# Transformational Leadership and Globalization: Attitudes of School Principals in Kuwait.

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**Abstract**

The study explores the attitudes of a sample of school principals in a Kuwaiti local authority towards the need for transformational leadership, the use of its behaviours, whether these school leaders are ready to behave in diverse ways or whether there are barriers that prevent them from acting in such a manner. The findings of this study demonstrate that the participants agreed on the need for transformational leadership and had positive attitudes towards its behaviours. Although the participants identified some barriers to the application of this leadership style, the results indicated that the participants were generally ready to promote transformational leadership behaviours.

## Introduction

Globalization is one of the greatest challenges of the twenty-first century with rapid change affecting nations in economic, technological and cultural terms, resulting in calls for changes to be made in societal systems (Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004; Armstrong, 2007). The meaning of this complex phenomenon is understood differently in activities related to global economies, but is generally considered to be a series of "social processes in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding" (Waters 1995: 3).

Bottery (2006: 100) provides a useful overview of the nature of globalization, pointing out that "one of most notable features of the modern world is the global interconnectedness of different interests and the porosity of the nation states to them". This, he concludes, makes it difficult for even the most

powerful states to maintain the integrity of their borders. In keeping with most observers he sees the impact of the globalization processes in a number of ways including interestingly the categories of Environmental and American globalization. Apart from these two, however, the rest appear to fit within the traditional political, economic, social and technological terms (PEST) analysis tool.

It must be recognised at the outset that Kuwait is a very small, but extremely rich country with oil being its major resource. Like all countries it is subject to and a contributor to environmental factors that affect global health and climate. It is also an interesting case that, as an Arab country, ostensibly the American effect should be minimal. In reality, of course, Kuwait is not only influenced by American cultural transmission, it is host to an enormous US military garrison as a long term consequence of the Iraqi invasion of 1990. Thanks to the UN intervention and subsequent US support the state is stable, with demographic elections being held as recently as 2012.

Their major concerns typically relate to internal issues in terms of politics and social factors, however, rather than broader, global issues concerning the Environment and Americanisation. Cynics might argue, however, this stability is because of their fiscal wealth resulting in a society with no visible signs of poverty and a steady growth in employment of both nationals and non-Kuwaitis. In 2011 the national economy supported a population of 3.7 million with no requirement for personal income tax or national insurance contributions. It can be argued thus as a consequence of this wealth there

was little evidence of social unrest in Kuwait during the aftermaths of the 'Arab Spring' of 2011 which led to widespread disorder in many countries within the region. Despite local grumbling within the political system the state proceeds in much the same way as it has done since they relinquished the status of British Protectorate in 1961 and became a member of OPEC in 1970s. The Crown Prince (Emir) and his family continue to appoint the Prime Minister who selects a government from elected MPs. The state can thus be described as patriarchal and based on Muslim principles. Kuwaitis form a minority of the population, however, with over two-thirds of its workforce being ex-patriates (Public Authority for Civil Information, 2012). A significant social feature in recent years, however, has been the recognition by the Kuwait government of the large number of stateless people who live within their borders (for a great number of historical reasons relating to the social mores of the region). In short, therefore, typically the state of Kuwait could be described as looking inward more than beyond its borders.

Two categories of globalization are having a dynamic affect on Kuwait, however, in that they can no longer overlook the impact of technology or the need to develop their economy to become independent of oil production, if needed, in the future. A feature of the 2012 elections, for example, was the widespread use of social networking tools by political activists to challenge the credibility of some election candidates in ways that would have been unthinkable in previous generations. This represents a typical example of the way in which technology, particularly the use of mobile devices, has transformed Kuwaiti society in terms of the management of knowledge. There

is also a growing realisation within OPEC countries that mineral resources are finite and Kuwait is typical in that manner in searching for ways to consolidate their current wealth into a sustainable economic heritage.  To their credit the Kuwaiti government has taken positive action through their plans for an education system that meets the needs of these critical aspects of the globalization agenda.

**The Impact of Globalization on Education**

Bottery (2006) stresses the impact of globalization on education and considers the role of the educators should be re-defined as a consequence, with school leaders needing to play a vital role in such challenging circumstances.  As a consequence of the phenomenon of globalisation there is widespread evidence of many countries seeking transformations in their education systems (Harris, Day, Hopkins et al, 2003; Bottery, 2004).  Kuwait is a typical example of a nation exploring the consequence of globalisation and the possible impact on its educational provision.

In terms of economic challenges the State of Kuwait is strongly dependent on oil as a resource and, since there will come a time when oil production finishes, the government is seeking alternative approaches to managing the economy which will enable future generations to cope with this changing world.  In addition cultural challenges have been identified in terms of the values and thoughts of Kuwaiti society in relation to the trends generated by the globalization process.  Preserving national identity and the perceived positive values of community in Kuwait are being targeted and encouraged by

the national curriculum.  Recognition is also given, however, to the need to benefit from global development in order that Kuwaiti society does not become marginalized from the rest of the world (Kuwait Ministry of Education, 2008).

Technological challenges have been viewed in terms of exploiting the major developments in this era, which is often described as the digital century.  As a result educational institutions are being encouraged to take advantage of technology, with its potential to generate scientific revelations and various facilities for acquiring knowledge.  Hence, adopting these sophisticated developments in technology into the education system is required (Kuwait Ministry of Education, 2008).

In response to the challenges the Kuwaiti government has established reform initiatives which respond to the challenges through its Education Department and has sought to invest in its human capital.  A long-term strategy has been initiated that stresses objectives such as:

- providing effective learning systems;
- exploiting advanced technologies;
- enhancing the social status of teachers and their professional development in order to improve their job satisfaction;
- supporting schools' administrative independence.
  (Kuwait Ministry of Education, 2008)

Schools have been placed at the heart of these reforms and their levels of accountability and responsibility have risen, particularly for school leaders.

The onus is on school principals to improve their practices or adopt the necessary behaviours to achieve their schools' goals in accordance with reform and globalization

Consequently this paper argues that there is a need for transformational leadership behaviours to be displayed within Kuwaiti schools, since these have been found to be a suitable style in times of educational reform and challenging circumstances

**Transformational Leadership in Educational Settings**

The concept of transformational leadership first emerged with the work of Burns who stated that such a leader focuses on change, therefore transforming others within the organization, and "looks for potential motives in followers and seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower" (Burns, 1978: 4). Bass later claimed that transformative leaders:

> … convert followers to disciples; they develop followers into leaders. They elevate the concerns of followers on Maslow's need hierarchy from needs for safety and security to needs for achievement and self actualization, increase their awareness and consciousness of what is really important, and move them to go beyond their own self-interest for the good of the larger entities to which they belong. The transforming leader provides followers with a cause around which they can rally (Bass, 1985: 467)

According to Bass (1985), the components of transformational leadership are an idealized influence, meaning that leaders behave as a role model and are highly respected; inspirational motivation is exhibited in ways that motivate followers and enthuse them, such as:

- communicating high expectations;
- providing intellectual stimulation whereby creativity and innovations are strongly reinforced;
- individualized consideration that takes into account followers' needs.

Early work on transformational leadership was mostly concerned with events and processes within politics, business and the armed services (e.g. Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). It can be seen from such studies, however, how valuable followers are for transformational leadership and how this emphasis has distinguished it from studies on other leadership styles. This distinction appears to attract educationalists, invites them to extract its concept and apply it within institutions which seek reform. Leithwood and Jantzi (2000), for example, suggest that transformational leadership behaviours appear to be suitable in a time of reform to contribute towards the development of the capacity, commitment and motivation of the school workforce, with their findings being reflected in other similar studies (e.g. Day, Harris & Hadfield, 2001; Geijsel, Sleegers, Leithwood et al, 2003; Stewart, 2006). Litz and Litz (209: 13) conclude that:

> Perhaps transformational models of organizational learning and leadership are exactly the sort required for educational systems to prosper in the modern global world.

As a result many sets of leadership behaviours have been established and taken into account in order to be consistent with the evolving trends in educational reforms (Hallinger, 2003). Transformational leadership in educational settings works through inspiring the school workforce to build a

sense of efficacy which leads to improved student outcomes. Bass's model of transformational leadership was further developed by Leithwood & Jantzi (1999) to produce what they call *transformational leadership dimensions* where behaviours of transforming leaders are seen to be consistent with the educational context. They have described transformational leadership practices in terms of these dimensions as follows:

1. Building a school vision;
2. Establishing school goals;
3. Providing intellectual stimulation;
4. Symbolizing professional practices and values;
5. Demonstrating high performance expectations;
6. Developing a structure to foster participation in school decisions;
7. Offering individual support.

The leadership practices emanating from these dimensions build a shared vision and encourage followers to reassess their efforts and work. Under this broad line the behaviours of principals reflect the aims of the educational organization and are crucial in providing teachers with practical examples of modelling organizational values. The school workforce is persuaded to invent new strategies in classrooms and create initiatives that engage all students more fully with the learning experience.

These dimensions appear to inspire head teachers to establish behaviours expected to generate the transformational effects. Sergiovanni (2007) claims that this approach advocates a shared leadership base whereby the workforce participate in decision-making which focuses on effective curriculum development and instructional practices. Pepper (2010) claims that the behaviours or practices associated with this leadership style transform the

staff into taking up opportunities to determine the best path to reach goals in keeping with the school or organization's beliefs and visions. She claims that staff are empowered to take on leadership roles in certain areas according to their responsibilities towards learning and teaching because they know the needs of their students through their interactions with them. This eventually results in a strong school culture and the commitment of its members to a better student experience.

**Research into Kuwaiti School Principals**

Since this study seeks to explore school principals' attitudes towards transformational leadership, insiders' points of view were sought from participants. In this context a qualitative approach was identified as an investigative style centred on understanding answers to the "how" and "why" questions which yield narrative data. The interview technique was utilized in this study as the data collection instrument as it is a suitable tool when seeking people's attitudes towards an object or issue (Robson, 2002; Coleman and Briggs, 2007). Semi-structured interviews were employed as they provide flexibility in order to explore participant opinions in greater depth leading to more profound information by making interviewees free and able to lead the discussion (Mason, 1996; Coleman & Briggs, 2007; Plowright, 2011). In addition, this type of interview facilitates altering questions to gain desired responses, collaboration and better understanding. It helps to achieve these outcomes by avoiding the boundaries that could arise by structuring a whole interview. The semi-structured approach thus promotes the freedom of participants by providing the comfort to express ideas of relevance to a

research topic. Moreover, follow-up questions can be employed to obtain a deeper understanding of interviewees' responses (Coleman and Briggs, 2007).

Three research questions were developed in relation to the literature on transformational leadership and the context:

1. Is there a need for Kuwaiti school leaders to display transformational leadership behaviours due to the challenges of reform and globalization?
2. What are the principals' attitudes towards transformational leadership behaviours in Kuwaiti schools and are they ready to display such leadership behaviours?
3. What are the barriers that prevent school principals from promoting these leadership behaviours?

**Data collection**

Non-probability sampling was chosen for this study as it facilitates analysis and addresses the difficulty of including all 85 school principals in the local authority studied, Aljahra City. According to Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007):

> ... researchers hand-pick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality. In this way they build up a sample that is satisfactory to their specific needs" (114).

Purposive sampling and convenience sampling were thus used in identifying potential participants who were principals of elementary or secondary schools. The criteria for selection were the geographic proximity of the schools and the willingness of the principal to lead proactively during a process of educational reform in Kuwait (as identified by the regional officer/supervisor). Twenty principals matching these criteria were identified by local authority officials and

sent an email introducing the research issue, study aims and stating the need for willing participants. Willingness was ascertained by their reply to the email, with the respondents' convenience considered high priority when scheduling interviews.  Eight acceptances were received from this group of school principals who consequently formed the population sample.  There is no claim made here that the sample is representative, nor are we seeking to explore the common variables of this group in order to relate them to the concept of transformational leadership.  In short, therefore, this was an opportunity sample comprising participants who had been identified as exhibiting transformational leadership behaviours and who were willing to discuss their work with the research team.

Proposed interview questions were negotiated with experts, school principals and professionals involved in the school leadership field. Furthermore, since the interview was developed in English, an English-language specialist assessed the wording of the questions and their face validity and these questions were then translated into Arabic. The semantic correspondence of the Arabic and English versions was verified by experts in the department of translation at Kuwait University.  Volunteer participants were invited to a group session to discuss the questions prior to the commencement of individual interviews.

A request to obtain permission to interview the participants was translated into Arabic and sent to the Local Authority.  As a result the authors were allowed to access the schools needed and a copy of the letter of authorisation was

given to the principals of the schools prior to proceeding with the interviews. Issues of informed consent and confidentiality were addressed in the covering letter issued by the research team to ensure that participants would remain anonymous.

Individual interviews were conducted in the schools at an agreed time when the principal was available without interruption. Data collection was an iterative process, with each interview being shaped by the arising data analysis which resulted in more information to be gathered around the emerging themes (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996). This meant that new questions could be asked of other interviewees in response to the contribution provided by an earlier participant. Each interview was conducted in Arabic, was between 45 to 60 minutes in length, was recorded on a digital audio recording device and was subsequently transcribed in the original language by the first author. When transcribing the interviews, the emerging thoughts generated from the primary contact with the data were written down in Arabic in a way that contributed to the data analysis. Translation of the interview into English was undertaken by the first author and verified by experts in the department of translation at Kuwait University.

**Data Analysis**

Eight interviews were undertaken with the principals who had agreed to take part in the research (P1-8). The participants' ages ranged between 35 to 45 and their experience as school leaders ranged from five to nine years. A thematic analysis was employed in which responses were identified by code

and then grouped into categories (Smith, Harré & Langenhove, 1999).  Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggest that all the data collected from interviews which are associated with one theme should be placed in one group in order to integrate the themes and concepts that contribute to the aims of the current study. Consequently, four themes were drawn from the interviewees' responses:

1. The necessity for certain sets of leadership behaviours;
2. The atmosphere regarding transformational leadership behaviours;
3. Transformational experiences;
4. Obstacles to displaying transformational leadership behaviours.

**Findings**

**Theme 1:** *The necessity for certain sets of leadership behaviours*

This theme is concerned with investigating the participants' responses to the argument that school principals may need to display certain behaviours due to the challenges that face educational institutions in the current era. The interviewees debated the reasons that orientate principals to adopting new practices.  As a result, they spoke about the challenges they encountered in their role at school. The impact of globalization and reform initiatives and their reflection on the role of schools and leaders emerged as core reasons which seemed to encourage principals to adopt certain leadership behaviours.

In relation to globalization, seven out of the eight participants acknowledged the challenges that have greatly affected education in terms of technology. As an example, one of the participants commented:

> The information revolution has transformed the world into one village and is now faster than the blink of an eye. Therefore, the teacher is no longer the only source of information. He is one of the sources. He has become a facilitator. It is supposed that educators should be ready for this change and have to be qualified to deal with this effect (P1).

Another participant stressed the same challenge by claiming:

> Now we cannot keep up with the technological revolution and globalization, which have affected education greatly. Education is no longer confined to the classroom and students must search for knowledge. Education has now turned from knowledge into skills. Therefore, the Ministry of Education here is keen on empowering eLearning and the use of technology in education within their reform programmes (P2).

On the other hand, one of the participants addressed other processes of globalization that have had an impact upon education. He claimed:

> The educational system, like other systems, is affected by surrounding circumstances; whether these are new technologies or different lifestyles, even the changes of climate, as well as the economic side and the social side. Moreover, the changes in thoughts or cultures and the political circumstances all have their influences on society and the education process (P8).

Consistent with what was mentioned by the previous interviewee, all eight of the respondents agreed that the impact of globalization has resulted in the need for educational reform. However, it has also increased schools' responsibilities and challenges. One participant commented:

> Education reform has become a key demand in order to keep pace with the changes that occur in the world and doubled the roles of leaders at school (P3).

On the same issue, another respondent reported:

> Educational reform provides schools with contributions and projects endeavouring to find solutions for the problems of developing education in order to overcome the difficulties of globalization. Those projects could be either technological or through new systems or new educational methods and legislations. As a result, educators are being challenged in terms of adjusting these changes and ending up with more challenges to deal with (P4).

Regarding the challenges mentioned earlier by the participants, the interviewees claimed that in order to meet these challenges, the demands on the part of teachers, staff and leaders had increased. For instance, one of the respondents declared:

> The school leads the process of reform and change, so it will have a direct impact on schools' leadership and their faculties (P2).

Another interviewee extended this idea by claiming:

> Challenges of reform programmes and globalization have doubled the efforts of the schools, principals, teachers and technicians who are related to a school and all the workers at a school. As a result, commitment, extra effort and motivation are required on the part of staff and should be gained by school leaders (P4).

Similarly, another participant reported:

> The commitment and motivation of staff are one of the requirements for the success of school administration. This increases the quality of learning and the productivity of schools (P5).

An interesting comment was made by one of the participants to describe how complex the educational leader's task is nowadays. He said:

> I think that the task of educational leaders now is leading these complex changes in our world, which is a difficult mission (P2).

Likewise, seven out of the eight participants appeared to emphasize the role of leaders of schools in overcoming the task of reform and the challenges of the current era through their practices in motivating and inspiring teachers and staff. This belief in principals' roles is indicated by the expressed need to change leadership behaviours or adopt certain leadership sets. One of the participants commented:

> There must be ways, techniques, practices or theories in this educational leadership field which leaders should look for to cope with this challenging circumstance (P4).

Along the same lines, one respondent suggested:

> School principals should display new techniques of leadership. We need new methods and new ways which help to improve the quality of teaching methods and teaching aids, to motivate and encourage the workforce and raise the loyalty to schools, to build good sociable relationships within educational organizations which serve the educational process, and which benefit all the other organizations and institutions in our community (P6).

Another participant stated:

> The leadership within schools should change to be flexible and open to the students, their parents and the community and its institutions (P3).

Other responses described the diverse attributes of leadership. For instance, one respondent said:

> Firstly, school directors ought to have a leading spirit, have developed thinking, have clear knowledge, a clear strategy, a clear vision, a belief in change and a clear message (P4).

Another respondent stated:

> Change is important to make reformation. We are all as principals asked to make a change in people to overcome the challenges. We should believe in change and believe that change leads us to be the best and does not reduce our standards (P7).

From a different perspective, other participants emphasized the need to change leadership behaviours by criticizing the present education system in Kuwait. One of the participants commented:

> Unfortunately, here school leadership is called the "Director" and the Director seeks to apply the regulations without mistakes. Since there is a need to change the thoughts and behaviours of others, changing school administrators into education leaderships is required; otherwise, it would be impossible to keep up with developments (P2).

**Theme 2:** *The atmosphere regarding transformational leadership behaviours*

One of the major findings that emerged in this study is that six out of the eight participants showed positive attitudes towards transformational leadership and associated behaviours. Generally, the participants reacted positively to behaviours that transformational leadership encourages. Two people showed negative attitudes towards the application of some of the behaviours,

however, due to reasons that are not related to the behaviours themselves but to some obstacles that will be discussed later.

As for the positive attitudes, the following participant commented on the behaviours of valuing, motivating and encouraging teachers and staff:

> There is no doubt that the success of any institution depends on caring about workers as individuals and how to improve and develop them. They should have excellent training and be provided with modern means. They should always be encouraged and motivated. In the past, there was not enough care about individuals' needs. However, it is now a very important matter to meet the needs of workers and help them solve their problems, whether financial or spiritual, and to create an atmosphere without obstacles. Sure, this atmosphere of motivation and encouragement for individuals would raise their commitment and help schools to achieve their goals (P4).

Another participant added:

> Steven Covey has a wonderful principle, as mentioned in his book *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, involving a trust bank or a feelings bank. Each person has a trust bank with others. Whenever a person is positive with others, he or she obtains more votes of trust and feelings. The more the teacher is treated gently, the more positive the effect we get. If it happens that you need help from the teacher in the future, you will find the teacher ready to provide assistance positively (P1).

One of the participants stressed the importance of caring about the school workforce by saying:

> We are facing a difficult time which requires leading the process of change successfully. Principals are not the only people who are supposed to be changed, but the entire workforce in the school, so if you should motivate and encourage those people and promote them professionally it is easy to achieve the pre-set goals (P7).

When the participants were asked about building a shared vision, the results indicated that participants have looked at this practice from two angles. The first point of view reflected positive attitudes towards the significance of a common vision. In this regard, one of the participants said:

> Certainly, an institute should have a shared vision and mission and everyone should take part in forming them and work toward achieving them. Moreover, this will not be attained unless we make use of all abilities and means to substantiate this vision. Common vision makes an institution a fruitful one and raises cooperation among workers, in addition to increasing the level of loyalty to the institution (P4).

On the other hand, another participant stated:

> We used to have our own vision, but I found that it sounded useless to have a shared vision as we are obligatorily attached to the main vision of the Ministry of Education (P3).

However, one of the participants disagreed with the previous comment and said:

> No, it seems to be too far to reach the vision of the Ministry of Education. So as a school manager I should extract from the ministry vision the important items then form our vision and ensure that everyone within my school gets involved, which would raise expectations of reaching the vision. It is so important to have your own school vision because every school is different from the others and this vision would be a road map to reach your goals (P2).

Additionally, the encouraging environment regarding transformational leadership has been continued by the participants. One of the participants commented on the concept of promoting shared leadership by saying:

> The teacher will feel that his work is quite valuable and his role is unlimited. So, he will give more. (P2).

Another participant stressed the same idea by saying:

> Of course, I would be happy if someone shares leadership roles with me; it would make my life easier because he or she would carry out some of my responsibilities. Also, it is important to develop leadership behaviours among workers because one day they will be leaders in schools, so I hope that every leader takes this into consideration (P6).

However, one of the participants appeared to have slight reservations about empowering followers with leadership roles. He stated:

> As a value or as a way to develop work, it could be important to do so, but practically it is difficult to apply nowadays properly unless you have people who show leadership skills and know how to lead and know the characteristics of the work. That is good, as they will help to achieve the goals and take some of the responsibilities (P4).

Furthermore, the results showed that six of the principals were very supportive of the idea of engaging stakeholders in decision making. One of the participants claimed:

> Yes, of course, the greater the number of persons participating, the more success they will attain. When everyone participates in making the decision, everyone feels loyalty towards this decision and does his best to achieve the best results, because it is a part of him, of his goals and of his dreams. As long as there is participation in making the decision, the decision will be more acceptable for all. There will be a kind of psychological and sociable harmony (P8).

Similarly, another respondent stressed:

> Yes, exactly, and this is very important. If you want a decision to be carried out well, and to guarantee the success of the implementation, you must ensure great participation in forming it (P1).

On the other hand, one of the respondents appeared to have reservations about this behaviour because of the culture and structure of the current education system by saying:

> It might be beneficial to engage all your stakeholders in decision making for schools but let us be realistic; school leaders do not have real power to make decisions, we execute them, therefore this practice in schools might lose its value (P8).

Another participant, however, considered that even in the present juncture, there is some scope for leaders' discussion, and he stressed the value of engaging stakeholders in decision making in these areas, saying:

> Some decisions don't need to involve everyone in making them. These are orders that come from higher authorities and we have to execute them. We're an executive institution but principals should make use of the limited authority they have to exercise sharing decision making so why every school has board of directors and the education ministry support it.  Let me give you an example, a decision that says the exams must start at 8 a.m. That's a decision coming from a higher authority, but if I need to decide whether I need one or two supervisors in a classroom now to make a decision I consult the group working with me. There are some classes that need one teacher and others need two teachers and so on (P6).

Moreover, positive attitudes emerged amongst principals towards providing intellectual stimulation. In this regard, one of the participants reported:

> As we have discussed, the nature of education is changing due to the challenges of the current era so education nowadays is about creativity and innovation, so principals should provide and encourage them and

he or she should be flexible and meet the staff's needs to make creativity and innovation happen (P7).

The results also indicated that the principals found some transformational leadership behaviours to be effective, such as fostering a culture of collaboration and high performance expectation. In terms of building a culture, one of the participants said:

> The organizational culture is a set of values that dominate the school, and not just slogans. We need a culture that controls the general atmosphere in the school to show the specific organizational policy. (P1).

**Theme 3:** *Transformative experiences*

This section presents results of this study in which participants shared experience which reflects the concept of transformational leadership and its practices. These results show the readiness of five of the participants to display transformational leadership practices.

One of the participants talked about his experience relating to encouraging creativity:

> I have a very bright boy in my school who has received a lot of awards in scientific projects since I came to this school. The science departments have been providing all the possible support to this boy in order to encourage his creativity. I used to say to this student, you are an excellent student now; have you participated abroad? Do you have a desire to compete and be a special student or are you just aiming at reaching distinction? I'd give you the certificate and the reward but what have you achieved for yourself in external excellence? You have to have an external participation by which you serve society. After two years of planting the challenge in him, he got the trophy for Young Inventor of the Gulf Countries. (P6).

Another participant reflected her transformational behaviours by commenting on the issue of a common vision:

> I agree with you that there should be a clear vision and goals shared by everyone. In our case, we took time to formulate a vision. Not only to research for items. We explained in the beginning what we wanted to achieve, so gathered with heads of departments who will then meet the teachers as well as the students to comment on or give their suggestions regarding that issue. Choosing the vision took us an entire semester. Finally, we formed our vision, which is to be a "safe and smart and global school". Then, we decided to make the announcement in an official ceremony and we promoted it in different events and diverse approaches to make sure that our vision is clear. For example, in terms of a global school, we have created a website in three languages, Arabic, English and French, and each department will update its own page, each according to his language, with the help of students of course. We have been stressing our vision in all of the school activities; our vision is not just a slogan (P1).

Furthermore, a useful system has been established by one of the respondents' schools to ensure that students' voices are considered. He reported:

> Every class has got a representative who has been chosen by his classmates. Therefore, he is the link between the administration and his colleagues. This system has raised our students' identification with the school and makes them feel how valuable it is. One of the results of this system is that vandalism to school property has significantly dropped (P2).

**Theme 4:** *Obstacles to displaying transformational leadership behaviours*

While investigating the participants' attitudes towards transformational leadership behaviours, many barriers were identified which limited the application of such leadership behaviours. These obstacles include a lack of

confidence, the Kuwaiti educational system, and individual differences among principals and their workforce.

As for the first constraint, all the principals interviewed agreed that the Ministry of Education seemed to express a lack of confidence in school principals through centralizing the process of taking decisions and financial funding. In this regard, one of the respondents commented:

> First, I wish that we were granted power. Unfortunately, a school principal does not have power. He is just an executive on the side of higher education policies.  This stands in the way of achieving the desired change. (P6).

Another participant stressed the same point:

> As for engaging others in decision making, you make a person feel the value of his work when participating in the educational process. In fact, in the public sector, we are restricted by regulations and systems, but sometimes we try to get around the laws for the sake of this positive behaviour. (P2).

In terms of funding, the principals acknowledged that Kuwait does not have financial problems but that the freedom in administering the budget allocation is the question. The following interviewee stated:

> In the current situation, yes, there could be many difficulties such as the centralization of financial funding in schools. When it comes to stimulating creativity or providing motivation, you do need every possible support such as free funding, which is the most important thing to achieve the goals through providing awards as encouragement (P4).

As for the second obstacle, the results indicated that the education system and its rules in relation to appointing principals in Kuwait are considered two of the vital elements that deserve attention. In this context, one of the participants claimed:

> It is difficult when you are working to set up a vision for your school and plan to apply this vision when you are not sure of being the principal of the same school the next year. A substantial change or improvement does not happen overnight. (P8)

Another participant viewed the problem of the educational system from a different angle. She stated that the regulations should be modified to promote creativity:

> Creators are few. I am sorry to say that the terms for assessing the efficiency of the teacher that we take are tragic since they do not distinguish between a creative teacher and another who complies with the rules without any creativity. (P1)

One of the participants claimed, however, that the problem sometimes appears to be in the implementation of the system rather than the rules and regulations as such, commenting:

> No, the problem is not just with the system. The problem is with those who apply the system as well. Do school principals apply it properly? Does he or she apply it properly? However, we do need to develop our educational system (P7).

It can be seen from the first two obstacles that they have been associated with aspects of the Kuwaiti education system and can be grouped under one barrier, which is the system itself.

According to the results acquired from the interviews, the third point in relation to barriers concerns the differences between workers, such as their academic preparation, skills, culture and conditions. One participant commented:

> We must reconsider the plans and programmes that prepare educators and keep up with the variables that must be taken into consideration. There is no joint committee between the Ministry and the higher education colleges. For example, when we speak about issues like working collaboratively, framing a vision or fostering creativity, we find some of the staff are not prepared well enough at the academic level (P1).

Another participant said:

> Sometimes inside the school, you can find some people who are not convinced about practising certain leadership activities because of their environment or conditions. I mean the effects of the parents, the nature of the community and their cultural levels or ways of thinking. These factors apparently lead to resistance to any changes (P7).

In the same vein, another participant highlighted how an entrenched mind-set can result in resistance to change:

> Some teachers have been working in this field for more than 25 years. They do not try to develop themselves; they are still working in a traditional way. Changing the mentality of workers to strengthen the positive side of such people and develop them is the big problem we face (P2).

In addition, doubt as to the skills of those in the workforce seemed to hinder principals in exercising some transformational leadership practices. One of the participants reported:

> Some people don't like to work in groups or lead programmes because they lack skills and fear that the others would discover that they are not skilful people or have simple skills. (P6)

The last obstacle mentioned by the participants is the leaders themselves. The huge workload and individual differences between principals appear to hinder the full implementation of certain leadership practices. One of the participants stated:

> Our time is usually consumed by unnecessary meetings and preparing paperwork, a matter that prevents us from doing our job fully in a way that benefits the school and the staff in such things like promoting creativity and the love of making a change among teachers. (P5)

Furthermore, in response to a question regarding providing individual consideration, one principal stated:

> Of course caring about everyone could be difficult or requires lots of time, but it is not impossible. However, as you mentioned there is much work to do and many tasks have to be done, especially in the school management, whereas there is not enough time to deal with the great number of workers and teachers. (P4)

Regarding the individual differences of school leaders, one participant said:

> The traditional thinking of some school principals is not suitable for leading schools in this modern world. Those principals hold the reins of things in their hands and centralize the whole process of the school around himself or herself. Therefore, such a mind cannot lead a successful institution. (P1)

Another participant appeared to stress the issue of individual differences between school principals in terms of their experience in the position. He claimed:

> Sometimes new principals are concerned about trying new or different leadership practices. Therefore they tend to follow what they have been asked to do by the ministry. This may be because they are afraid of the rules or lack of confidence. (P8)

**Discussion**

The findings appear consistent with the argument that since schools are encountering challenges in the present age, school principals are required to develop their practices or adopt transformational leadership behaviours (see, for example, Litz and Litz, 2009). Participants stressed the importance of education reforms in order to cope with the challenges of globalization and the present era. They recognised, however, that education reform increases the responsibilities and challenges of school principals. Furthermore, the participants mentioned that reform initiatives seem to require not only extra effort, but also motivation and commitment on the part of the workforce within the schools to make the reforms happen, findings that are in keeping with the work of Sergiovanni (2007) and Pepper (2010). This idea also resonates with Leithwood and Jantzi's (1999) assertion of the importance of having individuals in schools who are committed and motivated to education reform. Despite the challenges caused by globalization and reform initiatives, however, the participants appeared to believe that school leaders could overcome these challenges. They stressed that school principals might be

seeking change in their own practices for the sake of succeeding in their complex task.

The findings from this small-scale investigation demonstrate, therefore, that those principals within the local authority of Aljahra City who were identified as seeking change in their practice typically were not only aware of the most appropriate styles of leadership to address the challenge globalization presents to school systems, but were also able to show evidence of success in many instances of becoming transformational leaders. Many barriers to displaying transformational leadership behaviours continue to exist, however, and most notably the central decision-making role taken by the Ministry of Education. Whilst there was some evidence of local difficulty, through the attitude of teachers or because of the legacy of a previous principal, the lack of confidence in school principals and the close control of resources exhibited by the Ministry were considered by the participants in this study to be the key factors that militated against the desire and ability of school principals to be transformational.

**Conclusions & Recommendations**

In relation to the first research question ('the need for Kuwaiti school leaders to display transformational leadership behaviours due to the challenges of reform and globalization') it can be concluded that the participants were in favour of the argument that there is a need for transformational leadership behaviours to be displayed, since they have acknowledged challenges facing schools and the resulting demands and have indicated that transformational

leadership behaviours are required to meet the demands of educational reform and globalization.

In relation to the second research question ('principals' attitudes towards transformational leadership behaviours in Kuwaiti schools) participants tended to agree that change was needed in order to face a globalized era and that transformational leadership can be a suitable approach. Six of the participants had positive attitudes towards transformational leadership behaviours, values and issues, although two held reservations towards the implementation of transformational leadership behaviours, despite their endorsement of the value of the practices.

The participants revealed a great concern over the importance of the individuals within schools and maintained that the workforce should be developed, encouraged and thereby motivated. Furthermore participants reacted positively to the practice of shared leadership and were comfortable with the practices of building a shared vision.

The results also showed participants had exercised some transformational leadership behaviours, which reflects their positive attitudes as well as the usefulness of these behaviours. Participants' attitudes in favour of engaging school stakeholders in decision making and stressing the benefits of such behaviour was thus consistent with earlier discussions. In response to the second research question, therefore, participants showed positive attitudes towards the leadership behaviours advocated by the transformational

leadership approach and had exercised some of those practices, which reflects their readiness to apply this style.

In respect of the third research question ('what are the barriers that prevent school principals from promoting transformational leadership behaviours?') this study shows that participants perceived there to be such barriers. Certain aspects of the education system in Kuwait were identified by the participants as being a major challenge. Furthermore, the results indicated that the participants identified the school workforce as obstacles due to differences in academic preparation, cultures, skills and circumstances. Some individual differences could be controlled, however, by transformational leadership behaviours that seek to develop personal and improve their potential. Finally, the findings showed that there are factors surrounding school leaders, such as workload and individual differences, influence their adoption of transformational leadership behaviours. Participants stressed the individual differences between principals, saying their traditional thinking appears to represent a challenge.

Overall, therefore, the findings show that the participants perceived challenges which they thought call for certain leadership behaviours to be displayed within schools and suggested behaviours that are promoted by transformational leadership. Moreover, the results indicated that the principals had positive attitudes towards transformational leadership despite the presence of barriers and that behaviours consistent with such an approach were exercised by the principals. There is a need, therefore, to empower

models of transformational leadership in Kuwait, since the participants in this study reported an encouraging atmosphere towards this approach.

To sum up, this study supports the proposition that there is a need for transformational leadership behaviours to be displayed within Kuwaiti schools due to the challenges of globalization and reform initiatives. The results show that the participants indicated positive attitudes towards transformational leadership behaviours and appear to be ready to engage with them. Finally, this paper highlights barriers that relate to the educational system, workforce and school leaders and stand in the way of the application of transformational leadership practices.

The positive reactions to transformational leadership behaviours by the participants in this study appear to support the claim, therefore, that transformational leadership behaviours are highly efficacious in relation to the challenges presented to the country by globalization. This approach could, therefore, be the way forward for the Kuwaiti Education Ministry.  As a consequence, recommendations for the Kuwaiti government and future research have been derived from the analysis of the data gathered in this study, as follows

- school principals should be educated to transformational leadership behaviours be provide with opportunities to try such new practices;

- obstacles that prevent principals from exhibiting transformational leadership behaviours need to be recognised and addressed.

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