

IMPROVEMENT OF LEADERSHIP SKILLS AMONG HEADMASTERS IN THE BASIC EDUCATION IN DAKHILIYAH REGION, OMAN

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Abstract

This study is to discover the types of skills and ways required by school leaders. It also presented a guideline of the skills needed which assist school leaders in implementing the new basic education system. The findings indicated that most of our school headmasters in Al-Dakhiliyah region, Oman, require activities, training programs and workshops which would develop their leadership skills, fit their needs, fill their gaps in knowledge, and match the specific challenges of the basic school education. This in turn will assist them in implementing its aims and helps them to carry out their new responsibilities in their schools.

Keywords Leadership skills, headmaster, basic education, effective leadership, Instructional leadership, Al-Dakhiliyah Region

INTRODUCTION

The ministry of education in Oman in 1998 established a new system of education called the Basic Education which was designed by the UNESCO. Changing of the traditional education system to the basic education system has added different responsibilities to the school headmasters. Hence, school leaders need to be qualified and well prepared to undertake their new responsibilities expertly and proficiently. The studies by Deal & Peterson (1990), Evans & Gold (1998), Elmore (2000), Hoy & Miskel (2001), McEwan (2003), Leithwood et al., (2004), Bush (2005), Fildler (2005) and Cranston (2007) stated

that, in order for school leaders to obtain and maintain a strategic advantage, they must have good skills such as leading skills, decision making, self management, budget and financial management, and communication skills. For the new changes, more emphasis is now being placed on the leadership of our school in Oman. For effective educational reform, Al- Ghassani (2003) in her study, about leaders in Omani schools, suggested that the school leaders in Oman might need different skills to help them to implement the new basic education system. Moreover, as an experienced person in the school systems, the researcher noticed that some leaders could not cope with the new education system and proposed some training, programs and guidance in order for them to gain more educational skills which will help them to implement the new basic education.

Theoretical Framework

Successful leadership is not the result of simply obtaining a position, but rather possessing the knowledge and understanding of successful leadership skills along with the personal ability to effectively implement those skills. Hence, "School leaders need impressive skills to provide effective leadership in our diverse school environments" (The New York State Board of Regents, The New York State Education Department, 2003). Leadership crafted a definition of the knowledge and skills required of school leaders that forms the foundation for leadership development. In Figure 1, the theoretical framework was developed by the researcher. It contains different types of skills, knowledge and traits that might help our school leadership toward their performance development which was adapted from McEwan (2003), Hoy & Miskel (2005), Yukl (2006), and Allan (2007). It shows that the independent variables - leadership, self management, decision making, communication and so on which make up the process of skills and traits of effective leadership. The dependent variable is the way these skills increase the effectiveness of the leadership skills.

Research Questions

This study aims to seek answers to the following research questions.

1. What type of skills are needed to qualify school headmasters in implementing the new system of basic education?
2. Are there any significant differences in skills needed towards implementing the basic education system between headmasters and head mistresses?
3. Are there any significant difference in skills needed towards implementing the new system of education based on the experiences of school headmasters in basic education?
4. What type of difficulties are faced by school headmasters in implementing the basic education?

5. What type of activities or in-service programs do school headmasters need to further develop their leadership skills to fulfil their needs in basic education?

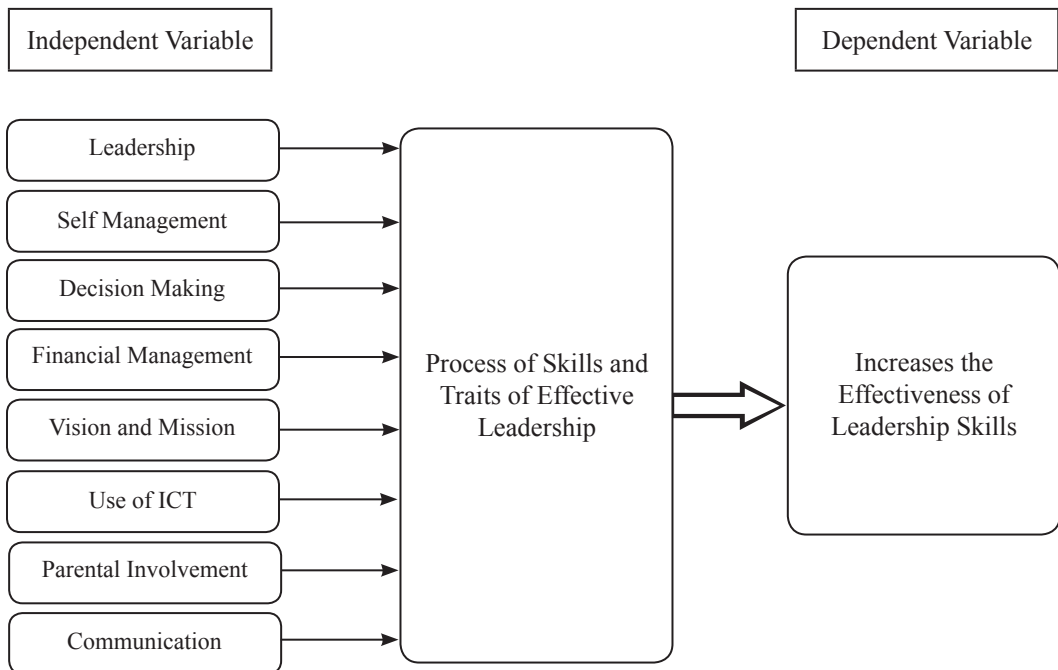


Figure 1 Theoretical Framework of the Study
 Source: McEwan (2003), Hoy & Miskel (2005), Yukl (2006), Alan (2007).

This study, therefore, aims to discover what type of skills and ways required by school headmasters in Al-Dakhiliyah Region, Oman in adopting the new system of education (Basic Education), and to present a guideline of the skills needed which might assist them in implementing its aims and help them to carry out their responsibilities in their schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership and Characteristic of Leadership

Educational literature states that leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. Morphet et al., (1982), Hoy and Miskel, (2005), and Bush (2006),” Moreover, leaders carry out this process by applying their leadership attributes, such as beliefs, values, ethics, character, knowledge, and skills. Although your position as a manager, supervisor, lead,... etc, which will give you the authority to accomplish certain tasks and objectives in the organization, this power does not make you a leader, but it might simply makes you the boss. Leadership differs in that it makes the followers want to achieve high goals, rather than simply bossing people around.”

In the school situation leadership plays a vital role in setting the direction for successful schools, but existing knowledge on the best ways to prepare and develop highly qualified candidates is sparse. Therefore, throughout the years, there have been many leadership style theories identified. Furthermore, in common vocabulary, leadership describes the traits and behaviors of people whom we admire because of their ability to bring people together to achieve a shared objective. Leadership is also used to identify formal positions of authority (specialized role view) and the informal influence that seems to naturally occur in any kind of social group by any one at any time (shared influence view). Further, successful leadership is not the result of simply obtaining a position, but rather possessing the knowledge and understanding of successful leadership skills along with the personal ability to effectively implement those skills. As well as, (Gray et al, (1999) cited in Reynolds; (2006)) suggested eight important characteristics and areas in determining good leadership. The first refers to headmaster should develop a limited number of well organized and defined goals and communicating them to all school constituency.

A second characteristic of effective leadership has been noted as ensuring that others are related in the process, or a participative approach. This in the researcher's opinion refer to, that the good school headmaster who always involve his or her administrative staff and the teachers in the school plans and decisions making. Mortimore et al., (1988) noted that the importance of involving the deputy headmaster in the life of the school and in the taking of decisions. Rutter et al., (1979), furthermore, noted the importance of ensuring that all teachers felt represented and that their views had been taken into account. Furthermore, another particular importance is likely to be the headmaster's motivation and use of a senior management team, and work with departmental heads, whose role as middle managers is of crucial importance in determining school outcomes (Sammons et al., 1997). As well, Teddlie and Stringfield, (1993) noted that sharing of academic leadership with colleagues in the school and in his or her society was also a good characteristic of the effective headmaster.

A third characteristic, as Reynolds (2006), of effective leadership is the exhibiting of what is called, in the United States, instructional leadership. In part this is related to the belief of the headmaster that instruction is the purpose of the school (Levine and Lezotte, 1990), For example, in the United Kingdom, Instructional leadership is shown by a concern with teaching, pupil learning and the operation of the classroom or learning level. Another component, of effective leadership involves direct intervention in school life through the frequent, personal monitoring of staff performance. Focusing on the importance of academic goals and educational processes is another characteristic, Reynolds (2006), where an academic in education emphasis, has been shown to be core correlates of effective leadership. Another characteristic is that motivating staff to have high expectations for students is associated with a staff group who themselves have high expectations of what it is possible for them to achieve from the headmaster. The final characteristic for good leadership, mentioned by Reynolds (2006), is using monitoring and evaluation systems at school level to manage school effectively. This might refer that good headmaster could monitor his or her school and at the same time evaluate the school development. Murphy's (1990) review concluded, aptly, that effective leaders practice a wide variety of monitoring behavior.

The Skills Required for the Schools' Headmasters

Principals or headmasters and other key school leaders should help teachers and other stakeholders build effective work teams by developing new organizational structures and creating a shared mission and vision which focuses on authentic student learning (Fullan, 2001; Yukl, 2002). Today's school environments, as mentioned by The New York State Board of Regents and The New York State Education Department (2003), have become more complex and diverse where all children are expected to learn and where high learning standards set the vision of educational success for all students. In a rapidly changing and more technologically oriented society, students will need to acquire the knowledge and skills that will help them achieve success in school and in life. The evolving nature of school environments has placed new demands on educational leaders. Where knowledge of school management, finance, legal issues and state mandates were once the primary focus for the preparation of school leaders, education reform, thus, has created an urgent need for a strong emphasis on development of instructional leadership skills to promote good teaching and high level learning.

Furthermore, school leaders must recognize and assume a shared responsibility not only for students' intellectual and educational development, but also for their personal, social, emotional, and physical development. The increasing diversity of school communities places a premium on school leaders who can create a vision of success for all students, and use their skills in communication, collaboration and community building to ensure that the vision becomes a reality, Karen (1996), and Sukor and Yong (2005). Therefore, the school headmaster plays a vital role in setting the direction for successful schools, but, existing knowledge on the best ways to prepare and develop highly qualified candidates is explicitly sparse. Good leadership skills are the behaviors that allow him or her to get the results, after, while at the same time positively motivating their followers. Now while this may sound like an easy rule to follow, but, in practice it is not all that simple (Fullan, 2001; Yukl, 2002). Furthermore the different types of skills such as decision making, self management, financial management, vision mission, human resource management, the use of ICT, and communication skill are described.

Decision making refers to the ability to plan, solve problem and make decisions (Evans & Gold, 1998; cited in Al-Ghassani, 2003). Whereas, Hoy and Miskel (2005) illustrate that, leadership by principals at the building level is necessary for effective staff participation in decision making. The principal in his or her should make sure that teachers and staff feel comfortable by providing an open trusting school climate. A general theory of administration must include principles of organization that will ensure correct decision making, just as it must include principles that will ensure effective action (Hoy & Miskel, 2005).

The self management, as many writers, indicate is an art worth developing aspect of our school headmaster where they can develop their career, but not easily achieved without different skills and practical intelligence ability to know how things work and to make things work. Thus, Evan and Gold (1998) point out that self management is the ability to plan and to organize the daily own work effectively. Moreover, an effective school headmaster, Al-Ghassani (2003), in her study stated that self management need different planning skills with regards to the resources and the time; where an effective school headmaster always starts by setting up plans and develops them according to his or her school needs and circumstances.

Financial management, as seen by Odden and Picus (2000), is a very important aspect in school management, where the school's headmaster is the officer in charge of financial management in the school. Therefore, the headmaster of the school and the subordinates are responsible to arrange a good development plan for the school's budget yearly according to the number of students, the staff and the school's needs of the next academic year such as network, fields services, etc. Bell and Rhodes (1996) refer that all money should be spent within the context of the schools plan development and it should also contain the limited previous budget available for all allocation of any expenditure for the development projects which were planned. Hence, as an opinion, in order to provide the best learning environment for students and help the school to achieve its performance, the headmaster should draw up and recommend a budget for the whole year to the educational department in his or her region and assisting and monitoring the senior staff in who to spend the money during the course year.

Nowadays, many of educational authors indicate that, effective school headmaster and his or her staff, who could imply and emphasize on vision, mission and purposes, work in order to achieve the purposed aims within school's organization. Hence, "an organization is a school unit with a purpose as well as with formal linkages among those who are a part of it" (Knezevich, 1984, p. 27). This means, the effective headmaster who involved in his or her organization these parts in order to build a good teaching and learning atmosphere, taking into account the relationship between the all participants in the school to provide a good performance. In addition, we could say that successful school improvement requires establishing a clear educational vision and a shared institutional mission, knowing how well the school is accomplishing that mission, identifying areas for improvement, developing plans to change educational activities and programs, and implementing those plans or new programs effectively. Furthermore, the school's administrative, teachers and parents should contribute in making the vision and mission of the school a reality (Murphy and Datnow, 2003, and Chabra, 2005).

Certainly, human resources management (HRM) proposes that a good leader has the ability to decide what type of functions, activities, and programs that his or her staff needs. These needs could be fulfilled either by in-house programs or by in service training. This, as well as the school headmaster, will help to ensure the performance of his or her staff which will support the school's performance (Currie, 2006; Allan, 2007). Moreover, from the researcher's view, trusting and confidence should school headmaster primary aspect which will help ensure the staff satisfaction in the school. Whereas, effective communication could be the key to winning organizational trust and confidence, which, could be done by assisting staff in understanding the school overall strategy and by helping them to understand how they can contribute to achieve key school plan objectives. Moreover, Allan (2007) states that, a good human resource management (HRM) in an organization should ensure that it has staffs that are willing and able to achieve the organization's objectives. This might be achieved by supporting the school headmasters with educational programs on how to manage and deal with their staff. On the other hand, the headmasters in schools should ensure health and safety of school for and ensuring cooperation and initiations of team work.

Nowadays, most of the educational authors believed that communication technology i.e. (ICT) is a good instrument to support teaching and learning. Using the communication technology in teaching and learning will enhance students' knowledge and prepare them to face the economic needs in their society. Debra (1999) states that today's education school should be empowered with ICT professionals knowledge, skills, and abilities that technology offers. In addition, Moses (2002) suggests that, our schools these days need support to successfully implement information technology in education to cope with the new economic needs and the community needs. Hence, the schools need to: (a) maintain and repair their technological devices, (b) provide some degree of support to the administrative and teachers within the school building so as to train them in how to use ICT during the academic year, and (d) provide adequate support to teachers and administrative staffs within the school so as to train them in the use of information technologies for administrative and communication purposes. Finally, we could state that a good headmaster is one who could support his or her school with information technology (ICT) equipments and has the ability to use them effectively, appropriately and guide his or her staff in the usage during teaching and learning process.

Karen (1990) states different methods and skills which might help school headmasters to be effective school communicators; first you should provide genuine praise whenever possible to create a more constructive atmosphere. This could be by telling the other in the school or in the community what they doing while the school or the community meeting. Secondly, the leader should be available and welcome to any personal contact argument and comments from others. As meetings an important aspect which could develop these skills, thus, makes a headmaster able to know his or her staff well and make best use of each one in the staff member's capabilities. "Removing barriers" which can be attained through informal communication with school staff and this, on the other hand, build a trustful relation between a headmaster and the school staff. Moreover, "Building Teamwork" is another skill on the school headmaster's hand which might help the schools to move toward site-based management and open communication becomes even more essential. This teamwork should be natural through an earnest effort to help each one of the school staff to achieve their potential and consequently the school performance.

Finally, "Using Humor" is an important aspect in communication skills as many writers indicate that humor is the seventh sense necessary for effective school leadership. Thus, a headmaster as well as, as a communicator, should possess this kind of ability when interacting with all staff and hence makes every staff in the school feel good about every angle of communication. Finally, as many scholar indicate that everyone should be involved in the process within school's organization to empower equipped citizen such as teachers, parents, administrators, community, etc. with same quality team. A good leadership "... works best when everyone enrolls in the quality process and purposes, when everyone share the responsibilities and joys of defining and creating successful contribution" (Kaufaman and Zahn, 1993, p. 62). Through the researcher's experience in the schools of Oman, it could be asserted that, parental and societal involvement in the school and educational process will help often the headmaster and his or her staff in achieving their mission, overcoming students' problems, and catering student's needs.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a survey method, which was designed to gain headmasters' perceptions toward the types of skills that they need which might help them to improve their career and manage their school effectively. Open-ended questionnaire with nine parts was used as an instrument to collect the data needed. The questionnaire was developed to cover different types of skills and was based on the researchers' point of view, the literature review, and the characteristics of the good leaders and on the skills required for successful school leaders. The sample was obtained from 100 school principals out of 138 in Al-Dakhiliyah Region in Oman. Particular attention was given to gain high participation of urban and rural schools. From the total of 100 questionnaires, 72 principals returned the questionnaires and some of them were incomplete. This was due to their unavailability, as to accomplish examination tasks; at the point the questionnaires were distributed. The female participants were 44 and male 28. As we noticed, the higher number of females because, in Al-Dakhiliyah Region in the academic year 2010-2011, there are 84 female school headmistresses whereas males are only 54 headmasters.

The SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) program version 19.0 was used to analyze descriptive and inferential statistics of data. Descriptive statistics was employed to compute the frequency and percentage, while inferential statistics used Mann-Whitney U in order to compare the headmasters' perceptions. Data obtained from each respondent was tabulated and analysed as descriptive statistic frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation that were used to determine the different types of skills needed to qualify our headmasters in implementing the new system of education. To compare the perception of the two groups the t-test for related samples was used to test the significant differences between male and female headmasters' perceptions. Moreover, the significant differences between the headmasters' perceptions towards the skills needed based on the differences of experiences in implementing the new basic education system was analysed by Wilcoxon non-parametric test. Finally, the qualitative study through open-ended questions was analyzed according to theme or categories based on part of questionnaire constructed.

RESULTS

Analysis of Participants' Information

The gathered general information was analyzed by a method of frequency distribution of response by frequency and percentage. This information was analyzed statistically based on gender, type of school and the experience of the 72 school headmasters in the basic education schools.

Overall, the female respondents were the highest in number at 61.1% compared to male who were at 38.9%. We mentioned earlier, that the higher number of females is because, in Al-Dakhiliyah Region, Oman, there are 84 female school headmistresses, whereas male headmasters are only 54; all the school principals in "Cycle One" in the basic education are females. The type of schools it was found that the majority of the respondents came from

Cycle One, (1-4) and Two, (5-9) at the percentage of 34.7% for cycle one and 30.6% for cycle two. The percentage of the respondents from other school which contains different levels of schooling ages i.e. more than one cycle as mentioned earlier was 23.5%. While the percentage of respondents who come from the Post education (11- 12) was only 11.1%; this low percentage is due to final stage of schooling.

Majority of the respondents are with an experience of 6 to 9 years that is 37.5% which means that the majority of the respondents have long held the position as school headmasters in the basic education. The respondents with an experience of 3 to 6 years were 26.4%, while the respondents of an experience of 1 to 3 years and from 10 years and above were only 18.1%. (Refer to Table 1).

Table 1 Gender, type of school and experience factors of the participants

Information	Respondent N=72		Total f (%)
	F	%	
Gender			
Male	28	38.9	72
Female	44	61.1	(100)
Type of School			
1-4	22	30.6	
5-10	25	34.7	72
11-12	8	11.1	(100)
Others	17	23.6	
Experience in Basic Education			
1-3 years	13	18.1	
3-6 years	19	26.4	72
6-9 years	27	37.5	(100)
> 10 years	13	18.1	

Headmasters’ Perceptions Towards the Skills Needed

The statements in the questionnaire were assessed by Likert scale with values of 5 for strongly agree (SA), 4 for agree (A), 3 for neutral (N), 2 for partial disagree (D) and 1 for strongly disagree (SD). Data obtained from the questionnaire is shown in Table 2 as follows:

Table 2 Distribution of headmasters’ perceptions towards the skills needed for leadership

Skill	Respondents N = 72					Total f (%)	Mean (SD)
	VH f (%)	H f (%)	A f (%)	L f (%)	VL f (%)		
Ability to control the staff effectively.	47 (65.3)	24 (33.3)	1 (1.4)	0 (0)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.64 (0.51)
Ability to motivate and encourage teachers.	50 (69.4)	20 (27.8)	2 (2.8)	0 (0)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.67 (0.53)
Ability to develop trustful relationships with staff.	45 (62.5)	24 (33.3)	3 (4.2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.58 (0.57)
Activate interpersonal relation inside the school.	44 (61.1)	26 (36.1)	2 (2.8)	0 (0)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.58 (0.55)
Overall							4.61 (0.54)

Overall, majority of the respondents answered Very High with mean value of 4.61(SD=0,54). As can be seen from Table 2, 65.3% of the respondents chose Very High and 33.3% for High that school headmasters need the ability to control the staff effectively. Additionally, 69.4% of the respondents very highly agreed towards the ability to motivate and encourage teachers, while only 2.8% responded Average. Further, for the ability to develop trustful relationships with staff, 62.5% of the respondents agreed on Very High while only 4.2% respondents agreed on Average. From the Table we could notice that, the composite of the perception towards the activate interpersonal relation inside the school skills are 61.1% deemed Very High and 36.1% deemed High; whereas only 2 headmasters responded Average. The Table above showed that there was no response for Low and Very Low. This explicitly projects that headmasters needed these skills toward developing their performances.

Table 3 Distribution of headmasters’ perceptions towards the decision making skills

Skill	Respondents N = 72					Total f (%)	Mean (SD)
	VH f (%)	H f (%)	A f (%)	L f (%)	VL f (%)		
Ability to plan decisions in advance.	44 (61.1)	25 (34.7)	3 (4.2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.57 (0.57)

cont... **Table 3**

Ability to create organisational structures that involve the school staff in decision making.	28 (38.9)	40 (55.6)	2 (2.8)	2 (2.8)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.31 (0.66)
Empowering teachers in decision making.	38 (52.8)	25 (34.7)	6 (8.3)	2 (2.8)	1 (1.4)	72 (100)	4.35 (0.85)
Continually search for appropriate solutions with regards to school daily events.	34 (47.2)	33 (45.8)	3 (4.2)	2 (2.8)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.38 (0.70)
Overall							4.40 (0.70)

Overall, majority of the respondents chose Very High toward the decision making skills needed with mean value of 4.40 (SD=0,70). It can be seen from the Table 3 that, 61.1% of headmasters have very high self-perception towards the ability to plan decision in advance with 34.7% opted for High and only 4.2% opted for Average. But, perceptions towards the ability to create organisational structures that involve the school staff in decision making yielded a slight difference where the highest percentage came from High with 55.6%, and 38.9% decided on Very High while only 4 respondents chose Average and Low. On the other hand, 52.8% perceived very highly that our leadership need empowering teachers in decision making skill and only 34.7% with high, and we could notice that only 8 responded on Average, Low and Very Low. Finally, for the continuous search for appropriate solutions with regard to school daily events skills the participants agreed with 47.2% with very High and 45.8% with High while 4.2% with average and 2.8% with low. It can be clearly seen from the table above that there were only few respondents with Low and Very Low.

Table 4 Distribution of headmasters’ perceptions towards the self management skills

Skill	Respondents N = 72					Total f (%)	Mean (SD)
	VH f (%)	H f (%)	A f (%)	L f (%)	VL f (%)		
Ability to be away from the centralisation at work.	30 (41.7)	32 (44.4)	7 (9.7)	2 (2.8)	1 (1.4)	72 (100)	4.23 (0.84)
Making effective use of rules according to school circumstances.	39 (54.2)	29 (40.3)	2 (2.8)	1 (1.4)	1 (1.4)	72 (100)	4.44 (0.74)

cont... **Table 4**

Ability to solve school problems independently	50 (69.4)	20 (27.8)	1 (1.4)	1 (1.4)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.65 (0.58)
Ability to manage the work without the guidance of the higher authorities	39 (54.2)	28 (38.9)	4 (5.6)	1 (1.4)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.46 (0.67)
Overall							4.44 (0.71)

Table 4 showed that headmasters perceived very highly towards the skills under the dimension of the self management skills with mean value of 4.44 (SD=0,71). In their perception towards the ability to be away from the centralization at work, 41.75 agreed with Very High and 44.45 with High. Whereas 9.7% of them responded with Average and only 3 responded with Low and Very Low. Moreover, headmasters perceptions towards making effective use of rules according to school circumstances skills was 54.2% with Very High and 40.3% with High, while only 2.8% towards Average and only 2 responded with Low and Very Low. As we can see, 69.4% responded Very High and 27.8% responded High towards the ability to solve school problems independently while only 1.4% responded Average and Low. The headmasters’ perception towards the ability to manage the work without the guidance of the higher authorities was 54.2% in Very High and 38.9% towards high; only 5.6% with Average and 1.4% with Low and there was no respondent with Very Low. In overall, majority of the respondents agreed with Very High and High towards skills needed.

Table 5 Distribution of headmasters’ perceptions towards the financial management skills

Skill	Respondents N = 72					Total f (%)	Mean (SD)
	VH f (%)	H f (%)	A f (%)	L f (%)	VL f (%)		
Recognizing rules and regulations of financial resources.	50 (69.4)	19 (26.4)	1 (1.4)	1 (1.4)	1 (1.4)	72 (100)	4.61 (0.72)
Ability to distribute school budget appropriately	47 (65.3)	20 (27.8)	4 (5.6)	1 (1.4)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.57 (0.66)
Ability to find other alternatives to enhance school budget.	40 (55.6)	26 (36.1)	5 (6.9)	1 (1.4)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.46 (0.69)

cont... **Table 5**

Ability to define priorities of school expenditure.	45 (26.5)	23 (31.9)	3 (4.2)	1 (1.4)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.54 (0.71)
Overall							4.54 (0.70)

The Table 5 above showed that the majority of the respondents perceived the financial management skills as very high with mean value of 4.54 (SD=(0,70). Under recognizing rules and regulations of financial resources skill, the headmasters’ perception was 69.4% with Very High and 26.4% with High, while only 1.4% for Average, Low and Very Low. Similarly, the headmaster’s perception agreed with very high 65.3% and 27.8% with high towards the ability to distribute school budget appropriately. Whereas majority of the respondents for ability to find other alternatives to enhance school budget was 55.6% with Very High and 36.1% with High and, only 6.9% and 1.4% for Average and Low respectively. Moreover, as it can be seen from the Table 5 that the perceptions towards the ability to define priorities of school expenditure for Very High being 26.5% only compared to 31.9% for High, and only 4 respondents opted for Average and Low. Finally, as we noticed from the table above, that there was only one respondent with Very Low for all the skills. Thus, we can say that most of the school headmasters need these skills to improve their performance.

Table 6 Distribution of headmasters’ perceptions towards vision and mission

Skill	Respondents N = 72					Total f (%)	Mean (SD)
	VH f (%)	H f (%)	A f (%)	L f (%)	VL f (%)		
Ability to specify the general aims of the school.	50 (69.4)	20 (27.8)	1 (1.4)	1 (1.4)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.65 (0.58)
Encouraging the staff to participate in preparing the school plan.	49 (68.1)	21 (29.2)	1 (1.4)	1 (1.4)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.64 (0.58)
Ability to analyse the current school situation.	44 (61.1)	26 (36.1)	2 (2.8)	0 (0)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.58 (0.55)
Ability to develop school improvement plans from results of inquiry and reflection.	40 (55.6)	27 (37.5)	5 (6.9)	0 (0)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.49 (0.62)
Overall							4.59 (0.59)

Statistically, Table 6 shows that our headmasters agreed highly towards the need of vision and mission skills with mean value of 4.59 (SD=0,59). It shows that 69.4% of the respondents agreed with Very High and 27.8% for High that school headmasters need the ability to specify the general aims of the school. While, 68.1% of the respondents agreed with Very High towards the skill of encouraging the staff to participate in preparing the school plan and, only 2 responded toward Average and Low. Likewise, the headmaster's perception on the ability to analyse the current school situation shows 44 respondents with 61.1% chose Very High while no respondents with Low and Very Low. Furthermore, 55.6% of the respondents agreed with Very High towards the ability to develop school improvement plans from results of inquiry and reflection. The table above reveals that there is no response with Very Low. Therefore, we could conclude that most of the headmasters need these skills toward developing their performances.

Table 7 Distribution of headmasters' perceptions towards human resource management skills

Skill	Respondents N = 72					Total f (%)	Mean (SD)
	VH f (%)	H f (%)	A f (%)	L f (%)	VL f (%)		
Identifying the training needs of the school staff.	40 (55.6)	24 (33.3)	7 (9.7)	1 (1.4)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.43 (0.72)
Ability to build a climate of mutual trust and respect.	48 (66.7)	22 (30.6)	1 (1.4)	1 (1.4)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.63 (0.59)
Ability to encourage cooperation and group work in the school.	49 (68.1)	21 (29.2)	1 (1.4)	1 (1.4)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.64 (0.58)
Ability to ensure fairness among teachers.	52 (72.2)	19 (26.4)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (1.4)	72 (100)	4.68 (0.62)
Overall							4.59 (0.63)

Overall, the majority of the headmasters agreed with Very High with mean value of 4.59(SD=0,63) towards their need of the human resource management skills. It could be observed from Table 7 that 55.6% of headmasters opted Very High towards the skill of identifying the training needs of the school and 33.3% opted for High. Similarly, majority of the respondents for the ability to build a climate of mutual trust and respect was 66.7% for Very High, 30.6% for High, and only 1.4% for Average and Low. Moreover, as it can be seen from Table 4.7 that the perceptions towards the ability to encourage cooperation and group work in the school for Very High was 68.1%; only 1.4% with Average and no respondents with Very Low. Correspondingly, their perceptions towards the ability to ensure fairness

among teachers for Very High and High were 72.2% and 26.4% respectively. Finally, Table 7 demonstrated that most of the respondents fell into Very High and High with only one respondent opted for Very Low. Thus, we can say that most of the school headmasters might need these skills to improve their career effectiveness.

Table 8 Distribution of headmasters’ perceptions towards the use of ICT skills

Skill	Respondents N = 72					Total f (%)	Mean (SD)
	VH f (%)	H f (%)	A f (%)	L f (%)	VL f (%)		
Ability to use new technologies in the daily work.	33 (45.8)	29 (40.3)	8 (11.1)	2 (2.8)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.29 (0.77)
Implementing new technologies to support the learning process.	41 (56.9)	25 (34.7)	4 (5.6)	2 (2.8)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.46 (0.73)
Ability to prepare training programs using computers.	30 (41.7)	29 (40.3)	9 (12.5)	4 (5.6)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.18 (0.86)
Ability to use the internet effectively in the school.	13 (18.1)	33 (45.8)	22 (30.6)	4 (5.6)	0 (0)	72 (100)	3.76 (0.81)
Overall							4.17 (0.79)

Referring to the data in Table 8 above, the majority of the headmasters’ perceptions towards the use of ICT skills was high with mean value of 4.17 (SD=0,79). They agreed that they need the ability to use new technologies in their daily work with 45.8% agreed with Very High and 40.3% with High, while, they agreed with 56.9% Very High and 34.7% High towards the skill of implementing new technologies to support the learning process. Also, their perceptions towards the ability to prepare training programs using computers were relatively similar for Very High and High being 41.7% and 40.3% respectively; while, only 12.5% towards Average. Whereas, their perceptions towards the ability to use the internet effectively in the school was only 18.1% for Very High. Majority of the respondents chose High with 45.8%. The perceptions for Average was 30.6% and only 5.6% for Low. On the whole, for the perceptions towards the use of ICT skills, there were very few respondents for Low and no respondent at all for Very Low.

Table 9 Distribution of headmasters' perceptions towards the communication skills

Skill	Respondents N = 72					Total f (%)	Mean (SD)
	VH f (%)	H f (%)	A f (%)	L f (%)	VL f (%)		
Ability to communicate effectively with the society.	46 (63.9)	22 (30.6)	3 (4.2)	1 (1.4)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.57 (0.64)
Ability to build good relation with other schools.	40 (55.6)	28 (38.9)	3 (4.2)	1 (1.4)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.49 (0.65)
Ability to be in a good contact with the different media.	30 (41.7)	28 (38.9)	13 (18.1)	0 (0)	1 (1.4)	72 (100)	4.19 (0.83)
Ability to be in a good contact with the higher authorities.	49 (68.1)	22 (30.6)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (1.4)	72 (100)	4.64 (0.63)
Overall							4.47 (0.69)

Overall, majority of the respondents agreed with very high with mean value of 4.47 (SD=0,69) for headmasters' perceptions towards their need for the communication skills. Table 9 shows that 63.9% of headmasters agreed with Very High towards the ability to communicate effectively with the society; 30.6% for High and only 1.4% for Low. The percentage of their perceptions towards the ability to build good relation with other schools was 55.6% for Very High, 38.9% for High and only 1.4% for Low. As we could notice from the table, 41.7% respondents chose Very High and 38.9% for High in favour of their response towards the ability to be in a good contact with the different media, while, it fell for 18.1% for Average and 1.4% for Low. Whereas 68.1% of headmasters agreed with Very High towards the ability to be in a good contact with the higher authorities; 30.6% opted for High and only one respondent opted for Very Low. Generally, we could notice from the Table 9 that, 2 perceptions, i.e. Average and Very Low were not agreeable to respondents. Therefore, we could suggest that most of the headmasters need these skills to improve their work performance.

Table 10 Distribution of headmasters’ perceptions towards involvement of parents in school

Skill	Respondents N = 72					Total f (%)	Mean (SD)
	VH f (%)	H f (%)	A f (%)	L f (%)	VL f (%)		
Encouraging parents to follow up their children progress.	50 (69.4)	17 (23.6)	3 (4.2)	2 (2.8)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.60 (0.70)
Ability to cooperate with parents to solve students’ problems.	31 (43.1)	28 (38.9)	10 (13.9)	2 (2.8)	1 (1.4)	72 (100)	4.19 (0.88)
Encouraging parents to participate in the school activities.	29 (40.3)	33 (45.8)	9 (12.5)	1 (1.4)	0 (0)	72 (100)	4.25 (0.72)
Overall							3.34 (0.77)

Table 10 showed that the headmasters agreed with average level towards the skill of enhancing the involvement of parents in school with mean value of 3.34 (SD=0,77). Statistically, it shows that 69.4% of the respondents agreed with Very High and 23.6% High that school headmasters need the skills to encourage parents to follow up their children’s progress. On the other hand they agreed with 43.1% for Very High and 38.9% High towards the ability to cooperate with parents to solve students’ problems while only 3 respondents with Low and Very Low. Aversely, the Table 4.10 above demonstrates that the perceptions towards the skill of encouraging parents to participate in the school for Very High was only 40.3% compared to 45.8% for High; 12.5% for Average and only 1 respondent came under Low.

Gender Factor of the Headmasters’ Perceptions Towards Skills Needed

To compare the perception of the two groups, the t-test for related samples was used to test the significant differences between male and female headmasters’ perceptions. The following table 11 gave a comparison between the headmasters’ and headmistresses’ perceptions in Al-Dakhiliyah region towards the skills needed to improve their leadership skills.

Table 11 Gender Factors of the headmaster’s perception towards skills needed

No	Skill	Gender				t-value	Sig
		Male		Female			
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1	Leadership	4.93	0.26	4.82	0.39	1.32	0.19
2	Decision Making	4.64	0.62	4.77	0.48	-1.00	0.32
3	Self Management	4.71	0.71	4.68	0.52	.22	0.82
4	Financial Management	4.68	0.86	4.75	0.53	-.43	0.67
5	Vision and Mission	4.79	0.50	4.84	0.43	-.50	0.62
6	Human Resource Management	4.68	0.82	4.89	0.32	-1.51	0.13
7	The Use of ICT	4.46	0.80	4.55	0.82	-.41	0.68
8	Communication	4.57	0.74	4.70	0.55	-.87	0.39
9	Parental Involvement	4.43	0.79	4.59	0.69	-.92	0.36
	Overall	4.65	0.68	4.73	0.53	0.80	0.46

*Note: t-value significant at $p \leq 0.05$

In general, Table 11 showed that there is no significant difference towards the headmasters’ perception of skills needed between male and female with t value = 0.8 ($p \geq .05$). Moreover, from both mean value, mean = 4.65 for male and mean = 4.73 for female, the skill needed between male and female is moderate. From the results as well, we could conclude that both male and female have similar perception which highly agreed towards the most skills needed under the dimensions that stated in the questionnaire of the present study.

Experience Factor of the Headmasters’ Perceptions Towards Skills Needed

Table 12 Grouping Variable: Experience Year

Headmasters’ performance	
Chi-Square	3.200
Df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.362

a the Wilcoxon test

b Grouping Variable: Experience Year

c. Total N= 72, 1-3 years N=13, 3-6 years N=19, 6-9 years N=27, 10 years and above N=13

The significant difference in the headmasters' perceptions towards the skills needed based on the differences of experiences in the basic education system was analysed using non-parametric test (Wilcoxon test). The following Table 12 shows that chi-square value was calculated at 3.200 and the corresponding p value was .362, $\chi^2(3, N=72) = 3.200$, ($p > .05$). It means that there is no significant difference of headmasters' perceptions across the four experience year towards the skill needed. Therefore, we could say that all headmasters have similar perceptions despite of the differences in experience in the basic education.

Difficulties and Suggestions to Improve the Leadership Skills as Perceived by the School Headmasters

Data from the open-ended questions of the research survey showed that less than 25% of our school headmasters were satisfied with their knowledge and skills towards implementing the basic education system effectively. Whereas some of them enhance their knowledge and skills on their own effort through different programs and activities such as computing programs, English courses, visiting others schools, etc. Through the answers provided by the respondents, the researcher selected a list of different activities that the respondents required in order to improve their skills and performance. In order to improve the headmasters' leadership skills, they come up with the following suggestions:

a. Pre- training and in-service programs and courses

1. In-service training on how to manage the school financial management and how to manage the school budget.
2. Conducting in-service training in human resource which might help to develop the schools' headmasters to improve their skills in managing their staff and identifying their needs.
3. Attending courses in English.

b. Workshops and meetings

1. Workshops on how to plan, to involve the staff in the school's short and long term plans, mission and vision, with different experienced educational people and lecturers.
2. Workshops on decision making and self-management theoretically and practically.
3. Workshops on managing time by different expert trainers.

c. ICT training programs

1. Using computer software, excel, power point, etc.
2. (ICDL) The International Computer Driving License.

3. Using internet, using e-mail building-website, and e-learning.
4. (SPSS) Statistical Package for Social Sciences.

d. Visits and Supervision

1. Exchanging visits among school headmasters in and outside the region to gain more experience.
2. Supervisors when visiting schools should provide clear, critical and fruitful feedback on headmasters' management practices.

e. Communities and parents council

1. Activate the role of the state council in order to encourage all the schools, parents, headmasters, teachers, students, etc. to participate in its activities effectively.
2. Praise and encourage the community to participate in schools' different activities such as open day, jumbo sale, game competitions, etc.

Overall, the majority of the participants affirmed that headmasters need different types of training programs, workshops and courses in order to enhance their management knowledge and to develop their leadership skills. Al-Ghassani (2003) and Chabra (2005) in their study suggested that school leaders should have different training in school management to enhance their skills and behaviors.

DISCUSSION

As a result of implementing the new education system and according to the Guide of the Basic Education Schools of Oman (2003), it has added different responsibilities to the school headmasters. Where, unfortunately, most of the headmasters were not engaged in pre-training programs or courses in order to prepare them for the new system. Thus, in the researcher's opinion and from the 'open-ended questionnaire' responses, it was noticed that most of the headmasters as they concluded, need different knowledge and skills of educational leadership which, as Fullan (2001) and Yukl (2002) noted, might help them in developing their performance; parallel to what Hoy and Miskel (2005) posit that educational theories and training programs help to develop the quality of education.

A theory of administration recommended that the decision making is one of the dimensions where the school headmasters should have different abilities in order to plan, solve problems and make their decisions. In the highlight of the respondents of the study in Table 3, majority of the them highly agreed that they need these skills (with mean value of 4.40 (SD=0,70) in implementing the aims of the new education system. Likewise, Al-Ghassani (2003) in her study found that most of the headmasters might need the decision-making skills in implementing the basic education. Further, the findings show that most of them need different skills in self management which might help them to plan and to organize their daily routines within the basic education schools. This might be because, nowadays,

most our school headmasters try to be away from the centralization system of managing their schools, which is one of the fundamental aims of the ministry of education in Oman. Certainly, different personal skills are needed. As well this might help them to manage their schools independently and effectively. Allan (2007) agrees that effective school leaders should have particular management skill to deal with the daily school circumstances.

Al- Ghassani, (2003) in her study about improving the leaders' skills in Oman found that our school headmasters need different type of skills in order to achieve their extra responsibilities towards the financial management. This has been substantiated in this study as it was found that most of the perceptions towards the financial management skills needed were similar with mean value of 4.54 (SD=(0,70). , additionally, has demonstrated that the headmasters need different type of activities and programs on how to manage and to increase the school's budget by using alternative ways. This confirms that the basic education has yielded different and extra responsibilities in financial and school budget management.

According to many educational theories, an effective school should have an effective vision and mission along with a highly capable school leader who is able to implement the abovementioned quality in his/her school. Similarly goes to the new schools within the basic education in Oman where the headmasters should have the abilities to implement their vision and mission. Thus, from the findings of the present study, we could suggest that most of the headmasters are in need of certain knowledge and skills to build up the school's vision and mission to cope with the current development. Broadly speaking, as the findings in this study suggest, our headmasters indeed are in need of different types of skills to plan effective vision and mission which involve their staff in the school organization.

Nowadays, many educational scholars agreed that schools should be facilitated with ICT equipment where the school headmaster and the staff should be trained well in using information technology in the daily administrative routines and teaching to support the learning process. The findings of the present study show us that more than 70% of the headmasters need different programs and activities in order to enhance their knowledge and improve their abilities in using the information technology during the their daily routines and to support teaching and learning process. These findings of this study are similar to Moses' (2002) findings as he reviews that in school situation we should: (a) provide some degree of support to the administrative and teachers within the school building so as to train them in how to use ICT during the academic year, and (b) provide adequate support to teachers and administrative staffs within the school so as to train them in the use of information technologies for administrative and communication purposes. , Omani headmasters agreed that they need different types of ICT programs such as using computer software, excel, power point, etc., ICDL and using internet, using e-mail building-website, and e-learning which, might help them to enhance their skills and knowledge of the information technology.

Further findings of this study suggest that communication is an important aspect in which the headmasters handle their job. Thus, good communication can break the barrier between the headmaster and their members. Therefore, the participants of the study agreed that they need communication skills which might help in bridging the gap between them and other people, either within their school fraternity or within the community. Al- Ghassani

(2003) in her study, on improving skills of the school leaders in Oman in the new education system, has obtained similar results where, the school headmasters might need different types of communication skills to help them influence their school's organization and its performance. The results of this study has demonstrated us that most of the headmasters affirmed that they need human resource skills in order to enhance their leadership skills and knowledge which on the other hand help them to manage their schools effectively. Thus, 77% of Omani school headmasters stated, conducting in-service training in human resource might help them to improve their skills in managing their staff and identifying their needs; similar as to Currie (2006) and Allan (2007) who assert that, enhancing the human resource skills could be fulfilled either by in-house programs or by in service training, which in turn help to ensure the headmaster's performance.

According to the Guide of the Basic Education Schools of Oman (2003), one of the main responsibilities of the school headmasters in the basic education is to activate parents and society involvement in schools. Hence, the findings in Table, 1.10 about the type of skills that might be needed in involving parents and the community in school organization illustrated that, our school headmasters are in need of these skills which might provide them the capability to cooperate with the community. Likewise, Knoff (2007) in his study proposes that, schools' leaders should have the abilities to create ways and activities which might engage parents with the school.

Schools these days, embrace many more processes, accountabilities and managerial complexities. As a result, many scholars and practitioners agree that the school headmasters should be adequately prepared with educational knowledge, traits and leadership skills through different training and programs so as to change the traditional methods and to meet the leadership challenges and complexity needs of the schools (McEwan, 2003; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Yukl, 2006; Allan, 2007). Conclusively, as the present study findings suggest, our headmasters undeniably are in need of different leadership skills through different activities and training programs to enhance their management knowledge, which in turn might help them to implement the new basic education aims and its new responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

School leadership is not the result of simply obtaining a position, but rather possessing the knowledge and understanding of successful leadership skills along with the personal ability to effectively implement those skills towards their school performance. The study finds that knowledge and leadership skills in school's vision and mission, human resource management, finance, other issues and state mandates are the primary focus for the preparation of school leaders, thus, education reform in Oman should have a strong emphasis on leadership skills to promote good performance, which on the other hand help them to implement their responsibilities in the basic education.

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