Principals' communication styles and school performance in Al Ain government schools, UAE

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Abstract

This study described principals' communication styles and investigated their relationships to school performance in Al Ain city government schools in the UAE. Data were collected through a questionnaire of 50 items. Six hundred sixty seven male and female staff out of a total population of 2240 in 40 schools responded to the questionnaire. Then, semi-structured phone interviews with 11 participants were conducted to collect qualitative data. The results showed that principals in Al Ain schools are almost always expressive in their communication. They almost never act aggressively or use moodiness or threat. The results showed also that participants attributed high performance to the principal's supportiveness style. When the school was used as the unit of analysis, the preciseness style of the principal had the highest correlation coefficient with high performance. Finally, the study found that styles of moodiness and threat were correlated negatively with school performance.

Keywords: school principals; communication styles; school performance; UAE

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1. Introduction

Communication is a basic need for human life. People communicate for a variety of reasons one of which is to create common understandings (Richard, 1998). The transmission of facts, ideas, opinions, attitudes, and feelings enables humans to develop awareness and to learn (Richmond, McCroskey, & Powell, 2012). In any organization, communication is a necessity for coordinating most activities, and this is especially true in educational institutions. Given the widespread changes in education today, educational institutions need effective leaders who are good communicators. Lunenburg and Irby (2006) contend that effective leaders spend most of their time communicating with various stakeholders.

Recognizing the importance of communication in leading schools, educational associations give attention to communication in their publications. The Educational Leadership Constituent Council standards (ELCC), which guide the preparation and development of school leaders in the US and many other countries, for instance, highlight communication as a main component of school leadership. According to ELCC standards, communication is the vehicle that enables leaders to improve their schools. The standards require that principals be responsible for articulating the vision, leading an effective instructional program, managing all aspects in schools ethically and professionally, working in partnership with communities including students' families, and understanding and influencing the larger society. None of these responsibilities is possible without effective communication.

In the UAE, communication is emphasized as an essential skill for school principals. The framework of leaders in the New School Model (NSM), established in 2010 by the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) to reform education in the Abu Dhabi emirate, includes five key areas for school principals: leading strategically, leading teaching and learning, leading people, leading the organization, and leading the community.[1] In each of these areas, communication stands as an indispensable competency for school leaders. For instance, leading strategically requires building a collaborative school vision that is communicated and modeled through words and actions of the principal (ADEC, n.d.a, 2010). In Dubai, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) and the Dubai School Inspection Bureau (DSIB) assess school performance based on seven indicators. One of these indicators is the quality of school leadership and management, understood in terms of the ability of school leaders to manage resources for the benefit of students, improve the school, create relationships with parents, and have an effective role in the community (KHDA, 2011).[2] All of these benchmarks depend largely on how effectively principals communicate.

In schools, communication happens at all times, in all directions, and in many ways. However, principals have certain styles when they communicate. A communication style is the method by which one negotiates situations involving others. It is a distinctive way and mode of action by which one usually behaves when exchanging information, ideas, and emotions with others (Reece, Brandt, & Howie, 2010). Different leadership styles can be associated with different communication styles. Reversibly, different styles of communication

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[1] ADEC is a government body established in 2005 to develop education and educational institutions in the emirate of Abu Dhabi. It is responsible for designing educational plans and programs and implementing educational policies. In September 2010, ADEC launched the New School Model (NSM); an initiative which is hoped to result in better educational outcomes. The NSM focuses on the partnership of all stakeholders and on improving curriculum, teaching methods, learning material, resources, and school facilities (ADEC, n.d.b).

[2] The Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) is a regulatory authority in the Dubai Government responsible for the improvement of schools, universities, training institutes, and other human resource sectors (KHDA, n.d.a). Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) is one of five entities under the jurisdiction of KHDA. It is responsible for supervising the quality of education in different schools in Dubai. It publishes annual reports that provide educational institutions with evaluation results and recommendations for improvement (KHDA, n.d.b).

indicate different leadership styles. For example, a human-oriented leadership style is strongly connected to an open communication style that respects people and their viewpoints. A charismatic leadership style is connected to a communication style that inspires followers and encourages them. On the other hand, a task-oriented leadership style depends less on open and receptive communication styles and is directive and controlling (de Vries, Bakker-Pieper, & Oostenveld, 2009).

Each leadership style, part of which is communication, has different effects on school performance. Literature is rich with discussion on the relationship between leadership styles and school performance, and, perhaps not surprisingly, the results are less than decisive. On the one hand, there are studies that confirm the existence of a relationship between school leadership style and school performance. For example, Ubben and Hughes (1992) found that certain principals' styles could create a school climate that improves the productivity of both teachers and students. Other researchers, such as Hallinger and Heck (1998), Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger (2003), Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2004), and Kruger, Witziers, and Sleegers (2007), reached similar findings. On the other hand, some studies found no relationship between school leadership styles and effectiveness of schools as reflected in student achievement on standardized tests (Di Vincenzo, 2008; Huffman, 2003).

The present study moves beyond investigating the general impact of leadership styles and examines the communication practices of school principals and their relationships to school performance. Specifically, this study investigates the predominant communication styles deployed by principals in UAE Al Ain schools. It explores the relationship between communication styles and school performance. The aim is to identify those communication styles that either positively or negatively correlate with school performance. With this information in hand, principals could adjust their communication styles by increasing the use of positive styles and minimizing the use of the negative styles.

1.1 The Problem

The results of an ADEC survey study (2009) on Abu Dhabi government schoolteachers revealed that teachers generally thought they were not given enough chances or encouragement by their school principals to participate in decision-making or influence school activities. Further, a great percentage of teachers believed that principals did not clarify school visions or expectations for meeting instructional goals. While a high percentage of teachers could discuss different issues with their principals, these teachers did not equally feel that principals considered their opinions or cared for their welfare (ADEC, 2009a). On the other hand, principals complained about staff tendency to resist change and the indifference or disinterest of parents in their children's education as obstacles to school improvement (ADEC, 2009b). While these problems were not necessarily caused by ineffective communication alone, they clearly indicate a need for solutions that can be found only by using highly effective communication styles.

The current study builds on two premises: first, communication consumes significant amounts of time and effort from a school principal, and not using the most effective styles of communication can lead to decreasing school performance. Second, while principals' communication styles are ingrained in their leadership styles and largely in their cultural backgrounds, this study assumes that school principals could develop and apply positive communication styles that are associated with effective school performance and positive school climate.

This study's research question draws on the results of local studies in the UAE, which highlight the existence of challenges in the Emirati education system due to ineffective communication or lack of awareness of the best styles of communication in relation to school performance (ADEC, 2009a, 2009b). Further, while communication is essential to principals in the current period of change in the UAE education system, there is little research about principal communication and its connection to school performance.

1.2 Research Questions

This study investigated three questions:

➢ How do staff members in Al Ain schools describe their principal's communication styles?

➢ How do staff members in Al Ain schools view their school's performance level?

➢ How do staff members in Al Ain schools view the relationship between their principal's communication style and their school's performance?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Communication Styles

Communication is a complex and multidisciplinary concept, and there is no consensus on exactly how it should be defined across the disciplines (Krauss & Russel, 1996). The complexity of the term comes from the fact that any behavior is considered a type of communication, so long as it occurs in a social situation (Novinger, 2001). One implication of this view is that to understand communication, every symbolic or expressive gesture in a given situation must be taken into account, and such a prescription does not lend itself easily to a practical research strategy. To add to this complexity, communication involves processes that enable participants to produce and comprehend messages at the intrapersonal level, and at the same time, it involves processes that cause participants to simultaneously affect and be affected by one another. Further, as Novinger (2001) notes, communication across cultures is more difficult than communication among individuals from the same culture.

Norton (1975) defines a communication style as the way a person uses verbal and nonverbal communicative behaviors to indicate how literally others should interpret a message. De Vries, Bakker-Pieper, Siberg, Gameren, and Vlug (2009) consider Norton's definition very narrow so they added other dimensions. They define a communication style as a distinguishing way an individual transmits verbal, paraverbal, and nonverbal indicators in social interactions to present the identity he or she has or wants to have, the way he or she relates with people, and the way his or her messages should be understood. In this definition, de Vries et al. (2009) focus on interpersonal communication and exclude intrapersonal communication (which refers to how people use their internal feelings to guide their behaviors based on an event).

As with the definition of communication and communication styles, disagreement extends to the scales used to measure styles of communication. The inconsistency comes from the different perspectives each team of scholars has. Some understand communication as part of personality, others are more concerned with the context or culture, and still a third group has a tendency to depend on the language itself (i.e., the lexical side). Consequently, there are three different perspectives for assessing communication styles. In styles targeting the personality, Norton (as quoted in Oswalt, 2011) identifies ten features of communication styles that can fit into two clusters: passive and active. The passive cluster includes the attentive, friendly, and relaxed styles while the active cluster consisted of the dominant, dramatic, animated, contentious, open, impression-leaving, and precise styles. The cultural view of communication styles assumes that people learn how to communicate and interact with others based on their cultures. Therefore, cultural values and norms condition communication styles (Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Chua, 1988; Gudykunst et al., 1996).

Novinger (2001) also explains that cultural variation in communication styles happens because some cultures rely more on nonverbal communication behaviors. These are considered high-context cultures. The high-context message depends more on the context and the receiver. Cultures that rely more on speech and verbal communication are considered to have low-context communication style. The low-context message contains more words and less nonverbal communication. Because different cultures deal differently with factors like personal space, fast and slow messages, and monochronic and polychronic time, in studying intercultural

communication, understanding how people in different cultures deal with such factors is important to interpreting and responding to them correctly (Hall & Hall, 1990).

This study focuses on the lexical side of communication styles and therefore de Vries et al.'s (2009) classification deserves some attention. de Vries et al. investigate the lexical side of communication using a three-phase lexical study. In the first phase, they selected adjectives and verbs to describe communication styles from the Dutch Van Dale dictionary. In the second phase, they selected 42 students in communication sciences, Dutch language, and culture to assess the list of adjectives and verbs. In the last phase, 441 respondents from university students and community residents rated the list produced at the end of phase two. The results led to seven dimensions for communication styles represented by the acronym PRESENT which stands for Preciseness, Reflectiveness, Expressiveness, Supportiveness, Emotionality, Niceness, and Threateningness. Preciseness consists of adjectives that refer to clarity, conciseness, efficiency, and composure. Reflectiveness consists of both verbs and adjectives that refer to engagement, analytical reflectiveness, and philosophical or poetic communication behaviors. Expressiveness consists of verbs and adjectives that signify talkativeness, certainty, energy, and eloquence. Supportiveness consists of verbs of a relational response which include accommodation, supportiveness, stimulation, and admiration. Emotionality or moodiness consists mainly of adjectives that reflect feelings like sadness, irritability, anger, and tension. Niceness consists of adjectives and verbs that reflect general communication attitude and its meaning can be seen through friendliness, uncriticalness, modesty, and cheerfulness. Finally, threateningness consists mainly of verbs that refer to abuse, threateningness, and deceptiveness.

2.2 School Performance

This study is concerned with school performance in its relationship to the communication styles of principals. According to Maslowski (2001), school performance can be measured through the effectiveness and efficiency of the school system. Effectiveness and efficiency can be viewed as ratios between inputs to and outputs of the education system. A more effective system obtains more outputs for a given set of non-monetary inputs while an efficient system obtains more output for a given set of monetary inputs (Lockheed, 1998). While Sammons, Hillman, and Mortimore (1995) admit that the concept of school performance is complex, multi-dimensional, and not reducible to simple measures, they argue that core characteristics of school effectiveness and efficiency can be categorized. In general, frameworks that measure school performance concentrate on the following elements: leadership in school and classroom, assessment for and of learning, resource allocation, family and community engagement and partnership, student voice, professional development, intervention and support, improvement and accountability, and curriculum and teaching (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008; DCPS, 2009; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

School climate is another indicator used to assess school performance. This indicator includes four dimensions. The first one is safety at school which is measured through having clear rules about physical and social harm, the feeling of being safe from physical harm at school, and the feeling that all members at school are safe from being verbally abused. The second element is school support for learning the knowledge and skills and is measured through providing rich opportunities to learn inside and outside school. The third element is having healthy interpersonal relationships such as respect for diversity, collaboration among adults, adult support for students, and collaboration among students. The last element is institutional environment which includes the feeling of belonging to the school, participating in school life for students and families, and keeping the school clean and tidy (Pinkus, 2009; Vanhoof & Petegem, 2011).

To assess schools, the Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) identifies benchmark quality indicators that government and private schools in Dubai are required to reach for the purposes of inspection. According the DSIB Handbook (KHDA, 2011), the main goals for students are to achieve high academic outcomes and to improve personal and interpersonal skills. The seven quality indicators used for inspection include: students' attainment and progress; students' personal and social development; teaching, learning, and assessment; the

extent to which the curriculum meets the educational needs of all students; student protection and support; leadership and management; and school overall performance. To inspect schools in Abu Dhabi, ADEC started a program called Irtiqa'a which evaluates schools according to eight standards: student achievement and progress; personal development of students; quality of teaching; meeting students' needs; protection, care, guidance, and support of students; quality of school facilities; availability of resources; and efficiency of school leadership and management (ADEC, n.d.c).

2.3 Communication Styles and School Performance

There is little research on the relationship between the communication styles of principals and school performance. In general, researchers assumed that a relationship exists between positive styles of a school principal's communication and the performance level of his/her school. Communication is usually an implied element in the general leadership style of the principal. Few researchers study communication as a separate and important factor that could lead to improved school performance. Salazar (2008), for example, highlights that high-performing schools were led by principals who positively affected school success. He notes that successful leaders concentrated on five areas of action, one of which is establishing processes to enhance two-way communication rather than one-way communication. He concludes that open and democratic communication is considered an important factor in the effective leadership of schools and the creation of a non-stressful work culture.

de Vries, Bekker-Pieper, and Oostenveld (2009) investigated the relationships between leaders' communication styles on one hand, and charismatic, human-oriented, and task-oriented leadership styles on the other hand. They collected data from 279 employees of a governmental organization via a survey consisting of 138 items. They used six communication styles: verbal aggressiveness, expressiveness, preciseness, assuredness, supportiveness, and argumentativeness. In line with expectations, the study found that charismatic and human-oriented leadership were mainly communicative, while task-oriented leadership was significantly less communicative. The communication styles were strongly related to knowledge sharing behaviors, perceived leader performance, satisfaction with the leader, and team commitment. For example, supportiveness had the strongest positive relationship with outcomes like satisfaction with the leader, sharing knowledge with leaders, and gaining team commitment, and it came second in rank in its relationship with perceived leader performance. Preciseness was found to have the strongest direct relationship with leader performance. The expressiveness style of communication was correlated with sharing knowledge with the leaders but not to leader performance.

In the UAE, no published research investigating communication styles and school performance exists. This comes in contradiction to the consistent calls by educational authorities to improve communication at schools. For example, the KHDA and DSIB Handbook (2011) explain that communication is at the core of leadership of schools and of managing their performance. At the same time, ADEC's NSM Policy Manual provides clear evidence that raising school performance depends heavily on changing communication styles in schools. For example, the Manual emphasizes effective communication with students, colleagues, parents, and the community and identifies the principal as the person responsible for leading change and involving teachers and head faculty in creating improvement plans through effective communication (ADEC, 2012). The emphasis of the Manual on communication leads to one conclusion: communication is at the core of improving school performance in ADEC's schools.

3. Method and Instruments

This study uses an explanatory mixed research design in which quantitative data is collected and analyzed. Quantitative findings are then used to identify the types of qualitative data needed to help interpret the findings. These qualitative data were collected during the second phase of the study (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). During the first phase, researchers developed a self-administered questionnaire for collecting the data. In addition to participant demographic information, the questionnaire included statements on two sections: a)

principals' communication styles, and b) school performance. The section on principals' communication styles consists of twenty-five structured items derived from de Vries et al.'s (2009) lexical study. The seven styles that this study investigates include preciseness, reflectiveness, expressiveness, supportiveness, emotionality/ moodiness, niceness, and threateningness. In addition, one open-ended question is used to enable participants to write their opinions on their principal's communication style.

At the time of data collection, ADEC's school inspection of government schools had not commenced. Therefore, an objective benchmark for school performance was not available. Presently, ADEC inspects all schools in Abu Dhabi. However, it only publishes reports of private schools on its website. Reports of government schools are not published and hard to get. In order to assess school performance in this study, the researchers developed a twenty-five structured items that assessed participants' opinions about school performance on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "0" = "Strongly disagree" to "4" = "Strongly agree". The statements are derived from the KHDA Annual Report (KHDA, 2011), the NSM Policy Manual (ADEC, 2010), and the international framework discussed previously. Statements focus on the internal effectiveness and efficiency of schools measured in light of organizational behavior, school culture, relationships, and student progress. The questionnaire concludes with two open-ended questions to enable participants to write their opinions about their school performance and about their perceptions of the relationship between principal's communication style and school performance at their school.

Validity and Reliability - Cross-referencing with literature was the first step to ensure validity. Then, one schoolteacher and one university professor reviewed the questionnaire in its initial form to achieve face validity. The questionnaire was then shared with five College of Education professors who reviewed items and checked their content validity, and the questionnaire was modified according to their feedback. Next, four school teachers checked the questionnaire and reviewed its language to make sure that all items were clear. The statements were rearranged and some minor changes were made based on their feedback. Finally, the questionnaire was pilot-tested for reliability on twenty-seven participants before distributing it to the sample. The Cronbach Alpha coefficients for the pilot sample and actual sample were calculated for each of the sub-scales separately (communication and performance) and for all statements in the questionnaire. All coefficients in both tests were above 0.8, which indicates high reliability.

The Interview - Based on quantitative data analysis, the researchers wrote interview questions to address the research questions and explain the quantitative results thoroughly. Semi-structured phone interviews were used to collect qualitative data for this study. Follow-up questions were used to probe for more information and to clarify vague answers. For qualitative data analysis, Miles and Huberman (2004) used four interactive steps. The first step was writing and compiling the transcripts of the interviews and answers to open-ended questions into Word files. The second step was data reduction or condensation through reading and coding/labeling important ideas. The third step was assembling and organizing codes/labels into categories/themes. A subsequent step was to decide on important and relevant themes. For each theme, quotes or phrases were selected to provide evidence and support the analysis. The last step was to draw conclusions and verify their meanings by going back to the transcripts.

Population and Sample - This study is limited to government schools in the urban areas of Al Ain city for reasons of proximity and accessibility. The population includes schools from Grade 1 to 5 or Cycle 1 schools. Other cycles include Cycle 2 (grades 6-9), and Cycle 3 (grades 10-12). Schools including two or more cycles at the same building were not selected because the NSM was not implemented in some of them. The population includes principals, vice principals, secretaries, social workers, teachers, and other staff.

The questionnaire was distributed by hand in 40 schools, which represented around 70% of Al Ain urban schools. According to school records, the number of staff at these schools was 2240. At schools, the questionnaire was distributed to available and willing staff. Therefore, the sample is considered a convenient one. The number of participants was 667, which represents 30% of school staff in the 40 schools. Table 2 summarizes

demographic information of the sample. Of this sample, 305 participants answered some or all of the open-ended questions. Only 22 participants indicated an interest in participating in interviews and provided contact information. Interviews were conducted with eleven participants as the rest declined later. Participants in the interview were five males and six females: nine teachers, one social worker, and one principal.

This study followed research ethical principles especially as they relate to freedom of participation, anonymity of participants, confidentiality of data, right to withdraw from participation, and right to access the researchers. In the consent form which accompanied the questionnaire, participants were informed of the purpose of study, that their participation was voluntary, that participation would not affect them in any way, that there was no penalty for non-participants, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time with no consequence. To protect their identities, participants were not asked to identify themselves by names, subject, or grades they teach. School members were not involved in distributing or collecting the questionnaires. To insure confidentiality, the demographic sheets and completed questionnaires were coded and locked in separate, safe locations. Participants voluntarily provided their phone numbers to participate in phone interviews. During the interviews, the names of participants and their schools were not identified. Therefore, there was no link between individual responses and participants' identities. Finally, participants were supplied with the researchers' contact information, should they need to ask questions.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Schools (Cycles 1, 2, 3) in Population and Sample

	N of schools (Population)				N of schools (Sample)			
	C1	C2	C3	Total	C1	C2	C3	Total
Male schools	16	8	5	29	10	5	4	19
Female schools	13	10	6	29	10	6	5	21
Total	29	18	11	58	20	11	9	40

Table 2

Demographic Information of Participants

	Participants	C1	C2	C3	Total
Gender	Male	30	133	58	221
	Female	257	111	78	446
Position	Administrator	31	28	9	68
	Teacher	208	197	115	520
	Technician	30	8	5	43
	Undefined	18	11	7	36
Nationality	Emirati	236	130	80	446
	Arab	43	104	51	198
	Foreigner	1	0	0	1
	Undefined	7	10	5	22
Age	Less than 25	20	11	9	40
	25-34	8	0	2	10
	35-44	121	97	52	270
	45-54	124	97	55	276
	Undefined	21	37	21	79

4. Findings

4.1 First Question

The first question in this study investigates the perceptions of school staff members in Al Ain schools of the communication styles of principals. Table 3 presents the means, medians, modes, and standard deviations for statements of the first five communication styles and Table 4 presents findings of statements for styles six and seven. The first five styles are positive in nature while the last two are negative.

Table 3

Communication Styles of Expressiveness, Precieseness, Niceness, Supportivenss, and Reflectiveness

Styles	Statements	Mean	SD	Median	Mode
Expressiveness	The principal talks with all people freely.	3.16	.964	3.00	4.00
	The principal clarifies his/her ideas fluently.	3.42	.807	4.00	4.00
	I feel that the principal is certain about what he/she is saying.	3.30	.921	4.00	4.00
	The principal is spirited.	3.21	.974	3.00	4.00
Precieseness	The principal's messages are concise.	2.76	1.11	3.00	3.00
	The principal's messages are clear.	2.93	1.15	3.00	4.00
	The principal acts efficiently like a businessman.	2.77	1.11	3.00	3.00
Niceness	The principal builds friendly rapport with other people.	2.90	1.15	3.00	4.00
	The principal avoids criticizing teachers' performance.	2.15	1.23	2.00	2.00
	The presence of the principal broadcasts cheerful feelings among teachers and staff.	2.73	1.17	3.00	4.00
	The principal is humble in his/her interaction with people.	3.21	.99	4.00	4.00
Supportiveness	The principal supports people who need help.	3.16	1.02	3.00	4.00
	The principal tries his/her best to make the school environment comfortable for all.	3.13	1.06	3.00	4.00
	The principal shows his/her admiration for teachers' work.	3.04	1.07	3.00	4.00
	The principal reinforces people positively.	2.86	1.18	3.00	4.00
Reflectiveness	The principal engages mentally with people.	2.98	1.12	3.00	4.00
	The principal acts as a philosopher.	1.51	1.42	1.00	0.00
	The principal analytically reflects on what happens at school.	2.79	1.07	3.00	3.00

Statements 2, 3, and 4 in the expressiveness style had means higher than 3.2, which is the measure for "almost always" on the Likert scale. Statement 1 had the lowest mean (3.16) in this style, which is the measure for "usually" on the Likert scale. The results indicate that principals in the sample were almost always expressive in their communication. All statements in the preciseness style had means in the "usually" range on the Likert scale. This indicates that school principals were usually precise in their communication. However, the results suggest that the teachers did not feel that principals were as precise as they were expressive in their communication. Statements 8 and 10 in the niceness style had means in the "usually" range on the Likert scale. Statement 11 about "being humble in interaction with people" had a mean of 3.21 (above 3.2) which indicates that it is "almost always" a behavior of most school principals. The results indicate that participants were neutral on the statement "The principal avoids criticizing teachers' performance," suggesting that school principals occasionally criticized teachers' performance. All statements in the supportiveness style located the principals in the "usually" range, which indicates that they were usually supportive in their communication. With regard to the reflectiveness style, two statements had means in the "usually" range. The third statement, "acting as a philosopher," had the lowest mean of 1.51, which indicates that this behavior was rarely perceived in school principals in the sample.

With regard to the "aggressiveness" style, the means of statements 19-22 were located in the "rarely" range on the scale. The "aggressiveness" behavior had the lowest mean of 0.5 and the lowest standard deviation, which indicates that principals in the sample almost never used such a behavior. Using obscene language was rarely used too. On the other hand, participants mentioned that principals occasionally used "deceptiveness" to achieve goals and "threat" to motivate teachers. All statements in the emotionality/moodiness style had means located in the "rarely" range, indicating that principals rarely showed moody practices such as being affected by tensions or not controlling their anger.

By ranking all the statements, principals in Al Ain schools can be portrayed according to their communication styles in the following manner. They are almost always fluent, certain, spirited (i.e., expressive) and humble (i.e., nice). They are usually supportive, precise, and reflective communicators. Sometimes the principals avoid criticizing others' performance, but they may use deception (or cunningness) to achieve their goals. Principals in Al Ain schools rarely act or reason as philosophers, and neither do they show moodiness or threateningness. They almost never act aggressively.

Table 4

Communication Styles of Threateningness and Emotionality/Moodiness

Styles	Statements	Mean	SD	Median	Mode
Threateningness	The principal uses threats to motivate teachers to achieve goals.	1.40	1.37	1.00	0.00
	The principal uses deceptiveness to achieve goals.	1.67	1.63	1.00	0.00
	The principal uses obscene language.	.90	1.17	0.00	0.00
	The principal behaves aggressively.	.50	.916	0.00	0.00
Moodiness	The principal does not control his/her anger.	.98	1.16	1.00	0.00
	The principal's bad feelings affect his work.	1.09	1.24	1.00	0.00
	Tensions easily affect the principal.	1.34	1.24	1.00	0.00

To describe the principals' communication styles in light of the most and the least practiced styles, accumulative averages for means, medians, and modes for each style were calculated. The expressiveness style had the highest mean and the lowest standard deviation. This style seems to be the style almost always practiced by school principals in the sample. Principals usually practice the styles of supportiveness, preciseness, and niceness and they rarely show moodiness or threateningness styles in their communication with others. Table 5 summarizes these results.

Table 5

Ranked Principal Communication Styles

Communication style	Mean	SD	Median	Mode
Expressiveness style	3.26	.781	3.5	4
Supportiveness style	3.03	.989	3	4
Preciseness style	2.79	.818	3	3.3
Niceness style	2.71	.902	3	3.5
Reflectiveness style	2.40	.747	2.3	2.3
Moodiness style	1.13	1.08	1	0
Threateningness style	1.11	.845	0.5	0

4.2 Finding Differences

To identify differences in the responses of participants due to gender, position, and nationality, Kruskal Wallis and Mann-Whitney tests were performed. Kruskal Wallis test showed that position significantly affected how participants perceived the communication styles of expressiveness, supportiveness, threateningness, and moodiness. Multiple comparisons were performed using the Mann-Whitney test to identify whose perceptions differed significantly due to position. The results indicate that teachers' perceptions differed significantly in comparison with those of the administration and other technical staff. While the administration and technical staff viewed that the expressiveness style and the supportiveness style of principals were higher than what the teachers viewed, they considered that the threateningness style and the moodiness style were lower than what the teachers perceived. The results are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6

Kruskal Wallis Test[a] for styles based on cumulative means

	Expressiveness	Preciseness	Niceness	Supportiveness	Reflectiveness	Threateningness	Moodiness
Chi-Square	24.046	7.755	6.065	22.167	2.084	7.855	19.339
Df	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.051	.108	.000	.555	.049	.000

Note. [a]Grouping variable is position

The Mann-Whitney test for differences based on gender show that male and female participants differed in their views on the degree of principals' practice of communication styles. Female participants reported higher practice of the expressiveness, niceness, supportiveness, and reflectiveness styles. The results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Mann-Whitney Test[a] for styles based on cumulative means

	Expressiveness	Preciseness	Niceness	Supportiveness	Reflectiveness	Threateningness	Moodiness
Mann-Whitney U	40362.0	46495.0	40813.0	39118.0	42000.5	42896.5	46332.5
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.828	.006	.000	.026	.083	.884

Note. [a]Grouping variable is gender

Investigating differences between Emirati and non-Emirati teachers, the Mann-Whitney test was used. The results showed that participants significantly differed in their views on expressiveness, supportiveness, and threateningness styles. Emirati teachers reported higher results for expressiveness, supportiveness, and threateningness styles than non-Emirati teachers did. The results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8

Mann-Whitney Test[a] for styles based on cumulative means

	Expressiveness	Preciseness	Niceness	Supportiveness	Reflectiveness	Threateningness	Moodiness
Mann-Whitney U	36637.5	40547.5	39138.0	37331.5	41171.5	37600.0	40919.5
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.367	.117	.014	.545	.027	.556

Note. [a]Grouping variable is nationality

4.3 Second Question

The second question investigates staff members' perceptions of the level of their school performance. This question is answered by using the means and cumulative means of statements in the school performance section of the questionnaire. The findings show that participants in five schools viewed their school performance level as average (i.e., the means were 1.6 - 2.39 on the Likert scale). Participants in 25 schools agreed that their school performance was high (scaling 2.4 - 3.19), and those in 10 schools viewed that their school performance was very high (scaling 3.2 - 4). Participants in cycle 1 and 3 schools perceived their school performance as mostly high or very high while those in cycles 2 perceived their school performance as mostly high. Table 9 summarizes the results.

Table 9

School performance based on cumulative means

Performance level					
	Very low M = 0.00 – 0.79	Low M = 0.8 - 1.59	Average M = 1.6 – 2.39	High M = 2.4 – 3.19	Very high M = 3.20 – 4.00
Cycle 1	0	0	2	11	7
Cycle 2	0	0	2	9	0
Cycle 3	0	0	1	5	3

In the interviews, most participants reported that the performance of their schools was high. Some claimed

that their schools were distinguished, asserting that principals and staff tried their best to improve schools and meet ADEC requirements. At the same time, a few participants argued that their school performance should be improved. Overall, the qualitative results seemed to support the quantitative results in classifying school performance.

4.4 Third Question

The third question investigated staff members' perceptions of the relationships between the communication styles of their principals and their school performance. In order to answer this question, Pearson r analyses were performed to identify correlation coefficients between the means of principals' communication styles and the means of school performance. In addition, the answers to the three open-ended questions in the questionnaire and the responses given in the interviews were analyzed and the findings were used to describe the relationship between communication styles and school performance. Table 10 summarizes the results of Pearson r analyses.

When each participant was used as the unit for analysis, the seven communication styles were found to correlate significantly to school performance in varying degrees. The supportiveness style had the highest correlation with school performance followed by the preciseness style. Threateningness and moodiness styles had moderate negative correlations with school performance.

Table 10

Correlation Coefficient between Principal Styles and School Performance (Individual Participants)

Item#	Principal Communication styles	Pearson Correlation (School performance)	Sig. (2-tailed)
4	Supportiveness style	.609	.000
2	Preciseness style	.579	.000
1	Expressiveness style	.554	.000
3	Niceness style	.512	.000
5	Reflectiveness style	.327	.000
6	Threateningness style	-.405	.000
7	Moodiness style	-.520	.000

When each school was used as the unit for analysis, the results indicated that preciseness and expressiveness styles preceded the supportiveness style in their relationship to performance. The results are summarized in Table 11.

Table 11

Correlation Coefficient between Principal Styles and School Performance (Individual Schools)

Item#	Styles	Pearson Correlation (School performance)	Sig. (2-tailed)
2	Preciseness style	.742	.000
1	Expressiveness style	.730	.000
4	Supportiveness style	.672	.000
3	Niceness style	.538	.000
5	Reflectiveness style	.433	.000
6	Threateningness style	-.509	.000
7	Moodiness style	-.688	.000

To summarize, the supportiveness style has the highest correlation with school performance from the viewpoints of each participant, while the preciseness style has the highest correlation with performance when the analysis is conducted for individual schools. In both cases, the expressiveness style comes second. On the other hand, both individual school samples and individual participants in the sample perceive moodiness and threateningness as the styles affecting school performance negatively.

4.5 Qualitative Findings

Drawing on qualitative data, and notwithstanding two interviewees who suggested that participants might be flattering their principals, nine interviewees confirmed that the quantitative findings were realistic. Many of the interviewees described the relationship between communication and performance by saying that "it's a direct… relationship." It was clear from the responses that most interviewees considered the supportiveness style key for motivating teachers and staff and for recognizing their achievements. In the interviews, most participants mentioned that being supportive is the best communication style because "it is consistent with human nature." One participant said, "the supportive principal creates a positive environment because he/she knows it is not easy to do the tasks. Sometimes he/she gives examples to staff to help them achieve the goals." Participants explained that it is significant for a principal to be expressive, precise, and nice. All of these qualities help enhance school performance. At the same time, they emphasized that being clear in giving directions is something important for any effective principal. Participants' responses indicate their refusal to accept a principal's attempt to force obedience to directions without giving enough clarifications on their worth. Furthermore, participants argued that principals should be wise and "choose the best style according to people and conditions at schools." On the other hand, all participants stressed that the "threateningness" style affects school performance negatively because of many reasons. Participants said, "even if this style can succeed with few people, it fails with the rest", "using threatening may succeed but for a limited time", "it can contribute to creating uncomfortable school environment", and "with threatening, staff complete the required tasks simply to avoid being criticized, but they would not introduce new initiatives." Only one teacher argued, "Sometimes, principals should be tough in responding to non-disciplined behaviors of some staff". All participants agreed, "Moodiness is the worst style for principals to use." They agreed that moodiness is "very dangerous because it can lead to much gossiping." Principals cannot, they argued, depend on this style if they want to raise the performance of their schools.

The interviewees differed in ranking the communication styles that could improve performance. Some of them ranked the supportiveness style as the most needed style followed by preciseness style, expressiveness style, niceness style, and reflectiveness style. Others ranked preciseness as the most needed style following by the other styles. A third group argued that "being flexible" is the best. By this, they meant that the principals should choose the best style that fits the school community.

In an answer to why many principals in Al Ain schools possess positive communication styles as the quantitative results indicated, one participant clarified, "the extensive professional development programs that ADEC conducted for principals contributed to the creation of similar communication styles that most principals already have by now." Another participant claimed, "the time of the dictatorial leadership has decayed and school principals now work within the school team." A third one explained, "most principals are above 35 and have at least ten years of experience which makes them more rational, less moody, and [more able to] deal with almost all issues patiently." Another interviewee added, "principals' long experience in working with many people helped them to understand that people are different and need multiple styles to interact with." Participants argued that evaluation of the principals during the last three years was an important factor that led to improvements in principals' communication styles because "evaluation encouraged principals to identify their weaknesses and work to overcome them through professional development sessions."

5. Discussion

Two interviewees dismissed the quantitative findings on the claim that "participants were flattering their principals." It is highly possible that their disagreement arise from negative personal experiences with their principals, or their general personal communication attitudes. In fact, Norton and Miller (1975) argue that personal communication styles affect peoples' judgments on others' communication styles. Beyond this point, it is obvious from quantitative and qualitative findings that principals have been consistently using certain positive communication styles. School principals in Al Ain government schools, this study revealed, were perceived to be expressive, supportive, precise, nice, and reflective. Principals least often exhibit communication styles of

threateningness and moodiness.

These results can be understood in terms of the fact that principals in the sample had many years of experience, which enriched their communication styles. In addition to their experience as principals, ADEC, as the governing body of schools in Abu Dhabi, emphasizes the importance of communication as a highly needed leadership skill from all principals as it enables them to work with different stakeholders inside and outside schools (ADEC, n.d.a). Following its emphasis on communication, ADEC continuously provides extensive professional development opportunities to school principals—an effort which surely contributed to the relatively consistent communication styles they possess.

Another reason for such wide use of positive communication styles by school principals in Al Ain schools is the fact that principals are evaluated annually. Evaluation provides an opportunity to motivate principals to develop themselves in various areas—one of which is communication. In general, performance evaluation bears a huge importance in the UAE school context with students, teachers, and principals oriented towards high results. They usually give utmost attention to evaluation and strive to get the highest ranks. With this in mind, it is not unusual to see principals making every effort to follow the guidelines of evaluation documents to get high appraisals.

Nevertheless, full understanding of the positive communication styles of principals should not be interpreted as arising only from their years of experience, ADEC training, and evaluation, but the broader cultural context especially the temperament of the Emirati people and their own styles of behavior and communication is significant in this regard. Emirati citizens are generally friendly and supportive people. They usually avoid direct criticism and confrontations. Therefore, the results of the study reveal a general cultural component of the society, which disdains aggressiveness and threateningness, especially in the workplace.

The findings of this study show that female principals are more expressive, friendly, supportive, and reflective than male principals. This is not a surprising finding since it falls in line with other research findings. Research findings indicate that women are more likely to adopt human-oriented leadership styles than men, whereas men prefer task-oriented leadership styles (Appelbaum, Audet, & Miller, 2003). The findings also reveal that Emirati teachers rate principals higher on the expressiveness and supportiveness styles than non-Emirati teachers do. This result can be explained in terms of the fact that the UAE culture is a high-context culture that relies more on nonverbal communication and behaviors. In this culture, women and men speak less but at the same time, they believe that the message they send through different means of communication should be complete and clear, even if the communication is not clear or detailed on its face. The fact that most teachers in female schools are citizens made communication easier. The case is slightly different in male schools, as teachers come mainly from different Arab and Western countries. The high-context/low-context differences can account for not only differences between the female and male perceptions of principals' communication styles but also for differences between Emirati and non-Emirati teachers. Emirati teachers reported higher values for principals' threateningness style than did non-Emirati teachers. This might seem surprising and perhaps contradictory compared with the high values they reported for expressiveness and supportiveness. However, if this finding is viewed from the perspective of what it means to be a UAE national citizen, the picture becomes clear. While non-Emirati teachers might accept direct commands and explanations of inadequate performance from a principal, national teachers might not equally accept this type of communication. The reason may be due to their belief that by virtue of their nationality entitlement, they have certain privileges and should not be treated in the same manner as non-national teachers in certain situations.

The findings support the existence of a positive relationship between communication styles of supportiveness, preciseness, expressiveness, and niceness on the one hand and school performance on the other hand. Similarly, de Vries, Bakker-Pieper, and Oostenveld (2009) found that the supportiveness and preciseness styles are perceived as the most important communication styles to raise school performance. In fact, the preciseness style is considered by all staff in each school as *the* style that leads to better performance. Individual participants seem more interested in communication styles that initiate from human-oriented leadership styles

such as supportiveness whereas individual school samples support communication styles that associate more with task-oriented leadership styles such as preciseness.

In Tabernero, Chambel, Curral, and Arana (2009) study, the task- and human-oriented leadership styles were examined and their influences were correlated to a host of variables such as group efficacy, cohesion, and performance of managerial and complex tasks. The results show that human-oriented leadership behaviors generate greater cohesion than task-oriented behaviors. On the other hand, task-oriented leadership behaviors encourage greater group efficacy than human-oriented leadership behaviors and greater performance of managerial and complex tasks. What can be inferred from the findings of the current study and other research is that school principals should be able to strike a balance between the communication styles connected with both leadership styles. Today's changing educational landscape necessitates that principals master and be ready to use different communication styles suitable to school goals and contexts. In other words, participants in this study stress the need for the supportiveness style as one requirement for raising performance. At the same time, precise communication gains higher correlation with raising school performance. This means that both human-oriented and task-oriented communication styles are significant.

However, the findings of this study indicate a compelling need for using communication that is more precise so that schools can raise their performance. In fact, in the problem statement section of this study, the problem was substantiated on general accounts of lack of communication and on the outcries of ADEC for more effective communication. In ADEC (2009a), teachers complained that they were not given enough encouragement by their school principals to take decisions (i.e., lack of supportiveness) and principals did not clarify expectations for meeting instructional goals (i.e. lack of preciseness). In ADEC (2009b), teachers and staff had a tendency to resist change—an expected behavior when principals are not supportive or precise enough. The results of this study show that principals are using positive styles of communication and refraining from negative styles. Therefore, it seems that school principals are not using the proper styles of communication in the proper order of importance or weight to help raise the school performance. In other words, school principals are more expressive and supportive while they should be more precise. In fact, this aligns with the findings when participants' perceptions in individual schools are considered. Participants' desire to receive concise and precise messages relates to the culture of educational change in the UAE. Over the last decade, educational reforms in the UAE have heavily depended on Western models. The new schools have flocks of foreign teachers from many Western countries to help in teaching science, English, and math, using English language as the medium of instruction. In such a high-context culture, it is interesting to see that during a period of change, teachers from all backgrounds aspire for communication that is more precise.

The findings of the current study also support a moderate, negative relationship between both threateningness and moodiness on the one hand and school performance on the other hand. This can be understood from the words of most participants in the interviews who explained that in the UAE almost all teachers work hard to get high evaluation marks regardless of their principals' communication styles. Furthermore, the findings indicate that moodiness is the most dangerous style that can affect school performance. As participants clarify, this style of communication will not help people to feel comfortable or to know exactly how the work should be done.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of this study provide a clear strategy for principals to work to increase their school performance using certain communication styles. All of the styles except threateningness and moodiness can contribute positively in developing school performance. Additionally, principals should rely more on the preciseness style when they communicate to groups. When they engage in individual communication, they should be precise and supportive. Expressiveness or talkativeness of principals, which ranked first and was used more than other styles, should be minimized. It is equally important for principals to understand that the threateningness and moodiness styles will not lead to improving the school climate or performance and therefore they have to avoid using them altogether.

It was important to conduct this study in the context of the UAE because of the remarkable changes initiated by ADEC and framed in the New School Model. The NSM changed the ways in which schools are managed in the emirate of Abu Dhabi and it was important to study how communication plays a role in facilitating or hindering such a change. The study contributes to the knowledge about principals' communication styles in the country—an area of research that has received little attention. The study helps clarify the relationships between principals' communication styles and school performance. Furthermore, the study identifies school principals' communication styles which could impact school performance positively and negatively. Thus, it provides a road map for school principals to reshape their communication styles in ways that could improve school performance. The results of this study should guide the efforts of ADEC and KHDA with regard to professional development programs for principals and can help enhance programs of school principal preparation in the country. The results of this study will be shared with principals in Al Ain schools to inform them of how their communication styles are perceived by teachers and staff, and to raise their awareness of the communication styles that can lead to better performance.

Further research should be conducted using in-depth qualitative methods to investigate how school principal communication styles can positively or negatively affect school performance. Studies that target a limited number of male and female schools may help in discovering deeper differences in the communication styles that best improve school performance. Other studies can compare the views of foreign teachers and staff who do not speak Arabic with those who speak Arabic to find differences in their perceptions of principals' communication styles. Future research should consider whether the communication style of participants condition their responses or influence their judgments on principals' communication styles.

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