Knowledge production on educational leadership and management in Arab societies: A systematic review of research

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Abstract

The study that we report in this paper was undertaken within the context of recent efforts to diversify the global knowledge base in educational leadership and management (EDLM). This systematic review of research synthesized trends in EDLM research from Arab societies published between 2000 and 2016. In contrast with Oplatka and Arar's (2017) recent review of theories and findings within the Arab EDLM literature, this review focused on synthesizing trends in knowledge production. The review employed systematic methods to identify 62 articles published in nine core international EDLM journals. Information was extracted from the articles and analyzed using quantitative methods. Trends identified in the review were benchmarked against findings reported in recent reviews EDLM research from other developing societies in Asia and Africa. The review found that the Arab EDLM literature is relatively small, largely of recent vintage, and geographically dispersed. No 'centers of research excellence' were identified either in terms of societies or universities within the Arab world. The Arab EDLM literature is composed primarily of empirical studies with few conceptual or review papers. The authors conclude that this is an 'emerging literature' which bears similarities to literatures from other developing societies in Asia and Africa. Recommendations for strengthening future EDLM research from this region center on developing research capacity through international networking among Arab scholars and encouraging scholars to conceptualize distinctive features of leading and managing in Arab societies.

Keywords

Leadership, management, schools, Arab, review

Since the turn of the millennium there has been an explosion of knowledge creation in the field of educational leadership and management (EDLM) across the globe. Whereas prior to 2000 EDLM publications were dominated by scholarship from Anglo-American societies (see Bell et al., 2003; Blunt and Jones, 1997; Bridges, 1982; Hallinger and Heck, 1996a; Leithwood et al., 1990), the past two decades have witnessed a significant increase in contributions from scholars in developing

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societies. This trend was highlighted in recent reviews of EDLM research from Asia (Hallinger and Bryant, 2013b, 2013c; Hallinger and Chen, 2015), Africa (Hallinger, 2017), and Arab societies (Oplatka and Arar, 2017), where scholars found that 90% of the journal literature had been published since 2005.

This growth in EDLM scholarship from developing societies has been spurred on by two concurrent developments. First, since the mid-1990s, there has been a growing acceptance, if not consensus, concerning limitations on the universality of the EDLM knowledge base (Bajunid, 1996; Belchetz and Leithwood, 2007; Clarke and O'Donoghue, 2017; Hallinger, 2017; Mertkan et al., 2017; Walker and Dimmock, 2002). For the first time since the birth of the theory movement in educational administration 60 years ago, scholars have discarded images of the global knowledge base as a monochromatic canvas and embraced the goal of portraying the rich diversity of EDLM practices (Bajunid, 1996; Blunt and Jones, 1997; Cheng, 1995; Hallinger and Leithwood, 1996; Oplatka and Arar, 2016; 2017; Walker and Dimmock, 2002). This paradigm shift has led to a concerted effort to elaborate how the cultural, political, and socio-economic contexts of societies shape school leadership and management (Buchmann and Dalton, 2002; Clarke and O'Donoghue, 2017; Day and Leithwood, 2007; Hallinger, 2016; Hallinger and Walker, 2017; Oplatka and Arar, 2016, 2017; Walker and Hallinger, 2015).

A second factor contributing to the increase in EDLM publications from developing societies arose from the rapid expansion of higher education systems and their concurrent adoption of international standards of academic quality and accountability. Perhaps nowhere is the latter trend more evident than in the normative response to World University Rankings which gained traction during the same period. National goals, strategies, and policies have been widely adopted in developing societies that have made it mandatory for university faculty to publish in selected international refereed journals (Hallinger, 2014b, 2017; Mertkan et al., 2017). As recently as a decade ago, terms such as 'SSCI', 'SCOPUS', and 'impact factor' were largely unknown to EDLM scholars in developing societies. Today, they are part of the language of scholars throughout the world, even if the actual meaning remains obscure to many. The effects of these mutually reinforcing trends on the volume of journal publications from developing societies are unequivocal (see Hallinger, 2017).

The study that we report in this paper was undertaken within the context of these efforts to diversify the global knowledge base (Clarke and O'Donoghue, 2017; Hallinger and Bryant, 2013a; Mertkan et al., 2017; Oplatka and Arar, 2016, 2017). More specifically, this systematic review of research synthesized trends in published EDLM research from Arab societies. The following research questions guided the review:

1. What is the volume of literature published on educational leadership and management in the Arab world in core EDLM journals?
2. How has the volume of journal publications on EDLM from Arab societies changed between 2000 and 2016?
3. What is the geographical distribution of articles from Arab societies published in core international EDLM journals since 2000?
4. How is the journal literature on EDLM from Arab societies distributed across the core international EDLM journals?
5. What is the composition of the EDLM literature from Arab societies in terms of 'type of study': empirical, conceptual, commentary, research review?
6. What is the citation impact of the journal literature on EDLM from Arab societies?

This systematic review (Gough, 2007; Hallinger, 2013) used an explicit set of criteria to identify 62 articles on EDLM in Arab societies published in nine 'core' international EDLM journals between 2000 and the end of 2016. Data related to our research questions were extracted from the articles and analyzed using quantitative methods aimed at highlighting modal trends. These results were benchmarked against findings reported in recently published reviews of EDLM research from Asia (Hallinger and Chen, 2015) and Africa (Hallinger, 2017) in order to gain perspective on their meaning.

Our interest in examining EDLM research from Arab societies is grounded in shared features of the social context in which education is organized and delivered. As explicated in Oplatka and Arar's (2017) recent synthesis of research findings from the Arab EDLM literature, Arab societies share both a common religion, Islam, and cultural heritage. These features of the social context shape normative attitudes and practices in education (Hofsetede, 1986) and management (Obeidat et al., 2012). Politically, Arab societies have adopted unitary authority structures which reflect a socio-cultural norm of 'large power distance' (Obeidat et al., 2012). At the same time, however, the past two decades have also witnessed the emergence of education as a force for social change, innovation, and development in selected Arab societies (e.g. United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Oman, Jordan). Thus, we believe that examination of EDLM in Arab societies has potential to yield distinctive findings that can enrich the global tapestry of knowledge in our field.

Method

The method employed in this study of the EDLM literature in Arab societies followed guidelines for conducting 'topographical reviews of research' (Hallinger, 2013; Hallinger and Bryant, 2013b, 2013c; Hallinger and Chen, 2015; Hallinger and Heck, 1996b; Heck and Hallinger, 1999). Topographical reviews of research are aimed at 'mapping' observable features that describe a body of knowledge (Hallinger, 2013, 2017). Instead of seeking to synthesize substantive results, as was capably done by Oplatka and Arar (2017), this topographical review aims to illuminate patterns of EDLM knowledge production in Arab societies (e.g. Bridges, 1982; Hallinger and Heck, 1996b; Heck and Hallinger, 1999).

Identification of sources

This review took as its starting point findings reported by Hallinger and colleagues (Hallinger, 2017; Hallinger and Bryant, 2013c; Hallinger and Chen, 2015) in topographical reviews of the Asian and African literatures in EDLM. These reviews had noted a paucity of EDLM studies from Arab societies in both Asia and Africa. Thus, in this review, we were interested in updating these results and training a more focused lens on the subset of EDLM studies conducted in Arab societies.

In order to maintain the 'comparative power' of our lens, we focused on a largely similar set of EDLM journals as had been incorporated in these earlier reviews. This constituted a systematic search of 'core' international EDLM journals[1]: *Educational Administration Quarterly (EAQ)*, *Journal of Educational Administration (JEA)*, *School Effectiveness and School Improvement (SESI)*, *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership (EMAL)*, *International Journal of Leadership in Education (IJLE)*, *International Journal of Educational Management (IJEM)*, *School Leadership and Management (SLM)*, *Leadership and Policy in Schools (LPS)*, *and International Studies in Educational Administration (ISEA)*.

The strengths of this set of sources lie in the ease of accessibility to digital archives, clarity of search boundaries, and assurance of identifying articles that meet consistent quality standards. Each of these journals has an espoused mission of publishing international research in EDLM, employs blind review procedures, publishes in English, and meets a moderate to high standard of citation impact. In order to establish the latter criterion, we employed the *h-index* statistic which can be used to measure the cumulative impact of a journal by reference to frequency of citations of its published articles (Harzing, 2007).[2] The *h-index* for these journals ranged from a low of 29 for *ISEA*, to a high of 152 for *EAQ*.[3] Our approach to journal selection was, therefore, designed to ensure that the journals would provide a broad international representation of moderate to high quality theoretical and empirical research knowledge on EDLM.[4]

We were interested in establishing search criteria that would enable us to describe both the nature of the Arab knowledge base represented in these EDLM journals, as well as its evolution over time. Prior reviews of research had found little EDLM research activity within most Asian and African societies prior to 2000 (see also Oplatka and Arar, 2017). Therefore, we decided to seek literature published between 2000 and the end of 2016.[5]

The next criterion concerned the topical and geographical scope of the research. We limited the search to articles that described 'leadership and management in educational organizations' (i.e. K-12 and tertiary education) in Arab societies, without regard to the race, nationality, or location of the author(s). The geographical scope included Arab societies in North Africa (e.g. Morocco, Libya, Tunisia, Mauritania, Western Sahara, Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, South Sudan), and Western Asia (e.g. Lebanon, Palestine, Arab sector of Israel, Iraq, Syria, Bahrain, UAE, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Yemen).

It should be noted that we made an explicit decision to include EDLM studies of the Arab education sector of Israel in the review. Although Israel is not an 'Arab society', during the search we identified numerous studies that focused explicitly on leadership and management issues within the Arab education sector in Israel (e.g. Arar, 2014, 2016; Mizel, 2009; Nasra and Heilbrunn, 2016; Shapira et al., 2010, 2011). Since the purpose of the review was to highlight trends in the study of 'EDLM in Arab societies', we decided to include these studies.

Rather than using a search engine to identify studies (Fehrmann and Thomas, 2011; Gough, 2007; Hallinger, 2013), we employed a more labor intensive but reliable search method. We scanned the abstracts of all articles published in the nine journals between 2000 and 2016 in order to identify articles about EDLM in Arab societies. When an article fit our search criteria, we downloaded a soft file copy and its citation. These articles comprised the full corpus of articles on EDLM from Arab societies published in these nine core journals over the 17-year period. This search method resulted in 62 studies that met our criteria.

Data extraction

Next, we scanned each article with the goal of extracting information relevant to the research questions posed at the outset of the paper. These included: journal name, research topic, author(s), type of paper (conceptual, empirical, review, other), research method (quantitative, qualitative, mixed method). These data were then entered into a spreadsheet. In order to facilitate the subsequent analysis of trends across studies, we coded some of the data. For example, the 'type of article' was coded as follows: empirical = 1, conceptual = 2, commentary = 3, review of research = 4. The resulting spreadsheet incorporated the corpus of knowledge for review.

Data analysis

Although data analysis relied primarily on the use of quantitative methods, data interpretation and synthesis were grounded in our understanding of the broader EDLM literature as well as findings from other reviews of EDLM research in developing societies. First, we employed descriptive statistics to generate a series of graphs aimed at identifying modal trends in patterns of knowledge production from these Arab societies. In order to place the results in perspective, we also benchmarked our findings against trends identified in reviews of EDLM research conducted in North America (e.g. Bridges, 1982; Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger and Heck, 1996a; Leithwood et al., 1990), Asia (e.g. Hallinger and Bryant, 2013b, 2013c; Hallinger and Chen, 2015), and Africa (Hallinger, 2017).

Citation analysis was also employed as a form of data analysis in this review. Citation analysis is an accepted method of assessing the impact of scholarship that has been used in reviews of EDLM research for the past 40 years (see Bridges, 1982; Campbell, 1979; Gardner et al., 2010; Hallinger, 2011, 2017; Hallinger and Chen, 2015). Citation analysis has been applied to understand the impact of individual articles, scholars, journals, and topics within a field of study. Citation analysis can also be employed to gain insights into the development of a literature and how it evolves over time (see Hallinger, 2017; Hallinger and Chen, 2015).

In citation analysis, the findings depend very much upon the 'database' of studies on which the reviewer draws. One popular database used in citation analysis is the Web of Science™ which is at the heart of the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI). For example, Gumus et al. (2016) recently analyzed patterns of citation in the Web of Science™ in their assessment of theory development in EDLM.

We chose to use Googlescholar™ rather than the Web of Science™ in the belief that it offers a far more comprehensive coverage of international research on EDLM. The only widely accepted international EDLM journals currently included in the Web of Science™ are EAQ, SESI, and EMAL. Moreover, EMAL was only accepted into SSCI in 2013. Thus, citation analyses based on the Web of Science™ exclude most of the core international EDLM journals. In our opinion, this results in a highly distorted view of the field. For example, in the case of this review, EAQ has never published an article from an Arab society, and SESI, only two.

In contrast, citations compiled within the Googlescholar™ database cover all of the journals that were included in this study, and more. With this in mind, we assert that Googlescholar™ represents a more suitable database for reviews of EDLM research. For ease of use, Googlescholar™ offers citation information on each source as basic information provided on the search results page. Thus, we downloaded the citation information related to each article during the data extraction phase. Then we analyzed modal trends for articles, authors, and the literature as a whole. We also benchmarked these citation statistics against trends reported for the broader Asian and African literatures.

Results

This section of the paper presents the results with respect to patterns of knowledge production on EDLM in Arab societies. We drew upon the database of 62 articles to address the research questions posed at the outset of this article. We reiterate that the purpose of this review was not to synthesize substantive results of the studies, but rather to illuminate patterns in knowledge production.
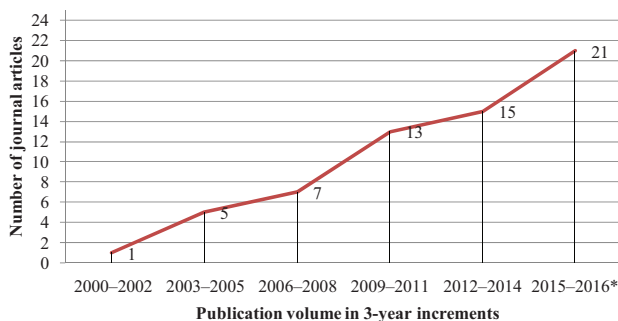
Figure 1. Volume of publication of journal articles from Arab societies over time, 2000–2016.

Volume of EDLM knowledge production in Arab societies

Our first analyses concerned the volume, evolution, and composition of the EDLM literature from Arab societies. First, we note that the total number of papers published in the nine EDLM journals between 2000 and 2016 exceeded 4000 articles. In light of this volume of EDLM publications, the subset of 62 Arab-related EDLM studies is indeed small. However, this should be placed in the perspective of knowledge production among other developing societies of the world. For example, Hallinger (2017) reported that just 60 articles from all of Africa had been published in the identical set of journals during the same period of time.

Next, we analyzed the 'year of publication' for articles in the Arab EDLM corpus. Data presented in Figure 1 indicate a sharp and consistent uptick in publication volume over the 17-year period from 2000 to 2016. Remarkably, 90% of the articles had been published since 2005 and 74% since 2010. This pattern of increasing publication volume in recent years was consistent with findings reported for Africa and Asia for the comparable period of time (Hallinger, 2017; Hallinger and Bryant, 2013b, 2013c).

Thus far, the 'Arab literature' has been analyzed as if it were a single entity; however, there is in fact a wide variation in EDLM knowledge production across the Arab societies (see Figure 2). The largest contributors of Arab-related EDLM studies to the selected journals were the UAE, Arab-sector of Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon.

Two points are worth noting with respect to this pattern of knowledge production. First, even the largest producer of knowledge on school leadership and management, the UAE, has yet to generate a critical mass of scholarship sufficient to inform theory, policy, or practice. Second, numerous Arab societies are unrepresented in the chart (e.g. Algeria, Tunisia, Sudan, Yemen, Mauritania). Thus, consistent with other reviews of research on EDLM in Asia and Africa (Hallinger, 2017; Hallinger and Bryant, 2013c; Oplatka and Arar, 2017), EDLM research in Arab societies remains both uneven in geographic coverage and extremely thin in scope. These findings highlight how little we know about leadership and management practices in most Arab societies and the fact that even the most active producers of EDLM knowledge in the Arab region demonstrate limited capacity (Oplatka and Arar, 2017).

Patterns of publication in core EDLM journals

We were also interested in how the corpus of articles was distributed across the nine core journals. As indicated in Figure 3, there was striking variation in the frequency of publication of articles
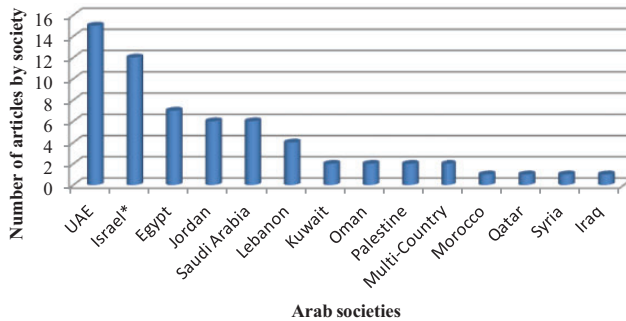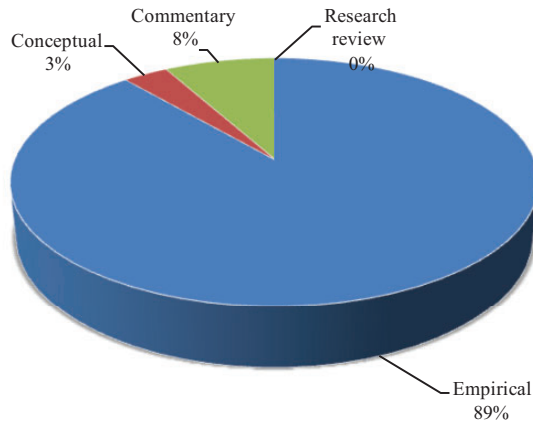
Figure 2. Distribution of EDLM articles by society, 2000–2016.
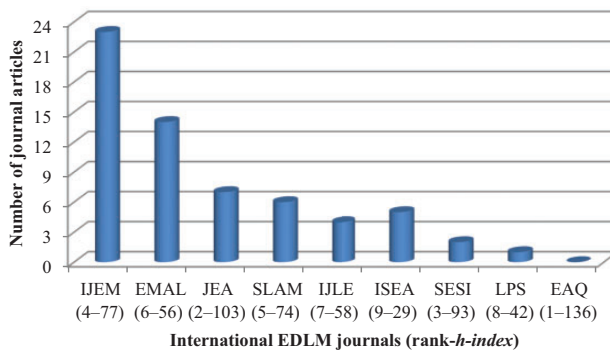
Figure 3. Distribution of articles in nine EDLM journals, 2000–2016.

from Arab societies in the nine journals. The most frequent outlets for Arab-related EDLM research were *IJEM* (23 articles) and *EMAL* (14 articles). In contrast, *LPS* (Al-Mahdy et al., 2016), *SESI* (Al-Tanehji and McLeod, 2008; Jabr and Cahan, 2015), and *EAQ* (none), published few, if any, articles from Arab societies. With the exception of the high number of articles published in the *IJEM*, this distribution is very similar to the pattern of journal publication reported by Hallinger (2017) for African scholarship in EDLM. The higher number of papers from *IJEM* found in this study is very likely due to the fact that the African review did not include higher education studies.

These results suggest highly variable interest among the nine core EDLM journals in scholarship not only from Arab societies, but also from developing societies in general. Although it might seem reasonable to suggest 'differences in journal quality' as the causal factor for this pattern, this was not supported by our data. More specifically, there was no clear relationship between frequency of publication and the *h-index* of the journals (see Figure 3). The four *least frequent venues* for Arab EDLM studies included both journals that ranked high (i.e. *EAQ* (1), *SESI* (3)) and low (i.e. *LPS* (8) and *ISEA* (9)) among the nine journals on their *h-index*. The four *most frequent venues* for Arab scholarship in EDLM included journals that rank high (*JEA* (2)) to moderate (*IJEM* (4), *SLAM* (5), EMAL (6)) on the *h-index*. Thus, we cannot conclude that journal quality accounts for the pattern of publication of EDLM studies from Arab societies.

Figure 4. Distribution of Arab EDLM articles by type of study.

Types of research articles comprising the Arab knowledge base in EDLM

Next, we employed a rubric developed by Hallinger (2017) to analyze the distribution of articles according to whether they were empirical studies, conceptual papers, commentaries, or reviews of research (see also Bridges, 1982; Hallinger, 2011, 2017; Hallinger and Chen, 2015; Leithwood et al., 1990). Empirical articles report the results of studies in which data were collected and analyzed to answer explicit research questions. Conceptual papers propose models that can be applied towards the understanding of EDLM either in the abstract (e.g. proposing a theory of leadership and learning) or in practice (e.g. proposing a system for teacher evaluation). Commentaries offer analyses or critiques of issues based on a combination of opinion, personal experience, exposition via an illustrative case, and/or selective reference to relevant literature. A review of research undertakes the systematic synthesis of information from an explicitly identified body of studies (Hallinger, 2017).

No single distribution among these four types of articles is deemed 'optimal' (Donmoyer et al., 1995; Hallinger and Bryant, 2013a; Ogawa et al., 2000). Rather, the 'desirable composition' of knowledge sources depends upon the relative 'maturity' of the field, or line of inquiry (Hallinger, 2014a; Hallinger and Bryant, 2013a). Nonetheless, the distribution of source types within a body of literature can offer insight into the strengths and weaknesses of existing scholarship and the potential for future knowledge production (Campbell, 1979).

We used this rubric to disaggregate the distribution of studies by type of article (see Figure 4). The data indicated a clear-cut preference among these scholars for publishing empirical research on EDLM. Among the 62 articles, 89% were empirical (e.g. Arar, 2014, 2016; Badri and Mohaidat, 2014; Elmeski, 2015; Emira, 2010; Hourani and Stringer, 2015; Kanan, 2005; Litz and Scott, 2017; Mattar, 2012, 2016; Shapira et al., 2010, 2011), 8% (5 articles) were commentaries (i.e. Algarni and Male, 2014; Elmelegy, 2015; Gaad et al., 2006; Hammad, 2013; Macpherson et al., 2007), and 3% (2 articles) were conceptual (i.e. Al-Turki and Duffuaa, 2003; Badri and Abdulla, 2004). At the time of our search, there were no published reviews of research in the corpus of Arab-related EDLM publications.[6]

We interpreted this distribution from several perspectives. First, the predominance of empirical studies is a positive trend. Progress in understanding the nature of EDLM in these societies and
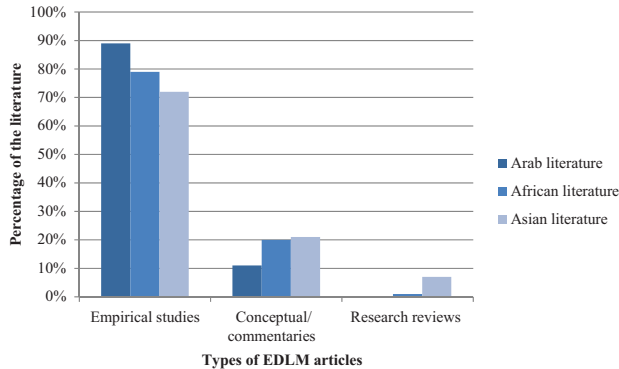
Figure 5. Comparative distribution of EDLM articles by type of study for Arab, African, and Asian societies.

building a sound knowledge base requires 'grounded descriptions' and 'data-based analyses' of existing practices. This pattern of knowledge production suggests that, at least in some Arab societies, the literature is advancing beyond opinion and prescription. However, when interpreted in light of the highly uneven distribution of the Arab EDLM literature, this trend begs expansion to additional societies and further encouragement within the most productive societies.

The absence of research reviews in this literature was not surprising given the relative recency of this literature. However, the scarcity of papers that critique and conceptualize leadership and management practices within Arab societies is problematic. While we did note that numerous authors sought to 'contextualize' their empirical studies, this is not a substitute for thoughtful conceptual and critical analysis.

Hoping to gain further insight into this pattern of knowledge production, we benchmarked these results against findings reported in recent reviews of research conducted in Africa[7] (Hallinger, 2017) and Asia[8] (Hallinger and Chen, 2015). The distribution of the Arab literature was strikingly similar to the pattern reported for these broader EDLM literatures (see Figure 5). More specifically, all three EDLM literatures evidenced a predominance of empirical studies, followed by a smaller core of conceptual and commentary papers, and a very small number of research reviews. In both cases, however, the percentage of conceptual and commentary articles was somewhat larger than we observed in the Arab literature.

This benchmarking exercise yields two tentative but useful conclusions. First, it suggests that, in a broad sense, development of the Arab EDLM literature is evolving in a similar fashion to the EDLM literatures emerging from other developing societies in Asia and Africa. Second, it reinforces Oplatka and Arar's (2017) contention that more effort should be aimed at critiquing and conceptualizing leadership and management systems and practices in the Arab world.

Analysis of citation impact of the literature

Finally, we employed citation analysis to examine the impact of the Arab EDLM literature. Since our prior analyses had already painted a picture of an 'emergent literature', we did not expect to find a large number of 'high-impact' articles. Using citation data from Googlescholar™, we found that the 62 articles had been cited a total of 946 times in other sources covered in the Googlescholar™ database. Citation analysis further revealed an average of 15.8 citations per article, and a mean annual citation rate of 2.4 citations per year, per article.

When we turned to the citation impact of individual contributions, only Sohail and Shaikh's (2004) article on service quality in higher education (164 citations) had achieved a citation impact exceeding 100 citations or an annual citation rate above 10 citations/year (i.e. 12.6). The other *most frequently cited* papers within this literature included Badri and Abdulla (2004; 87 citations), Al-Turki and Duffuaa (2003; 74 citations), Gaad et al. (2006; 71 citations), Badri et al. (2006; 46 citations), and MacPherson et al. (2007; 44 citations). It is interesting to note that all of these more frequently cited articles concerned either higher education or system-level leadership and management. None focused on EDLM in K-12 schools.

We benchmarked these results against findings reported in a review of EDLM research from East Asia contained in a similar set of journals, spanning the years 2000–2011 (Hallinger and Bryant, 2013b). The East Asia review reported a total of 2553 citations for the corpus of 184 articles, an average of 13.9 citations per article, and a mean citation rate of 1.6 citations per article per year. The higher number of total citations can be accounted for by the larger size of the East Asian corpus.[9] Nonetheless, the citation rates per article and per article per year for the two literatures are fairly comparable. Moreover, we note that the distribution of citations across the East Asian corpus was also quite similar to the citation patterns in the Arab literature. For example, the East Asian corpus contained one frequently cited article (343 citations), eight articles with more than 50 citations, and 13% uncited articles (Hallinger and Chen, 2015). Nonetheless, if the period covered for the East Asian corpus had extended to 2016, these figures could be as much as 50% higher.

Discussion

The growth of educational leadership and management into a 'global field of applied study' demands that we diversify the sources of scholarship which comprise our knowledge base (Hallinger, 2011, 2016, 2017; Hallinger and Bryant, 2013a; Mertkan et al., 2017; Oplatka, 2004; Oplatka and Arar, 2017). This current topographical review of research was undertaken to address the absence of prior efforts to describe, analyze, or synthesize studies on EDLM in Arab societies. In this closing section of the paper we highlight limitations of this review, summarize and discuss our interpretation of the findings, and offer recommendations for future research.

Limitations

In this review of research, we made a conscious decision to focus on publications in a defined set of international refereed EDLM journals that are published in English. This ignores the potential contributions of conference papers, books, book chapters, and domestic journals, as well as sources written in Arabic or French. Moreover, we acknowledge that other respected general education and management journals also contain potentially relevant contributions to the EDLM knowledge base in Arab societies. Although we believe that findings based on the selected set of journals are probably representative of the broader literature, this assertion remains to be verified through a review of the broader literature on EDLM in Arab societies.

Another limitation concerns our decision to focus on *patterns of knowledge production* rather than the *content of research findings*. The analyses presented in this paper neither examined topics studied nor specific research findings. However, Oplatka and Arar (2017) recently published a research synthesis of the Arab literature that examined substantive trends within an overlapping body of studies. Thus, we believe that this pair of systematic reviews offer a timely and complementary perspective on the EDLM literature from Arab societies.

Summary and interpretation of the findings

The volume of EDLM research in Arab societies published in the selected journals was small and largely of recent vintage. Moreover, the distribution of knowledge production across Arab societies was very uneven. Indeed, 40% of all Arab societies were unrepresented in the corpus, and numerous others made only minimal contributions. Even among those Arab societies with the strongest research output in EDLM (i.e. UAE, Arab sector of Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia), none had accumulated the critical mass of studies needed to inform policy, practice, or theory building. Citation analysis further suggested a pattern of weak impact for the corpus as whole as well as for individual contributions.

In the midst of synthesizing these trends in EDLM from 'the Arab world', it is easy to lose sight of the diversity of these societies. While Arab culture and the religion of Islam create a degree of commonality among Arab societies, it is also the case that levels of economic development and political stability vary widely from the oil-rich Gulf States to Sudan, Yemen, Somalia, and Palestine. This variability is reflected in the level of support afforded to universities and to research across these societies. Thus, future productivity in research and development across these societies will follow broader gains in economic development, political stability, and expansion of higher education systems.

As discussed above, this review was delimited to a specific set of 'core' international EDLM journals. Our analysis of publication trends (see Figure) evidenced surprisingly high variability across the nine journals. Moreover, we noted that objective measures of 'journal quality' did not correlate with the frequency of publication of papers on EDLM in Arab societies. Since a similar finding was reported in reviews of EDLM research from Asia and Africa (Hallinger, 2017; Hallinger and Bryant, 2013b, 2013c; Mertkan et al., 2017), it should give pause to the editors of these journals. During an era when 'social justice' represents a defining value for the field, it seems strange that our journals are not making more active efforts to encourage broad representation of international scholarship from developing societies.

Our findings also suggest that the task of building the knowledge base on EDLM in Arab societies requires not only 'more research' but also a different distribution of scholarship. We noted that 89% of this literature was empirical; only two papers could be classified as 'conceptual' in nature. This composition suggests an overly narrow perspective towards Arab scholarship in EDLM. Although this review did not analyze conceptual models and topics covered in the Arab literature, we observed that most authors employed 'Western models' (e.g. transformational leadership, school-based management, instructional leadership) to guide their empirical studies (see Oplatka and Arar, 2017). Consequently, we encountered very little of the 'generative' work recommended by Bajunid (1996) and Cheng (1995) aimed at conceptualizing leadership and management within 'indigenous contexts'.

Notably, our characterizations of the Arab EDLM literature mirror the larger Asian and African literatures in almost every respect: relatively low volume, recency of publication, uneven geographical distribution, prevalence of empirical studies, and low citation impact. Indeed, possibly the only area in which we found a difference is the absence of any notable 'centers of EDLM excellence' in the Arab world. This contrasts with Asia where Hong Kong and Israel were positive outliers (Hallinger and Chen, 2015), and Africa where South Africa stood apart from other societies in terms of volume of EDLM research output (Hallinger, 2017).

Despite these limitations, we suggest that this emerging scholarship should be viewed on a 'developmental trajectory' and within a historical perspective. The earliest formal scholarship in

EDLM emerged from the USA during the 1950s and 1960s in the context of the 'theory movement in educational administration' (Bridges, 1982; Campbell and Faber, 1961; Donmoyer et al., 1995; Griffiths, 1979). Reviews of the 'first generation' of EDLM scholarship produced by researchers at famous American universities (e.g. University of Chicago, Ohio State University, University of California, Stanford University, Teachers College) produced conclusions that reprise many of the same findings articulated in this review (see Bridges, 1982; Briner and Campbell, 1964; Campbell, 1979; Campbell and Faber, 1961; Erickson, 1967; Hallinger, 2014a). Bridges (1982), for example, characterized the first generation of American research on educational administration as a series of 'intellectual random events', lacking in theoretical or practical underpinnings, reliant on weak research methods, and evidencing weak citation impact. In contrast, more recent reviews of the Western EDLM research have found a more balanced contribution of empirical, conceptual, and review articles and evidence of both conceptual, methodological, and substantive progress (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger and Heck, 1996a; Leithwood, 2005). Thus, we assert that current trends in the EDLM literature from developing societies, including the Arab literature, must be interpreted as 'first generation efforts'. Therefore, critiques such as our own should be viewed as efforts aimed at 'shifting the trajectory' of scholarship towards a path that is more likely to reach the desired destination 10 and 20 years from now.

Recommendations for future research

We wish to close this review with recommendations designed to enhance future efforts at building this regional knowledge base in EDLM. First, given our assessment of the current state of the literature, one could not expect to find a solid foundation of knowledge within the current 'Arab EDLM literature' (see Oplatka and Arar, 2017). This mirrors attempts to synthesize findings from the first generation of American EDLM studies conducted during the early 1960s (e.g. Briner and Campbell, 1964; Campbell and Faber, 1961). Due to the immaturity of the knowledge base and lack of a critical mass of studies on common topics (see Hallinger, 2014), substantive reviews must be regarded as exploratory rather than explanatory in nature.

Nonetheless, we do recommend extending this topographical review of EDLM research from Arab societies to a broader set of sources. The scope of the review could be changed to 'all journals' as opposed to the nine 'core' journals that we selected. Alternatively, the review could be extended to include graduate theses and conference papers as well as published journal articles. There is no single right or wrong decision in determining the scope of a research review; rather, the decision depends on practical exigencies related to the size of the database that is uncovered and the resources available to the reviewer (see Bridges, 1982; Gough, 2007; Hallinger, 2013).

We also recommend that Arab scholars work towards developing their informal network(s) with the dual goals of sharing knowledge and developing a common set of research priorities. Although the research enterprise in higher education within and across these and other societies will continue to be 'loosely coupled', some coordination of research effort is desirable in order to move the field forward (see Hallinger and Bryant, 2013a; Ogawa et al., 2000). In the current global higher education environment, universities will continue to press individual scholars towards *doing whatever is necessary to publish*, without regard to a broader or more meaningful agenda. Intellectual leadership is needed within the community of Arab scholars in order to forge an agenda that leads towards productive research on EDLM practices in these societies. In the absence of intellectual leadership, little will change in the patterns of knowledge production highlighted in this review during the next decade.

However, networking among scholars within the Arab world may not, by itself, be enough. Although some Arab societies are producing more knowledge in EDLM than others, we did not identify any 'centers of EDLM excellence' in the Arab world. This implies that an Arab network of EDLM scholars will need to link up with productive EDLM scholars and research networks from outside the region in order to build capacity. Thus, in our view, the development of a research agenda, loose coordination/collaboration among scholars, and strengthened research capacity are prerequisites for making sustainable progress towards the goal of building an identifiable and useful Arab-focused literature in EDLM.

In closing, we are optimistic that the coming decades will be fruitful ones in terms of building a more diverse global knowledge base in EDLM. Scholars working in Arab societies have a role to play in this global effort. Indeed, based on data presented in this review, we are confident that scholars from Arab societies will dramatically increase their contributions to global scholarship in EDLM. We hope that the recommendations offered in this review will enhance the quality and utility of those contributions in much the same fashion that Bridges' (1982) review did for the field of educational administration in the USA 35 years ago.

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None declared.

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Notes

1. Note that we characterized these as 'nine core international research journals' rather than 'the nine core international research journals . . .'. Although any selection of 'the core journals' is disputable, we assert that this set is a reasonably comprehensive yet focused list of educational leadership journals.
2. The *h-index* was proposed by JE Hirsch in his paper 'An index to quantify an individual's scientific research output', arXiv: physics/0508025 v5 29 Sep 2005. It is defined as follows: A scientist or journal has index h if h of Np papers have at least h citations each, and the other (Np-h) papers have no more than h citations each.
3. This is based on the author's analysis of these journals using Harzing's (2007) Publish or Perish tool on March 30, 2017.
4. We considered other well-known journals: *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, *Leading and Managing*, *NASSP Bulletin*, *Educational Leadership*, and the *Journal of School Leadership*. However, the *h-index* for the first two was below 25, and the last three failed to meet our criterion of having a mission of including international research.
5. Thus, it should be noted that the actual search was conducted during February and March 2017.
6. The Oplatka and Arar (2017) review was published in April 2017.
7. The review of African research was not limited to the same core journals, but rather extended to 'all refereed journal articles'. The review database comprised 506 journal articles published between 2000 and 2016 (Hallinger, 2017).
8. The Asian review (Hallinger and Chen, 2015) examined all Asia-related EDLM studies published between 1995 and 2012 in eight of the nine core journals included in this review, the exception being *International Studies in Educational Administration*.

9. It should be noted when interpreting these comparative data that although the duration of the Arab and East Asian reviews was the same (i.e. 17 years), the East Asia review only extended to 2011. Given the trends towards steadily increasing rates of publication, we believe that differences in the total number of papers and total citations could be larger if both reviews had covered identical time periods.

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