LEADERSHIP AS A SOCIALLY AND CULTURALLY INFORMED PRAXIS: THE QUESTION OF INTERNATIONALISATION IN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

EL LIDERAZGO COMO UNA PRAXIS SOCIAL Y CULTURALMENTE INFORMADA: LA CUESTIÓN DE LA INTERNACIONALIZACIÓN EN EL LIDERAZGO DE ESCUELAS INTERNACIONALES

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Resumen

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A pesar del crecimiento en número y tamaño de las escuelas internacionales a nivel global, la investigación que examina su liderazgo y comunidades es aún limitada. El emergente interés en la investigación de este campo aún no ha explorado cabalmente las relaciones de los líderes con los campos sociales en los cuales trabajan y las necesidades culturales y sociales de sus docentes y estudiantes. Este artículo investiga la práctica de liderazgo y el aprendizaje en las escuelas internacionales en Inglaterra y Qatar, ofreciendo un breve contexto histórico respecto del desarrollo de estas escuelas en cada país. De manera adicional, el artículo examina la respuesta de los líderes a los campos sociales multiculturales en los cuales trabajan y el capital cultural de sus docentes y estudiantes. El artículo usa la teoría social de Bourdieu como marco sociológico clave y se involucra con sus conceptos, campo, capital, habitus y práctica, destacando su interconexión y relevancia en el contexto de su investigación. El artículo analiza la praxis de liderazgo (conocimiento y práctica) construyendo sobre la investigación actual sobre liderazgo de justicia social, y liderazgo educacional culturalmente relevante y culturalmente receptivo. Este artículo está basado en un estudio más extenso que aborda las limitaciones del liderazgo y la práctica en las escuelas internacionales de Qatar e Inglaterra a través de un enfoque crítico realista y metodológico mixto. Sin embargo, este artículo presenta solamente resultados de las entrevistas en profundidad, individuales y grupales (N=24), con líderes experimentados de las escuelas internacionales (n=10), líderes intermedios (n=9), docentes (n=7), y estudiantes de educación secundaria (n=16). Los hallazgos mostraron que las escuelas internacionales se caracterizan por el multiculturalismo, movilidad y transitoriedad, lo que impacta significativamente las experiencias de trabajo y aprendizaje en estos contextos. Los hallazgos reflejan nociones de internacionalismo que son amplias y performativas, y brechas significativas en el conocimiento y práctica del liderazgo en relación con el capital cultural y las necesidades de sus docentes y estudiantes. La discusión de los hallazgos se adentra en el análisis teórico de las razones detrás de estas brechas y el impacto del neoliberalismo y la estructuralización en el campo. El artículo releva la necesidad de un cambio en la perspectiva en la teoría de liderazgo educativo que incluya una praxis social y culturalmente informada y aprendizaje de liderazgo transformativo y que requiere una mayor teorización de la internacionalización en el liderazgo educativo.

Abstract

Despite the growing size and number of international schools globally, research examining their leadership and communities is still limited. The emerging research interest in this field has not yet fully explored the relationship of leaders with the social fields in which they work and the cultural and social needs of their teachers and students. This article investigates leadership practice and learning in international schools in England and Qatar, offering a brief historical background of the development of these schools in each country. Additionally, the article examines leaders' response to the multicultural social fields in which they work and the cultural capital of their teachers and students. The article uses Bourdieu's social theory as a key sociological framework and engages with his concepts, field, capital, habitus, and practice highlighting their interconnection and relevance in the context of this research. The article analyses leadership praxis (knowledge and practice) by building on existing research in social justice leadership, culturally relevant, and culturally responsiveness educational leadership. This article is based on a larger study that addresses the limitations of leadership learning and practice in Qatar and England international schools through a critical realist and a mixed methodological approach. Nonetheless, this article presents only the results of in-depth individual and group interviews (N=24) with senior international school leaders (n=10), middle leaders (n= 9), teachers (n=7), and high-school students (n=16). The findings showed that international schools are characterised by multiculturalism, mobility, and transience, which significantly impacts the experiences of working and learning in these contexts. The findings reflect broad and performative notions of internationalism and substantial gaps in leadership knowledge and practice in relation to the cultural capital and needs of their teachers and students. The discussion of findings engages in a theoretical analysis of the reasons behind these gaps and the impact of neoliberalisation and structuralisation in the field. The article highlights the need for a perspective shift in educational leadership theory that involves a socially and culturally informed praxis and transformative leadership learning and calls for further theorising of internationalisation in educational leadership.

Keywords: Leadership; practice; international schools; England; Qatar

1. Introduction

The relationship of educational leadership with the context in which it is exercised is well established in the literature (Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2017). However, studies investigating leadership in multicultural international schools are still limited (Bunnell, 2021). The growth of international schools, particularly in the Middle East, has been accelerating over the last two decades and is still expected to develop over the next few years (ICS Research, 2023). In addition, international schools have also expanded in the United Kingdom following policy recommendations for increasing aspects of globalisation and global partnerships in education (Bunnell, 2010). However, this expansion remained slow if compared with other countries, especially in Asian and African countries.

Despite a significant increase in the size and number of international schools, leadership in this context is still understudied. This article addresses the internationalism and multiculturalism shaping students and teachers' experiences in these schools, the praxis (knowledge and practice) of their leadership and the leaders' relationship with schools as social and cultural fields. International schools in this article are defined as schools that host a diverse population of students, teach in English, and offer a curriculum that is different from that of the host country (ISC Research, 2023). While ISC Research is a commercial research organisation, not an academic source, their definition has been used by different researchers in the field due to its practicality and comprehensiveness (Bunnell, 2021; Pearce, 2023).

This research took place in England and Qatar international schools, where communities are highly diverse. The study unpacks the phenomena of uni-dimensionality and leadership practice and learning in these contexts. The article introduces international schools in England and Qatar and offers a vignette of each context. Using Bourdieu's theory (1977, 1986), the article conceptualises international schools as social and cultural fields and analyses leadership practice, capital, and habitus. In addition, the article draws on culturally relevant and culturally responsive leadership (Brown, 2004; Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Khalifa et al., 2016), and argues for a deeper connection between leadership praxis and the social field.

Context and background

England
International schools and colleges have been known in England since the last quarter of the 18th century and were associated with foreign—mainly European and American—communities (Sylvester, 2002, p. 101). In the 1970s, the British ties with the European Market attracted many European individuals and families, who relocated to the United Kingdom (UK)—and particularly to England, creating additional demands for schools that would culturally and

linguistically serve their children. To this day, most international schools in the UK —both public and private—are centred in England (Bunnell, 2016). Most of these schools offer one or more of the IB programs. However, the number of schools identifying as *international* in England is still limited. Many independent schools in England cater for the needs of international students (British Educational Suppliers Association [BESA], 2023) and local students looking to expand their "globalised capital", but "internationalism is often a hidden dimension" (Brooks & Waters, 2015, p. 101). The contemporary notion of internationalisation of education in England can be traced back to the DfID ACT (2005) which encouraged international education and promoted the growth of English education outside the UK. In 1997, the New Labour government encouraged English schools to establish ties and partnerships abroad and to grow the Global dimension and international education inside the UK (Ball, 2017; Bunnell, 2010). The Department for International Development's (DfID) initiative issued in 2005—currently the Foreign and Commonwealth Office—contributed to developing an internationalised environment and a wider acceptance of international education in England under the 'Global dimension' (DfES, 2006 in Bunnell, 2010). In addition, English education under Blair's government was encouraged to develop its global impact and global citizenship values (Ball, 2017) and to equip students and adults with skills needed for life and work in a global economy (Brooks & Waters, 2015).

The DfID's initiative encouraged independent schools to grow their business overseas, while supporting the development of international schools in England to cater for the needs of diplomats and wealthy expats who chose England as a second home. According to Ball (2017), the growth of international schools in England can be linked to a growing wave of privatisation and the increasing emphasis on the commercialisation of educational services since the 1980s, which has also been a part of the foreign economic policy agenda. Since the 1990s, many independent schools have decided to expand their business overseas (Ball, 2017). Several entities were formed to support and serve British international schools globally, especially in the Middle East, such as the Council for British International Schools (COBIS), British Schools in the Middle East (BSME), and British Schools Overseas (BSO). These schools are listed under independent schools, follow the guidance of the Office of the Secretary of Education, and host students from multiple cultural backgrounds. However, while British international education has been flourishing overseas, the growth of international schools within the United Kingdom has not been equally promising.

Qatar

The Gulf States, including Qatar, have witnessed a massive increase in the number of international schools since the end of the 1990s where the boosting economy not only increased local population's wealth but also attracted significant numbers of international

white-collar workers, professionals, and entrepreneurs. The categorisation of newcomers varies between *workers* and *ex-patriates* (expats), with the latter generally addressing people from the Global North or migrants with a higher social and cultural capital. Qatar offers rewarding opportunities to many people who benefit from tax free income, free market inspiration, relaxed business regulations, and a socially constructed superior position.

International schools have been known in the Middle East for a very long time, but their presence was associated with religious missionaries before the term international schools came to life in the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, the Gulf region did not have significant geopolitical importance before the discovery of the oil in the mid-1930s. Qatar is one of the six states in the Gulf and was the second–after Kuwait–to produce oil in 1937. Oil led to a massive change in the country's economy and social life afterwards. Consequently, the number of international companies and their staff and their families also increased. Thus, the need for schools that would teach their children the curricula of their countries became vital. Qatar's flourishing economy since the early 2000s supported thousands of investments, which created an additional need for international schools that would serve this growing multicultural population. Over the last twenty years, the population almost doubled (World Population Review, 2023). Nonetheless, international schools continued to function within a "closed elite circuit" (Gardner-McTaggart, 2022) of affluent groups, in addition to middle class, or rising middle class families.

There is a deep assumption in Qatar and the rest of the Gulf countries that Western international schools are better than others and offer good quality education (Khalil, 2019), especially those with White Eurocentric–and Anglophonic–programs (Samier, 2021), staff and leaders. Most parents want their children to speak and act like their White teachers, simply because this is seen as *better* and could offer them *better* future and work opportunities. As a result, many international and local schools prefer recruiting White Anglophonic teachers and leaders, with the exception of the Arabic and Islamic studies that are usually allocated to teachers from the SWANA region (Ben Giaber et al., 2023).

The British international school was the first to serve the children of expats in Doha since 1971, which can be described as a traditional (type A) school (Hayden & Thompson, 2016). Over the following years, more traditional and non-traditional (Type C) schools were founded (Ibid.). The expansion of international schools in Qatar is aligned with their expansion in many Asian countries and the rest of the world and can be viewed as part of a neoliberal ideology that nurtures private businesses and for-profit educational services. Corporatism and privatisation have been encouraged in Qatar as part of the government's strategy to attract investors and

provide promising opportunities. However, the impact on education was not restricted to corporatisation and profitability approaches but was paralleled by the growth of a performative culture across the sector that is practiced and normalised in public and private—including international—schools. The excessive focus on performativity and corporatism is represented by a heavy reliance on marketisation and materialities in almost all aspects of schooling. As these schools cater for the needs of middle class and wealthy elites, they represent a space of competitiveness within the country where they compete for demonstrating a well-crafted digital image in the public eye, using sophisticated apparatus and appearances that serve their fragile discourse of globalisation and diversity.

International schools in Qatar have particular significance due to the historical relationships connecting them with the UK, as Qatar was a protectorate of the Empire until 1971 (Adiong, 2012). Although historical relations have ended legally, it could be argued that they still affect the social and political construction of power dynamics and ongoing relationships (Go, 2013), including the desirability of international schools. Despite a growing American community and the development of a few American international schools, the number and size of British schools is much larger, which is also the case in other Gulf states (Khalil, 2019). Students in Qatar come from multiple cultures and speak different languages, and many of them come from contexts affected by ethnic, religious, or political conflicts that were the reasons for their relocation besides issues of social and economic insecurity. The complexity of this social field offers significant implications for international school leadership.

Literature review and key research areas

The school as a Bourdieusian field

Understanding the school as a Bourdieusian field brings forward the inseparable relationship between the field, the capital, the habitus, and the practice of leaders (1977, 1992). Bourdieu's fields are 'networks of social relations' and 'structured systems of social positions' (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 25), which constitute the cultural and social spaces and hierarchies through which social agents interact (Eacott, 2013). Each field has its own set of beliefs and perspectives or what Bourdieu called doxas, which legitimise the game in the field (Bourdieu, 1977). Doxas explain why certain forms of capital can be valued more than others, and consequently, determine the positions of agents in the field (Thomson, 2017). Positions and symbolic power in the field are based on the capital(s) possessed by agents, and the habitus they demonstrate in their new fields. Hence, field, capital and habitus are interconnected concepts, and

international schools—in this research—are conceptualised as fields of power that (re)produce cultural transposition and advantage (Grenfell, 2014). In Bourdieu's words (1992), a field is

> a structural social space, a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who
> dominate and people who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships
> of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a
> space in which the various actors struggle for the transformation or
> preservation of the field (p. 4).

Conceptualising the school as a social field creates opportunities for questioning leadership practice and the role of leaders in reproducing invisible cultural and social hierarchies. In fact, Bourdieu's lens legitimises critical questions related to the connection of practice, agency, the social and cultural capitals embodied by students and teachers, and their recognition (or lack of it) in the field. Therefore, questions such as the reproduction of the logics of the structure, and the officialised norms and forms of action (leading and teaching) in schools, and the response of leadership to the capital(s) of students and teachers become essential and inevitable.

Leadership in international schools' research

International school leadership is an expanding field of interest, however, there hasn't been sufficient research in this area despite the growing population they serve. Bunnell and Gardner-McTaggart (2022) examined the dominant narrative in international school leadership through a Bourdieusian perspective, revealing the prioritisation of a specific set of skills and appearances that qualify leaders to be "fit" to serve a globally affluent group or an aspiring one. Sawalhi and Tamimi (2021) discussed international school leaders in Qatar amidst a global pandemic and focused on their relationships with communities and authorities. Additionally, Bunnell (2022) analysed the perception of international school leaders in the digital sphere reflecting the challenges and rivalries associated with the job that is also described as short-tenured (Benson, 2011) and precariat (Bunnell, 2016). Keller's research (2015) analysed the duality of situations, times, and cultures, where leaders manage organisational priorities whilst working toward meeting their school needs.

Despite prevailing heterogeneity and multiculturalism in international schools, the questions of the connection of leadership with this diversity have not been fully explored by leadership and international education scholars. A few studies suggested that leaders need to be aware of the different cultures constituting their organisations and adapt their behaviours to meet the different needs (Fisher, 2021). Some in-depth examination of the nature and dynamics of these schools can be particularly useful to explore the connection of this multicultural field and the work of school leaders. Mainstream studies in educational leadership can be relatable and

useful to understanding some of the key dimensions of leaders' work in schools, especially studies conducted based on wide-scale samples (see Leithwood et al., 2020) or reviews that incorporate research from a diversity of contexts including international schools (see Robinson, 2011). However, the particularity of these schools and the amplified value associated with economic capital and some aspects of cultural capital in their practice besides the diversity of their communities call for further examination of leadership and the extent to which it responds to the social and cultural capital (1986) of students and teachers.

Scholars of social justice leadership have established evidence that culturally responsive leadership can lead to engaged students with better connections to their school communities and better learning outcomes (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Lopez, 2016; Smyth, 2006; Smyth et al., 2014). Social justice leadership, culturally relevant (Brown, 2006) and culturally responsiveness leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016) can be useful to explore international schools due to the multiculturality of their students, and the socially constructed hierarchies embedded within their practices (Gardner-McTaggart, 2022). Arar et al. (2017) and Lopez (2016) suggested that leadership needs to be sensitive to the power dynamics and delicate relationships between schools and their leadership and the needs of students in multicultural schools, while Khalifa et al. (2016) suggested that relevant leadership and pedagogy are not sufficient; they need to be fully responsive and ensure that the needs of students are attended to and cared for. Khalifa (2018) confirmed that there is no single recipe for cultural sensitivity and responsiveness due to the unique values in each context. It is up to leadership to figure out what the needs are and how they should be met, which should be developed in collaboration with school communities and local stakeholders. Although these theories did not emerge based on studying contexts similar to international schools, their investigations in heterogenous societies and schools where unidimensional norms prevail and inequalities are reproduced establish a case of relevance, although not similarity.

Leadership practice

Bourdieu understood professional practice as the process of putting thought and discourse logics into action (Bourdieu, 1977), which implies that practice, to Bourdieu, was not merely a set of technicist functions, but a complementary process of combining thought and action. Bourdieu defined practice as the unity of "mechanical" actions driven by the "logics of discourse" that are reproduced with the aim of "symbolic mastery" and reinforced by social norms and structures (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 17). The "rationalisation" of these mechanical acts by

the structure endows a form of legitimacy and legalism (Ibid.). As these acts become
"ritualised", they turn into the habitus.

Practice is focused on goals and effectiveness, and adaptation to the logic of the game, which
could turn the actions of school leaders into mechanical performances. Therefore, Bourdieu
argued that "practice is the produce of a generative scheme of logics (rules) of the game", that
are "different from the logic of thought and discourse" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 20) and require
engaging one's reflexive thought and relationship inquiry. Leadership practice, in this sense, is
about applying the rules, and putting into action a "repertoire of devices or techniques where
the whole art of performance [...] reappears" (Ibid). However, Bourdieu warned against these
generative schemes producing justifications for the structures by providing them with a
particular rationalisation, when there is a disconnect (clash) between the [leadership]
disposition and the structure" (1977, p. 20). Bourdieu continues to explain:

> Even if they [these clashes] appear to affect practice within the narrow limits, the fact
> remains that whenever the adjustment of structures and dispositions is broken, the
> transformation of the degenerative schemes is doubtless reinforced and accelerated by
> the dialectic between the schemes immanent in practice and the enormous knowledge
> produced by reflections on practice, which impose new meanings on them by reference
> to alien structures. (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 20)

Practice, according to Bourdieu is produced (and reproduced) by the interaction of the field
with the habitus and the capitals, which is summarised by his formula "Practice = Field x
(habitus + capital)" (1984, p. 110). Bourdieu's notion of practice is influenced by the rules of the
field, where specific forms of capital are recognised and more valued that others. Such
recognitions are embedded into the social norms within the field, which legitimises certain
actions and dispositions. The mannerisms of coping and mastering actions that are aligned with
these norms and recognitions, is constantly reinforced and officialised by the structure. The
habitualisation of these actions over time makes them a part of the habitus, which functions
unconsciously and consciously, and turns into thinkable and unthinkable behaviour. This
explains why Bourdieu explicitly alerted that the legalisation of structural rules "must not lead
us to make the habitus the exclusive principle of practice" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 20). Instead,
Bourdieu called for reflection and for "constructing the objective structures" to be "able to
pose the question of the mechanisms through which the relationships between the structures
and the practices or the representations which accompany them take place" (1977, p. 21).

The key focus of this article is the practice of school leaders in international schools where the structure or the governing entity beyond the schools influences leadership but can also be influenced by the agency of leadership. The article also focuses on what leaders do that represents their leadership practice; what activities count as leading, and how they enact leadership in specific contexts while responding to organisational expectations. Literature in the field shows a wide range of studies in different contexts suggesting that leadership priorities are essentially pedagogic (Male & Palaiologou, 2012) and instructional (Day et al., 2016; Hallinger, 2010), which are also described by others as learning-centred (Southworth, 2011), or student-centred (Robinson, 2011). Regardless of the differences between these theories, the focus on supporting teaching and improving student learning are fundamental in each of them. Most theories related to leading teaching and learning offer useful guidance on the main dimensions of practice and the strategies to implement them. However, these were mostly driven from studies in mainstream schools, mostly public sector in Western countries, which could still apply to different areas in the work of international school leaders. Nonetheless, the adaptability of leadership approaches, teaching, pedagogy, and curriculum based on the needs of international school students, or the knowledge and experience of their teachers have not been fully examined by research.

Bourdieusian research on school leadership explains that what leaders learn before and during their years of practice not only adds to their own symbolic capital, but becomes embedded in their habitus, which incorporates the norms and rules of the field. The habitus encompasses dispositions and mental structures resulting from someone's previous knowledge and experience, guides other structures of thought and behaviour, and enables individual development in relation to their social context (1977). This perspective underpins the main argument in this article that leadership in schools should be immersed in the field not only at the structural level, but at community (social and cultural) level, in order to learn and incorporate the norms, knowledge(s) and expectations of teachers, students, and their families. As the literature review on leadership in international schools shows short tenures (Mancuso et al., 2010; Benson, 2011) and limited or no preparation to leading in international contexts (Calnin et al. 2018), this study investigates the implications of these gaps on leadership using a critical realist multimethodological approach.

2. Methodological approach

The article is based on a larger study that uses a critical realist lens. Although critical realism is not widely used in educational leadership research, its stratified axiological reality (the empirical, the actual, and the real) (Alderson, 2021) can be a powerful paradigm that meets the goals of this research. Critical realism views reality as situated, contextualised, and

"multilayered" (Thorpe, 2020 p. 6). Leadership is a sophisticated form of action that takes place in a complex field and engages in relationships with authorities, other leaders, teachers, students and families, besides organisational structures. Therefore, a critical realist approach would help to address this complexity.

Critical realism embraces an empiricist perspective along with subjective constructivism, while incorporating a critical lens that unpicks the connections between the different layers of reality and paves the way for constructing transformative possibilities. Critical realism was established with the writings of Bhaskar (2016) who viewed "reality as structured, differentiated and changing". Critical realists believe that our knowledge of the world is context-, concept-, and activity-dependent (Archer et al., 1998), which allows the critique of ideology that can be generalised to the critique of 'social systems' and 'structures' (Thorpe, 2020, p. 7).

The original study used mixed methods: a questionnaire, field analysis, document analysis and interviews. However, for the purpose of this article, only the findings of individual and group interviews are presented. The interviews (n=24) took place with senior leaders (n=10), middle leaders (n=9), teachers (n=7), and high school students (n=16) in England (n=2) and Qatar (n=3) international schools. Data collected from each school was analysed independently then integrated with data collected from other schools, which allowed a triangulation of key findings. Data collected from each group of interviewees was analysed independently then triangulated with data collected from other groups. The integrated outcomes were categorised into four main themes that will be presented in the findings section.

This research examines the relationship of leadership with the social field, through Bourdieu's lens and a critical realist perspective. Ontologically, understanding the features and dynamics of the field is essential to understanding the practices of school leaders. Both Bourdieu theory and the critical realist perspective consider the relationship of leadership with the field inevitable, and so is the influence of one on the other. Epistemologically, the three layers of knowledge can be useful to respond to the main inquiry while incorporating the complexity of leadership and its relationship with the field. The realist layer documents empirical evidence related to school phenomena and leaders' perspectives as represented in the interviews. The actual can interpret events and practices and construct meaning through interviews' thematic analysis, whereas the real, which is the most difficult layer, can uncover the causal relationships behind different phenomena and practices. The latter can be reached through thematic analysis and the immersion in a theoretical discussion.

Using critical realism in educational leadership can help to critique unidimensional managerialist approaches, to explore the new patterns of change revealed by participants, to recognise the deeper connections between schooling and the multi-cultures and capital(s) of students and teachers, and to advocate for leadership as agency and transformation. A philosophical and theoretical framework that utilises realist, constructivist and analytical approaches is best suited for the purpose of this research due to the complex nature of leadership and the field in which it is exercised.

3. The findings

International schools as fields of mobility and transience

Schools participating in this research have predominantly white Anglo-phonic leaders and managers and mostly white teachers, with one exception where the senior leaders were from Global South countries, that is, non-Whites, but also not locals.

> We are not as culturally diverse as we should be. Our staff are either White male or White female teachers that are from either England or the UK. (Middle leader, Qatar)

> The teaching cohort is not as diverse as we would like. That is due to the way in which recruitment into teaching takes place. We have people from different ethnic groups, but not at the same scale as the diversity in the student body. (Principal, England)

The communities encompassing these schools are highly diverse. In Qatar case studies, most leaders and staff are from the Global North while students are mostly from the global South, in addition to children of expatriates. Only one case study in Qatar has a majority of staff and leaders from the Middle East and a minority from the Global South. Alternatively, in England case studies, students were predominantly diverse (described as international), while leaders and teachers were predominantly locals (White British), with a few ethnic-minority British staff. The dominant themes across all interviews were mobility, transience, and temporality. When interviewees spoke of their experiences in relation to being a part of an international school, they shared stories of disconnection with previous places and friends, experiences of belonging and dis-belonging (Vincent, 2022), besides the impact of mobility on their identities. Identities were described as single, double, multiple, or hybrid.

Leaders generally referred to internationalism as central to their school culture and viewed student diversity as an asset but described it mostly in terms of festivities and celebrations of international events, costumes, cultures, and food.

> We tell students that we want to embrace their culture, and we have events that promote that. We have international food fairs, learning celebrations through the lens of different cultures, countries, and languages, with which the parent community gets involved. (Principal, England)

Internationalisation, to leaders, also meant learning how to cope with a new structure and the expectations of the government in a new location. To most leaders, the perception of internationalism in their schools requires an acknowledgement that working amongst people from multiple cultural backgrounds necessitates focusing on bringing these elements together and ensuring that everyone feels valued. While to others, the dominant perception was the unparalleled role played by the school in educating students and parents in a foreign country.

> Parents are overwhelmingly happy that their children speak English like us, especially that their parents do not speak with the same accent. Also, we don't only teach the children, we have different activities where we teach parents too. (Principal, Qatar)

Leadership practice

Senior leaders

The findings related to senior leaders' most common areas of practice were consistent with the outcomes of existing research in educational leadership and management, such as Hallinger (2016), Robinson (2011), and Leithwood et al. (2020), with slight differences in each case study. Leaders largely prioritise setting goals and expectations, safety and order, manage resources and recruitment, lead and organise staff professional development, and supervise the teaching process and the curriculum (Robinson, 2011). Additionally, they dedicate significant amounts of their time to working with governors, accrediting bodies, and government officials, promoting school-community relationships, and overseeing the school's digital image. Although the interviews included specific questions on what teaching and learning look like in this environment, senior leaders were largely focused on attainment, accreditation, and competition with other schools. Awareness of aspects of internationalisation is trivial and hardly connected with their school communities. Although they speak highly of diversity, the implications of diversity on their practice were not established in the findings. The deep connections of student cultures and identities, the capital(s) they bring along to their schools, and their impact on teaching and learning were not deeply recognised or acknowledged by most senior leaders.

One of the key challenges highlighted by senior leaders is the "revolving door", where schools have a significantly high rate of staff turnover. Although transience is generally normalised within transnational communities who are capable of navigating their privileges of smooth mobility across borders (Kunz, 2019), its negative impact on school operations and student learning cannot be underestimated.

> One of the challenges facing most schools in Qatar is the turnover of teachers and staff, which makes it difficult to develop leaders within the school. The average is three years for a staff member to stay in school, and this is not enough. Only around 50% of staff stay in the school much longer. (Principal, Qatar)

Senior leaders are substantially committed to flourishing their schools and reinforcing the structure (the organisation behind their school). They are largely immersed in organisational frameworks, to the extent that they often fail to adapt their practices to the needs of their contexts, or to develop programs that are driven by the key issues relevant to their school communities. Senior leaders clearly take initiatives in response to the guidance or recommendations of key local figures such as investors or sponsors. They show representation and respect to the local authority; nevertheless, the main social and cultural issues taking place within their communities–beyond authorities, investors, or sponsors–are widely ignored.

Middle leaders

Unlike senior leaders, middle leaders simply addressed the limited attention to–or the lack of–internationalisation in their teaching, or the curriculum they teach. Most teachers and middle leaders acknowledged the dominant logics of discourse in their schools. They addressed the restricted diversity in their school's recruitment and hiring policy and the lack of orientation or training preparing them to deal with the cultural diversity of students and their parents.

Middle leaders work in teams, with teachers and other leaders. They learn from each other, value collaboration, and interact closely with students. As a result, they understand the demands and issues faced by teachers and students in many ways, whereas most senior leaders seemed detached and spoke of areas vital to their students as abstract.

Middle leaders' interviews showed that they are generally reflective, while some of them were critical to the homogenisation of the school culture. Critical practitioners proposed alternative strategies and a different future for their schools, hoping for further awareness of multiculturalism amongst both staff and students. A few of them suggested that students' multiculturalism should be respected and incorporated in the teaching practice and in the school culture.

They [students] have been immersed in the culture that we've created. Perhaps we've had an unconscious bias, and we may need to reconsider this as a school. We need to gradually immerse students in a wider variety of cultures and racial backgrounds through the curriculum. (Middle leader, Qatar)

Teachers' perspectives

Teachers' experiences of transience and mobility were quite similar to those of leaders and students. Most teachers explained their career as a journey across countries and school systems. The experiences of teachers who are a part of the dominant culture in their schools were positively portrayed and characterised by collaboration and ongoing learning. Many teachers mentioned their mobility as parallel to the accumulated professional capital they have gained in their career. However, teachers from cultural minorities described being treated differently and paid less than others. Some explained that their whole cultural and social capital are marginalised and misrecognised (Fraser, 2000) by the school's dominant culture. In general, the pandemic not only threatened health and wellbeing but also induced economic risks to some teachers, who said that their schools decided to reduce their wages. Teachers in different schools were in precarious situations that were made worse by the pandemic.

Wherever there is a dominant cultural group, there is a probability that a few other nationalities or cultures might take more time to feel well settled or represented. It might be unconscious; many people may or may not think it's happening. (Teacher, Qatar)

I have witnessed some teachers from specific cultures and nationalities treated differently, and they noticed that they have been spoken to not in the same way or at the same level as a person coming from a Western country. (Middle leader, Qatar)

Currently due to Covid19, and because of the financial constraints, we could lose a portion of our salaries and we can do nothing to stop it. (Middle leader, Qatar)

To most teachers, team and leadership support were present but they lacked preparation to deal with the diversity of cultures and languages in their classrooms. They generally teach a predesigned curriculum and follow specific prescribed pedagogies based on their schools and the guidance of their team leaders. While most schools offer English language support for their

students, teachers confirmed that schools teach content and narratives that are written by Global North authors with no representation or consideration for their multicultural students, with a few exceptions.

Students' perspectives

Students' interviews reflected the heavy impact of the experiences of migration and mobility on their lives and learning experiences. To them, internationalisation was equivalent to transience, temporality, disconnection, and difficulty in making new friends. Students experienced difficulties resulting from leaving their friends and loved ones behind and trying to settle in new places and spaces, which can be difficult. Others viewed this experience of internationalisation as a positive one as it placed them in an environment where everyone else is viewed similarly, whereas their previous experience in local schools was different as students' groups were culturally homogenous. The sense of belonging or disbelonging was mentioned frequently by students. Additionally, students linked their experiences in international schools to their sense of dual identity (as a national of a specific country and an international student), or having multiple identities, passports, languages, and livelihoods.

> In the beginning it was difficult. I felt that I did not belong here at all. Now, I have some sense of belonging; it just needs more time. (Student, Qatar)

> When I first came here, I was miserable, and I didn't want to continue learning here. (Student, England)

Students demonstrated strong discursive awareness of internationalisation and diversity. Some have a permanent state of temporality as they move from one place to the other, which strongly impacts their sense of belonging to new-short term locations and schools.

> When I came to an international school, there were so many different people. It was quite hard to be an outsider. I felt appreciated, or my culture was appreciated, even if it was not intentionally done by the school. (Student, England)

> Our British international school celebrates British things, and obviously, celebrates how international we are, but I don't feel that there's a huge focus on us being international or an appreciation towards our diverse cultures within the school. I don't feel like the school does enough to appreciate our cultures or really acknowledge them. (Student, Qatar)

Many students referred to their own identities within their schools as unappreciated or misrecognised. Some students explained that their cultures and identities are not represented in their schools, referring to school priorities, agendas, staffing, and the curriculum. Students showed deep and sincere awareness about their own positions in their schools, especially those from the Global South(s). Nonetheless, the majority of students who took part in interviews (both Global South and Global North students), reflected critical awareness related to issues of social justice and recognition, and addresses the dominant narratives of discrimination within and across cultures, besides critiquing issues of competitiveness and the excessive focus on attainment.

4. Discussion

Schools as social and cultural fields

The findings showed that social fields have significant effects on the practice of leaders (Addison, 2009; Flint, 2011). Participant schools have many elements in common, however, their particularities emerge from the specific features of their communities. Working with communities that are characterised by social and cultural distinctness requires leaders to engage in a journey of learning and adapt their previously learned skills to meet the needs of the new fields (Schepen, 2017). The nature of the school and the needs of its community are key in setting the direction and dimensions of leadership (Leithwood et al., 2020).

International schools are generally different from other diverse schools as their communities are characterised by frequent mobility, which embodies a sense of temporality (Sklair, 2001) and disconnection with spaces and places (Halse, 2018). In mobile communities, such as international schools, people lose association with specific locations or adopt fragmented connections that lack the sense of longevity, which heavily affects their relationships with the new field. Contrastingly, the sense of permanency or stability—in other contexts—allows students and teachers to develop a sense of belonging (Riley, 2022) and build lasting relationships with the place (Hayes & Skattebol, 2015) and the community. The literature review on international school communities reflects limited attention to the significance and consequences of movement in educational contexts (Urry, 2007). Educational research generally overlooks the reasons behind their mobility, the number of times they have moved, and the places they lived in, which affect their learning and their ability to engage with new fields.

The findings showed that students—and their multicultural capital—are generally underrepresented in their schools, with a few exceptions. Leaders, teachers, and key staff are predominantly White Anglophonic (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018), with a minority of people of colour in teaching, administrative or support positions (Bunnell & Gardner-McTaggart, 2022). The limited cultural representation in staff, or the lack of it, creates additional distance between students and their schools, thus, adding another layer to their 'alienation' (Go, 2013, p. 59). When considered besides predefined curriculum and pedagogy (hooks, 1994; Poore, 2005), it could be suggested that schools are at the risk of marginalising their students' social, cultural, and learning needs (Kim, 2019). It can be argued that students and a minority of teachers are in a status of *cultural invisibility* (R'boul, 2021). R'boul (2021) contended that students and teachers from the Global South(s) are invisible in their schools, which applies to case study schools in England, as many students are seen as an extension of the Global South(s) into the Global North(s). The marginalisation or invisibility of students and teachers' capital(s) (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) raise questions on how leadership practice relates and responds to its social field or reflects on the dominant narratives and norms in the field.

The question of leadership practice

The findings reflect the dominant patterns of leadership in international schools in these particular contexts. The triangulation of data collected from leaders, teachers and students showed evident gaps in the perspectives and practices of leaders in this context. Although the centrality of student learning (Robinson, 2011) was frequently mentioned in leaders and teachers' interviews, there was no reference to students' cultural and social needs or whether teaching and the curriculum respond to these needs. Similarly, student diversity and internationalism were mentioned frequently with significant enthusiasm. Nevertheless, when the discussion shifts from describing the school community to leading teaching and learning, the notions of internationalism and diversity disappear, and the narrative changes; the distinct features of students are minimised.

It was evident in the data that the curriculum in most schools does not represent students' cultures and knowledge(s). When students' socio-cultural needs are acknowledged and integrated in teaching, it was either incidental or an attempt by individual teachers (Brown, 2004), rather than a whole-school approach. Leaders and teachers focused on building social skills in the classroom while mostly mis-recognising their students' social and cultural capital, which could be attributed to the lack of training on teaching in international contexts (Calnin et al., 2018; Fisher, 2021).

Transformative leadership learning

The findings showed that training for principals rarely involves learning about their school communities. Contrastingly, most of their training is provided through their organisational affiliation and focuses on organisational goals and identity, with minimal attention to contextual learning and pluralistic or culturally responsive pedagog(ies). Contextual learning relates to the interaction with the communal spaces in which leaders work (Brown, 2004, 2006). It also refers to the influence of social, cultural, and historic dimensions which can limit or affect leader learning, especially when leaders can be fully immersed in their prior knowledge and experience (Mezirow, 1996). Critical reflection, alternatively, allows leaders to examine their previous knowledge, and immerse in new (culturally relevant) dilemmas, which lead to a perspective shift as leaders engage with new societal and cultural fields and create new 'meaning schemes' (Mezirow, 1996, pp. 13-14). This perspective shift requires recognition of the cultural and social capital of other leaders, teachers, students, and communities, and allows leaders to learn their narratives and histories and develop a sense of solidarity and respect (Habermas, 1984). The acknowledgement and adaptation to new discourses would encourage leaders to centre the social and cultural field as inherent elements in their own leadership practice and learning (Smyth et al., 2014). Adaptation also requires entrusting teachers and leaders to develop pedagogical approaches and a responsive curriculum, where change is driven by the knowledge of the many rather than the few (Brown, 2004; Furman, 2012).

Leadership as a socially and culturally informed praxis

The findings showed that students can learn better when their schools respect and enable their social relations. The transient position of students (Bailey & Gibson, 2020) allows them to embody an accumulation of social and cultural capital across different times and places. When leaders and teachers show understanding and respect to social and cultural capital, students develop a sense of belonging and trust (Banks & Banks, 2013; Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2021). Contrastingly, marginalising students' social and cultural capital by offering and normalising a unidimensional teaching approach and a homogenised learning environment, could leave students in a sense of alienation and disengagement, which can impact their learning and well-being (Baroutsis & Mills, 2018).

It is inevitable that leaders who work in an international context develop forms of awareness of what these new societies look like and learn how to communicate with them (Fisher, 2019) besides learning about their social norms, events, traditions, and culture. The immersion in new situations is essential to leaders who need this knowledge to adapt their perspectives and practices to the new context (Furman, 2012). Alternatively, the lack of societal engagement can leave leaders in isolation. Due to a shortage of intercultural capital, interactions between

parents and local teachers and expat leaders and teachers are generally dazzled by invisible cultural hierarchies (R'boul, 2021; Samier et al., 2021), which limit their interactions. Conversations can lead to reciprocal learning that can reduce prejudice (Banks & Banks, 2013) and help leaders to reconstruct a new perspective of the communities they serve.

When leaders described their school's direction and success, they discussed success in terms of accreditation reports, budget, enrolment rates and student attainment. According to the findings, leaders' work is heavily influenced by a managerialist and commercial culture that focuses on performative norms and compliance with structural frameworks. The findings revealed a busy environment in which leadership has no time to reflect and review deep socio-cultural issues despite their importance. International schools are generally governed by normative narratives of internationalism that normalise cultural hierarchies (Holliday, 2006; Samier, 2016) and the homogenisation of education programs (Calnin et al., 2018) as tenets of quality education. These narratives were criticised by some middle leaders and students as a controversial narrative that is largely driven by the limited multicultural—and intercultural—training that leaders receive, or the lack of it (Fisher, 2019).

The contentious forms of capital

The embodied form of cultural capital in this research is reflected through the different forms of knowledge (cultural and academic), languages, and worldviews. The objectified and the institutional cultural capital, alternatively, refer to school reports, accreditation records, technology tools and platforms and other materialistic representations. In addition, speaking English with a certain accent was recognised as a 'remarkable' form of objectified capital (Principal). While language is generally perceived as embodied, certain English accents are viewed as objectified and potentially exchangeable into other forms of capital in specific fields. In contrast, other accents or 'Englishes' might be denied value or suppressed as a form of cultural capital because they represent 'peripheric' knowledge(s) and identities rather than 'centric' English (Pennycook, 2007, 2017).

The rising waves of neoliberal culture dominating the field of international schools have changed the purpose and priorities of educational leaders and heavily influenced their practices (Ball, 2017; Bates, 2011). The excessive focus on the accumulation of objectified capital in schools occupied a significant space in leaders' timetables and attention. Leadership learning and practice have succumbed to the neoliberal narrative with overwhelming interest in quantified and competitive outputs. The outweighing of the embodied by the objectified capital and the extent to which this is legitimised in schools and societies are heavily affected by economic capital in schools. The forms of capital within schools are strongly connected and influence the habitus of those in the field (Bourdieu, 1986), including the leadership habitus.

While this assumption does not offer solutions to these challenges, it allows conceptual and theoretical clarity and creates potentials for a shift in perspective that influences practice.

The act of leading conscientiously involves a process of deconstructing prior knowledge, learning the socio-cultural context, reconstructing a relevant vision, and enacting responsive leadership. The cultural capital of leaders is not only a personal possession, but a process of embodiment of the present and future of a whole school, and its community, by understanding their histories and needs (Spillane et al., 2003). Leaders develop new ways of leading while interacting with their school's social and cultural elements that would become—with time—an inherent part of their habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Their habitus nourishes their inner voice and guides their actions in relevance to the field, which is inseparable from the social and cultural capital(s) of their students.

The leadership imperative: What can leaders do?

Fisher (2021) argued that leadership should respond to the cultural diversity in the school, not just attempt to influence it. A perspective shift in leading and managing schools is needed to normalise pluralism, not only regarding staff and students' nationalities, but in curriculum and pedagogy. International schools are multicultural communities where a philosophy of interculturalism can lead to more equitable educational approaches and outcomes in schools. An intercultural approach does not only acknowledge multiculturality but enables students and adults to learn about each other's cultures instead of internalising a homogenous narrative (Mehmedbegović, 2012). When leaders critically reflect on their current and prior knowledge and dispositions so they can embrace "the other" and unpack "how the other is related to […] [their] own thinking" (Schepen, 2017, p. 96). Interculturality and social justice cannot be simply achieved by learning about everybody else in the school (Banks & Banks, 2013), but through confronting the engraved prejudices, assumptions and attitudes accompanying their perception of the *other*. It requires acknowledging the emotions of the *others* that have historically shaped their experiences as a result of being *othered*. The question of why international schools are uni-dimensionally Western and why they marginalised other cultures in their programs and policies is a highly important one. The "Otherness" of global communities (Said, 1995, p. 97) is accompanied by an "orientalizing (p. 167) perspective, where those making decisions about knowledge (*what* and *how)* inherently assume that the *other* is less or simply "inferior" (p. 72). The attitude of *othering* other cultures and the difficult confrontation about their worthiness of being represented in the curriculum, pedagogy and policy are key issues. Additionally, the question of why leaders should examine their perspectives and engage in new meanings is crucial.

5. Conclusión

This article's engagement with leadership was initiated by Bourdieu's definition of practice, and his call for critical reflection to avoid the risks of mechanical and performance. Engaging the logics of thought and critical discourse in the study and practice of leadership requires questioning one's own perspectives and learning about where and who they lead, challenging themselves to step into new learning milestones, and confronting existing biases and pre-learned assumptions about the *other*. Responsiveness to the field entails immersion in elements of internationalisation, as a process of intercultural exchange rather than transmission. This pedagogy requires learning the historical narratives of different social groups, understanding existing tensions around local and global knowledge, religions, values, and other intersectional social and political issues (Samier et al., 2021).

A successful leadership endeavour in new social fields happens through a commitment to reflection and dialogue with others to understand different perspectives (Mezirow, 1996), which does not only involve adults in education, but also students. The article acknowledges the complex role of schools in reproducing cultural and social inequalities and argues for a reconstruction of a leadership perspective that is relevant to international schools' contexts. This argument centralises the social and the cultural field, including the capital(s), identities, needs and voices of students and teachers. The connection of the social and the cultural is inevitable and indispensable, and strongly relevant to leadership in international schools. The article calls for further sociological analyses of the practice and knowledge of educational leadership and a sociology of international schools and their communities that could contribute to the growing needs of the field.

Acknowledgements

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