

Leadership curricula in UAE business and education management programmes

A Habermasian analysis within an Islamic context

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate leadership curricula in UAE business and education management programmes and examine the extent to which they are derived from and linked to students' cultural and Islamic values using Habermas' critical theory.

Design/methodology/approach – The study employs a mixed methods approach that takes classical pragmatism as its philosophical foundation and critical theory as a theoretical lens. Data are collected in four sequential phases using critical discourse analysis of course materials, class observations, student survey and faculty interviews. Results are integrated at the interpretative level and abductive reasoning is used as the logic of justification.

Findings – Results show that despite the increasing efforts to incorporate cultural and Islamic values into the curriculum, it is still mainly dominated by Western theories and models of leadership, especially in the leadership courses offered by business schools, mainly because of accreditation requirements and the lack of English resources and theories on UAE and Islamic models of leadership.

Research limitations/implications – The study is limited to leadership curricula in the UAE. Researchers may extend and broaden the scope of the study by investigating leadership curricula in the Gulf and/or the Middle East. Future studies may also look at other theoretical frameworks recommended by other management scholars such as Mezirow's transformational learning and the socio-constructivist approach (Hotho and Dowling, 2010). This study aims to open an ongoing debate and further investigation on the topic.

Practical implications – The results of the current study may inspire faculty members and programme coordinators to develop critical and culturally relevant curricula that are informed by Habermas' critical theory and best teaching practices.

Originality/value – The study adds to the current knowledge base through its research design and approach that address an under-investigated topic. None of the current studies empirically investigated leadership curricula in the UAE. The theoretical framework and research findings can be used to develop culturally relevant and value-oriented leadership curricula that reflect indigenous and Western perspectives of leadership.

Keywords Leadership development, Habermas' critical theory

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

A number of management scholars (e.g. Ali and Al-Shakhis, 1989; Faris and Parry, 2011) have identified and discussed an existing gap between Muslims' espoused and practiced values at the workplace. They believed that this gap has put Muslim countries behind developed nations and led to many of the current inefficient work practices and problems such as injustice, favouritism, corruption, bribery, abuse of power and centralisation of work processes (Beekun and Badawi, 2005; Branine and Pollard, 2010). Many factors have contributed to the emergence of this gap. One is the long colonisation of Islamic countries, which divided the Islamic Empire into small states and weakened Islamic teachings and communication between Muslims, eventually resulting in applying Islamic principles and values differently in these countries. The second factor is the authoritarian political systems, following the colonial period (1258–early 1900), that were influenced, on one hand, by the



colonial authoritarian practices that ensured people's submission to their policies (Ali, 1990), and, on the other hand, the tribal values that give preference to family and friends over others (Branine and Pollard, 2010). The third factor is the tension between Bedouin values that emphasise pride, sib networks, and power, and Islamic values that emphasise submission to God, equality, justice and being humble. This tension has led to a dual system in Arab and Muslim countries where there is a gap between what Muslims believe in and what actually they practice (Al-Wardi, 1913).

However, one of the most influential factors contributing to this gap is globalisation and its profound impact on Muslim countries and higher education through the distribution of Western secular values and the uncritical borrowing of Western models and theories despite the clear contradiction between Islamic and Western values, as noted by a number of Muslim scholars. For example, Ali (1990) argued that the contradiction between Islamic values, which emphasise cooperation and working for the collective well-being of society and Western practices, which emphasise individualism and profit maximisation, has led to a great confusion in management and work practices. Branine and Pollard (2010) also attributed the lack of progress in Arab countries to Western management practices that are not adapted to or well integrated with local values and culture. Finally, Metcalfe and Murfin (2011) argued that the deviation from Islamic principles and following a Western secular path resulted in a failure of Muslim countries; they believed that societal renewal requires a return to Islam.

It is worth noting that this gap between espoused and practiced values is not limited only to Arab and Muslim countries. It appears to be a worldwide phenomenon that has led many scholars (e.g. Donn and Manthri, 2010; Giles and Smith, 2012) to call for different models and programmes of leadership that focus on moral values and ethical behaviour. For example, Nonaka and Takeuchi (2011) argued that the gap between ethics in theory and practice shows that there is something wrong with the way business schools and companies are developing leaders. Beekun (2012) also regarded the unethical practices at some global companies, such as Enron and Arthur Andersen, as an indication that the dominant models of leadership need to be rethought, as they do not put a great emphasis on moral values and ethical behaviour. Hence, it can be concluded that the gap between espoused and practiced values is a worldwide phenomenon resulting largely from neoliberal ideology and the materialistic values that have driven higher education programmes during the last four decades.

The political ideology of neoliberalism, initially associated with Ronald Reagan in the USA and Margaret Thatcher in the UK, is a group of economic policies and processes that gives primacy to private interests over the public good (Giroux, 2002). Although neoliberalism started with a noble objective of allowing all countries to prosper and achieve economic growth by facilitating the movement of goods and services between countries with the goal of maximising profits and efficiency (Romanowski, 2014), in practice, and through its emphasis on market values, competition and private interests, it is a form of domination that resulted in generating inequalities by widening the economic gap between the few rich developed countries in the North and the many poor underdeveloped countries in the South (Donn and Manthri, 2010; Mullen *et al.*, 2013). Neoliberalisation of education, in general, and higher education, in particular, may involve hidden political agendas or ideological projects to "change the soul", as indicated by Margaret Thatcher (see Lipman, 2011, p. 118). Giroux (2002) argued that neoliberalism is the most dangerous ideology of our time, as it produces "self-interested individuals" through the promotion of commercial and market values over social justice and sacred values (p. 425). He further argued that under neoliberalism, critical education, civic responsibility and moral values that are constitutive for creating responsible citizenship are sacrificed for profit maximisation, which threatens the purpose and significance of higher education. The neoliberalisation of higher education has led to the commercialisation and commodification of its programmes. In this regard,

knowledge is being treated as a tradable commodity or service to be bought by those who can afford it rather than a developmental process that enriches one's life (Gibbs, 2010). This is what Cesari (2004, p. 80) calls "the McDonaldisation of the world", referring to the American hegemony and the homogeneous culture that neoliberalism attempts to build through the distribution of Western secular values, life style and products across the world.

Giroux (2002) explained that higher education institutions are meant to be about the values they present, not the services or programmes they offer; thus, education should not be confused with job training in which students get degrees and credentials to sell themselves to the "highest bidder" (p. 433). Instead, universities should work for the public good and act as sites for critical learning that keep the tension between commercial and moral values. Consequently, educators should not allow commercial values to shape the mission and purpose of higher education. John Pape (1998) took a similar view by arguing that the core mission of higher education should not be limited only to job training or preparing students for profitable jobs in the market but mainly to educate them for being fully human and to prepare them for all aspects of personal and professional life (see Donn and Manthri, 2010). Gibbs (2010) shed light on the role played by higher education in maintaining one's culture by arguing that the main value of higher education is to develop students who can carry and transfer "culturally valued knowledge" (p. 243). Finally, Donn and Manthri (2010) concluded that although education cannot ignore or avoid the forces of globalisation, it should also not surrender and become a commodity in the global market. Actually, the problem is not only that higher education institutions follow the neoliberal values imposed on them, but, as indicated by Giroux (2002), it is also regarding students and parents who do not believe that higher education "is about higher learning" but rather view it as an opportunity for career advancement. This is obvious in the increasing demand on business programmes at the expense of literature, philosophy, history and social science programmes (pp. 433-435). This, according to Lipman (2011), converted the purpose of education from being for the public good to be perceived as a private good wherein one invests in himself/herself to effectively compete in the marketplace and "rise above others" (p. 118).

Neoliberalism with its exclusion of the influence of culture resulted in an uncritical adoption of so-called first-class educational products with little or no consideration of its appropriateness or applicability to the local environment (Romanowski, 2014). This made the underdeveloped countries consumers of Western knowledge with no significant contribution to its development. Some universities respond to this increasing effect of globalisation by applying an internationalisation strategy through which intercultural dimensions are integrated into teaching. However, this process is still dominated by Western models due to the absence of a coherent theory for internationalisation (Foskett and Maringe, 2010), on the one hand, and the lack of theories and models that are based on local cultures outside the North American context, on the other hand. Education worldwide is a driving force for both achieving economic growth and developing a sense of national identity (Kirk, 2010). Neoliberalisation and globalisation of higher education resulted in a shift of educational goals from being humanistic, where the focus is on cultural and intellectual growth of citizens, to becoming socio-economic where primacy is given to social and economic benefits. The UAE is not an exception from this dilemma. Higher education in the UAE is perceived as an engine for driving economic growth and preparing nationals to compete effectively in the global market. Thus, the higher education system, which has been established within the socio-economic model, resulted in a sharp increase in materialism. The UAE government has been relying heavily on borrowing and implementing Western educational models, practices and expertise (Mullen *et al.*, 2013) to accelerate the rate of national and economic development. This raises concerns about the suitability and relevance of these models to Emirati Arab and Islamic culture and the long-term implications they may have for developing and preserving the national and Islamic identity

of its citizens, particularly when the huge expansion of the higher education system led to the migration of many Western and non-Western faculty to the UAE who use different models of curricula. Although this does not provide an appropriate national role model for students (Al Farra, 2011), it enhances the Anglo-Westernisation process, as these professors tend to apply the curricula in which they were either trained or were using in their home country before coming to the UAE (Mullen *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, many Emiratis believe that the heavy use of Western curricula may put Islamic and traditional values at risk (Lootah, 2011).

The real challenge for the UAE government, then, is to develop and implement a hybrid education system that reflects traditional and Islamic values while incorporating latest knowledge established by Western and other scholars. This requires, first, a comprehensive investigation of the current curricula and, second, suggesting possible approaches for developing culturally relevant and value-oriented leadership curricula. The purpose of this study is to address the first requirement by investigating leadership curricula within UAE business and education management programmes and examining the extent to which they are derived from and linked to students' cultural and Islamic values. Particularly, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1. What type of leadership models and theories are being taught in selected UAE business and education management programmes?
- RQ2. To what extent are the leadership curricula relevant to and derived from UAE cultural and Islamic values?

2. Historical review of the UAE

The UAE is a relatively young but fast developing country that consists of seven emirates: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Fujairah, Umm Al-Quwain and Ras Al-Khaimah. The country occupies a strategic geographical location on the Arabian Peninsula along the southern shore of the Arabian Gulf and between Qatar peninsula in the west and Oman and the Gulf of Oman in the east. Although the country is predominantly desert, with mountains occupying 20 per cent of its area (O'Sullivan, 2008), it is an oil-rich country that possesses nearly 10 per cent of the world's total reserves. Abu Dhabi, the capital of the country, is the largest and wealthiest emirate in terms of area, population and oil resources. The World Bank's latest published data indicate that the UAE has a population of 9.16m inhabiting a total area of 83,600 square kilometres. According to the UAE constitution (2011), Islamic Sharia is the main source of legislation and Arabic is the official language of the country. Therefore, Islamic values are well connected with UAE public policies and social practices (Kirk, 2010). Oil revenues helped the country to achieve an unprecedented economic and societal development in a very short time. The leaders of the country, while pushing very hard for modernisation, dedicate similar efforts to maintain and promote UAE cultural and Islamic values among young Emiratis (Lawson and Al-Naboodah, 2008).

The development of the UAE formal education system started in the 1950s with 20 schools and less than 4,000 students, most of whom were male (Al Farra, 2011). Before that period, education was traditional and humble, mainly provided by religious men and women teachers who taught the Quran, Hadith, Islamic rituals and writing to children in their immediate area (Lootah, 2006). The UAE higher education system started in 1976 with the establishment of the UAE University, followed by the Higher Colleges of Technology, based on the Canadian model, in 1988 and Zayed University, based on a US model, in 1998. Although the three federal institutions follow UAE cultural traditions in terms of gender segregation, the language of instruction in all programmes, except for Arabic and Islamic courses, is English, with the curriculum following non-indigenous models in terms of teaching and content. The majority of faculty members are from the USA, UK, Australia or Canada, with a few Arabs who received

Western education that consists of predominantly USA and UK degrees (Kirk, 2010). The education system, while being relatively new, has been rapidly expanding because of the educational policy that encourages prestigious and private universities to open campuses inside free zone educational cities established by the Emirate governments to meet the increasing demand for higher education and foreign degrees. This made the higher education sector very complex, comprising of few federal and public universities along with many private foreign institutions that follow different models (e.g. American, Australian, British, Canadian) and are established under different Emirate authorities.

3. Literature review

Many scholars indicate that leadership development is in its infancy, requiring more research, a stronger theoretical foundation and more attention to situational and participant differences. For example, Hotho and Dowling (2010) suggested using a socio-constructivist framework for developing more effective leadership programmes that recognise contextual factors and students' differences, which are underestimated in current leadership programmes. They argued that for developing more effective programmes, we should move away from emphasising input (knowledge) over interaction (practice). Petriglieri *et al.* (2011) took a similar perspective by arguing that the inferences we make from experiences are inspired by the images, stories, and assumptions we have in mind about others and ourselves. Thus, leadership programmes must help students to become conscious of those images, allowing them to draw meaning and lessons from past and current experiences. They argued that leadership courses must focus more on how we teach rather than what we teach, and this require educators who are able to take learning "beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills" by complementing conceptual knowledge with critical discourses and reflective writing assignments about students' experiences and life stories (p. 446). Hay and Hodgkinson (2006) also argued that the current dominant theories of leadership are "framed by systems-control thinking" and are conceptualised in ways that make them very challenging to teach (p. 144). Thus, re-thinking leadership as a "two way process of influence" may offer a more achievable approach for its teaching, as teaching leaders how to negotiate is a more feasible task than teaching them how to inspire others (p. 155). In adopting this approach, educators need to move towards a de-centralised approach to teaching where both the teacher and students work collaboratively to construct knowledge and make sense of their experiences. Many other authors from a number of countries have also made this point (e.g. Densten and Gray, 2001).

Giles and Smith (2012) contended that current approaches to leadership development are dominated by the neoliberal ideology that gives priority to skill development and rationalist argument at the expense of critical and experiential approaches resulting in a decontextualisation of curriculum. They further argued that leadership programmes must have "an interpretive and critical priority towards emancipatory ends" (p. 233). They introduced a graduate educational leadership programme that addresses local issues in Auckland. In this programme, students were asked to write papers that critique local leadership practices and to discuss stories from their own experiences. This was carried out in addition to mentoring sessions with academic faculty and guest lectures that engage students in critical dialogues about leadership issues in their local environment. Kezar and Carducci (2009) also pointed out that leadership development programmes should move away from the traits, skills, behaviours and value-free traditional assumptions and view leadership as a process that involves mutual influence and power with a strong recognition of the role of values and traditions, culture and contextual factors, and history in leadership development. They introduced what they call "revolutionary leadership development programmes", which, according to them, should include reflective assignments, collaborative activities, address cultural sensitivity and context-specific issues, provide

opportunities for dialogue and exchange of ideas, train participants on facilitation and negotiation skills, and allow participants to understand the influence of culture, history, and social factors in the leadership process. Nash and Scott (2009) raised a similar point, noting that spiritual leadership has received increasing attention during the last few years. They argued that combining spiritual aspects with material ones (the soul with the intellect) provides a holistic learning experience, which results in a more complete leadership. They further explained that leadership is an interdisciplinary field that is strongly connected to many humanities subjects such as psychology, philosophy, religious studies, history, literature and art (see also Samier, 2009). All these subjects foster heart learning more than head learning. Thus, any leadership programme should address the universal and the particular, the feeling and the intellect, the spiritual and the material needs of human being (Nash and Scott, 2009).

Several scholars have discussed the domination of Western theories that assume cultural homogeneity over leadership curricula in the Middle East and other developing countries. For example, Jaeger and Kanungo (1990) argued that Western management theories and practices became the “sacred cows” due to their remarkable contributions to the economic growth of developed industrialised countries (p. 1). This resulted in uncritical adoption and transfer of Western thought and practices in many management programmes in developing countries despite the clear contradiction in the socio-cultural environment between both contexts, leading to inefficiency and ineffectiveness of organisational practices due to the limited applicability of the Western thought in those countries. Management practices in developing countries, according to Jaeger and Kanungo (1990), require different approaches and skills to cope with the many specific challenges faced by leaders in these countries such as the instability of political and economic conditions and the scarcity of intellectual and physical resources. Therefore, they call for developing indigenous approaches to management in developing countries that are derived from their local culture. Rodwell (1998) took a slightly different view; she argued that although there is ample evidence of the uncritical adoption of Western leadership models in developing countries with less consideration to their appropriateness and relevance to local contexts, the knowledge base required for developing indigenous educational leadership curricula remains limited. Thus, we should improve our understanding of cross-cultural issues that allow us to conduct successful adaptation of models and materials to local contexts such as that of a number of authors who have been investigating cultural dimensions like Hofstede (1993), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012), and Lewis (2006). Rodwell also recommended using the models that are congruent with indigenous values, norms and practices.

Samier (2014) argued that leadership curricula in the UAE predominantly reflect the USA and UK perspectives, with little or no adaption to the local culture. She advocated a hybrid leadership curriculum that integrates international and indigenous knowledge to prepare Emiratis to be global leaders while preserving and maintaining their cultural and Islamic values. ElKaleh and Samier (2013) argued for teaching Islamic leadership and Islamic work ethics in administration and leadership programmes to bridge the gap between Muslims’ espoused and practiced values. They suggested using case studies and the biographies of great Muslim leaders to help students develop their moral imagination and build their character. Shah (2010) raised similar concerns by arguing that leadership theories are rooted in Western philosophy and values with a hidden assumption of their universality or applicability in all contexts; however, people from different backgrounds and cultures perceive and practice leadership differently based on their cultural values and belief system. She pointed out that although cultural differences received some attention in leadership research, the significance of faith and/or religion has not been recognised yet. Relevant to this point is Metcalfe and Mimouni’s (2011) claim that current scholarship reflects Western industrial values and cultural norms that emphasise technical rationality,

performance measurement, individualism, profit maximisation and value-based leadership theories promoting ethical practices for the purpose of achieving organisational competitiveness, not social well-being. They argued that the transfer of those values through globalisation distorted Islamic leadership that is concerned with human and social welfare, sustainability, economic prosperity and social justice. Thus, leadership in the Middle East needs to be debated and discussed in context in which leaders strongly identify with Islamic and Arab culture. These arguments are consistent with the results of Ali and Schaupp (1992) and Ali (1993) who found that the consultative leadership style is the most preferred and commonly used style in Arab countries. This is seen in the leadership of Sheikh Zayed, the founder of the UAE, which, as contended by Suliman and Hayat (2011), is mainly derived from Islam. Metcalfe *et al.* (2011) also argued that the success of the Emirates offers a good development model that is premised on Islamic leadership while challenging the neoliberal market values. This further enhances the necessity of leadership programmes that are derived from Islamic culture and history while being informed by the knowledge and practices of the East and the West.

Some may argue that scholarship and religion should be separated so what we teach should not be confused with or influenced by religious and/or Islamic values. Actually, this separation between secular and spiritual aspects of life is not feasible in Islam because for Muslims, Islam is a comprehensive way of life in which there is no distinction between sacred and secular spheres (Ramadan, 2007). Quran describes leaders as those who are inspired by God to do good deeds, promote Islamic principles, help followers grow in their faith and observe Islamic teachings (Quran 21:73). Therefore, a major responsibility of Muslim leaders is to help followers develop their faith (Beekun and Badawi, 2009). According to Ibn Taymiyyah (2005), a classic Muslim scholar (661-728), leadership in Islam is a trust (*amanah*) that should be fulfilled to the best of one's knowledge and effort. He explained that on the day of judgment, leaders may experience disgrace and regret if they did not tackle their leadership roles effectively and honourably. Ibn Khaldun (1967), a medieval Arab sociologist (1332-1406), discussed that good leadership "is equivalent to mildness" (p. 153). When the leader is mild and forgives the faults and sins of his followers, they trust and love him. But if the leader is harsh and eager to select followers' mistakes and sins, they become fearful and lie to protect themselves. He believed that *asabiya* (building brotherly relations), supported by religion, is the major factors in developing leadership. However, sustaining leadership depends on possessing certain qualities such as generosity, forgiveness, tolerance, support of dependents, patience, faithful, commitment, respect for old people, fairness and care, humility, fulfilment of duties, and avoidance of fraud. Contemporary business management scholars define Islamic leadership as a "social exchange" (Beekun and Badawi, 2009, p. 7) and a "shared influence" (Ali, 2009, p. 163) process wherein leaders, while working for the well-being of society, seek advice and insights from followers through *Shura*. Metcalfe and Murfin (2011) argued that Islamic leadership involves a psychological contract in which the leader dedicates himself to protect, guide and serve his/her followers. ElKaleh and Samier (2013) contended that leadership in Islam is a responsibility rather than a privilege. It is an opportunity to attain God's love through self-denial and dedication to serve others and build a good community that is guided by Islamic principles.

Leadership in Islam offers a comprehensive approach to leadership that is different from Western approaches in a number of ways. First, it is neither limited to senior management positions nor exclusive to those who possess special traits or extraordinary qualities. In Islam, every Muslim is a leader within his small community. The Prophet advised that "Everyone of you is a guardian and everyone of you is responsible for his wards" (Al-Bukhari and Muslim, Book 1, Hadith 283). However, according to Jabnoun (2012), some people may possess greater leadership abilities than others. Therefore, he argued that

leadership in Islam is considered both a trait and skill, as some Muslims may have higher leadership abilities than others. Another important distinction of Islamic leadership is the practice of *Shura* (consultation), which is seeking insights and advice from followers who are intellectually capable to provide advice for the leader. *Shura* is a critical component of Islamic leadership because it is a means to strengthen one's leadership capabilities.

The Quran emphasises the importance of *Shura* by describing Muslims as those who conduct their affairs through the practice of *Shura* (Quran, 42:38).

The third distinction of Islamic leadership is that it is based on building brotherly relations among followers. The Prophet advised, "No one of you shall become a true believer until he desires for his brother what he desires for himself" (Al-Bukhari and Muslim). Armstrong (2002) argued that the rapid spread and acceptance of Islamic message reflects the genius of the Prophet who adopted a unique philosophy of creating brotherly relations among Muslims by replacing blood with faith. This philosophy helped him to establish a just and flourished Islamic society through the caliphal tradition, and it also helped in extending justice principles to non-Muslim in a very short time, which further accelerated the spread of his message (see also Ali, 2005). The fourth distinction of Islamic leadership is that followers are not passive; they take an active role by participating actively in *Shura* and by correcting the leader whenever he/she deviates from the right path. The Prophet advised, "among the greatest types of Jihad is a just statement before a tyrannical ruler" (at-Tirmidhi, 2174). Abu Bakr, the first Khalifa, said, "If I do well help me, and if I do ill, then put me right". This perspective is absent from the Western models. This perspective is absent from the current visionary approaches where the focus is on the leader's charisma and inspirational ability thus leaving followers dependent and passive. The fifth distinction is that leadership in Islam is not self-oriented or profit oriented. It is more concerned with the development of a just, moral and prosperous society, consistent with the values promoted by critical theory. Economic gains come as a result of Muslims' hard work, self-denial and dedication to their community. Metcalfe and Murfin (2011) explained that Muslim leaders are expected to be more humane and ethically oriented. They should act as role models and according to Islamic principles and laws. Therefore, ethics and moral values such as justice, humility, compassion, consultation, patience, tolerance, honesty, kindness and empathy are key components of Islamic leadership.

Yukl (1999) argued that although transformational and charismatic leadership offer significant views about effective leadership, they have conceptual weaknesses that may hinder their capacity to illustrate effective leadership. For example, the intellectual stimulation of transformational leadership is ambiguous and does not explain what leaders actually do to influence followers' cognitive processes. In contrast, Islamic leadership provides ample examples of what leaders and followers do to achieve effective leadership through the study of the Prophet and his companions. Actually, Islamic leadership offers fewer explicit concepts but ample cases and examples of what leaders can do in different situations and contexts that carry implicit concepts and values. This is how God taught the Prophet to lead effectively by telling him the stories of other Prophets since the creation of Adam till his time. Yukl (1999) also suggested that one solution in overcoming the heroic bias in leadership theories is to look at leadership as a shared process that enhances collective and individual capacity. Islamic leadership with its perception of leadership as a mutual and shared influence process overcomes this heroic assumption and offers, when taught with Western and other international approaches, a comprehensive approach to leadership that can be universally applicable. This review suggests that there is a critical need to develop a leadership identity for Muslim countries that derives its leadership values and behaviours from Islamic culture and history while informed by the leadership models and practices of other cultures in order to develop a solid and comprehensive understanding of leadership across the globe without sacrificing or compromising Islamic principles and/or cultural values.

4. Theoretical framework and philosophical foundation of the study

The study uses Habermas' account of critical theory as a theoretical framework to guide and inform the research process from its initial design up to its final conclusions and recommendations. Critical theory is a reasoning tool and a reflective model. "Critical" refers to the use of a systematic process in reviewing and analysing social and cultural phenomena. In this process, hidden and taken-for-granted assumptions that underpin cultural practices are questioned along with their negative impacts on society and organisations (Gall *et al.*, 1999, p. 361). Many scholars recommend the use of critical theory when the researcher's aim is to solve a social pressing problem. For example, Comstock (1982) argued that critical research starts from a practical problem with the aim of uncovering its unrecognised constraints and suggesting possible actions that may help subjects to liberate themselves. Guba and Lincoln (1994) took a similar perspective by recommending the use of critical theory when the aim of inquiry is to critique and transform certain structures in society, including knowledge structures in graduate and undergraduate programmes. This perspective makes critical theory a great fit for the current study that aims to address the domination of Western traditions over indigenous and Islamic knowledge within leadership curricula. Since Habermas' theories of knowledge and human interests and communicative action are widely used in higher and adult education (Brookfield, 2005), both have been selected as a theoretical framework for the current study. According to Cooper (2010), Habermas' (1971) theory of knowledge and human interests offers a unique and comprehensive approach to knowledge within which natural and objective sciences (technical interests) are balanced with interpretive research and humanistic perspectives (practical interests) through reasoning and critical reflection (emancipatory interest). Based on this theory, the study attempts to create knowledge through the use of these three constitutive interests by mixing the objective rigorous information of the quantitative methods with the different humanistic perspectives of the qualitative methods in a critical and reflective manner. Habermas' (1984) theory of communicative action is another important theory that has been extensively cited and used in adult education, as it provides a comprehensive framework for developing critical and participatory approaches to learning (Gouthro, 2006). Communicative action, according to Habermas (1984), is the action or activity taken by two or more individuals to reach mutual understanding leading to consensual decisions. For communicative action to take place, validity claims, the assumptions people make about the truth and sincerity of the speech, have to be satisfied. The three validity claims suggested by Habermas (1979) are as follows: truth as the "obligation to provide certain grounds"; rightness as the "obligation to provide justification; and truthfulness as the "obligation to provide trustworthy" (p. 65). Habermas (1987) believed that when people communicate, new meanings and concepts emerge, leading to change in perspectives and creation of new ideas. Therefore, he argued that universities should help people develop their communicative competences and ethical values through the use of discourse and communicative action. According to this theoretical framework, a leadership curriculum that provides students with a balanced and holistic learning experience should address the three cognitive interests (technical, practical, and emancipatory) and allow for communicative action to take place.

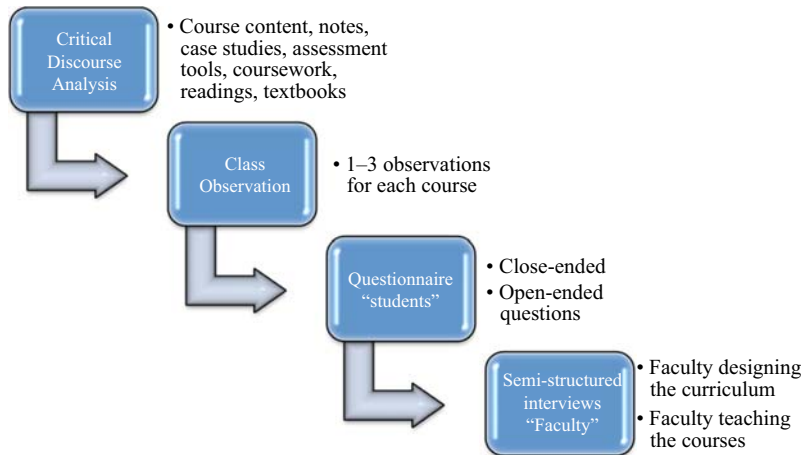
The study uses classical pragmatism that originally emerged from the writings of Charles Peirce, William James, and John Dewey as a philosophical foundation (Johnson *et al.*, 2007). Pragmatism, especially that of Dewey's, is considered as an "anti-philosophy" because it takes attention away from epistemological issues and focuses instead on the human-environment interactions. These interactions lead to different experiences from which knowledge is produced and further inform our actions (Greene and Hall, 2010). According to Dewey, no knowledge will provide us with a "true account of the world", as different experiences will result in different knowledge. In this regard, pragmatism endorses uncertainty where knowledge produced by research is relative and not absolute, which

means that the pragmatic inquiry provides us with the best answers we can currently get, as knowledge and truth may vary across persons, places and times (Johnson and Gary, 2010). Therefore, from a pragmatic view of point, research results give us “warranted assertions” instead of absolute truth (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010). Pragmatism is selected as a philosophical foundation for the study for three main reasons. First, it is congruent with critical theory. Pragmatism holds an explicit value-oriented approach to inquiry, which focuses on addressing important social problems and the consequences or actions the research can bring to solve them, and has a critical form that is consistent with critical theory (Maxcy, 1991). The pragmatic method “maxim” enables the researcher to select any combination of methods that best answers research questions (Creswell and Clark, 2011), which encourages creativity and frees the researcher from choosing specific methods that are tied to one of the dominant research paradigms. Second, pragmatism is congruent with the researcher’s epistemological, ontological and methodological beliefs. According to Greene and Hall (2010), our philosophical assumptions influence what we choose to study and how to approach it. Since the researcher’s main focus is the research problem and is neither a positivist nor a constructionist one, but strongly believes that research questions should be the driving force for selecting the methods that would best answer those questions, pragmatism was found the best philosophy to adopt. Third, the major authors of mixed methods research (Johnson *et al.*, 2007; Morgan, 2007) advocate pragmatism as the primary philosophy for the mixed methods approach; they argued that pragmatism, through its attempt to integrate paradigms and synthesise insights from qualitative and quantitative research, can help mixed methods research to exist peacefully as a third research approach without contradictions or inconsistencies that provides balanced and warranted research results. In data analysis, pragmatism uses abductive reasoning to draw conclusions from the knowledge produced by the combined use of qualitative and quantitative methods. When using abductive reasoning, Feilzer (2010) recommended that the researcher moves back and forth between inductive reasoning, which is used to draw conclusions from the qualitative data, and deductive reasoning, which is used to draw conclusions from the quantitative data. A good example would be the researcher using a sequential design wherein the inductive results from the qualitative data inform the deductive process on the quantitative data (Morgan, 2007). This is what happened in the current study in which the results from the critical discourse analysis and observations informed the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the survey.

5. Research approach and methodology

The study employs a mixed methods approach that is based on the pragmatic assumptions of knowledge. The purpose for mixing research methods is complementarity, development and triangulation in which methods were mixed to produce more comprehensive results, to develop initial findings, and to avoid bias that may arise from using one single method (Greene, 2007). The study uses a sequential design of four research methods: critical discourse analysis of course materials, class observations, student survey, and faculty interviews. According to Creswell (2009), taking a sequential design allows for investigating the phenomenon from different perspectives, provides deep insights on the research problem and facilitates value-based and action-oriented research. Greene (2007) suggested that any research study should start with a well-justified and well-defined purpose rather than a design or method. She believed that the methodology is “the servant of purpose”; thus, the design of the study should be derived directly from its purpose (p. 97). Since mixed methods research with a developmental purpose should follow a sequential design, the current study uses different research methods to collect data on the various aspects and dimensions of the curriculum in four sequential phases (see Figure 1). Qualitative and quantitative methods in this design are given equal weight and importance.

Figure 1.
The sequential design of the current research study



5.1 Site selection and sampling strategy

Universities were selected using purposive convenience sampling (Teddle and Yu, 2007) in which research sites were selected on the basis of the availability of leadership courses or components within their education and business programmes and the willingness of the institution and faculty members to participate in the study. Table I illustrates the courses selected in each institution. Courses and research participants were selected using complete collection or criterion sampling (Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007) in which all courses, teaching faculty and students who were willing to participate in the study were selected. First, all courses offered by education and business schools in the three institutions were reviewed to identify the leadership courses, modules and/or components within each college. Then, faculty members who were teaching the selected leadership courses were invited by email to participate in the study. All education faculty members (five) who were invited agreed to take part in the study, resulting in a 100 per cent response rate. However, only two out of five business faculty members agreed to participate, resulting in only a 40 per cent response rate.

5.2 Research methods

Research methods included critical discourse analysis of course content and materials, 1–3 class observations for each selected course, surveying students registered in the investigated courses using both close-ended and open-ended questions, and, finally, interviewing faculty members who taught and designed the curriculum of the selected courses using semi-structured interviews. The following is a detailed description of each research method.

5.2.1 Critical discourse analysis of course materials. Derived from Habermas’ critical theory, critical discourse analysis helps the analyst to understand social problems by

Institution	Programme	Leadership course
University A	Bachelor	ABBUSL
University A	Masters	AMEDCL
University B	Masters	BMEDCL
University B	Masters	BMBUSO
University B	Doctoral	BDEDCL
University C	Masters	CMEDCL

Table I.
The selected leadership courses

uncovering the ideological assumptions hidden in the written texts and spoken words (Fairclough, 1989). It is a type of analysis that investigates text from social, cultural, and political perspectives (Luke, 2002). Critical discourse analysis acknowledges that our beliefs, culture and knowledge influence the way we produce, read and interpret texts. Thus, critical discourse analysis is a “highly context-sensitive” approach that aims to improve society by drawing attention to unjust practices and social inequities (Huckin, 1997, p. 78). It includes three levels of analysis: the text, the discursive practices, and the social context (Fairclough, 1993).

Huckin (1997) suggested two stages for approaching the text: in the first, the analyst approaches the text as an ordinary reader who tries to understand it in an uncritical manner; the second involves stepping back from the text with a critical eye that raises questions about its hidden or taken-for-granted assumptions and how it could have been constructed differently. While critical discourse analysis suits the nature, purpose and theoretical framework of this research well, it is also beneficial because it frees the researcher from internal constraints such as bias and taken-for-granted assumptions by encouraging the investigator to question and challenge his/her own cultural beliefs and assumptions. It also helps the researcher to understand and identify social problems by challenging and unmasking the hidden ideological assumptions in the written text or oral words (Fairclough, 1993).

5.2.2 Class observation. The researcher conducted one to three structured class observations for each leadership course, a method that is well established in pedagogical and curriculum research (Baker, 2006). As argued by Mulhall (2003), observation has the advantage of capturing data from its natural environment, providing evidence for the dynamic process involved in social settings and social interaction more than that provided by the interview, and providing triangulation to balance personal views in interviews. Thus, using observation helps the researcher understand what actually happens in the classroom in terms of student participation, faculty responses, leadership theories, concepts and cases under investigation, and the cultural and work issues that are discussed. An observation protocol (Creswell and Clark, 2011) was developed and used to keep the researcher focused and to help in writing accurate and organised field notes. The main focus has been on the leadership theories and concepts discussed in class, students’ engagement and participation, the opportunities available for students to apply the theories in real-life situations, and how students relate the leadership concepts and theories to their own cultural and Islamic values. In addition to the observation guide, the researcher wrote reflective journals after each observation session, summarising the main ideas and thoughts that had emerged during the observation. These journals were very useful during data analysis.

Class observation preceded the administration of the survey and the interview because students’ and teachers’ behaviour in the classroom could be influenced by research questions as they would know what the researcher is looking for. Therefore, conducting the observation in an early stage of the research leads to more accurate results by limiting participant bias as recommended by Glesne (2011).

5.2.3 Student survey. The study uses a questionnaire that includes closed-ended and open-ended questions to investigate students’ view of the leadership curriculum, its applicability to the working environment in the UAE and its relevancy to cultural and Islamic values. The survey consists of three main sections. Section (1) includes demographic data and course information. Section (2) consists of 35 closed-ended questions that investigate students’ views of the different aspects of the curriculum and to what extent the curriculum addresses cultural and Islamic values using a six-point Likert scale. A “not applicable” option was added in case the situation does not apply to the student. Finally, Section (3) consists of six open-ended questions that allow students to freely evaluate and explain the cultural and Islamic components of the curriculum, allowing them to express and elaborate on their ideas,

improve the validity of fixed-response questions (Schutt, 2006), and help the researcher to gain a deeper understanding leading to correct interpretation of responses.

The survey was self-developed and validated following the common procedures recommended in the field (Field, 2009; Field and Hole, 2005; Greene and D'Oliveira, 2009). To ensure content validity, the items were developed on the basis of a careful review of relevant literature and revised with both experts in the field and prospective respondents (Schutt, 2006). Translation of the survey followed the recommended procedures in the literature (Brislin, 1970, 1976). The goal of the translation was to develop an equivalent meaning of the items in the original instrument rather than a word-to-word translation (Thorsteinsson, 2012). In pursuing this goal, the original survey was translated from English into Arabic by a bilingual translator who was knowledgeable about the field, then the both versions were reviewed by two bilingual professionals whose native language was Arabic to ensure that each item carried the same meaning in both languages, and finally the Arabic version was translated by another translator back into English. Finally, a focus group of three bilingual professionals, whose native language was Arabic and who were fluent in English, reviewed all three versions (original, translated, back-translated), and minor corrections were made in both the original English and Arabic translated versions to improve the quality and clarity of words, and to ensure that each item reflected exactly the same meaning across both versions. The questionnaire was then pilot tested with two groups of students. Reliability was measured using Cronbach's α (coefficient alpha) test. Cronbach's α for the scale was 0.981, which shows a high degree of internal consistency of the questionnaire. Cronbach's α for the split-half test was 0.962 and 0.968, and the correlation between the sums of items in each half was 0.919 (Brace *et al.*, 2009). These results indicate that the instrument has sufficient reliability to measure students' view of leadership curricula. The researcher administered the survey during class time with an informed consent form (using standard protocols). Participants were given a small thank you gift upon the completion of the survey. The data from the demographic and closed-ended questions were entered into SPSS for analysis using appropriate statistical tests, whereas critical discourse analysis was used to analyse responses from the open-ended questions.

5.2.4 Faculty interview. Based on students' responses, semi-structured interviews were conducted with faculty members who taught or designed the investigated curriculum to collect complementary and explanatory data and to obtain faculties' insights and recommendations on how to further develop the curriculum. An interview guide was developed on the basis of a comprehensive review of literature that addresses the current status of management research and programmes and the critical perspectives in teaching leadership (e.g. Ali, 1992; Metcalfe and Mimouni, 2011). This instrument consists of 12 open-ended questions. The first four request information on faculty's credentials, teaching experience, exposure to multicultural environment and country of origin. The content of the course, the teacher's role in designing the curriculum, the challenges or barriers in delivering the course material, and the methods used to help students apply the theories and concepts learned in class are investigated in questions 5–10. The last two questions (11 and 12) look at possible changes and developmental aspects of the curriculum. The interview guide was revised with four faculty members who were experts in the field, then it was pilot tested with a faculty member who had experience in teaching leadership and whose students took the pilot survey.

Seven faculty members were interviewed. Each interview lasted 40–60 minutes and took place in the faculty member's office after consent forms were signed. The interview was tape recorded and the researcher took field notes as well. The researcher then transcribed the interview data and sent the transcript to each faculty member by email for a member check.

Receiving no comments from faculty members on the interview transcript was considered as no objection to its content. Pseudonyms in data reporting were used to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of responses.

5.3 Data analysis procedures

Each method was analysed separately using qualitative data analysis techniques for qualitative methods and quantitative data analysis techniques for quantitative methods (Bryman, 2006). Critical discourse analysis was used to analyse course materials and the data collected from class observations, student responses to the open-ended questions of the survey, and faculty interviews. Descriptive and inferential statistical tests were used to analyse the data from the closed-ended questions of the survey. The results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis were integrated at the interpretative level during which the researcher went through the qualitative and quantitative findings, compared and assessed the results, and came up with a conclusion about how the qualitative and quantitative findings addressed the research questions (Greene, 2007). According to Creswell and Clark (2011), inferences are the conclusions or interpretations derived from qualitative and quantitative results. This included summarising the data into final coherent and cohesive themes through abductive reasoning, which is the process through which the researcher moves back and forth between the knowledge produced by qualitative and quantitative methods and brings them together through reflection to best answer research questions (Morgan, 2007). Charmaz (2011, p. 157) explained that abductive reasoning aims for “imaginative interpretation”, as it involves intuitive explanations and hypotheses that may emerge through the research process depending on the researcher’s expertise, intuition, and experience. Abductive reasoning is the process of deriving meaning from qualitative and quantitative data with the goal of finding useful connections to offer best possible explanations, which was followed in this study.

6. Research results

This section presents the main findings of each research method, followed by a critical discussion of its findings in relation to relevant research questions and literature.

6.1 Results of the critical discourse analysis of course materials

Results show that education courses included more cultural and Islamic materials than business courses. Most of the readings in education courses were very comprehensive and provided a thorough review on leadership models and theories such as transformational and transactional leadership, authentic and spiritual leadership, leadership in Islam, servant leadership, distributed and shared leadership, and cross-cultural leadership. However, some articles were very technical and challenging for masters’ students. Whereas two of the education courses had more diverse materials that discuss leadership in different countries, including leadership in the UAE and Islam, the other two focused on leadership models and practices in the USA only. Business courses focused on Western theories and models of leadership, effective leadership practices in organisations, and the significant role of leadership in implementing change. All materials were derived from either the USA or UK, with none of them addressing leadership in the UAE or Islam. Most of the case studies were mainly Western or Harvard review cases. However, assignments directly linked class instruction and discussion to the working environment in the UAE and required students to apply the Western concepts and theories to their local context. Table II presents a summary of course materials and assessment methods in each course.

6.2 Observation results

For each investigated course, one to three observations were conducted depending on the availability and approval of the faculty member (see Table III). In total, three education classes

Table II.
A summary of course materials and assessment methods

Course	Course materials	Assessment
AMEDCL	Diverse, address leadership in different countries including leadership in the UAE and Islam	Online discussions, leadership reflective statement, article critiques, class presentation
BMEDCL	Comprehensive but sometimes challenging. Focus on the USA leadership models and practices with few articles on Arab and Islamic leadership	Class presentation, written exam, a scholarly paper on leadership issues in the UAE
CMEDCL	Focus on UK and USA leadership practices	A case study of educational leadership models from a global perspective, an academic paper on an area of interest to student
BDEDCL	Diverse and comprehensive, address leadership in different countries including leadership in the UAE and Islam	A research proposal and plan, class presentation and a research paper
ABBUSL	Focus on USA models and practices of leadership in addition to a guest lecture on Islamic leadership	Quizzes, reflection papers, exams and case analysis
BMBUSO	Focus on UK and USA models and practices of leadership	Case analysis, class presentation, final report on an implementation of a change project

Table III.
A summary of observations

Course	Observations	Class time	Student number
AMEDCL	2	9:00–4:00	13
BMEDCL	3	5:00–9:00	10
CMEDCL	1	5:00–9:00	37
BDEDCL	2	9:00–1:00	10
ABBUSL	1	2:00–4:00	38
BMBUSO	2	6:00–10:00	40

had 9–13 students, whereas business classes and the fourth education class had 37–42 students. The teaching style of the big classes took the form of lecturing, whereas the small number of students in education classes allowed for communicative action to take place where students had equal opportunity to participate in class discussion. Styles and theories of leadership (e.g. transformational, servant, charismatic, authentic, distributed, and teacher leadership), ethics of leadership, power and politics at the workplace, emotional intelligence and cross-cultural leadership were the common topics discussed in both business and education classes.

Results shows that class discussions in all courses were well linked to the working environment in the UAE but less aligned to leadership in Islam. Leadership in Islam came up occasionally, except for two education classes in which students consistently referred to Islamic principles of leadership in their discussions and presentations. Whereas all class discussions included cultural values and/or local leadership issues, only a few were centred on Islamic values and/or leadership from an Islamic perspective. Faculty members who either were Muslim or grew up in a multicultural society where they taught Muslim students were more comfortable and able to link class concepts and theories to Islamic values and principles than those who were not exposed to similar experiences. Although most class materials discuss Western theories and models of leadership, class discussions aimed to contextualise the materials by linking them to UAE culture and working environment. The issues associated with importing Western models and curricula were raised in two education courses (BMEDCL, CMEDCL). For example, in BMEDCL, students complained that most of the articles discuss issues that are only related to the USA working environment. This was actually consistent with the results of the critical discourse analysis of this course where many of the readings are derived from the USA. Also, some of the

readings in this course are very challenging for master's students. For example, students did not like the article by Moughrabi (1978) on the Arab personality. They thought he was criticising the Arabs and presenting them in a negative way while he was actually responding to the misconceptions held or presented by other articles about Arab people, particularly the text by Patai (1973). Students' objection shows that they did not understand the reading well because of the complex language, analysis and concepts used in this paper, which make it more suitable for doctoral students.

6.3 Survey results

The study population was students enrolled in the investigated courses. A total of 139 out of 166 students agreed to participate in the study, yielding a response rate of 83.7 per cent. Questionnaire responses were coded and the data were entered into IBM SPSS statistics version 20. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise participants' demographic data and to identify students' overall views on the curriculum. Inferential statistics were used to compare student responses. Since the data were non-normally distributed and were ordinal in nature, non-parametric chi-square test was used to study the differences between student responses, and *p*-value was considered significant at *p* < 0.05. The sample included 97 female students (69.7 per cent) and 42 male students (30.2 per cent). The majority of participants were Muslim (93 per cent) and their age varied from 20 to 50. The subjects were classified into two groups based on college affiliation (business and education). This classification was conducted based on the results of previous research methods (document analysis and class observations) where education courses included more materials and discussions on cultural and Islamic leadership than business courses. Most of participants were UAE nationals (64.75 per cent) and working students (65 per cent). Although the study investigated four education courses and only two business courses, 61 per cent of participants were business students. This was due to an average enrolment in business classes of 38 students.

The overall survey results suggest that all of the leadership courses are well connected with the UAE working environment but less connected with the Islamic principles of leadership (Figure 2). Both business and education students agree on the following class characteristics: the course develops their understanding of leadership practices in their country (76.8 per cent); class discussions address important issues in their society (77 per cent); students are encouraged to use examples from their community (77 per cent); the course helps them to think critically of the situations they encounter in their professional and personal lives (83 per cent); there is a strong relation between what they learn in class and the working environment (75 per cent); and the professor is very skilful in helping them relate leadership concepts to the working environment in their country (77.5 per cent).

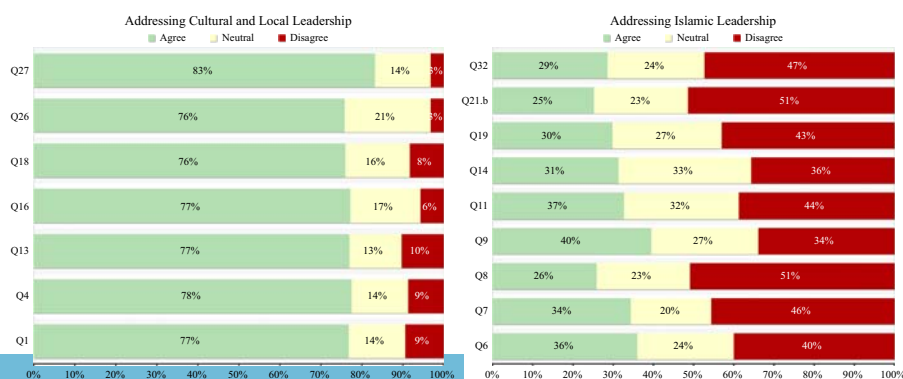


Figure 2. Cultural and Islamic leadership in the curriculum

In contrast, the majority of students do not feel that the course develops their understanding of or includes materials on leadership in Islam. Only 28.6 per cent of students report that they learned a great deal about leadership in Islam, 25.7 per cent indicate that they discuss the behaviour of the Prophet Muhammad in class, 25 per cent agree that course materials provide enough information about Islamic leadership, 35 per cent feel that the course develops their understanding of effective leadership practices in Islam, 34 per cent report that the course encourages them to learn more about leadership in Islam, 31 per cent feel that they are encouraged to use examples from Islamic history, 39 per cent believe that the course helps them to understand their responsibilities as Muslim leaders, and 37 per cent agree that the professor has genuine interest in Islamic leadership. However, the results suggest that all of the courses put great emphasis on values. All students reported that the courses address values of perfection of work (89 per cent), collaboration (84 per cent), face-to-face communication (83 per cent), honesty (81 per cent), trust (80 per cent), courtesy (80 per cent), sincerity and keeping promises (76 per cent), justice (75 per cent), service to others (74 per cent), patience (73 per cent), integrity (73 per cent), consultation (71 per cent), building brotherly relations (71 per cent) and kindness and care (68 per cent). However, both education and business students reported that there was less emphasis on values of save facing or being sensitive to others' feelings, respect for age and seniority (58 per cent), humility (57 per cent), and generosity (52 per cent), even though they are central values in Islam.

Education courses appear to incorporate more local and Islamic materials than business courses (Figure 3). For example, there was a significant difference between business and education courses in terms of focusing on Western models and theories of leadership ($\chi^2_{(2, n=138)} = 9.59, p < 0.05$), with 52 per cent of business students versus 48 per cent of education students reporting that the course focuses on Western models and theories of leadership only. There was also a significant difference in the reading materials between business and education courses ($\chi^2_{(2, n=115)} = 15.93, p < 0.05$), as education courses included more material on Islamic leadership (44 per cent) than business courses (14 per cent). Furthermore, there was a significant difference in the overall quality between education and business courses ($\chi^2_{(2, n=124)} = 8.26, p < 0.05$), with education courses receiving a higher

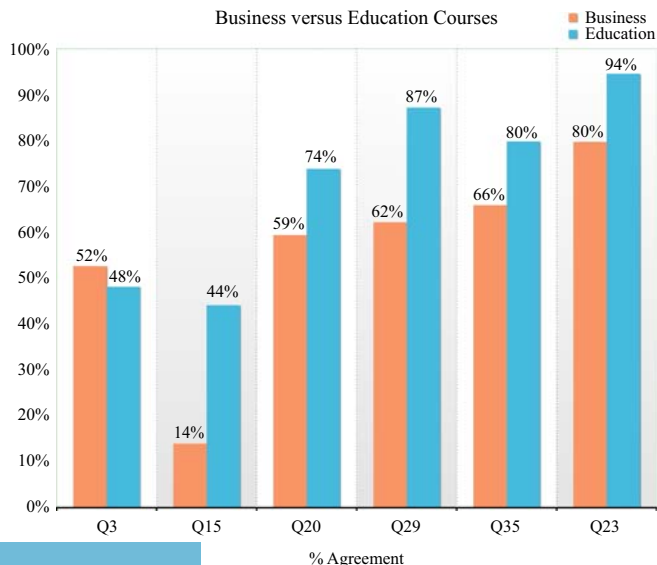


Figure 3.
The significant differences between business and education courses

overall quality rating (74 per cent) than business courses (59 per cent). Consequently, there was a significant difference in meeting students' expectations ($\chi^2_{(2, n=128)} = 9.89, p < 0.05$), with educational courses receiving higher ratings (87 per cent) than business courses (62 per cent). The results also indicate that education students (80 per cent) are more likely to recommend the course to other students than business students (66 per cent), with a significant difference between both groups of ($\chi^2_{(2, n=124)} = 9.13, p < 0.05$). Whereas 76 per cent of students in all courses agreed that assignments help them to apply the theories and concepts they learn to real-life situations in their society, only 30 per cent agreed that assignments facilitate more learning about leadership in Islam. These results were further supported by students' responses to the open-ended questions.

Students' responses to the open-ended questions were analysed separately using critical discourse analysis of students' responses. In terms of the leaders about whom students learned in class, education students reported that Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, John Adams, Abraham Lincoln, Hitler, Napoleon, Julius, and Churchill were the main leaders who were constantly mentioned in class discussions. Business students reported that they learned about many Western leaders and chief executive officers (CEO) of famous firms such as Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, Oprah Winfrey and George Washington. When asked about the extent to which course content addresses leadership issues in their society, business students provided contradictory responses and/or perspectives. Whereas many students reported that the course does not include anything about leadership in their society, others believed that the course is indirectly linked to their society because these Western models are universal and can be applied everywhere.

This discrepancy in student responses can be attributed to the difference in cultural competency and Islamic knowledge held by the two faculty members who were teaching those business courses. Since one of the professors is Arab and Muslim, he was more capable of linking class concepts to many examples that were derived from either the UAE or Islamic history. Therefore, students in this class found the course more relevant to their society. However, there was less discrepancy in the responses of education students who believed that the course is to a great extent linked to leadership in their society, either explicitly "we discussed the leadership style of Sheikh Zayed and how he managed to unite the tribes" or implicitly "we relate what we learn to what we have in our society". This agreement among education students is mainly because three out of the four courses included articles and/or books that discuss leadership in the UAE and/or the Gulf region. Only a few education students believed that the course is not well connected with their society, which creates a challenge for them in writing research papers, and it is evident in the responses from the following student:

S1: The course contains information about leadership in the West and the lecturer tries to link it to our society. Therefore, we face difficulty in writing our research papers because it is not related to our cultural and Islamic society.

In terms of the extent to which the curriculum is linked to leadership in Islam, there was an agreement among the majority of business and education students that the course did not include any information or materials about Islamic leadership:

S91: It doesn't talk about Arab leaders at all, even one example, I think students should develop their leadership skills through reading about Islamic and Arab leaders because Islamic and Arabic society is different. We also shouldn't ignore the values of Islam with prudent leadership.

In developing the curriculum further, some students suggested including literature from the Islamic golden age and adding the most influential leaders in Islamic history in addition to the contemporary leaders who have made remarkable economic and societal development in the UAE, Malaysia, and Turkey. Others believed that the course should be radically changed to reflect leadership styles and behaviours of the Prophet and his companions.

They argued that Islamic leadership is an approach that is more relevant to their society and traditions. A third group of students suggested taking an international approach by stressing both Western and Islamic perspectives so that students can compare and contrast both approaches and select the practices that work best in their society.

In their final comments on the courses, some students indicated that they did not benefit much from the course due to the lack of connection between what they learn and the real life in their society. Others stressed the significance of leadership courses in their personal and professional lives; they hoped institutions would take the concerns raised in this study seriously and act on them. A few suggested inviting leaders from the community to speak about their experience, which could be another way of integrating local voices into the curriculum.

6.4 Results from the interviews

The interview results suggest that teachers' profiles (e.g. nationality, background, experience, and cross-cultural competency) seem to have a great influence on the design of the course. Faculty members who grew up in a multicultural environment or have previous experience in teaching Muslim students seem to be more comfortable with and keen to include Islamic and cultural materials in the curriculum. One of the instructors who used to teach Muslim students in New Zealand and who is quite familiar with Islamic values and beliefs explains the philosophical underpinning of the design of the course as follows:

FA1: We have always had a strong belief that local voices or regional voices should be heard in the course [...] students who graduate from this course will be leaders in this culture so they need to be able to analyse and understand their own perspectives in relation to leadership.

Another faculty member, who grew up in Canada with a German and French background, explains that the model she uses in the UAE is different because "it is far more informed by Islamic and Arab customs". She has been very familiar with Islam because her parents had Muslim friends and she used to supervise Muslim students in Canada, which encouraged her to learn about Islamic scholarship. When she came to the UAE, she started developing a hybrid model that reflects both indigenous and global perspectives:

FB2: Once I came here it became serious to make sure that the major texts in the course show significant regional content so it was not only extra readings I have been adding but I started modifying [the approach] [...] So I came up with an internationalised indigenised model.

Faculty members had different perspectives on the curriculum as it relates to or addresses issues of Islamic leadership or cultural practices. Whereas some think that the course thoroughly covers leadership from Islamic and cultural perspectives, others believe that the course does not explicitly address them; however, they are embedded in the theories that they are teaching or are addressed during class discussions and debates:

FB1: I do not think it addresses them directly although when one talks about servant leadership or pastoral leadership that is an area that is very closely related to Islamic values.

FB3: Unfortunately, with the content wise it does not relate [...] the books of the course are non-Middle Eastern books. None of the European or American books will deal with Islamic leadership or cultural values issues.

It is apparent that the courses are more linked to UAE leadership models, culture and working environments than to Islamic principles and values. Also, faculty members have to meet certain criteria and standards such as using *Harvard Review* cases and/or articles, which are required for international accreditation purposes. Furthermore, having international students with different religious affiliations makes it difficult to teach

Islamic leadership because it may be unfair for non-Muslim students to turn the discussion towards Islamic values and principles:

FC1: Leadership in UAE definitely but not specifically linked to Islam. Definitely in terms of UAE, we have already started to talk about leadership models in the Emirates. In terms of Islam, no.

Class and group discussions, debates, case study analysis, mind mapping, Socratic style teaching, and writing reflective and scholarly research papers are the common methods used by most faculty members to help students apply leadership theories and concepts to real-life situations. Students' resistance to ideas that are in contradiction to their ideas, the absence of big libraries that have good and large collections of books and the lack of full subscription to all databases, micromanagement by senior administrators who sometimes get themselves involved in programme or course content without having the background or understanding of the implications of their interference were the main barriers identified by faculty members. In terms of challenges, identifying good quality materials, in general, and Middle Eastern and Islamic scholarship, in particular, and the lack of linguistic proficiency by students have been identified as the major challenges faced by most instructors. Some argued that a full integration of Islamic and cultural perspectives would not occur unless the textbooks and academic materials that discuss leadership in the UAE, Middle East and/or Islam are available:

FC1: There is a big discrepancy in language. When we ask them [students] to read articles or book chapters, which are all in English then the language is an issue. We are spending 30% of time in class dealing with language issues having to explain the language rather than the concept. So I think the materials coupled with the language are the big two challenges.

7. Discussion of the results

This section presents the integrated findings from the four research methods and links them to relevant research questions and literature. In terms of the leadership models and theories that are being taught in UAE business and education management programs, the overall results suggest that most of them are mainly Western theories that have been developed by North American scholars such as transformational, charismatic, strategic, servant, authentic, distributed, participative and cross-cultural leadership. Only two education courses included some indigenous models such as political leadership in the UAE, leadership in Islam, and *Al-Shura* leadership in Oman. It seems that the scarcity of indigenous models and the absence of academic textbooks that discuss leadership from Islamic and cultural perspectives are the main barriers for integrating those perspectives in the curriculum. This view is consistent some scholars' observation that the lack of indigenous and cultural knowledge obliges faculty to use Western cases in the classroom. For example, Ali (2005) argues that research on management from Islamic and cultural perspectives is in its fancy. However, as indicated by Ali (1992) and other management scholars, Arab and Islamic culture offers "untapped resources that can be easily utilised in research and teaching" (p. 15) and many of which are available in English such as Al-Buraey (1988), Al-Farabi (1997), Al-Ghazali (1964), Ali (2005), Ibn Khaldun (1967), among others. More effort is needed to make use of those materials and integrate them into the curriculum. Results also show that instructors exerted genuine efforts to help students think critically about the Western models and link them to the UAE organisations. Course assignments also required application of these theories to the different contexts of the UAE. These results are to some extent inconsistent with Ali (1992), Ali and Camp's (1995), and Samier's (2014) observations that the rapid and quantitative growth in higher education institutions in the Arab countries resulted in uncritical application of Western management theories and practices. Also, two of the education courses received higher satisfaction rate from students

because they adopted a hybrid model in which indigenous, Islamic, and global perspectives of leadership were well integrated into the curriculum. However, this adoption was successful because the faculty members who were teaching these courses had a good understanding of both “the foreign and Arab cultures” (Ali and Camp, 1995, p. 15). In the other courses, discussion of Islamic leadership was implicit rather than explicit, with faculty members leaving this optional for students to make the connection. Therefore, many students, while appreciating the great efforts exerted by faculty members to link the Western models and theories to their local culture, believe that Islamic models of leadership should be included in the curricula. Also, most of their responses show that they feel disconnected from the Western models and case studies they are learning, which reflect leadership and work practices in Western countries. This is consistent with Greenleaf’s (2008) view that nothing is meaningful unless it is related to one’s own experience. Hofstede (1993) also raised a similar concern by arguing that American management theories and models reflect the unique characteristics of the American culture that stresses its market processes, the individual, and managers rather than workers. He further explains that these characteristics are not necessarily espoused or stressed in other cultures. Actually, Islamic principles of leadership stress the collective welfare of society, group interests, and followers’ well-being, which are contradictory to the main characteristics that form the basis for American management theories and models as identified by Hofstede. This can explain why those students felt disconnected from what they are learning.

Results also show that class activities and assignments that foster reflection and critical thinking lead to better understanding of class concepts. For example, using an online discussion forum helped students to think critically about the Western leadership models and theories they were taking in class and to relate them to themselves and to the workplace. Such practices, as argued by Proserpio and Gioia (2007), provide useful engaging means for the current virtual generation of students. Also, providing students with opportunities to practice leadership roles further enhanced the development of their leadership skills on a personal and professional level. As indicated by Petriglieri *et al.* (2011), leadership development is “largely personal development” (p. 430). Therefore, leadership courses should focus more on transformational learning that takes place through reflection on one’s own experiences and beliefs. This was evident in the current study in which reflective writing allowed students to think critically about themselves and become aware of their leadership strengths and weaknesses. Reflective papers also helped students to think critically about their own values and to “raise questions that are moral as well as technical in nature” (Reynolds, 1999, p. 539).

In terms of the extent to which the leadership curricula are relevant to and derived from UAE cultural and Islamic values, overall results suggest that both business and education courses are well connected to the culture and work practices in the UAE but less connected to leadership in Islam. Whereas most course materials and textbooks were imported from either Europe or North America, most of class discussions and assignments were linked to leadership practices in the UAE. However, little attention was given to leadership in Islam, with faculty members leaving this optional for students to make the connection or to discuss it in their assignments. Most students reported that the courses did not have enough information about leadership in Islam. They argued that Islamic leadership is an approach that is more relevant to their society and traditions and Islamic history is very rich with leadership models to which they can easily identify. Results also show that education courses were more relevant to UAE cultural and Islamic values than business courses. Because education as a discipline is more human oriented and business is more market and profit oriented, education courses tended to focus more on the human aspects of leadership, which resulted in more inclusion of cultural and Islamic materials into the curriculum. However, business courses focused more on efficiency and business

practices that lead to higher levels of performance and profits with an assumption that theories are science that can be applicable everywhere. Thus, they tended to include less cultural and Islamic materials in the curriculum. Consequently, education courses suffered less from the market model and neoliberal policies and received higher rates of satisfaction from students.

A question that comes to mind is that if there is some agreement about what makes effective leadership, evident across the leadership literature in which a number of factors are consistently identified, why is there still a leadership crisis in many organisations as many scholars have argued (e.g. Burns, 1978; Lipman, 2011)? It is definitely not the shortage of knowledge, as there are ample theories and models that discuss almost the same ideas internationally, sometimes using different terminology; however, forms of expression in application differ. Nevertheless, based on the research in the field, it is more likely a lack of application and the absence of context that would take different societal configurations, culture, and political factors into consideration. As indicated by Al-Buraey (1988), effective leadership models should be embedded in the ideology and culture of the people. Also, contingency theories show that different contexts call for different leadership behaviours and practices and that leadership varies across situations and cultures; therefore, it cannot have a universal effect (Glynn and DeJordy, 2010). Although these factors have been well understood since the emergence of contingency theories, too many continue to teach leadership models and theories that are developed in and for different contexts in forms that are not transferrable. According to the current study, instructor's profiles in terms of cultural competency, previous experience with Muslim students, knowledge of Islamic values, passion, and personal values were found to be critical factors in adapting the curriculum to students' culture and Islamic principles of leadership. Those who were open to learning and had previous experience with Muslim students were more comfortable and were able to include Islamic principles of leadership, and they also encouraged students to take a holistic approach to knowledge and try to learn from all traditions. They believed that each culture has something to offer, and this passion for learning was contagious to students. However, since finding good materials and textbooks on UAE and Islamic leadership was the greatest challenge faced by all faculty members participating in this study, a full integration will not occur until we have textbooks that deal with Western and Islamic traditions linking them in a scholarly scientific way. Otherwise, adapting the curriculum to cultural and Islamic values will continue to be individual efforts and will vary across institutions, disciplines, and faculty members. Also, a full integration will not happen unless we have good collection of resources from both traditions that are available for both faculty and students.

Leadership curricula should be developed in a way that helps students identify with leaders from their own community, the leaders they view as effective and as role models. Klimoski (2006) argued that good role models help in building one's character. This was evident in this study in which students were observed acting similar to their professors, using their own words and body language and practicing their own values. Consequently, as argued by ElKaleh and Samier (2013), using the biographies of great Muslim and national leaders will help students build their character and "apprehend the situation under the right principles" (Hartman, 2006, p. 77). Said (1993) also contended that people should use stories to assert their identities and sense of belonging, so using national and Islamic stories would help students maintain their UAE and Islamic Identity and feel connected with their community. The Prophet is the first leader in Islam and his leadership style has been recognised not only by Muslims but also by Western scholars. For example, Michael Hart (1979) considered him as one of the most influential leaders across history. Armstrong (2002) regarded his wise leadership as the most influential factor for the rapid spread of Islam. Therefore, many case studies can be written about the

leadership style of the Prophet and his companions as well as successful historical and contemporary Muslim leaders such as Sheikh Zayed and Mahathir Mohamad who were the driving force behind the development of the UAE and Malaysia. According to Ali (2005), the rise and fall of nations and organisations can be attributed to effective leadership, and this is evident in the effective leadership of both leaders that contributed to the remarkable development in both countries. Including such historical figures in the curriculum will play a significant role in leadership development as suggested by Smith (2007) who discussed the importance of reflecting on historical events to guide and inform present and future behaviour. Smith (2007) also argued that discussing historical events helps students to gain wisdom and develop sound judgment skills.

8. Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate leadership curricula in UAE management programmes and to suggest possible developmental approaches that may help in indigenising the curriculum and bridging the gap between theory and practice in Arab and Muslim countries. The study aims to add to the current knowledge base through its research design and approach that address under-investigated topic. None of the current studies empirically investigated leadership curricula in UAE or any other Muslim country. Results of the four research methods were complementary and presented a comprehensive overview of the curriculum from different perspectives. For example, while class materials in most courses were mainly derived from either the UK or USA, representing Western models and theories of leadership, class observations showed how those perspectives were contextualised and linked to UAE working environment through class discussions and debates. Student survey and faculty interviews also revealed consistent and complementary data with both students and faculty members requesting more inclusion of indigenous and Islamic materials into the curriculum. No contradictory results were found across the four methods. Habermas' (1971, 1984) critical theory was used to investigate the extent to which the curriculum addresses the three cognitive interests (technical, practical, and emancipatory) and the practice of communicative action suggested by Habermas (1971, 1984) to provide students with a holistic and balanced learning experience that leads to social evolution. Results indicate that only two education courses fully address those interests by including the dominant international and traditional models of leadership (technical interest), discussing moral and ethical behaviour of leadership and linking them to local leadership practices (practical interest), and providing opportunities for communicative action and reflection to take place through class discussions and course assignments (emancipatory interest). Other courses did not fully cover those three interests due to the lack of indigenous materials and/or the absence of communicative action and reflection.

The overall results suggest that there are increasing efforts to incorporate cultural and Islamic materials into the curriculum. However, the curriculum is still mainly dominated by Western theories and models of leadership, especially in the leadership courses offered by business schools. A significant difference was found between business and education courses, with education courses including more indigenous and Islamic materials on leadership than business courses. Accordingly, education students viewed the curriculum as more relevant to their cultural and Islamic values than business students. Faculty members played a significant role in adapting the curriculum to students cultural and Islamic values. Those who came from a multicultural environment where they had previous experiences with Muslim students tended to include more materials on Islamic and indigenous models of leadership than those who were not exposed to similar experiences or possessed the same knowledge about Islam. Students, while being appreciative of the genuine efforts exerted by faculty to contextualise the curriculum, believed that these efforts are not enough as their

history is very rich and more materials on Islamic and indigenous models of leadership can be further added to the curriculum. Faculty attributed the limited use of Islamic and traditional materials to the lack of research and published work on Islamic and indigenous theories and models, on the one hand, and to the academic standards that have to be met for the purposes of international accreditation, on the other hand.

As argued by Brookfield (1995), “we teach to change the world”; however, “our attempts to increase the amount of love and justice in the world are never simple” (p. 1). Therefore, we should critically reflect on and assess our teaching models and practices and identify the assumptions that underpin what and how we teach, based on an understanding of the values and culture of where the teaching is located and also what are the goals, vision, and objectives of the country where we are teaching. According to management scholars, leadership curricula should foster heart and head learning, address the universal and the particular, and recognise the spiritual and the material needs of human being (Nash and Scott, 2009). They are expected to help students understand their responsibilities as leaders, find their wholeness and their innate capabilities, feel the value of giving and living for noble goals, and identify with leaders who inspire them. Such curricula should also provide students with opportunities for experiential and reflective learning where they practice leadership rather than learning about leadership. This is not possible by teaching leadership models and theories that are developed in and for Western countries, which have different political, economic, cultural, and historical experiences. Since people from different backgrounds and cultures perceive and practice leadership differently based on their cultural and belief system, management scholars and curriculum coordinators need to find possible approaches to integrate both Western and indigenous sources of knowledge where students’ cultural values and historical experiences are recognised.

According to the current study, Habermas’ (1971) theory of knowledge and human interest may provide a powerful theoretical framework for developing culturally relevant leadership curricula that are derived from students’ culture and working environment while being informed by international knowledge and best practices. Under the technical interest, which presents the scientific aspect of knowledge, educators can include the dominant international and traditional models and theories of leadership. The practical interest, which presents the applied aspect of knowledge, may include leadership practices and values and linking them to students’ cultural values and leadership practices in their country. It may also include historical experiences and local case studies. Finally, the emancipatory interest, which presents the critical and reflective aspect of knowledge, can be realised through the use of communicative action (Habermas, 1984), class debates and self-reflection strategies. This type of curriculum will help students develop a solid and comprehensive understanding of leadership across the globe without sacrificing or compromising their own cultural values. It will enable students to select the leadership behaviour and practices that would work best in a particular society, given its unique cultural and traditional values.

9. Research implications

There are a number of suggestions and lessons that can be learned from the current research. First, appropriate faculty members who understand the culture and the nature of students, and are willing to learn about other traditions should be selected. According to this study, a teacher’s cultural competency, familiarity with traditional values, and openness to learning had a huge impact on developing a balanced curriculum that leads to a holistic learning experience for students. The second important action is to promote and encourage research and publications on indigenous and traditional models of leadership as well as putting more resources into building larger library collections for literature that

is already available. The level of English language used is also an important factor to take into consideration while writing such publications. Having good publications in a medium English level that is suitable for second language speakers would greatly facilitate student learning and save teachers' time and efforts, particularly in the early stages of programmes.

The third action is to use interactive and critical teaching methods that allow students to actively contribute to course content and class discussions, broaden their minds and encourage them to be open to new ideas. Also, including reflective writing and leadership personal statements in course assignments would help students think critically about themselves and their own ideas and beliefs. The fourth possible action is to conduct cultural training for new faculty members who did not work before in the country to help them understand the cultural and traditional values of students.

Finally, according to the pragmatic perspective, knowledge produced by research is relative and not absolute, which means that knowledge and truth produced by the current study may vary across persons, places and times (Johnson and Gary, 2010). Therefore, the methodological framework proposed in this study may be used as a foundation for future research projects that builds on the current findings and look for more insights on how to further contextualise and develop the curriculum. Future research may look at other institutions and/or courses using the initial insights and findings of the current research as a base for its projects. Researchers may also extend and broaden the scope of the study by investigating leadership curricula in the Gulf and/or the Middle East.

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