Chapter 5
The Knowledge Base on Educational Leadership and Management in Arab Countries: Its Current State and Its Implications for Leadership Development

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Abstract This chapter seeks to expose the challenges and promises faced by educational leadership and management (EDLM) scholars in Arab societies as they strive to establish an indigenous knowledge base that is connected to the global international scholarly discourse. We examine this issue and consider its implications for leadership development in the Arab context. Given the relative scarcity of Arab-related EDLM literature published internationally, our intention is to engage our international colleagues in the dialogue, hence responding to the multiple calls of international scholars to expand the cultural bases of the existing knowledge base in the field. In this chapter, we embrace a broad conception of leadership preparation that goes beyond initial preparation to encompass induction programmes and in-service training. The chapter engages with current international trends in educational leadership development and proposes future directions for research and practice in the Arab region.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, there has been a growing recognition among educational leadership and management scholars of the link between school leadership and school effectiveness. Evidence suggests that effective school leadership positively affects teachers' professional learning as well as student outcomes and that how school leaders are prepared makes a significant difference (Bush and Jackson 2002; McCarthy 2015; Murphy et al. 2008). This has given prominence to leadership preparation as a

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promising area of research. A growing body of research has been conducted on the preparation and development of school leaders in different contexts (e.g. Asuga et al. 2015; Barnett 2004; Bates and Eacott 2008; Yan and Ehrich 2009; English 2006; Gurr and Drysdale 2015; Guerra and Pazey 2016; Orr 2006). Studies focused on the aims, content, and systems of delivery of leadership development programmes. Some of this research has focused on the context as it relates to leadership preparation, indicating that the use of imported frameworks in developing leadership can be problematic. Researchers are increasingly raising questions about the 'utility of knowledge across national contexts' (Hallinger 1995; Asuga et al. 2015), emphasising the need for a context-specific conceptualisation of educational leadership and management (Asuga et al. 2016; Beycioglu and Wildy 2015; Bush 2012; Lumby et al. 2009).

We argue that developing effective educational leadership programmes in Arab societies poses challenges that are shared with the rest of the international research community and yet requires additional considerations that are sensitive to cultural context and responsive to the priorities and needs of indigenous practitioners. At the root of these considerations is the development of a contextualised knowledge base to inform the pedagogical approaches to leadership development as well as the content knowledge and consequently the competencies that the prospective school leader ought to possess. We claim that aspiring educational leaders in Arab societies need to be also prepared to face the pressing demands of globalisation and concur with our international colleagues that educational leaders ought to be prepared to be part of 'global epistemic communities' (Crow et al. 2008 in Bush 2012) and that they need to have the ability to balance their commitment to be responsive to their local context with adopting global trends for conceptualising problems and designing solutions. This is particularly important in developing Arab societies, currently under sensitive sociopolitical conditions, where educators bear the responsibility to safeguard a national identity with a specific set of values and beliefs (Richardson 2004), values that are frequently misrepresented and undervalued on the global front.

The purpose of this chapter is to expose the challenges and promises faced by educational leadership and management (EDLM) scholars in Arab societies as they strive to establish an indigenous knowledge base that is connected to the global international scholarly discourse. We examine this issue and consider its implications for leadership development in the Arab region. While the issue is at the heart of educational scholars' concerns in the Arab region, we realise that the language barrier in the region will prevent many Arab scholars from accessing this work. Thus, our primary audience is international. We aim to engage our international colleagues in the dialogue, hence responding to the multiple calls of international scholars to expand the cultural bases of the existing knowledge base (Hallinger 1995; Hallinger and Leithwood 1996; Heck 1996; Bush 2012). Additionally, this chapter is based on a broad conception of leadership preparation that aligns with Bush's (2012) invitation to address leadership development as a continuum going beyond initial preparation, to encompass induction programmes and in-service training.

The first part of the chapter highlights current directions of research and practice found in the international literature. In the second part, we present the existing

knowledge base available in the Arab educational leadership and management literature that is relevant to leadership preparation drawing upon recent reviews of this literature. In the last part, we present the implications of the local and global state of educational leadership development proposing future directions for research and practice.

Educational Leadership Development: The International Context

As a field of scholarship and research, educational management and leadership is still considered worldwide an emergent field characterised by continuous quest to overcome conceptual turmoil and build a knowledge base (Bridges 1982; Donmoyer 1999). It is often subjected to critique, especially on whether it provides actionable knowledge that can inform policy and practice (McCarthy 2015; Murphy et al. 2008). However, the impact of leadership on school effectiveness and the critical contribution of leadership preparation on achieving this effectiveness at all levels have become solidly established in the international literature (Bush 2012; Foster 1986; Heck and Hallinger 1999; McCarthy 2015, Murphy et al. 2008).

In the twenty-first century, the role of school leaders is expanding because of an increase in the complexity of schools as organisations and in the social and political demands placed on schools as socially impactful institutions. Consequently, educational leadership is broadly accepted as a 'specialist occupation which requires specific preparation' (Bush 2012, p. 665). For the most part, leadership development has been almost exclusively targeted at preparing individual educators to assume formal leadership roles in their institutions. In the West, it was historically focused on initial preparation of those individuals prior to their appointment to their position. Nowadays, leadership development is presented as a 'moral obligation', where development is conceived as a continuum that encompasses initial training, induction programmes, and in-service professional development (Bush 2012).

Though the practice of leadership has been part of the emergence of schools as social institutions, attempts at inducing it through knowledge acquisition and skill development in academic settings can only be tracked to the mid-twentieth century (Bush 2012; McCarthy 2015; Murphy 2002). In the USA, the first school management course was offered in 1881, but formal principal leadership preparation programmes started in the 1900s (Donmoyer 1999). The USA and few Western countries pioneered the efforts of establishing educational leadership as a field of graduate study in faculties of education, launching accreditation of preparation programmes for quality control, instituting licensure requirements as entry to the profession, and establishing professional and research associations to establish and promote a coherent knowledge base aimed at instilling effective leadership practices (McCarthy 2015; Murphy 2002; Murphy et al. 2008). Consequently, a growing knowledge base emerged and was documented in specialised journals, handbook of research, books and confer-

ence proceedings, mainly in English (Murphy 2002; Murphy et al. 2008). Countries around the world have been following suit offering researchers' programmatic commonalities as well as unique culturally contextualised practices (Bush 2012).

Within this trajectory of growth, the past three decades have witnessed an emerging trend in EDLM research characterised by concerted, more focused endeavours to diversify the global knowledge base in the field (Clarke and O'Donoghue 2017; Hallinger and Bryant 2013; Mertkan et al. 2017). This has led to a dramatic increase in EDLM scholarship from developing societies as indicative in the publication in 2008 of the first *International Handbook on the Preparation and Development of School Leaders* (McCarthy 2015) and the recent surge of reviews of EDLM research from Asia (Hallinger and Chen 2015), Africa (Hallinger 2018a), and Latin America (Castillo and Hallinger 2018). Much of this scholarship has been grounded in the limitations of 'Western' theories of educational leadership (Blunt and Jones 1997) and the need to examine and understand EDLM practices within the sociocultural, political, and economic context of the society (Clarke and O'Donoghue 2017; Hallinger 2018b; Mertkan et al. 2017).

Despite the noted turmoil and uneven growth of the field, EDLM scholars mark many recent developments as notable achievements. Examples of achievements are identified in leadership development programmes in the USA. These include a shift towards the following: a learner-centred mode of delivery; a move from presenting knowledge to be consumed by learners to collaboratively creating it (Bridges 2012); introductions of ethics courses; and an emphasis on addressing the cultural foundation and social justice (McCarthy 2015). Improvements are also noted in the delivery system as follows: establishing partnerships between district and school practitioners both in research and in teaching (McCarthy 2015), introducing field-based learning that permeates all offerings of the programme (Murphy et al. 2008), and adopting a cohort system (Barnett et al. 2000). Many US scholars have reported that underlying the above achievements is the establishment of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) in the mid-1990s under the leadership of Joseph Murphy. This consortium currently comprises 45 state education agencies and 11 professional organisations committed to adopt or adapt the ISLLC standards in policy or statute, leading universities to align their initial licensure programmes with widely accepted standards (McCarthy 2015).

However, there is major criticism directed to these apparent achievements, mainly at how leadership development is conceived, researched, and practiced (Hess and Kelly 2007; Murphy 2002; Murphy et al. 2008; McCarthy 2015; Levine 2005). Many scholars questioned the coherence and rigour of leadership programmes as well as their overemphasis on theoretical knowledge at the expense of practice-based activities. Moreover, in a comprehensive review of initial leadership development programmes in the USA, McCarthy (2015) critically pointed at the limitations of using academic tests (like the GRE) as the sole determinant of leadership potential of applicants to the programmes. She also criticised the lack of alignment between the announced emphasis on leadership for learning and the existing curriculum content, noting that the latter remained unchanged with a dominance of discipline-based courses. A study by Hess and Kelly (2007) analysed in-depth course syllabi to deter-

mine what is chosen to be taught in principal preparation programmes. The study revealed that the category with the highest percentage was 'technical knowledge' which dealt with school laws, finances, etc., followed by 'managing for results' and 'course category which dealt with school-level program evaluation and implementation' (Hess and Kelly 2007, p. 11).

Researchers agree that despite various attempts to reform, the previous period is characterised by continuity (McCarthy 2015; Murphy 2002; Murphy et al. 2008). Upon examination of the reform initiative to rebuild programmes in 54 states in six states in the USA, Murphy et al. (2008) report that most reform attempts remained in the margin failing to make changes in the underlying values and professional beliefs. They explain that designers of new programmes lack imaginative capacity to innovate and are still operating within the confines of institutions that 'continue to approach program change as an administrative function to be accomplished with the least expenditure of time and resources' (p. 2186). Additionally, Murphy et al. (2008) suggest that programme designers lack an actionable theory about their work, defining actionable theory as lacking a 'set of generally well-tested propositions about relevant phenomena that can be applied in the school setting with confidence that the action will achieve some intended result' (p. 2187).

As she reviews research on educational leadership development, McCarthy (2015) expresses her frustration with the failed attempts at improvement and invites her colleagues to 'be open to different viewpoints, to take reasonable—and at times bold—risks, and to question deeply held values and assumptions' (p. 431). Similarly, Murphy (2002) proposes to 're-culture' the profession inviting colleagues to take risk and move away from traditional paradigms that he considered dysfunctional. Both stressed the need for a paradigmatic shift that challenges deeply rooted practices, especially in the academic circles of university preparation programmes. Murphy's (2002) call to 're-culture' the profession of educational leadership reflects his bold position for paradigmatic change. He advocates for a synthesising paradigm rooted in utilitarianism (Donmoyer 1999) where the emphasis favours valued aims over the narrow focus on technical knowledge and subject matter. Within this paradigm, he proposes three key concepts to anchor educational leadership as a profession: school improvement, democratic community, and social justice. The three concepts provide these valued aims for leadership development as well as for the educational leadership profession as a whole (Murphy 2002). Using the power of metaphors, he also advances a new definition of leadership that is aligned with the three concepts and builds on the accumulated knowledge base: leader as a steward, educator, and community builder (Murphy 2002). Against the backdrop of this proposed paradigmatic shift, we would like to conclude this overview by endorsing the recommendations that Murphy et al. (2008) advanced as holding promise to international reformers targeting the improvement of educational leadership development in their societies:

> (1) working from an outcome-based paradigm; (2) creating a strong platform of actionable theory; (3) establishing a clear, coherent conceptual focus and foundation; (4) recruiting and selecting candidates through rigorous, value-based admissions; (5) grounding and integrating learning through practice- anchored learning experiences; (6) providing adequate support for technical and adaptive change; (7) replacing a culture of autonomy with a culture of

community; and (8) maintaining quality and continual improvement through outcome based accountability. (p. 2173)

Research on Educational Leadership and Management in Arab Societies

Despite apparent discrepancies, many scholars agree that since Arab societies share a common language, and several historical and sociocultural features that characterise them, we can address these societies as a distinct unit for study within existing international scholarship on educational administration (Hallinger and Hammad 2017; Karami-Akkary and El Saheb forthcoming). There are promising signals of rising interest in EDLM research in the region, with the volume of internationally published research sharply rising in the last two decades (Hallinger and Hammad 2017; Oplatka and Arar 2017). However, recent reviews of EDLM research conducted in the Arab region describe the existing literature as 'in its infancy', 'emerging', 'highly diffuse', 'decontextualised', 'lacking in programmatic inquiry', and falling short of addressing issues salient for policy and practice, which makes it far from the aim of building a knowledge base (Hallinger and Hammad 2017; Hammad and Hallinger 2017; Karami-Akkary and El Sahib forthcoming; Oplatka and Arar 2017).

A number of scholars point out that this emerging nature of existing Arab EDLM knowledge base in general, and one that is related to leadership preparation, has serious implications on practice in the region. One key implication is that most leadership development programmes have been strictly based on non-indigenous paradigms and modelled after existing programmes, mainly in the USA and Europe (Al-Dabbagh and Assaad 2010; Hallinger and Leithwood 1996; Kanan and Baker 2006; Romanowski 2017), thus paying little attention to local realities. Al-Dabbagh and Assaad (2010) explain that this persists even in the case of programmes that are being 'tailor made to the needs of the region' (p. 3).

The Knowledge Base in Educational Leadership in the Arab Context

Four recent reviews of existing EDLM scholarship reported a rising interest in research and practice within this field (Hallinger and Hammad 2017; Hammad and Hallinger 2017; Karami-Akkary and El Sahib forthcoming; Oplatka and Arar 2017). Oplatka and Arar's (2017) review synthesised results from 48 Arab-related EDLM articles published between 1990 and 2015 in international educational journals. Hallinger and Hammad's reviews covered 62 articles published in nine international EDLM journals between 2000 and 2016. Karami-Akkary and El Saheb's (forthcoming) reviewed 224 EDLM articles published in Arab journals between 2007 and

2016 that are accessible through 'Shamaa', a local database for Arab educational research. The studies aimed at understanding how the study of educational leadership is shaped within the social and cultural contexts prevalent in these countries while highlighting the challenge of building a knowledge base and the applicability of theories and concepts borrowed from the international literature. Findings revealed several common features. Generally, this literature was found to be relatively thin in scope, 'geographically dispersed' as many Arab countries were not covered in the studies identified (Hallinger and Hammad 2017; Oplatka and Arar 2017; Karami-Akkary and El Sahib forthcoming). In addition, the reviews highlighted other specific characteristics related to topical coverage as well as conceptual and methodological limitations. Topical coverage was found to be 'highly diffuse' as evidenced in the lack of connectedness among the studies (Hammad and Hallinger 2017). Karami-Akkary and El Sahib (forthcoming) reported that out of 224 full-text articles reviewed, they were able to extract only ten themes where more than three studies are addressing the same theme as a research focus. This diffusion limits the ability of reviewers to synthesise the results of research, hindering attempts at establishing a contextualised knowledge base.

The reviews also found that the Arab EDLM literature is characterised by a lack of conceptualisation of how EDLM practices are shaped by the social, cultural, and political characteristics observed in Arab societies. This is evidenced by the fact that many studies were found to be decontextualised (Hammad and Hallinger 2017; Karami-Akkary and El Sahib forthcoming; Oplatka and Arar 2017). Karami-Akkary and El Sahib (forthcoming) explain that Arab researchers seem to focus on applying methodologically complex statistical tools while keeping a distance from addressing critical problems of practice that are relevant to their contexts such as political instability, war-torn communities, economic deprivation and inequality, religious and ethnic tensions, colonialisation and corruption.

The reviews also revealed an uncritical reliance on Western conceptions while framing the research studies. Karami-Akkary and El Sahib (forthcoming) found that many studies adopted conceptions of educational leadership that are widely used in the international literature, like transformational leadership, learning organisations, and organisational culture. However, their review pointed at the absence of a cross-cultural perspective while adopting these international conceptions as theoretical lenses to interpret leadership practices in the Arab context.

While Oplatka and Arar's (2017) review concluded that there is limited capacity for EDLM knowledge production in this part of the world, Hallinger and Hammad (2017) emphasised the 'emerging' nature of the knowledge base, drawing attention to the similarities with the Western literature at earlier stages of its development. On the other hand, Karami-Akkary and El Sahib (forthcoming) conclude their review reporting the presence of what they deem to be 'promising' attempts at addressing issues in administration and leadership that reflect the priorities and concerns in the local context. They also consider the focused interest on certain topics, though limited, and the alignment with some key international trends as another promising move towards building a culturally grounded knowledge base.

Research on Leadership Preparation in the Arab Region

A number of researchers argue that research into leadership development in the Arab region has become particularly crucial, especially in recent times, characterised by a growing recognition of the importance of leadership development and the consequent rapid expansion of leadership programmes provided by public, private, and non-profit institutions across the Arab region (Kanan and Baker 2006; Al-Dabbagh and Assaad 2010). As suggested by Jiang et al. (2017), these studies 'not only contribute to the knowledge base but also will ensure that school leadership preparation and training is understood in more culturally and contextually appropriate ways' (p. 11).

Based on the literature we reviewed, most studies are evaluative in nature. Some focused on evaluating educational leadership degree programmes provided by Arab universities. These included a study of the educational leadership programme at Taibah University (KSA) from the point of view of the educational leaders enrolled (Abu Jamie 2015), a study of the master's programme in Educational Administration and Planning at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University in KSA (Al-Fantoukh 2015), a study of educational administration master's programmes offered by a Palestinian university from the perspective of a cohort of 23 graduates (Kanan and Baker 2006), and a study of the educational diploma programme in the College of Education at Umm Al Qura University (KSA) (Al-Omari 2012).

Other studies aimed at evaluating in-service leadership development programmes provided for practicing principals. For instance, Shehab (2009) explored the perceptions of primary school principals in Ninwa (Iraq) about their school leadership training programme. Alhouti and Male (2017) carried out a study to investigate the perceptions of Kuwaiti principals regarding their leadership preparation and in-service professional development needs. Hourani and Stringer's (2015) study explored the perceptions of school principals in Abu Dhabi regarding the benefits of their leadership development programmes at a time of educational reform.

In addition to research on principal preparation, a few more studies focused on preparation of higher-level educational leaders. These included Al-Humaidi's (2010) study of the preparation programme offered to candidates of the General Education Schools Agency in Taif (KSA), Ayesh et al.'s (2011) investigation of the preparation of supervisors at UNRWA centres in Jordan, Al-Shimari's (2012) study of the preparation of educational supervisors in Hail (KSA), and Kanan's (2005) exploration of the perceptions of superintendents and their supervisors about the roles and training needs of superintendents in Palestine.

The findings of these studies showed a variation in the attitudes towards leadership development programmes. Some were viewed positively (Hourani and Stringer 2015; Al-Humaidi 2010; Al-Omari 2012), others were perceived negatively (Alhouti and Male 2017), whereas Ayesh et al.'s (2011) study detected moderate positive attitudes towards the principal training programme. As for the studies related to evaluating the effectiveness of university preparation programmes, results showed that the master's of Educational Administration and Planning Programme at the Faculty of Social

Sciences at King Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University is 'poor' in general (Al-Fantoukh 2015). Kanan and Baker (2006) reported a lack of emphasis on important issues such as political leadership and educational policy analysis and concluded that the existing university programmes bore the features of similar ones in the West forty years ago. Some studies also identified impediments to advancement of leadership development in the region. They pointed at the highly centralised policies, the lack of economic resources, and the weak system of rewards and incentives adopted by universities as key constraints (Al Kadi 2013).

Directions for the Future

Developing effective, culturally relevant leadership development requires a solid, contextualised knowledge base that can inform both the competencies to be targeted and the pedagogical approaches suitable for preparing Arab educational leaders. Reviews of the existing Arab EDLM literature raise concerns about its ability to contribute to this goal. Interestingly, similar concerns are also felt by international scholars making them apply to the state of leadership development worldwide (Bush 2012; McCarthy 2015; Murphy et al. 2008). Consequently, Arab researchers carry a double burden as they are expected to navigate within the confines of both global and local challenges.

In the absence of an indigenous knowledge base, heavy reliance on Western leadership development methods and content pose a key challenge as to how to resolve 'the tension between dominant "Western" perspectives on leadership and "local" needs and realities' (Al-Dabbagh and Assaad 2010, p. 11). Hallinger and Leithwood (1996) stressed the importance of considering local cultures in the design of leadership preparation courses. Romanowski (2017) also warned against uncritical application of Western standards to develop or evaluate leadership preparation programmes in the Arab region, reasoning that these standards have different meanings and interpretations in different cultural contexts. Considering the above, we agree with Kanan and Baker (2006) that Arab countries must shift their focus to 'develop local paradigms of administrator preparation programs that spare them the exorbitant price of maintaining parody with western countries' (p. 167). We further assert that, with their knowledge base still in its infancy, Arab scholars have a unique opportunity to restore pride in their cultural heritage and acquire an in-depth understanding of how the prevailing sociocultural context shapes the demands and aspirations for developing educational leaders.

From that position, we would like to conclude this chapter by recommending some future directions that we think may contribute towards this end. A key starting point is achieving a paradigmatic shift. This requires a concerted effort at the national level where leadership development becomes a strategic goal for policy-makers and researchers alike. To anchor this paradigmatic shift, Arab policy-makers should push for adoption of national standards that capture the aspirations of their societies for effectiveness and ensure their readiness to be key players in the global

economy. These standards should encompass a profile of Arab graduate, effective teacher, and educational leader, as well as characteristics of the effective school. As Murphy et al. (2008) recommend, we propose that these standards are grounded in a clear, coherent conceptual focus and foundation. This will require local reconstruction of internationally accepted conceptions like schools as learning organisations, distributive leadership, critically reflective practice and transformational change, and grounding them in the context as foundational components of these standards.

Recommendations for Research

On the research front, we recommend that researchers conduct additional, high-quality reviews of local studies focusing on topical domains that emerged from local and international reviews. We also invite researchers to examine these studies through a critical theorist lens that questions the moral imperatives of leadership and gives priority to addressing urgent issues of practice, especially those pertaining to social justice. With that, we suggest that Arab researchers remain abreast of international developments in the EDLM field, engaging in a critical dialogue with the international community and basing this engagement in a local agenda of research that seeks contextually relevant answers and avoids blindly following international trends in research and practice.

We also recommend that Arab researchers focus on understanding their context and explore the impact of societal and cultural factors on leadership practices in their societies. Contextualising leadership studies will be especially useful in determining the knowledge base to be taught in leadership preparation programmes (Hallinger and Leithwood 1996). EDLM researchers (Jiang et al. 2017; Qian and Walker 2014), particularly in the Arab context (Hammad and Hallinger 2017), have documented a lack of research studies exploring how leadership behaviours and practices are shaped by these factors. We believe that conducting more research to explore how these factors affect school leadership in Arab societies is crucial if we are to localise/contextualise leadership development and make it a better fit for the Arab local context.

Additional research is needed to understand the processes and skills for leading school-based improvement (Karami-Akkary 2014). Given the current educational changes and innovations taking place in many Arab countries, it is not clear how far the existing principal preparation/development programmes meet the requirements of Arab school principals to cope with and implement proposed changes. We also concur with Madsen's (2010) note that, 'timely research topics that have immediate practical applications for the implementation of leadership development programs are recommended' (p. 109). This means giving more attention from Arab EDLM researchers to exploring how Arab educators learn leadership. This is because designing effective leadership programmes that meet the developmental needs of learners depends to a large extent on understanding how they engage with their leadership learning experiences (Madsen 2010) and how these experiences are shaped by the values prevalent in their respective societies (Richardson 2004). Another area of

enquiry is principals' training needs. Failure to identify these needs can be problematic in the context of increasing pressures on school principals to be more active in leading educational change at the school level (Jiang et al. 2017).

Recommendations for Designers of Leadership Development Programmes

On the other hand, and concerning leadership development practice, we recommend that designers of both pre-service and in-service leadership preparation provision anchor their programmes in nationally agreed-on standards while enforcing learner-centred approaches and adopting job-embedded strategies. We also call on leadership development designers to embed promoting a collaborative culture in their programmes' designs. This can be manifested through establishing a strong research and practice partnership between university scholars and school-based practitioners. Many researchers have argued that leadership development programmes should be designed and implemented in close collaboration with practitioners and should align with the professional vision of educational institutions as learning organisations with all members continuously drawing on theory and research to improve their practice (Bush and Jackson 2002). A collaborative culture is also reflected in building on the expertise of veteran educational leaders, supporting them to act as mentors and coaches to novice leaders.

We also encourage Arab countries to develop international collaborative initiatives in leadership preparation. Bush and Jackson (2002) suggested the establishment of 'an international network of leadership centers' (p. 427). These can be aimed at facilitating mutual learning in the field of leadership preparation (Murphy et al. 2008). It would be useful if Arab leadership preparation providers establish connections with existing centres and explore possibilities for collaboration. This would offer exposure to examples of good practice that would benefit existing leadership programmes in the Arab region such as employing external resources and facilitating exchange visits to widen leadership experience (Alhouti and Male 2017; Karami-Akkary and El Saheb forthcoming).

We offer additional recommendations that focus on the structure and content of the training programmes. These include: (1) alignment of the training programmes with the individual needs of principals and schools, which requires seeking participants' feedback on their future training requirements (Abu Jamie 2015; Amr and Awawda 2016; Hourani and Stringer 2015); (2) minimising the theoretical aspects of the training and reinforcing the practical ones through using a wider range of learning strategies such as study groups, 'virtual' provision using seminars and hands-on activities, incorporating mentoring and internship as important parts of principals' preparation programmes, employing external resources, and facilitating exchange visits among schools to widen leadership experiences (Alhouti and Male 2017; Al-Humaidi 2010; Amr and Awawda 2016; Ayesh et al. 2011; Bush and

Jackson 2002; Hourani and Stringer 2015; Kanan 2005; Murphy et al. 2008); (3) enriching courses with topics such as empowerment, creative problem-solving skills, team collaboration, and coordination (Al Kadi 2013); (4) raising the competencies of trainers and improving training activities (Amr and Awawda 2016; Hourani and Stringer 2015); (5) encouraging faculty to conduct collaborative action research maintaining quality and continual improvement through outcome-based accountability (Bush 2012; Murphy et al. 2008).

McCarthy (2015) concluded her reflections on the evolution and challenges of educational leadership preparation programmes in the USA admitting that despite decades of research and practice, scholars 'do not have all the answers' and yet assert that they 'cannot be paralysed by what we do not know'. According to her, 'we are ethically responsible to act on what we do know' (p. 431). Arab educational scholars must do just that. Despite the sociopolitical turmoil in the region, they have a unique opportunity for a fresh start informed by decades of international experiences, a heightened awareness of the added value of cultural diversity in the knowledge base, and a growing interconnected international community of researchers. There is a wealth of local and international experiences among researchers and practitioners alike that can be explored, examined, and synthesised to inform future directions of establishing a contextualised leadership development scholarship and practice.

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