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# **opción**

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## Assessing the functioning of Saudi Arabian government schools as learning organizations

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of school leaderships' practices towards employing the characteristics of Learning Organizations in public education schools in Saudi Arabia. **Methodology:** Data were collected through learning school questionnaire (LSQ) that were adapted from Goh (2003). **Main Findings:** One of the most important results of the research is agreement on the importance of school leaderships in achieving Learning Organizations, and there are difficulties, including centralization, the low level of administrative support in educational departments, and the ineffectiveness of organizational education training programs, which require financial, administrative and training stimulation to develop schools.

**Keywords:** Learning organizations; School leaderships; Teachers; Saudi Arabia.

## Evaluación del funcionamiento de las escuelas gubernamentales de Arabia Saudita como organizaciones de aprendizaje

### Resumen

El estudio examina las percepciones de los maestros sobre las prácticas de líderes escolares mediante la aplicación de las características de las organizaciones de aprendizaje en escuelas de educación pública en Arabia Saudita. Metodología: Los datos se recolectaron a través del cuestionario de escuelas de aprendizaje (LSQ) que fueron adaptados de Goh (2003). Principales Hallazgos: Principalmente se encontró que hay acuerdo sobre la importancia de los liderazgos escolares para lograr organizaciones de aprendizaje; como dificultades, se hallaron: centralización, bajo nivel de apoyo administrativo en los departamentos educativos e ineficacia de la formación educativa organizacional. Se requiere

estímulo financiero-administrativo y de formación para el desarrollo de las escuelas.

**Palabras clave:** Organizaciones de aprendizaje, Liderazgo escolar, Profesores, Arabia Saudita.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, increasing attention has been given to bringing about school improvement through the transformation of school systems into Learning Organizations.

The research that was conducted on this subject reveals that all educational organizations should be transformed into Learning Organizations to survive and cope with the great changes that have occurred in almost all fields in the 21st century. (RIINA, 2014).

Recently, there were inevitably desires for changing the administrative strategies of Saudi schools as far as their mission and vision are concerned. This change was due to the need for matching the modern trends in school management to surmount a lot of problems in several schools in the Arab countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and in the light of sustainable development to improve the students' learning, as well as the school leaderships (The High Level Political Forum for the year 2018). The school leadership are responsible for the efficient and effective functioning of the building and the occupants in it. (ALHARTHI, et al., 2018). They serve as a vital connecting link between the central office/board of education and classrooms and between teachers and parents. (KLINKER, 2006).

### 1.1. Research Questions

The current study seeks to answer the following questions:

First question:

To what extent are the identified Learning Organization characteristics supported by school leaderships in the views of some schools' teachers in Saudi Arabia?

Second question:

What are the obstacles that hinder transforming Saudi schools into Learning Organizations in the views of the schools' leadership in Saudi Arabia?

Third question:

What are the suggestions that might enable schools to become Learning Organizations?

## **2. Research Method**

A questionnaire has been developed to identify the characteristics that can be used to diagnose whether school leaderships are able to transform their school into a Learning Organization. We depended on many resources to identify characteristics that must be acquired by school leaderships to be able to create a learning school, for example GOH (2003), COPPIETERS (2005), JEREZ-GÓMEZ et al (2005).

The instrument used a five-point scale that ranged from high score happened to low score happened. The first version of the questionnaire, which consisted of (42) items, was originally pilot-tested on a group of fourteen participants for clarity. Furthermore, 10 specialist professors at Saudi universities checked the instrument as far as its content validity is concerned. On revision, the instrument was administered to a group of 247 leaderships from schools in Jazan region.

Reliability tests were conducted, and the instrument was further refined and expanded. In particular, items with low reliabilities and low factor loadings in relation to their corresponding constructs were deleted. The threshold used for factor loadings was 0.40. In its final format, the instrument consisted of (33) items. The overall reliability of the instrument was measured in terms of Coefficient alpha and was found to be 0.97. Again, only items pertaining to the earlier described Learning Organization dimensions are analyzed in this study.

Moreover, the reduced instrument from the factorial analysis was applied to the sample of the teachers in Saudi.

The sample included (221) teachers. This instrument was used to judge school leaderships ability to transform their schools into Learning Organizations.

## **3. Data Analysis**

After the data from the school leaderships were collected, we used principal components analysis (PCA), with varimax rotation to determine (BROWN, 2009a) if the instrument was measuring the dimensions it was

designed to measure and therefore empirically construct validation for the Learning Organization dimensions investigated by the study.

For this study, the criterion used in order to determine how many components to retain is that of Kaiser (only components whose eigenvalues are greater than 1 are retained). Finally, the internal homogeneity of each factor was determined by calculating the coefficient alpha. If coefficient alpha was found to be above 0.70, the factor was deemed reliable and exhibiting internal consistency at an acceptable level. After confirming the factorial validity, the instrument was applied to the subjects who were in Saudi teachers and school leadership, then the appropriate statistical techniques were used for analyzing data and answering the respective research questions

#### 4. Results and Findings

The results of the statistical analyses are depicted in Tables 1 through 4. Principal Component Analysis (PCA). The results of the PCA as well as the Reliability of each factor are presented in Table 1. As shown, the PCA that used a varimax rotation produced a five-factor solution that accounted

For 63.5 percent of the total variance. The sample of school leaderships used for this analysis was (247) from Jazan region.

Table 1. Principal Component Analysis and Reliability Results of Learning School Dimensions

Factor	Eigen value	Variance (%)	Cronbach's Alpha
1	5.672	15.33	0.87
2	5.440	14.70	0.91
3	4.475	12.09	0.92
4	4.401	11.89	0.90
5	3.481	9.407	0.89

Factor Eigen value Variance (%) Cronbach's Alpha

As shown in the last Table, almost all factors had a reliability coefficient in the 0.87 to 0.92 range, which provides evidence of internal factor homogeneity. Alpha for all thirty-three learning school variables included in this article was measured at 0.95. The variables comprising each factor as well as the corresponding factor loadings are depicted in Table 2 as following.

Table 2. Factor Loadings of Learning School Constructs (75)  
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Item and Factor Description	1	2	3	4	5
<b>innovation and experimentation</b>					
1 People who are new in this school are encouraged to question the way things are done.	.754				
2 New ideas from employees are not treated seriously by school management. (r)	.744				
3 Innovative ideas that work is often rewarded by school leadership.	.695				
4 I my school encourages to Experimentation and Innovation in the work.	.680				
5 This school encourages the suitable environment for constructing an open-dialogue at school.	.608				
6 My principal motivates suitable environment for trailing new ideas presented by the working staff.	.579				
<b>supporting research and learning</b>					
7 Using procedural researches results for developing the school work.		.772			
8 Training the working employees for employing the procedural researches to solve problems.		.758			
9 Developing the staff's research skills for solving school problems.		.755			
10 Supporting the mechanisms that help in solving problems scientifically rather than normal and traditional ways.		.755			
11 The school leadership pursuits teachers' practices in the light of		.748			

	the results of the procedural researches.	
12	Enhancing the opportunities of the staff's continuing education.	.531
13	There are different mechanisms for dealing with the new employees' queries about work.	.438
<b>Empowerment and leadership commitment</b>		
14	Management in this school frequently involves employees in important decisions.	.767
15	Making decisions with the agreement of all the staff.	.720
16	Encouraging team work groups that are self- operating.	.708
17	Expanding the authority of decision- making at school settings.	.705
18	Forming team work groups for solve-problems.	.675
19	Accepting and discussing the consultancies and advices presented by the working staff.	.648
<b>Knowledge Management</b>		
20	Writing down new information continuously.	.667
21	Encouraging the employees to transmit and exchange learning experiences among themselves.	.667
22	Failures are seldom constructively discussed in our school (r).	.618
23	Writing down and saving knowledge via evidences, databases, and files in order to make use of then within new situations.	.610
24	Employing / using/ information freely without setting any restrictions between the staff.	.604

25	Creating the school climate for acquiring new knowledge.	.571
26	In our school, there is a system that helps us to learn good practices from other schools.	.538
27	Supporting the flow of information easily among principals, and supervisors for all staff.	.512
28	Using information technology in circulating knowledge inside the school.	.487
<b>Vision and mission of the school</b>		
29	In our school, there is clear school vision and mission.	.701
30	Most of the school staff takes part in preparing school vision and mission.	.820
31	Unifying and mobilizing staff efforts for achieving the vision and mission.	.688
32	Identifying the goals and procedural aims of school.	.686
33	Cooperating students and their parents, and the school staff in setting school objectives/aims.	.522

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. (Brown, 2009a).

In short, the first rotated factor, which accounted for 15.33 percent of the total variance, had the highest factor loadings from five variables, which is characterized by trial of new ideas. This factor was thus named the innovation and experimentation, the second rotated factor, which accounted for 14.70 percent of the total variance, was composed of variables that collectively characterize the extent to which the organization support use of action research for problem solving in school and support for learning. This factor was thus called supporting research and learning. The third factor generated dealt with the extent to which the employees can participate in decision making in the school. This factor accounted for 12.09 percent of the total variance and was called empowerment and leadership commitment.

The fourth factor, which accounted for 11.89 percent of the total variance, pertained to the extent to which the employees have information, knowledge in order to perform their job in a professional manner. This factor was therefore labeled Knowledge Management. The fifth factor consisted of variables that describe clarity of vision and mission of school so this factor was therefore labeled vision and mission of the school.

The means, standard deviations, and correlations are among the factors summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations, and internal Correlations

	N.	M.	SD.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1- Innovation & Experimentation	6	3.51	.87	1	<b>0.65**</b>	<b>0.65**</b>	<b>0.75**</b>	<b>0.57**</b>	0.87**
2- supporting research & learning	7	3.20	.26		1	<b>0.59**</b>	<b>0.74**</b>	<b>0.68**</b>	0.87**
3- empowerment and Leadership commitment	6	3.48	.63			1	<b>0.67**</b>	<b>0.52**</b>	0.80**
4- knowledge management	9	3.26	.95				1	<b>0.64**</b>	0.90**
5- vision and mission of school	5	3.23	.33					1	0.78**
6-Total	<b>33</b>								1

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As shown in the last Table, all of the correlations between dimensions of learning school are significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed), this indicates internal constancy of the instrument.

Then, the effectiveness of the current study could be demonstrated in determining the characteristics of Learning Organizations by answering the following question:

First question: To what extent are the identified Learning Organization characteristics supported by school leaderships from the views of some schools' teachers in Saudi Arabia?

In relation to this question, the answer was worked out via identifying the minimum and maximum value of each measurement variable and arithmetic average and standard deviation. It was done by dividing the arithmetic rate of the maximum value for each variable after working out the percentage that indicates the principals' support of the characteristics of the Learning Organization in their schools. Table 4 displays the answer to the question described above.

Table 4. Teachers' responses about Principals' Support to characteristics of the learning school

	N	Mean	Std.	Rank
<b>1-Experimentation &amp; Innovation</b>	221	3.51	4.08	<b>1</b>
<b>2- supporting research and learning</b>	221	3.20	4.79	<b>5</b>
<b>3- empowerment and Leadership commitment</b>	221	3.48	4.44	<b>2</b>
<b>4- knowledge management</b>	221	3.26	6.88	<b>3</b>
<b>5- vision and mission of school</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>3.23</b>	<b>3.53</b>	<b>4</b>

The previous table, according to the teachers' responses, shows that the total ratio of the school leadership' practices which support the learning school characteristics is high. but this indicates the school leaderships need to identify and support these characteristics in their schools. This result is relatively consistent with the recommendations for these two studies AGANDY & ALGEHENY (2018) and ALBLIWAI, TANASH, (2017).

The table shows that the knowledge management dimension is higher than the empowerment and Leadership commitment, but with the Experimentation & innovation dimension is lower than the supporting research and learning dimension,

These results can be explained in the light of some different cultural factors, especially, for example, the high income of a teacher and the availability of material resources is high and then made the overall ratio to the discretion of teachers to support the characteristics of a Learning Organization high in schools ,The central system of education made , the teachers are interested in implementing rules more than looking forward to develop creative students just following the regulations and laws. Although the overall percentage of the creation of schools as learning communities remains low, perhaps the reason behind this is due to the legislative factors such as the central control of the educational system in the country and some of the bureaucratic complications that reduce the freedom of schools and weaken the sense of independence and school-based management. (JACOBSON,et al.2011)

Second question: What are the obstacles that hinder transforming Saudi schools into Learning Organizations in the views of the schools' leaderships in Saudi Arabia?

In relation to the second question, the answer was worked out via the qualitative analysis of the school leaderships' responses in Saudi Arabia.

## **5. Conclusion**

The current study has shown the important role of school leaderships in supporting the characteristics of the learning school. However, there are some likely restrictions that may hinder turning Saudi schools into Learning Organizations. There are similarities in these restrictions, as stated by the principals in Saudi schools, such as the prominent centralized administration in the educational system in spite of the fact that there are recent attempts towards decentralization. Furthermore, it is due to the low-level organizational support of the school from educational administrations and the lack of the effectiveness of the training programs for school leaderships, particularly those of organizational learning skills. Therefore, The Kingdom seeks to develop leadership side by side with modern trends to reach the learning organization. Among these are expanding the authorities given to school leaderships, enhancing continuing learning opportunities for teaching and administrative staff at schools, financial support from the side of the ministry and school districts, improving the school climate, and motivating training programs that fulfil staff's needs and desires at school.

## **Limitation and study forward**

Selecting and examining larger samples can help in analyzing.

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