

Factors Influencing the Roles and Responsibilities of Middle Leaders in Saudi and English Primary Schools: A Comparative Critical Study

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Abstract : The role of middle leaders, especially in primary schools, is a multi-faced role that has been subject to changes in nature over recent decades, with claims for more distributed leadership practices. This research examines the way 18 middle leaders in Saudi and English primary schools conceptualise their roles and responsibilities, and different factors influencing those roles and responsibilities. It begins from the premise that both the power of the role and the values of middle leaders are grounded in cultural and political bases, a belief held by the researcher as an 'insider' within the Saudi educational leadership context. The study consisted of a comparative analysis of the role and the responsibilities of middle leaders in Saudi primary schools and their equivalents in English primary schools. A purely qualitative methodological stance was adopted, using in-depth face-to-face semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis. Middle leaders were asked to reflect deeply on their perceptions and understanding of their roles and explain what they thought influenced their daily practices and responsibilities. The findings suggest that the concept of middle leadership has been influenced by power imposed from above by political authority, via internal and external hierarchical structures, which shapes the nature of the role of the middle leaders and forces them to comply. Middle leaders seem to believe they have the power to make decisions and promote change, but these findings suggest that this is illusory. The power that keeps middle leaders performing is the power of their cultural and religious values. Those values are the resource to which they turn in their search for more energy when they lack support and are short of time taken. Middle leaders in Saudi, just like their equivalents in English schools must comply with the requirements of their role. However, Saudi middle leaders are given no leeway to make decisions or implement change, neither do they have the culture of collegiality that seems to give middle leaders in England more power over their resources and decisions. However, in neither educational setting have middle leaders been given the power to lead, so they remain managers rather than leaders. The findings of this research suggest that there are more similarities between the educational settings of Saudi and England than differences; and in the light of different factors identified in the study, suggest the establishment of a framework for middle leadership, in the hope of enhancing the way the role is practiced.

Keywords : middle leader, primary school, power, educational leadership, value, culture, model, Saudi Arabia, England

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