed thematically.

In the quantitative analysis, the study investigated various aspects related to respondents' demographics, their perceptions of school leaders' support, and the impact of such support on middle leaders. The findings revealed that a significant proportion of respondents agreed that school leaders provide appropriate support in nurturing middle leaders. The study also delved into demographic characteristics such as gender, age, teaching experience, and tenure, providing a comprehensive profile of the respondents.

The qualitative phase involved thematic analysis of the interview transcripts. The thematic analysis comprised several stages, including familiarity with data, generation of initial codes, determination of themes, review of potential themes, defining and naming themes, and finally, producing a report [34]. The analysis revealed three main themes: professional development for middle leaders, involvement in decision-making, and communication. These themes were further subdivided into eight sub-themes, including open-door policy, listening to middle leaders, face-to-face discussions, consulting middle leaders, approving important decisions, attending leadership programs, attending summits, and participating in personal development programs.

The study found that professional development, network collaboration, coaching, and mentoring are crucial factors that impact the quality of middle leadership, which agreed with the findings of Patuawa et al. [35]. School leaders play a pivotal role in fostering these aspects, ultimately influencing the success of teaching and learning in Sharjah schools. The research contributes to the understanding of how leadership practices can enhance middle leaders' performance and, consequently, the overall educational outcomes as Gjerde and Alvesson [36] claim that protecting teachers and coordinators from what is perceived as excessive and harmful initiatives and information from top management is part of the job of middle leaders.

The discussion of findings emphasized the importance of professional development, effective communication, and collaborative decision-making in enhancing middle leaders' effectiveness. The study highlighted that when school leaders prioritize professional development, create conducive communication channels, and involve middle leaders in decision-making processes, it positively influences the teaching and learning environment. Zhang et al. [37] and Gurr [38] claim that effective middle leadership can promote teachers' professional growth and learning in addition to students' performance. Furthermore, evidence from the data analysis was combined with relevant literature to support the interpretations and implications of the research findings.

In summary, the research employed a comprehensive approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the influence of school leaders on middle leaders and, subsequently, on teaching and learning outcomes. The findings underscore the importance of leadership practices in promoting professional development, effective communication, and collaborative decision-making, contributing to a deeper understanding of the dynamics within educational institutions in Sharjah. Through study inferences, the chapter lists the conclusion assertion, study implications, and recommendations. In the chapter's final portion, how far the study might go in the future was also discussed.

The importance of school leaders in determining the general efficacy and success of educational institutions has been acknowledged in the context of education. The success of the school is greatly influenced by middle leaders, who act as a vital link between senior leadership and classroom instructors. Research highlights middle leaders' potential as pedagogical leaders [39][40]. They provide feedback, coach, and model initiatives [41]. They

also help to create an environment that is conducive to teaching and learning. In Japan context, they are called teachers' educators [42]. Although middle leaders play a crucial role in educational institutions, more research needs to be done on the precise techniques and strategies school leaders use to develop and improve middle leaders' performance, notably in Sharjah's private school sector. A major information gap exists about the function of school leaders in developing middle leaders, which prevents the creation of effective leadership models and evidence-based strategies. By examining the crucial role played by school leaders in Sharjah's private schools and how their leadership styles affect middle leaders' performance and professional development, this study seeks to close this gap.

This study shed light on the distinct difficulties and opportunities faced by middle and school leaders in the educational and cultural setting of the area by concentrating on a private school in Sharjah. To empower middle leaders and eventually improve their performance and the success of the school, it examined the present leadership techniques, strategies, and support systems used by school administrators. This research produced useful information that can help inform educational policymakers, school leaders, and administrators about effective leadership practices and strategies for developing middle leaders through an in-depth exploration of the perceptions and experiences of school leaders and teachers. The results of this study added to the body of information on educational leadership. They provided useful advice and insights for Sharjah schools and possibly other institutions, with the goal of enhancing overall school performance, teacher satisfaction, and student outcomes. It describes the precise procedures and tactics used by the administrators of a private Sharjah school to develop middle leaders, and it investigates how middle leaders' performance and professional development are impacted by the support and direction of school leaders.

This study's anticipated results deepen our understanding of the crucial role that school leaders play in developing middle leaders and offer suggestions for improving their performance, which will eventually enhance educational outcomes in schools. The study emphasizes the value of supporting leadership training programs for middle leaders, involving them in decision-making and communication, and collaboration between school leaders and middle leaders. To promote a culture of effective leadership inside the organization, private schools in Sharjah must prioritize the development of their middle leaders' skills and professional networks. Effective channels of communication and consistent feedback systems between school leaders and middle leaders are crucial. Open channels of communication should be established to guarantee that middle leaders are given the opportunity for professional dialogue as well as clear expectations and constructive criticism. This drives constant growth and fosters a sense of shared purpose.

Middle leaders' motivation and performance can be positively affected by acknowledging and recognizing their efforts and accomplishments. Abd Rahman et al. [43] mention that schools ought to think about putting in place recognition and incentive programs that value the contributions of middle leaders and motivate them to perform well in their positions. Establishing professional learning communities in private schools helps encourage middle leaders to work together, share expertise, and pursue ongoing professional development. Middle leaders should be able to engage in peer-to-peer learning, share best practices, and work together to address difficulties in these communities, which school leaders should help to create. The study emphasizes the significance of succession planning for long-term leadership growth. To find and equip future leaders for middle leadership positions, private schools should create elaborate succession plans. This guarantees a seamless changeover and the institution's continued effective leadership. According to the study, middle leaders need to be developed. Thus, educational policymakers and school administrators need to realize this.

Policy frameworks should be created to support leadership development programs, offer appropriate resources, and foster an atmosphere that will encourage middle leaders' development and performance improvement.

The findings can offer various distinctive contributions. By putting the study's findings into practice, private schools in Sharjah can improve the quality of their leadership practices to support and empower middle leaders to perform their roles effectively and ultimately improve the productivity and achievement of their organizations. These features underline its distinctiveness. The study focuses primarily on how school leaders can develop middle leaders. Even though there is already research on the value of school leadership, this study concentrates on the connection between school leaders and middle leaders. This enables a thorough examination of the strategies, difficulties, and opportunities associated with growing and improving the performance of middle leaders.

The study places a strong emphasis on the value of nurturing and supportive leadership techniques used by school administrators. It aims to pinpoint strategies, methods, and conduct that school administrators can use to support and promote middle leaders efficiently. Unlike studies that only focus on the hierarchical features of leadership or the administrative duties of school leaders, this emphasis on developing leadership is unique. The study aims to establish a direct connection between school leaders' activities and middle leaders' improved performance. The study shed important light on how leadership practices shape the abilities, confidence, and effectiveness of middle leaders by investigating the direct impact of school leaders on middle leader development.

The study acknowledges the importance of collaboration and organizational culture in schools. It recognizes that the larger context in which middle leaders function also plays a role in their success as middle-leader developers. The study provides a thorough view of leadership development that goes beyond individual leadership behaviors by examining how school leaders may promote cooperation, provide a supportive atmosphere, and build effective leadership teams. The study seeks to offer practical recommendations for both policymakers and educational practitioners. By giving school administrators and leaders useful advice and suggestions, it aims to close the gap between research and practice. The study increases its relevance and possible influence on the field of educational leadership by connecting its findings to actual demands and difficulties.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, a study that focuses on middle leader development emphasizes nurturing leadership practices, examines the impact on middle leader performance, emphasizes the significance of organizational culture and collaboration, and offers practical implications for practice and policy contributions to the field.

The study's findings, considering the importance of school leaders in developing middle leaders and raising their performance in Sharjah's private schools, are discussed. The results emphasize the value of good leadership techniques and the benefits they can have on the growth and achievement of middle leaders in educational institutions. According to the study, supporting middle leaders' development and effectiveness requires a collaborative leadership style that emphasizes participation in decision-making, mentoring, and professional development opportunities. School administrators may favorably affect the performance of the entire institution by actively supporting middle leaders and providing them with a supportive atmosphere that enables them to flourish in their positions.

Additionally, key elements in developing middle leaders include the creation of professional learning groups, achievement recognition, and effective communication channels. Irvine and Brundrett [44] claim that middle leaders need opportunities for experiential learning. These elements support their motivation, ongoing development, and career advancement. The findings of this study go beyond Sharjah's private schools, offering useful information for leaders, school administrators, and educators in various fields. The suggestions made in this study emphasize the value of encouraging cooperation, investing in leadership development, and putting supportive policies and procedures in place to improve the effectiveness of middle leaders.

In the end, the study emphasizes the significance of school leaders' role in developing middle leaders' capacity for and effectiveness as leaders. Private schools in Sharjah and elsewhere can develop a strong leadership culture that leads to excellent outcomes for students, instructors, and the entire school community by accepting these findings and putting the suggested strategies into practice.

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