

# The Phenomenon of Leadership Among Middle Management Leaders in Public Schools in Bahrain: Aspects of Performance, Personality Pattern Analysis, Impact Strategies, and Challenges

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**Abstract:** The concept of middle school management leadership refers to teachers who teach and have leadership roles. This study aimed to investigate the phenomenon of leadership among middle management leaders in the Kingdom of Bahrain who occupy the positions of heads or coordinators of school departments in public schools. The current study followed the qualitative methodology by analyzing the final projects of teachers who finished the "Understanding Leadership" course for teachers in 2022. The study sample consisted of (21) projects (presented by 5 males and 16 females) who occupy middle leadership positions in public schools. The study instrument was an analysis sheet that included the dimensions to be studied, the aspects of performance to be changed, personal leadership styles according to international standards and self-reflection, the impact strategies used, and the challenges and strategies used to confront them. The results of the study indicated that the most important aspects of schoolwork that these leaders believe to be the first to change our professional development for teachers, employment of digital empowerment tools, and meeting the needs of new teachers. The most practiced personal leadership styles according to international scales are democracy, diplomacy and transformational, while according to self-reflection they were democracy, transformational and servant. Finally, the most challenges faced by leaders were many educational and administrative tasks and dealing with negative personality patterns for teachers, and resistance to change. The most used strategies to confront these challenges were organizing work, managing time, and following up on the impact of professional development activities and development sessions. The study recommended adopting and implementing a national professional development program for these leaders and proposing complementary studies for this study.

**Keywords:** leadership, middle management, performance, leadership styles.

## 1 Introduction

The phenomenon of leadership is an old human practice that is deeply rooted in history. Leadership emerges when two or more people participate in performing a certain work (situation), where one of them emerges with his personal, psychological and cognitive abilities (the leader), which makes him able to inspire others (subordinates) and motivate them to do everything they can to achieve their desired goals, and the group of activities carried out by the leader is called leadership. Philosophers, thinkers and researchers have been studying the phenomenon of leadership throughout the ages, and they have set out theories that explain it. Socrates (400 BC) described the characteristics and traits of a military leader, and after eighteen hundred years, Machiavelli mentioned that leadership as the characteristics of a political leader, and he set his conditions and characteristics. In the nineteenth century, the era of the Industrial Revolution, the concept of leadership expanded to include leaders of trade unions and secret organizations. After the end of World War II (1945), the concept of leadership expanded to include all activities undertaken by those who lead a group of individuals to achieve certain goals in all aspects of contemporary life [1].

This was paralleled by the emergence of several theories that explain the phenomenon of leadership, including the theory of the great man (its most famous pioneer was Galton), the theory of the traits (Stogdill), and the theory of attitudes (Fidler), and decision-making (Simon). From the last quarter of the twentieth century until the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, new leadership theories and trends emerged, such as transformational leadership (its most famous pioneer was Burns), leadership with total quality (Deming), leadership with emotional intelligence (Goleman), and caring leadership (Younger), servant leadership (Greenleaf), and others [2].

The school is one of the most important humanitarian institutions, which aims to develop societies and build their future by providing an effective teaching and learning environment, with its human, moral and material resources. Perhaps the

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human resource is the most important, as the leaders of these institutions practice leadership in pursuit of the goals of personal, national, and global education [3]. The challenging times in the educational systems during the academic years 2020-2022 have shown the need for cohesive school leaders capable of managing change more than ever and facilitating the choice of paths for in-person education or full e-learning (distance) education or between them (integrated), to suit health decisions and conditions and the ability to create new educational pathways [4].

The concept of leadership includes the ability to influence others. The personal influence of a leader is the ability he has to change the convictions, ideas, or skills of another individual or group of individuals, and push them to the desired practice. The amount of personal influence depends on major issues such as the available psychological, political and economic resources, as well as the good development of the ability to respond and persuade. The ability of a leader to influence others depends on his ability to establish personal credibility, be trustworthy, manage adversity, and develop positive relationships. A leader also should develop his self-awareness and lead with his core values in mind [5].

Bloom [6] set forth seven strategies to influence others. First is the strategic Impact, which is a comprehensive approach to building the desired influence of the leader in the future, by building credibility, communication, skills, and knowledge to be used in the future efficiently. The second is the tactical effect, which is the short-term effect, i.e. the effect of obtaining the support of a particular person for a particular purpose. The third is situational influence, which is related to influencing others to buy products or adopt ideas, and this depends on how well the leader knows the topic under discussion, and who they are talking to increase their influence. Fourth is the self-help to be influenced by others, in which the leader allows himself to be influenced by another person to improve his personality. Fifth is the inverted influence, which is the strategy through which the leader allows himself to be influenced by another person to gain his attention, trust, and support. Sixth is the unintended influence, where a leader tries to influence someone to do a certain thing, but on the contrary, the person does the opposite. Seventh is the reverse influence, which occurs when the leader tries to influence a person to do a certain action by telling him that he cannot or should not do so.

### **Middle school administration leadership**

The concept of middle school management leadership refers to teachers who teach and have leadership roles, thus bridging the gap between teaching practices and education management. Middle school leadership is an increasingly complex and important site of school leadership, with research showing the importance of middle leadership in school improvement and teacher development [5]. Perhaps the most important work of middle leadership in schools is to lead a team of teachers to achieve the school's strategies in the field they are studying. The team leader performs a set of roles, working to help the work team discover the general purpose required of it, determine its identity, identify its needs, know its capabilities, understand its critical processes, and discover its latent innovations [1]. They are usually a source of innovation and development in their field of work. They are also concerned with coordinating the work of the lower administration so that the schoolwork teams support the achievement of the school's vision and mission.

The middle leadership function in schools came as a result of the educational reforms initiated by different countries of the world since the eighties of the twentieth century, which led to increased pressure on school leaders, and consequently, school leaders created a lower administrative level in the school hierarchy, between them and groups of teachers. These teachers are middle-level leaders, who are assigned to specific responsibilities, with a significant intensification of the administrative work of leaders in middle management [7]. As a result, the scope and scale of the tasks they are now expected to perform have led to an increasingly challenging role for these practitioners. Educational leadership views middle management leaders as professional leaders, and an integral part of educational and professional development in schools and other educational institutions, immersing them in real educational contexts [8]. Middle school management leaders are distinctively multitasking in small teams, facing increasing pressure and a growing diversity of roles during schoolwork. They are central to change and restructuring in the education system and within their schools. There are capabilities at the middle leadership level to resist and/or adapt creatively to change. This is strongly influenced by contextual factors as well as the responses of middle management leaders themselves. The issue of resistance and adaptation is closely linked to interrelated issues such as accountability, autonomy and professionalism [9].

Bennett et al [10] indicated that the roles of leaders in the middle management levels are variable and correspond to the change in the expressions used to describe them from an informal subject specialist to curriculum coordinator, to the department head, to Middle manager, to the middle leader. Despite these changes, middle management leaders' reticence to practice monitoring and evaluating their colleagues remains problematic. This conflicts with their belief that their primary commitment is to their departments rather than the school, and calls into question the authority and scope of the middle leader.

On the position of middle management leadership in schools, Van Schaik et al [11] conducted a study aimed at classifying school leaders according to their promotion of cooperative learning for teachers in the Netherlands. Data was collected using interviews with ten school leaders and a questionnaire completed by 39 teachers from six secondary schools. From the results of the study, four types of school leaders were distinguished: (a) teacher learning integrators, (b) teacher

learning facilitators, (c) teacher learning managers, (d) school daily practice managers, and these types of leadership are carried out by management leaders. Central, distributed leadership helps promote collaborative learning for educators.

Lipscombe et al [5] identified and analyzed peer-reviewed empirical articles on middle leadership from 2006 to 2020 to understand how middle management leaders are identified, the responsibilities they have, the influence and professional development they have, and to discover gaps in studies to support further research. The review was conducted using Scopus and ERIC databases. A total of 35 articles in 14 countries were selected, using NVivo. After analyzing the articles, four conclusions were reached. The concept of middle leadership is difficult to define, and the roles and responsibilities of middle leadership vary widely and are understood by the context in which they operate. Middle management leaders, directly and indirectly, influence teacher practices, team development, school reform, and professional learning. Professional development for middle leadership has not been provided to the extent that it aims to prepare and develop them appropriately for the complexity of their tasks.

On the challenges of school leadership. Llorent-Bedmar et al [12] conducted a study in Spain aimed at identifying the factors that hinder effective leadership in schools in Western Andalusia. A mixed methodology was used, in which 282 teachers were surveyed and interviews with 14 principals were conducted. According to the teachers surveyed, the most important challenges of school management were understanding and dealing with disadvantaged contexts, professional development of teachers according to the diverse needs of students, greater autonomy for teachers in teaching practice, and the need for highly qualified and experienced professionals with greater commitment and selflessness, the difficulty in engaging the local community, the high rate of employee turnover, the high rates of absenteeism and student dropout.

Bassett [7] conducted a study in New Zealand aimed at examining middle leadership development practices in New Zealand secondary schools and identifying the challenges they face. A qualitative questionnaire was sent to boards of trustees, senior leaders and middle management leaders in five large urban secondary schools. The results revealed agreement of the study sample regarding the expectations of the role of middle management leaders and the challenges they face. Middle management leaders are responsible for a variety of leadership functions that significantly affect student learning outcomes. However, the complexity of the role of middle management leaders is confusing to many practitioners, as they feel unprepared to deal with the increasing workload and challenges associated with it. Three main challenges were identified; the lack of time allocated to their many tasks, the lack of development of their leadership abilities, and the existence of tensions between department leadership and work within the broader school context.

#### *The problem of the study*

The COVID-19 pandemic has halted education globally in just a few months and created undeniable chaos [13]. It has shaken the very fabric of education, redefining learning as a remote, screen-based activity that most learners receive support from online teachers. Education has been significantly reorganized [14], and the educational system in Bahrain has been exposed to the same crisis resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. Face-to-face education has been suspended since 25 February 2020 for a period of 20 weeks, and the shift towards distance education has begun from March to June 2020. From the academic year 2020/2021 to the end of the next academic year 2021/2022, the two-way system was adopted under certain conditions. The electronic remote system was not desired by parents, and educational institutions in the Kingdom of Bahrain took measures and imposed various laws to confront the pandemic to ensure the continuation of the educational process during this period. Among these changes made by the Ministry of Education, and private schools was the transition to a distance learning system [15, 16]. This necessitated the school leaders to deal with these new circumstances and their aftermath, and the middle school leadership plays a pivotal role in bringing about this change.

On the other hand, the leaders of the middle levels in schools were responsible for implementing the strategic plans adopted by the Ministry of Education in the Kingdom of Bahrain and their schools, by directly supervising the teaching and learning processes. They interact daily with teachers and students and provide direct educational support to them. They are the link between the team of teachers and the senior leadership in the school and based on the data and information they provide to the higher authorities, the educational reality is evaluated and developed by the Education and Training Quality Authority. This level of leadership is not fully studied and investigated in the literature. There is no study in Bahrain aimed at studying the phenomenon of leadership among middle management in schools, which opened the gate to investigate this topic in this study.

#### *Questions of the study:*

This study sought to answer the following questions:

- 1- What are the aspects of school performance to be changed from the point of view of middle management leaders in Bahraini public schools?
- 2- What are the influence strategies that middle management leaders follow in Bahraini public schools?
- 3- What are the personal leadership styles that middle management leaders follow in Bahraini public schools?

- 4- What are the challenges facing middle management leaders in Bahraini public schools and the strategies used to overcome them?

### *Objectives of the study*

This study aimed at investigating the phenomenon of leadership among middle management leaders who occupy the positions of heads or coordinators of school departments in public schools in the Kingdom of Bahrain, in terms of determining the aspects of performance to be changed, and analyzing personal leadership patterns according to international standards and self-reflection and the strategies of influence used and identifying challenges and obstacles facing them and the strategies used to confront them.

### *Significance of the study*

This study investigated the phenomenon of leadership among middle management leaders in the Kingdom of Bahrain who occupy the positions of heads or coordinators of school departments in public schools. The results of this study will be useful to understand the nature of this level of leadership and help top management to assess and evaluate the situation. Investigating such a level of leadership will bridge the gap between top management and lower management. The results of this study will add to the theoretical literature on the concept of leadership in schools. School principals will use such insights to strengthen the middle leadership and make it more effective and efficient.

### *Limitation of the study*

This study was limited to analyzing the final projects of teachers who finished the "Understanding Leadership" course for teachers in 2022. The study was limited to Bahrain only and included teachers who work in the Ministry of Education.

## **2 Methods**

The current study followed the qualitative methodology by analyzing the final projects of teachers who finished the course "Understanding Leadership for Teachers TCTL521" at the Bahrain Teachers College of middle management leaders in public schools in the Kingdom of Bahrain in the second semester (2022) according to the aspects included in the study questions.

### *Sampling*

The study sample consisted of (21) projects (presented by 5 males and 16 females) whose evaluation was excellent according to the approved rubric among (99) projects presented in 4 sections that were studied by the researcher at the end of the second semester. All teachers of the course occupy middle leadership positions in public schools, such as department heads and course coordinators.

### *Instrument of the study*

The study instrument was an analysis sheet that included the dimensions to be studied, which were aspects of performance to be changed, personal leadership styles according to international standards and self-reflection, impact strategies followed, and challenges and strategies used to confront them.

The validity of the instrument was confirmed by presenting it in its initial form to 6 colleagues who studied this course. Some parts of the instrument were modified, such as adding global standards and self-reflection to the personal leadership styles dimension. The reliability of the instrument was confirmed by the researcher and a colleague who studied this course during the same period by analyzing five randomly selected student projects, and the two analyzes were completely identical, which reassured the researcher to use the instrument for this study.

## **3 Results and discussion**

### *Results of the first question*

To answer the first question of the study, the sample projects were analyzed. The performance aspects to be changed, their number and percentages are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Aspects of performance to be changed, their number and percentages in descending order

| Aspect                                | Number | Percentage % |
|---------------------------------------|--------|--------------|
| Professional development for teachers | 9      | 43           |
| Employing digital empowerment tools   | 5      | 24           |
| Meeting the needs of new teachers     | 3      | 14           |
| Improving the school environment      | 2      | 9            |
| Student's quality of life             | 1      | 5            |

|                                       |    |     |
|---------------------------------------|----|-----|
| Leadership, Management and Governance | 1  | 5   |
| Total                                 | 21 | 100 |

It is noted from Table 1 that the teachers’ professional development aspect ranked first as the most desired aspect of school performance to be changed according to the viewpoint of the middle leadership members in Bahraini schools with 9 repetitions out of 21 and 43%. This may be because the professional development of teachers works in the current stage on achieving the objectives of the in-person or distance learning method, or a combination of them, considering the effects of the pandemic. Teachers' development also bridges the gap between the technical and administrative capabilities of teachers and meets the needs of teachers and the educational system in Bahrain.

This is logical given the urgent need for teachers and school administrations to possess these necessary tools for distance teaching or hybrid teaching. Educational leaders in the Kingdom of Bahrain at the national, regional and school levels worked to provide hundreds of training workshops, initiatives and various projects to meet the needs of different categories of teachers. Meeting the needs of new teachers, and improving the school environment, came second and third, respectively, while the quality of student life, leadership, administration and governance came in the last place, with only one project for each, and 5%. This may be because students for most of the past two years were learning remotely. Thus, the student's quality of life is summarized in remote health instructions, and the role of the teacher's leadership in the same period is summarized in following up the implementation of the instructions of the Ministry of Education.

*Results of the second question*

To answer the second question, the influence strategies used by the middle management leadership in Bahraini schools and their number were listed, as presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Influence strategies used by middle management leadership in Bahraini schools and their frequency in descending order

| Influence strategies                       | Frequency* |
|--|------------|
| Tactical                                   | 18         |
| Situational                                | 15         |
| Strategic                                  | 10         |
| Helping oneself to be influenced by others | 8          |
| Oppositional                               | 3          |
| Reverse                                    | 1          |

\*Allows the sample members to mention more than one strategy.

It is noted in Table 2 that the tactical influence strategy is the most used by middle leaders in Bahraini schools with a frequency of (18) times, which means that these leaders are convinced that tactical practices are the best in influencing the work team. These leaders tend to use tactical influence in the long term. These practices include reciprocity, admiration, the delegation of authority, and proactive action, which helps motivate the team, obtain their support, and thus play the role of the desired change leader [6].

The situational impact strategy came in second place with a frequency of (15) times, which means a great preference for leaders in middle management in Bahraini schools to use this strategy. It is appropriate in preparing for meetings, managing individual and group discussions, determining the extent of the leader's ability to influence the work team, and the use of maneuvers to achieve the desired goals. Then came the strategies of strategic influence and self-help to be influenced by others, respectively, while the inverted influence strategy ranked last and was repeated once. This may be because this strategy includes manipulating and cajoling others to gain their support, and this behavior is incompatible with the personality of the Bahraini person.

*Results of the third question*

To answer this question, the school leaders’ answers about their leadership styles were analyzed in two ways: the first according to the international scales Mind Tools, Leadership IQ, lookinmena, USC), and the second according to their self-reflection, and the results were presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Personal leadership styles followed by middle school leaders in Bahraini public schools classified by style and ranked in descending order according to their frequency

| Style                   | personal leadership style | Frequency * |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| International standards | democracy (participatory) | 13          |
|                         | Diplomatic                | 9           |
|                         | Transformative            | 6           |
|                         | Visionary                 | 5           |

|                 |                           |    |
|-----------------|---------------------------|----|
| Self-reflection | Servant leader            | 4  |
|                 | Idealistic                | 2  |
|                 | Strategic                 | 1  |
|                 | democracy (participatory) | 12 |
|                 | Transformative            | 10 |
|                 | Servant leader            | 6  |
|                 | Ethical                   | 5  |
|                 | Transactional             | 2  |

\*The sample members are allowed to use more than one scale and to mention more than one leadership style in self-reflection.

It is noted in Table 3 that using international measures of personality patterns, the democratic leadership style (participatory) is the most common among middle management leaders in Bahrain schools. This corresponds to the prevailing political view in Bahrain on the one hand, and on the other hand, this leadership style includes respect for the personalities of the work team appreciating their ideas and involving them in planning, implementing and making decisions that concern their work. All this leads to an increase in their motivation to work and their integration into it, and their taking responsibility, thus increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the teaching and learning processes. Then the diplomatic style came in second place, with a frequency of 9 times. This may be because the diplomatic leader values harmony among team members, which is the force that maintains group cohesion and achieves work goals and at the same time fulfilling the demands of team members. Then came the transformational, visionary, servant-leading, and idealistic personal leadership styles, respectively. While the strategic personal leadership style ranked last with only one repetition. This may be because leaders in middle management are executive leaders who take realistic actions, while strategies are placed by higher levels of educational leadership.

Concerning the personal reflection on leadership styles used by middle management leaders, the democratic (participatory) leadership style came in the first place. It is noted that the results of using the international standards method agree with the personal reflections in confirming this leadership style, which means that this leadership style is rooted in these leaders, achieves their goals as effectively as possible, and is commensurate with personal traits of teachers in Bahrain schools. The transformational leadership style came second with a frequency of (10) times, which indicates a great tendency for middle management leaders to use this leadership style. The transformational leader works to urge workers to adhere to the school's common collective aspirations and goals and empowers them individually and collectively, and thus invest their energies and abilities to achieve the school vision and mission. These leaders see that they are admired by their teams and can influence them, inspire them, raise their moral level and drive them to a higher level that enables them to achieve team goals more effectively. Transactional leadership ranked last as the least personal leadership style practiced by middle management leaders in Bahrain schools. This may be because this leadership style includes barter, which often reduces the quality of work, and satisfies medium or low levels of achievement.

#### *Results of the fourth question:*

To answer this question, the challenges facing middle leadership in Bahraini schools have been identified and their frequencies, as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4:** The challenges facing the middle leadership in Bahraini schools and the strategies used to overcome them, ranked in descending order

| Number | Challenges  | Frequency* |
|--------|---|------------|
| 1      | The huge number of educational and administrative tasks | 15         |
| 2      | Dealing with negative personality patterns of teachers  | 12         |
| 3      | Resistance to change                                    | 8          |
| 4      | Dealing with digital transformation                     | 6          |
| 5      | Challenges related to professional development          | 6          |
| 6      | lack of motivation                                      | 4          |

\*The study sample members can mention more than one challenge.

It is noted in Table 4 that the most challenge facing middle management leaders in Bahraini schools was many educational and administrative tasks, with a frequency of (15) times. This means that the roles, responsibilities and tasks of these leaders are many in the educational and administrative aspects, and this may be due to the circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, in which the educational environment in Bahrain, and perhaps in the whole world, was characterized by the abundance of national decisions, and their change according to the change in the epidemiological situation, and the speed of transition from one form to another of education. On the other hand, there is in Bahrain an independent body called the "Education and Training Quality Authority", whose work directly in achieving the fourth goal of the Sustainable

Development Goals, “Quality Education” - ensuring equitable and inclusive quality education for all, and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, ensuring the achievement of the goal by 2030.

To achieve this, the authority visits all public and private schools, to evaluate their performance, and to ensure their implementation of the approved standards of education and administration. This action resulted in school leaders having many written and executive work, most of which are carried out by the leaders of middle administrations, and follow-up on their implementation by their work teams, which contributed to increasing tasks for Educational and administrative leaders of middle management. This result was supported by Bassett [7] when he explained that school leaders have greatly intensified the administrative work of leaders in middle management. This result is consistent with the results of Bennett et al [10], which indicated the multiplicity of the roles of leaders in the middle management levels and their change, and that their work is strongly affected by the conditions in which they work. The results also agree with Lipscombe et al [5], which indicated the complexity of their tasks.

The challenge of dealing with teachers’ negative personality patterns came in second place with a frequency of (12) times, which means that there is real suffering for these leaders in dealing with different and negative personalities of teachers. This may be because some teachers in Bahrain schools are not satisfied with the teaching profession. They suffer from many educational and administrative burdens, especially in the conditions of the pandemic, and quality requirements and their dissatisfaction and suffering appear in the form of uninterested, frustrated and constantly complaining personalities, and they delay in implementing what is required of them, which hinders the implementation of the tasks required by the work, and there is a challenge for leaders to deal with them. Then came the challenges of resisting change, dealing with digital transformation, and professional development challenges, respectively, while the lack of motivation was the least of those challenges, with a frequency of 4 times, which means that there are strong motives for these leaders to work and achieve more achievements. These results are like the results of Llorent-Bedmar et al [12] on the need for teachers with greater commitment and selflessness (i.e., positive non-negative personalities) and differed from them in the professional development challenge, which was one of the most important challenges.

The strategies adopted by these leaders to face the previous challenges and their repetition were obtained, and Table 5 illustrates the results.

**Table 5:** The strategies used by the middle leadership to meet leadership challenges, arranged in descending order of frequency

| Number | Strategy  | Frequency* |
|--------|---|------------|
| 1      | Work organization and time management               | 12         |
| 1      | Follow up on the impact of professional development | 11         |
| 2      | Development sessions                                | 9          |
| 3      | Show successful models                              | 7          |
| 4      | Creating learning communities                       | 6          |
| 5      | Motivation  | 6          |
| 6      | Developing social relationships                     | 4          |

\*The sample members can define more than one strategy to face the challenges.

It is noted in Table 5 that the most strategies for dealing with the challenges faced by middle management leaders in Bahrain are work organization and time management, with a frequency of (12) times, which means that these leaders have the appropriate strategy to meet the most prominent challenges, which is many functional tasks in organization and time management. Then came the strategy of following up on the impact of professional development programs and activities for teachers, with a frequency of (11) times, whereby these leaders can ensure that teachers transfer the impact of professional development programs and activities that they receive to the school context. Then came the strategies of the development sessions, presenting successful models, establishing learning communities, and stimulating the arrangement, while the strategy for developing social relations came in the last place in practice. This may be because schoolwork during the pandemic period was often done remotely, and on the other hand, it was a commitment to instructions on social distancing approved by the health authorities in Bahrain.

## 4 Conclusion

This study demonstrated that middle management leaders play a pivotal role in schools, mediating between top-level leaders in the school and teachers within their departments, through ongoing social interactions among team members. Furthermore, middle leaders perform technical functions, such as curriculum leadership and implement an applied model in teaching and assessment, which greatly influence student learning outcomes. They also perform managerial functions such as implementing the school's strategic plan for their departments, organizing department work, and evaluating team performance. The role of a leader in middle management is challenging and requires appropriate preparation in the form of professional development and training [17].

In this study, the aspects of schoolwork that middle management leaders believe are the first to change were identified. These aspects were professional development for teachers, employment of digital empowerment tools, and meeting the needs of new teachers. The most used influence strategies were tactical, situational and strategic, and the most practiced personal leadership styles according to international standards were democracy, diplomacy and transformational, while according to self-reflection, they were democracy, transformational and servant. Finally, the most challenges faced by leaders were many educational and administrative tasks and dealing with negative personality patterns for teachers, and resistance to change. The most used strategies to meet these challenges were organizing work, managing time, and following up on the impact of professional development activities, and development sessions.

## Recommendations

Based on the results of the study and the complexity of the leader's role in middle management, the study recommends the educational authorities define the tasks and roles of middle management leaders in schools to reduce the administrative and technical burdens on them. It is also recommended to find a national program for preparing and developing middle management leaders professionally before and during their leadership roles, which require specialized knowledge and training, and focus on the methods and procedures for dealing with the different personalities of teachers, especially the negativity that hinders work and resists change.

However, one of the limitations of this study is the relatively small sample size. Further research can be done to study the phenomenon of leadership in middle management in Bahraini public and private schools, using a larger sample, descriptive, quantitative and empirical methodologies, and case studies to integrate knowledge about these leaders.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict regarding the publication of this paper.

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