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Elementary school principals' performance of instructional leadership in both Egypt and Kuwait from teachers' perspectives (A Field Study)

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Abstract:

This study aims to investigate the extent of teachers' satisfaction with principals' demonstrations of instructional leadership practices in credited primary schools in Egypt (Asyut) and excellent primary schools in Kuwait. A total of 346 participants selected through stratified random sampling, 185 from Egypt (Asyut) and 161 from Kuwait, completed a questionnaire scored on a 4-point Likert scale. The results support the proposed hypothesis that both countries share more common features of school instructional leadership than they hold differences as it confirmed that principals in both countries were actively involved in practising instructional leadership in seven domains. However, principals in Egypt (Asyut) showed slightly higher mean scores than those in Kuwait for most survey items. The study recommends that concepts such as 'decentralization of school administration', 'collaborative practice', and "instructional leadership", need to be adopted in both countries. The study recommends the improvement of school principals' current practices of instructional leadership.

Keywords: Egypt; instructional leadership; Kuwait; primary schools

أداء مديري المدارس الابتدائية للقيادة التعليمية في كل من مصر والكويت من وجهة نظر المعلمين (دراسة ميدانية)
اعداد

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ملخص البحث:

هدف البحث إلى معرفة مدى رضا المعلمين عن ممارسات مديري المدارس للقيادة التعليمية في المدارس الابتدائية المعتمدة في مصر (أسيوط) والمدارس الابتدائية المتميزة في الكويت. ولتحقيق هدف البحث استخدم المنهج الوصفي حيث تم اختيار 346 معلماً ومعلمة من خلال أخذ عينات عشوائية طبقية، 185 من مصر (أسيوط) و161 من الكويت، وتم إعداد إستبانة لإستطلاع رأي المعلمين في ممارسة مديري المدارس التي يعملون بها لأبعاد القيادة التعليمية. وخلصت نتائج الدراسة إلى التأكيد على أن مديري المدارس في كلا البلدين يشاركون بفاعلية في ممارسة القيادة التعليمية بمجالاتها السبعة، وذلك من وجهة نظر المعلمين، (1. تحسين أداء الطلاب، 2. إتخاذ القرار، 3. التواصل الفعال، 4. تطوير المعلمين، 5. تطوير القيادة، 6. التكنولوجيا، 7. التعلم الذاتي المهني). وقد أظهر مديروا المدارس في مصر (أسيوط) متوسط درجات أعلى قليلاً من تلك الموجودة في الكويت بالنسبة لمعظم عناصر المسح. وعليه وتوصي الدراسة بضرورة اعتماد مفاهيم مثل "لامركزية الإدارة المدرسية" و"الممارسة التعاونية" و"القيادة التعليمية" في كلا البلدين لدعم ممارسة مديري المدارس للقيادة التعليمية. كما توصي الدراسة بتحسين الممارسات الحالية لمديري المدارس للقيادة التعليمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مصر؛ القيادة التعليمية؛ الكويت، المدارس الابتدائية

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Introduction:

As an instructional leader, the school principal plays two vital roles: the first is enhancing students' learning achievement and the second is sustaining school improvement. The first is an educational role that includes instructional and political perspectives (Goddard et al. 2015; Hallinger 2010). In this sense the principal is perceived as an agent of change through which he becomes the source of all political, technological, educational, and social changes in the school that seek to set ambitious school vision and smart objectives; planning and maintaining school programs; amplifying and improving students' learning achievements and teachers' instructional performance (Hui and Singh 2020; Kwan 2020).

As an instructional leader, the principal becomes responsible for magnifying students' commitment to learning and inspiring leadership in both teachers and students (Hui and Singh 2020; Reborra 2019). This is achieved by communicating trust and motivation between students and teachers (Zeinabadi; Kouhsari, and Gurr 2020; Wahab et al. 2020).

The second role is administrative that is expressed in the practice of power to construct a functional hierarchy of authority; making data informed decisions; assessing and evaluating performance and outcomes; and managing human and fiscal resources (Halverson et al. 2007; Owens 2001).

Generally, the school principal as an instructional leader is held accountable for each detail and incident that take place at school

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starting from setting school vision and strategic goals, developing a factual and applicable action plan; allocating and managing all types of resources (Martin 2018; McCullough et al. 2016). In addition to promoting teachers' professionalism and students' learning attainment (Brauckmann; Pashiardis, and Ärlestig 2023; Herrmann et al. 2019; Karacabey; Bellibaş, and Adams 2022)

Conceptual framework:

This section is specified to outline the conceptual framework of the study starting with the discussion of instructional leadership (definition, roles, and importance in time of reform). In addition to the discussion of school reform in Egypt and Kuwait. In conclusion, this section will end with an analysis of the relationship between instructional leadership and school reformation in both Egypt and Kuwait.

Definition of instructional leadership:

The concept of instructional leadership prioritizes the principal's role in supporting teachers' work to improve students learning achievement over their administrative responsibilities (Aryani & Haryadi, 2023; Khokhar et al., 2023, p. 1513). This style of leadership entails direct and indirect activities such as supporting teachers to improve classroom instruction and conducting action research to suit teachers' competencies with students' learning goals (Kilag & Sasan, 2023, p. 66)

In late 20th century the definition of learning performance has shifted from focusing on academic achievement into a multiple competence-based comprehension. A transition that has impacted the design and implementation of curricula, learning paradigms, and school leadership. It motivated student's creativity and promoted teachers' instructional innovation and evoked principal to practice unconventional techniques of leadership (Ismail et al., 2018, p. 137). These benefits assert the fact that school principals have become key pillars influencing students learning achievements, teachers'

professional development, and teaching and learning effectiveness (Khokhar et al., 2023, p. 1513)

Roles of school principal as instructional leadership:

School principals as instructional leaders are currently held accountable for improving teaching and learning. Yet the effect of a school principal is directly influencing teachers as well as classroom environment, and indirectly student learning. In the meantime, school leaders are projected to the influence of stakeholders such as national community leaders, education professional associations, and their professional and personal experiences, (K. Wahlstrom et al., 2010). However, it is proved that no single case of a school that has succeeded in improving its students' achievement in the absence of a talented leadership as "leaders have the potential to unleash talent capacities in organization" (p. 9).

An instructional principal is considered a leader when he/she succeeds in developing, and supervising the methods of instructions and activities that lead to improving the learning process (Hariyati et al., 2023) via executing principalship duties such as: planning and goal setting, decision making, communication, faculty development, leadership development, effective use of technologies, and personal professional learning (Hallinger et al., 2020).

Therefore, it is widely recognized that the success of any school is strongly associated with its leader's ability to plan, organise, and implement in and out school activities along with school bodies and with local and business organizations and collaborate with families to make sure they are extracting the maximum possible potential of students' achievement (Cox and Mullen, 2023).

Consequently, instructional leaders are held responsible for creating a balance between administrative and leadership chores. Leaders exhibit and practice fairness, flexibility, friendship, fearlessness, and futuristic vision (Shaked, 2020, p. 82). Therefore, to plan and set ambitious goals for the school several measures should be taken into consideration such as: teachers' expectations of educational purposes, the vision of the organization, and the consensus on the school intended goals (Honig and Rainey, 2020). In the meantime,

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instructional principals are expected to invest their competencies and skills to assemble all the inputs into inducing the achievement of school goals (Hui and Singh, 2020).

As for decision making several studies affirmed that successful instructional leaders manage to get various stakeholders to collaborate in decision making process that leads to higher production in the schools (Aryani and Haryadi, 2023). Mulwa et al. (2020) assert that “collaborative decision making refers to the involvement of different stakeholders in presenting different alternatives to achieve discipline related to school goals” (p. 1). It is thus observed that teachers, students, parents, and others are among the stakeholders who should be involved in school decision making. In such a situation, any collaborative decision is no longer attributable to any single entity or individual, but it is perceived as the harvest of school collaboration with the inside and outside community (Mulwa et al., 2020).

In this case an instructional leader is held accountable for maintaining a nurturing and safe environment for parents and teachers to be part of the decision-making process and for the students to be the primary beneficiary of school services and activities. Besides, instructional school leaders are responsible for fostering teachers' collaboration that is the anchor of any school improvement efforts. School leaders have considerable influence on shaping and structuring workplace conditions that opens the floor for teachers' collaboration in decision making (Patrick, 2022).

Additionally, the school is the place of instruction. Hence, an instructional leader functions as a manager, administrator, curricula consultant, as well as teachers, to smooth the teaching and learning process he/she has to communicate school vision and goals clearly to all stakeholders, direct curricula, observe teachers' performance, assign and invest resources efficiently and effectively, most importantly he/she has to motivate teachers to perform their duties professionally and efficiently. To perform these roles instructional a school leader should master verbal and non-verbal communication skills to be able to deliver all his/her messages and instructions clearly (Naz and Rashid, 2021, p. 479)

Moreover, instructional leaders recognize and appreciate teachers' capabilities and interests. They perceive teachers as extraordinarily learned wise people who deserve to work in a constructive positive environment that appreciates their efforts and enables them to prosper professionally and personally. Upon that instructional leaders work their best to create an environment with the school that provides teachers with all possible chances to proceed their professional development so they can assist their students grow and learn (Bafadal et al., 2019). Within this context, teachers and principals share leadership and work collaboratively to ensure the creation of an inclusive environment that embraces continuous progress and flourishing of everyone within the school. Distributing leadership among teachers stimulates their intrinsic motivation and the willingness to get rid of negativity. Therefore, principals as instructional leaders are responsible to instil all the above segments and turn them into the actual assets within the institution (Bafadal et al., 2019).

The roles of instructional leadership in time of reformation:

Most recent school reform approaches are structured around school-based management (SBM) that adopts decentralization and school autonomy. SBM assumes that decision making concerning the instruction and the organization of time, space, people, facilities, and other resources should be managed and controlled by those who work closely with students because they are the ones who fully understand the context and culture of the school (Lindberg & Vanyushyn, 2013, p. 41). Such transformation requires delegation of authority and power; therefore, the school has become a fundamental decision-making unit within the education system in order to identify and respond to students' needs. In such case, instructional leadership emerges as the most suitable leadership model that can mobilize teachers to think and behave in a manner satisfying students' needs and attaining society expectations (Sofa et al., 2012, p. 506).

SBM also holds school accountable for its students' learning and developmental outcomes. This accountability has brought sustainable pressure on principals who are considered the main contributors to any intended school improvements. Paradoxically, this

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rigorous pressure for education accountability provides an additional opportunity that highlights the importance of school instructional leadership (Tulowitzki, 2019, p. 573)

Consequently, improving education quality requires substantial changes in both teaching and learning practices. To accomplish this goal governments and policy makers assert that a competent instructional leader is a necessity. In short, school education quality depends to a great extent on school leaders' willingness to dedicate effort to improving their performance as instructional leaders (Hallinger & Lee, 2013, p. 7)

Notwithstanding, reality confirms that in many parts of the world, including the Arab world, the role of the school principal as an instructional leader is poorly understood and outside the main job description of most principals. Therefore, in many nations, the expectation of the principal to act as an instructional leader requires a grand transformation to be able to challenge his/her traditional practice (Hallinger & Lee, 2013, p. 7).

Upon that, the current research targets to investigate how elementary school teachers in both Egypt (Asyut) and Kuwait perceive the traits of efficacious instructional leaders that their school principals exhibit specially on the time of reform. Therefore, it targets to examine teachers' perception of their school principals' instructional leadership style and to what extent it elevates teachers' motivation and students' learning outcomes.

School reform in Egypt (Edu. 2.0):

Education is a multidimensional process that affects national socioeconomic status and a country's ability to achieve its strategic goals. It is also a core factor that reflects investment in manpower and its ability to secure decent and dignifying life for its people. Recently international organization transcend the definition of poverty beyond the lack on income to the lack of prospects that lead to better life (Beycan, 2023). As poverty restrains people from investing in their children's education which in return confine them to marginalized low

paid jobs and deprive the country from a significance contribution to its overall socioeconomic growth (Hurulle et al., 2023).

An overview of Egypt's current Socioeconomic status:

The world Bank (2023) describes Egypt as a struggling country because it suffers from several long-standing challenges that intersected with multiple global shocks that led to “a foreign exchange crisis, historic inflation, and pressures to worsen the already stretched fiscal and external accounts”. These pressures have caused an unprecedented escalation in the government debt limiting the fiscal space required for human capital development and physical capital for the Egyptian population that exceeds 105 million whom 30 percent of them are below the national level of poverty (The World Bank In Egypt, 2023, p. 18).

In response to these challenges Egyptian government has proceeded a series of reform policies and adjustments including: 1) raising key policy rates; 2) adopting flexible exchange rate policy to control foreign exchange market distortions; 3) introducing social mitigation plans for vulnerable groups like pensions and food subsidies (The World Bank In Egypt, 2023, p. 23).

In return, the World Bank expects that Egypt domestic macroeconomic status will improve gradually as the countries continues to push ahead with stabilization and structural reforms especially in regard to improving private business environment that will “unleash its potentials in higher value-added and export-oriented activities necessary for job-creation and better living standards”(World Bank, 2023, p. 24).

In its report “*Egypt Public Expenditure Review for the Human Development Sectors*”, (2022) the World Bank Group analyzed Egypt's expenditures on education in relation to its efficiency and impact on learning outcomes and how they respond to the escalating human development challenges, poverty reduction requirements, equality, and long-term growth. According to this report quality education is placed at the heart of any social or economic reform the country intends to implement (p. 16). It has been viewed for decades “as a major component of human capital formation, which represents a

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major component of any economic growth and social welfare (Sayed, 2006, p. 13)

An overview of Egyptian education system:

The Egyptian educational system is considered the largest in the Middle East and North Africa, with over 24 million students and more than 40,000 schools. The public and private sector together have approximately 821,000 teachers, 711,000 administrators, and total 1.6 million employees (Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics: Egypt statistical yearbook 2020-Education 2020).

The system was divided into three levels: 1) Children aged 4–12 years. The first two years are kindergarten, followed by six years of primary school; 2) 3 years preparatory school, junior high; 3) 3 years secondary level, senior high school. These three levels are mandatory and are free of charge in all public schools. However, wealthy students usually attend private schools, creating social gaps. Skills learned in most public schools often mismatch those required for the knowledge economy and the country's development needs. The deficiency of the Egyptian Education system is explained by the low internal efficiency of the system, which causes a high rate of repetition that in turn exerts greater pressure on the education system by increasing gross enrolment, while they did not have an effect on net enrolment (Arab Republic of Egypt Ministry of Education 2007, 34).

Egypt thus launched its strategic plan for reforming pre-university education (2007/08–2011/12) to bridge this quality gap and integrate knowledge economy requirements into the education system. This reform covered all aspects of the education system, such as access, curricula, teaching quality, textbooks, assessment methods, school management, governance, and funding resources (Arab Republic of Egypt Ministry of Education 2007; Helali 2011). The National Centre of Curricula Development, the National Centre for Education Research, and the National Centre for Examinations and Educational Evaluation all collaborated with the Ministry of Education in organizing promotional exams for all levels of education except for

sixth, ninth, and twelfth grade, because they use national standardized tests (Helali 2011, 123).

In 2018 Egypt's Ministry of Education and Technical Education (MoETE) worked on aligning its strategic plan for reforming the education system with Egypt's 2030 vision. These new reforms brought about large-scale transformations of the country's education system, known now as (Edu 2.0) (Tuncay; Uzunboylu, and Teker 2011).

(Edu 2.0) is a free web-based education site with various features for teachers, students, and parents. It needs nothing to download or install and it includes Facebook-like news feeds and social networking. What is more, it can be accessed from any mobile device. For expert users' low-cost premium plans are available. It consists of a rich set of assessment tools, including quizzes, question banks, and seven other kinds of assignments. In this system, students should adopt a deep learning approach from the earliest age via learning environments where they can control their learning. (949-950)

In its first phase, Egypt built a digital infrastructure, whereby 2500 public secondary schools have fibre optic cables and smart classrooms to reach students in remote areas, and a million tablets have been distributed among students and teachers to roll out digital exams in grades 10 to 12. All secondary students are granted access to a large national digital library called the *Egyptian Knowledge Bank* (EKB), which was used in 2020 to host all learning content at the primary and secondary levels (UNICEF Egypt Country Office 2021).

In the big picture, this reform aims to modernise Egypt's education by improving the quality of education in K-12 schooling. This improvement should increase access to pre-primary education and improve the quality of teaching and learning in line with international standards, leading to an improvement in Egypt's international education ranking (Moustafa et al. 2022, 52). The reform is gradually implemented in early grades through the implementation of (Edu.2.0) system starting with pre-primary grades in 2018, moving one year at a

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time, reaching 5th grade in 2023 and aiming to transform the entire system by 2030.

In the elementary stage, the (Edu.2.0) reform focuses on shifting teaching and learning from 'content-based' to 'competency-based', focusing on classroom experience and learning outcomes. Students are being trained to adopt a deep learning approach where they can manage and control their learning, an easy-read rubric and an easy-to-use grading book is prepared to assess their learning progress through moderate challenging assessment tasks, assessment standards and criteria are clearly defined, quick formative feedback is provided, and students have many chances to alter and improve their learning (Yılmaz and Orhan 2010).

To sustain this cultural reform shift, high-quality sustainable professional development and a robust accountability system have become essential, requiring a substantial coalition and continuous communication at the administrative level. Therefore, competent instructional leadership is needed to create a clear, coherent, and comprehensive vision of the (Edu.2.0) system and transmit it to teachers, parents, the community, and stakeholders. Moreover, an instructional school principal is responsible for supporting and sustaining school improvement and fostering a constructive learning environment that secures students' learning progress (Saaverdra 2019; Moustafa et al. 2022; Hui and Singh 2020).

School principal roles in Egyptian education system

A considerable cluster of Egyptian education literature documented a general dissatisfaction of the education system outcomes regarding the week academic performance of students specially in public schools. They recorded and analysed the constant deterioration of both learning quality and school services (Elbadawy, 2015; Ille, 2015) and developed a consensus that part of this dilemma is the responsibility of school principals who failed to fulfil their role as instructional leaders. They accused them with disregarding their priorities as: working with teachers to promote teaching and learning in schools through coaching, monitoring, assessing, coordinating and

developing classroom instruction (Al-Samadi & Al-Mahdy, 2016; Hammad et al., 2021).

In reviewing the process and the selection criteria of public-school principals in Egypt we find several procedures have been taken to improve school principals' performance in an attempt to deal with the problem of education quality. In 2006 the National Quality Assurance and Accreditation Authority was established and issues a manual of clear and specified standards and indicators of effective school-system (Egyptian Government, 2006). In 2007 the Egyptian education law was amended to set new standards and job description for those who work in supervisory and leadership position in schools. The law also imposed new job requirements for teaching including licensing. It also ordered the establishment of a new professional development academy to provide continuous professional development training to all those who work in the education system including school principals (Egyptian Government, 2007, 2008). The academy is also responsible for licensing practitioners, setting requirements for education qualification, and designing assessment tools required to occupy educational positions. In 2008 the Ministry of Education issued a decree defining the roles and responsibilities, specialization, and requirements for occupying positions in school administration, supervision, and higher administrative positions in the education directorates in the regions and the ministry. According to this decree the eligible candidates for leadership positions in schools are mostly among principals, deputies, and expert teachers (A) who possess at least 15 years of experience (Egyptian Ministry of Education, 2004). However, these terms do not guarantee the quality of school principals' performance specially in regard to their roles as instructional leaders.

So, despite these efforts school principals in most public schools are still holding tight to their traditional roles and responsibilities, they spend most of their time in paper work and other routine administrative tasks as budget building, clerical work and managing discipline issues (Al-Samadi & Al-Mahdy, 2016, p. 119).

Meanwhile, improving education quality requires significant changes in teaching and learning practices. To accomplish this goal school leaders need to possess a sincere willingness to dedicate most of

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their time and effort to improve their practice of instructional leadership (Hallinger & Lee, 2013, p. 7)

School reform in Kuwait (Excellent Schools)

Education reform is a continuous undertaking in numerous nations, Kuwait being one of them. The objective is to establish first-rate educational institutions that deliver superior instruction to pupils. To guarantee that students obtain an optimal education, this entails the implementation of modifications in curriculum, pedagogical approaches, and school administration. In an effort to improve its education system, Kuwait has implemented measures to modernize curricula, integrate technology into classrooms, and enhance teacher preparation. Kuwait's objective in investing in school reform is to establish high-quality educational institutions that equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in the contemporary global landscape (AlAjmi,2022; AlAjmi et al ,2022).

In 2008, the Excellent School initiative was incepted by the Ministry of Education in Kuwait. Promoting schools to pursue excellence through the improvement of their plans, development, and overall educational environment for students is the primary objective of this initiative. Educational institutions undergo assessment according to predetermined standards; they are deemed Excellent Schools upon satisfying these standards and demonstrating consistent progress in academic performance. By ensuring that students receive a high-quality education, this initiative seeks to foster continuous improvement (Ministry of Education,2022)

An overview of Kuwait's current Socioeconomic status

In the second half of the twentieth century and after gaining independence the Arabian Peninsula have witnessed a huge socioeconomic transformation caused by the increase in oil wealth. The state of Kuwait is no exception, this small country occupying the north of the Arabian Gulf became one of the wealthiest country in the Middle East (Gulseven, 2016, p. 1429)

Kuwait's economy depends heavily on oil production and domestic consumption as main drivers of economic growth. This has caused a slow pace in structural reforms and diversification of income revenues and formed long-term economic challenges (Azar et al., 2021).

In 2022 Kuwait was blessed economically because of the robust of oil sector that increased by 13.3%. Yet, the economy declined sharply in 2023 due to OPEC+ new policy that agreed on cutting oil production quotas in addition to other global disturbances such as: oil price volatility, monetary tightening, geopolitical instability associated with Russia/Ukraine war, economic growth recession. Despite that, the non-oil sector in 2023 succeeded in maintaining its growth that was supported by a rise in oil price due the increase in external demands (Olver-Ellis, 2020, p. 5).

Nationally the government generously provides subsidies on food and energy. It also provides citizens with free education and healthcare. Most Kuwaiti citizens are employed in the public sector. The government social policy has played a major role in easing the inflationary pressures caused by COVID 19 Pandemic and other global disruptions during 2023 (Matsuo, 2019, p. 7).

However, the continues expansion of the public sector employment because of, the higher social status it secures, the higher salaries it grants, the permanent job security it bestows, and the limited working hours and longer holidays it offers made it more appealing for most Kuwaiti citizens than the private sector. Therefore, more than 76% of Kuwaiti labour force work in the public sector (Matsuo, 2019, p. 9).

Kuwaiti government tries to rebalance the labour market between the public and the private sectors and the national and the migrant labour force. It also tries to mitigate the risk caused by the rising unemployment rates among Kuwait's youth who seeks to enter the already saturated public sector. Therefore, amalgamating more Kuwaiti into the labour market has become one of the most critical socioeconomic challenge facing the country (Olver-Ellis, 2020, p. 10).

Education in Kuwait contributed to this national socioeconomic dilemma as it caused a mismatch between the existing human capital

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skills and targeted labour market requirements as delineated in the country's vision 2035. Most of the Kuwaiti youth undertake university degree preferring soft majors as social sciences and humanities over hard ones as science and technology. However, a growing renaissance of the importance of reforming the whole education system is sweeping among Kuwaiti officials and policy makers to overcome the unemployment obstacle and prepare the country to transit into knowledge economy (Ottesen et al., 2023, p. 1).

An overview of Kuwaiti education system

In Kuwait, education is offered free of charge to all Kuwaitis and is compulsory for ages 6–14. Education development in the country represents the foundation of the Kuwaiti government's commitment to utilising the country's human resource base and meeting the social developmental challenges of the new millennium (Alhashem and Alhouti 2021). Public education in Kuwait includes elementary, intermediate, and secondary schools. The role of education in Kuwait is becoming increasingly important because of the need to address the gap between the country's development goals and human resource skills. The foundation of elementary education in Kuwait is the child's early childhood experiences. During this phase, fundamental knowledge and behaviour learning skills are established. The elementary school curriculum in Kuwait is competency-based and aims to foster students' holistic development, encompassing intellectual, social, emotional, and physical growth. The objective is to ensure that students acquire fundamental and general skills in a systematic manner (Ministry of Education, 2016).

Unfortunately, Kuwait ranks 103rd out of 140 countries in terms of basic education quality, 88th in total higher education and training quality, 99th in mathematics and scientific education, and 86th in school administration (Oxford Business Group 2017). Considering the quality of education and the growing youth population in the country, the government of Kuwait has shown great concern about revitalising the education sector through reforms (Al-Shehab 2010). With the assistance of the World Bank, Kuwait's Ministry of Education and the National Centre for Education Development

launched a comprehensive school reform initiative. Educational reform aims to address issues in the current educational system (Alkhoja et al. 2014), whereby enhancing and improving the curriculum, building effective school leadership, setting national education standards, and strengthening teaching and learning are all parts of the reform-planning process (Kuwait Education Program Achievement Report 2014). According to Alqurbah et al. (2020), the Education Reform Project consists of five pillars: (1) reforming the curriculum; (2) effective teaching, which includes professionalising teachers; (3) improving school efficiency; (4) enhancing school leadership; and (5) improving accountability systems. To improve school performance, the initiative refers to the role played by school principals in Kuwait. According to the reform plans, the roles of current school principals should shift from managers to instructional leaders with more autonomy and authority in leading schools (Al Ajmi 2022a; Al Ajmi et al. 2022). School leaders have a significant influence on student achievement (Alqurbah et al. 2020). They are in charge of professional growth inside their schools and have the responsibility to integrate technology effectively into classrooms by ensuring that both teachers and pupils have access to and use digital platforms and resources (Al Ajmi 2022b). School principals are instructional leaders responsible for collecting, analysing, and sharing data across schools, tracking performance, and offering helpful feedback to improve performance (Alqurbah et al. 2020).

School principal roles in Kuwait education system

Education in Kuwait is controlled by the Ministry of Education through a vertical structure dividing the country into six education districts. Schools in each district is subjected to the authority and supervision of the district administrators. The Guidelines for Academic Occupation (Alhashem & Alhouti, 2021) divides the roles and tasks of a school principal into admirative roles focusing on maintaining open channels between the school and the Ministry of Education, and technical roles focusing on the teaching and learning process. The administrative roles encompass 147 monthly tasks, while the technical roles encompass six daily activities including monitoring

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and assessing teachers' performance and students conducts. In their study Ibrahim Alhouti and Trevor Male (2017) deduced that school principals are more likely to spend most of their working hours in executing administrative roles at the expense of their technical responsibilities causing the restriction of their leadership roles to managerial leadership (Alhouti & Male, 2017, p. 89).

Consequently, teachers believe that school principal care more for building strong connections with the Ministry of Education than strengthening bonds with them. Additionally teachers believe that school principals are more concerned with embellishing their image than providing instructional feedback to improve teaching and learning outcomes (Alsaleh, 2019, p. 101).

Recently, Kuwait Vision 2035 sets an ambitious plan to diversify the economy and introduce the country to the 21st century knowledge society. This plan necessitates the modernization of the education system to ensure the readiness of its youth to emerge into the area of information technology through capitalizing their talents. Therefore several initiatives have been commenced to introduce new trends, policies, and projects to improve education in the country (Supreme Council of Development and Planning, 2020). Among these initiatives the 2015 agreement between the Ministry of Education and the World Bank to modernize and improve the Kuwaiti education system. The agreement targeted to improve learning outcomes, curricula enhancement and development, effective classroom instruction, and competent school leadership (Alsharija & Watters, 2021, p. 884).

Other projects were carried out to reform the Kuwaiti education system, yet none have succeeded in achieving significant progress because of the absence of efficient change agents, teachers' resistance of change, and community rejection of reform plans. Upon that the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education decides to withdraw and stop the implementation of any reform projects (Alsharija & Watters, 2021; Buscemi, 2017).

In 2014 a three-year project was launched by the Ministry of Education to improve school leadership, "School Leadership

Programme (SLP), it was implemented in 48 schools. The project was designed to promote team-based approaches, data informed decision making, community participation, and effective strategic planning. School principal in the 48 school were granted full autonomy in managing their school but in return they were held accountable for the consequences of their decisions. However, for undefined reasons the project was suspended before assessing its outcomes (Alsaleh, 2019, p. 97).

Based on the above literature review the research proposes that instructional leadership emerges in the Egyptian and Kuwaiti context as the most appropriate school leadership style suitable for accomplishing the intend reforms because it focuses on establishing a learning climate free of disruption, a system of clear teaching objectives, and high teacher expectations for students that leads at the end to improving students' learning achievement (Helali 2011; Ginsburg et al. 2010).

Methodology

The current research is an exploratory field study based on collecting quantitative data using a designed questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to collect data from school teachers sample working in credited Egyptian governmental schools (Asyut) and Excellent schools in Kuwait to investigate their perceptions of their school principals' performance of instructional leadership in its seven domains.

Purpose of the study:

Research has affirmed that successful school transformation is usually led by instructional leaders (Owens 2001; Salisbury and Irby 2020; Wahab et al. 2020) who dedicate their efforts to directing school activities and resources to improve teaching and learning. However, most of these insights into the effectiveness of instructional leadership are drawn from an examination of decentralised Western systems, and evidence supporting the role of instructional leadership in reforming schools in centralised contexts is limited. Therefore, the current study aims to investigate how teachers in high-performing schools in Egypt

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(Asyut) and Kuwait perceive the role of school principals as instructional leaders to present new insights into the role of instructional leadership in the Egyptian and Kuwaiti contexts.

Study hypothesis:

Since both Egypt and Kuwait seek to transform their educational systems in the early stages, the current study seeks to examine the following hypotheses:

- 1- School principals in Egypt accredited schools and Kuwait's excellent school practices of instructional leadership in its seven domains are positively perceived by teachers.
- 2- There are statistical differences between Egyptian and Kuwaiti teachers' degree of satisfaction with their principles' practices of instructional leadership in its seven domains.

Study approach:

Due to the nature of this research, a descriptive approach was adopted to investigate the two hypotheses.

To collect data, a cross-sectional survey was designed to explore school principals' instructional leadership practices from the perspectives of maths, English, Arabic, and science teachers.

However, it has been acknowledged that a school's effectiveness reflects more than the effectiveness of its principals. It reflects school-specific characteristics and circumstances beyond the principal's control. For instance, the geographical location of a school, whether in middle-class or poor areas, affects school effectiveness, as schools located in advantaged areas can attract high-performing students and teachers. Teachers' pre-existing abilities that they bring to classrooms, regardless of the principal under whom they serve, also contribute to school effectiveness. However, most studies argue that principals can still affect student outcomes by enabling their teachers to be more effective than expected (Hassenpflug 2013; Brown 2015; Reynolds 2001).

To control the effect of these factors, the following precautions were adopted:

- 1- Only accredited public schools in Egypt (Asyut) and excellent public schools in Kuwait were included in this study.
- 2- The selected schools covered different geographical areas in both Asyut Governorate and Kuwait State.
- 3- Discrepancies in teachers' competencies are being addressed, as in both Egypt (Asyut) and Kuwait, the Ministry of Education dominates teacher staffing and distribution among public schools.
- 4- The hegemonic centralised system controls schools in both Egypt (Asyut) and Kuwait, the establishment of schools, and the distribution of funds monopolised by the Ministry of Education. Thus, most government schools have similar facilities and resources.

Study procedures:

This study used a cross-sectional survey design to collect data from 346 participants: 185 from Egypt (Asyut) and 161 from Kuwait. Participants were selected using a stratified random sampling method based on type of school (public school) and level of education (elementary school). The survey instrument consisted of 52 items measuring the extent to which principals participated in instructional leadership practices, such as setting goals and evaluating student achievement, among others. The items were adapted from previous studies and rated on a 4-point Likert scale, where 1 = not satisfied at all, 2 = not satisfied, 3 = satisfied, and 4 = very much satisfied.

Reliability and validity:

Table 1 presents the 21 Likert scale items, and the Cronbach's alpha reliability scores. The items are consistent for each scale. Therefore, the questionnaire was a reliable research instrument.

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha values

No	Likert scales	Items	Cronbach Alpha
1	Goal setting	04	.895
2	Students' achievement	02	.748
3	School leadership decisions	04	.867
4	Achievement according to standards	02	.839

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No	Likert scales	Items	Cronbach Alpha
5	Factual basis for decisions	02	.872
6	Decision-making structure	02	.828
7	Vision decisions	02	.817
8	Evaluation of decisions	02	.831
9	Effective communication with students	02	.824
10	Effective communication with teachers	02	.817
11	Effective communication with parents and guardians	02	.810
12	Learners' competencies and needs	03	.832
13	Leading professional development	03	.895
14	Official and non-official feedback	03	.854
15	The selection and training of leaders	03	.828
16	Delegation and confidence	02	.826
17	Technology use for learners' improvement	02	.811
18	Technology use competency	03	.890
19	Research trends understanding	02	.800
20	Professional development (focus)	02	.812
21	Learning application	03	.857
Total		52	$\alpha > .70$

This study examined the reliability of a Likert scale measuring various aspects of instructional leadership. It comprises 21 subscales, each containing a different number of items. Overall, the scale had a total of 52 items and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient greater than .70.

Table 2. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.965
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. χ^2	17941.311
	df	1326
	Sig.	.000

A KMO value of .965 indicates that the data were suitable for factor analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, indicating that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix. Principal axis factoring with 21 factors or sub-dimensions with and without varimax

rotation techniques did not yield or rotate the factor matrix owing to the number of factors. Therefore, other inferential statistical tests, the *t*-test or Mann-Whitney U test for group comparisons, were run on each Likert-type item separately for greater accuracy. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were not used along with discriminant and convergent validities. Based on the criterion of an eigenvalue greater than 1, the factor matrix included 34 statements, each of which was assigned a factor-loading score between 0 and 1. The statements were grouped into seven factors, with factor 1 representing the principal's participation in setting goals and evaluating decisions based on student achievement data; factor 2 representing the principal's focus on student achievement and data-informed decision making, factor 3 representing the principal's interactive communication with different stakeholders inside and outside the school, factor 4 representing the principal's engagement in professional development and support for teachers; factor 5 representing the principal's effort to foster leadership through the distribution and delegation of authority; factor 6 representing the effective integration of technology in teaching/learning and administration; and factor 7 representing the principal's effort to improve his/her leadership practices through sustainable professional development. Factor-loading scores indicate the degree of association between each statement and its corresponding factor, with higher scores indicating a stronger association. Overall, the results suggest that a principal's active participation in setting goals and evaluating decisions based on student achievement data, providing feedback to teachers, and using technology in professional development are positively associated with student achievement.

Data analysis procedures:

Descriptive and inferential statistical tests were used to analyse the data. Descriptive statistics consisted of measures of central tendency and dispersion. Central tendency measures mostly include the mean, whereas dispersion measures include the standard deviation along with frequencies and percentages. Inferential statistical tests included the

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independent-sample *t*-test and the Mann-Whitney U test for sensitivity analysis and cross-checking (Field 2013).

Findings

Sociodemographic variables

This section compares various sociodemographic variables between Egypt (Asyut) and Kuwait. The variables include grade level, sex, years of experience, highest educational degree, academic major, and the instructed syllabus.

Table 3. Sociodemographic variables by country

		Country					
		Kuwait		Egypt (Asyut)		Total	
Grade	3	91	56.5%	104	56.2%	195	56.4%
	4	70	43.5%	81	43.8%	151	43.6%
Gender	Male	45	28.0%	44	23.8%	89	25.7%
	Female	116	72.0%	141	76.2%	257	74.3%
Years of experience	0–5	16	9.9%	4	2.2%	20	5.8%
	6–10	47	29.2%	29	15.7%	76	22.0%
	11–20	98	60.9%	152	82.2%	250	72.3%
Highest education degree	Bachelor	129	80.1%	131	70.8%	260	75.1%
	Diploma	32	19.9%	52	28.1%	84	24.3%
	Masters	0	0.0%	1	0.5%	1	0.3%
	Doctorate	0	0.0%	1	0.5%	1	0.3%
Academic major	Arabic	60	37.3%	69	37.3%	129	37.3%
	English	42	26.1%	49	26.5%	91	26.3%
	Science	28	17.4%	30	16.2%	58	16.8%
	Maths	31	19.3%	37	20.0%	68	19.7%
Instructed syllabus	Arabic	45	28.0%	69	37.3%	114	32.9%
	English	44	27.3%	49	26.5%	93	26.9%
	Science	37	23.0%	29	15.7%	66	19.1%
	Maths	35	21.7%	38	20.5%	73	21.1%

Table 3 presents data on sociodemographic variables by country. The countries included were Egypt, represented by the Asyut Governorate, and Kuwait. The variables included grade, sex, years of experience, highest educational degree, academic major, and the instructed syllabus. The table shows the percentage of respondents in each category and the total number of respondents in each category. Overall, it appears that there are slightly more respondents in Kuwait than in Egypt (Asyut), and that the majority of respondents are female

teachers of 3 or 4, and with 11–20 years of experience, have a bachelor’s degree, have an academic major in Arabic or English, and have been instructed using a syllabus in Arabic or English.

There are several similarities and differences between the two countries. In terms of similarities, the percentages of respondents in grades 3 and 4 were relatively similar between the two countries, with a slightly higher percentage of respondents in grade 3 in Kuwait and slightly more in grade 4 in Egypt (Asyut). Additionally, the percentages of respondents with academic majors in Arabic and English were similar between the two countries. In terms of differences, there are more female than male respondents in both countries, but the percentage of females was higher in Egypt (Asyut) than in Kuwait. Additionally, a higher percentage of respondents had 11–20 years of experience in Egypt (Asyut) than in Kuwait. In terms of education, a higher percentage of respondents in Kuwait had a bachelor’s degree than in Egypt (Asyut); there was no respondent in Kuwait with a master’s or doctoral degree, whereas there was one respondent in each category in Egypt (Asyut). Furthermore, the higher percentage of respondents in Egypt (Asyut) were Arabic teachers more than in Kuwait.

Egypt (Asyut) and Kuwait teachers’ satisfaction with their principals’ practice of instructional leader leadership

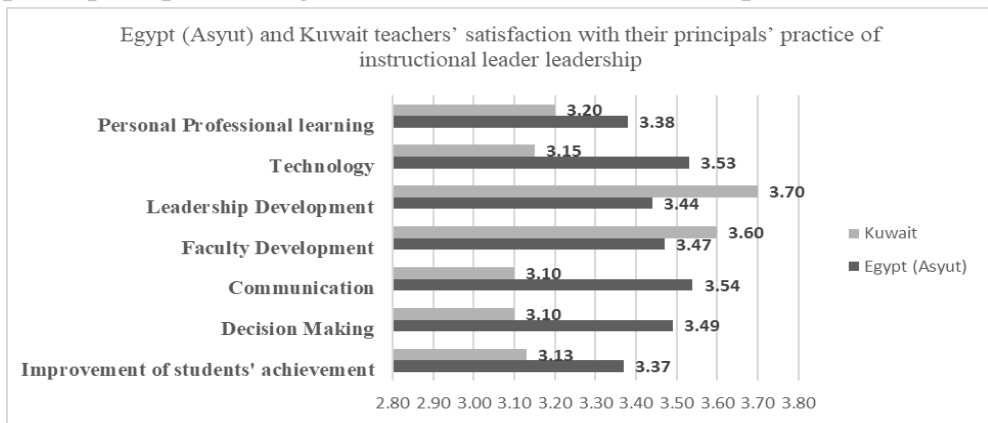


Fig. 1 Average results of Egypt (Asyut) and Kuwait teachers’ satisfaction with school principals’ practices of instructional leadership

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Figure 1 represents the average of the results for Egyptian (Asyut) and Kuwaiti teachers' satisfaction with their principals' practices of instructional leadership in its seven domains, which prove the first hypothesis that states "School principals in Egypt accredited schools and Kuwait's excellent school practices of instructional leadership in its seven domains are positively perceived by teachers".

Table 4. Egypt (Asyut) and Kuwait teachers' satisfaction with school principals' practices of instructional leadership in its seven domains ranked.

Ranking	Egypt (Asyut)		Kuwait	
	Instructional leadership domains	average	Instructional leadership domains	Average
1	Communication	3.54	Leadership Development	3.70
2	Leadership development	3.52	Faculty Development	3.60
3	Improvement of students' achievement	3.47	Personal Professional Learning	3.20
4	Technology	3.45	Technology	3.15
5	Personal professional learning	3.43	Improvement of students' achievement	3.13
6	Decision making	3.42	Decision making	3.10
7	Faculty development	3.41	Communication	3.10
	Total	3.59	Total	3.22

Table 4 shows that Egyptian (Asyut) teachers are more satisfied with their principals' practices of communication, leadership development, and improvement of students' achievement, technology, personal professional learning, decision making, and finally faculty development. In the meantime, Kuwaiti teachers are most satisfied with their principals' leadership development, faculty development, personal professional learning, and technology use, while decision making, and communication earned the lowest satisfaction among Kuwaiti teachers. These results also confirm the first hypothesis

“School principals in Egypt accredited schools and Kuwait’s excellent school practices of instructional leadership in its seven domains are positively perceived by teachers”.

Satisfaction with instructional leadership practices was high in both countries. However, there is a statistically significant difference in instructional leadership in favour of Egypt (Asyut; $p < .05$), except for three items for which there is no statistically significant difference ($p > .05$): ‘the principal encourages teachers to provide examples of teaching strategies that have succeeded in improving students’ achievement’; ‘the principal uses email, word processing, spreadsheets, presentation software, and district databases’; and ‘the principal takes the initiative in learning new technologies. These items relate to the principals’ instructional leadership practices regarding students’ achievement and technology use. This proves the second hypothesis that states “There are statistical differences between Egyptian and Kuwaiti teachers’ degree of satisfaction with their principles’ practices of instructional leadership in its seven domains”.

Discussion

To extract meaning from the statistical results, the concept of ‘positive deviant practice’ was adopted. ‘Positive deviance is used to describe the statistical outliers encountered in fieldwork who outperform the norm’ (Pascale and Monique 2010, 23). When conventional methods fail to address and solve problems, people can rely on positive deviance because it presents an innovative collective approach with high commitment, high performance, and an effective top-down and bottom-up approach to organisational transformation (Leavy 2011, 18). Therefore, it is mainly concerned with creative solutions in the workplace, as positive deviants are described as outliers who succeed in overcoming complex problems, while their average peers continue to struggle (Jingwa 2019).

Within the context of school leadership, positive deviance can be perceived as an approach to analyse school principals’ unique and unconventional behaviours that contribute to improving school performance without extra resources or knowledge. Regarding the current study, instructional leadership represents the pillar upon which

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it revolves because it is the type of leadership that is concerned with improving students' learning outcomes (Hui and Singh 2020; Wahab et al. 2020).

The First hypothesis: School principals in Egypt accredited schools and Kuwait's excellent school practices of instructional leadership in its seven domains are positively perceived by teachers.

Statistical results confirm the first hypothesis that school principals in Egypt accredited schools and Kuwait's excellent school practices of instructional leadership in its seven domains are positively perceived by teachers. Nevertheless, they contradict with what Badran and Toprak (2020) proposed about the suffering of the most Egyptian public schools from serious operational and managerial deficiencies that severely damage the quality of education regardless of the various initiatives launched to reform schools. Similarly, Alajami (2022) and Alazmi (2020) and Alhouti and Male (2017) confirmed that most school principals in Kuwait prioritize administrative roles over technical responsibilities so they work on strengthening their relationship with the Ministry of education rather than focusing on monitoring and assessing teachers' performance and evaluating students' learning progress and outcomes.

Yet, results appear to be inconsistency with what Hallinger and Lee (2013) argued that in reality many school principals fail to develop a comprehensive understanding of the genuine essence of instructional leadership and feel more comfortable holding on traditional roles as managers. This is exactly the case of school principals in both Egypt (Asyut) and Kuwait, as results reveal that in Egypt (Asyut) teachers unintentionally highlighted the fact that school principals are more concerned with pursuing active communication with different stakeholders, as it comes in the first place, and in developing leadership to prepare the second class leaders, as it comes in the second place, over dedicating time and effort to improve student's learning, that comes in the third place. In parallel, Kuwaiti teachers conveyed messages regarding school principals prioritizing of leadership development, that comes in the first place; faculty

development, that comes second; that personal professional learning, third; and technology, that comes in fourth place; over their responsibilities towards improving students' academic achievement, that comes in the fifth place.

Comparing these results with other researches findings, it can be asserted that for a school principal to become an instructional leader he/she should focus on two main tasks: providing direction and exercising influence (Aryani & Haryadi, 2023). These two roles should be practiced consecutively to improve students' learning outcomes (Cox and Mullen 2023; Bolanle 2013). Accordingly, school principals should balance stability with change, as they support and direct teachers to perform their best while reorganising schools to improve their effectiveness (Wahlstrom et al. 2010). In other words, if school principals are committed to their roles as instructional leaders, they need to direct their attention to focusing on setting school goals, managing educational programs, monitoring and evaluating students' achievements, and fostering a positive learning environment (Kwan 2020; Hui and Singh 2020; Hariyati et al. 2023; Salisbury and Irby 2020). Yet, results repeal these propositions because improving students' achievements ranked third in Egypt and fifth in Kuwait.

On another realm, results from both countries reveal high satisfaction with school principals' integration of technology by assessing teachers' investment of technology in classroom instruction and students' learning. It may be noted that this is one of the silver linings of the COVID-19 pandemic, as it increased school leaders' awareness of the unprecedented advantages and opportunities technology grants (Banoğlu et al. 2023; Waterstone 2021). During mandatory closing of schools owing to Covid pandemic, school principals exercised some of their best technological practices to empower teachers to control and manage teaching and learning without supervision, monitoring, or guidance. They also activate different types of leadership to receive assistance, create ideal conditions to support online instruction and conduct virtual managerial meetings from home.

“Power within any organization belongs to those who control the most important decisions to be made” (Wermke et al. 2022, 737). Therefore, instructional leaders demonstrate authority and power

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through decision-making that targets to improve school performance. Successful instructional leaders usually include teachers, parents, and students in decision-making processes (Woo et al. 2022). This democratic manifestation of authority is expected to nurture a safe and open environment that allows stakeholders to participate in improving teaching and learning in schools. Despite that, results revealed that teachers in Egypt (Asyut) and Kuwait were slightly satisfied with their principals' practices of collaborative decision making, as it was ranked sixth in both cases. This can be justified when considering the rooted hegemonic traditional centralized administration system that marginalize principals' and teachers' opinions and hinders their ability to make individual or collective decisions (El Halawany & AlAjmi, 2022).

Another important dimension of instructional leadership is effective communication practices (Munna 2023). Without such a mechanism, the various intended outcomes of school reform cannot be achieved or reported to local and national stakeholders. In Egypt, results revealed that school principals show better communication practices than Kuwaiti principals. This discrepancy can be explicated when considering the organizational structure of Kuwaiti schools. Each department in Kuwaiti schools is administered by a head teacher, the direct leader of teachers in this specialization. The head teacher works as a contact point between teachers and a higher level of authority in schools. The department heads deliver all messages and notes. Therefore, teachers are prohibited from directly addressing the principal; they can only deliver their demands to the head teacher (Alajmi, 2022; Alsaleh, 2019). Contrary to Kuwaiti teachers, Egyptian teachers interact with a more flexible pyramid of authority in schools as they can contact principals at any time they wish with no exceptions.

In conclusion, regardless the support of the first hypothesis, the scrutiny of results proves that counter to teachers' perceptions school principals in both countries cannot be described as positive deviant because they failed to defy traditional roles and practice instructional leadership.

The second hypothesis: There are statistical differences between Egyptian and Kuwaiti teachers' degree of satisfaction with their principals' practices of instructional leadership in its seven domains.

Results confirm the second hypothesis that there are statistical differences between Egyptian and Kuwaiti teachers' degree of satisfaction with their principals' practices of instructional leadership in its seven domains. Teachers' satisfaction with their school principals' practice of instructional leadership is significantly high in both countries. However, there is a statistically significant difference in instructional leadership in favour of Egypt (Asyut; $p < .05$), except for three items for which there is no statistically significant difference ($p > .05$): 'the principal encourages teachers to provide examples of teaching strategies that have succeeded in improving students' achievement'; 'the principal uses email, word processing, spreadsheets, presentation software, and district databases'; and 'the principal takes the initiative in learning new technologies. These items relate to the principals' instructional leadership practices regarding students' achievement and technology use.

Other discrepancies between Egypt's and Kuwait results unfold as results revealed a gap between Egypt and Kuwait concerning "faculty development" (PD) where Egyptian teachers show the least satisfaction regarding this role, while Kuwaiti teachers were most satisfied with it. This can be explained when taking into consideration governmental policy and procedures that control and supervise teachers' PD activities in both countries. Whereas Kuwait implements a decentralized system for teachers' PD through allocating funds for each school to carry out its teachers' professional development activities (Alajmi, 2022). While the Egyptian Ministry of Education controls teachers' PD centrally through the "Professional Academy of Teachers" (Professional Academy of Teachers 2023).

Findings protruded from a significant body of research in both countries argued that most PD programs have little effect on transforming instructional practice and student learning to the extent that some scholars downgrade their influence on education reform whether worldwide or in Egypt and Kuwait (Badran & Toprak, 2020, p. 4; Brauckmann et al., 2023; El-Bilawi & Nasser, 2017) In the case

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of Egypt and Kuwait teachers usually express their dissatisfaction with PD programs because they focused on content rather than practice, as well as lacking sustainability. Therefore, Carter Andrews and Richmond (2019) suggested that PD should move from confined pre-designated events such as workshops, courses...etc to contextualized and embedded routine that teachers practice on daily bases, in this sense it becomes a powerful tool for changing teaching practice as well as transforming teachers (p. 412).

In accordance, the above findings affect teachers' perceptions of their school principals' efforts to maintain personal and professional learning. Results mark a significant satisfaction of Kuwaiti teachers whereas less satisfaction expressed by Egyptian teachers in relation to this domain.

Digging beyond the different socioeconomic context that would apart Egypt from Kuwait, the scrutiny of results impressively bass over all discrepancies and emancipate several common features. On the government level, both countries designed education reform plans on combining the practices of distributed and instructional leadership. In addition they both structured their reform plan around school-based management (SBM) that promoted decentralization and foster school autonomy that targets to improve education quality (Lindberg & Vanyushyn, 2013).

Results revealed that teachers in both countries agree that school principals have succeeded in discovering potential leaders, cultivating leadership, delegating authority, and building a second class of leaders (Brauckmann; Pashiardis, and Ärlestig 2023; Munna 2023). At the same time, they failed to craft a school vision where teaching and learning occupy its core and consequently set a factual action plan guaranteeing quality classroom instructions and learning outcomes (Karacabey et al., 2022).

Both Egypt and Kuwait share some common features regarding teachers and principals' reluctance to adhere to reform instructions and practices. Yet, in Egypt the resistance to change is associated with economic reason. The increasing national dept and rising inflation rate caused a shortage in allocating fiscal pace required for executing

reform plans. Meanwhile, in Kuwait, despite its wealth, the government is incapable of forcing or luring teachers and principals to implement reform plans. Additionally, in both countries the criterion of selecting school principals is limited to years of experience rather than qualifications and competencies, besides the absence of a reliable accountability system, these factors have negatively affected the implementation of any reform plan in both countries.

In other words, although Egypt and Kuwait have launched series of initiatives and projects to reform the education system, these efforts have not yet been fruitful as teachers miss the core values and principles of instructional leadership, meanwhile principals failed to support and sustain school improvement as well as fostering a constructive learning environment that secures students' learning progress which means they still away from mastering the required competencies of instructional leadership.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research confirms that principals' duties as instructional leaders in the time of reform have changed, as well as their job descriptions, especially if they target to act as positive deviants. When thinking about leading a school in time of reform with limited funds and resources and severe reluctance and resistance, principals roles as instructional leaders should revolve around supporting teaching and learning through constant tracking, monitoring, and evaluation of students' learning outcomes, practising influence on teachers to lead and construct their professional development by collaborating and transforming the school into a professional learning community, investing technology to support classroom instruction to enrich and expand students' learning experiences, fostering leadership to empower teachers and middle leaders to take responsibility and be accountable for their words and actions, establishing interactive communication channels inside and outside the school to report successes and call for help when necessary, and finally, adopting sustainable self-development as a creed that instructs and directs all their actions and decisions.

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On the other realm, concepts like “decentralization of school administration”, “collaborative practice”, “school-based management”, and “instructional leadership” should form the pillars of any leadership capacity-building program.

Limitation and recommendations for future research

The study's investigation of teachers' satisfaction with principals' demonstrations of instructional leadership practices in schools, is limited to accredited primary schools in Egypt (Asyut) and excellent primary schools in Kuwait; therefore, studies exploring instructional leadership practices in private and other public schools are recommended to provide policymakers with more in-depth analyses. The current study was limited to survey methods. Thus, using other qualitative methods such as direct observations, case studies, and interviews would be good recommendations for future research.

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