Metaphors Used by School Leaders for Globalisation in the Kingdom of Bahrain: Their Interpretations and Implications

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Abstract: In both our professional and personal interactions, we sometimes use metaphors to bring home more clearly to our listeners what we are attempting to say or convey. Walter and Helmig (2008, p. 123) emphasise that metaphors serve as 'surrogates for other words', and they have great influence on the construction of our realities. What metaphors for globalisation are used by school leaders in Bahrain? How do these school leaders interpret these metaphors, and what implications can be derived from the use of these metaphors? Using data from group reports, individual interviews, and a focus group interview of school leaders undergoing an Educational Leadership Programme at the Bahrain Teachers College, University of Bahrain, this study attempted to determine (1) the types of metaphors used for globalisation by the participant school leaders of Bahrain; (2) interpretations given by the participant school leaders for those metaphors; (3) possible implications of the use of those metaphors for the participants' leadership roles in schools; and (4) the implications of globalisation, from the perspective of those metaphors, for education in Bahrain. The study found that school leaders in Bahrain described globalisation using metaphors that saw globalisation as unavoidable, as both positive and negative, and as a two-way process, among others. Implications were drawn for the role of the school leader and for education in Bahrain.

Keywords: Globalisation, metaphors, school leader, educational leadership, leadership preparation programme

1. INTRODUCTION

As far back as before the year 2000 and into the 2000s, the leaders of the Kingdom of Bahrain had seen the effect of globalisation on many aspects of the lives of the people of the Kingdom. The Kingdom's leaders implemented initiatives to ensure that the Kingdom responded effectively to the impacts of globalisation. These initiatives included those in the business, political, and educational environments. The focus of this research paper is on part of the many initiatives of the Kingdom in the educational environment. Specifically, the paper is a report of a study on the views of school leaders on globalisation and its implications for education. The remaining parts of the paper report on the following aspects of the study: the context, purpose, literature review, method, findings and discussion, and concluding remarks.

2. THE CONTEXT

The Kingdom of Bahrain, a small island Arab nation, lies in the Arabian Gulf between Qatar and Saudi Arabia (Durante & Raghavamoorthy (ed), (n.d.); Explorer Group, 2007). It is an archipelago of 40 islands with a total area of 741.4 square kilometres, according to the Bahrain Informatics Organisation (2011). The main island of Bahrain is 48 kilometres long and 16 kilometres wide (Durante & Raghavamoorthy (ed), (n.d.); Explorer Group, 2007). According to the latest census conducted by the Bahrain Informatics Organisation in 2010, the total population of Bahrain stands at 1,234,596 with Bahrainis in the minority, forming 46% of the population, with the rest being non-Bahrainis (Bahrain Informatics Organisation, 2011). The non-Bahrainis are described by D'Cruz (n.d.) as other Arab nationals, and expatriates from many parts of the world.

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Most children of expatriates and many children of Bahraini citizens attend private schools, but the majority of children of Bahraini citizens attend Bahraini public schools. In the Kingdom of Bahrain public school system, the Ministry of Education's (MOE) (2012) latest statistics indicate that there are 204 schools.

Every year since 2008, selected Bahraini school leaders, namely, assistant principals of schools in the public system, have undergone a nine-month part-time training programme in educational leadership, referred to as the Educational Leadership Programme—ELP, at the Bahrain Teachers College, University of Bahrain (Educational Leadership Programme 2011-2012 Course Handbook, 2011). The ELP was developed and implemented in the first year (i.e., the 2008/2009 academic year) by the National Institute of Education (NIE), at the Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. The aim of the programme is to equip prospective school principals, also referred to in the paper as the programme participants or school leaders, with the relevant leadership knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes needed for their leadership roles in schools, in the context of the globalisation sweeping across the small island Kingdom. Hence, in a number of the ELP study modules, the programme participants are given the opportunity to state which metaphors they use for globalisation, and the implications of globalisation for education in the Kingdom from the perspective of those metaphors.

3.   LITERATURE REVIEW

In our day-to-day professional and personal interactions, we sometimes use metaphors to convey our thoughts to others. The Compact Oxford English Dictionary (2006) defines metaphor as 'a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is used of something to which it does not literally apply (*e.g. the long arm of the law*)'. And Semino (2008 p. 1) writes "By 'metaphor' I mean the phenomenon whereby we talk and, potentially, think about something in terms of something else". For instance, to borrow an example from Semino (2008, p. 6), when an expression such as 'life is a journey' is used, these words do not represent their literal meaning; rather, they have a transferred meaning that is carried across to deliver the intended idea. Metaphors are built into the language we use daily. Most of the time, they deliver an indirect appeal to the listener's emotions and understanding of the phenomenon. Semino (2008) argues that individuals use metaphors to convey their own views and assessment of any given topic. Owen (2011) emphasises the difficulty of understanding a metaphor without understanding the context.

Khong and Smith (2008) view a metaphor as the use of 'one conceptual category, experience or object to describe or define another conceptual category'. Metaphors, according to Walter and Helmig (2008, p. 123), serve as 'surrogates for other words', and they have great influence on the construction of our realities. They are seen to add more meaning to what we say (Carver & Pikalo, 2008). Hence, metaphors afford us a way of putting our thoughts, our conceptions, and our views of the world in a clearer way.

Semino (2008) argues that, although some scientists may insist that metaphors have no place in science, this is contrary to what we observe in scientific discourse. Semino (2008, p. 131) points out that expressions "such as 'Big Bang', 'greenhouse effect', 'black holes' or 'genetic code'" in scientific discourse, are all examples of metaphors.

In the area of educational materials, Semino (2008, p. 148) notes:

The fact that metaphor allows us to think and talk about one domain of experience in terms of another can be exploited in order to help students understand new, unfamiliar phenomena in terms of phenomena they are familiar with. Metaphors can therefore help to make topics clearer, more accessible, and easier to imagine and remember. This is particularly important when learners are introduced to phenomena that are not just new to them, but also complex and inaccessible to ordinary perception, such as electricity, atomic structure or the functions of DNA.

In discussing 'pacing and leading' in leadership, Owen (2011, p. 3) argues that, 'pacing, in this context, means walking in step with another person or group of people'. This shows the metaphorical use of 'walking in step with other people' to describe the role of leadership in building relationships or rapport in organisations.

Globalisation, a word of more current and regular usage, is described by Ray (2010, pp. 37-38) as a process that 'leads to worldwide connectivity, cultural de-territorialisation and hybrid subcultures . . .' Referring to the works of others, she identifies five dimensions of globalisation, namely:

- *'ethnoscapes'*—people movements—e.g., 'refugees, tourists, guest workers'
- *'mediascape's*—i.e., 'mass media and their content, particularly in their digital form'
- *'technoscapes'*—i.e., 'technologies whether industrial, digital, or intellectual'
- *'financescapes'*—i.e., movements of money through money markets and equivalent institutions, and

- *'ideoscapes'*—referring to ideologies spread by and through mediascapes (Ray, 2010, p.38).

The UN University (2006, p.169) also states that:

Globalisation refers to the increasing cross-border movements of goods, money, information and ideas as well as people, and to an ensuing interdependency of people and institutions around the world.

The use of metaphors in reference to globalisation is not uncommon. For example, Ang is reported in Koh (2010, p. 42) to have used the metaphor of 'the crossroads' in reference to the mix of the global and local in globalisation.

4. PURPOSE

It was the purpose of this study to analyse (a) the group reports on the use of metaphors among several groups of participants in the Educational Leadership Programme (ELP) during the 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 academic years, and (b) interviews with selected 2011/2012 ELP participants on the use of metaphors, with a view towards identifying metaphors used for globalisation in relation to education in the Kingdom of Bahrain, in order to determine:

a. the types of metaphors used for globalisation
b. interpretations given by the participants for those metaphors
c. possible implications of the use of those metaphors for the participants' leadership roles in schools; and
d. the implications of globalisation, from the perspective of the metaphors, for education in Bahrain

5. METHOD

The reports were all done on charts, with the metaphors depicted in drawings and words or expressions. The implications were mostly indicated in drawings and/or words. For example, a group that used the sun as a metaphor for globalisation drew the sun with its rays pointing to different parts of a globe. Implications for education from this were indicated in words/expressions. Content analysis was done on the 10 reports from the ELP participants from the 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 academic years, resulting in all of the metaphors from the group reports being listed and their implications noted.

Secondly, the listed metaphors were presented to three individual interviewees and a five-member focus group of interviewees who were requested to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each metaphor. If they agreed with the metaphor, they were required to indicate the implications they saw in the use of the metaphor. If they disagreed, they were requested to give reasons for their disagreement. All of the interviewees were also required to indicate their own metaphors if these were not included in the list, and also to indicate their meanings and implications. The interviewees were also given the opportunity to express their views on the types of metaphors they would like the principals to use or not use and the reasons for their responses. In the focus group interview, interviewees were also free to change their minds about whether or not they agreed with a given metaphor as the interview went on.

All the eight interviewees were drawn from a total of 53 ELP participants of the 2011/2012 academic year, made up of 39 females and 14 males. All of them (i.e. the interviewees) were purposefully selected on the basis of their keenness on the programme and their competence in the use of English. Both the individual and focus group interviews were conducted in the last month of the 2011/2012 ELP session, that is, June 2012. The three individual interviewees consisted of one male and two female assistant principals. Each interview lasted for about thirty minutes. A focus group interview, which lasted for about an hour and fifteen minutes, was also held with five of the ELP participants, all of whom were also assistant principals but did not participate in the individual interviews. The group consisted of three female and two male participants. With permission from the participants, all the interviews were tape recorded. They were later transcribed and then their contents were analysed.

Thirdly, all the data from the interviews and the reports were separately assembled. Then, concepts, generalisations, and themes relating to the metaphors, their uses, their possible implications on the leadership roles of the users of the metaphors, and their implications on Bahraini education were noted for this report.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In line with the purpose of the study, the findings and discussion are reported under the following subheadings: metaphors used for globalisation and their interpretations, implications for the role of school leaders who used various metaphors, and implications of globalisation for Bahraini education.

a. **Metaphors used for globalisation and their interpretations.** A total of 16 metaphors emerged from the group reports, the individual interviews, and the focus group interview. The authors put the globalisation metaphors, on the basis of the descriptions of the metaphors given by participants, into the following six categories:(1) those that portrayed globalisation as a phenomenon that cannot be avoided, (2)

those that saw globalisation as bringing both good and bad to the Kingdom, (3) those that perceived globalisation to be neutral,(4) those that showed globalisation as a two-way process (5) those that portrayed globalisation only as positive, and (6) those that portrayed globalisation only as negative. It was possible for some metaphors to fall into more than one category.

i. ***Metaphors depicting globalisation as an unavoidable phenomenon.*** Of the 16 metaphors, three depicted globalisation as something we cannot stop or avoid. These metaphors were the sun, the tide, and the wind. These natural phenomena, like the man-made globalisation phenomenon, were seen as phenomena Bahrain cannot stop or prevent. Accepting these and adjusting to them were seen as appropriate responses. 'Nobody can stop the tide. So we have to select from these, what we find suitable for us. . .I think we adults can choose what is right, but the effect on our children is our concern', remarked an interviewee.

The view that globalisation is a process that Bahrain cannot stop or avoid but has to accept is consistent with the observation from El-Shibiny (2005, p. 18) that 'With globalization now acknowledged as the New World Order, many third world countries have had no choice but to follow it'. Similarly, Abdulla (2006, p. 180), in discussing the impact of globalisation on the Gulf States, remarked that, 'Gulf states acknowledge that they are in the grip of forces over which they have little power'.

Other interpretations were given for the sun. For example, the sun was described as a source of life, a symbol of clarity, the centre of the solar system, an indispensable phenomenon, and found everywhere. It was also perceived as a source of light, energy, power, and also as a big heat. The wind was further classified into a breeze, a strong wind, and a hurricane. The breeze was described as refreshing and purifying; strong wind was seen as just effective, while the hurricane was described as unsuitable.

ii. ***Metaphors depicting globalisation as positive and negative phenomena.*** Globalisation as a phenomenon with two sides, the positive and the negative, was also reflected in some of the metaphors. Six metaphors were used to depict this two-sided nature of globalisation. These metaphors were a double-edged sword, a volcano, a tree, the sun, wind, and a cloud. One side of the double-edged sword was seen as

beneficial while the other was viewed as destructive.

The volcano, like globalisation, was described as bringing many things out of the earth, some being good and others bad. Those who used these metaphors saw globalisation, on one hand, as bringing good things to the Kingdom, such as easy access to things, up-to-date information, ICT, and excellent links to other agencies. As one interviewee put it:

> We can't deny globalisation has affected our schools in a positive way. The QAA (Quality Assurance Authority), the school improvement projects, other good projects—from where did all of these come? They are all from globalisation.

At the same time, globalisation was seen to have also brought some things which are not deemed so desirable to the Kingdom. These included globalisation's negative effect on the culture, particularly the family and values, the need to study a new foreign language (English), and the influx of strange lifestyles.

The other four metaphors depicting globalisation as both positive and negative were the tree, sun, wind, and cloud. The tree was interpreted to have both good and bad sides. On the good side, the tree was seen as giving food, wood for all kinds of uses, and shade to people against the heat of the sun. One interviewee described globalisation as 'a tree that feeds the entire world'. The root of the tree was interpreted to imply the need for Bahrain to maintain its strong values and norms so as to stand against the influx of strange foreign lifestyles and practices. The participants could have added other positive things from the tree, such as its medicinal value. The only negative side identified for the tree metaphor was that when its leaves fall, it was seen to create a mess that needed to be cleared or swept away. But the fallen leaves also fertilise the soil, a positive side which was not identified.

The sun was described as positive in terms of its positive effects, as mentioned earlier. But it was also seen as bad if the heat from the sun is too much. The bad side of the wind was when it is too strong or came in the form of a hurricane, in which case it was seen as damaging. As an interviewee noted, 'if the wind is strong it may be damaging. It will damage everything'. The cloud was seen as bringing rain sometimes, which was a good thing, but the cloud could bring about some bad things, such as a storm. As one interviewee put it, 'if we get benefit from it, it is a good cloud', and another interviewee stated that, 'clouds mean patience—sometimes I can look at the clouds as challenges or barriers that, if we do our best, if we be patient enough, it will clear sooner or later'.

iii. ***Metaphors depicting globalisation as a neutral phenomenon.*** Four metaphors were used to portray globalisation in a neutral way; that is, globalisation was not considered as either good or bad in itself. These were the metaphors that saw globalisation as a village or city (community), an information bank, and a flooded river. Although a flooded river would literally be considered bad, the metaphor of a flooded river was interpreted to mean that globalisation has brought a flood of ideas to all parts of the world. Hence, without globalisation, ideas would not be easily accessible and shared among the peoples of the world as we have it now. A related metaphor was that of globalisation as an information bank, or a bank of knowledge from which one can easily and readily access knowledge and information. In terms of the village or city, interviewees saw globalisation bringing the world together to form one community, a village or city, in which by the touch of a button we can know what is happening everywhere and relations are close.

iv. ***Metaphors depicting globalisation as a two-way phenomenon.*** Two metaphors depicted globalisation as a two-way process. One was the metaphor of the mirror, which was interpreted to mean that the mirror exposes practices and standards in Bahrain to the world as it also exposes the world to Bahrain. This enables Bahrain to know where it stands in relation to world standards and practices. This will in turn help Bahrain to know what reforms and changes are necessary in its education system. The other was the metaphor of relationships. As an interviewee put it:

> I think globalisation means to me, more relationships because I think as human beings we like to build up a relationship with other people not only from our country but it's good for the person to know other people. . .so that we can know more about their culture, how they think, and their countries.

Globalisation was therefore seen as opening a door for Bahrain to have relationships with people from other countries.

v. ***Metaphors depicting globalisation as only a positive phenomenon.*** A number of metaphors depicted globalisation only in a positive light. One was the metaphor of a beehive, which was interpreted to mean individual responsibility and accountability in whatever we do, as well as involvement of all stakeholders in all important matters. The other was the metaphor of a garden. As an interviewee put it, 'I want to look at it [globalisation] as a good thing with green plants, with flowers, with the good things'. The implication of this interpretation appears to be that even if globalisation has some bad aspects, Bahrain does not have to accept those, but only focus on the good things.

vi. ***Metaphors depicting globalisation as only a negative phenomenon.*** Metaphors that depicted globalisation as purely negative did not feature much in the group reports and among the interviewees. The only one that appeared close to being negative was from a group report that had a map of the world with arrows pointing down from the north and which appeared to depict globalisation from the north piercing the south with foreign standards and changes. But even here, the group members also saw some good from globalisation by indicating 'pros and cons' in some areas.

b. **Implications for the role of the school leader using the metaphors.** It became evident from the interviewees that school leaders who used positive metaphors for globalisation would tend to transfer such positive attitudes onto their teachers, who would also positively affect their students to have positive attitudes towards globalisation, which would eventually be good for education and the nation as a whole. The interviewees unanimously agreed that school leaders should avoid using metaphors that put fear into their staff members, namely metaphors that are demotivating, negative, or bad.

School leaders who used negative metaphors for globalisation were seen as being insensitive to the positive sides of globalisation and as likely to have a negative impact on their teachers, the students, and the school as a whole.

The interviewees were in agreement that school leaders should use metaphors that are seen as positive, support the efforts of teachers, show appreciation for teachers' efforts, and are encouraging. One interviewee used the metaphor of a belt, signifying working together

and collaboration, to exemplify metaphors that the school leader can use for school-community relationships. Metaphors such as a mother and a father were used by others to describe the school leader, and these were seen as encouraging the school leader to exhibit the qualities of father or mother to his/her teachers and supporting staff members.

    c. Implications for Bahraini education. Given that globalisation was seen as something that Bahrain could not avoid, it was noted that Bahrainis should be well prepared to cope with the changes and demands of globalisation. As one interviewee put it, 'it is a must that every child should have the opportunity to get proper education from the age of six to 15'. Another stated, 'we have to prepare ourselves strongly and therefore, for example, our culture should be such that when these new things are coming at us we can stand on our own'. It follows that Bahraini children should be well versed in ICT, be able to communicate in such language as English, be creative, relate well in the globalised context, and at the same time be well rooted in their culture.

From the above, it can be seen that the school curriculum should meet the standards and practices of globalisation. The clarity, transparency, and standards of globalisation also call for appropriate professional development activities and objective appraisal of teachers. This will lead to the development of more relevant teaching strategies, and imparting of such skills as creative thinking, higher-order thinking, and collaborative skills to students, so that they will be able to meet the demands of globalisation.

Globalisation is also seen as bringing enlightenment to the population as a whole; hence the need for the school to better work with the community and parents in the education of children. Given globalisation as a river flooded with ideas, an information bank, or a bank of knowledge, interviewees saw the need for Bahraini education to emphasise teaching and helping children to learn *how* to learn.

Additionally, the Bahraini principals demonstrated a high level of awareness in linking the latest educational reforms with international trends in education. Such awareness is critical, as many of the educational reforms introduced in Bahrain implied more work and, in some cases, a complete shift in focus.

However, when it comes to how globalisation impacted education negatively, most of the principals were not able to give examples that actually related to education or classroom practices. Mainly, their comments were related to the social impact and how traditions became harder to maintain.

From the analysis of the metaphors used by the Bahraini school leaders to depict their understanding of globalisation, it seems that there has been a significant shift in attitude. A decade ago, Bahraini educators were referring to globalisation as a negative factor. For them, it was another form of post-colonialism, seen as only bringing negative practices from the point of view of Bahraini society. However, with all of the transparency associated with benchmarking Bahrain's educational achievements and standards internationally, educators have started to realise a possible positive impact of globalisation on educational practices.

Openness to other countries' educational leadership practices has become more common, as principals started to question deeply-rooted cultural practices. For instance, policy makers anticipated serious resistance when QAAET and school reviews were introduced for the first time in Bahrain in 2008. Indeed, some resistance was evident at the beginning, as the whole process was seen as not fit for a centralised educational system in Bahrain. However, the level of resistance was far below what was expected initially. This might be linked to the level of exposure to quality practices around the globe. In addition, changes being brought about by globalisation and the interpretations given for globalisation call for the use of more instructional and transformational leadership practices among school leaders.

It is evident that the continuing use of metaphors in the training programmes of school leaders in the Kingdom of Bahrain would be useful. It would enable the school leaders to unpack and bring into the open their knowledge, attitudes, and feelings about globalisation for discussion and exchange of ideas on the issue with their colleagues. From the findings of this study, such an exchange of ideas would lead to the development of more positive attitudes towards globalisation as well as the development of appropriate approaches towards dealing with any perceived negative effects of the phenomenon.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The inevitability of the impact of globalisation on Bahrain and Bahraini education is well known by school leaders in the Kingdom. That school leaders see globalisation positively is a step in the right direction in the continuing movement of Bahraini education towards international education practices and standards.

The positive depiction of globalisation reported by the principals indicates that the Bahraini education system cannot afford not to engage principals in future reforms. Such inclusion should go beyond mere discussion during the early stages of reform and implementation. Albakar (2008), argues that, for any reform effort to be adopted from the bottom up, principals need to be stimulated by engaging them in an

on-going discussion of how well their students are doing as compared to those in other countries.

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