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**Middle Leaders' perspectives of leadership in Primary  
School: Comparative study between Saudi and England**

**By**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Manchester  
Metropolitan University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**School of Children, Youth And Education Studies**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The definition of a middle leader in the educational context is difficult to define because in some cases the middle leader is a teacher who has taken on a position of authority among his or her peers. In other situations, the middle leader can be a manager, external to the pedagogical component of the educational system but with a strong business acumen. This dissertation examines the perspectives of middle leaders in two contexts: Saudi Arabia and England. This research was undertaken primarily because there was a paucity of research that examined the Arabic context of middle leadership. This, paired with significant changes within the educational context in Saudi Arabia, meant that an opportunity existed to examine how Saudi middle leaders currently perceived their role in an attempt to shape how they could adapt to changes in the future. This research took on an ontological and epistemological view in an attempt to understand the interactional and practical experience of middle leaders. Using a case study design, the researcher used semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis to interpret the perceptions of middle leaders within six different primary schools across Saudi Arabia and England. Findings from this study suggested that middle leaders in Saudi Arabia took on a much more administrative position than their English counterparts, though in both cases, there were considerable challenges identified among the participants. These challenges largely related to educational culture and the difficulty of navigating between teachers and senior management. This research has contributed to knowledge by addressing the issues and perceptions of middle leaders, especially in Saudi Arabia, as the King intends to pursue his 2030 Vision, which would have a considerable impact on the middle leader population.

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## **DEDICATION**

*The hard work of more than 4 years is dedicated to the soul of my beloved late father for his invaluable contribution towards my success; and to my dearest mother- may*

*Allah give her a long and healthy life- for her endless support and prayers.*

*Also, to my dearly loved wife Fatima S Alriqasi who passed away in February 2009 -*

*may she rest in peace. I believe if she was here today she would be very proud of my*

*achievement.*

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

(OECD)	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
(MLs)	Middle Leaders
(GTC)	General Teaching Council for Scotland
(DFEE)	Department for Education and Employment
(ASTs)	Advanced Skills Teachers
(TTA)	Teachers' Training Agency
(TDA)	Teachers' Development Agency
(SENCOs)	Special Educational Needs Coordinators
(CoPs)	Communities of Practice
(OFSTED)	Office for Standards in Education

## **DECLARATION**

This results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are my own work. None of the material offered in this thesis has previously been offered in any other degree.



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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Overview**

This chapter presents an introduction to this research. After offering a statement of the problem and establishing its scope, it explains why studies of this kind are valuable and needed in societies like Saudi Arabia and England where middle leadership is being implemented. After providing this rationale, the aims and objectives of the research are presented, followed by the research questions that the study addresses. The proposed methodology and a summary of its contribution have been also addressed. Data were collected from middle leaders in primary schools and the study focuses on their perceptions. The chapter concludes with an overview of the content of each chapter.

#### **1.2 The scope of the research**

This research investigates the concept and role of middle leaders in state primary schools in Saudi Arabia and England by conducting a study in six different schools. The study gauges the opinions and perspectives of middle management staff on the concept of middle leadership and factors embedded within their internal and external environments that could shape their roles and daily practices. The findings of the research should assist in suggesting alternative ways to improve school practice by enhancing the effectiveness of their organisation. By synthesising data mainly gathered from semi-structured interviews conducted with middle management staff, as well as limited observations and official documents, this research identifies factors that are likely to facilitate or hinder the implementation of changes to middle leadership in England and Saudi Arabia. The study discusses how these relate to broader educational leadership, considering the implications for political, cultural and organisational factors. Where useful, the study draws on evidence and insights from other research and case studies regarding educational

leadership from both the Western world and developing countries, comparing and contrasting these with findings from this study and using them to identify best practices that would be applicable in England and Saudi Arabia.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

*The Standards for Leadership and Management – Middle Leaders’ Guidelines for Self-Evaluation*, published in 2014, and *Improving School Leadership* by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report, published in 2016, are just two official documents in English produced by authorities on behalf of the government, that outline for leaders, middle leaders, and others the strategies for leadership (Bush and Jackson, 2002; Busher, 2005; Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain, 2011; Pont et al. 2016; Bennett et al. 2003). For these, in the context of English schools (or more precisely, primary schools), effective leaders are those who can survive under multiple pressures, play multiple roles simultaneously, and tackle their responsibilities in collaboration with other members of the school community. In the context of Saudi Arabia, due to the reforming agenda introduced into the educational system in 2014, the job title of ‘middle manager’ was transformed into that of ‘middle leader.’ In fact, although this reform has been embraced by the government, official documents lack information and formal descriptions of the new role of middle leader, and do not explain (in relation to this new role) what it means to be an effective leader. Noticeably, and according to currently available official documents in both England and Saudi Arabia, middle leaders need to fulfil their roles in line with policy (Pont et al. 2016), which implies that they have limited personal say in how their role might be shaped. They also need to abide by the expectations of senior management and are required to behave more as managers than leaders (Heng and Marsh, 2009), which makes the phrase “effective leader” less meaningful.

In fact, the tension between attempting to lead and answering to senior management limits what middle leaders are expected to achieve to be effective; this has been highlighted by existing researchers, including Bennett (1995, 2003 and 2007). This tension becomes more problematic when middle leaders, especially in state primary schools, struggle to make sense of their roles and responsibilities when the collegial culture of the school clashes with what it means to be a manager or managing leader (Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain, 2011). Middle leaders who want to be ‘good’ leaders (Busher, 2005) experience various cultural, political, and organisational factors that shape their roles as middle leaders. Various educational and training programmes have been designed and delivered by different agencies to inspire middle leaders and improve the skills that will make them better able to lead effectively (Pont et al. 2016). This raises a question, however. How can middle leaders benefit fully from such education and training if they are limited in leadership due to the requirements of senior management? Further, how can middle leaders be motivated by official documents that promise to share power and leadership when middle leaders are acting more like management?

In the Saudi Arabian context, my professional experiences as a middle leader (deputy) in a private Saudi Arabian primary school reflects another part of the story. Saudi's middle leaders are operating in a highly bureaucratic system. Schools are hierarchically structured to an extent that is emphasised even in the architecture of the buildings. The headteacher, whose office is located on the first floor, owns the power of decision-making, which is only shared when the headteacher allows it, during official - participatory-meetings. In fact, I was able to experience colleagues’ struggles taking on leadership roles, given the fact that middle leaders in Saudi Arabia are officially requested to accept guidance and instructions from the headteacher and to play the role of the deputy as middle line management staff. I was able to sense that the power imposed on schools by Saudi Arabia’s government through the Department of Education and inspection

system influences the practice of middle leaders. Even though I was working in a private school, I was able to sense the pressure as a result of the obstacles to leadership. Among all the announcements made by the Saudi Arabian government promoting change in the education sector, especially in schools, I was hoping that the reforms introduced in 2014 would promote real change in the practice of middle leadership.

It is evident that regardless of the differences between the educational settings of Saudi Arabia and England, the role of middle leadership remains fluid. Thus, this section concludes with a question that underpins this research: How is it that middle leaders are requested, and even expected, to contribute to the universal goal of the school as a learning organisation if they have not been given the chance to be leaders? Indeed, who is the effective leader, and what factors are embedded in the internal and external environment that hinder or improve the practices of middle leaders? This is a study of middle leaders from their own perspective and their perceptions allow these questions to be addressed.

#### **1.4 Rationale for the Study**

As indicated, the effectiveness of the practical role and experience of middle leadership in Saudi Arabian and English primary schools needs examination. The gap between theory and practice in terms of understanding the concept of good, effective middle leadership, is noticeable in academic literature in England and is not explained or even clearly mentioned in the Saudi Arabian educational context. In fact, since the first reforms of the Saudi Arabian education sector were introduced in 2006, there has been turbulence and a lack of understanding as to what exactly the phrase ‘middle leader’ means and of what roles and responsibilities of middle leadership the middle leaders should assume. Consequently, there have been suggestions, within education departments, that further training of professionals to empower them and enhance their understanding of the

meaning of middle leadership be provided (Busher, 2005; Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain, 2011). Given the fact that middle leaders' positions are fluid, and there is no adequate evidence to show how middle leaders understood their roles in the lights of all the changes and reforming, this research is important in terms of examining how middle leaders conceive their roles and what are the factors that may shape their practices as leaders

As noted above, there is a lack of current research and literature on middle leadership written in Arabic for the Arab population. This means that the theoretical principles on which this research is based depend mainly on literature written in the English context. In making comparisons and highlighting contrasts between the two education systems, most of the references are to literature written for the English context. In view of this, and because of the justifications that drove the need for this research, the following aims, objectives and questions were identified.

### **1.5 Aims and Objectives of the Study**

The overarching aim of this study is to examine, compare, and contrast how different internal and external environmental factors might influence the roles and practices of middle leaders operating in primary schools in England and Saudi Arabia from their perspectives. For that, there is a need to identify whether middle leaders perceive themselves as leaders or managers; and to identify the external and internal factors that influence their roles and daily responsibilities, and in turn, influence their practice of middle leadership. Given these overarching aims, more four specific objectives were formulated:

- To critically examine the up-to-date literature on middle leaders' roles and responsibilities and to identify factors that impact on the daily practices of middle leaders and their perceptions of their roles.



- To investigate empirically the extent to which cultural, social and political factors play a role in shaping the perceptions and daily practices of middle leaders in England and Saudi Arabia.
- To determine how middle leaders, perceive their roles and responsibilities in relation to complicated internal and external organisational factors.
- To determine similarities and differences between the perceptions of middle leaders operating in both educational settings.

Given the cultural and political factors surrounding Saudi middle leaders, there is an assumption that middle leaders, in such an environment, are less likely to be able to reflect upon their opinions and perceptions beyond the restrictions of the practical experience they are going through. In addition, regardless of the continuing attempts of Saudi Arabia and other Arab researchers and educationists to enrich Arabic-written literature with theories of educational leadership in the hope of enhancing our understanding, a large amount of Arabic written literature on the matter of educational leadership is the translated work of English literature. It is beyond the scope of this research to examine the extent to which such translations are able to reflect upon the original texts, but at the same time, the issue of translation and its impact has been considered.

### **1.6 Research Questions**

In order to achieve the above objectives, the research questions were developed, as follows:

- How do the internal and external environmental factors that are embedded in the English and Saudi Arabia educational settings of middle leaders in primary schools influence their perception of their roles and daily practices?

Sub-questions:

- How are the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders perceived in Saudi Arabia and English Primary Schools?
- What factors contribute to the shaping of the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders in primary schools in Saudi Arabia and England?
- What kinds of factors are likely to make the school more effective in its organisation?

### **1.7 Proposed Methodology**

Case study, as a research design in the format of comparative case study analysis, is the approach that was selected to meet the main aim of this research and to respond to the research inquiry. Reviewing the currently available literature in both Arabic and English was a necessary first step towards understanding the how the concept of the middle leader was introduced and then evolved in each context, and to determining factors that might shape the practices of middle leaders in primary schools. The literature review also helped the researcher to gather the secondary data required to create interview questions for the collection of primary data directly from middle leaders in Saudi Arabia and England. Middle leaders were then interviewed, and this study relates to how they saw their role in middle schools. They are the ones in whom this knowledge is invested as they carry out their duties and are best placed to understand the challenges, they are facing in their daily working experience. The data collected from the Saudi Arabian context was translated and analysed in preparation for further critical discussion of the issues raised by the research, enabling comparisons and contrasts to be identified in later chapters, and identifying differences and similarities in the roles of middle leaders in relation to their different cultural, political and organisational environments.

## **1.8 Proposed Contribution to Knowledge**

The contribution made by the research can be seen through different lenses. While the details of the contribution to knowledge are provided in the conclusion, it is important to set the tone of this research in terms of its wider context. Up until this point, there has been a dearth of research studies that have addressed middle leadership in the context of Saudi Arabia, and this poses considerable issues for those working in the field. Collecting research that may be of use to middle leaders working in the Saudi context, while making it relevant and available adds meaning to this research project. Additionally, there is use in providing the findings of this study not only for middle leaders, but for head teachers and other researchers who can use this to further expand the knowledge in this field.

## **1.9 Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis consists of five chapters.

Chapter One outlines the important and critical factors that drive this study. It explains the need for this research, and addresses how the research aim, objectives and questions (including sub-questions) were formulated. The chapter contains a brief explanation of how the main issues were tackled, and how data was collected and analysed to achieve the desired aim of the research. Its potential contribution to the theory and practice of middle leadership is outlined.

Chapter Two is the literature review chapter, which is designed to address different issues related to the emergence of middle leadership in Saudi Arabia and English educational settings, as well as factors affecting the evolution of the concept. The chapter starts by explaining the relationship between leadership and management in the educational context and goes on to outline the development and practice of these roles in Saudi Arabia and England. Issues related to the semblance of autonomy, and the differences between compliance and distributed leadership styles as well as effectiveness and performativity

in the culture of middle leadership are all critically discussed. Finally, after drawing together the most significant concerns, the research questions of this study are formulated.

Chapter Three is the methodology chapter, which begins by outlining the theoretical principles of the research and the methodological understandings, which emerged in response to the research inquiry. Following this, the chapter explains why the study was designed as pure qualitative research and why the most suitable design was found to be a case study approach. After this, descriptions of how the samples were selected, how the data was collected, translated, transcribed, and analysed, are provided. This chapter concludes with a clear explanation of the ethical considerations that were identified and taken into account during the study.

Chapter Four is the findings chapter. After thematic analysis of the data, this chapter presents the findings in the light of the research questions. The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the findings are discussed under headings for each question, along with supporting evidence from the interviews, documents or observation. Conclusions are drawn together at the end to illustrate the main findings and lay the groundwork for the discussion chapter.

Chapter Five is the discussion chapter. The chapter provides a discussion of the most critical issues addressed in the findings chapter. As indicated, this research has particular value in its uniqueness by examining a context that has previously not been considered (i.e. the case of Saudi Arabia). By pairing this with findings from the English context and the wide array of academic literature primarily in the English context, the discussion chapter offers suggestions as to the implications of how middle leadership is shaped and classified.

Chapter Six is the conclusion. Ultimately, a set of recommendations with indications of the implications of this research on different stakeholders is provided. The research

questions, initially defined above, are specifically answered, and the contributions to the field of knowledge are addressed. While it is acknowledged that this case study approach to research cannot be generalized across countries or regions, value is demonstrated to those who participated in the research and suggestions on how this research can be expanded are identified.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

This thesis examines the concept of middle leadership in primary schools. As described in Chapter 1, the main aim of the thesis is to examine, compare, and contrast the external and internal environmental factors that are embedded in the educational settings of middle leaders in primary schools and how these factors influence their perspectives on their roles and responsibilities. In particular, the thesis focuses on how middle leaders conceptualise themselves as both leaders and managers and thus their practice of middle leadership (Spillane et al. 2001).

The definition of a middle leader is not straightforward, as the role can involve different responsibilities, depending on the school and its location. Middle leaders, in some contexts, may be teachers who perform formal leadership roles (e.g. England). However, although they may have both managerial and pedagogical responsibilities, they are not part of the school's senior management (Southworth, 2004; Busher et al. 2007). Instead, they may be teachers who focus on a subject, department, or have pastoral responsibility (Gunter, 2001:106). However, in this study, middle leadership is defined as formal leadership that is related to middle management (in Saudi and England) and subject leadership (in England) (Heng and Marsh, 2009). Researchers have identified the emergence of middle leaders in schools, their evolving roles in education management, and their increasing importance in the realisation of educational outcomes and school performance (Bennett, 1995; Earley and Weindling, 2004; Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain, 2011). However, unlike previous studies, the present research examines how the concept is conceptualised, manifested and practised in primary schools by comparing the education systems in both England and Saudi Arabia.

This chapter begins by exploring the connections between leadership and management in the context of education. It then discusses how middle leadership has evolved and how it is practiced in the two education settings of England and Saudi Arabia. In particular, issues related to organisational culture issues, power relations, effectiveness, accountability, performativity and distributed leadership, along with the claims of autonomy and shared power, are discussed critically to identify the most significant factors to be addressed in this research. These factors will be formulated later in Chapter 3 in the empirical part of this research.

## **2.2 Terminology and the Interrelated Concepts of Leadership and Management in Schools: A General View**

Reviewing different definitions of leadership and the comprehensive literature of management reveals that while leadership is concerned with values, morals, and purposes and through demonstrating of the long-term vision of the school as an organisation, management is the framework that controls leadership and demonstrates the power of policy, authority and direction. Thus, as Bolman and Deal (1997) and Precey (2011) state, although the literature has differentiated between management and leadership, both are important to achieve schools' aims. This could explain why schools that are under-led, but over-managed, may lose any sense of spirit or purpose to develop and, conversely, why:

“Poorly managed organisations with strong charismatic leaders may soar temporarily only to crash shortly thereafter. The challenge of modern organisations requires the objective perspective of the manager, as well as the flashes of vision and commitment wise leadership provides” (Bolman and Deal, 1997, pp. xiii-xiv).

Commenting on Bolman and Deal (1997), it can be said that leadership is a continuous process that entails influencing a group of people in order to realise mutual objectives and

goals (Ciulla, 2004; Northouse, 2007). In contrast, management is conceptualised in many studies as the process of planning, organising, monitoring, controlling and directing human resources and other resources in order to achieve organisational goals (Griffin, 2010; Lunenberg, 2011).

There is ongoing controversy regarding the difference between leadership and management (Yukl, 2010). The contention arises when trying to create distinctions despite the fact that the processes of leadership and management are fundamentally interconnected and dependent on one another. This is exemplified in Bass (2010), who argues that, although leadership and management can overlap, they are distinct, because of their different qualities and focus. Further to this, Lunenberg (2011) argues that leaders are people-oriented in their focus, as opposed to task or resource oriented, as managers are. However, in many ways people are resources that must be managed as well as led. The fact that they are interconnected is, therefore, undeniable: the process of creating a vision and mission is possible if this is communicated to all parties and actioned through the planning, training, organising and directing of staff members and resources. In short, leadership requires management, and management requires leadership, in order for either process to function at optimal capacity. Mulford (2003) argues that leadership is established to serve the organisational context within school communities and the context will influence the leaders and the way in which they lead the school.

Clarifying this interconnectedness, Fleming (2000) lays out a four-point list for the effective performance of middle sector staff roles in England:

1. Having a clear vision of the importance of the area for which you are responsible and being able to enthuse others with this vision. This is *leadership*.
2. Being clear about what constitutes good practice and using it. This is having specialist knowledge or expertise and *being a good practitioner*.



3. Being an effective manager of people and resources. This involves being able to plan, motivate, encourage good practice, challenge bad practice, solve problems, and see tasks through. This is *management*.
4. Being able to put in place procedures to secure efficiency. This is *administration*.  
(Fleming 2000:3, emphasis added).

As such, good middle leaders in England are expected to balance their leadership and management duties, while also performing administrative and teaching duties. However, the extent to which this balance is equal depends on the individual middle leader and the school, its context, culture, and needs, as well as the needs of the students. Fleming (2000) fails to consider that these elements are subject to change, based on the requirements of a school, but his four-point plan for effective middle leadership identifies key areas in which middle leaders need to perform. The pedagogical or practitioner aspect of this role is stressed throughout this thesis and understood as an element that aims to support leadership by creating a teacher-leader amalgam that acts as a conduit for power in the traditional hierarchy of many education systems. However, the education system in Saudi Arabia has functioned with a more centralised structure when creating a school's vision and objectives, thereby minimising any innovative approach to leadership, as will be further discussed (see sections 2.3 and 2.4.3). In addition to this, an absence of pedagogical duties in the Saudi Arabian middle manager counterpart of middle leaders means they do not fulfil the role of teacher, which Fleming (2000) identified as necessary in England. As such, their roles become focused on only two of the aspects: administration and management.

### **2.3 Management and Leadership in England and Saudi Arabia**

As the literature was reviewed, it was noticeable that the conceptions of management and leadership were understood and developed differently. In England, since the mid-1900s,

academics, educational practitioners and policy makers have shown increasing interest in finding strategies and approaches for improving school effectiveness and performance (Harris, 2004). A considerable number of studies have argued that one of the essential determinants of school performance in a rapidly evolving global education context is leadership (Witziers et al. 2003; Dinham, 2005; Ekundayo, 2010). Some studies have demonstrated that effective leadership plays a pivotal role in securing high quality service provision and high standards in schools (Pepper and Thomas 2002; Saphier et al. 2006; Nettles and Herrington, 2007). Studies by Dinham (2005) and Marzano et al. (2005) have demonstrated the connection between leadership and key processes, activities, and goals of schools, such as teaching and learning, as well as the critical importance of leadership in driving continuous and evolving change in the global education context. Similarly, in a study conducted by Lezotte (2001), it was established that leadership plays an integral role in the realisation of positive school outcomes. Conversely, some studies have established that individual factors and school structural issues are essential determinants of school performance (Stewart, 2007; Koth et al. 2008; Stewart, 2008). Others have found that, besides leadership, there are a myriad of factors that mediate school performance and effectiveness (Lezotte, 1991; Cheng, 1996; Kirk and Jones, 2004; Bollen et al. 2012). For instance, studies carried out by Kirk and Jones (2004) and Cordell and Waters (1993) highlight the following: available resources, existing legislation, school relations and culture, and structural issues. Cordell and Waters (1993) argue that school performance can be dependent on the way in which the school leadership, teachers, students, parents, support staff, policy makers, the government and the community work together (Cordell and Waters, 1993). As a consequence of the focus on the benefits of leadership, significant emphasis has been placed on improving it in order to enhance school performance and outcomes (Dinham, 2005; Nettles and Herrington, 2007).

In the Saudi context, leadership as a concept has very limited usage. The term leadership is exclusively used to refer to military or high-ranking government officials. Alternatively, words such as manager, administrator, head, organiser, director, and supervisor are used to refer to those who take up leadership positions. The limited use of the term 'leadership' in different career fields, especially education, reflects the existing unwillingness of teachers to embrace a leadership role, or a refusal to allow them to take up a leadership role (Badawood, 2003).

In the primary school setting in Saudi, as compared to the English education system, the teacher's role in school leadership is limited. Many teachers find themselves engaging mainly in the day-to-day classroom managerial routine that mostly centres on how to teach creatively, how to assess students' growth, how to deal with learners' behaviour and how to manage the classroom effectively. These activities can be viewed as typical managerial roles that do not involve leadership. Management, in most cases, may involve routine maintenance operations and organisational arrangements. It may include recurring activities, such as writing reports, timetabling, or curriculum discussions and holding parent meetings (Burton and Brundrett, 2005). As a result of the workload and pressure associated with these managerial roles, most teachers are put in a position where they have limited time to think of their professional roles as teacher leaders (Alsalahi, 2014).

There are a number of reasons why teachers within the Saudi education system do not take up leadership roles in their profession. One of these reasons has to do with teachers' perception and beliefs about leadership roles. In this regard, Alsalahi (2014) notes that teachers' perception and beliefs about leadership are mainly developed in the course of their training or university studies. While undertaking their preparatory programs, teachers' beliefs regarding teaching work roles and ways of managing their profession are shaped. It follows that many teacher training programs in Saudi do not effectively capture the essence, depth and breadth of teacher leadership. They tend to focus instead

on technical pedagogy rather than the practical roles that teachers can play to improve school outcomes. In this regard, Alabaas (2010) notes that many programs fail to effectively introduce teacher trainees to a critical pedagogy of teaching. Furthermore, most of these programmes are theoretical and mechanical in nature and largely deal with the managerial work of headteachers, while overlooking teacher leadership areas (Fullan, 1993). From this perspective, school teachers and middle leaders become agents who deliver the government perspectives of social and educational improvement.

In addition to this, Alabaas (2010) argues that the day-to-day leadership practices of headteachers impact on teachers' beliefs about good leadership practices. This, coupled with the top-down managerial and supervisory practices of regional supervisions, affects teachers' beliefs negatively, since many headteachers and supervisors tend to be authoritarian. Consequently, many teachers form the belief that leadership is the preserve of headteachers and regional supervisors (Alabaas, 2010; Alsalahi, 2014).

The dynamics in many schools in the Saudi system – including managerial decisions, work conditions, lack of support, volatile relations and social status, as well as changes in education practices – make it difficult for teachers to receive the recognition they deserve as individuals capable of leadership in their profession. Consequently, most teachers in this system are kept out of leadership roles and remain followers or classroom managers (Alsalahi, 2014).

From a related angle, reviewing the Arabic literature reveals that although there were some attempts to create unique conceptions of the meanings and understandings of leadership and management (Al-Orabi, 2011; Reda, 2014), the majority of Arabic studies are built upon literal linguistic English translations of educational literature where the words “*Qayid*” and “*mudir*”, which mean leader and manager, respectively, are used as synonymous (Lahlop, 2012). From the perspective of Reda (2014) and Romanowski

(2014). the issue of leadership in schools in the Arab world is over-complicated, because it is not only driven by Western neoliberal ideology, which encourages building up the knowledge and skills required by imported products, but also because such ideology is embraced by governments without actual consideration of the cultural, religious and philosophical differences.

When the Saudi government, for example, announced that the position of “school managers” had been replaced with that of ‘school leaders’, people working in these positions in schools did not experience improvement because, in reality, the principals are undertaking managers’ responsibilities and roles rather than leaders’ roles and responsibilities. The actual shift from ‘middle manager’ into ‘middle leader’ might have better been first agreed in practice among the middle leaders themselves, by evaluating and analysing the embraced policies and reforms and creating a channel of communication. Romanowski (2014) theorises that reform of educational polices in Arabic countries, including the Gulf region, did not happen as a result of internal need, but rather due to external forces. This reform led to further confusion due to lack of understanding of the needs of the new position and how the shift was achieved in practice.

This reflects the deep influence of the wave of globalisation following westernisation, as a new style of colonisation, on knowledge and research in the Arab world. Mufwene and Vigouroux (2008) highlight the point that the cultural influence of Arabic as a language of knowledge has been marginalised, referring to the role of Western colonisation and domination in economics, politics and education. Abdurrahman (2015), who is one of the most well-known modern Arab and Islamic philosophers and whose research focuses on logic and languages, argues that the major struggle of most Arabic researchers and thinkers is that they are thinking and producing knowledge with a colonised mindset. Furthermore, some researchers attempt to liberate the mind but struggle with linguistic expression and discourse, because British and American English dominate the literature.

Abdurrahman (2015) encourages Arab principals and funders to establish research centres to develop the communication in Arabic of the current development of research, as a way of actual liberation, insisting that the power of a nation comes from the power of research language. This is because language holds the identity and the power of the culture and reflects the influence of a nation on the development of knowledge and humanity. Thus, liberating the conception of leadership in schools from the control of the linguistic imperialism of English requires collaborative work between theory-writers, policy makers and leaders in schools to connect between the political, theoretical and practical dimensions.

One of the theoretical foundations for understanding the context of middle leaders is to consider the culture that exists surrounding the context. Middle leaders are embedded in multiple different contexts, from the national environment (i.e. Saudi Arabia or England) as well as the institutional culture surrounding education. To consider aspects of culture, Hofstede (2003) identified multiple value dimensions that attempted to explain why people act and react in the way that they do. He identified differences in the power – distance relationships, identifying how people view the role of power. He links this to the value of individualism and collectivism, which he suggests explains the desire of individuals to work for their own personal gain (individual) or for their country/community (collectivist). The power distance and individual collectivist values are intertwined, in that hierarchical societies are more likely to be collectivistic, whereas the opposite is true of individualistic nations. Making this distinction assumes culture at a national level, but when culture is examined at the community level, the clearly defined boundaries may become muddied. This is because how people act in a job role may require different skills than those of nationalistic pride. Saudi Arabia can be largely collectivistic, in general, with its hierarchical underpinnings of government and religion. In contrast, England can be individualistic, with people generally out for personal gain. It

is the job of the middle leader to navigate these cultural value dimensions in situations where there is not always clarity.

## **2.4 Leadership and the Role of Middle Management**

In this section, the roles of principals in general are explored before moving to the examination of middle leaders (MLs) in England in the legislative context. This is followed by an explanation of the development of middle leaders (MLs) in Saudi.

### **2.4.1 Defining Leadership**

Bush and Glover (2003; 2014) argue that although there are wide ranges of definitions of leadership in schools, there are a few central elements that shape principals' roles, including the middle management team; these are:

1. *Leadership is a social influencing process*, hence, the power applied by one individual or group should be accepted by other individuals or groups to create the structure of activities and relationships (Bush and Glover, 2003). For example, although instructional leadership can be seen as an influencing process because it is able to establish different relationships with pedagogy and curriculum, such leadership focuses too much on the assumption that the principal is the centre of expertise, power and authority which leads, in turn, to ignoring the role of other leaders such as middle leader teams (Hallinger, 2003).
2. *Leadership is built upon core values*; learning is about the development of the whole person and is a core value in schools; learning must be available to every member in the community as everyone's value is acknowledged (Bush and Glover, 2003). Schools were created to serve the community. To thrive, learners need trust, encouragement and praise. A good leader is a person who can represent the community's moral purpose and values. Pont et al. (2016) stressed that all

principals in primary schools, including the middle management team, are expected to work collaboratively to enhance the culture of learning among schools, where knowledge is the core (Pont et al. 2016). The report of the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTC) (2012) stressed that middle leaders are expected to work in line with schools' visions and values to support the school, departmental and faculty improvement agenda.

3. *Vision, or a mental image of a thriving future, is a main principle of school leadership* (Bush and Glover, 2003). Capowski (1994) suggests that leaders need to have fundamental attributes such as vision, integrity, trust, selflessness, commitment, creative ability, toughness, communication ability, risk taking, and visibility, to lead, while managers need to have clear vision of how to make the required decisions and which processes must be tackled to achieve the organisational goal. Mike Cladingbowl, an Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) inspector, stated in 2013 that “middle leaders are enthusiasts for their subject, good managers and administrators – but to be truly effective they embrace the more challenging characteristics of leadership, which are to do with vision, strategy and a drive towards improvement”.

Good managers are, therefore, leaders who can take on the challenge of making the vision and strategies of headteachers and senior managers to become reality (OFSTED, cited in Nelson and Quinn, 2016). Bush and Glover (2002) argued that ‘vision’ can operate at different levels and successful leaders are those who can articulate and develop their vision with respect to their professional and personal values to influence all stakeholders and transfer the vision to become a shared vision. The problem, as described by Bush and Glover (2014), is that transformational leadership in England can be critical, as leaders and middle leaders have been seen as institutional agents of adherence to government policies rather than powerful principals who are able to engage all stakeholders to achieve



the school's educational objectives. Fullan (1992) stresses that highly powered principals find themselves in a position where they need to manipulate others' cultures, because they are blinded by their own visions. Bolam et al. (1993), in their study of 12 leaders of effective schools, found that most leaders were "closely in line with what one might expect of the British system of education" (P.35).

#### **2.4.2 Middle Management and Leadership in English Primary Schools**

This section explores the nature of middle leadership in the context of English primary schools, providing insight on what it entails and how it has been manifested over the years within the English school system. In order to understand what middle leadership entails, it is important to contextualise how it is manifested within different school settings. Middle leadership varies from one school system to another (Ruding, 2002). The context is important for educators to be able to draw comparisons and establish factors that influence practice and identify best practices for achieving positive outcomes.

##### ***2.4.2.1 Legislative Development***

The recognition of leadership as a distributed phenomenon in schools in both policy and practice has been characterised by the emergence of a body of literature that focuses on the notion and roles of middle leaders (Bennett, 1999; Wise and Bush, 1999; Blandford, 2006). This literature has identified the emergence of middle leadership, its evolving role in education management and its increasing importance in the realisation of education outcomes and school performance (Bennett, 1995; Earley, and Weindling, 2004; Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain, 2011). Middle leadership has been described as a label for teachers who oversee a subject, department and/or have a pastoral responsibility within an educational organisation (Gunter, 2001:106). Middle leaders in schools occupy a position in the leadership hierarchy between senior management and teachers. The term

is commonly used to refer to teachers who perform formal leadership roles that have both managerial and pedagogical responsibilities within the school, aside from the headteacher and senior leaders (Southworth, 2004; Busher et al. 2007).

Middle leadership focuses on formal leadership positions related to middle management and subject leadership, rather than on the broad capabilities of teachers to lead within the school organisation (Heng and Marsh, 2009). Middle leadership, then, epitomises a contemporary wave of leadership that operates alongside the broader concept of distributed leadership and needs to be understood and implemented accordingly in order to improve school performance and overall outcomes (Earley and Weindling, 2004; Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain, 2011).

Fleming and Amesbury (2013) explore what middle leadership within the primary school context entails. They observe that the term 'leadership' is a relatively new concept particularly within the primary school context. For decades, primary school headteachers and teachers did not consider themselves to be anything close to leaders. However, with time, as some research studies began to emphasise the importance of leadership in the improvement of school outcomes, the Department for Education and Employment (DFEE) and OFSTED began to embrace the notion that middle leadership can be pivotal in enhancing best practice and improving educational outcomes. As a result, the need for middle leaders in primary schools began to appear regularly in school improvement and development plans (Fleming and Amesbury, 2013). In a bid to improve school outcomes, teachers gradually began to take up a series of additional duties extending from their typical teaching duties in the classroom (Danielson, 2006). Although -posts of extra responsibility- among primary school teachers had existed for many years within various education systems, the term 'middle leadership' was hardly used or recognised until more recently.

The increased pressure on senior leaders in the 1980s and 90s provided the impetus for distributed leadership and thus both directly caused its emergence and defined its nature (Dinham, 2005; Muijs and Harris, 2005; Spillane, 2006). To corroborate this, Brown et al. (2000) note that societal, cultural, and legislative changes that took place in the late 1980s brought about the role played by middle leaders. More specifically, a movement towards the legislative recognition of middle-leadership began under Prime Minister Tony Blair, whose party produced a Green Paper in 1998 entitled *Teachers: Meeting the Challenge of Change* that established a vision to improve standards and recognised that this required ‘a broader leadership group’ (Secretary of State for Education and Employment, p.17). They aimed to do this through investment in training, recognition of different levels of teachers in the form of ASTs (Advanced Skills Teachers), and the incentivisation of excellence through a new appraisal and pay progression scheme. This appraisal scheme would also serve to identify bad practice in order to direct appropriate professional development.

Though the government did not “wish to impose any single model” on schools and had a view to fostering innovative schools, (Secretary of State for Education and Employment, P.13), the Teachers’ Training Agency (TTA), now known as the Teachers’ Development Agency (TDA), did begin to produce guidelines on various forms of middle leadership, which it admitted would vary between schools, based on the environment. For example, in the same year as the Green Paper, the TTA produced a paper on the National Standards for Subject Leaders (1998). This paper advocated a change in title from ‘curriculum coordinator’ to ‘subject leader’ in order to further develop “how experienced and effective coordinators provide leadership in their subject” (TTA, 1998:3). The TTA stressed both the leadership and managerial qualities needed in a subject leader. These include directing the vision for the subject through an ‘action plan’ (TTA, 1998:10), driving it forward by enthusing other teachers with that vision, using effective resources and managing them

efficiently with a mind to achieving good value for money, and leading and managing staff through both motivation and professional development, as well as effective delegation.

In addition to these leadership and management aspects, subject leaders should also demonstrate -high quality teaching in the subject- and understand ‘the main strategies for improving and sustaining high standards of teaching, learning and achievement’, in other words they should be good practitioners. The TTA document does not stress administrative duties. It does, however, encourage the efficient use of ICT to aid in subject management. This is directly related to the Government’s wish to “help relieve teachers of the bureaucratic burden” through technology (Secretary of State for Education and Employment, 1998:13). In any case, the elements advocated by the TTA here offer a similar picture to that offered by Fleming of good middle leadership in 2000. What must be discussed, however, is whether these practices and the skills advocated by the national standards for subject leadership, as well as those in other areas such as Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), were effectively put in place, and whether they gained any success.

#### ***2.4.2.2 Legislation in Practice***

Middle leaders have been found to play an essential role in the maintenance and development of the nature and quality of the pupil’s learning experience (Teddlie and Reynolds 2000; Harber and Davies, 2006). Their roles and responsibilities have been found by some to be the fulcrum of change and responsible for a restructuring in the education system. Within their schools, middle leaders have been increasingly recognised as the main change agents (Bell and Ritchie, 1999; Pont et al. 2016). According to Pont et al. (2016), middle leaders play a more crucial role in shaping school culture than headteachers. This is largely attributed to the roles that they play in communicating,

liaising, and acting as agents of change and role models in the school setting. Harris et al. (2001) show the important role played by department heads as middle leaders, and while the focus of that study is on secondary schools, the findings can be applied to primary schools to better understand the importance of the role played by middle leaders. The study found that middle leaders contribute to improvement in learning outcomes by monitoring teaching practice and identifying areas for change and improvement. They achieve this by creating a vision for their department, taking charge, monitoring staff performance and observing their colleagues' classroom practice; using the results of their observation to discuss and improve practice as well as keeping detailed records of individual student performance to enable them to track performance over time. Consequently, the effective performance of middle leadership is expected to have a positive impact on learner outcomes at any education level by setting and maintaining practice standards, as well as identifying areas for improvement and change (Heng and Marsh, 2009).

However, Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain (2011) investigated the development of middle leadership in relation to these government initiatives, drawing on work undertaken by Hammersley-Fletcher and others between 1996 and 2007. They demonstrate an awareness of the wider context, noting that greater accountability to the government and the public through transparency, assessment and monitoring has meant middle leaders 'may be placed in a position where their actions and priorities are heavily influenced by wider political agendas' (Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain, 2011:876). Indeed, bodies such as the Department of Education and the Office for Standards in Education can directly influence the job of a middle leader through curriculum setting, although Cladingbowl (2013) notes that the two bodies have encouraged middle leaders to be involved in decision-making processes such as curriculum development and planning. Whether the context is a negative or positive influence is subject to interpretation and

change, however it does indicate that the room to innovate is constrained and as such may reduce a middle leader's ability to actually lead. Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain found that "their ability to innovate and instigate change was very dependent upon the head" (2011:879), although they also noted that this traditional hierarchy had devolved power over time in an emphasis on practices of consultation.

The extent to which middle leaders are able to instigate change in English primary schools is one of the key aspects that this research explores. However, Hammersley-Fletcher (2007) suggests that in the efforts to reform education exerted by the government over time, the middle leader role becomes a form of control over colleagues. It was noticeable from some of the quotations relating to this research data that MLs were not interested in controlling others, rather in working collaboratively. These authors also point out that from 2004-2007 significant discussion was being directed towards the implementation of change. As a result, middle leaders were being consulted and engaged in change initiatives.

Other areas, which did not seem to become fully functioning as quickly as the TTA and Government had planned, included monitoring and evaluating, and the peer review function of middle leaders. Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain (2011) note that the majority of monitoring was performed through an assessment of students' work rather than teacher observation, with only 'modest' peer review of teaching being carried out in the schools visited. Similarly, Glover et al. (1998) noticed a reticence on the part of middle leaders in secondary schools to perform formal monitoring of their colleagues, but this was only just after the new element of monitoring and evaluating had been introduced in the roles of middle leaders and therefore arguably could be expected. In all, it was clear that middle leaders did begin to consider themselves as leaders as time went by (Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain, 2011).

Positive elements that had been firmly established in primary schools were the practitioner aspects, in that middle leaders felt they had to lead by example and have specialist knowledge of their subject. Likewise, the responsibility for excellence in teaching and learning standards had been conferred onto middle leaders such as subject leaders, who were aware of their need for specialist knowledge and the need to motivate and help other teachers develop their subject. This in turn fosters a collegiate atmosphere of collaborative discussion, which leads to decisions on best practice approaches and improving school performance. The function of a teacher leader has been shown to reveal a wealth of positive results for the individual teacher, other staff members, and school improvement more generally. For example, Barth (2001) writes:

“Teachers who become leaders experience personal and professional satisfaction, a reduction in isolation, a sense of instrumentality, and new learning – all of which spill over into their teaching. As school-based reformers, these teachers become owners and investors in the school, rather than mere tenants... They become professionals” (Barth, 2001:443).

Though Barth is specifically discussing the US here, his assertion can also be directed towards other schools – it indicates an awareness that if those who teach can participate in the running of the school, not just the running of their classroom, they will be more inclined to further their professional development and become more instrumental in school improvement. Furthermore, an education practitioner described his experience of the duality of being a teacher and leader as follows:

“My leadership role has given me an eye-opening, unique perspective on education reform and how changes in my profession will shape the policies and practices in my own classroom... [I’ve] been able to remain in the classroom, grounded in the realities of day-to-day teaching” (in Barth, 2001:443).

It is thus reasonable to consider that the positioning of a middle leader between the more formal position of headteacher, and the position of teacher is most accurately reflected in the hybridity of their leadership and practitioner capacities, allowing them to act as a bridge between the two, firmly grounded in the classroom, but expanding beyond that reach. Indeed Hammersley-Fletcher and Adnett (2009) suggest that the control of a school should be firmly embedded within the school itself, and not with a centralised system; this would then allow more decision-making opportunities to take place outside the classroom. Shah (2015) suggests that leadership is specifically being linked to student achievement and to the performance of schools, positioning the middle leader as a fundamental element in the educational settings.

Middle leaders in English primary schools have, over the years, been subjected to a wide range of political initiatives that have defined their role or operation in various leadership capacities within the school, though De Nobile (2018) suggests that the definitions and recent shift in terminology has generally been a positive one. External control by the government, especially over the curriculum, in order to improve learning standards and ensure accountability, has for the past decade influenced the roles of middle managers in English primary school (Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain 2011). Although in theory middle leaders are expected to take up more leadership roles, in practice there is a wide range of variables such as societal expectations, institutional conditions and norms and external controls by government which mediate and hinder their autonomy in the execution of their specific roles. The government's vision and subsequent remodelling initiative (DfES, 2002) have significantly contributed to the reconfiguration of leadership in the development of middle leaders in English primary schools, as well as to the conditions of leadership in schools being put under further pressure. Moreover, this change is continually reforming and being renewed by professional development,



investigations into good practice, and development across teaching and management structures in English schools.

### **2.4.3 Middle Management and Leadership in Saudi's Primary Schools**

Over the last few years, and more precisely since 2014, the King of Saudi Arabia has promoted different changes to the education system there. Some of these changes have targeted middle management staff and the title of the position has been changed from middle manager to middle leader. Nevertheless, there is no evidence on how things have changed in daily managerial practice and responsibilities. This research may therefore be considered timely, as it attempts to provide further insight into what this reform has promoted in middle leadership and suggests future developments and changes.

Very little research has been directed towards exploring the nature of middle management and the nature of the role that middle management staff play in Saudi primary schools. Nevertheless, a few studies provide insight into the structures and policies in the Saudi education system that is likely to affect this role and contextualise its evolution. Al-Sadan (2000) observes that following the establishment of the Saudi educational system in 1924, a few primary schools for boys were instituted. Education in primary schools was very simple and mainly involved the study of religion. In 1938, the Directorate of Education was established to control all educational affairs (Rugh, 2002). In 1953, the Ministry of Education replaced the Directorate of Education. The General Presidency for Girls' Education was further established in 1963 as a subsidiary (Al-Hakami, 2010) and, in 2003, the Ministry of Education took direct responsibility for overseeing education in girls' schools (Ministry of Education, 2005). Over time, an extensive educational framework was established, and more schools were built in order to improve educational outcomes. According to data by the Ministry of Education (2006), by 2005 there were approximately 30,000 primary schools in Saudi Arabia.

Despite these milestones, concerns were being raised about the quality and substance of education in Saudi Arabia. It was felt that the learning outcomes realised were not on par with changes in the global environment. Consequently, the Saudi government began to institute numerous educational reforms, in order to improve educational standards and, at the same time, ensure that the education delivered was in line with Islamic principles and values (Cordesman, 2008; Al-Hakami, 2010).

As part of the education reforms instituted, among its many roles, the Ministry of Education was charged with the responsibility to oversee the development of the curriculum and the management, inspection and supervision of schools. In this regard, Kurdi (2011) notes that despite many developments and reforms, one of the notable aspects of Saudi's education system is that it is highly centralised and provides very little autonomy to educators operating at the lower levels of the system. Aqil (2005) and Cladingbowl (2013) also note that the structures set in the Saudi education system are characterised by a high level of government control. Similarly, Al-Sadan (2000) argues that, due to the power accorded to the Ministry of Education, there is very little autonomy in the delivery of educational services. The government, through the Ministry of Education, controls almost all aspects of education. This includes a high level of involvement in the formulation of education policy, the development of the curriculum, and the implementation of the syllabus. Al-Sadan (2000) further notes that as the main authority and provider of educational services and facilities, the Ministry of Education dictates major aspects of learning, such as learning content and materials, school timetables, teaching schedules, and assessment. Kurdi (2011) states that the Ministry of Education oversees the school budget, monitors staff performance, provides guidance on the delivery of the syllabus and initiates changes in schools. Furthermore, the Ministry enforces the Saudi educational policy, which requires that, in every aspect of education, Islamic principles and values are upheld (Al-Sadan, 2000). Thus, headteachers and other

teachers have little or no influence in the implementation of the curriculum, change management or management of the delivery of instruction to learners (Al-Sadan, 2000).

Assessment and supervision are also largely performed by the Ministry of Education through the regulatory authority of the regional School Supervisor Offices (Al-Salloom, 1995; Abdul-Kareem, 2001). Each office is led by a Director of Supervisors who oversees the school supervisors who monitor, inspect, and provide support to teachers and the overall management of the school (Abdul-Kareem, 2001; Cordesman, 2008). In essence, all teachers are managed under the regulatory authority of regional school supervisors. Abdul-Kareem (2001) observes that, in addition to supporting and providing guidance to teachers, the Ministry of Education, through the regional school supervisors, carries out administrative and instructional monitoring and inspections to ensure that the educational standards they set are being met (Abdul-Kareem, 2001).

Although there are no specific studies exploring the nature of the role of middle leaders in Saudi primary schools, Jeffrey and Troman (2009) suggest that Foucault's genealogical approach, that analyses discourse in relation to social structure and the effects of power, can provide a suitable framework for understanding the nature of management in different contexts. Based on this framework, schools are arenas where contesting discourses are monitored and controlled, vetoed, or allowed by those with power (the government). As middle leadership in Saudi primary schools is based in a highly centralised, bureaucratic system characterised by government limitations on autonomy, in practical terms the concept of shared or distributed leadership, which forms the basis for middle leadership in England and elsewhere, is non-existent in public (government) schools (Al-Sadan, 2000).

#### ***2.4.3.1 The Role of Middle Managers/ Leaders in Saudi Primary Schools***

Al-Sadan (2000) argues that most aspects of education in Saudi's education system, such as curriculum content, teachers, assessment, facilities, and administration, are predetermined and, therefore, middle managers are likely to have little or no influence over them (Al-Sadan, 2000; Al Sadaawi, 2010).

According to Fleming (2002), the role of middle managers is largely dependent on the organisational culture in the wider context, which largely influences and restrains their actions. Since most Saudi primary schools have hierarchical and traditional organisational culture, there is a likelihood that middle managers have clear role boundaries. In this case, the roles of middle managers are confined within the already predefined rules and procedures of the school (Fleming, 2002).

According to Fitzgerald (2002), in most primary schools with a traditional organisational model the majority of administrative leadership roles and decisions solely rest on the headteacher. Given that most Saudi primary schools have such a model, it is likely that headteachers already carry out the motivating and guiding of teachers and encourage good practice. As a result, a large part of the middle manager role (as understood in England and elsewhere) may not actually be delegated by headteachers (Fitzgerald, 2002).

### **2.5 Factors Influencing the Roles and the Responsibilities of Middle Leaders in Primary Schools**

A considerable number of studies have focused primarily on examining the characteristics and functions of middle leaders (Bennett, 1995; Earley and Weindling, 2004). Nevertheless, few studies have looked into the context in which middle leaders operate and how this affects the nature of their work (Cullingford, 1997; Fleming, 2002).

This section considers the complications of the debate about different notions related to the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders in primary schools, who are operating and practicing in organisations that have their own structure and are controlled by the power of rules, regulations, policies and agendas. The guide created by the Pont et al. (2016) stressed that conceptualising schools as organisations means that each will have their own unique culture. According to Fullan (2007), school culture can be defined as the guiding beliefs and values evident in the way a school operates. Teasley (2017) advocates more studies of organisational culture in schools because this has not been considered deeply enough when professional standards have been reformed.

The report provided by the National College for Schools leadership (Carter, 2003) to shape the role and purpose of middle leaders in schools identified different types of culture that influence the responsibilities and practices of middle leaders, namely institutional culture, departmental culture and structural resources. The report distinguished between two different cultures shaping the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders. Firstly, the external environmental culture, which is outside the school boundaries, including:

“the compulsory appraisal of staff, curriculum changes, OFSTED and the development of the inspection framework, and TTA (Teacher Training Agency) statements about the ‘core purpose’ of the subject leader – have generated uncertainty and a desire for professional development and training” (P.9).

Secondly, internal culture or organisational culture is the culture inside the boundaries of the school, including the relationship with the head-teacher, senior management teams, leadership style or the ‘seat of power’.

## **2.5.1 Organisational Culture: Communities of Practice, School Hierarchical Structure and the Size of the School**

Teasley (2017) argues that the concept of organisational culture has been borrowed from management literature in education because schools have been conceptualised as organisations that have a unique culture, understood as a set of values, common morals, rules and regulations, which are all shaped by policy and articulate the relationships between school community members. McCollum and Yader (2011) stress that the organisational culture in schools plays an important role in enhancing creativity and advocating excellence, adding that organisational culture interacts with leadership values, which are shaped by a larger national and political culture. Schein (2016) sees that the relationship between organisational culture and leadership is very close, as leadership creates and changes culture, and culture shapes leadership in organisations. A recent study, carried out by Asker (2012) and written in Arabic, examines the relationship between participatory leadership and organisational culture from the perspective of school leaders in Gaza. He found that organisational culture in schools is shaped by three main factors:

- The relationships of power between different stakeholders internally and externally, which are articulated by language (discourse), structure, rules, regulations and policy. This also includes autonomous power to make decisions and promote changes.
- The personal values and cultures of leaders, middle leaders and teachers, including other factors such as religious values, national cultural values, political system values and trust.
- Principals and decision-makers look at the methods which can be used to transfer values into actions (behaviour) to support creativity and innovation, a ‘democratic professionalism’ insisting on the role of the behaviour policies

and 'discipline reward' systems in shaping the roles and responsibilities of leaders.

Fleming (2002) introduces organisational culture as an interesting dimension pertaining to the nature of middle leadership, stressing that the functions and roles of middle leadership practice are largely dependent on the organisational culture.

According to Robbins et al. (2013), organisational culture is a system of shared beliefs and meanings held by organisational members; it distinguishes one organisation from another. On the other hand, Pfister (2009) observes that organisational culture is a pattern of basic assumptions that members of an organisation have invented or discovered in order to cope with internal and external problems. Fleming (2002) argues that middle leaders in schools operate in the wider context of organisational culture, which to a great extent influences and constrains their actions. This implies that the organisational culture of a school can have a significant impact on decisions, behaviours, and outcomes.

A study carried out by George and Jayan (2012) found that shared values, beliefs, norms and assumptions within an organisation can affect personal and team effectiveness (George and Jayan, 2012). These findings are consistent with the findings of studies conducted by Sharma and Sharma (2010) and Zhang (2012). Similarly, a study by Shahzad et al. (2012) found that organisational culture can affect the performance of members of the organisation.

Similarly, Cullingford (1997) and George and Jayan (2012) support the idea that organisational culture may determine the nature of middle leadership in primary schools. In essence, the role and functions of middle leadership practice are largely dependent on organisational culture. According to Cullingford (1997), primary schools have their own unique culture. In many primary schools, the ethos focuses on fostering close working relationships amongst teachers.

This is, in turn, reflected in the reality of practice, which stresses collaboration and collegiality. Furthermore, Cullingford (1997) argues that many primary schools tend to have a culture of openness and responsiveness. Significantly, these aspects of organisational culture, evident in many primary schools, come into play in middle leadership. However, considering the changes and reforms that have occurred in the educational sector over the years, these cultures of openness and responsiveness may also have changed.

Ganser (2000) and McLaughlin and Zarrow (2001) argue that effective professional development can be implemented within a particular context. This context is based in schools and connected to the daily activities of teachers. In this case, schools are transformed into Communities of Practice (CoPs), where teachers are regarded as learners in their professional communities (Newmann and King, 2000). According to Wenger (2011), CoPs are fundamental in improving the performance in the educational/workplace setting. Considerable evidence in the literature suggests that effective professional development is related to collaboration between teachers working together reflectively in order to improve practice (Lee, 2007; Stoll and Loius, 2007; Jones and Harris, 2014). In this context, the professional development of teachers occurs as a collaborative process characterised by meaningful interactions among teachers, with some taking up leadership roles in these processes (Busher et al. 2007). The notion of the existence of a CoP is not entirely of the systems theory tradition, as it is rooted in both anthropology and social theory (Wenger, 2011). It is both simple and complex in its design and offers participants the opportunity to develop a social discipline of learning (Wenger, 2011) making it essential for groups such as middle leaders.

In the school context, and in order to demonstrate how aspects of organisational culture come into play in middle leadership, Busher et al. (2007) take into account the concept of CoPs. They note that clear understandings of the nature of the work of middle leaders can



be effectively investigated by considering different aspects of their relationships with members of their communities of practice. CoPs can be considered as groups of people in the same profession, who meet and engage regularly in a bid to enhance the quality of their practice and professional development (Cox, 2005). CoPs are essentially based on collegiality and collaboration amongst educators. They are characterised by cooperative relationships, where members share ideas and experiences, provide constructive feedback, collaborate in learning activities, encourage best practice and evaluate each other's progress. These practices play a critical role in enhancing the professional development of academic staff (Anthony and Harris, 2001; Mittendorff et al. 2006; Shah, 2015). Similarly, other studies have suggested that CoPs lead to improved teaching and learning (Cremers and Valkenburg, 2008; Bouchamma and Michaud, 2011).

As far as the engagement of middle leaders and teachers is concerned, CoPs often provide an avenue for the provision of guidance and feedback, monitor and evaluate the practice of other teachers. However, since CoPs are based on the notion of collegiality and collaboration (Anthony and Harris, 2001; Shah, 2015), it is essential that middle leaders are not construed as the 'controlling authority' but rather as the 'voice of reason' so as to ensure open sharing and collaboration by all teachers (Barton and Tusting, 2005). In this regard, Busher et al. (2007) argue that, within their CoPs, middle leaders who have some form of authority to supervise the work of teachers tend to employ a collaborative approach. They facilitate knowledge sharing and interactions among teachers. Negotiation of meaning is paramount in the way in which they operate and engage with other teachers (Busher et al. 2007).

Burnard and White (2008) further highlight the importance of CoPs in promoting creativity. As middle leadership is essentially based on collegiality and collaboration amongst staff, the role is characterised by the promotion of cooperative relationships, where staff are requested to share ideas and experiences, provide constructive feedback,

collaborate in learning activities, encourage best practice and evaluate each other's progress. These practices play a critical role in enhancing the professional development of academic staff (Anthony and Harris, 2001; Shah, 2015). Similarly, CoP culture becomes embedded, where a group of people come together with the intention to share professional knowledge and practices (Wenger, 1998; Cox, 2005). Through these interactions, educators can disseminate resources and tools, share experiences and ideas, and come up with solutions that facilitate best practice. This may in turn lead to the improvement of knowledge and practice and further enhance creativity (Sherer et al. 2003; Gannon-Leary and Fontainha, 2007).

The level of collegiality may be much more prevalent in primary schools that take a more autonomous view and distribute leadership. Feedback and monitoring are methods used to support a group of teachers and enhance their performance, but in practice the government requests middle leaders to perform the same responsibilities as a 'controlling authority' rather than as the 'voice of reason'. The conflict between these perspectives leads to increased tensions between the government and middle leadership. The CoP culture, which is the culture of middle leaders, can be influenced by the hierarchical structure of the school. This is evident in Fleming's (2002) statement, when he asserts that the nature of middle leadership in a primary school is largely influenced by organisational culture. For example, in schools with hierarchical or traditional organisational culture it is likely that there are clear job descriptions, procedures and role boundaries set out for each staff. Therefore, in this case the functions or roles of middle leaders may be confined within already predefined job descriptions, rules and procedures of the school (Fleming, 2002). In support of Fleming's views, studies carried out by Denison et al. (2004) and Hartnell et al. (2011) found that organisational culture may have a significant impact on the behaviour and functions of members within the organisation. Conversely Johns and Saks (2005) refute the claim that an organisation's culture has an

impact on the functions or performance of its members. These studies suggest that individual factors and factors in the external environment, including government regulations, individual motivation and the availability of resources, have more impact on the functions or performance of members within the organisation. However, it remains likely that organisational culture does have an impact on middle leadership roles, and it appears that the research points to it having a significant impact.

Hammersley-Fletcher (2005) observes that the deference to hierarchically appointed middle leaders raises questions pertaining to how power affects the negotiation of shared meanings between middle leaders and teachers trying to function and engage effectively. She further argues that this is an issue that affects negotiations about whether or not teachers in primary schools are recognised formally as co-equals, since each negotiation is likely to involve a struggle between the beliefs and values of middle leaders and other teachers. This is because the functions or role of middle leaders are largely shaped by bureaucratic or formal sources of power (Hammersley-Fletcher, 2005).

Bennett et al. (2007) note that there are several structural issues pertaining to the conceptualisation of hierarchies within the school that significantly influence middle leadership in a primary school context. There are two key issues in particular that have been identified in the existing literature (Bennett et al. 2007). The first issue revolves around monitoring. Since teachers who act as middle leaders perform the role of monitoring other teachers to ensure quality in learning and teaching, their role may be conceptualised differently. Their role may be conceptualised hierarchically based on the assurance process. It may be considered as a collegial process of mutual learning. It may also be conceptualised as a surveillance role. As a result, this role can be resented by other teachers. The way in which other teachers conceptualise the role of middle leaders may significantly affect their influence and effectiveness at work (Bennett et al. 2007; Hammersley-Fletcher and Kirkham, 2007). The conceptualisation of strong hierarchies

creates fertile ground for the emergence of certain subcultures, thus leading to an organisational culture characterised by fragmentation and differentiation. However, Dimmock and Lee (1999) argue that this type of conceptualisation can act as a barrier to change and whole staff involvement. Identities such as superior and sub-ordinate are likely to develop gradually, thus inhibiting free and open engagement between middle leaders and other teachers (Dimmock and Lee, 1999). The perception among teachers that middle leaders are superior to their subordinates could hinder the collegial process of professional development. Some teachers may become less open and honest in the course of the monitoring process (Dimmock and Lee, 1999; Bennett et al. 2007). The view of Bennett et al. (2007), concerning teachers who act as middle leaders by taking up the role of monitoring other teachers, is somewhat limited since it overlooks issues that are likely to arise in the course of the monitoring process. A more in-depth examination of these issues is therefore necessary.

Secondly, in a case where the role of middle leaders is conceptualised as a collegial process of mutual learning the idea of monitoring and evaluation may be resisted (Bennett et al. 2007). This conceptualisation generally implies that teachers acting as middle leaders are largely equal in status with other teachers. In small schools particularly, all teachers may be considered to be middle leaders. Therefore, they foster collegiality by trusting other teachers to discharge their duties without being monitored. In such a collegial atmosphere, the middle leader assumes that the teachers are accountable professionals, who can be trusted to enhance their competence pedagogically and keep up-to-date their subject knowledge, with the result that monitoring is kept to a minimum (Bennett et al. 2007). Harris and Chapman (2002) argue that although different conceptualisations of middle leadership are apparent, the role of middle leaders in many primary schools exists within strong hierarchical structures that define the nature of their work.

Furthermore, as Cladingbowl (2013) observes, although middle leaders are expected to be involved in decision making processes, such as curriculum development and planning, there is a large gap between what is expected and what actually happens. In various school contexts, the function of middle leadership has been subjected to different political initiatives that have defined their role or function in various leadership capacities within the school. Since many primary schools tend to have hierarchical models, the activities of teachers who take up middle leadership roles are often societal expectations, institutional conditions and norms (Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain, 2011). Hence, as previously postulated by Fleming (2002) and Cullingford (1997), organisational culture significantly determines the nature of middle leadership in primary schools.

Besides organisational culture, Hammersley-Fletcher and Kirkman (2007) argue that another major issue that shapes the nature of middle leadership in primary schools is the size of the school. They note that primary schools vary significantly in size. Some schools may have more students, more classes and more teaching staff. In small schools, where a few teachers undertake multiple roles, the role of middle leaders may become redundant since they have a very small number of people to lead and fewer tasks to manage. On the other hand, in large schools, middle leaders are likely to have a lot of work, since they have a large number of people to lead and more tasks to manage. It is likely that teachers who take up such roles may feel overwhelmed due to the size of their workload. On the other hand, in small schools, role confusion is likely to occur. In such a context, middle leadership functions may become unclear. Despite efforts to clearly define the role and responsibilities of middle leadership, the role itself continues to face disparate, unclear responsibilities, and the obligation to perform administrative rather than instructional tasks (Cullingford, 1997; Fitzgerald, 2002; Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain, 2011). Supovitz et al. (2010) further note that in some instances middle leaders may take up both formal management roles and informal roles such as offering support and motivation to

their peers. Such roles could take up a considerable amount of time or effort, thus making it difficult for these teachers to fully provide much-needed support in the classrooms or other school activities.

#### ***2.5.1.1 Differences between Saudi and English primary school contexts***

Middle leadership roles in both Saudi Arabia and England are defined by the context in which they operate. The differences can be attributed to dimensions of culture, which in Hofstede's (2009) view, reflect distinct values related to specific national cultures. Saudi Arabia has been defined as a society with large power distance (see At-Twajri and Al-Muhaiza, 1996), where power is distributed less equally; in education this translates to teacher-centred classes, leading to acceptance of this inequality at all levels. On the other hand, in England the primary schools are characterised by a small power distance society, where classes are student-centred, there may be less difference in hierarchy between teachers and students, and this may also be the case among different levels of management (Hofstede, 2009).

The expectations of middle leaders in these societies supposed to be fundamentally different. For example, middle leaders in Saudi Arabia may feel the need to comply with directives from above, in England middle leaders may want to question and debate those instructions. This difference relates to cultural components, which should not be underestimated when considering both contexts (see Hofstede, 2009; Hall, 2001).

Hierarchical organisations may be found in both contexts but in Saudi Arabia the head may not be quite as amenable to power-sharing as perhaps their English counterpart based on cultural assumptions (see Hofstede, 2009; Hall, 2001; Nias, 2002). In the classroom there is a greater sense of hierarchy in the Saudi classroom, meaning that the teachers may be more rigid in their teaching style (e.g. teacher does the talking, student is a passive learner) (Al-Sadan, 2000). However, in an English classroom the hierarchical structure

between teacher and student may be more relaxed (Nias, 2002). In management roles those in high power distance cultures tend to be more status-conscious, but in low power distance cultures, there is a more participative leadership behaviour (Goolaup and Ismayilov, 2011). Based on the literature, the different values ascribed to Saudi and English cultures may suggest that middle leaders may behave differently in each context.

The way that the educational setting is an important component to consider when attempting to determine how middle leaders in school might fit within the different contexts. While scholars such as Hofstede (2009) offer some insight into some of the differences that can be expected between a Saudi setting and an English one, culture is a far reaching topic where the philosophical underpinnings are essential to better understand the justification behind the study, which is why the work of Foucault also requires consideration.

### **2.5.2 Concepts of Power**

Foucault has offered the field of education a presentation of power in the modern period where he has classified it as a fluid and malleable network of social relations between individuals, groups and individuals (1995; 2002). Foucault suggested that it is impossible to ‘possess’ power because it is not tangible, but instead, power is “always already there” because it exists within multiple different relationships, and never outside of it. While individuals may never be ‘outside of’ power relations, Foucault suggests that it is, in fact, possible to change these relations (Apple, 1996). While there are instances where power can be seen as prohibitive, there are other instances where power can be utilized to bring success or fulfilment to a relationship. In order for this to be achieved according to Foucault, power must operate through a complex arrangement of strategies that are embedded in different relations and thus, power is exercised through the social body (Apple, 1996). Furthermore, while people can enact power, it is a rationality that can be

separated from the individual. Despite this separation, Foucault would argue that power relations exist (1995; 2002).

Foucault notes that power relations exist within other types of relations, which may include economic relations. In this case, Foucault draws attention to the ‘microphysics of power’ and highlights the impact that individual choices, behaviours, and interactions can have on relations (2002). These minute decisions help individuals to understand the links between the empirical and the theoretical components relating to power (i.e. as considering power as a conceptualization or as a methodology). As such, power operates at the micro levels of social relations and is omnipresent at each level of the social body (Apple, 2015). As Foucault suggests that the small choices that are made by an individual can have large effects on social relations, it is important to recognize that these “relations of power are among the best hidden things in the social body” (Foucault, 1998, as cited in Ball, 2012:119). In short, Foucault defines power as a relation, rather than a thing.

Foucault’s view of power is different from previous scholars (e.g. Marx, Gramsci) as he creates inherent links in his writing that connects power with knowledge. When he makes this connection, he highlights that it is productive and this becomes an essential component of Foucault’s definition of power. Foucault writes that “power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (Foucault, 1995). This mentality is essential for educational research because it differs from the more structuralist/historical views of power that are often focused on the hierarchy of institutions and of positional power. In Foucault’s view, power stems from the bottom up and takes on much more of a low profile. Instead of a rigorous interpretation of hierarchy, Foucault suggests that the minute decisions that occur among individuals can be grouped together, without any sort of logical order as a means for power to exist in a localized way. Disciplinary power,



according to Foucault and as it relates to schools, is a result of a series of these minute decisions as individuals attempt to objectify and or regulate individuals with the setting (i.e. the school). Thus, the exercise of power is strategic.

Moreover, it is imperative that the actions associated with power are understood. Under this assumption, it is imperative to understand that power only exists when put into action. According to Foucault, “We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes,’ it ‘represses,’ it ‘censors,’ it ‘abstracts,’ it ‘masks,’ it ‘conceals.’ In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production” (1991:194).

Using the theories of Foucault in considering educational leadership are particularly useful. His perspective on power means that more traditional neoliberal discourses can be challenged. Under neoliberalism, certain individuals are generally understood to be arbiters of best practice; in the case of a school, this would be the principal. This neoliberalist interpretation requires there to be a ‘best’ and assumes that one way is particularly ‘good’ or fundamentally ‘bad’ (Apple, 1996). Neoliberalist theory would have educators believe that if a solution is found in one educational context, it can be copied and pasted into other school settings without regard for culture, history, tradition, location and human relationships (Apple, 1996). Foucault’s theories move away from this rigid structural implementation and instead asks individuals to consider how both power and resistance are exercised within an educational setting and how this is related to the complex workings of different relationships.

There is an abundance of research that uses Foucault’s theories on power when considering aspects of educational curriculum (e.g. Hoskin, 1979), but there is considerably less research that uses Foucault as a theoretical foundation for educational

leadership. While some exceptions exist (e.g. Gillies, 2013), the resource *Foucault and Educational Leadership* written by Niesche (2011) is particularly helpful. This is because while Niesche (2011) investigates leadership of school principals, his use of Foucault's theories on power relations and the application to educational leadership offer potential insight to the topic of middle leadership. Specifically, Niesche (2011) uses three levels of power relations: the systemic level (governmentality), the school level (disciplinary) and the individual level (ethics). These levels are fundamentally built upon Foucault's views on power and are relevant to the educational leadership context within this thesis.

Foucault's contribution to our understanding of power suggests that power relations in society are conditioned by a culturally generated set of ideas and that these relations constitute a space of both pressure and resistance (Dalglish, 2009). The question of how individuals resist or react to the influences of power and how institutions in society use their position to exert their power on individuals or groups is pertinent to our discussion here. One of Foucault's observations is that any exertion of such power should not be considered as oppressive but rather as an opportunity for changing behaviours; he is more interested in how individuals have an active role in resisting power coming from above. Power relations are found in every kind of relationship; according to Foucault, the resistance that is always involved in such relationships is a productive factor and it is this emphasis on production of new ideas and new behaviours that Foucault's theory proposes that gives a positive connection to power relations.

All of these depictions of power involve relationships and it is important to understand the positioning of power in the relationship of middle leaders in the school management relationships. In some cases power is seen as a necessary component of good leadership and the success of the school. Barth suggests that teachers who become leaders get to become owners and investors in their school, rather than just tenants (Barth, 2001:443). As a result of this, he suggests that they become more invested. This investment, in itself,

is a component of personal power. It exemplifies the strength that it takes to become a leader in the educational sector and highlights the empowering function of leadership. Marzano et al. (2005) suggest that effective leadership is the driver for continuous change in the global educational context, and we can see this constant change highlighted in the educational framework in Saudi Arabia. In this case the development from a few primary schools for boys in 1924 to the implementation of a formal schooling system for girls in 2003 suggests that some power lies in the hands of teachers and educators (Al-Hakami, 2010; Cordesman, 2008). Without leadership and direction, it is unlikely that such changes would have emerged.

These changes in educational policy have occurred over a long period of time, which may be one reason why the middle leaders in schools feel frustrated over a lack of power. When immersed in the context, it seems easy to get caught up in the stagnation of the day to day frustrations, while not considering the bigger picture. Power, in leadership, means that influence is being exerted for the right reasons, specifically for the benefit of the school (Foucault, 1977). In this instance, while the frustration may exist, and while the power may be limited in both contexts, there are indications that these middle leaders are looking toward the broader context and may contribute in some way to the larger vision of change, thus demonstrating aspects of power.

Power is overall a relational concept as it depends on the way one person relates to another and how a person perceives the level of control held by another (Dahl, 1957; 2007). Power is seen in relationships throughout different aspects within societies, ranging from political, religious and military organisations (Mills, 1999) to social groups, and down to family relationships (Laurin et al. 2016). There are several different theories on how power is obtained. For example, power is invested in the position an individual has earned. This means that power relates to the position, not to the individual. In a school setting, as an example, a head teacher might be allocated a certain amount of power by

upper management, but this power would cease if the head teacher was no longer in this role. Power can also be taken by more dominant groups or individuals (Laurin et al. 2016). Power can also be seen as everywhere but not fully understood, which requires self-regulation. In the case of schools as an example, teachers could demonstrate power by coming together and disputing a lesson topic. With enough support, teachers who may have little power, could contribute to change at higher levels. While these three theories are not the only ones in existence, they relate well to the school setting.

In order to maintain order in a society, individuals are given power or authority to establish control and stability (Johnson, 2000). This is either achieved through an election (e.g. by the people) or by appointment (e.g. by higher levels of authority). In the school system, it is often the latter that exists, though this is not to say that 'the people' are removed from this process, but rather that the direct influence is lessened. It is therefore not an individual possession but handed to individuals according to their position in that society; it is consequently a system resource (Wong, 2015). The social system in which people operate determines the roles that individuals should play, usually dependent on the skills, abilities or knowledge they may have. Tyler (2006) argues, people adhere to rules because they feel they are obliged to do so because power is recognised in the culture and the setting. Individuals are placed in positions because of their knowledge and skills and this sometimes gives them the legitimacy to assume authority.

Political power gains its legitimacy from the societies where the power is practised and Saudi Arabia is ruled over by a King who traditionally owns power. According to Weber (1978), in a traditional setting, people who submit to the power of an authority do so for one of two reasons: either power is inherited from an older generation which already exercises traditional authority, or society is religious, in which people believe that leaders/rulers are anointed by God. In this case, the King does not need the law to justify his legitimacy and people do not have any other option but to comply with that power,

which is not only justified (legalised) by the older generation but also by religion. On the other hand, in England, the power is a rational-legal authority because it is derived from law and a society which is built upon rules and laws. The authority has the power to act and make decisions under the power of the law; authority in England needs the law to gain legitimacy. Power, in the English context, comes with certain expectations from the public, though there is often a level of apathy among voters, which could have negative impacts on the educational sector and how regulatory bodies choose to exercise their authority. Therefore, while in England power is supposed to be in the hands of the people, in reality, there are a select number of elites which do much of the decision making that is associated with the educational process.

#### ***2.5.2.1 Power and Culture***

Watson (2008) suggests that shared leadership helps to develop middle managers and gives them more confidence in communicating difficult decisions, and while this is different to distributed leadership, her research study found value in having a peer support network. Peer networks in the workplace are generally seen as valuable entities in research that goes beyond the context of middle leadership (e.g. Uhl-Bien, 2011). It is a possible solution that would enhance the power of middle leaders to communicate more collaborative values (Moos et al. 2011).

The spheres of educational, political, and cultural processes are fundamentally intertwined. Cultural resources, within society in general, are becoming commercialized and all of this creates an educational system that is unequal for students and for workers (Apple, 2015). Conditions in schools continue to worsen in terms of culture due to the dynamics of uneven development where there is polarization occurring between those who 'have' and those who do not (Apple, 2015). This is demonstrated through wages, where those in lower skilled positions are paid considerably less than those in higher

positions or positions of power. Yet while it may be easy to focus on the economic impact of these divisions, it is also essential to focus on the cultural acceptance of such a model. Schools must portray a certain ideology and oftentimes, this ideology contains multiple contradictions related to random sets of beliefs that are often inconsistent (Zald, 1996). Yet in the school setting, these types of ideologies are meant to maintain the hegemony of the dominant classes. Middle leaders, in the way that they are positioned in the educational sector are often the ones who must elaborate upon dominant ideologies (Zald, 1996). In order for this to occur, middle leaders must navigate these ideologies by attempting to win over people as unity among all is attempted. The middle leader must bring the dominant practices to sometimes what would be a contested field of ideology (Zald, 1996). This notion of ‘winning over’ the masses is something that has often been highlighted by influential scholars, such as Gramsci, who examined the relationship between culture and the economy. In order for middle leaders to maintain control of the cultural apparatus of a society, Gramsci would argue that they not only require a specific knowledge related to preserving the educational institution, but also a comprehensive understanding of the workers that exist within them (see Zald, 1996).

Culture can be seen as a ‘lived workplace’, and this can be identified in both work setting and in educational settings, so it is well suited as a topic that relates to educational leadership. There are, in these settings, pressures from both economic and political spheres which influence both culture and social reproductions. It is suggested that these social reproductions are contradictory, and generally do not occur naturally. Instead, social reproductions, as they relate to the cultural component, are something of a struggle. In these social reproductions, and the corresponding struggles, more dominant issues of class must be considered (Apple, 1996). ‘Class’ as a term does not only involve financial compensation or specific job title, but the cultural and economic capital that goes along with it. Culture is therefore seen as a particularly complex process that while embedded

within class also includes aspects of language, style, personal social relations, desires, and wishes. It is also associated with power, and the concepts of culture and class cannot be separated from power, control, or reproduction.

It has been acknowledged in the literature by scholars that the mechanistic issues of culture cannot be easily documented (Zald, 1996). In the prominent works of Gramsci and Wright (see Zald, 1996), they acknowledge that determining what cultural reproduction 'looks like' is far from simple and may suggest that not even the evaluation of complex social processes could begin to truly reflect how much of a role culture has on an environment. Yet despite these claims, there is ample research on the study of culture. Apple (1996) has suggested that culture has to be structural enough at the theory level to ensure that social order is organized and controlled, but also general enough that differential benefits are accounted for (P.86). Apple (1996), notes however that at the general level, one must be cautious not to be overly general or the everyday actions, experiences, and struggles of individuals will not be fully realized. Instead, he suggests that in attempting to evaluate culture, the connections and interpenetrations of different components of everyday existence must be analysed. Through this process, the straightforward and structural mechanization of culture can be avoided.

From this general overview of the complexities in culture, it is also important to consider how it is viewed in the educational context. There is no shortage of research that points to inequality in the educational sector (e.g. Addi-Racah and Ayalon, 2002), and this appears at all levels of investigation and from students to workers. Moreover, schools have been shown to act as agents in cultural reproduction, facilitating an unequal society. As highlighted previously, leaders in educational settings tend to seek at least some sense of control over their own work, which can include perceptions of informal power over time, a sense of work pacing, and the overall deployment of job-specific skills. Yet while leaders may seek to gain power, middle leaders in particular are controlled by others. In

this way, their power is limited, and they will attempt to seek out control in culturally specific ways.

Schools in general have an underlying set of guidelines that are culturally motivated but that inform curriculum decisions (Addi-Raccah and Ayalon, 2002). Schools are designed to reproduce social inequality among students and produce students that are valuable in the workplace. This means instilling specific values among the student population. From the perspective of a middle leader, much of these values are asserted over students in relation to meanings and norms that are either associated with personal and internal struggles, or dictated by those in positions of authority (Zald, 1996). In this way, the educational culture begins to show its multitude of cultural layers that exist between education and other elements of society.

When examining culture, there is also a need to consider the subculture. Subcultures generally exist within society because groups of people often share collectively experienced challenges and seek solutions. These challenges often relate to contradictions in the social structure but are likely to generate a collective identity (Apple, 1996; 2015). Subcultures move beyond class and education and usually the solutions to the challenges that are sought are unsolvable at a material level. Instead, these subcultures are able to address their challenges at a cultural level through the explicit evaluation of different cultural forms (Apple, 2015). One of the more prominent aspects of subculture that is considered in the literature is the division of labour by sex. Masculine and feminine roles often provide very different outcomes, meaning that it is impossible to separate gender and culture from each other. For these reasons, considering gender as a sub-element of the larger context of culture is essential.

Yet while gender based subculture is important, there are other aspects of culture that become relevant. The workplace culture is particularly complex. This is because the



culture itself cannot be completely controlled by management. While certain norms might be expected related to punctuality, authority, and compliance, workplace culture also allows for other elements that go beyond the reproductive culture. For example, culture can be seen as a means for worker resistance or collective action; moreover it can be seen as a place where workers can assert their humanity (Apple, 1996). The resistance of workers, from a cultural perspective, is just as important to consider as the social norms of workplace culture (Apple, 1996). This resistance can also be interpreted in its own form of reproduction, as the establishment of a seemingly informal work culture can increase a sense of control over the process of labour. This sense may not be at the level where it affects the larger production model, but it allows middle leaders, in this case, to challenge the 'rights' of higher management.

In social determinants of culture, middle leaders exist within an important position. Schools tend to act as important legislators of the social orders, thus giving them considerable power (Apple, 1996; 2015). The educational system, by and large, is designed to uphold the meritocratic values of society. In this way, students are conditioned to accept successes and failures based on specific social pressures where those who do not conform are typically considered 'deviant'. In this way, the school, as described, is facilitating inequality. Curricular and teaching practices associated with the implementation of such inequality is not overtly outlined in an explicit curriculum model, but embraces what is essentially a hidden curriculum and one that is differentiated in grouping practices that separate students into those that are culturally acceptable and those that are culturally deviant (Apple, 1996). If enough students are classified as 'deviant,' this then becomes the expectation of the school as a whole, where both the students and the school are crucially attached to a 'label'. Their label becomes their culture, and they seem destined to live out their lives adhering to a specific moral career. In this sense, middle leaders have a considerable amount of influence within this situation.

They are responsible for managing the inequality and to differentiate what constitutes a success versus a failure.

While middle leaders may have some authority, it would be inaccurate to assert them the power to distribute such cultural boundaries within the sector. It is irresponsible to assume that ideologies that accompany cultural influence are always accurately employed (Apple, 1996). Culture may be something that is lived, but it exists within and in conjunction with the economic sphere. It is impossible to believe that a cultural influence in a school will have the desired effect and will lead to a straightforward assertion of control. It is essential that all contradictory pressures be examined in order to truly understand workplace culture.

Workplace culture is not easily understood. This is because it is not clearly visible to the outsider, and like the hidden curriculum that has been described above, requires a certain embeddedness within the situational context to truly understand the culture along with its subtleties and organisation. Even with informal practices and variations between locations, work culture can be characterized as “a relatively autonomous sphere of action on the job, a realm of informal, customary values and rules which mediates the formal authority structure of the workplace and distances workers from its impact” (Apple, 2015:70). What is significant specifically about work culture is that it allows those within it to be transformative in the activity that they pursue, giving them some strength and the appearance of control within their own subculture.

Workplace culture, as it relates to education can be useful for manifesting cooperation among groups as they share workplace arrangements. This type of collaboration may be more commonly found among lower level workers, so in this case, the teachers. There may be instances of retaliation where workers undertake collaborative tasks against those perceived to be in a different culture (Apple, 1996). The power of these teachers, in the

case of schools, has the potential to be enough to take the reins of control in some instances because they have some control over authority and productivity. While some of this ‘control’ relates to economic capital (such as the ability to strike or to bargain over wages and benefits), there are also influences of culture that are embedded within this mind set (Apple, 1996; 2015). Formal measures may be last ditch efforts to exert control, but the underlying aspects of informal resistance, which are much more tied to culture, can be much more influential in the long term.

This informal aspect of work culture is not always productive and influential over the ideology of management. Informal work culture can also lead to pressures that are turned back upon the teachers. From a management perspective identifying aspects of the culture that can keep workers both busy and relatively happy are often seen as key to positive outcomes (Apple, 1996). Yet it is important not to trivialize culture, because workplace culture and productivity are not synonymous. Furthermore, culture cannot be ‘solved’ by compensation or management adjustment, as it is not necessarily a mechanism in the larger social order. Workers, in this sense, cannot be treated like robots; instead relationships must be formed and understood.

Based on the understanding the detailed and complex nature of culture, it is evident that it must include working culture as well as aspects of gender and ethnicity to form a complex web of ideology that is in some ways related to economic forces. Culture has roots in history and in societal expectations. While it may not be easily viewed from an outsider perspective, it has deep roots within any particular sub-component of culture (Apple, 1996). There will always be resistance to culture at some point, by someone or by a group, as the changing power relations and economic positioning will make it so. In the case of middle leaders, there must be many cultural aspects that are interpreted because the link from the subcultures of teachers and students may end up being very

different from the cultural ideologies of upper management. This creates a challenging system of navigation for middle leaders.

Jackson and Stewart (2012) conclude that teachers involved in decision-making are empowered to accept responsibilities that make them better teachers in the classroom as they have more understanding of what the school requires of them. The conditions for promoting a degree of autonomy in school middle leaders, who are likely to have a teaching role as well, depend on the supportive culture within the establishment and the promotion of professional development, according to Jumani and Malki (2017). The concept of shared leadership or so-called collegial autonomy means that responsibilities are also shared and there is a system of collective decision-making and this can enhance teacher leadership (Jumani and Malki, 2017).

The social construct within which a school is contextualised means that the way in which the educational aims of a school must be implemented is controlled outside the school itself. This is determined by policies set by education departments at government level and is defined by expectations of society (Zald, 1996). Within schools the heads need to ensure they are subscribing to such requirements, which provide a cohesive approach to education within a particular society; nevertheless, small changes may still be made at school level, and this is why the professional values of each school may differ.

Trust in others within the organisation is essential, and this is an aspect that cannot come without understanding and building relationships with colleagues (Bryk and Schneider, 2004). Trusting middle leaders to make the right decisions for the school is what gives them the power to make those decisions. The behaviour of those entrusted with power must replicate the values of the organisation, and these are seen as professional values.

There are different sets of values that are embodied in the culture of any organisation and which are especially noted in a schools context. The professional culture of the school

may be a social construct but it is also an individual construct and this is why all middle leaders in schools need to work with shared values (Matsumoto, 1996). If middle leaders aspired to different behaviours and values, they would not be in a position to work together for the overall good of the school; there would be conflict in how they achieved the organisational goals. In terms of the implications of these values to culture and power, it is essential to remember the social determinants of culture and the link to social order. The school system is designed to maintain the social order, thus giving the institution itself a considerable amount of power. When considering different contexts, keeping in mind this central theme is essential to the overarching topic of middle leadership and how it 'fits' within the greater picture.

#### ***2.5.2.2 Cultural Forces***

Bush and Glover (2003) suggest that in today's literature the term 'culture' is linked with leadership and they argue that given the changes that have occurred in education, issues of societal culture are increasingly significant. Indeed, societal culture is one important aspect of the context within which leaders must operate. Based on this, it is suggested that there is a need to understand that middle leadership cannot be examined in isolation from cultural and political forces. In fact, the literature suggests that middle leadership is embraced in the English system and that the alternative, middle management, is embraced in the Saudi system and that this can be largely attributed to the difference in the entrenched education policies that guide schools in each system. We have seen that the English education system tends to favour the notion of autonomy. The publications of bodies such as the Department of Education and the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) continuously encourage teachers to take up leadership roles and participate in decision making processes, curriculum development, and planning (Claddingbowl, 2013; GTCS, 2014). Likewise, Bell and Ritchie (1999) and Claddingbowl (2013) suggest that

middle leaders take up leadership roles such as overseeing the social, moral, and emotional welfare of teachers in their departments and for the general care of students (Bell and Ritchie, 1999; Cladingbowl, 2013). However, the critiques referred to above question the extent to which this autonomy is actually distributed to middle leaders, and the extent to which it is acted upon. In practice, middle leaders are controlled by the power of the policy and regulations that pull them back and prevent them from being autonomous. Thus, only in theory does the English system provide room for teachers to exercise leadership through middle leader roles. In practice, middle leaders in the English system take up leadership roles in curriculum planning and development. Nevertheless, overall the research points to the fact that middle leaders do take on roles in which leadership is practised, and as such independent and individual acts taken by middle leaders can affect the organisation in which they work.

In contrast, the Saudi system is arguably embedded within the philosophy of regulation. This implies that activities, roles or functions are regulated and directed and there is very little room to exercise control, which raises the question of root and branch reform at Government and Ministry level. In Saudi Arabia, although the recent reforms have replaced the old word *Alwakeel* (middle manager) with the new word *Naeab Al Qaeed* (middle leader), middle leaders are still under the power and control of top management. Middle leaders are therefore preferred in this system because they can be regulated and directed to coordinate and implement the directives of government, without having the function of setting a vision or directive themselves. Typically, the role of middle leaders involves ensuring that education policy and programmes are being implemented effectively according to the directives of the government. Whilst it has been noted that middle leaders in the English system also may function to ensure the implementation of government directives, such as the statutory acts of the national curriculum and national testing, once again their function coincides with their more autonomous leadership roles.

Very little research exists on Saudi Arabian middle leaders and the extent to which their roles improve effectiveness in schools, in particular with regards to leadership practices. Indeed, there is little information available on the roles of middle leaders in Saudi Arabia at all. The centralised system, which has been discussed, would indicate a potential lack of autonomy and leadership, which the data collected in the course of this PhD, will go some lengths to ascertain.

## **2.6 The Connection between Middle Leaders' Effectiveness and Performativity in the Education Systems of England and Saudi**

This section explains how autonomy and effectiveness can be connected. Bennett et al. (2003) suggest that there is a hidden connection between effectiveness and performativity that determines that a good middle leader is not only a proactive person who is able to maintain and perform school-wide roles, but is also a person who is able to suggest effective changes. Glover et al. (1999) found that middle leader effectiveness should be assessed by their ability as leaders to motivate, inspire and support other school staff as well as conducting roles and responsibilities defined by policy. In Glover et al.'s (1999) study, teachers were able to understand their roles as wider than departmental-based structures; as a result, they were able to motivate better performance. Jeffrey (2003) suggests that the common use of notions such as effectiveness and performativity in policy tools could reflect the extent to which policymakers are interested in supporting such practices in schools. Jeffrey (2001) argued that effective middle leaders need to demonstrate interpersonal skills in team building, controlling external initiatives to reduce overload and maintain a high level of trust.

In England, performative reforms have had an impact on school leadership and the governance of schools as they have increased the autonomy of schools to self-govern (Wilkins, 2015). These reforms of the 1990s introduced performative regimes in English

primary schools (Troman et al. 2007). Jeffrey and Troman (2009) argue that performativity has been encouraged by government texts to enforce standards at all levels of the schools' population. Governments use performativity and its measured outcomes to compete globally as workforces with measured skills arguably bring good knowledge and practices into schools, which in turn, in a culture of measurement, create good reputations. Schools are thus encouraged by education policies to embed performativity as a culture. Hence, in practice, teachers learn how to incorporate the language of performativity into their practice as a way to work around the power of policy and regulations that are preventing them from having adequate free space to create. This may explain why Troman, et al. (2007) suggest that teachers' attempts to do this tend to encroach upon performativity, as a way to work within the given working space of the seemingly contradictory policies of what is defined as creative teaching.

From another perspective, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, middle leaders act as facilitators in their school communities, their role in fostering performativity is essential. Depending on the autonomy provided in the system of education in which they operate, middle leaders can provide guidance and feedback on potentially creative practices of the teachers within a school without this having to be part of an external governing body, such as regional government inspectors in Saudi Arabia or OFSTED in England (Anthony and Harris, 2001; Shah, 2015). In other words, in a bureaucratic education system with less autonomy, it may be difficult for middle leaders to effectively facilitate performativity since they lack an adequate mandate to provide guidance and feedback, and monitor and evaluate the practice of other teachers. In the Saudi literature, there are no specific studies that have explored the connections between reforms and performativity in primary schools. There is evidence that in past three decades, the Saudi government has exerted significant effort towards instituting educational reforms that aim to improve education standards and bring the country's education system up to par with



other developed economies (Al-Kinani, 2013). However, in particular the power and control imposed by the education authority weakens the influence of the changes. One of the most notable reforms instituted over time is the establishment of the regulatory authority of the regional school supervisor offices (Al-Salloom, 1995; Abdul-Kareem, 2001) whose main role is to oversee the function of schools, and to monitor, inspect and provide support to teachers and the overall management of the school (Abdul-Kareem, 2001; Cordesman, 2008). Although the function of regional school supervisors plays a critical role in providing support to teachers and ensuring that educational standards are upheld, they also significantly hinder the autonomy of teachers and the school as whole. Primary schools in Saudi are subjected to a high level of supervision and control thus hindering the spread of creative practices. Basically, supervisors visit schools to inspect and provide direction on the instructional and administrative aspects of the school. In order to receive approval from the supervisors, teachers have to adhere to the set instructions and standards provided. This in turn inhibits them from taking creative initiatives (Abdul-Kareem, 2001; Cordesman, 2008). As Brundrett and Rhodes (2010) note, a culture or model of performativity in education is one in which the concept of the autonomous professional has become redundant and has been replaced by a state-imposed regime that is founded on the external measurement of quality, using a burdensome and onerous system of testing and inspection. Based on these sentiments, it is plausible to argue that this type of performativity is the predominant culture or model in most primary schools in Saudi Arabia.

Secondly, as mentioned earlier, the Saudi education system is characterised by highly centralised and bureaucratic structures. As a result, there is little room for autonomy and exploration (Al-Sadan, 2000; Al Sadaawi, 2010). In a context where pedagogical approaches and roles have already been determined, it may be very difficult to foster creative practices since there is no pedagogical autonomy. In this regard, Burnard and

White (2008) argue that in order for creativity to be fostered in schools, there is a need for professional agency and pedagogical autonomy. In bureaucratic education systems such as Saudi Arabia, middle managers are not afforded the autonomy that enables them to make decisions on how to go about their work. Moreover, Hartley (2007) argues that in an education system that is performance-driven, monitored, and standardized, fostering creativity can be somewhat challenging since there is a likelihood that creativity will be managed and monitored as a set of outcomes and competencies. In this case, performativity overshadows creativity (Hartley, 2007; Burnard and White, 2008).

Nevertheless, over time there has been recognition of the importance of fostering teaching practices that enable creativity within the Saudi education system. It has been recognised that creativity can play a significant role in bringing the Saudi education system and economy up to par with other developed economies. A number of education policy documents have emphasised the need for educators to employ creative practices in order to foster innovation and prepare learners for emerging challenges (Rugh, 2002; Al Mengash, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2011). The demands of the Saudi economy have compelled policy makers to put greater emphasis on creativity especially in science related subjects (Al-Haj, 2002; Al-Abdulkareem, 2002; Rugh, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2011). Nevertheless, there is a major disparity between the recommendations of policy documents and what is actually practised. Although educational policy makers have emphasised the need for schools to promote creativity amongst learners, there has been very little attempt to establish ways in which teachers can promote creativity in their practice. To date, Saudi primary schools are still highly supervised and regulated, thus leaving very little room for educators to come up with new initiatives that foster creativity (Rugh, 2002; Al Mengash, 2006).

Thus, Saudi education systems, decision-makers and strategists need to become more open to learning from other countries. This research has the potential to provide insights

into how different forms of leadership can lead to better performativity and enhanced middle leadership practices.

## **2.7 Issues and concerns arising from the literature review**

There is no doubt that the concept of middle leadership in primary schools has been subject to change as a result of policy makers' decisions to change and reform educational policies as well as professional standards in both England and Saudi. These changes appear in the theoretical English and Arabic literature, but do they appear in practice, in the implementation of middle leaders' practices? This research aims to provide an answer to such questions

According to the literature surveyed it seems that promoting democracy in Saudi schools would not thrive with the result of reforming the position or replacing the old title of manager with a new title of middle leader, but requires collaboration from all parties involved in education. This includes researchers, whose task is to highlight the statement of current practices and provide insights and suggestions about what could be going wrong and what needs a change. One problem, identified during the survey of the literature, is that reforming the Saudi education system should be seen from different angles, especially when a scholar such as Al-Orabi (2011) highlights the different types of force experienced by the Saudi education system. For example, Al-Orabi (2011) uses the term 'Canned Knowledge' "*Almaerifaa Almaellaba*" to refer to the type of knowledge schools are forcing on pupils. Just like canned food, canned knowledge lacks the fresh elements, which contain the 'true power of knowledge'. Al-Orabi (2011) blames a neoliberal mentality that shifts the value of the knowledge itself onto the value of the product of the knowledge. Al-Orabi (2011) wonders how the current political systems are able to conceive schools as learning organisations without giving school leaders, including middle leaders, the power to change, and to adopt changes individually and

together by creating collaboration. The question then becomes: whether leaders were able to create a field of internal and external relationships without embedding the ‘true values of knowledge,’ which can only be approached by the collaborative efforts of all? In 2016, Pont et al. (2006) suggested that “*School leaders ensure that the organisation’s actions are consistent with its vision, goals and values*” (P.10) which indicates that leaders are expected to work under the larger umbrella of ideological policy, rules, regulations, and values. In addition, middle leaders cannot operate and promote the required changes without the support of professional bodies and policy that enhances collaboration. References to leadership in the guide, it was noted, always included all principals. In other words, although the document indicated that the roles and responsibilities of school leaders in primary schools was to support the movement towards promoting schools as learning organisations, there was no indication of the specific role of middle leaders. The concern is that, regardless of the textual emphasis on the official document, that leaders need to lead other staff in the school, how middle leaders practice their roles in light of current management mentality. Put another way, there was no indication of what management needs to do and what leadership needs to be in order to promote schools as learning organisations. Those questions arising from the literature review are the focus of this research. The opinions and insights of middle leaders in primary schools are examined in this qualitative study to answer the issues and concerns identified by the literature.

A second conclusion drawn from the literature is that, interestingly, evidence from the English education system indicates that middle leaders do not understand what leadership is, and therefore operate more as managers than leaders. On the other hand, Saudi middle leaders have not been given the chance to lead and therefore they attempt to manage. The distinction between these two roles can be largely attributed to the difference in educational culture and philosophies that guide these educational systems. The English

education system in public state primary schools tends to be a secular system. Therefore, schools, supporting the ethics and values of secular systems, are given a certain degree of autonomy. This, in turn, influences the role of middle leaders and gives them some limited autonomy to implement and make decisions. On the other hand, the Saudi system is embedded within the philosophy of kingship regulation and religion. This implies that activities, roles or functions are regulated and directed and there is very little room to exercise power. Middle leaders in Saudi have not been given the power of autonomy to make decisions or implement them (Al-Sadan, 2000; Al Sadaawi, 2010; Cladingbowl, 2013). At the same time, they operate in an environment in which religious values have significant influence on their behaviour and attitudes (Al Sadaawi, 2010). Thus, we can ask a question about the differences between religious and secular values, and how these differences influence the practice of middle leadership in the two countries.

The Saudi and English education systems are continuously undergoing reform. This suggests that there is hope for improving policies and practices as far as middle management is concerned (Al-Kinani, 2013). This current study therefore provides evidence-based information that can be used as a basis for instituting reforms to improve middle leadership and management in Saudi and English primary schools and may lead to the adoption of middle leadership in school systems as a way to promote efficiency and improve school performance.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The last chapter comprised a survey of relevant literature consulted within the context of this study. It also critically examined and compared the influence of government policy on the performance of middle leaders in Saudi Arabian and English primary schools to establish a better understanding of how politics can influence both education systems and the professionals working in those systems. This chapter discusses the methodological approaches that were taken to fulfil the study's aims.

The chapter then documents the story of a four year journey, which was neither simple nor straightforward. I explain the methodological choices and my interest in qualitative data, in exploring the perceptions of the participants in middle leadership roles in schools. The chapter tells the story of the case study design, how participants were selected and approached, and how the data were collected using multiple instruments, as well as of how they were eventually analysed. The last part of the chapter discusses ethical considerations and how the quality of the research was assured.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

Every piece of research has a nature and the nature of the research is aligned to the inquiry (the research questions) and to the researcher's understandings of the world around him or her (Cohen et al. 2011). In connection with this, careful understanding and thinking about the philosophical stance of the research is integral to the methodology and choice of approach(es). Another fundamental requirement is the selection of the appropriate research strategy and design to complete the project successfully (Collier, 1994). According to Collier (1994), having no philosophical stance in research is not an option, as “[t]he ‘unphilosophical’ person has an unconscious philosophy, which they apply in

their practice whether of science or politics or daily life” (P.17). It is important to consider the philosophical underpinnings of educational research from an initially broad focus and then to narrow down this focus accordingly. Ontological assumptions inform epistemological ones, which in turn inform a methodology. This movement from broad to narrow allows methods used in data collection to emerge (Bryman, 2001).

Bryman (2008) states that a researcher needs to consider both ontology and epistemology before making a selection and be able to justify their position. Ontology can be defined as “the study of being”; it is concerned with “what kind of world we are investigating, with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such” (Crotty, 2012:10). So, ontology is about being (and the nature of being/reality), epistemology is about how we can know reality – or about the status of knowledge (often the difference between understanding all knowledge as a construct or seeing it as something that can accurately represent reality) (Carson et al. 2001). Both ontology and epistemology exist in research to create the research paradigm. In the current study, it was important to begin with what I believed could be researched (the ontological position) and then linking this to what I can know about it (the epistemological position). In this way, my ontological assumptions inform my epistemological assumptions, and thus my research methodology.

The study aims to understand a phenomenon rooted in middle leaders' interactional and practical experience. My assumption is that knowledge about the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders is socially constructed through their interpretations, and so the research involves capturing their subjective perceptions of their roles and responsibilities. One of the ways that this can be achieved is by positioning this research within the interpretivist perspective. The main aim of the research is to obtain middle leaders' varying perceptions, opinions and meanings via human interaction. This suggests that knowledge is constructed and gained through understanding the middle leaders' interpretations of their roles and responsibilities. The phenomenon under investigation is

not an independent and single reality, but different realities as they are perceived by middle leaders. As a consequence, the methodology is underpinned by the desire to understand middle leaders' perspectives, because they are best placed to understand the problems of schools and the education system.

As this research takes an interpretivist stance, a qualitative approach is most suitable. Denscombe (2010:53) suggests that the case study can be used as a research design in qualitative research to gain in-depth holistic knowledge, rather than isolated factors about the studied phenomenon or real-life situations. In this sense "the real value of a case study is that it offers the opportunity to explain why certain outcomes might happen – more than just find out what those outcomes are" (Denscombe, 2010:53). Exploring the perceptions of middle leaders in both Saudi and English schools gives the opportunity of providing more insight into the phenomenon.

### **3.3 Use of a Qualitative Interpretivist Approach**

The qualitative paradigm considers that all human understanding is attained through repetition of experience and behaviour, and consideration of interdependent meanings. It thereby obtains meaning through observing and analysing behaviour and experience. Knowledge is generated by interpreting the views, opinions and experiences of individuals in the research setting (Mack, 2010). Unlike the positivist paradigm, which is founded on the notion that knowledge is objective and separate from individuals, interpretivists believe that reality is relative and multiple, and that these multiple realities depend on systems of meanings developed by people (Klenke, 2008). Thus, there are no fixed realities. Interpretivists further believe that knowledge is socially constructed and not objectively determined or perceived. Drawing on this paradigm, data are extracted from the views, experiences, opinions, practices or behaviours of research participants. Subsequently, data are interpreted, analysed and used to answer the identified research



questions (Klenke, 2008). An interpretivist approach was appropriate in this study because the objective was to investigate understandings of middle leadership/management in the English and Saudi education systems and the personal experiences of actors in the education system constituted the majority of the data collected and analysed.

Interpretivist researchers tend to avoid rigid structural frameworks such as those used in positivist research and instead adopt a more personal and flexible approach receptive to deciphering what is perceived as reality and capturing the meanings of human interaction (Black, 2006). Researchers often enter the field with prior knowledge of the context, but do not assume that this is adequate to enable them to develop a fixed research design due to the multiple, complex, and unpredictable nature of what different people perceive as reality. Consequently, they do not begin with, but rather generate, a theory inductively from the patterns of meaning provided by the informants (Creswell, 2003). As a result, researchers remain open to new knowledge or insights provided by their informants throughout a study (Black, 2006; Klenke, 2008). This collaborative approach (between the researchers and researched) is consistent with the interpretivist belief that social realities vary from one individual to another and that each person's view is worth taking into account. The goal of a researcher is therefore to understand and interpret the meanings of individual views, beliefs, opinions, experiences, practices, and behaviours as opposed to generalising and predicting causes and effects. For an interpretivist researcher, it is crucial to understand the underlying meanings, motives, reasons, and other subjective experiences, which are dependent upon context and time (Klenke, 2008; Wimmer and Dominick, 2011).

The flexibility offered by the interpretivist paradigm offers the possibility of more in-depth findings, as it allows exhaustive examination of phenomena. This is because it is not tied to one particular theoretical approach, instead the theory is derived from the data

(Thomas, 2011). This method is therefore exploratory as it would consider all concepts brought to its attention, regardless of prior assumptions of what would prove to be correct. However, the areas of study are guided by the judgment of the researcher depending on the factors that are considered interesting and relevant. Moreover, this paradigm offers the opportunity for the researcher to gather substantive data in order to generate a more complete understanding of the research topic and relate relevant research variables, including the cross-cultural nature of this study (Ponelis, 2015).

The interpretive approach is thus imperative when gathering research across two cultural systems, as this study does. Qualitative data alone cannot explicitly express the cultural grounds upon which differences occur, as personal experience does not tend to offer itself naturally in terms suitable for comparison. Qualitative research does, however, invite exploration of participants' views, opinions and experiences that reflect their cultural background. To compare information collected independently from different cultural groups, one must use interpretive techniques to draw out the differences and similarities before analysis can be performed (Higgs and Rowland, 2005). Accordingly, the interpretivist research model is clearly the relevant paradigm for this research and has been used in three ways in this study. Firstly, the theory is used in generating a relevant design for data collection; secondly as an iterative process of collecting data for the purpose of analysis and thirdly, as a means of understanding the outcome of the case study (Mack, 2010).

### **3.4 The Research participants**

It is important to ensure that the selection of a participant is appropriate for providing the required data and this is why both middle leaders in primary schools and head teachers were purposively selected. In this study the main involvement of the participant was during the face-to-face interviews. There were some differences in the process of

selection of participants between both English and Saudi settings. For Saudi schools the Ministry of Education suggested the participation of schools and then headteachers suggested individual middle leaders as participants. In this sense, the two samples in this study were in total selected based on a convenience selection method. The suggestions from both the Ministry of Education and the headteachers were likely to have reflected access and availability of schools and middle leaders.

Careful selection of participants is important mainly because it helps avoid extraneous effort, and conserves limited resources and thereby promotes efficiency (Gravetter and Forzano, 2015). There are two broad categories of selection methods, namely: random and non-random selection. In random selection each unit of the population stands an equal chance of being selected. In non-random selection certain groups are targeted based on specific relevance to the researcher's aims, or, as is the case in this study, with regards to their availability and willingness to participate (Lund Research, 2012; Gravetter and Forzano, 2015). According to Gravetter and Forzano (2015), convenience selection is a commonly used method in qualitative research. The selection of middle leaders in England was made by the researcher, based on the non-random selection method referred to as convenience selection.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 middle leaders in 6 different schools (3 in England and 3 in Saudi). Primary schools serve mainly pupils age 5 to 12, and Table 1, below, provides a summary of the participants from all the schools in the study. As can be seen below the selected participants covered a range of ages and experiences.

*Table 1: Comparative Overall View representing all 6 Schools.*

Case code	Gender	Age	Previous experience (Years)
S1	F, F, F	35/50/30	6/12/3 Teaching experience 3/4/6 Management experience
S2	F, F, F	32/41/37	7/16/5 Teaching experience 2/3/5 Management experience
S3	F, M, F	34/40/43	5/3/6 Teaching experience 3/8/7 Management experience
S4	F, F, F	50/52/41	12/13/not valuable, Teaching experience 18/20/15 Management experience
S5	M, M, M	51/52/35	23/28/1 Teaching experience 2/4/10 Management experience
S6	M, M, M	37/49/45	4/15/10 Teaching experience 4/9/8 Management experience

### **3.5 Data Collection Methods**

Cohen and Manion (1994) suggest that in qualitative data the main potential source of invalidity is bias in the interviews. Risk of bias may be reduced through respondent validation (Scott and Howell, 2008) or involve different sources of evidence to determine the accuracy of information (Scott, 2007). I decided initially to use multiple data collection methods because I wanted to enhance the trustworthiness of the study as a multiplicity of qualitative data often helps to get richer or more in-depth data, verify the data collected and enhance the validity of the study (Wilson, 2014). Additionally, I sought to understand the role from multiple angles. Following Wilson (2014), my reasons for using multiple data collection methods were as follows:

- 1- To elaborate the results obtained from the study.
- 2- To develop new theoretical concepts based on qualitative data sourced from the study. the theoretical concepts are tested against data from multiple sources
- 3- To ensure the conclusion is well validated, as well as ensuring that the qualitative results from the two different cultural backgrounds are compared in the process.

Possible data sources can include document analysis, interviews, and observation, all of which can provide contextual information (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Onwuegbuzie et al. 2012). In this study, it was intended that qualitative data be sourced primarily through, semi-structured face-to-face interviews, observations and document analysis, with the aim of uncovering emerging themes, concepts, patterns, insights, and understandings (Patton, 2002). As such the study would provide insight into underlying processes, sequences of events or constructs and the manner in which they relate – the rigour of which process is, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) observe, commensurate with that of quantitative inquiry when the underlying epistemological orientation is taken into account.

The overarching aims of this research were to understand how middle leaders in education settings in England and Saudi perceive their roles and responsibilities in primary schools, and to discover the factors that shaped their perspectives. To fulfil these aims, I needed qualitative data that provided shades of understanding, not only of respondents' opinions and perspectives but also of the social and cultural contexts in which particular behavioural patterns are enacted. Qualitative research is not unsystematic. Shank (2002) notes that it is systematic and empirical in nature and can be used to establish the meaning of a particular research issue that involves attitude and values. It allows the researcher to observe and interpret various behavioral patterns as exhibited by selected individuals. Choosing a qualitative method thus took into account the interplay between the researcher and the respondents across the two cultures. It also established the relationship between the respondents and their own experiences and how they constructed reality from those experiences.

The flexibility of a qualitative research method was another key aspect within the context of this study. This method allows new information to be taken into account, including reflections on a new perspective or behaviours that might redefine already existing ideas.

The actions and the activities of individuals need to be understood in their experiential context at an everyday level so that it becomes possible to understand how they contribute, in various settings, to academic knowledge (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). The flexibility of qualitative data allows the researcher to observe the participants in various situations and gain a breadth of information. As such, in contrast with quantitative methodology, qualitative research allows the researcher to have an in-depth, direct engagement with the field of study, taking into account the social and cultural backgrounds and the daily experience of participants (Bryman, 2015).

In addition, a qualitative method provides a suitable framework for generating findings that are culturally specific (Mack and Woodsong, 2005). This study aims to discover how real educators act and interact in their schools, and to then understand the impact of those actions on the performance of the students within the school. To do this it is important to understand the schools themselves, the cultures in which they exist, and the feelings and beliefs of the individuals working in these settings. Qualitative inquiry is better suited than quantitative research to exploring the “human side” of a research issue, and to providing textual descriptions of encounters, views and experiences regarding a particular research question in a specific social setting (Mack and Woodsong, 2005; Merriam, 2009). Because the data needed to conduct the analyses were rich, text-based interviews and conversations in two different countries, it was logical to employ a qualitative methodology when designing the study.

For this particular study a qualitative research method was more suitable for a number of reasons. First, qualitative research mostly explores “why” questions (Corbin and Strauss, 1990), which can be easily addressed using research instruments such as interviews that allow further prompting to explore responses. It also tends to focus on the detailed and intimate explanations offered by a smaller group of individuals. Lastly, a qualitative

method was used because it was more appropriate for a multi-level study, and specifically well-suited to the study of middle leaders in primary schools.

Three qualitative methods of data collection were used in this study. These included semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and observations. It has been previously noted that in order to fully examine the everyday functioning of a management system, investigation of the organisation's real-life environment is essential (Dean, Cobb and Zhao, 2009). The primary means for data collection was through semi-structured interviews (see Section 3.5.1) because this research was concerned with the perspectives of the participants. However, in order to fully make sense of and verify the responses provided in these interviews, other methods were needed. In this way, both observations and document analysis were used to support the semi-structured interviews. Using multiple research methods also contributed to the trustworthiness of the data (see Section 3.9), which was an important element to consider when considering the aims of this research project.

### **3.5.1 Semi-structured Interviews**

Interviews are a commonly used qualitative method of data collection that enables the researcher to engage in a conversation with a respondent so as to obtain "in-depth", detailed or carefully worked out data or information about a particular research issue (Debasish and Das, 2009). Interviews are flexible and provide room for discussion between the interviewer and research participants. They provide a platform for the researcher to ask for clarification on some of the responses provided by participants, search for opinions, ask for further explanation and make comparisons. It also allows the researcher to elicit more accurate information since the interviewer is in a position to ask for more explanation or clarification in a case where a vague response is provided (Wood and Ross-Kerr, 2011). The main aim of this process is to source a rich and descriptive

data-set, which is significant because it allows the researcher to understand precisely the participants' construction of knowledge and social facts pertaining to the research. A tape recorder is beneficial when used to record and store data during the interview sessions. Questions should be predetermined, but also neutral and open ended thus giving participants an opportunity to express themselves freely (Debasish and Das, 2009). In this instance, interviews focused on exploring different issues relating to the perceptions of middle leadership/management in Saudi and English primary schools.

Semi-structured interviews complemented the exploratory nature of this qualitative and interpretive research study because the researcher studied an individual and asked for anecdotal responses. Interviews are particularly useful for studying people's expectations and attitudes while they interact during an interview session. Mack (2010) also comments that semi-structured interviews help in gaining an insight into organisational members' embedded perceptions, while simultaneously offering a clearer picture of the entire research situation. This method thus allows for a relatively systematic collection of data, and as a result, ensures that no significant information is left out. Another advantage of interviews is that they are characterised by synchronous communication thus enabling the researcher to observe and get information from non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, intonation and voice among many other cues. Information can be recorded via note taking as well as tape recording in some cases. This is in contrast to questionnaires, which have a standard and rigid structure and tend to produce a breadth of data that is broadly applicable but would not be specific enough for the information this study requires.

However, interviews can be time-consuming in terms of scheduling, conducting and transcription, and may be considered intrusive by research participants, because they explore issues more in-depth and seek clarification of sometimes complex research issues.



### **3.5.2 Official Documents**

Documents act as an important source of data/information in qualitative research as they can support and help to validate perceptions of interviewees. They may contain texts and images incorporated in books, journals, manuals, minutes of meetings, attendance registers, agendas, charts, diaries, brochures, scrapbooks, memoranda, press releases, institutional reports, public records, event programs, and newspapers (Bowen, 2009). Such documents were considered for corroboration and augmentation of evidence available from other sources and relevant for this research study. One of the key advantages of document analysis is that it allows the researcher to access information that would be difficult to discuss in detail during an interview, or to observe in the available time in each school. Documents can also provide the researcher with an idea of what happened in the past and they are cost effective since the information has already been produced (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Rapley, 2007). In this study, various documents were critically analysed to give a different angle on the topic, and also to enrich my knowledge about middle level leaders in primary schools in both Saudi Arabia and England.

In this study, textual, digital, and printed activities were involved in reviewing, evaluating and interpretation of different types of documents such as official reports (e.g. the Saudi Ministry of Education guidelines and regulations book, Ofsted inspection reports, and school websites). Official documents were used to provide the researcher with official perspectives on how the role and the responsibilities of middle leaders were officially defined and articulated.

I initially thought that reviewing and analysing official documents would provide necessary background information about each of the cases studied and describe organisational aspects such as the structure of schools, the process of middle leader recruitment, the codes of practice in each school and the process of decision making and

promoting change, as addressed in policies and strategies. While these documents could be found in some schools, not all schools had the same in-depth level of documentation, and for some schools, the information related to middle leaders was sometimes very minimally described. For example, although the official guidelines, produced by the Ministry of Education in Saudi, were at hand for all middle leaders and school staff, the descriptions of the middle leaders' role and responsibilities were limited to one and a half pages of an A4 handbook. Additionally, the final paragraph of the official guidelines gave headteachers the authority to add any extra responsibilities they thought that middle leaders should complete. In the English schools, there was information available on the school websites and sometimes a printed format, but again, without consistency between schools, information on middle leaders was somewhat limited and sometimes was replaced by other terms, such as middle management. The lack of consistent information added a level of challenge to the inclusion of these documents, but also provided insight into why some of the challenges of middle leadership that have been published in previous research actually exist.

The focus of this research was on the perceptions of middle leaders, and therefore, while the documents were useful in assisting to put other data collected into context. The use of the official documents in this study was limited to the following purposes:

1. Identifying limitations in terms of articulating and describing the role and responsibilities of middle leaders in England and Saudi. This helped explain limitations and suggested a map to improve the description that would help middle leaders understand how decision-makers and policy makers perceive their roles and responsibilities;
2. Identifying where the middle leader position is located in the school structure and linking this to the findings from the interviews to understand how their position

in the structure influenced the power relations between middle leaders and other staff;

3. Learning about the background of each school to provide the required description of each case.

In order to use the evidence from the documents in the findings chapter, they have been coded as follows: (D) refers to a document, followed by a number that identifies which case the document belongs to. For example, (D1/S1) refers to document number (1) and relates to case S1. Some official documents were authorised to be used in full. These are presented in the appendices and referred to as required.

### **3.6 The Pilot Study**

Prior to the main research interviews, a pilot study of 4 interviewees (2 middle leaders from Saudi and 2 middle leaders from England) was conducted. The interview questions in Arabic and English were piloted with middle leaders, who were not invited to take part in the main research project. It has been suggested by Bryman (2015) that it is preferable for any participants in a pilot to come from the same type of group of participants for the main study and the pilot participants in the current study were in the role of middle leaders in both Saudi and English primary schools. The aim of the pilot study was not to collect data, but to test the comprehensibility and clarity of the questions. Bryman and Bell (2015) explain that completing a pilot study is a chance for the researcher to practise the interview questions in a real-world context.

A further benefit of a pilot study is to address any weaknesses in the structure of the interviews and the reaction of the participants to the questions, so these can be amended if necessary. Identifying any questions that are unclear or questions that make participants uncomfortable before the actual research takes place can help the researcher avoid or improve them before the main study (Bryman, 2001). In this study piloting the interview

questions not only helped me in identifying possible ambiguity in the questions but also identified my own weaknesses in my interview skills. It gave me a sense of confidence, as it gave me prior experience in learning how to schedule the questions and how to avoid any possible obstacles during the main study. Piloting the interviews was also helpful for examining the flow of the instructions and their suitability for the issue under investigation, starting from the introduction to the termination of the interview (Bryman and Bell, 2015). This in many ways helped to determine the trustworthiness of the questions being used, as it enabled the data collected in the main study to be fully aligned with the research objectives.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

The adoption of a qualitative research paradigm is likely to elicit a number of ethical concerns revolving around official consent, the rights of participants and how the collected data is treated and seeking the required permissions from authorities. In this research, all of those concerns were considered when I completed Manchester Metropolitan University's Ethical Approval form. No research took place before the form was approved (see Appendix 1); and all the information collected was stored on a password-protected university computer with access limited to me only, to protect the anonymity and privacy of participants, thus preserving confidentiality. Once the form was approved I needed to seek the required permissions (see Appendix 2) from the education authorities in both educational settings in Saudi and England for further information about ethical considerations. In the English schools, the pathway towards conducting the interviews was less problematic because all I needed to do to select the sample was to contact the headteacher by email, introduce myself and give a brief account of my research. However, in Saudi it was a concern for the researcher that samples were selected by the headteachers and education department, which may raise a sample bias issue. An

important question was present for me all the time during the interviews ‘Are they telling me what they want me to hear or they are reflecting their realities?’ Being aware of this matter, I asked more probing questions during the interviews to test the knowledge they were sharing and to illustrate deeper understanding and connections. From another perspective, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) argue that research ethics in social science are usually centred on three principle aspects: consent, privacy and bias. In the following section, I address each one of these aspects individually.

### **3.7.1 Consent**

From a legal standpoint, informed consent encompasses three elements, namely: information, capacity, and voluntariness (Field and Behrman, 2004). All these three elements must be met in order for informed consent to be considered valid. Information must be effectively communicated in order for informed consent to be provided. The researcher must ensure that the research participants receive the right information and understand the implication of their involvement. The capacity of a participant involves their ability to acquire, retain and evaluate information and make sound decisions. The last element of informed consent is voluntariness. This involves an individual’s ability to exercise their free will and make choices without being under any duress, deceit or fraud (Field and Behrman, 2004). Therefore, researchers need to seek and gain consent from their research participants, making sure that participants are carefully and truthfully briefed about the aims and the objectives of the study before they agree to take part. In this study, I not only gave participants a written consent form, but also made it clear that I intended to record their interview. I made sure that they had read, understood, agreed and signed the form before starting each interview. It was made clear to participants that the content of the interviews would be used for academic purposes only. In addition, participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage of the research, and that

there would be no negative consequences as a result of their withdrawal (see Appendix 3).

The work of the researcher is to ensure that the participants completely understand the purpose of the study; thus, the researcher should outline the methods, the demands of the study, and the risk participants may face (Best and Kahn, 2006; Jones and Kottler, 2006). As I wished to carry out observations, I had to follow more complicated procedures in the English schools than in the Saudi schools. I initially submitted a request to all headteachers in the schools under investigation. Unlike the quick responses I received when I requested interviews, responses for observations were delayed for over 2 weeks and even then, only one school accepted the request, which was limited to only one access. Later, more schools allowed me further access to their middle leaders. While it was initially unclear why the hesitation existed, previous research on conducting observations suggests that reticence towards observations is often a natural response (Mercer, 2007). This is because observations can be interpreted as a form of judgement, perhaps more than in the case of an interview (Mercer, 2007). The outcome in the current study exemplified this reticence as headteachers gave multiple excuses as to why observations should not be conducted. These included instances such as a lack of time or inadequate staffing numbers. I assured the headteacher that I would only be working with adults and would be spending no time alone with the students. While these were initially considered as significant challenges, in my continued interactions with headteachers, I was able to gain a certain level of trust which led to more acceptance of observations in some instances.

### **3.7.2 Privacy and confidentiality**

Due to the individual's right to privacy, researchers must ensure that they protect the identity of their research participants. Consequently, pseudonyms were used to refer to

the participants instead of their real names, in order to protect their identities (see chapter 4). This is connected to the third aspect, which entails protecting participants from harm. This covers all kinds of harm, whether physical, emotional or any other type. In this research, the researcher agreed not to carry out any observations or record any notes without the awareness of participant. I respected the limitations and boundaries participants suggested and did not discuss issues unrelated to the research.

### **3.7.3 Bias**

Although there are many benefits associated with the use of a qualitative research design, it is limited in the sense that it is subjective in nature and leaves room for bias. Since findings from qualitative research studies are generated by interpreting and analysing the views, opinions and experiences of research participants, there is a likelihood that some of the information gathered may incorporate bias from either the research participants or the researcher (Klenke, 2008; Mack and Woodson, 2005). In order to avert or minimise potential biases, this study employed one major method (e.g. semi-structured interview) and attempted two minor methods of data collection (document analysis, and observation).

Research participants may also be affected by the manner in which the researcher conducts the research or how they perceive the researcher depending on their age, race, sex, or other characteristics that are likely to determine what they tell the researcher during interviews or how they behave during the process of observation (Rapley, 2007; Corbin and Strauss, 2008). All the data collected is subject to the researcher's interpretation of events, behaviour or activities in the research setting. In this research, observations were deemed to be important, but plagued by problems relating to trust and the lack of willingness to participate. It is acknowledged in Dewalt and Dewalt (2002) that one of the downfalls of observation as a data collection method is that the presence

of the researcher in the research settings may affect normal or routine behaviours and occurrences as some individuals tend to change their behaviour whenever they notice they are being observed. So, the fact that observations did not work well in the current research study is not necessarily a downfall, despite noting that bias exists in this scenario. In the case of this study, observations were used because they assisted in the collection of first-hand data that could be used to verify the validity of the other methods, e.g. interviews and document analysis.

Likewise, there is a propensity for bias in the proposed sampling method. Since this approach is non-random, there is a likelihood that the sample selected may not be completely representative of the entire population that the study seeks to focus on (Lund Research, 2012). Gravetter and Forzano (2015) argue that this approach is a weak method of sampling mainly because the researcher has very little control over the representativeness of the sample. While this is seen as a limitation, it is more of a concern when there is a desire to demonstrate that a research project is generalizable (Creswell, 2013), which in this study is not the case. Thus, the sample selected may be biased, but this is acknowledged and is simply part of the study. However, this study endeavoured to minimise the potential bias of the sample by ensuring that the research participants were diverse in terms of age, gender, primary school, length of work experience and work position (Best, 2014). Despite the drawbacks associated with convenience sampling, it is still commonly used because it is cheap, easy to execute and timely as compared to other random sampling methods (Gravetter and Forzano, 2015).

#### **3.7.4 Comparability (girls' schools in Saudi)**

One potential source of bias in the sample could have been an absence of women. In Saudi culture and society, women's education was marginalised up until the 1950s when a group of educated middle-class men petitioned the government to create schools just for girls.



This culture of segregation is motivated by Shari'a law (Baki, 2004). As Baki (2004) says, the goal of education in Saudi is to foster morality and encourage a religious lifestyle, a factor that has led to the segregation of genders, and in which the education system treats men and women differently, in accordance with the Islamic religion, due to their divergent societal expectations. This has ensured that they are educated in different systems. To make a fair comparison between the two countries in the study, female middle leaders in Saudi Arabia would have to be interviewed and in order to do this, help had to be sought from a female colleague to carry out the research in female schools for purposes of gender sensitivity. She was guided by the prepared research questions. Saudi culture is different from the English culture in this respect, where the concept of gender equality is promoted, and men and women go through the same education system (Baki, 2004). Having multiple people assessing the participants adds a level of complication to the research process, but the fact that this female colleague could carry out the research under the instruction of the researcher negated some of these complications. Furthermore, as the study was written up by the researcher, a consistent voice was maintained.

### **3.8 Data Analysis: A Thematic Approach**

This study has taken a thematic analysis approach to finding meanings in the participant interviews. Ayres et al. (2003:867) describe thematic analysis as “a data reduction and analysis strategy by which qualitative data are segmented, categorised, summarised, and reconstructed in a way that captures important concepts within the data set”. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest six phases a researcher should adopt to complete thematic analysis successfully (see table 2 below).

Table 2: Reproduced table in the light of Braun and Clarke, 2006

	<b>Phases</b>	<b>Description of the process</b>
<b>1</b>	Make myself familiar with my data	Listen, read and re-read the transcribed and translated data.
<b>2</b>	Make initial coding	Highlight important features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code using colours.
<b>3</b>	Search for possible sub-themes	Transferring codes into potential sub-themes, gathering all relevant to each potential theme.
<b>4</b>	Review themes and subthemes	Checking if the themes and sub-themes work in relation to the coded extracts (level 1) and the entire data sets (level 2).
<b>5</b>	Define and name final set of themes	Keep analysing to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
<b>6</b>	Completing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Select vivid, compelling extracts; relate the analysis back to the research question and literature; producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

In this study, thematic analysis has been used to analyse the data collected and all six phases were applied. For the purpose of analysing the interviews thematically, the first step started immediately after all audio records were transcribed into text. The Arabic interviews were then translated into English.

***Phase one: Make myself familiar with my data***

Although Braun and Clarke (2006) advise researchers intending to use thematic analysis to become familiar with the collected data, they do not explain or define how to perform this step. My understanding is that Braun and Clarke (2006) encourage the researcher to take free reign to engage with the data in order to gain familiarity with it. In this research, the first analytical step began even before all interviews were transcribed, as I started to familiarise myself with the data by repeatedly listening to the original recording. Then when I began to transcribe I found myself almost remembering some of the terms or important issues indicated by the participants. Of course, listening to the Arabic recorded interviews was easier in terms of getting every aspect mentioned by the participant, but transcribing interviews conducted in English was simpler because I did not need to

complete the further step of translating them. Translation is a challenging task, as there are many different ways of interpreting what has been expressed. As a researcher, I had to be very careful to ensure that I was not influencing the translation through my own expectations. The fact that I was using thematic analysis made this process easier, as while it is difficult to justify all translation at word level (Mundays, 1998), given that there can be many English words that could substitute for an Arabic one (see appendix 4), the overall concepts generally do not require such a detailed level of translation. The translation process also made me more familiar with the data because I had to come back to it again, and I also discussed some of the ideas mentioned in the recordings with a professional translator which made me very close to my data in different ways. As soon as the data was prepared in a Word document, I read it line by line, recording comments on my first impressions of what the data was saying. I performed this step until I had completed a read through of all interviews. I followed the same process when I analysed the observations and official documents.

### ***Phase two: Starting initial coding***

Once I had become more familiar with my data and some brief notes had been made, the second phase of thematic analysis began. Line by line coding was performed, this involved identifying “the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way” (Boyatzis, 1998 cited in Braun and Clarke, 2006:18) and then assigning names to the segments. These components are known as codes and were used to help build themes. In this phase, any element that the researcher thought relevant to research aims or which related to topics from the literature review was coded, even if the ideas which emerged seemed contradictory (Braun and Clarke, 2006), for example, changes and decision making. In this phase, a large number of codes was initially generated (see appendix 5), sometimes up to twenty for interviews, and the

collating process was done simply by sticking different coloured paper on the wall and comments on each paper to indicate which parent interview script the cluster belonged to. Notes were also made to illustrate how the clusters were produced and could be connected. Different attempts were typically made before arriving at the final groupings.

### ***Phase three: Searching for possible themes and sub-themes***

As soon as all the data had been coded, I started to group the colour codes into clusters, attempting to identify sub-themes using different colours. My understanding of the meaning of a theme is based on the definition of Boyatzis (1998), who described a theme as “a pattern in the information that at minimum describes and organises the possible observations, and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998 cited in Braun and Clarke, 2006:161). Thus, to illustrate this with a concrete example, analysis of the transcript of the original scripts identified a number of comments that referred to the role of middle leaders in relation to leadership (see appendix 5). When grouped together they pointed to a possible underlying theme about different issues and factors related to middle-leadership. The number of the line in the relevant theme, alongside the code of the interview, was mentioned underneath each of them to simplify the follow-up step, when themes and sub-themes were reviewed for the final version of the themes (see appendix 6).

In terms of the interviews conducted with middle leaders in general and Saudi middle leaders, issues such as ‘self-censorship’ were recognised. Self-censorship appears when participants do not feel comfortable communicating certain information in front of people they do not know. This explains the appearance of hesitation, unfinished sentences, euphemistic expressions, gestures or tones of voice that leave others [the researcher] to draw their own conclusions. Therefore, I had to use my insider knowledge of Saudi society to try to understand what the speaker might be attempting to imply and to interpret

this appropriately when allocating labels to categories. In the English context, this was not a common issue, most statements were clear and when there was a lack of clarity the supervisors were always available to clarify ambiguity in participants' comments.

#### ***Phase four: Reviewing themes and sub-themes***

At this stage, being precise in naming the themes and sub-themes was one of my main concerns. I was aware of the advice (Braun and Clarke, 2006:91) that possible candidate themes are not really themes (e.g., if there was not enough data to support them, or if data was too diverse), while others might collapse into each other (e.g., two apparently separate themes might form one theme). Other themes might need to be broken down into separate themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006:91), as I show in appendix 7. In order to complete this phase I had a long meeting with my supervisors and different diagrams and drafts were produced to ensure that names given to the themes and sub-themes reflected what the data was saying. This phase was one of the most challenging because it is time-consuming, requiring multiple careful reviews of themes and sub-themes, and a number of changes had to be made. I tried to discover any overlapping or redundant codes or any codes that did not appear to fit within an identified theme. To complete this step, I produced a large table to track the possibilities of overlapping or redundant codes.

#### ***Phase five: define and name a final set of themes***

Here, searching for the essence of each of the themes was crucial. In this penultimate phase, a complete picture of the data starts to emerge, and the researcher needs to think how each one of the themes can be linked to the objectives or answer any concerns and questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The phase was not completed until the core of each theme was specified and clear definitions and names were found for each theme. In order to complete this stage, I drew a large diagram to illustrate possible themes and how they

could be connected. All of these issues were discussed with the supervision team and a new diagram (9) was produced on the basis of their comments.

### ***Phase six: Producing the report***

I began to understand the deeper meanings and possible connections of the data, which was no longer raw or purely descriptive. I began to link each theme to the research questions and then to support the ideas and meanings proposed in each theme with quotations from the original scripts.

### **3.9 Trustworthiness of the data**

It is essential in research to consider the type of the data being collected; in the case of this study, it was most valuable to consider the trustworthiness. Guba (1981) provided four criteria that should be applied to qualitative data: credibility; transferability; dependability; and confirmability. Shenton (2004) suggested ways of ensuring these criteria are being met; for example, in establishing credibility, he suggests the procedures of conducting the research are well documented. In this chapter, I have recorded how I carried out the data collection and then analysed it, demonstrating that the methods being used were well-established ones. Using multiple sources of information can also be used to support credibility; in this instance I did use documentation as a way to support the individual interviews. Although the documentation analysis yielded limited data, it did provide a background to explain some of the information gleaned from the interviews. In addition, I was able to verify some of the details provided by the interviewees, which is what Shenton (2004) argues is the true value of documents as they shed light on the behaviour of the participants.

In terms of credibility, this can also involve verifying information from one participant with that from another (Shenton, 2004). I interviewed middle leaders from across

different schools and different cultures, therefore this gave the opportunity of checking information from various sources. Collecting data from the different schools also ensured that one set of data from one school could be compared with another; this can provide credibility, especially if similar results are shown. These findings can be given further credibility when linked to previous research studies, as I have done in the discussion of the findings, where I have related to existing literature.

Transferability in qualitative research is concerned with whether the research findings and conclusions can be transferred to other situations (Shenton, 2004). As most studies are contextual, this can be problematic, as the findings will be specific to a certain context. However, as long as full details of the context are provided, another researcher may be able to transfer similarities to a different context. The details of the context in Saudi and in English middle schools have been provided in this study; one of the benefits of having a dual-aspect context is that it already shows two settings. This provides the personal perspectives of two very different contexts, which was a key aim of this research project.

A further criterion for trustworthiness is that of dependability. This is in many ways related to the credibility of the research process as it entails giving full details of the research design, as I have done in this chapter. Shenton (2004) argues that there must be a clear audit trail throughout the methodological description so that a reader can understand why decisions were made and how procedures were carried out; this enables confirmability, which Miles and Huberman (1994) state shows how and why the researcher decided to use certain approaches. According to Miller and Glassner (1997) methods such as interviews can lead to potential bias. Participants may tell the story in the way they think the researcher wants to hear due to 'social desirability bias'. Therefore, to control for any such bias, and in order to enhance the dependability of all of the qualitative components of the study, and following the suggestions of Creswell (2013), Yin (2009) and Woolley (2009), secondary data was used to corroborate the evidence

gathered from primary sources. This included various documentary materials provided by the Saudi Ministry and local education authorities, together with data from the literature.

At the same time, I made sure that participants were clear from the beginning that there were no right or wrong answer to my questions and that I was interested in what they really thought. It was important that the participants responded honestly to the questions asked, and the researcher attempted to build rapport in the interviews (Bryman, 2015).

### **3.10 Positionality**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) insist that the researcher is one of the most important elements in each aspect of the research process, and this affects the credibility and dependability of the study. Bourke (2014) suggests that the researcher needs to explain their position, experience and background to the reader at an early stage, to enable them to understand how the research was undertaken and what the researcher's position was at the time when the data were collected. In connection with this, Hayfield and Huxley (2015) suggest that the importance of the researcher's position as an insider or outsider has been the focus of many researchers in education. Mercer (2007:4) rejects the idea that identifying a researcher's position in the research is simple and suggests that researchers are “multiple insiders and outsiders ... moving back and forth across different boundaries ... as situations involving different values arise, different statuses are activated and the lines of separation shift’. In this research, I was aware from an early stage that some of the research would be undertaken in my homeland. This suggested that it would not be possible to divorce myself from my context: the fact that I share a common language and cultural norms and values with the participants makes me an ‘insider’. On the other hand, to complete the part of the research which was to take place in England, with participants and in a cultural context very different from mine, I would be taking the position of ‘outsider.’ I had the



advantage, however, of having some previous access to this context during my master's degree study, during which I conducted cross-cultural comparative research into the role of the headteacher in Saudi and England. This gave me some insights into the operation of the education system in England and encouraged me to think more about other stakeholders involved in leadership, more specifically middle leadership (the focus of this research). Thus, it is too simplistic to suggest that I was choosing to be either 'insider' or 'outsider' because I was navigating complex insider/outsider experiences, and Bourke's (2014:2) advice - that the role of researcher is better conceptualised as a continuum of "multiple overlapping identities" - seemed very apt in my situation.

### **3.11 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the methodological approach followed to answer the research questions and to meet the research aim. The chapter has also justified the philosophical stance adopted and explains why the researcher intended to conduct qualitative research. It has also justified the use of multiple-exploratory case study design. Subsequently, and in an effort to ensure academic rigour, a full account of the sampling process was provided, as were detailed accounts of how the data was collected via semi-structured interviews with the addition of document analysis. Issues related to the quality of the research and the method of translation have also been discussed. The next chapter discusses the findings of the research.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Introduction

This research was conducted with the aim of examining the factors that influence the role and responsibilities of middle leaders in primary schools, comparing and contrasting the experiences of middle leaders in Saudi Arabian schools with those in English schools. In order to accomplish this, the following key research question and sub-questions were posed:

- How do the internal and external environmental factors that are embedded in English and Saudi educational settings of middle leaders in primary schools influence their perspectives on their roles and daily practices?

Sub-questions:

- How are the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders perceived in Saudi and English Primary Schools?
- What factors contribute to the shaping of the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders in primary schools in Saudi Arabia and England?
- What kinds of factors might make the school more effective in its organisation?

As explained in the methodology chapter, the initial plan of research was to conduct a process of comparing and contrasting the qualitative data collected from three sources in both Saudi and England: semi-structured interviews; observations in schools; and relevant (official Government Education Department) documents. In practice, I encountered questions and resistance to my presence for the purpose of observation in the English schools, as I was unfamiliar to them and they were busy institutions. The result of this was that observation was limited to the 8 visits I was permitted to make to the studied schools, and thus has contributed less to the findings than I had originally intended.

In accordance with adopting an interpretivist philosophy and the fact that this work has been informed by grounded theory and framed by case study design, I was open to this unexpected turn of events and accepted even this as data. A suspicion then arose that, as mentioned in the literature review, bias may be in operation in the widely accepted paradigm of the secular liberal West (as exemplified by English schools) and the hierarchical rigidity of the religious 'orient' (as exemplified by Saudi schools). This 'hermeneutic of suspicion' (as Paul Ricoeur famously termed it) drove me to look again at the literature, the relevant official documents and the verbatim reports of Ofsted in England and Department of Education in Saudi, and to be open to the possibility that the factor of values, in terms of both secular and religious ideology, may have more effect on perceptions of middle leaders' roles and responsibilities in Saudi and English primary schools than previously found. My suspicion did not come from meaningless assumptions but was built up as further restrictions were put in place to control my access to the examined setting, especially in England, for observation. This suggested that I needed to look more closely at the data extracted from different resources; including official documents and the literature I reviewed, to properly analyse and interpret middle leaders' perceptions. Hence, during my analysis I became more aware that middle leaders might be showing me only the surface layer they wanted me to see or understand, and that there might be other, deeper layers I needed to access in order to discover the root of their perceptions and the connection between the surface and the underlying layers. The fact that this sense of suspicion became a main element of my feelings and thoughts did not just influence my data collection journey, but also my interpretation and understanding of the opinions and perceptions of middle leaders, their deep-rootedness and interconnections.

Hence, this chapter will present the findings gathered from interviewing 18 middle leaders in 6 different primary schools in England and Saudi, with associated data collected from

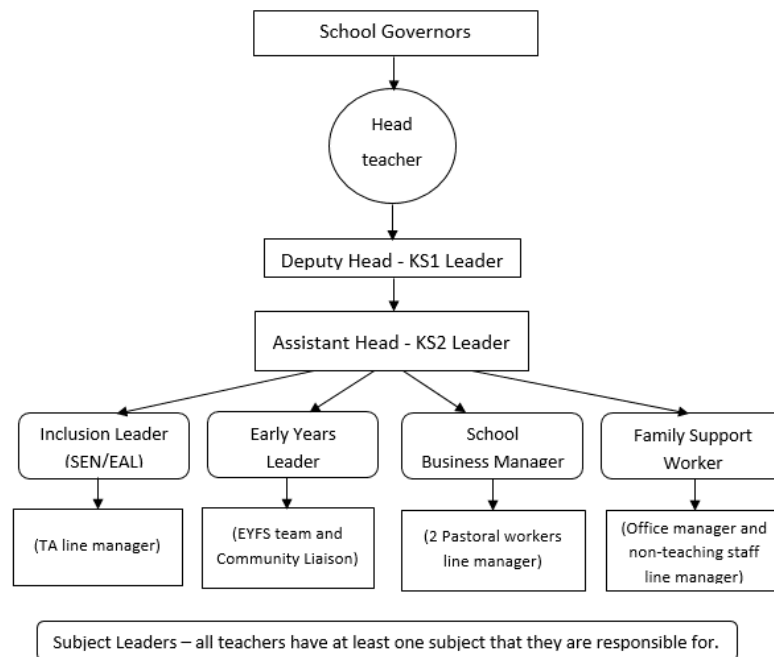
6 different observations and textual information extracted from official documents. In the light of the findings by Yin (2016), when a researcher adopts case study as a research design then he or she needs to provide a brief descriptive background of each studied case involved in the research. To satisfy this requirement, the descriptive data has been extracted from official documents and the notes made by the researcher during the schools' visits are provided starting by English schools and followed by Saudi schools.

## **4.2 Brief descriptions of each case involved in this research**

### **English schools**

#### **School 1:**

In this case, the English Primary School is classified as a voluntary aided primary school and the Local Authority Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme is part of the principle admission process (D3/S1). According to the National Archive, the school was established in 2002 as it was the supplementary building of the Church established in 1861 (D2/S1). The Ofsted report published in (2012) describes the school as an oversubscribed mixed gender primary school and all management team including middle leaders are working to serve over 280 pupils and the number is creasing every year the school has achieved several awards (e.g. a national anti-bullying award for 3 years) (D3/S1). It was interesting to notice that there have been several changes to the school leadership and management team since the previous Ofsted inspection, with a newly appointed head-Teacher, deputy head-Teacher, assistant head-Teacher and three middle leaders in September 2015 and after these changes the school started to receive awards (D4/S1) which could indicate that a new management team was better placed to meet Ofsted criteria. In terms of the school's structure, Figure (1) shows school 1 hieratical structure. Middle leaders are in the middle and they are responsible for creating the link between Head and other staff.

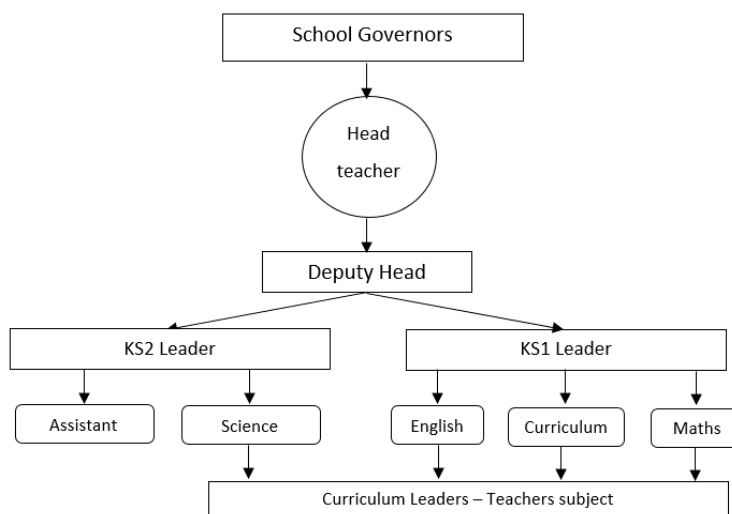


*Figure 1: School 1 Structure.*

## **School 2:**

School 2 is a mixed gender school located in economically deprived area with total number of 49 staff, 12 of them are working as middle leaders. According to an Ofsted inspection report published in 2004, this school is described as a community primary mixed school which serves pupils age between 3-11 years. It operates under the authority of a governing body (D1/S2). Ofsted's report (2017), adds that this school is a large primary school; it serves 12 classes from nursery to Year 6 with pupils from different minority backgrounds; mainly British Indian. The school is in a multicultural area, where 57.7% of the students have another first language (D2/S2). It was noticeable that, on the Governors/ Policies/ Statutory Information page of the web site rather than a message from the headteacher, there is a link to a policy related document headed by the following message *"Please note that, where possible, we adopt the draft policies provided by [?] County Council. Hard copies of all our policy documents can be viewed at school"*. This message indicates that the school management declares to public that they are running

the school in the line with local government's policies. In terms of school structure, Figure (2) shows school 2's structure.



*Figure 2: School 2 Structure*

This leadership chart appears to be a less complex hierarchy than in school 1.

### **School 3:**

Textual information available about this school is limited because the headteacher did not feel comfortable providing official documents about the school. When the researcher visited the website to search for information regarding the school hierarchical structure or any other online documents, what was found was only a few inspections' reports and the policies. From those available reports and documents, the researcher was able to provide this brief summary about the school. The school in socioeconomically disadvantaged area that included people from different backgrounds (research's notes) (O1/S3). The school is a mixed gender school serves 294 pupils from different cultural backgrounds. The school is served by 33 staff 7 of them middle leaders. According to Ofsted reports (2011-2017) and the school's website, the school is highly decorated, receiving six different performance awards over the last six years.

## Saudi schools

Most of primary schools in Saudi are built on a large three floor structures. The ground floor is dedicated to Years 1 and 2, the first floor is for Years 3 and 4, the third floor is for Years 5 and 6. This is a standard arrangement for how schools are organised in Saudi Arabia. According to the experience of the researcher and as a Saudi citizen, it is known that for the headteacher to achieve better control over the school, he or she divides ML responsibilities among the floors, although, such action does not match the schools' rule and regulations guide. According to the "Public Schools General Guideline, 2015", every public school in Saudi Arabia is expected to meet the "Formulation of the Governing Body in Public schools, 2015" (see table 3 below). Nevertheless, in practise, such a guideline is ignored by the local authority sometimes as the demand of the schools' needs is different than what is documented in the guidelines. Consequently, if a school breaks the regulations regarding the structure due to their specific needs, the local authority is not necessarily aware of the transgression.

*Table 3: Formulation of the Governing Body in Public schools*

<b><u>Second Floor</u></b>	<b><u>Year 5</u></b>	<b><u>Year 6</u></b>
Middle Manager (e.g. School Affairs Officer)	3 classes of 35 – 40 students per class	3 classes of 35 – 40 students per class
<b><u>First Floor</u></b>	<b><u>Year 3</u></b>	<b><u>Year 4</u></b>
Middle Manager (e.g. Student Affairs Officer) Welfare Officer's office	3 classes of 35 – 40 students per class	3 classes of 35 – 40 students per class
<b><u>Ground Floor</u></b>	<b><u>Year 1</u></b>	<b><u>Year 2</u></b>
Middle Manager (e.g. Teacher Affairs Officer) Headteacher's office Staff Room	3 classes of 35 – 40 students per class	3 classes of 35 – 40 students per class

## School 4:

It is important to stress that the documentary information sources, which were available to create background about School 4, were very limited because the school's principal

refused to share any official documents (going back to the issue of trust, as described above). In addition, the school did not have other sources of information such as a website, Facebook or Twitter available to the public. It is also important to note that the Saudi culture does not encourage sharing of information about female schools' activities including schooling. What can be said is that School 4 is a girl's school which serves 496 girls age between 6-12 years and the total number of staff is 48 professionals, 5 of whom are middle leaders (3 deputies and 2 welfare staff). This school is in Saudi Arabia, in city X in relatively affluent area.

#### **School 5:**

This school is in Saudi Arabia is in city X. This is a primary school for boys and serves 572 pupils with a total number of 60 staff. Unlike School 4, the girls' school: School 5 has its own website which includes some information about the school. From (D1/S5) it was found that the school adopts a hierarchal structure and according to the structure the main duties and principles are controlled by the headteacher. As can be seen from Figure (3), the middle management staff are located in the middle (the blue boxes) and they are line managed directly by the headteacher. The position given to the ML in the school is named as "*Alwakeel*" which is the alternative name to deputy (see section 2.5.2.2).

#### **School 6:**

This school is located in the City X in Saudi Arabia, but in relatively poorer area. This primary school is another boys' school. The school serves 575 pupils with total number of 58 staff, 38 of whom are teachers and the rest are administration and educational support staff. Just like all the schools in the Kingdom of Saudi, School 6 is must operate in a strictly structured hierarchy system (see Figure 3), where the head is responsible for the internal operation of the school. The hierarchy structure and the position title is not



unique to School 6 as all schools in Saudi Arabia adopt the same title in accordance with Ministry of Education policy which means this hierarchy is also applied Schools 4, 5 and 6 (Figure 3).

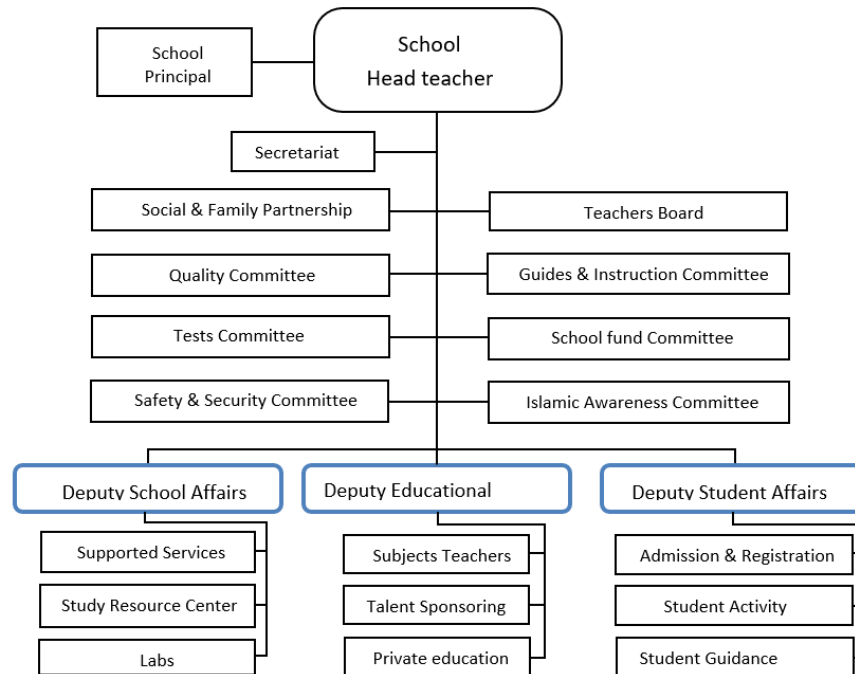


Figure 3: Hierarchal Structure of Saudi Primary Schools- adopted from D1/S4, S5 and S6.

### 4.3 Question One: How are the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders perceived in Saudi Arabia and English Primary Schools?

This question was formulated with the aim of eliciting middle leaders' understandings of their roles in both English and Saudi settings.

#### 4.3.1 Compliance-driven style of management and leadership in Saudi and England:

This section starts by addressing findings from the Saudi context, followed by findings extracted from the English context.

#### ***4.3.1.1 Rigid compliance with the King and religion in Saudi Arabia***

In a country where the King, who is at the same time the Prime Minister, is the main source of power to promote real change, Saudi middle leaders carried out their daily duties and offered an interpretation of their roles in relation to what they see as rigidly hierarchical systems of government power over education. As Safia from S4/S said:

“We cannot be in the education system and lead as we are operating in a military system [Silence]... We are working in a very rigid hierarchical system” (Safia, S4/S).

This rigid hierarchical system is imposed on the school’s management through different channels. The first channel is the official procedural and regulatory guide, where the management team has no option but to accept full compliance with the guide. In the official guidelines published by the Saudi government in 2015, all middle leaders and headteachers were requested to fully submit to a directive outlining their roles and responsibilities (Public Schools General Guideline, 2015). One participant told the researcher that school staff had been requested to demonstrate strong commitment to complying with the guidelines. This opinion was echoed by middle leaders in the schools investigated. For example, Rashed from S5/S stated:

“School management in Saudi Arabia’s schools is based on a procedural and regulative guide. The guide defines the responsibilities and tasks assigned to each member of middle management staff including middle leaders” (Rashed, S5/S).

According to Rashed from S5/S, Saudi middle leaders have been provided with these guidelines as the main source of knowledge about their roles and responsibilities. Their role has been defined and tasks assigned, and the outcome is that middle leaders feel they are left with no leeway for making choices.

In addition, middle leaders enact their administrative role in compliance with government policy. middle leaders’ positions are in effect equivalent to that of deputy head in the

English system, but without the strategic power to practice leadership. This was particularly evident when the researcher noted that one of the middle leaders utilised the written role guidelines to answer the question: what does your typical day look like? The researcher observed clearly (O1/S4) that Huda from S4/S demonstrated a complete lack of confidence to express her everyday responsibilities in her own way, which appeared to indicate her anxiety about both the role itself and the power of government. In her later response, she was anxious to demonstrate full compliance with the policy, saying that other staff complained about it. Moreover, she demonstrated some rigidity in her adherence to the rules:

“[Laughing] if you let me read the guidelines, you will know that all these duties are written there. I am just following up, basically, I am doing my job.

SA: but these are administrative duties and you are a leader

ML: [silence]... I do not know, I have no comment on this. As far as I know I have to comply with the role as it was described in the guidelines. I do not want even to think about it” (Huda, S4/S).

From comments of Huda from S4/S it may be inferred that she might not be fully aware of the responsibilities of the middle leader or she might be anxious of making mistakes while describing her role as middle leader. This may indicate the strict compliance environment which resulted in Huda consulting the guide for middle leaders prior to answering the question. This was not the only case where middle leaders did not have the confidence to express their opinions of their roles, but it was the most obvious example. The views of the participants were confirmed by their actions observed by the researcher during observations to Saudi schools 4, 5 and 6, that all middle leaders in the researched schools regularly consulted the official guidelines before taking any minor step or completing any daily duty such as paperwork. The official documents analysis also showed that middle leaders are strictly expected to follow the guidelines relevant to their

roles and responsibilities (Public Schools General Guideline 2015). Middle leaders also demonstrated their acceptance of the limited power authorized by the government to: “Help them to smoothly run the school while maintaining their commitment to the systems and regulations in force, which facilitates the educational process as well” (Rashed, S5/S).

The reluctance to ‘think about it’ suggests that middle leader Huda, from S4/S was operating wholly according to formal rules; she seemed unwilling to consider alternative approaches to her role.

The observations supported the power of the rigid hierarchical system as mentioned by Saudi participants and also appears in the way in which Saudi’s primary schools are structured. According to the researcher’s observations (O2/S3), primary schools in Saudi are divided into floors. The headteacher, who is at the top of the hierarchical system, operates from his or her office, which is located in a private space on the ground floor. The headteacher appoints a middle leader for every floor to be responsible for managing the duties of that floor. Every middle leader knows that his or her power is limited to his or her floor and he or she is only responsible for tackling the duties of that floor. The rigidity in the school structure appeared to influence negatively the value of collaboration among schools’ middle management. So, in the case of the absence of or late arrival of staff, the headteacher is responsible for covering (O3/S4).

Middle leaders in Saudi schools know that they have been given authority to force other staff and colleagues to work in line with the government’s guidelines. So, they have not only accepted the duty imposed on them, but also ensure that other colleagues adhere to the rules. Huda from S4/S stated:

“I help the teachers to complete their plans and make sure that plans are in line with the Ministry of Education policy” (Huda, S4/S)

While, Rashed, from S5/S stressed that:

“There is something called the distance of respect. If that distance was lost, then teachers and other staff would not respect me as a middle leader.... I need to keep that distance from staff so I will be able to encourage or sometime force them to comply with the government” (Rashed, S5/S).

According to the above quotation from Rashed, from S5/S, it seems that the concept of collegiality is influenced by the pressure on the middle leader to comply. They are working to ensure compliance with the daily routine as imposed by the government. This might cause a very high level of emphasis on what to do and who to please.

Furthermore, middle leaders know they are overloaded with heavy administrative duties, which have to be managed every day. Therefore, the leader does not have time to think or question the government line. Saod from S5/S stated:

“[Laughing]... a lot is happening once you put your feet in the school” (Saod, S5/S).

Alongside spending most of the time doing paperwork which takes their energy and motivation – they needed to focus on more important school-related duties such as observing and following up kids' achievement, behavioural, physiological, social, and psychological and health issues that arise within the school community (Abdulla from S6/S). There are a lot of other duties including supervision, monitoring, solving problems, and communicating with parents. Middle leaders are also responsible for:

“Enhance[ing] our students' sense of citizenship... [I] motivate and encourage teachers to utilise advanced teaching techniques and instruments, and I monitor any remarks or recommendations concerning scholastic courses and curriculum and report them to the headmaster” (Rashed, S5/S).

The above data showed that the middle leaders in the schools were found to be very busy in performing their responsibilities towards running the school smoothly in line with the

governmental rules and regulations. These data were also supported by the observation gathered by researchers from the primary schools 4 and 6 where the middle leaders were observed to be busy in holding meetings, visiting classrooms, checking the infrastructure, and having meetings with the headteachers (O1/S4). The busy schedule of the middle leaders was also evident from the observations relating to the two middle leaders from schools 4, when they delayed the interviews for 15 minutes with the researcher due to their meetings with the parents and school staff. The documents also present numerous duties and responsibilities outlined for the middle leaders in the official guidelines issued by the Department of Education (Public Schools General Guideline 2015).

The second level at which government power is imposed on middle leaders in primary schools in Saudi is via the headteacher. There are government attempts to convince headteachers and other staff that they are responsible for making decisions. The headteacher is therefore allowed to hold regular meetings. Abdulla, from S6/S and Safia, from S4/S agreed that:

“Well if the Head has something in mind and he wants us to vote for it, we conduct a meeting and we vote for it. I rarely experience any rejection of compliance; we are all happy with the head’s decision” (Abdulla, S6/S).

As a result, the headteacher creates the agenda that complies with the government’s approach to managing the school. The hierarchical structure of the school gives the head power to make the decision, although it was noticeable that all the middle leaders were aware that the headteacher is powerless and that by complying with him or her they are complying with the government. Ali, from S5/S stated:

“When you operate in a hierarchical structure like a school, then the head will dominate the decision because government wanted him to do that. In the school setting, the headteacher is responsible for making and taking decisions because he knows how to

please the government and how to keep people in the top management happy” (Ali, S5/S).

Holding meetings and allowing middle leaders and other staff to vote for even minor decisions is just like throwing dust in the eyes. The reality is that middle leaders and other teaching staff will be requested to attend a meeting to support the head’s vision – a vision that simply complies with the government-defined style of management and leadership. Sami, from S6/S stated:

“Brother, the meeting is just to clarify the issues the head wants us to vote on to give him peace of mind. [Pausing]..., we have been told that we have the power of voting. Ok, but the head wants me to vote for his decision he will come to talk to me and nicely ask me to support his decision” (Sami, S6/S).

At the same time, the headteacher has not been given much power to make decisions because the Department of Education dominates decision-making. Saod, from S5/S said: “We are all operating under their [Department of Education] umbrella. That is why I told you earlier there is no point in challenging the head, because he has no power to say his free opinion” (Saod, S5/S).

Thirdly, the government imposes its power via the Department of Education, which has the authority to carry out inspections to ensure that all schools comply with government. Headteachers and middle leaders have no power to do anything but comply with government regulations, which was also supported by the official document analysis (Public Schools General Guideline, 2015). Compliance is not given because the authority is trusted by middle leaders but because of the fear that a lack of commitment to compliance will appear on the report. As Safia, from S4/S said:

“You know, performance reports are always sent by the head and also the inspectors from the education Department - they visit us regularly. We have to be ready and also

to show them that we are ready, otherwise it will appear in the report mark” (Safia, S4/S).

This response is not only related to the fear of negative reports, but also to the fact that the headteacher has been given the authority to request that middle leaders conduct duties that have not been mentioned in the guidelines. All middle leaders in Saudi schools declared that they had been requested to comply with headteachers’ requests that were not confirmed by the government’s guidelines. Therefore, power imposed from the top of this hierarchical system goes down to middle leaders via the Department of Education, and the headteacher.

Not only that, but they also know that the government allocates power to school management on one side and withdraws power from management and teachers on the other side. This makes the position of middle leaders merely nominal. Abdulla, from S6/S stated:

“The situation became worse when the new policy was forced on them and power was withdrawn from the staff in response to some bad practice ....” (Abdulla, S6/S).

Hence, the official procedural and regulative guides call middle management staff leaders (Public Schools General Guideline, 2015), but the only power they are given is the power to comply with the description of middle leaders in the official procedural and regulative guide.

Middle leaders are aware of the power of policy and the government in shaping their roles. However, they are also aware of the religious values held by the headteacher. Middle leaders can understand and acknowledge such power as it appears in the head’s behaviour. As a result, the power of religion in the Saudi context is also a principle code in school leadership. The importance of respecting religious values appeared in Huda’s comment when she said:



“Yes of course, she is a religious woman, has a great fear of Allah in her heart and tries her best to achieve *amanah* [trust] as she is supposed to do so. We know as Muslims practicing our duties with full sense of *amanah* in Islam is fundamental. Emmm, because when you have a real *taqwa* [forbearance, fear and abstinence] in your heart, you will consider the deep meaning of *amanah* and you will practice it in your daily duties, and as I can see our Head has a great sense in her heart about the actual meaning of *amanah*” (Huda, S4/S).

Therefore, middle leaders submit to the power of religion in undertaking their daily work because the value of religious contexts such as Saudi Arabia is acknowledged and respected. Words like ‘*taqwa*’ and ‘*amanah*’ used by middle leaders reflect more than trust as a value, but are part of an Arabic religious discourse which has strong roots in Islam. These words also refer to a hierarchical power inspired by religion and embodied in the headteacher and/ or the government.

The religious commitments of leaders, who are able to demonstrate religious values in their daily practice, can therefore operate as a source of power, making it easier to implement policy. The religiosity of middle leaders was observed by the researcher when they were found to pay utmost attention to the religious rituals during their working hours in schools (O2/S3). Leadership is thus able to create a role model able to motivate and inspire middle leaders, who should comply strictly with religiously inspired values and morals to be able to lead for better practices. Saod, from S5/S stated that:

“You will find that leader who spends all his day working very hard to put everything in place and he would take extra time, for free, out of his time to make sure the job has been done perfectly fine. This person is usually morally and religiously very committed” (Saod, S5/S).

Huda from S4/S indicated that:

“Fearing Allah is a great value. When we fear Allah and we know that we are going to be judged by him and asked by him, then we commit better to our work and we complete our duties in perfection.” (Huda S4/S).

Therefore, it is not only about complying with religious values, but also about fearing the consequences, which leads to better commitment and perfection.

In conclusion, Saudi middle leaders operate as administrators who ensure compliance with educational policy. The education department imposes government power and ensures that management and leadership comply, through their power to carry out inspections. The prospect of a negative inspection report scares middle leaders and headteachers and not only makes them comply with the government guidelines themselves, but also makes them force other staff and colleagues to comply. At the same time, middle leaders operate in a context in which the structure of the school is influenced by the power of the hierarchical system. In both countries, then, current leadership styles constitute a challenge to the role of middle leaders. This was explicitly declared by a Saudi middle leader, who said:

“The managerial style of all primary schools throughout the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is set by the government and this is a big mistake due to the differences in educational environment from one school to another”. (Sami, S6/S).

The same opinion was expressed by another respondent from one of the English schools:

“In school although we work all collaboratively to meet the government requirements emmm... this does us no favours because we have not been given adequate space to lead, do you get me?” (Helen, S2/E).

Hence, middle leaders are given power only to help them run the school; the headteacher is awarded power to create an agenda if it complies with governmental guidelines. The rigid hierarchical system suggests that middle management (middle leaders) are expected

to fear the consequences of any failure to comply with the top management, who hold all the power.

Hence, Saudi middle leaders experience fear. However, the findings suggest that middle leaders have different types of fear. Fear sometimes leads to negative consequences, such as fear of the government. Although, arguably, this might just make middle leaders do what they are told and complete their duties, the findings suggest that fear of government also led to lack of collaboration and that the culture of collegiality was disadvantaged by the pressure of compliance. Middle leaders wished for greater leeway because they wanted the power to lead. Yet, in the findings, there is no evidence that the possibility of leading actually exists, due to the rigidity of the education system. In other words, although the fear of government power and control might drive them to dutifully undertake a heavy daily workload, middle leaders did not appear to be happy about their compliance. They complied because they had to comply. However, the position seemed to be different when it came to compliance with religious values: the sense of compliance seemed different. The findings suggest that when the energy generated by their fear of government dissipated, those Middle leaders with religious values were able to recall those values, which energised them, and enabled them to perform duties for which they were not paid. Acting in accordance with their religious values, middle leaders were not waiting for a reward from the government; rather they were expecting a greater reward from their Lord. Although to an outsider it appeared that the power of religion was imposed on them, it was noticeable that middle leaders were relaxed about referring to such power and complying with it. Their fear of government caused a lack of collaboration, but their fear of the Lord led to more commitment. Fear of government requests led middle leaders to refer to the guidelines that outlined their role, made them cooperate with the headteacher, and enforced the requirement to comply, while middle

leaders who demonstrated a fear of the Lord based on their religious values seemed motivated to exhibit more commitment and a desire for perfection.

#### ***4.3.1.2 Softer compliance with Government and secular ethics in English Schools***

According to the findings from 9 interviews at the English state primary schools investigated, middle leaders in English primary schools also operate in a hierarchical system. One of the middle leaders stated:

“My role is established to suit that hierarchy” (Helen, S2/E).

Katie from S2/E insisted that:

“Schools in England are operating in one hierarchical structure.... Although I have been given the chance to say my opinion, I must respect the hierarchy suggested by the policy where the headteacher had the final word.... It is the law "laughing", and who could break the law” (Katie, S2/E).

Based on this, middle leaders are aware that their roles and responsibilities are defined by the hierarchy and they are asked to comply with government policy in a way that has similarities with Saudi schools. However, in contrast to Saudi levels of rigidity, in English state schools, operating in a secular milieu, school leaders were given more leeway to share and communicate. Julie, from S3/E said:

“Britain is a secular country and the government holds the power by law. Therefore, when we respect the hierarchical system, we are respecting the law rather than complying with the government ....” (Julie, S3/E).

According to the above quotation, complying with the government is respecting the law and that this middle leader saw no problem about complying with government because the government represents the law. Another middle leader justified the government’s ability to force policy on school leaders, explaining that:

“The school depends mainly on the government’s funding, and so we are not allowed to bring any different schedules and to add extra subjects into the curriculum due to this, but independent schools can” (Julie, S3/E).

So, it is not only the power of the law, but also the power of funding which gives the government in England the power to force policy on state schools. The problematic part is that although English middle leaders accepted the power imposed by the government, they did not agree with it. Saudi middle leaders, on the other hand, complied out of fear rather than from acceptance. For example, middle leaders Katie and Vicky in school 2/E thought that policy was forced on schools’ leaders and agreed that to a great extent government policy influenced primary schools negatively. As one of them put it:

“We have had a lot of things enforced on us; a lot of government policy is enforced on us without discussion” (Vicky, S2/E).

Frustration about government pressure was obvious in one of the interviews to the extent that the negative reactions of one middle leader could be observed in her body language in response to the phrase “government policy”, reflecting the pressure she experienced as a result of the policy. She stated:

“Ha [she rolls her eyes]- what is mandatory and what needs to be taught needs to be taught, if funding is reduced there’s not a lot we can do with that other than micromanaging our staff very effectively” (Rachel, S1/E).

This middle leader felt that she did not need to know all the answers because she knows that senior members of staff not only know the answer but also have the authority, bestowed by the government, to enforce compliance with policy. She was also able to demonstrate awareness of the hierarchical power of the education system. She stated that:

“We have a really strong management structure, head, deputy head, and assistant head. If there was anything that came up during the day that I felt I couldn’t deal with, or had

no experience in, I could go to the head, deputy or assistant head depending on who was available and who I felt was most appropriate to talk to about it" (Rachel, S1/E).

Both these statements from Rachel echo Saudi middle leaders' perspectives and feelings about the government. The difference is that Saudi middle leaders were more in fear than experiencing feelings of frustration. Saudi middle leaders comply with the government out of fear, where middle leaders in England accept the need to comply but fear government micromanaging.

Similar to the Saudi government, the English government has created an inspection agency to ensure that compliance happens. As a counterpart to the Education Department in Saudi, Ofsted has been given the power to inspect schools and ensure that they comply with government directives. Katie, from S2/E said:

"They [Ofsted] are the government's stick to keep everything in line with government wishes" (Katie, S2/E).

At the same time, Ofsted's influence appears at an early stage when middle leaders are interviewed for their roles. All the middle leaders agreed that a representative from Ofsted is present during job interviews because, as one of them said:

"emm, Ofsted is there because they are representing the government" (Helen, S2/E).

Evidently, middle leaders were aware that part of the headteacher's role is to comply with the government. One middle leader explicitly stated that she supports the headteacher in her vision:

"She [the headteacher] knows what she wants and she knows what the government needs us [middle leaders] to achieve. So as a middle leader my duty is to support her" (Fatima, S3/E).

So, it is the headteachers' role to ensure that middle leaders in their schools comply with government regulations. As a result, all staff in the school experience high anxiety due to the pressure of government policies, the participants data were supported by the observations from school 2 (O1/S2). According to the observations, it was noticeable that some of the middle leaders demonstrated further stress when the activates in the school involved embracing government policy. Interestingly, another observation from school 1 also highlighted the same sense of anxiety expressed by one of the middle leaders as she was preparing himself to a visit from the department of education (O1/S3)

Similar to the structure of Saudi schools, the role of a middle leader in an English school involves compliance with the power imposed by the government, although they have greater leeway to express their opinions and fears.

Another middle leader responded to the same question with laughter and jokes but referred to Ofsted and the headteacher as agents at the top of the hierarchy, in charge of enforcing policy. She said:

“[Laughing] I make jokes [laughing] I need to make sure that all the school is operating in line with Ofsted and policy. Our head is very critical about Ofsted reports; you know we like ticking boxes [laughing]” (Sara, S1/E).

As this statement shows, the head is critical of Ofsted because negative Ofsted reports would have a detrimental effect on the school's reputation for performance. The negative reference to 'ticking boxes' indicates her critical attitude. At the same time, the phrase “we like ticking boxes” draws our attention to a bureaucratic culture in which middle leaders feel they cannot “just lead” because they are so over-loaded with meaningless exercises that prove nothing other than that they comply with government policy. The same middle leader added:

“Me: sorry I am not sure what the phrase “ticking boxes means”

ML: mmm.... I mean, Ofsted has a report and that report shows our school's performance. As more boxes have been ticked the better grades the school will receive" (Sara, S1/E).

According to all the above quotations and opinions, it seemed that middle leaders were aware of how the hierarchical system in schools worked and how authority was distributed. At the same time, the middle leader's words implied that positive Ofsted reports do not always reflect "how the school is really doing", but rather to what extent its management was able to demonstrate that leaders are compliant with government policy. In some cases, middle leaders saw themselves as managers whose job is to manage the compliance of "hard members":

"We do have hard members of staff who aren't as easy so you get them onside beforehand and once they're on side they then normally – when you give the idea - they're happy; as a manager you have to manage everyone differently" (Helen, S2/E).

Helen, from S2/E, used her own skills to "manage" hard members who would be barriers or cause delay. "We have to manage everyone differently" is a method of controlling people to ensure compliance more than a method of leadership. In contrast to the Saudi context, middle leaders in England could experience "hard members" who refuse to get involved in playing the game. In the Saudi context, compliance with the power of the government seemed not to be a subject of arbitration, while in English schools' staff can go into negotiation over the power of the government.

From another perspective, we can see the influence of values and ethics on the way that some middle leaders connect their roles and responsibilities with the need to comply with the government and headteacher. Julie, from S3/E, linked the hierarchical system and secular ethical values by saying:



“We respect the hierarchical system.... It is our values...our secular ethical values we share, we discuss, we are free to the extent in which we can express our thoughts and ideas” (Julie, S3/E).

A few middle leaders saw a connection between personal values, such as trust and compliance, with government policy and the head. For example, one participant indicated that:

“As a middle leader I am trusted by the head that I must keep teachers on track with their duties, and the head is trusted by the government” (Helen, S2/E).

Another middle leader associated the role with the need to support other staff in the school to comply with government policy, and connected this directly to the personal values of leadership, including trust. Helen, from S2/E indicated:

“I am able to support the head and any others or managers to do their jobs and to meet the government requirements. I am self-motivated and I can be fair and trusted. So, yes I can see myself as a leader” (Helen, S2/E).

Another middle leader mentioned the importance of “fairness” as a moral value that leads to good leadership: it is about the fairness of the timing of promotion. This participant added:

“I think, without experience, as a leader you won’t be able to lead properly, you’ve got to start from being a teacher to know what a teacher has to go through, then moving up to realise what middle managers have to go through, to become a headteacher or a senior headteacher because then you are fairer as a leader. Your leadership is fairer” (Sara, S1/E).

Not far from the structure of the hierarchical Saudi education system, middle leaders in the English schools studied are carrying out their daily duties and responsibility but with softer power to comply with. Similar to Saudi middle leaders, English middle leaders are

expected to work in line with policy, which is imposed on schools by the government that has the power of funding. Comparable to Saudi schools, headteachers in English schools are expected to demonstrate their commitment to compliance with government policy by ensuring that their vision is aligned with government policy.

The Saudi government created the Department of Education to assure that schools' style of leadership complies with policy; Ofsted in England plays the same role, as schools need to comply to avoid getting a negative performance report. Middle leaders in English schools accepted with frustration that the power of the government took priority over collegiality, which is a core value in school culture. Middle leaders in England would have the leeway to agree or disagree with the government power, but they need to accept that they must work in line with it, while middle leaders in Saudi have no leeway even to think about accepting or agreeing, they must simply comply.

Middle leaders in England acknowledged that their personal values and ethics influenced their view of the leadership role, suggesting that trusted and fair leaders are those who support heads and other staff to comply with government policy. This can be understood, and generally accepted, as 'secular' values in England are the common values. At the same time, complying with values suggests a softer form of compliance as values are usually internal rather than external forces, as compliance with government would suggest. Similarly, middle leaders in Saudi comply with the power of values and ethics. But their values and ethics were "religious" which can be accepted and understood in a country like Saudi where religion is a main aspect of people's lives. Interestingly, regardless of the values held by English and Saudi Middle leaders, values were always acknowledged as a back-up source of energy that Middle leaders depend on when they had no support or control over their heavy workloads. Middle leaders drew on their values to help them do over-time duties for which they do not get paid. They used their personal time to complete duties for which they do not expect material reward - but are seeking

the satisfaction of doing what is spiritually or morally right rather than just what brings material benefit.

#### **4.4 Question Two: What factors contribute to the shaping of the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders in primary schools in Saudi Arabia and England?**

This question was asked with the intention of identifying factors which could influence the shape of the roles and the responsibilities of English and Saudi middle leaders. The findings indicated that the centralisation of decision-making powers and the power to promote change has influenced the implementation of change in primary schools in Saudi and England.

##### **4.4.1 Decision making and change promotion**

Initiating change and the process of promoting it, in the context of middle leadership, in both Saudi and English primary schools, have been identified as core factors that influence the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders. Two different sub-themes were identified here. One of these concerned centralised decisions and change. The second was change relating to implementation. This section starts by presenting findings from the Saudis schools followed by findings from English schools.

##### ***4.4.1.1 Centralised decision-making and change***

The findings of the semi-structured interviews demonstrated that the powers of decision-making and promoting change in primary schools are centralised at government level. Nevertheless, while the power to initiate and promote change is imposed on Saudi schools by the King, middle leaders in the English primary schools studied believed that the government both imposes change and owns the power to make decisions. All middle

leaders from the Saudi schools studied agreed that the King of Saudi is the only person who has the power to promote change in the education system. Huda, from S4/S said: “...we are here to help and support the mission of the King to promote change and achieve the transformation he hopes for” (Huda, S4/S).

The King delegates the power of making decisions and promoting changes to the government, which then decides what changes to make and how to make them. Solafa, from S4/S continued:

“...during the last few years, lots of change has happened as part of the great vision of the King to change education systems and to enhance practices in schools. Therefore, the government transfers that vision into a policy and imposed the change on schools” (Solafa, S4/S).

In Saudi primary schools, the power to make decisions and promote change has not been given to middle leaders and other school staff, who know better about schools and pupils’ education needs. Instead, power is owned by decision-makers in government who do not know much about schools. As a result, those who hold the primary source of knowledge about schools and pupils have not been given power to make decisions and promote changes that are both wanted and needed. One middle leader declared:

“One of the Ministry of Education’s roles is to issue unilateral decisions that are not based on a real field study. Therefore, the education field should participate and give an opinion in making decisions concerning students’ interest” (Musaid, S6/S).

In the official documents and guidelines (Public Schools General Guidelines 2015), the government makes it clear to middle leaders and heads that making major decisions and promoting change is the responsibility of the Education Department. This was also detailed clearly in the responses of middle leaders, who agreed that school leaders are

only permitted by the government to make changes and decisions that have a minor effect on schools. Rashed, from S5/S said:

“There are a few decisions that are easy to take within the school [that] do not affect the education policy.... Major decisions are hard to take without referring to the Education Department Office” (Rashed, S5/S).

Middle leaders are not consulted about proposed changes to schools, even though they are likely to know better about their contexts and needs. Middle leaders will only be involved in changes at the set-up stage. One stated:

“I was not involved in the decision-making process for promoting changes in the school, as this decision was made externally by the Department of Education” (Huda, S4/S).

In addition, and in order to support them in running schools and implementing the imposed change, middle leaders in Saudi’s schools have been given a limited power to act: Sami, from S6/S said:

“The government makes you feel that you have the power to make the decision and promote change, but in reality, you are serving their own purposes. The power given to schools is power of illusion”. (Sami, S6/S)

This indicates that the power given to school leaders in primary schools is not the power to make decisions or promote change. School leaders are only given the power necessary to operate and bring government policy to fruition. Saod, from S5/S said:

“I mean even the headteacher does not have much power to promote serious and deep changes. .... The major power is in the hands of the Department of Education, we all operating under their umbrella. That is why I told you earlier there is no point in challenging the Head, because he has no power to say his free opinion” (Saod, S5/S).

When asked “why do you think the government is willing to keep the power of decision and change centralised” one respondent answered:

“I think, mmmm, I do not know... maybe they do not trust us to make such change or maybe they did not want that change to happen in all schools so they decided to centralize it” (Solafa, S4/S).

From this perspective school leaders are not judged good enough to decide what is best for their schools, even though they are the people who have the greatest knowledge about the educational needs of the students. Rashed, from S5/S said:

“I think the government’s fear is that when every school becomes independent in making decisions and promoting change, then their control over education and people will be less. Education and politics are very much connected. Government would not let the education sector’s decisions go independent, it is a power game” (Rashed, S5/S).

Many middle leaders in the Saudi schools studied agreed that centralising the changes and imposing them on schools without communicating or consulting school staff would not enhance their performance or meet the King’s objectives. One middle leader expressed this clearly:

“[laughing] I do not like to talk politics... I am just joking. You know the Education policy is fixed and it is not easy to promote any change to it from our side as middle leaders and even Heads cannot do any changes” (Huda, S4/S).

In the English schools studied, decision-making and change promotion is also centralised, but there is more freedom to make some internally necessary decisions and changes. A few middle leaders in the schools studied believed that they had no power to make decisions about big things, such as curriculum changes. For example, Helen from S2/E said:

“Some changes we have to do, like the new curriculum – we have no choice in the school about that – that comes from outside of the school and we had to do that” (Helen, S2/E).

Indeed, the pressure of centralisation that middle leaders were experiencing in their daily practices was also observed while the researcher was in a visit to school 4. During the observation, it was noticed that the middle leader had no influence or ability to make promises to parents and/or caregivers, nor did she have the power to accept (or reject) new children. She advised a parent who wanted to move her child to another school to contact the school admission line, her only available option. The middle leaders informed the mother that such a decision is centralized (O2/S4).

However, others think that they have been given some power to change the way they teach the curriculum, which enables them to teach it to the standard required for pupils to gain the required learning outcomes. At the same time, the hierarchy of power is justified because a middle leader is a subject leader who has experience and knowledge of the topic. One respondent stated:

“I do have the power to make decisions about the curriculum because obviously I’m the expert in the school – so changes to the curriculum, the way we teach or the way we assess I have the power to change” (Katie, S2/E).

The above quotation suggests that although English middle leaders have been given the power to change the way they teach, they have no power to change the curriculum itself. It is true that the government gave teachers the power to change the way they teach the curriculum because they know more about teaching their subjects than the decision-makers in government. However, no school has been given the power to change the curriculum, which reflects the government’s political and social vision. Julie, from S3/E linked government policy and major decisions such as curriculum change, as follows:

“Government policies, legislation and recommendations play a heavy role in the way the school is run and organised.... we are not allowed to bring any different schedules and to add no extra subjects into the curriculum due to this, but independent schools can” (Julie, S3/E).

Middle leaders saw that the government’s proposals fall on them. They must operationalise the change, which means that they lose their flexibility and start to become mere tools for the enactment of government policy. They have become the people who force their colleagues to conform. Middle leaders think their role is to manage the implementation of changes imposed by government, making other staff comply with them rather than actively leading. One middle leader stated:

“Changes keep coming to us, without asking us and knowing what has been happening in practice? We are confused and I think teachers did not know how to prioritise the targets” (Sara, S1/E).

The rhetoric is about freedom from government but they are controlled via the regime of inspections and testing, where if they do not do well the school is sanctioned by government. It seems that there is a sense of tension and contradiction between the rhetoric of collegiality and the pressure to implement unplanned change which is hierarchical and requires line management responsibilities to be exercised. Sara, from S1/E stressed that when it comes to implementing forced changes there is much less collegiality among teachers and middle leaders which leads to tension and confusion.

Middle leaders from all schools agreed that the rhetoric of collegiality gave the implementation of change some flexibility, but in practice changes must be implemented.

This statement is supported by a comment from Nicola, from S1/E who said:



“It could be a change to fit the vision of the new headteacher so he might pass it down to us. Changes come from everywhere, but if it’s a big change, then it must be definitely from the government” (Nicola, S1/E).

Thus, change is imposed by government, and the Head creates his or her vision to support that change. As Heads change, the vision will change, therefore middle leaders are able to suggest ways to cope with all the change coming from everywhere. Middle leaders are given “some leeway” and “lots of scope” to make the change happen – they do not necessarily decide the big changes but they can decide how they are going to put the change into practice – they do the ‘how to do it’ bit. This is a managerial role rather than a leadership role.

#### ***4.4.1.2 Implementing change and decisions***

It was found that the power to make major decisions and promote change was centralised in all the schools studied in both the Saudi and English contexts. In this section, however, decision-making and change relating to implementation refer to the amount of leeway given to the leadership in primary schools to implement decisions and change imposed from the top (by either the King or the government). In Saudi schools, the leeway given to middle leaders to make implementation decisions or changes was very limited, compared with that given to middle leaders in English schools. Abdulla, from S6/S mentioned:

“To me the word ‘decision’ is very powerful; I would not use it to refer to simple acts.

In schools we have no power to make decision, but we have the power to find the correct act to implement. We are like the tax man: he has the authority to collect the tax, but he has no authority to say who needs to pay and who does not” (Abdulla, S6/S).

A few middle leaders declared that although headteachers are required by law to empower them to make decisions, some do not give them any freedom to make even very minor

decisions. Complaining that the power to implement government-imposed change and decisions is dominated by the headteacher, one respondent from Solafa in S4/S said:

“I think I should say that one of the most important obstacles we are facing in managerial work is asking for the headteacher’s permission for any matter or decision related to my field of work”. (Solafa, S4/S).

When the middle leader was asked if the headteacher was able to implement what was agreed during the meeting, she responded that the request was rejected at first. However, the middle leader and the headteacher were able to gain approval in the end due to their good reputation and the use of their personal relationship:

“Emmm, well I and the Head used our own networks and relationship to give a push. Also, the school has a good performance report, so we used this as credit [silence] but also depending on the situation and the amount of changes we are asking for” (Huda, S4/S).

Middle leaders agreed that leaders in primary schools had no power to implement change because financial decisions are controlled by the Department of Education and she wondered how the school would implement more significant changes without the freedom to make financial decisions. For example, Rashed, from S5/S declared that:

“I always recommend new ideas, asking the school master to apply it, but in most cases he politely refuses to implement it due a shortage in the school budget. Therefore, implementing change is always prevented by a group of roadblocks including the financial budget controlled by the education department” (Rashed, S5/S).

Observing the duties of the middle leaders in Saudi schools confirmed the lack of power given to middle leaders over the schools’ budget. It has been observed that even for a minor financial decision, such as changing a classroom’s lock, the middle leader needed

to seek permission from the headteacher who was expected to seek funding for the lock change (O2/S5).

The problem is not only that change is imposed from the top, but also that the implementation of change is restricted by each school's need for approval from the Education Department, which has control over fiscal decision-making. As a means of overcoming this restriction, middle leaders and heads collaborate to use their personal networks and influence to persuade the Education Department to cooperate, but the school should have a good credit balance of "reputation" in order to achieve success.

The power of the personal relationships between headteacher, middle leaders, and other staff and their influence on decision-making and changes related to implementation in Saudi schools was recognised during an observation in S5 in Saudi (O1/S5). Rashed, from S5/S knew that the Education Department allowed the use of an electronic registration system to check in and check out for all students and teachers. The Head did not put the suggestion to a vote during a meeting because a group of teachers with whom he had a good relationship rejected the suggestion. Rashed, from S5/S felt that the taking the decision to a vote could be useful for many teachers and staff who are committed to their work, and they were willing to encourage other colleagues to participate. Hence, Rashed, from S5/S talked to the headteacher and advised him that it would be better to put the issue to a vote because then the other staff could not say he was taking sides, or that he was not fair. The headteacher accepted these points.

At the same time, Rashed, from S5/S created a larger pressure group made up of other middle leaders and staff to support the implementation of the decision and speed up the process. In the meeting, the middle leader group was able to win the vote and the system was implemented with the support of the headteacher. From this observation, we can see that although the power of implementing decisions in primary schools is given to the

headteacher, middle leaders can still use their communication and personal skills to create a group of colleagues to advocate for and support each other and to enhance the practice of middle leadership in primary schools in Saudi. In other words, although middle leaders have not been given power by the government to fight bad practice, they can create a powerful group within the school itself to make decisions in relation to the implementation of government recommendations.

In the English schools, middle leaders held two different perspectives in relation to decisions and changes relating to implementation. The first perspective supports the view that the headteacher takes the lead in implementing changes imposed by the government. The headteacher knows and understands what changes the government needs to implement and creates a vision to help realise them. Nicola from S1/ E was aware that if the government policy says “promote these changes”, then the headteacher needs to envisage the best ways to make that initiative work – so she sought ways to operationalise the initiative. The following quote provides an example of when a headteacher only appears to give the staff a choice – by presenting them with ideas about how to do something, and asking them to pick one. This is not how a headteacher could behave and is particularly restrictive. The middle leader said:

“You know the government promotes new changes and we have been asked to work in line with the changes. Those changes require new plans and methods of implementation. When the Head comes he has with him the agenda of implementation, how we are going to implement the changes. So, we will be voting on the methods of implementation” (Nicola, S1/E).

In this case, the headteacher thinks about the choice of implementation methods, which will be on his or her agenda. His or her choices correspond to the government policies. The headteacher uses staff meetings to hold a vote on the various choices, which means the middle leaders have the power to vote for change, but the change is suggested by the

headteacher, who in fact has no power to actively initiate changes independently of the government.

Middle leaders who adopt this opinion also think that a headteacher's attitudes are what make some of them accept middle leaders' suggestions for implementing change, while others do not accept the intervention of their staff. Helen, from S2/E declared this opinion clearly by saying:

"I do have the power really, ha, it's nice! I'm very lucky because the headteacher, as long as I can give a reason to do it and as long as it benefits the children she'll let you do it, because of the type of Head she is. I've worked with other not very kind Heads who won't let you do that. She's very kind and lets us, gives us the power to do things" (Helen, S2/E).

The middle leaders who gave similar opinions saw that power is given by the government which has the authority. The headteacher is the head of the hierarchical structure of the school. The headteacher can only trust staff who comply with authority. The headteacher has the power to make decisions about implementation, but subject leaders are only empowered to vote for the best. These are the roles of management staff in the school as shaped by the government.

The second perspective suggests that middle leaders have the power to make decisions in relation to implementation, and this is because middle leaders who are at the same time subject leaders know more about the topic and the teaching and learning needs. However, any decision should be made after discussion. Vicky from S2/E stated that:

"So, there are some things that are statutory – that have to be done by law. And then by discussion, I would have my ideas, but by discussion I would implement the things that we can negotiate with other members of staff" (Vicky, S2/E).

Here, it seems from the previous evidence that discussion is limited to a choice of ways to implement change –the change itself and its value for education are not discussed. So, changes around implementation start with the headteacher who has the authority to roll the various ways of implementing policy down to the senior leadership via meetings. Middle leaders also have their own choices and ways of implementing change but during staff meetings all choices will be filtered down. The middle leader role is the band between top management (the Head) and the teachers. Rachel, from S1/E confirmed that: “The vision is seen by the headteacher – that’s his vision. As we go down to management and leadership that’s where it starts to be implemented so as a middle leader you have one foot with the teachers and the other on the side of overseeing and evaluating what’s being done” (Rachel, S1/E).

The middle leaders as subject leaders are responsible for monitoring and observing choices around implementation, and for communicating with teachers to evaluate change. Fatima, from S3/E added:

“It is my responsibility to make sure that I am not veering away from the government or the headteacher’s vision.... Therefore, after implementation starts it is my role to keep evaluating and monitoring” (Fatima, S3/E).

The middle leader role is a managerial rather than a leadership role. The headteacher depends on the regular weekly meeting to find out whether change will be achieved or whether any changes have been missed, and the school is missing something important. The middle leaders think that the headteacher has given them power to vote on different ways to implement change, but is this really power? One of the middle leaders said: “Yes, we have different types of meetings to suggest how to make change happen. How to implement them.... The Head will be in the meeting and he is the head of the implementation. We discuss how to do things with him, but he also has his own vision ... Eventually, we are collaborating to implement” (Emma, S3/E).

This quotation suggests that the middle leaders believed that they could have power. In one observation carried out in S3 in England, the researcher was invited to attend a school meeting. When the meeting started, the headteacher was behaving very politely (O1/S3). All the teachers and middle leaders were given a chance to express their opinions during the meeting. However, I noticed that although the meeting went on for about 2 hours, none of the issues discussed in the meeting were decided upon. Many issues were bounced onwards for further discussion in other meetings. Perhaps final decisions were deferred because I was present in the meeting. I therefore questioned whether it was the culture of participation that drove the discussion in the meeting, or whether the staff were convinced they had the power to make decisions. My presence may have been the reason that decisions were deferred, but other evidence from different interviews suggested that this (extensive discussion without decision-making) was usual practice.

It was noticeable that in both perspectives, middle leaders were aware that the power of the headteacher is imposed through a strong, hierarchical management system. It was clear that they all understood that the headteacher could, however, give more leeway to subject leaders to promote change in the way their vision is implemented when the change was closely related to a subject. One leader declared:

“I cannot do major implementation decisions.... But I can do independent decision when the decision is related to my subject” (Fatima, S3/E).

At the same time, all respondents were aware that the final decision around implementing change in the school is in the hands of the head. As one middle leader confirmed:

“...my opinion may not make a big difference to the final decision, but I would not feel bad because I said what I have in my mind. We all know it is the Head who gives the final word” (Julie, S3/E).

To conclude, in the context of both Saudi and English primary schools, middle leaders agreed that they have limited power to make decisions and changes related to implementation. However, compared with the freedom given to middle leaders in English schools, middle leaders and headteachers in Saudi had less leeway. In both the Saudi and English contexts, the power given to headteachers seemed illusory rather than real – the power of ‘how to’ rather than the power of ‘why’ or ‘whether’ to do something. Middle leaders in Saudi felt that although headteachers have been given the illusion of power, the reality was that none of the leaders were trusted by the government and consequently have not been given decision-making powers. In Saudi primary schools, creating a pressure group helped in making implementation decisions, and using personal relationships helped the school leaders to access decision-makers in the Education Department. A good reputation, good networking and good networks and links could all have an impact on implementation decisions.

#### **4.4.2 Tension between local initiative and government interference**

A few of the middle leaders interviewed in Saudi and English primary schools referred to a tension between schools’ local initiatives and government interference when they were asked for their opinions about the government’s influence on the role of a middle leader. Unexpectedly, middle leaders in Saudi primary schools openly expressed their opinions about the government’s role in increasing tension in schools and declared that the government uses education policy to influence schools rather than helping schools to run effectively. Musaid, from S6/S said:

“The education policy in many aspects in the Kingdom is not effective as it conflicts with the managerial work in the school” (Musaid, S6/S).



Similarly, in English schools, middle leaders saw that the government was responsible for the unproductive relationship between schools and government and for increased tension because, as one of the middle leaders stated:

“They think because they have the power they know what to do and they can tell others what to do” (Helen, S2/E).

Ali, from S5 in Saudi made a powerful statement after an initial refusal to talk about the role of the government. When the researcher asked him why he did not want to talk about it, his expression turned to one of frustration and he said:

“Look around you and you will know why. Mess and problems everywhere, they [government] do not listen. They know but they do not care. The policy is in one place and what is happening in reality is totally in a different place. No one wants to know the actual true reality” (Ali, S5/S).

The fact that the government did not listen to middle leaders was identified by many middle leaders, but what was different about this interview was the suggestion that the government knows about the problems and mess that is happening in schools, but has made very little effort to resolve the situation. The result is as one of the middle leaders stated:

“In writing, the goals and aspirations of the Ministry of Education are magnificent but when you come into real life and practice the plans they implement are a great mess” (Abdulla, S6/S).

In English schools, middle leaders agreed that government policy and change was not helpful, not only because the suggested changes were hard to incorporate into their practice, but also because there were too many changes. New changes are proposed every time a new government comes into power and every government’s vision is different. One middle leader said:

“Our biggest challenge is that every time new government comes things change.

Education needs consistency to be able to achieve learning”. (Katie, S2/E)

As Katie, from S2/E said, education needs consistency – it should not be influenced by political interests to be able to achieve its goal. Governments should not change policy just for political purposes, as this is neither useful for a school’s development nor to help leaders achieve the main purpose of education. Conflict between education and policy as a source of tension between government and local initiatives is recognised by middle leaders in both English and Saudi schools. One middle leader in a Saudi school expressed her frustration about government political interference in the following way:

“The major problem is that change happening in education and school is not happening for more knowledge gain; rather it is promoted for more political gain. The West and America are pushing for more changes in the country to achieve more liberation as they claimed but the reality is that they are interfering in our life and our generations’ life which is not helping” (Safia, S4/S).

This middle leader seems to be suggesting an unacceptable level of international political interference. Therefore, the government promotes change and new policies in schools not because it believes these changes are vital and necessarily, but as part of imposing the external power of the West and America on Saudi for political reasons. Saod, from S5/S suggested that the Saudi government attempts to implement:

“Foreign educational program in the primary school [which] will [not] be successful due to the inappropriate educational environment we have here [in Saudi]” (Saod, S5/S).

Middle leaders are often aware that government policy is not self-empowered but is rather enforced from outside the country. This type of awareness can lead to resistance on the part of leaders, and lack of cooperation and support for government policy. Schools

demonstrate compliance under political pressure applied by the government via policy, but the reality is that some are expressing a high sense of resistance. This tension created by government interference for political purposes also appeared in English schools as one of the leaders stated:

“As a teacher I find it difficult to see why they are doing these things and why they are making these changes. For me as a teacher: the political game does not benefit our children and that’s what’s important” (Rachel, S1/E).

Although what has been declared by Saudi’s middle leaders is similar to the English reluctance to see education as political, Saudi middle leaders are frustrated that foreign forces are coming from outside the Kingdom to change its identity. The word “liberation”, uttered by Safia from S4/S, implies fear of changes forced on the Kingdom. All English and Saudi middle leaders suggested that those who know little about education have the power to enforce policies that do not benefit children, and in the Saudi context they believe that the imposition of foreign power on education threatens the next generation. Nevertheless, developing an argument about the influence of political forces in shaping and reforming Saudi education policy based on a few comments from one middle leader in one school would not be sufficient. Hence, further studies that focus on this area of research are suggested in the concluding chapter.

In the Saudi schools in this study, middle leaders believed that change might be promoted for political purposes, and they were confident that such “political games” would neither improve schools nor help leaders to carry out their roles effectively, especially when school leaders are given no power to control everyday decisions and changes. The government in Saudi needs to know that some official guidelines and policies are unhelpful. One middle leader said:

“[Pausing]... to be honest, the guide suggested by the Ministry of Education does not help at all because it is inefficient and there is a lot of overlapping in managerial work

between managerial staff members, by which I mean the middle managers” (Abdulla, S6/S).

Few Middle leaders in Saudi see a lack of communication between the government and primary school management. Middle leaders in all the investigated schools complained that school staff are not consulted before a decision is made to promote major change, such as alterations to the curriculum. The government ignores the fact that middle leaders and teachers (because they are in regular interaction with children and have better knowledge of the subjects and methods of teaching and learning) have a clear vision of what is needed and how it should be implemented.

Rachel, from S1 in England suggested that education policy makers should visit schools to learn about their needs before promoting curriculum change. Another middle leader from Saudi, Safia from S4, justified the need for middle leaders to be involved in curriculum development by stating:

“We know more about the children’s needs and ways of learning more than the government knows” (Safia, S4/S).

Involving school leaders in making decisions before making policy that promotes change would help to reduce the negative impact of policy change. As one middle leader said: “within the last few years, the change of education policy has had a negative impact as much of the authority of the headteacher, middle managers and teachers as well have been recalled.... we have not been asked before changes have happened” (Saod, S5/S).

In English schools, on the other hand, the existence of an advisor between schools and government did not help to reduce the tension, because although he or she advises schools they do not get the chance to advise government in return about which changes work and which do not. Katie, from S2/E said:

“Our link to the government is our advisor.... and the advisors kind of inform us of the changes that the government have made” (Katie, S2/E).

However, when the middle leader was asked if having an advisor helps school transfer the leaders’ vision and suggestions back to the government, the answer was:

“Not really, because what the government wants to do it will do, with or without the advisor’s suggestions” (Katie, S2/E).

To conclude, tension between the government and local initiatives was identified by middle leaders in both English and Saudi schools. The government was seen to increase the tension due to the way it imposed on school leaders, making regular changes in schools without clear justification. At the same time, middle leaders believed that either the government knows that there are problems in school, but ignores them, or does not know what challenges they face, and simply forces its policies onto schools without considering the value of leaders’ knowledge and experience to improve practice. In addition, the issue of the ‘foreign interference’ mentioned earlier by Safia from S4/S could not be developed further here due to lack of evidence. However, in the concluding chapter, the researcher suggests further studies to examine the influence of foreign political forces on reforming Saudi’s educational policy.

#### **4.5 Question Three: What kinds of factors might make the school more effective in its organisation?”**

One of the main questions asked during the interviews was “what kinds of things might make the school more effective in its organisation?” Responses showed that different factors impede primary school leaders, and that those challenges in turn influence schools’ effectiveness.

All the middle leaders in all English and Saudi schools identified lack of power as an impediment to their role and influence. Rashed from S5/S argued that lack of power is:

“One of the most important obstacles that we [middle leaders] encounter in primary schools, especially in our attempts to introduce new initiatives for a change or a development and for the managerial work as well” (Rashed, S5/S).

Vicky from S2/E reasoned that the lack of power given to middle leaders in English schools is just the nature of the hierarchical system in which schools operate:

“Middle leaders’ power is defined by the hierarchy system of schools, power is not distributed, but power is controlled” (Vicky, S2/E).

Thus, the hierarchical organisational structure adopted by schools limits middle leaders’ power and twists their duties away from leadership and towards management. Their lack of power undermined middle leaders’ ability to tackle their duties and carry out everyday responsibilities. When asked if he saw himself as a leader, one, from a Saudi school, answered:

“I am, pausing, maybe, pausing, I am management member. I manage things but I cannot lead because I do not have the freedom of decision and the power to make it”.  
(Musaid, S6/S).

This is challenging because it not only influences the actual concept and understanding of leadership but also the practice and implementation of change. Katie from S2/E concluded that:

“There is no full success in managerial work in a primary school unless school management has full the power and authority in hand” (Katie, S2/E).

Thus, giving middle leaders the required power would help them support the government in enforcing change. As the same middle leader stated:

“When you promote changes to a place, you need to give leaders the extra power to be able to make immediate decision. Mistakes can happen, but there is no learning without mistakes” (Katie, S2/E).

So, when the government gives the school leaders (namely middle leaders) power it is doing itself a favour because more power for middle leaders means more chance of enforcing change.

Another middle leader from the same school saw that lack of power is connected with trust and both of them (power and trust) are connected with the meaning of leadership. Therefore,

“[Different] meanings of leadership would not have any positive influences without giving the leaders the trust and the power of change”. (Ali, S5/S).

Thus, when they are given power they need to be given trust as well. As Ali, from S5/S said:

“The government would authorize the school with extended powers to allow it to run its own affairs, meaning without continuous interference from the Education Department Office” (Ali, S5/S).

Leaders not only blamed government for the obstacles suffered by middle leaders in primary schools but some also blamed leaders themselves who struggle to change their way of thinking about leadership. Fatima, from S3/E said:

“There is a saying that “if an egg is broken by outside force, life ends. If broken by inside force, life begins. Great things always begin from inside.” I am referring to this saying because leaders always blame others that we cannot do the real change but I think change must come from inside. We [leaders] need to change ourselves, our way of thinking as leaders and then convince others to change” (Fatima, S3/E).

Although a few events were identified in which middle leaders saw themselves – to some extent - practicing leadership in self-empowered change, and in the way, they enacted government change, they suggested that in order to improve the current style of management and leadership in primary schools in both Saudi and England, they should be given more flexibility to allow them to actually perform a leadership role.

In English schools, the word flexibility was not spoken in respondents' descriptions of the needs of current primary school leadership for development. However, hard work was a quality they thought important. One respondent said:

“I guess, erm, it's hard – in some respects there's some people I'd like to work a little harder and I feel that some people aren't working equally hard. That's probably because I'm a bit younger and I'm a bit like 'well this should happen, this should happen'. And I think as well, erm, I'd possibly consider you know, erm, it's hard really to think without saying it incorrectly” (Helen, S2/E).

From this statement we can see that young middle leaders might find it quite intimidating to talk about what they see as injustice, in attempting to express their opinions about the amount of work they should do. Many middle leaders pointed out that their marking duties are more like homework, because they do not have time to do it in school, and that this increases the pressure on them. However, this opinion was rejected by Fatima, from S3/E who believed that responsibilities were equally distributed because schools operate as a hierarchy, and there is no chance of injustice. The middle leader stressed that new middle leaders do not know how to communicate effectively, which causes conflict from time to time among leaders:

“Create better communication among the staff. A few of the younger middle leaders who came recently into the school, they do not really appreciate the actual meanings of school as a big family” (Fatima, S3/E).



She suggested that younger generations of middle leaders need more training on communication in schools to fit into the school environment:

“I think a little bit more communication sometimes, I think sometimes a little bit more teamwork would help” (Fatima, S3/E).

From the above quotations, it appears that middle leaders are urging more collaboration and further consideration from young middle leaders of the meaning of school as family, and young middle leaders would like less pressure and more time to promote and implement change.

#### **4.6 Summary of the findings**

This research was carried out with the aim of examining: different factors that influence perceptions of middle leaders' roles and responsibilities in Saudi and English primary schools. The findings suggest a significant level of similarity between both educational contexts. The similarities between middle leaders in Saudi and middle leaders in England are that all of them are under pressure from the government. However, in the Saudi context, compliance is harder and more rigid, as power is imposed by the King. In English schools the pressure to comply is softer because power is imposed by the government. Further, the power imposed by the King in Saudi and that imposed by the government in England are embedded in different levels of external and internal hierarchical system. The external system is responsible for generating education policies and inspecting activities carried out by similar education agencies (In Saudi, the Department of Education and in England, Ofsted), and forcing the internal hierarchical structure inside schools to comply. The differences between Saudi and English schools appeared mainly in the leeway for freedom given by the external power, to schools' leaders to practice their daily duties and on the culture of middle leadership.

With the leeway given to middle leaders in English schools in the practice of their daily duties, middle leaders appeared to hold different responsibilities: as Heads of department and subject leaders. Their main duties are teaching, which means they are part of the teaching team, but at the same time, they are part of the line management team. Middle leaders in English schools perceive managerial and administration responsibilities as incidental duties as their main duties are teaching and supporting teaching. Middle leaders in English schools have some control over their subject funds, although they must seek permission from the headteacher. Middle leaders in English schools have the power to arrange in-house training for the teaching staff. However, in Saudi schools, training is centralised. So, although centralisation is an issue in terms of making the decision and promoting change, it is not as hard as it is in the Saudi school context.

Middle leaders in Saudi are appointed according to their years of teaching experience. The process of appointing a middle leader is bureaucratic and controlled by the Education Department. Middle leaders have no choice about where to go and the headteacher has no power to appoint a middle leader, as the decision is controlled directly by the Education Department. Middle leaders in the studied schools expressed their frustration and struggle in conducting their daily duties due to lack of training and experience. The rigid style of leadership and management imposed by the government has left middle leaders in Saudi with no options to lead, and their role therefore tends to be more managerial and administrative and less about leadership.

Middle leaders in Saudi are playing more the role of administrator. The hierarchy in the system and the structure influence the daily practices of middle leaders. The statement “I am a manager” suggests that middle leaders seemed to perceive other teachers as staff rather than as colleagues. This influenced the sense of collegiality because middle leaders are attached to the management line, but not to the teaching line. The findings show that: middle leaders in Saudi perform no teaching duties. They are not subject leaders and their

position in the hierarchy means that they are not Heads of a department, rather they are deputies. While in English schools some middle leaders demonstrated interests in performing monitoring duties, some others tended to hold the stick of government to force the changes and decisions imposed from above. The power imposed by the government seemed to influence the culture of collegiality. This leads to tension not only between local initiatives and government but also between the culture of collegiality and the pressure of the government. In English schools, middle leaders comply with the power of secular ethics. It is a commitment which influences the practices in schools where the secular system is in control. The rhetoric of freedom, which secular ethics supports, is controlled by the government via inspection.

This rhetoric and ethics created a space of freedom and helped teachers to incorporate government pressure. At the same time, the pressure of work leads to conflict between the requirements of the government (compliance) and the rhetoric of secular ethics (freedom). This conflict seemed to influence the daily practices of middle leaders in English schools.

Fear is one of the significant issues identified in this research that influences the way in which middle leaders perform their daily duties. As demonstrated in this study, middle leaders in Saudi and England fear the consequences of failing to comply with government. But in the Saudi context, and due to the rigidity of the system, the fear seemed greater. In England, middle leaders had the power to disagree, even though they had to comply with the government, under threat of a negative Ofsted report. A middle leader is like a taxman, who has illusory power - he can collect the tax but has no power to say who should pay what.

Interestingly, the illusion of power creates an alternative source of energy that motivates middle leaders to do their job. The findings suggest that in both contexts religious and

secular values and ethics appeared to have a positive influence - supplying middle leaders with positive energy to complete their duties. Middle leaders rely on their good values when the pressure becomes high. Taking into consideration that performing everyday over-time duties at home, such as marking for English leaders and planning for Saudi leaders, is not part of their paid hours, middle leaders' values, either secular or religious, seem to be an effective element that makes them stick at their job. As such, if the education departments and headteachers in both England and Saudi Arabia are successfully keeping their middle leaders compliantly working and ensuring that they in turn keep their subordinate colleagues doing the same, does it really make a difference whether this compliance to the directives of authority is 'soft' or 'rigid'? With all these qualitative findings of unpaid overtime, limited decision-making, expected deference to authority, checking and rechecking before actually being allowed to spend school money (or even change the school bell) it appears that in both contexts a process of 'self-policing' is going on. In understanding this process, it is worth looking again at the accepted dichotomy of 'submission' to religious ideology and the 'freedom' provided by systems of secular ethics. Caught in the middle, between various contested discourses, middle leaders appear to exemplify the position Foucault describes as one of simultaneous compliance and resistance in relation to social structure and the effects of power (Jeffrey and Troman, 2009). Further, it appears that for Saudi middle leaders, commitment to religious values can be an energy source because they believe that their good deeds will be rewarded by the greatest spiritual pleasure, and this grants them the pleasure of satisfaction that they would win from the Lord. Thus, they will be satisfied that they did what they should do to comply, happily, with the Lord. For English middle leaders, similarly, committing to secular ethical values is part of their system of fairness and collegiality. The reward they get from commitment is not material, but is more about the satisfaction of knowing that they did what they should do for their schools.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the findings of this study and their relationship to existing literature on the subject of middle leaders in primary schools. It is now important to try and find meanings from the data and to understand the position of educational middle leadership roles and the extent to which they operate within their cultural, social and political environments. This study gives the opportunity to compare two different contexts in which middle leaders operate and to identify similarities and differences between such roles in England and Saudi Arabia. The methodology applied in this study gives the study a unique insight into both these contexts in allowing middle leaders in Saudi Arabia and England a voice; the methods selected, of interviewing and document analysis, along with some observation provide a balanced approach.

The first component of this chapter focuses on how middle leaders perceive their roles and responsibilities in Saudi and English primary schools. It identifies how leaders believe they fit into the management system within their school environment. Also, the discussion analyses areas where there are similar views, as well as where there are different perceptions of their responsibilities. This explores the first research question for the study: How are the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders perceived in Saudi and English primary schools?

Factors shaping that role are then discussed; such factors relate to the wider environment within which they operate and the structures that dominate the extent to which they can make decisions and create change. The second research question which this section explores is: What factors contribute to the shaping of roles and responsibilities of middle leaders in primary schools in Saudi Arabia and England?

The third section discusses the effectiveness of the organisation by focusing on power within schools. The chapter explains how power and communication channels are used to comply with decision-making. This is in response to the third research question: What kinds of factors are likely to make the school more effective in its organisation? Within each section differences and similarities between the contexts are highlighted. The concluding section summarises the discussion of the research questions and main themes.

## **5.2 Perceptions of Roles and Responsibilities**

To prompt information on the role of middle leaders in primary schools in England and Saudi Arabia, and the extent to which external and internal factors have an impact on their perceptions and daily practices, seven observations were carried out, official documents were scrutinised, and eighteen semi-structured interviews of middle leaders were conducted. Some of the themes observed by the researcher were tensions between the middle leader role and compliance, government pressure, and interactions with teachers and senior management. For example, in England the middle leaders were a conduit between senior management and teachers which was contrary to Saudi Arabia where the middle leaders lacked a defined teaching guideline.

### **5.2.1 Similarities in Roles in Primary Schools**

One of the challenges associated with the identification of similarities among middle leaders relates to the definition. The role of a middle leader varies depending on the school and where it is located. Typically, middle leaders have both managerial and teaching commitments to adhere to (Busher et al. 2007), but the way that these tasks are divided can differ greatly. It is noted that in both Saudi Arabia and England middle leaders generally sit in a middle management position (Heng and Marsh, 2009) and this allows them to create a vision and a mission that best fits their environment (Lunenberg, 2011).

The results show that middle leaders from primary schools in both England and Saudi Arabia view their role as that of leader, which differs from the middle management title assigned to them. Their role is to help colleagues to perform their duties to the level of professionalism demanded by senior management. In both cases, there seems to be a fear that the purpose of the middle is not always about communication between senior management and teachers, but instead about mediation - making sure that both sides are happy. This is demonstrated by a comment from Huda, who indicated:

“I help the teachers to complete their plans and make sure that plans are in line with the Ministry of Education Policy” (Huda, S4/S).

Huda’s role in this instance is not only ensuring compliance, but also ensuring that teachers are appropriately adhering to guidelines that will ensure the school’s success, thus satisfying senior management. In this way, Huda is facilitating positive school outcomes for her institution. This is something that has been highlighted in the literature as particularly important (Lezotte, 2001; Jarvis, 2012).

The role of mediator also appears in the English context, as middle leaders must also balance the requirements of the headteacher and of the regulatory bodies with what is being taught in the classroom. This is particularly evident in a comment made by Fatima (S3/E) when she discusses her own headteacher (S3/E). Fatima perhaps suggests that she is one more step removed from the connection being made between teachers and senior management when she comments that the headteacher has the final say because she knows the particular expectations of the government. While the structure might be slightly different in this case, the underlying premise is the same; the role of the middle leader is to strengthen the connection between teachers and senior management to ensure positive school outcomes for the institution (Fluckiger et al. 2015).

Sammons et al. (1997) showed gaps in the development and variation of middle leaders in the absence of senior leaders in relation to the performance of schools. This is in alignment with the findings of the study that middle leaders in primary schools located in both England and Saudi Arabia recognise themselves as vehicles for improving the school's performance which is indicated by positive Ofsted reports. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the role the middle leaders perceive as theirs may not always be the one that they are carrying out, where they only comply to avoid getting a negative performance report. Some of the development and variance demonstrated in the findings of this study linked to the job descriptions of the positions. As indicated above, what actually constitutes a middle leader can be difficult to define. In this study, teachers in both countries highlighted the fact that they were following the guidelines for their particular job role. In Saudi Arabia, this required specific duties related to the overall hierarchy, in England it often related to Ofsted requirements. In both cases, the outcomes are consistent with the literature because the organisational context acts as an influence on the tasks and leadership components middle leaders choose to pursue (Koh et al. 2011; Mulford, 2003).

However, there are some discrepancies between the development and variation found within the study and those specifically highlighted in the literature. It was found that in both Saudi Arabia and England, there was limited influence and power within the middle leaders' roles. However, the findings of this study do indicate that the role of a middle leader is embedded in the primary school's system at the organisational level where top leaders generate policies with which they expect middle leaders to comply. This is inconsistent with the arguments put forward by Bassett (2016) that middle leaders perform administrative tasks and compliance-related functions to some extent. It is acknowledged that in both Saudi Arabia and England, administrative tasks may be a component of the duties of a middle leader, but the intricacies of the job do suggest organising role is of paramount importance.



Further, similar attitudes were found in middle leaders from both England and Saudi Arabia, who perceived that their duties revolve around the development of teachers and complying with regulations. This indicates that middle leaders in both England and Saudi Arabia understand what their job role should be. There are strong indications that in both contexts the teachers take their responsibilities seriously. Nevertheless, tensions were noted in the hierarchy where middle leaders from both countries noted they were under pressure to comply with orders from above. They agreed that their role situated them between senior management and junior teachers and that it was their responsibility to create a balanced relationship between the two. Other studies have previously found that the middle leaders' role is a bridge between the top leadership and those at the bottom of the hierarchy (Bolman and Deal, 1997; Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain, 2011; Cardno, 2012). Although there is a consensus that their position is between headteachers and teaching staff, both Saudi and English middle leaders find their role is more limited than a central leadership role would seem to imply.

In Saudi schools, for example, Safia (S4/S) reported that they operated “in a military system, a very rigid hierarchical system”, there is no doubt they do indeed have a very structured hierarchy and that schools are required to allocate specific roles and responsibilities to their middle leaders. Similarly, in England, Katie from S2/E reported that “*Schools in England are operating in one hierarchical structure*” which is an indication that the hierarchical system allocates the roles and responsibilities to the middle leaders.

Such roles are pre-defined and middle leaders must work within these confines. This has been seen to lead to certain resistance, as was noted in an observation where one middle leader was worried she might not be fully compliant with government policy. This is in line with Foucault's theories which view power relations as containing both resistance and pressure. However, although the middle leaders resist their pre-defined roles,

Foucault mentions that the exertion of such power should not be seen as oppressive, but rather viewed as an opportunity for behavioural changes (Foucault, in Dalglish, 2009). Such concern is shown in the way that other middle leaders were observed consulting official guidelines before carrying out tasks. The adherence to strict guidelines does not allow Saudi middle leaders to propose ways of improving the system or of reflecting on ways they can use their knowledge and skills to best advantage. However, it has fostered a belief that they are ensuring the “smooth running of the school”, as Rashed (S5/S) argued, and as Fleming (2002) previously noted. This is mainly where their responsibilities lie, and where they feel they can contribute.

It may be considered that English schools have more freedom, but they too operate within a hierarchical structure comparable to that of Saudi. Similar to the Saudi system, government policy sets out the educational requirements for state schools. The headteacher may have ‘the final word’ as one interviewee commented (Katie S2/E), but there is little doubt that the headteacher must also comply with government policy. Although another interviewee (Julie S3/E) attempted to differentiate between government policy and respecting the law of the land, she also admitted that funding meant the locus of power lay with the government and therefore schools had to comply. English schools may, therefore, be afraid of losing their funding if they do not comply with government legislation. Such compliance is monitored through an inspection regime carried out by the Education Department in Saudi Arabia and Ofsted in England. The Saudi schools may have their official guidelines, but similarly, the English schools have their Ofsted inspections, and both create an atmosphere where there is fear of being found not to be complying. Such systems of inspection relate funding to productivity or outputs, and it is seen as an ‘economic methodology of government’ (Ball, 2013:42). Compliance is consequently essential, and schools operate within a system which, as Foucault (2010:173) suggests, reduces teachers and students to business ‘enterprises’.

Any power within a Saudi school is invested in the headteacher, who also wants to comply with government policy, and this is not unlike the situation in English schools. Although the governments may want to create a situation whereby headteachers can make appropriate decisions for their schools, the headteachers tend to be cautious in veering from government policy. Any meetings they hold with middle leaders in Saudi schools result in agreement and compliance, as has been noted in the interviews; middle leaders suggest headteachers simply want to please the government and are reluctant to cause any dissent (Abdulla, S6/S; Ali, S5/S; Sami, S6/S). Other middle leaders were more sympathetic towards the position of the headteachers, feeling they have no option but to comply. A similar attitude was found in English middle leaders, agreeing that headteachers were entrusted to comply with government policy and meet government requirements (Helen, S2/E). The government determines policies that are designed to increase that nation's economic viability and wealth; this means that they must ensure that education is targeted at preparing its citizens for contributing to national economic growth (Apple, 1995; Hall, 2013). However, this reduces education to an approach which is regulated by the needs of the state. Education is then not in the hands of the educators but determined by national economic needs. As Foucault (2009:365) argues, schools become accountable for 'the population-wealth problem' and are tied to the need to become wealth creators by educating the population to become economically competitive (Ball, 2013).

While it is important to note that the idea of hierarchy within the schools was a similarity found in relation to roles, it is important to consider the implications of such statements from the very different cultural viewpoints of these middle leaders. Saudi Arabia's educational system has had some real challenges with the notions of hierarchy and the issue of leadership in general. According to Reda (2014) and Romanowski (2014), the entire notion of leadership in schools has not been implemented in a particularly logical

way. They suggest that a lack of consideration of cultural, religious and philosophical differences has led to issues with educational outcomes in the region. Therefore, when middle leaders in the Saudi context speak about the hierarchy, they may not only be connecting the roles of senior management with teachers, but also considering the wider implications of living in a patriarchal society that is generally very restrictive in many different sectors. This can be contrasted with the English view of hierarchy, where teachers are largely focused on the organisational structure, without a broader view of the cultural or philosophical implications (Jarvis, 2012).

Regardless of the difference in cultural implications between the two locations, it would be difficult to find much difference between compliance due to pleasing the government or due to feel trusted to do so; the result is the same. Helen's suggestion from S2/E that trust is involved could equally be applied to Saudi headteachers, and Abdulla's comment from S6/S on pleasing the government is a reflection of what is happening in the English schools. Both are complying because it is in their interests to do so; they do not have the power to resist such compliance, although it may be argued that they are empowered through the way in which their behaviour adapts to this compliance. Bush and Glover (2016) have highlighted the way middle leaders have come to be seen as institutional agents responsible for ensuring that government policies are adhered to. Helen's and Abdulla's compliance is evidence that Bush and Glover's (2014) statement is accurate in each of these particular contexts. Helen and Abdulla both reflect that their headteachers are entrusted to carry out policies that are ultimately in the national interests and which are then cascaded down through the middle leaders, who will also comply; this is how they see their role.

Because middle leaders were often teachers before they were leaders, there is an inherent desire to relate more to the teachers than to senior management. This bias can be problematic at times because middle leaders need to keep a distance from teachers so they

can enforce government policy. This is a fine balance that seems to be executed well by middle leaders in both contexts, as the job specifications outline the roles clearly. However, both in England and Saudi, the roles of middle leaders tend to include substantial amounts of paperwork. Due to this, middle leaders have the opportunity to monitor other areas of the school's functioning, though they may be unable to make any significant changes. This was seen as a matter of concern (Abdulla S6/S). According to Cullingford (1997), middle leaders may feel overwhelmed by the size of their workload, which seems to be the case in both contexts. As a result, it may be the case that they cannot connect with teachers in a way that allows support for the implementation of government policy. This was because it was clear from observations in the Saudi schools that the daily schedule of middle leaders was extremely busy and did not lend itself to taking the time to support and listen to teachers, a view supported in the literature by Alsalahi (2014).

Important for this thesis is the understanding that perceptions of roles and responsibilities are very similar in both contexts and that there are many similarities in the hierarchical systems in operation in both English and Saudi schools. It is evident from the past literature on the subject that the role of a middle leader is complex and that the organisational structure plays a significant role in how the middle leader interprets his/her position. Additionally, a fear of non-compliance runs through middle leaders, whether operating in an English or Saudi Arabia context, and this means that their role is framed by the need to comply with government policy. Ultimately, while there are many similarities to consider, it is worthwhile noting that there may be other variables, such as culture or religion, that influence how roles and responsibilities are perceived, even in cases where similarities are highlighted.

### **5.2.2 Differences in Responsibilities in Primary Schools**

In the Saudi Arabia context, the idea of leadership has a limited role within the context of the translation to Arabic, and more specifically, in how it is interpreted. Leadership here is generally a term used only for military or high-ranking government officials (Badawood, 2003). Within this context, it presents, even at the most basic level, opportunities for differences to arise. In England, being designated as a leader generally suggests that your role within the organisation is of a higher standard than some others. Therefore, when considering the responsibilities of a leader, one might expect the English teachers to take more pride in their role as a leader than their Saudi counterparts, based entirely on the prestige of the word. In practice, this did not necessarily occur. In the interviews and observations, the English teachers demonstrated a much more casual demeanour when discussing their positions as middle-leaders. It was, in this instance, almost as if they were minimizing the level of responsibility that the leadership role entailed, or not viewing the leadership position as significant enough to involve significant responsibility. Responsibilities for the English teachers were downplayed or brushed off, but not in a way that was overly modest. Rather, the English teachers still felt very much controlled by upper levels of management and their response was typically to simply follow the directives imposed on them. This contrasted with some of the Saudi middle leaders, who took their role and responsibility as a leader quite seriously. Therefore, while the literature seems to suggest that there should be high levels of responsibility in the English context, it was not necessarily present in the findings.

An additional difference between English and Saudi schools was subject level expertise and the experience of middle leaders, due to their differential roles and responsibilities. Although this may not have been how the middle leaders perceived their role, it shows the reality may not always be aligned with perceptions. The data obtained from the observations, interviews and official documents suggest that middle leaders appointed to

Saudi primary schools are not necessarily experts in their subjects, as they are required to have only minimal teaching experience (2 years) to be selected as middle leaders; they are then given initial leadership training prior to taking up the role. However, the middle leaders leading subjects in primary schools in England were found by this study to have expertise and special knowledge about their subjects before their appointment as a middle leader. This resonates with Muijs and Harris (2005), who argue that the qualifications and training of middle leaders in the subject area they lead are fundamental to understanding the work of their colleagues. Therefore, this study suggests that middle leaders in the English primary schools are subject leaders with the ability to strike a balance between teaching professionalism and leadership. In this way, their role is more positioned as a conduit between senior management and teachers, but this is not as clearly seen in the Saudi schools.

In England, Ofsted emphasises subject knowledge as being critical for performing the duties and responsibilities of a middle leader, and this was supported by interview data and observations that qualifications and degrees in the respective subjects were viewed as significant factors for promotion or appointment of teachers from the classroom to a leadership position such as middle leadership. This was regarded as essential by Cardno (2012), who provides evidence from the context of primary schools in New Zealand that classroom teachers are promoted to middle leadership rather than hiring non-classroom practitioners. One of the English school interviewees (Sara S1/E) stressed that a leader could not lead correctly without having a full understanding of the jobs others are doing, and that a middle manager needs to have had a teaching role in order to realise what is expected of teachers: “I think, without experience, as a leader you won’t be able to lead properly, you’ve got to start from being a teacher to know what a teacher has to go through”. The English middle leaders are consequently in a position where they are likely to have the experience and expertise to offer support to classroom teachers. Sara’s

comment is insightful, illustrating her view as one that largely sides with teachers. Note that Sara is not indicating that she requires senior management experience to be a successful middle leader. Furthermore, based on what has been learned from Sara, it is apparent that she has never had an alternative experience (i.e. she was a teacher before being a middle leader, thus cannot accurately comment on another version of the situation from personal experience). According to the literature, leaders in England are supposed to be able to balance leadership and management skills (Fleming, 2002). It could be suggested that Sara lacks the subject knowledge of management despite being promoted to this position. Therefore, while Sara may believe that her teaching skills offer her an advantage over those without teaching experience, her justification for such feelings is not evidence based.

In contrast, middle leaders in the Saudi context are not classroom practitioners or subject leaders, being more like the American context described by Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009), where they reported that the middle leaders are hired not from subject teachers, although their duties involve the monitoring of subject teachers. Countering the above argument, there may be some benefits of hiring external candidates to act in middle leadership positions. External candidates are less likely to have close relationships with colleagues before they are asked to lead, giving them some semblance of power, as they can come in to the school and have control. By contrast, as in the English context described above, by not having had personal experiences as teachers in the school context, middle leaders may experience difficult challenges and confidence in their leadership abilities in a different way than the English middle leaders might. The appointment of a middle leader as a non-practitioner in Saudi primary schools sits well with the arguments of Frost and Durrant (2003), who suggest the notion of ‘non-promoted posts’ for a middle leader, rather than selecting from teachers based simply on their teaching expertise and subject knowledge. They further propose that, chosen independently, middle leaders are



better able to make decisions in a hierarchical structure. However, much depends on the role the middle leaders are given and the power of that role to make decisions. From the findings of this study, it was clear that Saudi middle leaders did not feel they were allowed to participate in decision-making.

Some academics argue that middle leaders in non-promoted posts can monitor, motivate and support the school mission, interact with junior staff and senior management in an effective and efficient way. They are also capable of utilising the leadership functions in a variety of ways to drive forward the school's performance and implement and shape departmental and school policies (Busher, 2005). From this perspective, it seems that non-promoted middle leaders are in a better position to lead their colleagues within a hierarchical system, compared to the middle leaders (also subject leaders) in the primary schools in England. However, Bush and Jackson (2002) support the position of middle leaders as subject leaders, as found in this study, by arguing that such a role is better in circumstances where the goal is to implement policies and participate in the decision-making process in schools to improve learning and teaching within the organisation. In England the middle leader role assumes the role of teacher educator when it comes to the development of the teaching portfolio of the school, whereas the middle leader in Saudi Arabia acts more as an administrator and manager rather than a subject leader, and ensures school performance and teacher development comply with the requirements of senior management. These could both be reasons why the above examples from Saudi Arabia and England have provided the outcomes that they have. The work and role of middle leaders in English primary schools may come into conflict with the interests of other subject teachers (juniors) within the same schools; middle leaders are more likely to face challenges in performing their routine duties as both subject and middle leaders, compared to their counterparts in Saudi Arabia.

Leadership is a continuous process and something that directly relates to influencing people in order to realise mutual objectives and goals (Ciulla, 2004; Northouse, 2007). Under this premise, middle leaders must take direction from the top, not only working under the direction of senior management, but also leading the teachers for whom they are responsible. Leadership is difficult to pinpoint, though it is generally suggested in the literature that a good leader is someone who has a clear vision of the importance of their area of responsibility (Fleming, 2002). In terms of how this leadership is portrayed, there are two very different approaches to building vision. It is important to consider how middle leaders position themselves among colleagues. For example, in the Saudi examples in the findings, there is a clear element of respect for the position. The language utilized in the remarks made by Saod (S5/S), for example, suggest that he is willing to take extra time to demonstrate how committed he is to his position. Within these comments there are references to religion and spirituality, linking higher power expectations with the workplace. By contrast, in the English context, the language and non-verbal communication highlights frustration with the management and the bureaucratic structure in general. Rachel (S1/E) rolls her eyes when she discusses government policy, while Sara (S1/E) laughs while she has to describe her role and her relationship with the headteacher. It is clear that the leadership practices of Sara and Rachel are significantly different from those observed in the Saudi context, as mutual objectives and goals are not being achieved. The implications of this difference is far-reaching; it suggests that the role and responsibility of a leader may be defined very differently in different cultural contexts.

Middle leaders in Saudi schools are expected to monitor colleagues to ensure they are also adhering to the rules. This not only shows a lack of cooperative interaction in Saudi schools, but also creates a feeling of separateness between middle leaders and teachers, which Rashed (S5/S) suggests is good, as it denotes respect. Although the Saudi middle

leaders perceive their role as being one that supports colleagues in achieving levels of professionalism, the observations carried out showed that they had few opportunities for interaction with the teachers and their influence on the performance of the school is very much limited to administration and compliance. This was explained by Alsalahi (2014) in that Saudi teacher trainees are shaped by their university experiences, which focus on the theoretical aspects of teaching. It was further explained by Alabaas (2010) that trainee teachers in the Saudi system are not trained in critical teaching pedagogy, which leaves them without the breadth of experience and expertise to guide other teachers. There is an argument here that they do not have the confidence to support or mentor colleagues, although middle leaders in Saudi schools have been observed to have a heavy administrative workload.

The two contexts, Saudi and English schools, also uphold different values. Saudi Arabia is a very conservative country and is defined by its adherence to the Islamic religion. It is therefore not surprising that Islamic values are a large part of people's lives. This is seen in the way that religion plays a role in schools; a headteacher who is seen to be upholding Islamic values in their school has the respect of their staff. They are seen as a role model and, according to such values, can also be seen as embodying power through their religious commitment. However, within such values, there is also the fear of non-compliance, of facing the consequences of being judged at a higher level. This fear is transmitted to middle leaders. Although British values may not be seen as so embedded in religion, they are nevertheless based on ethical values that have been strongly influenced by Christian values. There is still respect for others and middle leaders show an awareness of the trust placed in them by headteachers for carrying out their duties to the best of their ability (Helen S2/E). In both Saudi and English settings, middle leaders in schools use their values to motivate them. However, it can be argued that the Saudi middle leaders are more motivated by fear of non-compliance, whilst the English middle

leaders are motivated to comply by not wanting to let others down by betraying their trust. Bligh (2017) reveals that trust is a fundamental matter in an organisation; it needs to be enhanced in order to improve organisational commitment and is strongly and positively associated with whether or not employees identify with their organisation.

From this, it would appear that the English middle leaders identify more with their schools than their Saudi counterparts and are likely to be more committed to their roles. Helen (S2/E) confirms this in her statement: “I can support the headteacher and any others or managers to do their jobs and to meet the government requirements. I am self-motivated, and I can be fair and trusted. So, yes, I can see myself as a leader”. According to Vislocky (2013), school performance is dependent on the way all the stakeholders work together. Therefore the cohesiveness of the team within the school structure is essential; this would imply that identification with the school and commitment to the organisation play a significant role in enhancing school performance.

This thesis finds it significant that the responsibilities of middle leaders in Saudi schools are influenced by the volume of paperwork involved and the need for them to carry out a management role, ensuring that all systems are in place according to government guidelines. Middle leaders, in this context, may often be hired externally, creating specific challenges to how leadership functions within the larger social picture. The English middle leaders tend to have a more pastoral role as subject leaders, in a position where they can understand the needs of classroom teachers. This may offer benefits, but also poses challenges related to the one-sidedness of perspectives that may become particularly apparent in situations where there are disagreements with senior management. These are fundamental differences in roles and responsibilities within these two contexts. One of the identified differences is that English middle leaders offer expertise and support to classroom teachers, unlike in Saudi where they are not hired from among subject teachers. Religion is another factor that influences the roles of Saudi and

English teachers defining the norms of the teachers. The literature generally suggests definitions of leadership and attributes to it particular roles and responsibilities that are associated with effective leadership practices. As has been demonstrated by the above section, while some responsibilities do align, there are also a significant number that deviate from those presented in the literature.

### **5.3 Factors Shaping Roles and Responsibilities of Middle Leaders**

The roles and responsibilities of middle leaders are influenced by the internal and external environments in which they operate. At first glance one would expect disparities in such diverse contexts; England and Saudi Arabia appear to be divided by political as well as cultural and religious values. It is surprising, however, to discover that there are many similarities despite the political, cultural and organisational systems differences. This section will identify and explore the various factors embedded in the external and internal environments and their influence on the ways in which middle leaders perform their day to day activities.

#### **5.3.1 Similarities in the Cultural Context**

When considering culture, there might be an initial inclination towards the consideration of ‘Saudi’ culture versus ‘British’ culture, both of which clearly elicit different images in their portrayal (Alqahtani, 2011). Yet culture is a very difficult thing to define and can include sub-components, such as educational culture. It is in this instance that we see some similarities in the way that culture is understood between the primary school environments in both Saudi Arabia and English contexts. This is because the foundational principles in both locations seek to develop knowledge and humanity among all those in attendance. Therefore, when examining the findings of this research through the different perspectives of culture, certain similar themes emerge.

According to the findings of this study, Saudi society has the belief that the power lies in the hands solely of the King, and this was seen in the way that middle leaders from the Saudi schools accept that their role is to carry out the wishes of the King, as Huda (S4/S) explains. Although the King may not personally make decisions, he is the one who has the vision and directs the way in which policy should be made and implemented by his government. This means that the people making decisions about schools may be quite removed from the reality of school life, as the findings suggest. Ali (S5/S) commented that: ‘‘the policy is in one place and reality totally in a different place’’; the middle leaders have lost control of the outcomes. It is of some frustration that those most involved do not have a voice, as they feel they should have some influence over what is happening on the ground (Musaid S6/S). As Ali (S5/S) stressed, the government does not listen, and this results in ‘mess and problems everywhere’. Yet only the Education Department has the power to make decisions that affect the lives of teachers and students in schools. This may be the norm but it is not necessarily the reality (Foucault, 1981).

While the power of the King plays a considerable role in the functioning and the perspectives of Saudi citizens, participants’ comments generally focus on how the role of the King plays a part in the educational foundations of the primary school system, and consequently, how middle leaders must undertake their jobs. While in the English context, the Queen does not have such levels of authority over the educational foundations of the primary sector, there is a similar hierarchy in the British context. In England, policies also influence the organisational culture of the school system. These structures include aspects of standardised testing that generally encourage teachers to ‘teach to the test’. Because many of the funding options available generally rely on the outcomes of such tests, management seeks to maximise numerical scores. For teachers, in both contexts, the focus is on learning. It is acknowledged that learning can be achieved in a variety of different ways and may not necessarily be directly correlated with numerical

outputs. In both Saudi and English contexts, these sometimes polarising perspectives can put a focused strain on the middle leader, who must navigate the needs of teachers, while still attempting to uphold strong numerical scores among students. In both contexts, the educational culture follows a similar structure. When Solafa (S4/S) discusses the great vision of the King and his top down approach to policy implementation in schools, she is echoing statements made by Fatima (S3/E) who suggests she must not deviate from the government's vision. Both of these situations are highlighted in the literature. For example, Bush and Glover (2016) suggests that middle leaders are essentially institutional agents of adherence to government policies. This suggests that the educational culture of both Saudi Arabia and England demonstrates some similarities in the way top-down policy initiatives circulate through the schools.

The Education Department wants people to believe they are in control in their schools. As one respondent commented, schools are given the impression that they can make decisions or implement changes, but this is "the power of illusion" (Sami, S6/S). The only power that schools have is to implement government policy. A number of respondents were quite vociferous on this subject: there is recognition that middle leaders cannot be involved in changes and nor can the headteacher as this is outside their remit (Saod S5/S); some think the decision-making is out of their hands because they are not trusted (Solafa S4/S); others feel the government does not want to lose control over education (Rashed S5/S). Both English and Saudi leaders believe that the effectiveness of their role, responsibilities and power is founded on trust. This is in line with the work of Bennett et al. (2007) who argue that middle leaders in a collegial atmosphere assume that teachers are accountable professionals. Power is an inherent characteristic when it relates to culture. According to Hofstede (1980), a power-distance index exists. This index considers the extent to which members of less power within an institution accept and expect power to be unequally distributed. At the country level, Saudi Arabia and

England would score very differently with Saudi Arabia obtaining a high score, suggesting a clear hierarchy that is established and executed among members of the nation. Contrastively, England would score considerably lower on the index, signifying more instances where members of society are seen to question authority.

From the findings of this study, the power-distance index at the country level does not seem to apply at the organisational level, suggesting that a shift is occurring in both contexts. It is evident that Saod (S5/S) and Solafa (S4/S) are more willing to question authority when faced with challenging educational situations, which would generally defy the high power-distance scoring exhibited at the country level. The English middle-leaders, in a similar shift, generally seem to be acknowledging that a hierarchy exists that stems from Ofsted and levels of senior management. The similarity, in this instance, is that both countries are seeking to achieve a mid-ground position within the power-distance index, as decisions are made to assist in the compilation of a shared vision that pleases everyone. For the middle leaders in this study, this requires moves to be made in order to better the situation of all.

These middle leaders, despite feeling that they have no power, were found to have a voice. They could express their concerns over the role they have, and they could criticise the lack of power extended to schools and middle leaders. This in its way is a form of resistance, to which Foucault (1977) referred as force relations, where power is a strategy that depends on a multiplicity of resistances; although the middle leaders are changing their behaviour by complying or navigating the intricacies of working in the middle, they are also quietly resisting that power. They therefore also have power, which can come from below as well as from above (Foucault, 1981). In this instance, the middle leaders are indeed adhering to the norm of hierarchical power, but the reality is that they are also resisting that norm by voicing their opinions. Discourses can identify power but can also undermine it by identifying it (Foucault, 1977); the middle leaders identify that power is



coming from above, but they are also criticising the policies that they are complying with as they do not fit reality.

Educational culture is again illustrated by the above discussion on the use of voice. For middle leaders, there seems to be a need to encourage collaboration instead of the top down model that seemed to be more commonly applied. While it was apparent that both contexts demonstrated the use of voice by middle leaders, what was also evident was the lack of implementation of changes as a direct result of use of this voice. One example of this is a school meeting that occurred in S3 in England. In this meeting, the middle leader was permitted, and even encouraged, to express views on teacher concerns and to address functional changes within the school. While the concerns were acutely listened to by the headteacher, none of the issues discussed in the meeting were decided upon. A similar example can be shown in the Saudi context, though in this case there was more acceptance that the concerns being presented were illusory because of the assumption that headteachers in the Saudi context had considerably less power to make changes. This power relationship, as it pertains to educational culture, is summed up in the literature by Kurdi (2011), who notes that educators generally have very little autonomy.

The middle leaders from both countries in this study echoed their fears and powerlessness in the face of a state-operated system of school inspection and reporting mechanisms that hold the individuals accountable for their actions and decisions at ground level. Safia (S4/S) worries about the regular visits from inspectors from the Saudi Education Department “we have to be ready and show them we are ready, otherwise it will appear in the reporting mark”; Sara (S1/E) explains that the headteacher in her English school “is very critical about Ofsted reports....that report shows our school’s performance and as more boxes have been ticked, the better grades the school will receive”. These fears and anxieties expressed by middle leaders absolutely resonate with the word “terror” used by Perryman (2009) as it relates to inspection and comparisons, and with the “neo-liberal

forms of government that feature not only direct intervention by means of empowered and specialised apparatuses [inspections, reports, performance] but also characteristically develop indirect techniques [inspections, reports, performance] for leading and controlling individuals”, as argued by Lemke (2000:12). Productivity is thus prioritised over experience at an organisational level, and this belittles the leadership role and label of middle leader, taking their focus away from improving teaching practices (Hunter, 1999).

While middle leaders in both contexts indicated a frustration of the overarching government bodies, there were indications in the research that monitoring and assessment by middle leaders is generally not undertaken to a high standard (Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain 2011). In both countries, there was a desire for middle leaders to ‘pick a side,’ and many chose to attempt to support the needs of the teachers, in a balancing act of regulatory policies. Yet, several studies (i.e. Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain, 2011) suggest that educational culture puts the responsibility to demonstrate success on the student (e.g. through standardised assessment) and the focus on the evaluation of teaching is often an afterthought. Within this study, there was very little reference by the middle leaders to evaluation of teachers, as culturally it did not appear to be one of the responsibilities they chose to undertake in their working environment.

In a similar vein some of the middle leaders in the English schools also complain about the limits of their power to make decisions. Although some may believe they have some elements of power in their role, this too may be the power of illusion. As Julie (S3/E) explains, government legislation overrules other considerations. The changes that are imposed by central government come through so quickly that it makes it difficult for middle leaders to try and implement them. Despite the belief that there is more freedom in the English system, the middle leaders make it clear that they do not have a voice when it comes to decision-making. Like their Saudi counterparts, they are simply managing a

process. Nevertheless, it can also be seen in both contexts that minor decisions can be made within the school environment. As Rashed (S5/S) commented, these were decisions that did not affect education policy. It should be noted that Reda (2014) and Romanowski (2014) argue that many of the policies embraced by Saudi governments have been shaped by Western ideology, and little attention has been paid to considering systems that are more in line with their own religious, cultural and philosophical context. This may help to explain why so many similarities are evident between Saudi and English schools; Romanowski (2014) clearly states that even when reforms happen in education policies, they are still shaped by external forces rather than internal needs.

This thesis finds that culture is a key element that is similar in the two countries. Culture has broadly been defined as more extensive, including aspects of power and authority as well as to include the culture within the educational context. The centralised system of education in both countries is similar, meaning that there is an authoritarian approach to compliance which can sometimes intimidate middle leaders. Middle leaders feel controlled by the system and are not encouraged to focus on pedagogy in schools. This leaves them at an impasse. Some leaders were once teachers themselves, and even for those who were not, there is an inherent tendency to support the needs of teachers while still attempting to implement the policies of senior management. The middle leaders both in Saudi and in England felt that trust was a crucial component in their roles and responsibilities. The leaders, especially in Saudi, are controlled by the centralised system, which causes anxiety and lack of confidence. The damage is high as was observed in the case of Safa, who kept checking the guidelines every time she was asked a question. In contrast, although middle leaders in English schools mentioned trust as one of the barriers to efficiency, they were more comfortable and able to make a decision and implement change.

### **5.3.2 Differences between the Contexts**

It is possible, in some cases, to take aspects that were found to be similar between the two countries and examine differences in terms of the dynamics and fluidity of the approaches. As documented in the literature, the way leadership is both perceived and implemented at the educational level is significantly different even within the boundaries of a country (Harris, 2004). It is important to consider differences, not as a means to change either side, but instead to determine the responsibilities of the middle leaders and how their perceptions have been shaped within their context.

Nevertheless, differences between the two systems can still be seen. Any changes within schools are likely to be decided by the Saudi Education Department, yet this is a cause of frustration as the middle leaders feel they know what is best for their school. In Rashed's (S5/S) view, it is a highly political situation, where the government does not want to lose control of education: "I think the government fears that when every school becomes independent in making decisions and promoting change, then their control over education and people will be less". By applying the Hofstede power distance theory at a country level here, the English are seen to have a lower inequality in power in comparison to Saudi. Middle leaders, in this study, were attempting to demonstrate their ability to lead appropriately in their context, which was a challenge considering their likely overall acceptance of the power distance relationship within a larger context (see Cordell and Waters, 1993). A noteworthy point related to Rashed's (S5/S) view that Saudi middle leaders know what is best for the school. But what justification exists for this statement? It has already been determined that Saudi middle leaders are usually not teachers before they become leaders, nor is the word leadership truly developed as a concept within society (Al Sadaawi, 2010; Al-Sdan, 2000). While it is certainly plausible that Rashed (S5/S) could have ample experience as a middle leader within the Saudi context, it is surprising that this view of the middle 'knowing best' emerges.

Further considering the view presented above, using Hofstede's index of individualism and collectivism, Saudi emerges as a collectivist culture which prioritises family and religion. In this example, Rashed (S5/S) may not necessarily be demonstrating the collectivist tendencies of the country as a whole. One might expect, from Hofstede's index, for Rashed to embrace collaboration among the group as a whole (George and Jayan, 2012). Yet if Hofstede's index is considered at the educational level (i.e. educational culture), Rashed (S5/S) may view the school as the 'family' and all others as outsiders. Thus, the prioritisation of knowing what is best for the school situates the middle leader as the leader of the unit (Bennett et al. 2007). Yet in practice, it has been shown that Rashed (S5/S) feels very little authority over the school, while the government has all the power. This puts Rashed (S5/S) in a difficult position because as a leader of the educational unit, the responsibilities associated with this post should be upheld. According to Bush and Glover (2003), leadership is a social influencing process that is derived from leaders being the centre of expertise, power, and authority. This is clearly not the case for Rashed (S5/S).

In the context of England, there appears to be less expectation that power is given to the leader of an educational organisation. Fatima (S3/E) refers to her institution as a big family. When she does so, she appears to be excluding senior management from her definition of this role, making her position 'higher' than the teachers, but not necessarily the highest, which would likely be associated with the headteacher (Dimmock and Lee 2000). Fatima (S3/E), unlike Rashed (S5/S), believes that power and authority should be developed from the bottom up, meaning that the senior management should not have all the decision-making power. She suggests that "a few of the younger middle leaders who came recently into the school, they do not really appreciate the actual meanings of the school as a big family" Fatima (S3/E) appears to be more accepting of the notion of leadership as a social influencing process, as it is described in the literature. Her

suggestion that newly appointed leaders are not representative of the larger values of the unit generally contrasts the position of Rashed (S5/S), who assumes power is given. From Hofstede's account of individualism and collectivism, it would be expected that Fatima (S3/E) would fall largely in the individualistic range of the scale given her English background. This does not seem to be representative of her true feelings.

The above statement is not meant to assert that educational culture completely contradicts Hofstede's model. There are certainly instances where individualist components are more prominent in the English setting, and collectivist tendencies are highlighted in the Saudi one, for example, in a comment by Helen (S2/E), when she highlights how people in her educational context are not all working as hard as one another. Helen (S2/E) sees this as an injustice, but does nothing to attempt to remedy the situation, accepting the position that some people in her institution are required to work more than others. By contrast, Safia from S4/S highlights the school as a collective against the government, suggesting "We know more about the children's needs and ways of learning more than the government"; her comment uses the collective 'we' rather than the individualistic 'I' when describing her situation, which is consistent with a more collective view of the situation.

What can be ascertained from all this is the uniqueness of individuals within their own institution and how each views the cultural components of their position differently (Bell and Ritchie, 1999). It is not possible to generalise the information provided by middle leaders to a wider context, although it is evident that there are, in some cases, consistencies with the literature, and in others significant contrasts.

Both England and Saudi have different political initiatives and those in England are more flexible in comparison to those in Saudi. From a Saudi middle leader perspective, the centralisation of decision-making is not going to be in line with the vision of the King as

it does not motivate staff to improve their performance (Abdul-Kareem, 2001; Bush, 2003). This is in contrast to the perception of vision coming from a headteacher in English schools, as Nicola (S1/E) explains: “it could be a change to fit the vision of the new headteacher so he might pass it down to us”. This indicates that vision may be more focused in English schools and relate to the individual organisation, rather than being an all-encompassing vision promoted by the King in Saudi Arabia. Political initiatives play a significant role in organisations in multiple industries, though education is one that has imperative implications for those seeking re-election or affirmation of the people. It is very likely that in each scenario, the English regulatory bodies, and the vision of the King respectively are constructed via logical steps taken to ensure that the best type of education exists in schools. In the hierarchical structure of Saudi Arabia, there may be more pressure from the King to implement policies in a direct way (Al-Haj, 2002), though as highlighted by Abdulla (S6/S), this is often inefficiently presented.

Nevertheless, even within the English schools, the headteacher’s vision involves compliance: Fatima (S3/E) says “it is my role to keep evaluation and monitoring”. This is in line with Nelson and Quinn (2016) which indicates that good middle managers should ensure that the vision and the strategies of the senior managers are turned into reality. Considering the political initiatives, it is apparent that there is something of a power struggle in the English context, certainly to a greater extent than there is in the Saudi context (Al-Haj, 2002). It is unclear, in some way, what Fatima (S3/E) means by evaluation and monitoring. One might expect that if her goal was to ensure a high quality of teaching and learning, it would be teacher development that would be her focus. It was learned, however, that this is not likely to be the case. Instead, Fatima (S3/E) suggests that she is evaluating and monitoring the extent to which the vision of the headteacher, as directed by Ofsted, is being implemented in the classroom. The one size fits all approach to teaching seems an overly prescriptive model. For Ofsted, on paper, it is relatively easy

to see how a limited approach is practical (Fleming and Amesbury, 2013). If funding is distributed based on a set of specific criteria, evaluation is simpler and requires less thought and resources to implement. In practice, however, the prescriptive nature of the criteria may limit the innovation of teachers in the classroom (TTA, 1998). It may be the case that, although Saudi and English leaders lack autonomy, the extent of decision-making varies, where English middle leaders have more autonomy in comparison to the Saudi middle leaders. Therefore, if middle leaders must implement a vision in the English context, they are placed in a challenging dichotomy between the advancement of teaching and the ability to adhere to prescriptive guidelines.

However, from the English perspective, some middle leaders still feel they do have a certain amount of autonomy in making decisions and changes, as Katie (S2/E) commented: “I do have the power to make decisions about the curriculum because obviously, I’m the expert in the school”. Although Katie does not go into detail about the changes she may make, others, like Helen, at the same school say they do not have any control over curriculum. This may be because Katie makes it clear that she is the expert in the school and clearly has the experience to ensure that the required learning outcomes will be achieved. Unlike the Saudi system, it appears that there is some flexibility within the English system for qualified and experienced middle leaders to make decisions. This degree of autonomy is related to the knowledge that is embedded in the middle leaders (Foucault, 1980). There is also flexibility within the English independent school structures for curriculum changes, according to Julie (S3/E); this comes from trust in the professionalism of the staff. However, as Fleming (2002) and Robbins et al. (2013) indicate, it factors in the political and social environment that affects the school culture. Both of these factors have an impact on the role of middle leaders.

Much depends on the headteacher and their approach to leadership. Collaboration with senior management and middle leaders in English schools may imply that headteachers



are sharing power. Emma (S3/E) tells of the headteacher calling meetings to suggest how changes can be made: “eventually, we are collaborating to implement”. An observation carried out at this particular school noted that no decisions were made at a two-hour meeting. Middle leaders were given the opportunity to express their opinions, thereby allowing them to believe that they had a voice. Jumani and Malki (2017) suggest that promoting a degree of autonomy in middle leaders depends on the supportive culture within the organisation. It may be, however, that although middle leaders perceive they can contribute to decision-making at an organisational level, their power is as limited as in the Saudi schools. As Julie (S3/E) admitted: “we all know it is the headteacher which gives the final word”. The difference between the two contexts is that the Saudi middle leaders are aware that they have no decision-making powers, whereas the English middle leaders prefer to believe that they do have a certain amount of power in their role. This is likely to be related to cultural factors; according to Hofstede and Minkov (2010), the English have a lower power distance. Therefore they try to justify any inequalities in power. In the Saudi case, there is a large degree of power distance and society accepts these inequalities.

Important for this thesis is the way in which middle leaders perceive they have the power to make decisions. There are circumstances in the findings that generally suggest that neither country always aligns with the findings of pre-existing research into cultural value dimensions, and in some cases, the outcome is the opposite of what might be expected. The Saudi system does not encourage power-sharing and the model presented to teachers is one that comes from a top-down directive from the King. The notion of all Saudis being collective players in a larger unit does not seem to be evident at the level of teaching. By contrast, the expectation of English teachers as individualist has also not been shown to be consistent. The English system often gives the middle leaders the perception of power-sharing by arranging meetings to discuss changes and their implementation, thus

highlighting some element of collectivism; though in practice, the enactment of such changes has been minimal, also suggesting an overly prescriptive approach to the education sector. This prescriptiveness has implications in both contexts as it may affect the quality of teaching. Middle leaders tend to deal with this in different ways from frustration to overall acceptance.

### **5.3.3 Comparing both Saudi and English Contexts**

From the above discussion on factors shaping the roles of English and Saudi middle leaders, it can be shown there are differences that are specifically related to the cultural context. It should be noted that these findings are based upon a small sample, and are not generalizable on a larger scale. While the entire countries cannot be pigeonholed, there is value in summarizing the main findings from this study. These can be summarized as follows:

1. Middle leaders in the English context are teacher-leaders, so they contribute to their school through teaching as well as management. But middle leaders in Saudi are managers and they does not have any teaching duties. This has influenced the perspectives of middle leaders in Saudi who consider themselves more attuned to management duties, while middle leaders in the English context realise their role as being in relation to improving teachers and classroom practices. In other words, the English context middle leaders seem more teacher- and classroom-centred while middle leaders in Saudi seem more focused on managerial and administration duties. This makes a significant difference in the way they perceive their role as middle leaders and their value to the organisation.
2. The middle leaders in schools in the English context have their minister in the government, who acts as the liaison between management in schools and those in positions of higher power. There is communication between the different levels,

though this is not always productive or meaningful in getting this done and/or changed. In the Saudi context such practice is not available. Having representatives acting as liaisons has resulted in some English middle leaders believing that they have the power to change and shape policies, though the amount of influence that they actually have is unclear. However, the Saudi middle leaders were clear that their voices would not be heard and, although and, they had no influence beyond such internal school management practices.

3. One of the primary aspirations of middle leaders in England, based upon their responses in this study, was to create a collegial culture, and the rhetoric of collegiality may have had an influence on their professional autonomy. Middle leaders in England have more ability to negotiate their responsibility to monitor their colleagues as teachers in the classroom when compared to Saudi teachers, which may make some teachers feel their professional practice is being questioned. The duties of monitoring may lead to a certain amount of tension between the collegial culture and the duties the government expects them to conduct as middle leaders. However, in the Saudi educational setting a collegial culture does not exist. Any tension between schools and government is due to imposing changes and strategies and controlling decisions, but not because middle leaders in Saudi felt that their duties contradicted their profession culture.
4. Similar to the Saudi primary school context, the English school context is hierarchically structured and middle leaders in both contexts are required to comply with middle-line management responsibilities. In Saudi the middle leaders were conceived as more related to the head rather than the middle line, which is the case in England. This made middle leaders in England closer to teachers, while middle leaders in Saudi seemed in a closer position to the headteacher.

5. Middle leaders in England receive in-house training as part of their professional development. In Saudi, the training available to middle leaders is limited to what is offered by the MOE and its related departments. Additionally, the middle leaders' training seems different from what the middle leaders in England request. For example, the middle leaders in Saudi requested further training courses to support their administration skills, while middle leaders in England were more concerned with their teamworking and soft skills. Middle leadership training in England appears to focus on developing the middle leaders' interpersonal skills whereas in Saudi there were more comments made by middle leaders on their administration skills.
6. It has also been noted that middle leaders in England are given some authority to make financial decisions and they have limited power over their department's budget, which is not available in the Saudi context.
7. Middle leaders in England have their professional bodies and expertise on hand. Middle leadership literature and models have developed considerably during the last ten years. but in Saudi the concept has been introduced for the first time in this PhD study and the current literature written in Arabic has much space for development.
8. In both contexts the middle leaders were wanting to reduce the pressure applied from the headteacher, in order to shape their own role and daily responsibilities and gain further autonomy. The findings suggest that middle leaders in England have more freedom to voice their opinions but middle leaders in Saudi are still, to a large extent, under the control of the headteacher.

## **5.4 Power Relations**

The perceptions of middle leaders in both Saudi and English contexts show that they share many similarities about the power that influences their role in schools.

### **5.4.1 Similarities in Power Relations**

Power to make decisions and bring about change has been seen to be invested in governments and the role of the government is seen as a key deterrent to understanding the power relation, according to both Saudi and English middle leaders. Tensions between power coming from the government and the lack of power perceived by middle leaders were expressed by Musaid (S6/S), who suggested that education policy was not effective “As it conflicts with the managerial work in the school”. Similarly Helen (S2/E) saw that the government was responsible for the unproductive relationship that existed in English schools: “they think because they have the power, they can tell others what to do.” There is consequently a clash of power between governments and middle leaders. Most of those interviewed felt that the government did not listen to middle leaders and this was one of the main reasons why education policies did not always work in practice. As Foucault (2009) makes clear, while it is impossible to possess power he notes it is possible to change these relations. While there are instances where power can be seen has prohibitive, there are other instances where power can be utilised to bring success or fulfilment to a relationship. Rather it should be considered positively as all change requires adaptation. If, as Musaid (S6/S) argues, authoritarian power conflicts with school management, then the behaviours of middle leaders need to be changed. How these behaviours are changed is a source of productivity; even though there are guidelines, such guidelines need to be interpreted. As mentioned earlier, middle leaders in Saudi schools were seen referring to official guidelines to be able to comply with government policies. However, the middle

leaders ignore the guidelines because schools often require more directed and specific support that does not necessarily coincide with the guidelines.

The literature does not necessarily always equate the above finding with power, but in some cases seems to see it as a necessary component of good leadership and the success of the school. Barth suggests that teachers who become leaders get to become owners and investors in their school, rather than just tenants (2001:443). As a result of this, he suggests that they become more invested. This investment, in itself, is a component of personal power. It exemplifies the strength that it takes to become a leader in the educational sector and highlights the empowering function of leadership. Marzano et al. (2005) suggest that effective leadership is the driver for continuous change in the global educational context, and we can see this constant change highlighted in the educational framework in Saudi Arabia. In this case the development from a few primary schools for boys in 1924 to the implementation of a formal schooling system for girls in 2003 suggests that some power lies in the hands of teachers and educators (Al-Hakami, 2010; Cordesman, 2008). Without leadership and direction, it is unlikely that such changes would have emerged.

These changes in educational policy have occurred over a long period of time, which may be one reason why the middle leaders in schools feel frustrated over a lack of power. When immersed in the context, it is easy to get caught up in the stagnation of the day to day frustrations, while not considering the bigger picture. Power, in leadership, means that influence is being exerted for the right reasons, specifically for the benefit of the school (Foucault, 1977). In this instance, while the frustration may exist, and while the power may be limited in both contexts, there are indications that these middle leaders are looking toward the broader context and may contribute in some way to the larger vision of change, thus demonstrating aspects of power.

It is not the power that is being enforced upon the middle leaders, but the way in which they change their behaviour to resist that power which determines the locus of power. As Foucault (1977) argues, power is relational, and it is how that power is exerted that is most important. Katie (S2/E), one of the English middle leaders, sheds more light on this when she talks of advisors being their link to the government: “the advisors inform us of the changes the government has made”. The government may impose changes, the advisor may communicate those changes, but it is the schools that implement them. The power lies in the way the changes are implemented; in the same way, the Saudi schools use their guidelines to put educational policies into practice in their school. In both the Saudi and English context, it is apparent that as time passes, so do the expectations of leaders. Weber (1978) highlighted the need for power with reference to religious or traditional authority. Weber’s (1978) view is very classical, and it seeks to highlight a rigid structure of authority as power and therefore justified. As is evident in both cases, while the laws might be direct, they are not always rigid, as the implementation strategies of middle leaders allow them to bend and direct the regulations to suit their particular situation. Forty years on from Weber’s (1978) writing, it is evident that inventive solutions to a directed power system may be more common in the educational context.

In England, leadership contains differential knowledge sources that explain the government vision and the pre-defined. However, although the government has defined the power of the leader in the guidelines, leaders fail to follow it in practice. The difference between the theory of power and reality has contributed to the power clash among the English middle leaders and the government. The remedy for the power clash is that the government should involve middle leaders in policy decision-making. This clash of power is similar in some ways to the power struggle in Saudi Arabia described previously. While Saudi Arabia was culturally shifting to a formal education system for girls, the shift of power in the English context was less obvious, but still valuable. Middle

leaders were not particularly prominent in primary schools in the 1920s in England; looking forward to the current situation, there are now many middle leaders working within the primary context (Silver, 2013). As middle leaders continue to seek out the best direction for their schools in the English context, changes have emerged to the National Curriculum, teaching approaches, classroom numbers, and other fundamental elements of the educational experience. Again, these changes have not occurred overnight, and middle leaders in England may also be unable to view the bigger picture in the scheme of day-to-day frustrations over the lack of power.

Nevertheless, there was frustration from middle leaders in both contexts at what they saw as their lack of power. Rashed (S5/S), from the Saudi perspective, argued that this prevented “our attempts to introduce new initiatives”, while Vicky (S2/E) saw English middle leaders’ being confined by a hierarchical system where “power is not distributed, power is controlled”. Both Saudi and English middle leaders agreed that their hands were tied to being able to carry out leadership duties. Musaid (S6/S) commented that “I cannot lead because I do not have the freedom of decision and the power to make it”. Whereas the middle leaders perceived a lack of power as detrimental to their being able to function effectively, this does not align with Foucault’s (1977) theory that power can be a productive aspect of implementation. There may be space for power within their compliance role that they do not recognise, and this also resonates with Foucault’s (1981) theme of truth and its relationship with oneself; it is how we think about ourselves and how we acknowledge and change our behaviour. Ball (2015) suggests that it involves a continuous process of reflection or introspection, whereby we challenge patterns of behaviour to ensure they are still applicable; this results in empowerment. It may be that these middle leaders are already empowered but have a different concept of what power should be.



In terms of this thesis, it is important to note that in both Saudi and English schools there is resistance to decisions being imposed from above. This resistance seems to come from a system where the middle leaders are only able to see themselves as singular entities within the wider educational context. This narrow focus allows them to see what is particularly valuable for their own school, but does not necessarily focus them on the slower educational changes that have been occurring over the last several decades. It is acknowledged that the frustrations suggested by middle leaders are real, and they are components of a typically hierarchical power system in both contexts. The outcome, for these middle leaders, has been to use creative techniques to demonstrate their power in smaller ways in the educational situations they are placed in. Yet at the same time, there is not yet a realisation that middle leaders have within themselves the power to implement the changes in ways that are most effective for their schools.

#### **5.4.2 Differences in Power Relations**

Government interference in schools and the locus of power (seen as being government itself) was a source of frustration across both Saudi and English contexts. However, the Saudi middle leaders highlighted that interference as political changes being imposed upon the education system by Western influences. Safia (S4/S) expresses her frustration at changes being made for political reasons: “the West and America are interfering in our life and our generation’s lives.” In a global economy, Saudi Arabia needs to ensure its systems match international standards, but this does come at a cost, according to these middle leaders. Saod (S5/S) comments that “foreign educational programmes in the primary school will not be successful due to the inappropriate educational environment we have here”. There is, therefore, an awareness that Saudi government policy is influenced by foreign power, and this may even have an impact on the way they are reluctant to interact with each other in a collaborative way; they may feel that this is

unfamiliar to their way of thinking, and this may even be why they constantly refer to guidelines Abdurrahman (2015) brought this to mind when he suggested that Arabic researchers and thinkers are approaching education from a colonised mindset, not least because so much material is available in English and American literature. It is sometimes forgotten that there are many factors involved in education and that knowledge is constructed from cultural identity. According to middle leaders, the Saudi education policy needs to be firmly embedded in its own culture, even though it may still be adhering to international standards.

The sense of pride felt in the nationalistic views of Saudi middle leaders is not echoed by their English counterparts because of the differences in power dynamics. This pride links power to culture, which are two fundamental components that are essential in a collectivist mind-set, described above in relation to Hofstede's value dimensions. The Saudi middle leaders seem to approach this dynamic as an 'us versus them' perspective, where the Western ideology simply could not apply to the Saudi context. While the English teachers also demonstrated frustrations with the western approach, they did so for very different reasons.

The English do retain a strong national identity, where a sense of national identity seems to be lacking in the Saudi schools, and this power comes from the approach they have to each other. One of the main differences in practice was that English middle leaders were found to cooperate with their colleagues, and during the interview the tone and words they used about their colleagues, such as 'team-building', 'supportive role', and 'formal meetings' and 'informal discussions', were indicative of some measures undertaken by the middle leaders in England to establish the school as a collegium. These words convey a strong sense of collegial relationship between the middle leader and the junior teachers, which is in line with Ofsted's emphasis on collaboration, cooperation and building relationships with senior, middle and junior members of the organisation. Helen's (S2/E)

comment that she “supports others to do their jobs” contrasts with Huda’s (S4/S) declaration that she is there to “support the mission of the King”. This shows the difference in ways these middle leaders reflect on their role and the Saudi view is further emphasised by Sami’s (S6/S) comment that his headteacher will “nicely ask me to support his decision”. Relationships in the Saudi context are related to the enforcement of power, whereas the English context reflects more power sharing.

The collegial approach in the English context seems much more informal, in terms of power, than the Saudi perspective, which is nationalistic and supported by official documentation and culture. This informality may be largely culturally based, as Saudi culture is generally seen as quite traditional and rigid in comparison to English culture. This traditional nature can be seen beyond the classroom in terms of dress, religion, and gender relations. Therefore, while these differences in power exist, the outcome may be a direct result of underlying cultural components.

It is important, however, that there is recognition that power is not focused on one domain and that the middle leaders also have much to offer; Hallinger (2003) cautions that it is easy to ignore the role of middle leaders if too much emphasis is placed on one source of power. These middle leaders can enhance the vision and value of their organisation (GTC, 2012). They are the ones who can make the vision into reality (Nelson and Quinn, 2016).

In this research, it was also found that some middle leaders in Saudi comply with the enforcement of government power but with feelings of resistance. For instance, Safia (S4/S) demonstrates her feeling of rejection by emphasising the fact that leading cannot happen in a system run under the rule of ‘a military system’. Her feelings of resistance are connected to a hierarchical military system, where soldiers are simply expected to obey. In connection to the rigidity of the hierarchical system and employees' feeling of resistance, Casey (1995) reveals that although employees may comply with power

imposed from the top down, the level of their satisfaction is low, which in turn influences the degree of acceptance of, or resistance to, the authority's power. Rachel (S1/E), the English middle leader, is prepared to change her behaviour (as argued by Foucault, 1977) when conditions require it; "if funding is reduced there's not a lot we can do with that other than micromanaging our staff very effectively." She sees that the hierarchical system protects the legitimacy of each person in the school and is defined by the structure of the schools. Therefore, she would comply with the power of the authority who maintains that power: "I could go to the headteacher, deputy or assistant head ...who I felt was most appropriate to talk to about it." A similar statement was echoed in research completed by Ribbins (2007), which suggests that some middle leaders think that working in line with management is necessary, to make sure that the school is performing effectively.

Important for this thesis is the way in which Saudi and English middle leaders have different ideas about what constitutes support: the Saudis support a system, whereas the English support each other. This is a fundamental difference in overall perspectives. The literature generally indicates that there are aspects of power that are directly related to cultural values. In these value dimensions, there is a certain satisfaction among Saudi middle leaders from working within the system, whereas the English teachers demonstrate more instances where they question that authority. While the outcome in both situations may be the same (i.e. managing the link between teachers and senior management) both outcomes seem effective in their different ways. It is also important to recognise that Saudi schools may be influenced by Western ideologies not conducive to their own culture.

## 5.5 Summary

This chapter has discussed similarities and differences in middle leaders' perceptions of their role and responsibilities in Saudi and English primary schools. It has been seen that middle leaders perceive their role as one of compliance. Concerns of non-compliance are evident across both sets of middle leaders. The Saudis are more related to administration, whereas the English are involved in a supportive role. One of the critical factors in shaping the middle leader role is the authoritarian decision-making system. A centralised, hierarchical system operates in both Saudi and English schools but, while the English system may give an illusion of power-sharing, the Saudi system does not encourage this at all.

England adopts a different approach in which leaders have a more collegial relationship with their subordinates in comparison to Saudi which applies an individualist approach. There is a higher power distance between the senior and middle leaders in Saudi in comparison to England. This is as a result of the difference in culture, political, social and religious factors. The study also indicates that England had a higher level of trust in comparison to the Saudi context where the leaders were more concerned with appearance and whether their responses would be communicated to the senior management. One of the ways that middle leaders attain more autonomy and power is through applying the distributed approach to leadership where the leadership is not from the top but distributed from other organisational levels.

There is also evidence that while in many cases the middle leaders feel powerless, they have opportunities to make small changes in order to create a better overall environment for their schools. This power has been shown in the past several decades to have led to educational policy changes. Yet progress is slow, and frustration is high. There is a consistent notion that the government or educational authority has the overall say on aspects of curriculum and the role of teachers in school, which inhibits their ability to be

seen as leaders in schools and distracts from their ability to lead, thus weakening their overall power within the larger system.

A collaborative approach is seen in some of the English schools, but middle leaders in the Saudi schools may feel that foreign ideologies have a heavy influence on the power being imposed on them. This may have a detrimental effect on organisational effectiveness, and systems in both Saudi and English schools may benefit from some changes.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1 Introduction

This study was undertaken to assess the concept of middle leadership in the primary school context in two different countries: Saudi Arabia and England. The overarching goal was to examine, compare, and contrast external and internal environmental factors in the educational system. As has been consistently expressed, the definition of a middle leader was not straightforward, with researchers providing different explanations based on a school's location and requirements. This, alongside the paucity of research discussing middle leaders in the Saudi context made this a worthwhile area for examination. It was hoped, that in addition to the benefits gained by those participating in this study, there would be room for further research in this area in the Saudi context. This expansion would, in theory, allow for modifications and policy changes to be implemented to better support this unique population. While the data associated with this study has been identified as small, it has still offered significant benefit both in relation to the topic and, more personally, to the researcher. This concluding chapter therefore begins by highlighting the role of the researcher in this context, before moving on to discuss the key findings based on the research question:

- How do the internal and external environmental factors that are embedded in the English and Saudi educational settings of middle leaders in primary schools influence their perception of their roles and daily practices?

In addition, in order to demonstrate that this question has been answered, reflection will be offered on the aims and objectives of this study. For review, these aims and objectives were:

- To critically examine the up-to-date literature on middle leaders' roles and responsibilities and to identify factors that impact on the daily practices of middle leaders and their perceptions of their roles.
- To investigate empirically the extent to which cultural, social and political factors play a role in shaping the perceptions and daily practices of middle leaders in England and Saudi Arabia.
- To determine how middle leaders, perceive their roles and responsibilities in relation to complicated internal and external organisational factors.
- To determine similarities and differences between the perceptions of middle leaders operating in both educational settings.

This study was not without its challenges, as the observations and document analysis that were initially intended to have a greater effect on the overall study were not able to provide the level of detail required. Despite this, the interviews held with each of the participants in this research along with secondary data achieved through these observations and documents provided a useful expansion of the research that had already been conducted in this field. A contribution to knowledge is understood to be information that adds a new and important piece to the existing human understanding. In assessing the research that has been undertaken in this project, there has been small, yet impactful, documentation surrounding the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders in the primary context specifically through the *comparison* of the settings of Saudi Arabia and England.

## **6.2 Key Findings**

*The first objective: to critically examine the up-to-date literature on middle leaders' roles and responsibilities and to identify factors that impact on the daily practices of middle leaders and their perceptions of their roles.*

The literature on middle leaders' roles and responsibilities was heavily skewed towards



research conducted in the Western context; however, in order to meet the above objective, this literature, along with related studies from other contexts, was examined. The researcher paid specific attention to research papers examining the phenomena of middle leadership. In particular, there was a need to consider literature on educational management as well as on educational leadership to assure that the conceptual link between both was addressed.

In the literature review chapter, I offered an explanation of how the concept of the middle leader has grown in England and the challenges that have existed for those employed in these roles. That chapter used previous research and the roles of middle leaders in England to identify aspects of middle leadership in the Saudi context. Specifically, it addressed a concern relating to how middle leaders are currently struggling to lead while caught between their own perspectives and the dominating educational leadership practices of senior management.

The literature, as outlined in the review chapter, provided a good account of arguments about the role of leadership training courses. These courses, provided by the universities and Department of Education in Saudi Arabia, may discourage middle leaders from pursuing leadership strategies due to their negative perceptions of headship. As a result, it was demonstrated that there was a lack of motivation in those on the teaching side to become leaders. This was generally attributed to the management system and the role of headteachers.

While one of the purposes of the current study was to contribute to the literature on middle leadership in the Saudi context, there were indications in reviewing the published material that some scholars had applied a literal translation from English to Arabic. This had the potential to be problematic because the English and Saudi contexts are very different, and it may not be possible to apply one to the other. This is an important issue and further

investigation should be conducted to examine the role that translation may have played in the creation of leadership theory in Arabic, and the role of Arabic scholars in enriching the Arabic literature with leadership discourses used in training and educating middle leaders.

In connection with middle leadership, it was noticeable in the Arabic written literature that there were very few researchers and scholars interested in middle leadership. An explanation for this could not be found. In contrast, there was much more literature on the development of middle leadership in English primary schools written in English. Numerous scholars, researchers and official documents discussed the topic of middle leadership and were able to address important factors shaping the role of middle leaders since early 1995 (e.g. Bennett, 1999) Because middle leaders in England were typically teachers before they were middle leaders, their subject knowledge seemed to assist them in the transition to leadership.

Official documents, published on the websites of Ofsted and Department of Education, were also considered a benefit that was not available at the same level of richness and accessibility in the Saudi context. Reviewing such documents, for the purpose of the literature review, was very useful in terms of understanding how the concept of middle leadership has grown over time and what responsibilities and roles middle leaders are expected to play, thus meeting the first objective of this study. Remarkably, the official documents tended to emphasise the role of 'subject leader' as middle leader, but actual practice did not match the claims. It is expected that middle leaders should be engaging in management rather than leadership, although both concepts are in some ways related. It is possible that both concepts could be in regular tension with each other, nonetheless both are necessary to help schools meet their main purposes.

Thus, the literature review addressed the factors that shaped the roles and the

responsibilities of middle leaders, with a focus on both internal organisational culture issues and external environmental contextual issues. Although there was a heavy focus on the Western context it was possible to make some claims to address their impact on the daily practices of middle leaders and their perceptions of their roles.

***The second objective:** To investigate empirically the extent to which cultural, social and political factors play a role in shaping the perceptions and daily practices of middle leaders in England and Saudi Arabia.*

Empirical research was conducted in order to address this second objective. The research process was thoughtfully carried out in a methodical way. The instruments used were carefully constructed, piloted, implemented, and assessed to ensure that cultural, social, and political factors were addressed in both contexts. During the data collection process, 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted with middle leaders at six different schools, three in Saudi Arabia and three in England. The purpose of these interviews was to gain personal insight into how middle leaders perceived their role within the school along with any challenges, obstacles, or issues that they felt existed in their context. It was found that teachers in both contexts were able to clearly express their ideas and provide answers that addressed this second objective.

In addition to the interviews, eight different observations were carried out in the schools to observe middle leaders' practice. These aimed to assess the extent to which their perspectives were actually part of the reality of the school system. It was difficult to assess how perspective and reality intersected in such a brief observation period, but one component that was initially identified was that middle leaders felt quite limited in their ability to lead, which became evident when they were faced with a particularly difficult challenge in their schools.

Concurrently, official documents such as policies, guidelines, and official inspectors' reports were analysed to expand on how middle leaders' roles and responsibilities were perceived by educational and governmental authorities. Through this connection, it was established that middle leaders were operating in an internal cultural context that was influenced extensively by their own cultural and political context. This finding appeared to be applicable in both the Saudi and English contexts, though in different ways. Policy guidelines in Saudi Arabia were fairly rigid in comparison to the English model, as the hierarchical approach to the schooling system left little room for personal interpretation of the guidelines. This personal interpretation was much more prevalent among middle leaders in the English schools.

Adding to these differences, middle leaders in the Saudi context generally came from a different background than middle leaders in England. While middle leaders in the Saudi context were operating in a leadership style was consistent with the higher authority rules and policies, their counterparts in England were focused on a leadership style that specifically addressed the concerns of teachers from a personal perspective. This was because the middle leaders in England had teaching or pedagogical duties (or had been teachers prior to being middle leaders). In the Saudi schools, managerial and administrators' duties were the primary focus and middle leaders were not involved in teaching, even they were responsible to support teachers.

Because the middle leaders in England were heavily invested in teaching and pedagogy, the data collection associated with this study was in some cases difficult, because the middle leaders were concerned for the well-being of their colleagues and were sensitive to acknowledging challenges and issues within the school context. Despite this, they did acknowledge that there were challenges involved in being in the middle between the teachers and the overarching policies put in place, creating associated tensions and stress.

In contrast to the English context, in Saudi, some of the middle leaders attempted to circumvent control by building pressure to share in the decision-making process, although all middle leaders in the Saudi schools in this study knew that there was limited power to make decisions and promote change. Interestingly, in the English schools, middle leaders felt that they had been given the power to lead and make decisions, but the findings of the research suggested that most of their power was limited to implementation. This was significant because it showed discrepancies between perceptions and practice, and it linked to a better understanding of the political and cultural elements of middle leaders' positions.

One component that was socially and culturally different in the two contexts was the availability of the budget. While the middle leaders in the English context were able to have some control over budgetary elements, this was not the case in Saudi Arabia. While this has been highlighted as a difference, in practice, this difference may be minimal because the headteachers and administrators had considerable control over the allocation of this budget, and ultimately, the final say on its use.

Noticeably and regardless of the differences between the settings, the extent of the similarities in terms of practicing middle leadership was surprising. There was a sense among some middle leaders in both contexts that changes happening in the education systems should not be imposed and that there are foreign forces driving the changes into education sector. Similar to middle leaders in Saudi, middle leaders in England brought their values and ethics into their daily practice. Although, there was an opinion among some of the English leaders that their enthusiasm was aligned with the secular system of instruction, in the Saudi context, their practices seemed connected with Islamic values. This is significant, as the religious element seems an obvious difference between the two countries, but the study was able to identify religious and cultural differences that allowed

different perspectives to be addressed. This occurred primarily through the individual interviews with the middle leaders.

The study's key findings revolved around the matter of power, to which middle leaders were sometimes resistant. Some of them were convinced that their accountability and effectiveness in performance was more than just fulfilling the requirements of the inspections' system, as MLs desired the ability to lead as well as to achieve the title of 'leader'. In contrast, some of the middle leaders found that it was their responsibility to comply with the authority that holds the power of decision making and promoting change. This indicates that there is still confusion, in both contexts, about the role of the middle leader and what their responsibilities should entail; this links back to the original research surrounding the issue of defining what a 'middle leader' actually is.

***The third objective:** to determine similarities and differences between the perceptions of middle leaders operating in both educational settings.*

As the analysis was completed, there was a need to revisit the findings to determine where similarities and differences existed between the perceptions of middle leaders operating in both educational settings. Indeed, there was a need to think first about the similarities in terms of the middle leaders' perceptions of middle leadership and then determine whether differences could be identified. For example, one similarity that was particularly poignant was that middle leaders in both settings were operating in a compliance system of leadership. While this is similar on paper, the difference was in the amount of autonomy middle leaders were given to practice their roles. Certainly, there was a need to look deeper in order to find embedded factors that shaped their perceptions and in turn influenced on their practices.

There was more to the similarities than autonomy, because in both contexts' autonomy

was limited, but there were also requests on both sides for flexibility within the leadership role. As previously discussed, there are differences between schools, and therefore the role of a middle leader can be very different from one school to the next, regardless of the context. Flexibility could come in a variety of different ways; for example, via training in which middle leaders are given the useful professional development that might best apply to their particular context. This sort of professional development could also assist non-teachers to gain a better understanding of the teachers working in these primary schools or could assist younger middle leaders to assert themselves appropriately among higher ranking counterparts. It was deemed, therefore, from this research, that development and training would be useful in both contexts.

Culture also plays an inherent role in the differences that exist among middle leaders in both contexts. In the Saudi context, the power structure is clear and unyielding with the King as the decision maker and all others expected to carry out his wishes. This power-distance relationship and the notion of hierarchy is something that middle leaders in England are unlikely to understand. Comparing the two situations in terms of culture can be particularly challenging, as the perceptions of middle leaders in the English context might suggest that they feel very little power, but in comparison to the Saudi context, these middle leaders actually have quite a bit of power. These differences are difficult to represent. This is because the middle leaders in both contexts are unaware of the situation in the alternative context. They can only see their perspective, in their own situation. Therefore, while it is possible to examine elements such as power, culture, and flexibility in comparison, it is from an observer perspective and not one that allows for equality as these comparisons are undertaken. Despite this, it is useful to view both situations to determine what policy changes and/or recommendations might be useful to work towards achieving a better result.

### **6.3 Contribution to Knowledge**

This research has been pioneering in its focus on middle leadership in Saudi and primary schools; by using the models that have already been documented in English schools, it was possible to seek out instances where the two systems aligned or diverged. There was very little research in the Saudi context on the topic of middle leaders, and therefore it was necessary to seek out alternative literature as a starting point. This project has contributed to the creation of conceptual understandings of the meanings of middle leadership especially in the context of primary schools in Saudi, an area that has to this point been under researched. However, it has also demonstrated a number of similarities between the English and Saudi middle leaders. There appears to be a lack of rigid structure on what a middle leader should be, especially in the Saudi context. Middle leaders have limited influence and power within a hierarchal structure, and they show a resistance to decisions from above, but both Saudi and English teachers understand their role and responsibilities and trust is important to them. This gives encouragement that the research findings are thus more transferable than previously imagined.

This research could contribute to the current demand of one of the private Academy School management who sponsored the researcher, as a means to train and educate middle leaders who are able to contribute to the growth of the education sector in Saudi. The outcomes of this research will be offered on the format of the strategic report to address the challenges that face the middle leaders currently. Further to suggest, on the light of the findings and discussion, another way of understanding middle leadership.

Through exploring the English middle leaders this study has highlighted the diversity of understandings in the English system, inconsistency in government policy, a much greater fragmentation than anticipated and inconsistent provision. The structures may be in place in documentation, but in practice there is a discrepancy that shows middle leaders are not fulfilling their potential. For example, they could be participating in a greater role in



creating teams and improving the quality of work (Ashmore and Clay, 2016; Choi, 2013) if they were given more autonomy and professional responsibility.

When I decided to conduct this study on the concept of middle leadership and the contextual and cultural factors that might shape middle leaders' roles and responsibilities in England and Saudi, I was not aware that its contribution would be as varied as it appears to be. Nevertheless, I was aware that the Saudi government had been in the process of reforming the education system. This focused on different aspects of educational leadership, including the guidelines surrounding the middle leader position.

Recently, the King announced the new strategy '2030' to bring more development and changes to the public sector in Saudi Arabia (Kinninmont, 2017). The reformation includes the position of the middle leader in Saudi schools. This in turn makes this research timely as its findings can help decision makers utilise the strengths of middle leadership practices in England to enhance the future image of middle leaders in Saudi. Indeed, it is possible to teach middle leaders in Saudi how to become more effective in their context if they are permitted to lead in the first place. The study found that in English context, middle leaders were primarily classroom teachers before they were leaders. It seemed that their teaching duties were the principle component that strengthened their connection to their colleagues and built up the culture of collegiality. To some extent, this helped justify the position of middle leaders in England. In contrast, the Saudi middle leaders were typically not teachers before being middle leaders. For Saudi teachers, having the ability to take on teaching duties could be an advantage because this would likely offer a higher level of collegiality among the teaching group and establish useful leadership practices for that particular school. Thus, re-empowering Saudi middle leaders to take on teaching duties might be a useful way to enhance their authority in the school community.

The outcomes of this research offer middle leaders in Saudi an opportunity to listen to the voices of their counterparts in England as they share experiences on how the culture of collegiality is beneficial. This could assist Saudi middle leaders to develop resistance to the imposed power of the government. At the same time, the findings offer the middle leaders in both Saudi and England the opportunity to understand factors that might weaken their collegial culture once they are placed in a position of leadership.

Based on the above, this study comes at an opportune moment and contributes to theory in a number of different ways. First, because it has the opportunity to contribute to the debate on what the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders should be in this government reformation process, it adds value to the field of research. Secondly, because it builds upon already successful middle leadership strategies in England, it offers a realistic starting point for Saudi middle leaders to pursue.

In order to make contributions within the Saudi education context, I intend to formulate concrete proposals for enhancing the effectiveness of middle leaders in Saudi schools by encouraging adequate training and mentoring, by reformulating job descriptions and formal responsibilities to reflect middle leaders' role in team-building and improving quality in teaching, and by providing whole-school training supported by policies that encourage the sharing of good practice. This could be done at local level and further research could assess the effectiveness of these approaches.

The findings from this study will benefit the middle leaders in the Saudi schools, with special reference to the ones who participated in this study. Consequently, the intention is to run a number of workshop presentations, where the middle leaders will be invited to hear the results of this research and be able to compare the Saudi schools with the English schools. It is anticipated that these presentations will take place during the academic year 2019 – 2020 (see table 4 below).

In addition, the heads of primary schools within the region will be invited to a seminar, where the findings can be discussed, and suggestions put forward for improvements. Contributions from the heads will then support any decisions that may be made at governmental level. In order not to lose its currency, this seminar will be arranged for the first part of 2020.

To reach a wider audience, I will publish papers and attend conferences, and this is why it will be a priority to investigate and apply for presenting a paper at a conference in the Arab region, as it is likely that the issue with middle leaders is similar in other Arab primary schools. Part of the dissemination process will also involve assisting the private Academy School management – my sponsor – to address their training and professional development needs to train middle leaders who are able to contribute to the mission of the school.

*Table 4: Plan for dissemination*

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Audience</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
Workshop presentations	Saudi primary schools	Primary school middle leaders	2019-2020
Seminar	Saudi primary school	Primary school heads	Early 2020
Presenting a paper	Arab region conference	Arab education conference attendees	2019-2020
Publishing a paper	Academic journal	Academic readership	2019-2020
Assisting the private school's management to develop their own training centre	The private Academy School setting – Jeddah - Saudi	Primary school middle leaders	2019-2020

The presentations and dissemination of this research are important. In terms of PhD theses, unless they are published, very few become widely disseminated documents. Yet middle leaders would benefit from the findings of this study, which makes the publication of papers and participation in workshops valuable for professional development. Furthermore, there is no indication that all primary teachers would be regularly engaging

with academic journal articles, and therefore having both formal papers and informal workshops is most likely to target a wider audience.

#### **6.4 Study Limitations**

One of the limitations of this research has been its small sample size. While this has been useful in giving the perspectives of middle leaders in both English and Saudi middle schools, the findings are limited because of the small participant group. However, the perceptions that teachers have provided are valuable despite being subjective. More observational evidence of middle leadership in practice would have been valuable. Because only a few visits to the schools were made to conduct observation, the researcher was limited in terms of access. In addition, a more generalised view of the role of middle leaders may have been obtained from a survey of head teachers and middle leaders across a number of primary schools in Saudi Arabia and England. As the data is not generalisable, it may not necessarily match other sources of data in the literature.

Another limitation relates to the language being used in the data collection and the interview process. According to Beach and Connolly (2005), the decision-making process is regarded as a social, as opposed to solitary, practice. The individual interviews may have consequently created a barrier. Conducting the interviews in Arabic may have generated more insightful results but the matter of translation was a concern due to linguistic challenges in transferring local Saudi dialects into standard Arabic. Contrastively, because English is not my own first language, my ability to conduct interviews with English participants may not have been as detailed as the Arabic ones. This may have led to participants failing to disclose certain aspects of practice. Language is a significant obstacle, but in this study it was one that could not be avoided due to the context of the research and the requirement that this thesis be presented in English.

One concern and limitation that existed specifically in the Saudi context was the possibility of skewed responses as a result of an unwillingness to speak negatively about the King or other figures in power. Because participants may tend to mask their true feelings to some extent, there is no way of knowing how truthful they were. Although teachers may be willing to voice their perceptions, it must be acknowledged that they are also employed by the state and they may feel they cannot speak freely.

The level of bureaucracy in both settings seemed another important obstacle that may have limited the richness of the perspectives collected in this research. For example, unlike the quick responses I received when I requested interviews, responses for observations were delayed for over 2 weeks and even then, only one school accepted the request, which caused an unexpected delay. Conversely, the researcher was aware to a large extent of the possible influence of bureaucracy on the process of data collection and permissions needed to conduct the research in a Saudi context. Similar challenges with access were experienced in the English context. In addition, the level of control the headteacher had over the middle leaders in the Saudi context was evident; although access was agreed, headteachers made many excuses for staff not to be involved in observations.

Researcher bias is also a limitation that must be addressed. In the case of this study, the researcher was raised in the Saudi context and had worked in positions of middle leadership, thus presenting opportunities for the results to be skewed. Furthermore, cultural and political knowledge of the Saudi context could be seen as a hindrance as well as a benefit. As such, while personal and cultural knowledge and experience facilitated the researcher in protecting the dignity of participants, it was also difficult to analyse and interpret the findings without allowing the influence of prior experience to compromise objectivity. There is a possibility that my own background made me overlook some pertinent points that participants were making and made certain recurring themes more prominent.

## **6.5 Suggestions for Future Research**

One of the main notions identified in this project was that there was a paucity of research surrounding the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders in the Saudi context. This research study has addressed only a fragment of the issue and more work is required in this area. Comparing two contexts (i.e. England and Saudi Arabia) is a useful first step in examining the literature, but this comparison only offers one perspective on two countries that have very different educational and cultural systems. It is therefore suggested that an area of future research may consider the Saudi context on a wider scale, looking at middle leadership from a single-country standpoint. This would be a way of enhancing both the practice and understanding of the potential importance and contribution of middle leaders in Saudi schools.

There could be more room for comparison between England and Saudi Arabia, as this study took a small-scale approach to examining middle leaders' roles and responsibilities. There is also room for more research on the English context and how primary schools could benefit from taking on board some of the Saudi cultural practices, such as allowing middle leaders more time away from the classroom.

The emergent findings could be tested for applicability and generalizability in other types of school in Saudi Arabia and England, like private or international schools. Findings could also be used to test the applicability and generalizability in other public schools in Saudi Arabia and England (e.g. secondary schools). For example, the emergent findings that explain power relations between different actors can test whether these institutions have the same or different powers in relation to educational leadership in Saudi Arabia and England, since government regulations and power are different in each case.

This study used qualitative instruments as the primary method, and therefore future studies could implement more quantitative means as a way to assess the roles and

responsibilities of middle leaders. Therefore, while the findings of this research study could be used as a theoretical foundation, the collection of quantitative data on a larger scale could provide meaningful outcomes that may necessitate changes in policy and directives. Additionally, quantitative data might be able to collect more sensitive information from participants, as there may be less ‘fear’ of reprisal in anonymous, large scale data collection procedures. Therefore, further studies investigating cognitive and motivation biases in research are recommended, in order to investigate the influence of these factors involved in middle leadership and educational leadership.

This research focused on identifying and exploring the phenomenon of middle leadership. However, due to the time limitation of the project, the study did not develop or provide detailed solutions and recommendations on how to resolve and mitigate each identified internal and external factor. This certainly represents a clear and important direction for future research. Specifically, further research work should be carried out to identify and establish strategies and action plans to help school leaders and to mitigate the factors that currently impact on the practice of middle leaders.

## **6.6 Final Reflections**

What, do you imagine that I would take so much trouble and so much pleasure in writing ... if I were not preparing – with a rather shaky hand – a labyrinth into which I can venture ... in which I can lose myself (Foucault, 2002e:17).

Foucault’s words described my experience while writing this thesis. Yet, it was more than just trembling hands, as in my case the struggle involved fear, doubt, and anxiety; all of which contributed to the transformation of knowledge. As a person, my struggle has been multi-dimensional. The intellectual struggle has been a struggle for the liberation of my mind from the prison and system of punishment built up internally throughout my life. Living and practicing in a society that respects the power of traditional authority but not

the power of knowledge or intellect has been difficult. This prison is connected to the culture of fear, fear of everything around us, fear of opening the door to deeper thought that could ultimately lead to a liberated mind and soul. Liberation in this sense is dangerous, and people in my society prefer a person who knows how to play safe. Scholars from my country or outside my context might maintain a different perspective, but even beyond delivering this chapter, I have endured extensive pressure to birth a new 'self'. The new person means losing my old one, in the hope that the new can offer a space of freedom and knowledge. In terms of this new self, the researcher's confidence has flourished. From the ethical considerations, through the design of the research questions and finally to the collection and analysis of data, there has been much more understanding achieved by the researcher surrounding the steps in the research process and the progression from one phase to the next.

Yet, I am far from claiming that I have learned to be an expert in research, as through all my preparations, I have still lost my way at times. After a few years of consecutive struggles with my work I hope that the reader will be able to see that it is truly a part of a new me. This growth process, as Foucault states, is what is truly significant.

In this work, I have had to leave parts of myself behind and tackle new challenges. Intellectually, I have had to challenge myself to re-read my thoughts and interpretations beyond the literal meanings of the discourses I have used to make sense of power. Of course, I believe that I have considered the deep meanings of middle leaders' conversations. However, to read some parts of my thesis through a Foucauldian lens was a challenge. Overcoming this challenge in a relatively short period to achieve intellectual liberation has been rewarding, taking into consideration the shift in my way of thinking from modern to post-modern era thinkers that I needed to achieve.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

#### ETHICS CHECK LIST

The checklist overleaf must be completed before commencement of any research project. Note that ALL projects MUST have a risk assessment attached to this form. Please also refer to the University's Academic Ethical Framework ([www.mmu.ac.uk/sas/govandsec/pdf/policy\\_ref\\_Academic\\_Ethical\\_Framework](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/sas/govandsec/pdf/policy_ref_Academic_Ethical_Framework)) and the University's Guidelines on Good Research Practice ([http://www.red.mmu.ac.uk/?pageparent=4&page\\_id=110](http://www.red.mmu.ac.uk/?pageparent=4&page_id=110)).

<b>Name of applicant (Principal Investigator):</b> Saeed Alzahrani,	
<b>Telephone Number:</b>	
<b>Email address:</b>	
<b>Status:</b>	Postgraduate Student (Research)
<b>Department/School/Other Unit:</b> Education and Social Research Institution	
<b>Programme of study (if applicable):</b> Phd Educational Leadership and Management	
<b>Name of supervisor/Line manager:</b>	
<b>Project Title:</b> Middle Leaders' perspectives of leadership in Primary School: Comparative study between Saudi and England.	
<b>Brief description of project activities:</b> I will undertake a qualitative research which will involve interviewing and observing primary school middle managers in the UK and in Saudi primary schools.	
<b>Does the project require NHS National Research Ethics Service (NRES) approval?</b>  If yes, has approval been granted by NRES? Attach copy of letter of approval.	NO

## Appendix 2

### Permission for Saudi schools (Example)

الرقم: [REDACTED]  
التاريخ: ٢٠١٥/٢/٢٥  
المرفقات: [REDACTED]

وزارة التعليم  
الإدارة العامة للتربية والتعليم بمحافظة جدة  
التخطيط، والتطوير - قسم الدراسات والبحوث

إلى : سعادة الملحق الثقافي بالسفارة السعودية في لندن  
من : المدير العام للتعليم بمحافظة جدة .  
بشأن : الموافقة على قيام باحث بتطبيق أدوات بحثه على عينة من منسوب الإدارة .

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته  
تحية طيبة وبعد ، ، ،

إشارة إلى خطابكم رقم [REDACTED] وتاريخ ٢٠١٥/١٢/٩م المتضمن  
تسهيل مهمة الباحث سعيد بن مساعد بن هاشم الزهراني ، المبتعث لدراسة  
الدكتوراة في مانشستر بجامعة >Manchester Metropolitan< تخصص  
إدارة تربوية ، وعنوان بحثه : " الإدارة الوسطى بالمدارس الابتدائية: مقارنة  
بين المملكة العربية السعودية وبريطانيا " واستجابة لرغبتكم في  
تزويدكم بالموافقة على المهمة .

نفيدكم أنه لا مانع من ذلك تشجيعاً للبحث العلمي والتربوي وبما يعود على الوطن  
من جدوى علمي يمثل هذه البحوث الميدانية والتطبيقية ، ونتمنى للباحث التوفيق  
والتمدد .

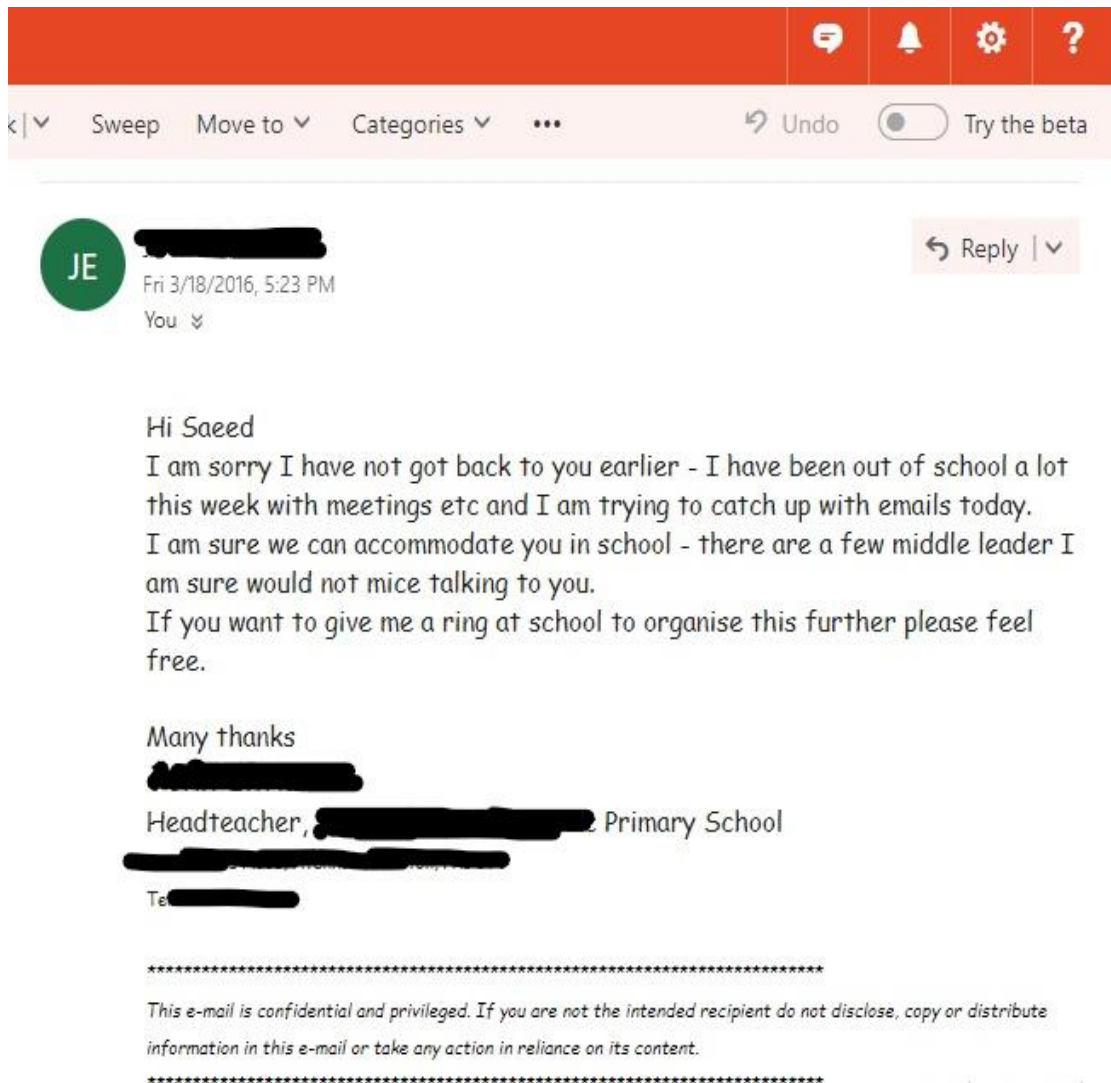
والله ولي التوفيق

المدير العام للتعليم بمحافظة جدة  
عبد الله بن أحمد الثقفي

من الإدارة التخطيط والتطوير

هاتف - فاكس - الرمز البريدي

## Permission for England schools (Example)



The screenshot shows an email client interface. At the top, there is a red header bar with icons for chat, notifications, settings, and help. Below this is a navigation bar with options like 'Sweep', 'Move to', 'Categories', and 'Undo'. The main content area displays an email from a sender with a green circular profile picture containing the initials 'JE'. The sender's name is redacted. The email is dated 'Fri 3/18/2016, 5:23 PM' and is addressed to 'You'. A 'Reply' button is visible on the right. The body of the email contains the following text:

Hi Saeed  
I am sorry I have not got back to you earlier - I have been out of school a lot this week with meetings etc and I am trying to catch up with emails today. I am sure we can accommodate you in school - there are a few middle leader I am sure would not mind talking to you. If you want to give me a ring at school to organise this further please feel free.

Many thanks  
[Redacted]  
Headteacher, [Redacted] Primary School  
[Redacted]  
Tel: [Redacted]

\*\*\*\*\*  
*This e-mail is confidential and privileged. If you are not the intended recipient do not disclose, copy or distribute information in this e-mail or take any action in reliance on its content.*  
\*\*\*\*\*

## Appendix 3

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PhD THESIS

**Date:** .....

**Study Title or Topic:**

*Middle Leaders' perspectives of leadership in Primary School: Comparative study between Saudi and England.*

**Researcher:** Saeed Alzahrani, PhD candidate, Educational Leadership and Management, Manchester Metropolitan University.

**Purpose of the Research:** .....

**What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:** .....

**Risks and Discomforts:** I do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research as all the details of your participation will remain confidential.

**Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:** You will contribute to research in the field of Educational Leadership and Management in particular, middle management in primary schools.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to answer any question or choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not have any negative repercussions for you.

**Withdrawal from the Study:** You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researcher. Should you decide to withdraw from the study; all data generated as a consequence of your participation will be destroyed.

**Confidentiality:** The study may include audio recordings of interviews and observations. All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and, unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Your data will be safely stored in a locked facility and only the researcher

will have access to this information. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

**Questions about the Research:** If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Saeed Alzahrani, PhD candidate in Educational Leadership and Management, at Manchester Metropolitan University. Telephone ....., or by ....., This research has been reviewed and approved for compliance with research ethics protocols by the MMU Ethics Review Committee and conforms to the standards of MMU Research Ethical guidelines and BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research. If you have any questions about this process or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact Faculty of Education .....

**Legal Rights and Signatures:**

I ..... consent to participate in the PhD study conducted by **Saeed Alzahrani**. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

**Signature**                      **Date:**                      **Participant:**

**Signature**                      **Date:**                      **Researcher:**



## Appendix 4

### An example of the translated interview

#### Interview MM1, School D in Saudi

This interview is conducted by the research assistant

Original copy was in Arabic, this is a translated version of the interview

**AS:** salaam Alikm sister, I would like to thank you for giving me the time to meet you and discuss the issue of middle leaders in your school

**MM1:** not at all, we are here to help and support the mission of the king to promote change and achieve the transformation

**AS:** Yes sure, let me check before starting the interview have you signed the information sheet and the consent form

**MM1:** Yes I did

**AS:** great, can we start the interview now

**MM1:** if you want

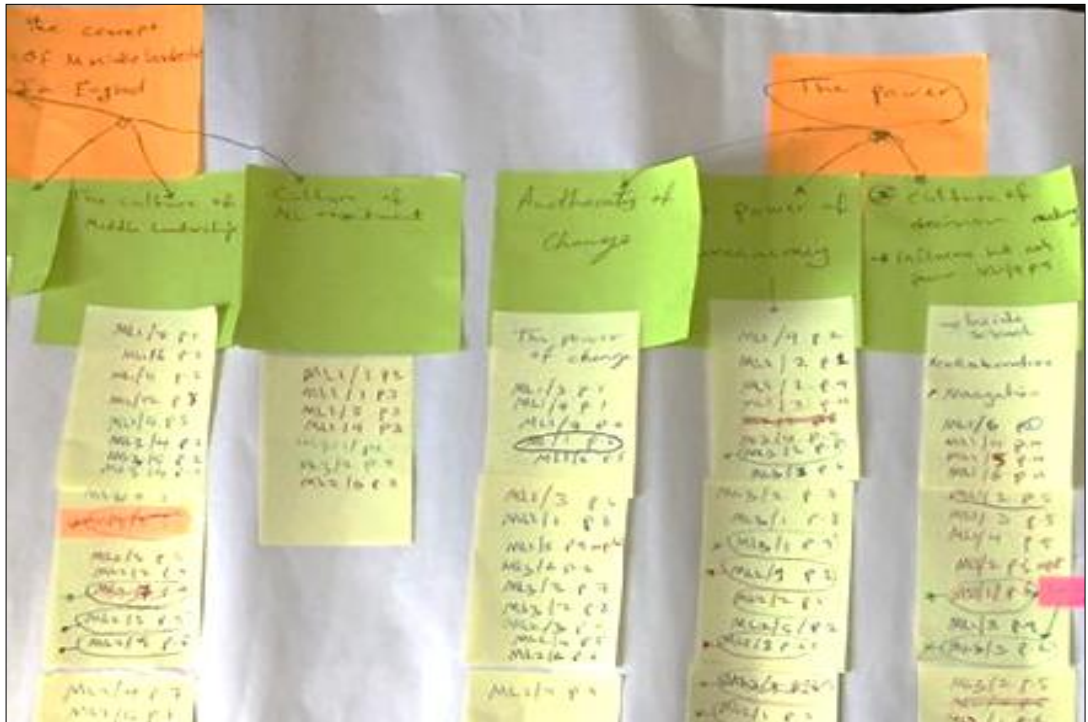
## Appendix 5

### An Example of the line by line coding

<p>Yeah, extremely high, very high, the vision is seen by the head teacher - that's his vision. As we go down to management and leadership that's where it starts to be implemented so as a middle leader you have one foot with the teachers, and the other side of overseeing and evaluating what's being done. Whilst you're doing it with the teachers also you've got that role at looking how to implement it, if it's working, and evaluating changes that have been put in place, to see if the vision of the head teacher is being achieved. Leader's roles are vitally important, we're on the shop floor doing the job not just setting targets, we actually have to do them alongside other</p>	<p><b>Comment [SH 14]:</b> middle leaders swings between teachers and seniors</p>
<p>the vision of the head teacher is being achieved. Leader's roles are vitally important, we're on the shop floor doing the job not just setting targets, we actually have to do them alongside other</p>	<p><b>Comment [SH 15]:</b> middle leaders are working collaboratively to achieve the head teacher's vision</p>

## Appendix 6

An example of the process of Searching for possible themes and sub-themes



## Appendix 7

### An Example of reviewing of the themes

