



# Teacher readiness: Cultivating leadership skills among primary schoolchildren in the United Arab Emirates Public Sector



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## Article History

Received 07 September, 2019

Received in revised form 09

April, 2020

Accepted 13 April, 2020

## Keywords:

Leadership,  
Skills,  
Primary school  
teachers,  
Young leaders,  
Public schools,  
Educational  
programme.

## Article Type:

*Full Length Research Article*

## ABSTRACT

Developing leadership skills in children is one of the most important ways to grow our future. The trend to nurture talent at the early childhood development stage is becoming common practice in the Arab world. Studies that have examined how education and leadership are interrelated are diverse and numerous. However, research dedicated to determining how children can be prepared to become competent leaders is still limited. The role and readiness of teachers to support the cultivation and development of leadership skills among young children is not entirely explored. There is need for more research tailored to examine the competence and experience of teachers in government schools, in line with the process of identifying young leaders and nurturing their talents at primary school. This study was carried out to evaluate the readiness of teachers to cultivate leadership skills in primary schoolchildren in the capital of the United Arab Emirates, Abu Dhabi. The study involved a total of five schools where a total of ten focus group sessions were conducted. The research found out that teachers in public primary schools in Abu Dhabi are not yet adequately prepared to identify and nurture leadership skills among young schoolchildren. The study concluded that curriculum improvement, private-public school collaboration, school reform, strategic school collaborations and government involvement is needed to ensure the readiness of teachers to cultivate leadership skills in primary schoolchildren.

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## INTRODUCTION

Leadership preparedness among schoolchildren remains an unclear concept to educators, students, community, etc. The current interests in learning indicate an existing need for a learning approach that can foster leadership skills development (Symonds et al., 2011). Such a scenario has been escalated by the existence of a transforming external culture and global requirements, but also skilled and competent persons who can fit into a dynamic world. These entire factors boil down to how well children are prepared to face future challenges and

needs. One approach towards the improvement and preparedness of schoolchildren in primary schools involves educational leadership (Symonds et al., 2011). While most of the concern has been set on the managerial aspect of leadership in schools, the change towards a learner-centred approach to student preparedness indicates how learner-centred and classroom-based leadership during instructional delivery has become a modern practice.

The New school Model (ADEK, 2016) is evident in the emirate of Abu Dhabi, which is part of education transformation measures. The model involves the grouping of children based on their needs and abilities (personalized learning environment) (Ridge et al., 2017).

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Teachers assess the capabilities of children to determine the needs for each learner. The objective of grouping children based on their abilities is to ensure that they are exposed to appropriate learning methods. Such a move can help to equip children with essential leadership skills, experiences, and behaviours to apply the acquired knowledge appropriately. For example, the education reforms in UAE have been centred on community growth, culture awareness, national heritage, and responsibility among children (Export Govt., 2018).

Schools across the globe are shifting towards transformational teaching (Rhoades, 2011). In most cases, it is taken for granted that once children have received classroom instruction, been prepared for college, and passed senior class tests to earn a qualification, they are then competent to undertake leadership roles in their profession and government offices (Symonds et al., 2011). However, this is not, in fact, the case since as children acquire classroom knowledge, leadership skills and behavioural excellence requires the same cultivation as factual learning (Jones and Weigel, 2014). Preparing children to understand science, language, and mathematics is important. On the other hand, they also require behavioural development, critical thinking, an understanding of their environment, and how they are expected to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds (Ridge et al., 2017). In the UAE, most schools allow children to engage and progress beyond the acquisition of language, science, and mathematical skills to understanding self-management, decision-making, and change management (ADEK, 2016; Al-Dabbagh and Assaad, 2010). Children, therefore, require an environment characterized by regular exposure to real-life experiences which present opportunities to develop and explore their talents beyond the academic perspective. This approach calls for voluntary measures rather than spontaneous and incidental experiences to guarantee effective leadership preparedness among children (Jones and Weigel, 2014; Symonds et al., 2011). Therefore, this research will evaluate the readiness of teachers to cultivate leadership skills in primary schoolchildren in Abu Dhabi and the approaches used to determine leadership qualities among these children.

### **Problem statement**

The process of nurturing leadership is a complex requirement for education-based institutions, especially at the elementary school level. Some countries, for example, United States, have been keen to establish frameworks and assessment programs that assist in identifying the specific leadership abilities of children (Children and Families Commission, 2017). Efforts are then made to improve these competencies, so these

talented children become efficient and reliable leaders (Zahran et al., 2016). In most cases, such measures require the comprehensive preparation of teachers, as well as creating an enabling environment and diverse curriculum. The inability to adequately address all these requirements has hampered the process of preparing young leaders in public schools (Rhoades, 2011). Private schools across the globe, however, especially in US, have made significant milestones in achieving the preparation of schoolchildren; however, in government schools, it has been more difficult (Rhoades, 2011).

According to Rhoades (2011), primary schoolchildren are at the developmental stages where essential skills can be easily nurtured and developed to influence cognitive and behavioural excellence. Another aspect of this same question is whether the government has set aside enough resources, and developed frameworks, guidelines, and policies to support early childhood leadership preparation (Zahran et al., 2016). That is, whether the government is prepared to support children with leadership abilities to educate and nurture them as they advance through to college. On the other hand, an evaluation of the literature on the preparation of young leaders also indicates limited evidence to offer essential insights for decision-making and change implementation (Mathias, 2017). The questions regarding primary schoolchildren preparation that linger among researchers are whether teachers in government schools in the UAE are sufficiently prepared to identify leadership traits and potential among the schoolchildren, especially at their stage of childhood development. Therefore, the readiness of teacher in public primary schools remains a critical concern in the UAE, which warrants an evidence-based assessment.

### **Study objectives**

The main objectives of this study is to evaluate the readiness of teachers to cultivate leadership skills in primary schoolchildren in the capital of the United Arab Emirates, Abu Dhabi. The other objectives were associated with the primary objective and were significant in providing the foundation for thematic assessment of the research topic. They included the following:

- i. To determine the skills among teachers that enhances the process of cultivating leadership competencies among primary schoolchildren in Abu Dhabi.
- ii. To determine the approaches that teachers use to determine leadership qualities among primary schoolchildren in Abu Dhabi.
- iii. To highlight the challenges that teachers face in Abu Dhabi primary schools while preparing primary schoolchildren to become leaders.
- iv. To highlight the best practices and future

considerations for teachers in Abu Dhabi primary schools that will guarantee the best outcomes while preparing primary schoolchildren to become leaders.

### Research questions

- i. Are classroom teachers ready and prepared to enhance the process of cultivating leadership competencies among primary schoolchildren in the emirate of Abu Dhabi?
- ii. What are some of the key strategies that teachers use to determine leadership qualities among primary schoolchildren in the emirate of Abu Dhabi?
- iii. How do schools help to prepare children to become future leaders?

### Significance of the Study

This study is important because it is presented at a time when primary schoolchildren leadership preparation has become one of the primary focuses across the globe (Rhoades, 2011). This research has presented diverse elements associated with the readiness and preparation of schoolchildren to acquire leadership skills relevant to their professional ambitions and development. The understanding of the nature of the strategies used in Abu Dhabi public schools to prepare primary schoolchildren to become leaders will provide a useful foundation for the decision process. Through the findings of this research, educators will be in a position to determine effective measures to be implemented to enhance the experience of children. An analysis of the effectiveness of the strategies used in the selected public schools will present the viability as well as the inappropriateness of the measures used (Bouckaert and de Vries, 2013). Moreover, highlighting the challenges faced in Abu Dhabi public schools while preparing primary schoolchildren is critical. Furthermore, the evaluation of the experiences of primary schoolchildren is equally essential (Rhoades, 2011).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Challenges: The cultivation of leadership skills

Zahran et al. (2016) lists technology, multi-language competency, culture awareness and diversity, innovation, teamwork and leadership as some of the skills that recruiters require among potential employees. Therefore, teachers and children are required to embrace skill development at an early age; however, specific aspects of education reform have yet to meet the demands of the country and global trends (Biygautane, 2016). As an

example, skills such as critical thinking and leadership are not yet evident within the policy and curricula frameworks (Zahran et al., 2016).

### Leadership skills needed in primary schoolchildren in UAE

The UAE embarked on transformed education to assist in the preparation of young Emirati children beyond the classroom knowledge and career or professional competence. Mathias (2017) calls for the preparation of young Emirati children to acquire competent leadership skills and experience. Although structural and policy-based limitations have characterized the process of leadership development, the internal and global needs have led to the reframing of programs in teaching and learning to guarantee long-run results (Mathias, 2017). According to Mathias (2017), UAE is among the top global economies in the world with significant inter-state implication, which require sustainable management of the endowed resources.

### Readiness for leadership

Schools in UAE have embarked on programs to assist young Emirati children in achieving the required leadership competence and preparedness while undertaking their education. While some schools have designed their programs, some have taken advantage of collaboration to ensure that they enhance the experience of their children. For example, a qualitative study regarding the inclusion, reforms, and curriculum implementation in private schools in UAE showed that a significant number of these schools have selected for collaboration with other international stakeholders to improve the teaching and learning experience of both teachers and children (O'Sullivan, 2015). Cultivating leadership skills among young Emirati children is a long-term process that requires multidimensional training that links the acquired skills to real-life experiences (Almazrouei and Pech, 2015). Teachers have been called to have a positive influence on the students, especially for the primary level to improve their ability to develop responsible behaviours (Rhoades, 2011). A significant number of private schools in Abu Dhabi have programs that enhance the social skills among Grade 1 to Grade 6 schoolchildren where they are taught on how to become acquainted with new people.

### Leadership dimensions in the Ministry Curriculum

Several federal laws have defined how the administration of schools and curriculum improvement should be

undertaken. On the other hand, proper guidance regarding the preparation of teachers and administrators exist (Almazrouei and Pech, 2015). Such a provision ensures that the schools are equipped with professionals who can inspire children to be competent leaders in future. Some of the fundamental federal laws include No. 1-M7, No. 11, No. 9, No. 4, No. 24, and No. 29 which have outlined the curriculum improvement needs, co-curricular involvement, and the inclusion of technology as part of education transformations and management (International Bureau of Education, 2010).

## METHODOLOGY

### Research method and design

It is worth pointing out that qualitative analysis is anchored on the assessment of beliefs, experiences, perception, and opinions of the participants regarding a particular topic of the variable. On the other hand, the use of the quantitative method is frequently associated with numerical evaluation (Saunders et al., 2012). In this case, mathematical and statistical principles and techniques are included to generate statistical trends that can be linked to existing theories. Research methods are often divided into two major paradigms, often viewed as opposing each other “qualitative and quantitative”. While these two approaches are the most common, they can also be integrated to create other research choices. For example, a mixed method involves the use of both qualitative and quantitative assessments to achieve the objectives of the study. Some cases, the mixed method research may use the two methods, but one is more fundamental in the research than the other. In such a case, the research method is called a multi-method, which can be either qualitative multi-method or quantitative multi-method.

In this paper, a qualitative research approach was adopted. The method was selected because there was a need to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the qualitative aspects of the topic. On the other hand, we also categorized and interpreted the data in line with the important themes as depicted in the research objectives, which was based on perception and beliefs of teachers who participated in the discussions.

### Data collection

The data was collected from five public schools in the emirate of Abu Dhabi. We submitted request through the ADEK system to the research department in order to seek approval of conducting study and accessing public schools. Meanwhile we were preparing focus group questions to be shared with the target participants. We

then approached the administrators to request permission to access their schools. Once permission was granted, we formed focus groups where selected questions were discussed. The use of convenience sampling approach dominated the research process. The schools to accept the request were the ones included in this research. The guideline used was that if a request is rejected, we then approached the next closest primary school. The same approach was used to select teachers where the first teachers to volunteer to participate were the ones included in the research since the goal is taking what we can get from primary teachers no matter what subject they teach, what work experience they have, what gender of school they are in, or even what are their nationalities. Volunteers in this study exemplify convenience sampling perfectly (Psc.dss.ucdavis.edu, n.d.).

### The sample

A sample of about eight teachers from each school participated in the focus group discussion. Two focus groups of about three or four teachers from each school was formed, and the researchers were the moderator. Although a much larger number of teachers and ideally representative sample should be selected instead of convenient small sample of 36, the selection of five schools (A-E) with a total of 36 teachers was based on the need for a convenience sample for the study in line with time constraints. The researchers decided to go with convenience sampling; as the sample was selected primarily on the basis of what we were able to access. Whilst this is an approach in small-scale pieces of research, one of the strongest rationales for this method is in this particular study is that the group under study are not generally easy to access but we were able to establish a sufficient degree of contact and trust with all the participants in order to be able to conduct a viable piece of research. The selection of about eight teachers per school was considered reasonable since large focus groups limit what the participants share. The summary of the discussion was categorized into themes based on the research questions and the objectives. The focus group meetings was planned to last for about an hour for each group.

### Data collection tool: Focus group

The study involved a total of five schools in the emirates of Abu Dhabi coded A to E. A total of 10 focus groups were included in the discussion with two groups established for each school. In School A, each focus group had three teachers. In School B and D, the first group had four teachers while the second group had

three teachers. School C and E had four participants for each focus group. Therefore, the total number of teachers who participated in the focus group discussions in the entire study were 36 teachers across the five schools. The convenience sample is sufficient for the purpose of this study since it can give us an overview in how school teachers are applying the leadership concept within their classrooms. The findings cannot be generalized to a larger population across public school in UAE; it can be transferable to another school setting. A total of 14 questions divided into three sub-sections formed the basis of this research, which resulted in 10 major themes emanating from the responses.

### List of variables

1. Source of data: teachers from Abu Dhabi primary public schools
2. Teachers' skills: A key factor to measure teachers' skills for in cultivating leadership skills in schoolchildren
3. Home country: United Arab Emirates, Emirate of Abu Dhabi

### DATA ANALYSIS

The data was analyzed by researchers after completing all the sessions. The process was starting by typing all the responses for each question, going through all responses and screens the repeated answers that address the questions. We then categorized the data to build the themes. Finally, we interpreted the data by making connection between the findings, literature to have answer to the main research questions.

Triangulation plays a key role in education research. The desire to understand how critical occurrences and frameworks impact education process calls for a comprehensive assessment of the evidence gathered from primary research to inform the decisions made to enhance the impact of education. In this research, the only participants included were the teachers from different public schools that were randomly selected. As noted earlier, the triangulation process involved a comparison between the literature themes and the actual evidence from the focus group. Therefore, one cannot entirely attribute the approach used in this research to a specific triangulation type. This is because we selected a theoretical framework that aligned with the research questions, then went ahead to use the literature review themes to form the focus group questions. At the end of the study, the conclusions and recommendations emanated from the link between the literature review perspectives and the actual outcomes from the focus group responses.

In this study, the use of data triangulation where sources of data are likely to be stakeholders in the education field. Teachers are the only participants in this study where the data can be collected to have in-depth understanding of the issue. During the analysis stage, feedback from the stakeholder groups would be compared to come up with unified answers that address the research questions of this study. We used coding techniques to identify the participated groups in schools. The five schools were coded from A to E and the focus grouped numbered 1 and 2 for each school. The credibility of the study is running the focus group in different gender schools that has multicultural teachers and teaching different subjects. The convenience participants' number is enough for this study since it will give reasonable and variety responses that will address the research questions in this study. This particular source of data which the researchers able to access in a way that is unusually rich, and which cannot be obtained in the same way by other researchers. The findings are not, therefore, straightforwardly generalizable to a wider population, but nevertheless have the potential to generate valuable insights. The basic aim here, though, is to be able to say something theoretically about the findings from the particular sample we have studied in a way that generates insights about other cases or contexts. One implication of this is that the study is based on non-probability samples is designed in a way that is consciously informed by both existing theoretical debates and the development of new theories.

Additionally, although we were not allowed to use direct quotes in the finished research as per the participants' request to secure the data collected confidentially, we were quite satisfied with the finished report since the findings presented in this study are reflected and interpreted directly to the responses collected.

### Skills among teachers

The first research question that the focus group teachers discussed was whether the teachers are prepared to enhance the process of cultivating leadership among primary schoolchildren in Abu Dhabi. For each focus group from different school, the key skills that the teachers mentioned were documented. Although there was a disparity in the examples that the participants gave, a clear repetitive pattern can be seen across different schools or focus groups. In School A, the first focus group listed communication, collaboration, teamwork, creativity, and problem-solving as required skills among teachers.

The two focus groups from School B had a slightly different perspective of the required skills when compared to the responses from School A. The participants in School B noted that being motivated and

result-oriented as well as being informed about what other schools are doing is critical to leadership cultivation. The teachers added that having the ability to incorporate independence and autonomy while handling young schoolchildren is equally important. The teachers of the focus group from this school also suggested that 21st-century instructional skills among teachers are central to leadership cultivation among young children. In this case, the participants listed that being in a position to provide opportunities for skill growth through group work, offering feedback to children, and fostering creativity is part of the concerns that teachers should undertake as part of the 21st-century instructional skills<sup>1</sup>.

On the other hand, in School C, teachers pointed out that leadership focused on classroom and lesson management are essential for leadership cultivation. The teachers also pointed out that the ability to manage the children and instil positive behaviour as equally important. Planning, research skills, and 21st-century skills were can help to enhance leadership cultivation among primary schoolchildren. Moreover, School E echoed the skills identified in other focus groups such as the level of motivation among teachers, problem-solving, and planning abilities as central to classroom-based leadership cultivation.

### **Challenges faced by teachers**

During the focus group discussions, teachers from the five schools pointed out the existence of several challenges that affect their ability to prepare primary schoolchildren to become leaders. Lack of parental participation, that is, parents offering limited support, was noted as one of the key challenges that affect the process of preparing primary schoolchildren to become leaders. Work overload among teachers in public schools and skewed technology implementations affects the ability of teachers to nurture students. Participants also pointed out that cultural barriers such as the intersection between the Arab and Western beliefs and values as well as language disparity originating from the immigrant diversity are part of the issues that the teachers face while preparing primary schoolchildren to become leaders. In other focus groups, teachers pointed out that bad and violent behaviour among children affects the relationship between teachers and the children. When the relationship is deteriorating, it becomes difficult for the teachers to help the children to improve their skills. In some groups, the teacher noted that the limited time they have with children prevents them from implementing

additional strategies to improve and impart leadership competencies among children. Moreover, the dynamic nature of the education policies also featured as one of the challenges that teachers face.

### **Mitigating the challenges that teachers face**

When asked about how to eliminate the challenges that teachers face while preparing schoolchildren to become leaders, the participants suggested several measures. During the discussion, professional development featured as one of the essential measures that can be used to enhance the necessary skills among teachers. It was also apparent that organizing workshops for parents can improve their involvement in school activities meant to improve the leadership competence among their children. The participants also noted the role of effective resource allocation to support the learning process as an initiative that can be used to improve leadership development among primary schoolchildren. Teachers also mentioned that improving teacher to student ratio can reduce workloads, which will give teachers the opportunity to implement additional skill development measures. In other focus groups, respondents pointed out that curriculum revitalization focused on student participation and hands-on tasks can be an important measure. Moreover, one of the participants argued that behavioural counselling for children can improve their cooperation with teachers by building a positive relationship both at school and at home.

### **How teachers determine leadership qualities**

The participants listed the strategies that they use to determine leadership qualities among primary schoolchildren in the emirates Abu Dhabi. The use of Kagan Strategies featured in all the focus groups and most of the participants are referring that they were attending workshops organized by ADEK talking about the teaching strategies within classrooms and one of the strategies are through the use of Kagan approach. Kagan approach is designed to focus on cognitive, behavioural, mental and emotional well-being and development among children (Clowes, 2011). The teachers also noted that the 21st-century learning skills are important when assessing leadership competencies among children. The respondents described the use of collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking as assessment features for leadership development. The teachers believed that the uses of these strategies have a significant impact of the development of classroom and co-curricular abilities of young children. According to the participants, the performance of children when working with a team or a group of other children defines their

<sup>1</sup>As stated by Partnership for 21st-century learning (P21 organization), 21st-century instructional skills it is all about ensuring the classroom is learner-centred and learner focused meeting students' needs. This is can be more broadly applicable learning through the use of innovation skills which can help cultivate leadership skills in children (P21.org, 2018).

abilities. However, some teachers argued that there is a lack of a unifying approach to determine leadership competencies among primary schoolchildren. Therefore, teachers use their personalized approach to identify the leadership abilities and set measures for improvement. Nevertheless, the use of strategies such as allowing the kids to take up assembly roles, classroom responsibilities, and being part of the student council provides opportunities for teachers to determine the leadership talent among the selected students. While this approach seems effective, the teachers argued that it only offers opportunities to a limited number of children. The use of co-curricular activity participation was also listed as part of the methods regularly used among teachers.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### Role and skills of teachers

Primary school education and care have received much attention as a significant component in education in the present world. It has universally been accepted in the global community of public primary school that leadership is a widely for the delivery of quality programs (Metcalf and Benn, 2013; Puccio et al., 2010). Fundamentally, leadership investment implies that investment in the quality of public primary school leadership has been ongoing for a long time but the manner in which it is implemented varies depending on various factors. The implication of this has been that the teachers have had to undertake multiple tasks in carrying out the responsibilities of being both a leader and a teacher (De Villiers and Stander, 2011; Yukl, 2013). This point was indicated as one of the secondary objectives of this study and addressed the first & second research questions which are whether classroom teachers ready and prepared to enhance the process of cultivating leadership skills among schoolchildren or not and what are some of the key strategies that teachers use to determining leadership qualities among schoolchildren in Abu Dhabi. Teachers are expected to nurture leadership skills among the primary schoolchildren while at the same time teach the regular subjects such as mathematics, religion, science, and languages. The Leader in Me program (2015) would help to tackle this challenge where it helps to develop a seven habits among kids. On the other hand, very little focus has been made to determine leadership qualities in the children at an early age. According to Riggio (2011 a), teachers should focus on the abilities of each learner and embedded teamwork through participatory approach into their lessons will develop the leadership skills. With comparison to teachers' responses, Abu Dhabi primary school teachers are using this strategy within their classroom where they

allow children to take different roles that allow them to utilize critical thinking and decision-making skills.

The failure to identify and nurture leadership abilities in schoolchildren extends the time taken to realize their leadership potential. Such a limitation has been undermined and yet it is significant in leadership development first to the child, the tutor and generally to the nation which is in need of quality leaders for development and prosperity. Existing literature has underscored the association between the leader and the followers and impact of the latter in influencing leadership (Puccio et al., 2010). Therefore, comprehensive research should not emphasize the leader or follower only, but both.

### Learning from other countries and private schools

The process of nurturing leadership is a complex requirement for education-based institution especially if it is to start at an elementary level. Most countries have been keen to establish frameworks and assessment programs that assist in identifying the specific leadership abilities among children (Rhoades, 2011). Efforts are then made to improve these competencies so that these talented children end up as effective and reliable leaders. In most cases, such measures require comprehensive preparation of teachers as well as creating an enabling environment and diverse curriculum altogether. The inability to effectively address all these requirements has hampered the process of leadership identification and nurturing among elementary schoolchildren. In the UAE, the scenario is not far from a similar reality. Private schools have made significant milestones in achieving the objectives associated with such programs; however, in government schools it has not been easy (O'Sullivan, 2015).

The above is linked with the last objective stated in this paper where highlighting best practices will guarantee the best outcomes of preparing primary schoolchildren and it is going in line with third research question on how do schools help to prepare children to become future leaders. As clarified in the literature review that some of the school in UAE took the steps of collaboration with other schools to take the best practices to improve the teaching and learning experiences for both teachers and students. The findings got from the focus group discussions emphasis this point where teachers noted that the availability resources which will support the learning process and this go in parallel with what stated in literature review about The Leader in Me program which is dedicated to change school processes to enhance leadership and life skills among children by empowering teachers and children through participatory programs. UAE made a progress with two private schools that applying the Leader in Me program; Brighton College

and rising school. Accordingly, MoE can learn from their experiences with the program to take the required action towards achieving the goal of having variety of leader's community.

On the other hand, an evaluation of the literature also indicates limited evidence assessing the process of identifying leadership skills in primary schoolchildren to offer essential insights for decision-making and change implementation.

### **Government involvement**

The question that lingers among researches is whether the teachers in government school in the UAE are prepared enough to identify potential leadership traits and potential among elementary schoolchildren, especially at early childhood development level. Another dimension related to this question is whether the government has set enough resources, frameworks, guidelines, and policies that guarantee early childhood leadership preparation (Ridge et al., 2017). That is, whether the government is ensuring that children with potential leadership competencies are identified and nurtured that they can become successful leaders when they advance in education until they graduate after college. From the above, we can referred to objectives No. 4 which spot on the best practices and future consideration for teachers that will guarantee the best outcomes while preparing schoolchildren to be future leaders and incorporate with the research question No. 3 on how do school help to prepare schoolchildren to become future leader. The school can participate on this based on the availability of resources that are provided from the government. As explained in literature review that some schools take the initiative in creating their own program internally like public speaking, writing and reading activities, which help to build courage and self confidence in schoolchildren. Meanwhile, at government level, as elaborated by Ridge et al. (2017) that MoE and ADEK are playing a critical role in ensuring the education system is supplying the framework and environment for young children' preparation for both career and leadership. As pointed by participant teachers in the findings, this cannot be achieved unless we have benchmarking and rotational teaching among schools or teachers in the same school.

Leadership is an important component in this study; therefore, schools and learning institutions can be a breeding ground for nurturing successful leadership traits. However, in most cases, such a consideration has been perceived as a core function of high school and higher learning levels. Nevertheless, the trend where talents are nurtured at elementary level starting with the early childhood development stage is becoming a common practice (Rhoades, 2011).

### **Training of teachers**

It is worth noting that such a change calls for proper preparation such as training of teachers, the creation of programs that are tailored to nurture leadership, and the availability of a dedicated budget to sustain such strategies. Teachers pointed that providing professional development in this matter for teachers will help achieving the goal of cultivating leadership skills on schoolchildren which consequently would answer research question No. 1 which is; are classroom teachers ready for and prepared to enhance the process of cultivating leadership competencies among primary schoolchildren in the emirate of Abu Dhabi. Furthermore, to double stress to the finding mentioned above Zahran et al. (2016) indicated that training, professional development, and remuneration of teachers impact the nature of learning outcomes, attitudes, and motivation of educators, as well as the experience of children.

In most cases in the UAE private institutions have emerged ahead of the government schools because of the advantage of access to resources – researches dedicated to determining how children are prepared to become competent leaders are limited.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Implication for practices**

The researchers found out that the teachers in Abu Dhabi should consider several models to enhance the experience of children while preparing them to become leaders. The approaches to childhood education that should be practiced in UAE include the Montessori Method, High/Scope, Reggio Emilia, Waldorf Education, and Multiple Intelligence. The models of childhood education represent a clear method of working with children, comprising a philosophical and theoretical foundation, objectives, curriculum designs, approaches, and assessment guidelines. All the three approaches named above are based on coherent visions of how to develop the human society by aiding the children to realize their optimal potential as intelligent, innovative, and complete individuals. The institutional cultures endeavour to safeguard their leading principles by practicing them in the best possible ways and preventing them from just becoming slogans.

### **Implications on practice**

The public schools in Abu Dhabi should consider the advantage that comes with the Leader in Me programs. Several schools have subscribed to different training programs for teachers and students. The online frame



work allows the teachers to access various materials tailored to enhance the leadership abilities of children in line with their grades. The participants from the schools included in this study confirmed that access to resources was a challenge. When schools collaborate with this organization they gain access to school transformation resources. Some schools receive funds from sponsors while other receives professional development to improve the role of teachers in supporting leadership abilities amongst young children (The Leader in Me, 2015). The advantage of being a partner with the Leader in Me organization is that the school will be in a position to benefit from the advanced framework developed to improve the process of teaching leadership and life skill in the 21st-century (The Leader in Me, 2015).

### **Implications for policy**

Based on the findings, there is need for curriculum improvement. The primary education curriculum should include a sustainable and appropriate curriculum that recognizes the leadership abilities of children and seek to nurture and prepare them for the future (Ridge et al., 2017). A national body that is solely responsible for curriculum development and improvement should be created. Local and international experts should work together to ensure that the teaching process goes beyond the ordinary subjects. Including a framework that will allow the teachers to prepare and regularly assess the children will address challenges associated with lack of clear direction as noted in this study (Ridge et al., 2017). A sustainable curriculum that will assist teachers to prepare schoolchildren to be leaders should include the role of teachers, the interventions to be used, and how this should be incorporated into the regular timetable.

### **Recommendations on Government support and involvement**

The government is the major stakeholder in education. The support from the government influences the outcome of education as well as the level of sustainability (O'Sullivan, 2015). In UAE, the government has already supported public schools by offering resources necessary to meet the needs of schoolchildren. Balanced resource allocation will eliminate the disparity witnessed in the five schools that participated in this study. The training of teachers should include leadership development competencies to ensure that professionals deployed to public school are aware and able to incorporate the current trends while teaching young schoolchildren (Epstein, 1993). Moreover, the government should recognize and accept the existence of education disparity

between public schools and private school then seek solutions to create consensus through collaboration (O'Sullivan, 2015). The teaching environment should motivate teachers for improved performance. The Ministry of Education has made major policy changes this year by introducing the teacher licensure where the teachers are assessed in the subject specialization as well as the pedagogy in order to work as a class teacher in the UAE (TIs.moe.gov.ae, 2018). This will be an added values through pedagogy part to assess teachers capabilities in building leadership skills in children and send the other teachers for training if needed.

### **Implication for research**

The findings of this research have provided a view of how young leadership preparation is important. However, based on the findings, it is clear that teachers play a significant role towards the achievement of this crucial role. There exist several factors that affect the preparedness of teachers to identify and nurture the leadership skills of primary schoolchildren. In this case, based on the outcomes of the analysis carried out in Abu Dhabi, there is need for more studies focusing on this area to determine the dimensions associated with policy implementation, effectiveness, and reliability. Future studies should examine the current policy frameworks and their validity based on the context of education reforms.

### **Conclusion**

While carrying out this research we realized that there is more to be done in public schools in Abu Dhabi to improve the quality of education including the process of nurturing young children to be leaders. It easy for someone to conclude that since the government has enacted policies then all is well. However, while conducting the research we realized that having policies in place does not guarantee their appropriateness or successful implementations. There is need for a monitoring and evaluation programs to ensure that each school has a system that ensures that teachers are playing their role. Otherwise, a desired action must be taken like improving the current policy or send teacher for training to run the policy in a new way that help plans go successfully. The government should also set measures such as availing enough resources and aligning the training of teachers to the emerging needs in schools.

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