

How National Context Indirectly Influences Instructional Leadership Implementation: The Case of Israel

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Abstract

Purpose: Instructional leadership has been identified as a key responsibility of principals who achieve promising results for school improvement. This study investigated how the national context has influenced the adoption of instructional leadership as a defining role responsibility for Israeli principals.

Research Methods: Participants in this qualitative study consisted of a diverse sample of 46 Israeli principals, broadly representative of the larger body of school principals in Israel. Data were collected through both interviews and focus groups. Data analysis proceeded in a four-stage process that involved condensing, coding, categorizing, and theorizing from the interview data. **Findings:** Findings identified three sociocultural norms that shaped principal adoption of instructional leadership in their role set: low power distance, clan culture, and incomplete identification of principals (and teachers) with their schools' academic missions. These contextual cohering forces led principals to resist new, formally defined policy expectations of their role as instructional leaders. **Implications:**

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This study's findings reinforce arguments that propose national context as an underserved theoretical lens for understanding differences in principals' practices across different societies. The findings suggest that despite increasing global acceptance of instructional leadership, its implementation in practice is inevitably shaped by the institutional policies and cultural values of different societies. Even when a "generic" model of instructional or transformational leadership is adopted by policy makers, there will be a process of mutual adaptation during implementation.

Keywords

instructional leadership, school principals, national context, foreign countries, power distance

Introduction

Instructional leadership reflects an ongoing and deep involvement of school principals in improving teaching and learning for all students (Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood & Louis, 2011; Neumerski et al., 2018). Although instructional leadership has occupied a central place in educational discourse in the United States for over half a century (Bridges, 1967), it has only spread to other parts of the world since the beginning of the 21st century (Hallinger, 2018b; Hallinger & Kovačević, 2019). Given this reality, instructional leadership serves as a good example of policy (or practice) borrowing. This refers to an intentional effort to improve an educational system through the introduction of a policy that originated in another national context (Nir et al., 2018). Policy borrowing diminishes the need to "reinvent the wheel" when confronting similar challenges, reduces uncertainties associated with implementation, and offers a justification that may reduce resistance to change (Nir et al., 2018). However, policy borrowing can also introduce unanticipated problems that arise from differences in sociocultural values and institutional policy frameworks between the originating and receiving societies (see Hallinger, 2010a). Both positive and negative responses to "borrowed" policy models have been documented in the recent literature on instructional leadership (Ng et al., 2015; Nir et al., 2018; Pan et al., 2017; Qian et al., 2017; Steiner-Khamsi, 2016).

From a social justice perspective, instructional leadership is particularly important in educational systems that are characterized by large achievement gaps (DeMatthews, 2018). Under a mandate that no talent be wasted, instructional leaders can contribute to the future assignment of individuals to the academic and social positions that correspond to their aptitudes and

motivations, irrespective of their family's wealth, background, or social standing (Wang, 2015). For example, in Israel inequality in academic performance between different groups of Israeli students one of the highest among the countries and economic entities that participated in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study, and the highest among Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (OECD, 2016). For this reason, during the late 2000s, instructional leadership was prioritized by Israeli policy makers and defined as a key role of Israeli school principals (Capstones, 2008).

The present study addressed the research question, "how has the national context shaped the enactment of instructional leadership by principals and teachers in Israeli schools." The study employed qualitative analysis of individual and focus group interviews conducted with 47 school principals to understand how Israel's national context has shaped the adoption and implementation of the instructional leadership role by principals. Holding both theoretical and practical implications, the findings contribute to a growing literature that seeks to document empirically the ways in which national culture shape the enactment of school leadership broadly defined, and instructional leadership in particular (Ng et al., 2015; Pan et al., 2017; Qian et al., 2017).

Theoretical Background

This section includes three subsections. The first presents the components, nature, premise, and challenges of instructional leadership. The second conceptualizes how national context shapes the enactment of school leadership. Finally, we provide relevant background on the role of principals in the Israeli education system.

Fundamentals, Dimensions, and Application of Instructional Leadership

Research has affirmed the efficacy of instructional leadership with respect to achieving the goals of student achievement and school improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Murphy et al., 2016; Robinson et al., 2008). The widely adopted conceptual framework of instructional leadership developed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985; Hallinger & Wang, 2015) consists of three dimensions. *Defines the School Mission* concerns the principal's role in defining and gaining commitment to clear, measurable, time-based school academic goals throughout the school community. *Manages the Instructional Program* focuses on the principal's responsibility for coordinating, developing, and monitoring teaching and learning throughout the school. *Develops a*

Positive School Learning Climate refers to the principal's responsibility for developing a culture of continuous improvement and high standards and expectations for students and teachers (Hallinger & Wang, 2015).

Leithwood and Louis (2011) claimed that a conceptual framework of instructional leadership should include a "set of responsibilities for principals that goes well beyond observing and intervening in classrooms—responsibilities touching on vision, organizational culture and the like" (p. 6). Specifically, they pointed to four core leadership practices: (1) setting directions—defining organizational purposes, (2) developing people—expanding the capacities of organizational members to pursue these directions, (3) redesigning the organization—modifying the organization to align with and support members' work, and (4) managing instructional program—improving teaching and curriculum.

Boyce and Bowers (2018) identified a remarkable deviation in the way instructional leadership has been conceptualized over the past few decades. According to them, leadership for learning is the conceptual development of 25 years of diverse instructional leadership research. Leadership for learning entails a focus on learning as an activity in which everyone learns (Dempster et al., 2017; Hallinger, 2011). Through this lens, learning relies on the effective interaction of social, emotional and cognitive processes, and its effectiveness depends on the different contexts and ways in which people learn. The potential for leadership originates in powerful learning experiences, while opportunities to exercise leadership advance learning (MacBeath, 2019). Given the significant overlap between these two conceptual frameworks of school leadership, the literature on leadership for learning is a natural counterpart to instructional leadership (Bowers et al., 2017; Hallinger, 2011).

Instructional leadership assumes that the main goal of schooling is qualification (Shaked, 2018). Qualification and socialization are the two major functions of schools identified by Biesta (2009), which may alternatively serve as the key objective of schooling. *Qualification* refers to providing children with the knowledge, skills, and understanding that will enable them to execute a wide range of actions. This function ranges from provision of very specific qualification (e.g., training students for a particular skill or technique, or for a particular job or profession) to much more general qualification (e.g., when students become acquainted with modern culture or Western civilization).

Socialization refers to the many ways in which, through education, students become members of and part of a particular social, cultural, and political "order." The two functions of qualification and socialization are two alternative answers to the question of the primary, ultimate goal of schooling. The instructional leadership approach, which focuses on the principal's deep involvement in promoting best instructional and learning practices, is

based on the assumption that student learning and academic success (*qualification*) is the most important goal of schooling (Shaked, 2018). In fact, the broader environment of measurement and accountability in education is also based on a belief that what matters most are academic outcomes, that is, qualification. As noted by Reeves (2014, p. 1): “In the end, every element of an effective accountability system must be evaluated by one and only one criteria: did it help students learn and achieve more than they might have without the system?”

Research findings have identified a considerable gap between the expectation for school principals to demonstrate instructional leadership and their professional practice (Aas & Brandmo, 2016; Hallinger & Murphy, 2013; Prytula et al., 2013). While some principals do consider the improvement of teaching quality and student learning a central component of their role, other principals continue to treat teaching and learning as issues of secondary importance (Goldring et al., 2015; Goldring et al., 2008; May et al., 2012). Scholars have identified time (Camburn et al., 2010; Grissom et al., 2013; Prytula et al., 2013), lack of a strong knowledge base on teaching and learning (Goldring et al., 2015; Hallinger & Wang, 2015), and organizational norms (Cuban, 1988; Murphy et al., 2016) as barriers to principals assuming responsibility for enacting the instructional leadership role. However, national context has only recently begun to be explored as an explanation for how principals perceive and enact their roles across different countries (Aas & Brandmo, 2016; Ng et al., 2015; Pan et al., 2017; Qian et al., 2017; Shaked, 2018, 2019).

Influences of National Context on Instructional Leadership

School leadership is context-dependent (Miller, 2018). Adopting a school leadership approach that has produced positive results in one country into another faces numerous challenges due to differences in the school contexts (Clarke & O’Donoghue, 2017). However, scholarly literature on leadership in education tends to either ignore the effects of context or relegates them to the shadows, investigating “what works” rather than “what works in a particular context” (Clarke & O’Donoghue, 2017; Hallinger, 2018a). Thus, scholars have asserted that the cutting edge of global research on educational leadership lies in revealing how the enactment of school leadership varies cross and is shaped by the institutional, political, and cultural contexts of different societies (Clarke & O’Donoghue, 2017; Hallinger, 2018a).

Context can be analyzed from multiple perspectives. The influences of national context on school leadership are both manifest (i.e., visible, tangible) and latent (i.e., embedded, pervasive). The institutional context of a

society (e.g., policies, laws, rules, standards, qualification requirements, training curricula) shapes the formal role definition, scope of action, and job responsibilities of principals (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2016; Grinshtain & Gibton, 2018). The cultural context shapes principal behavior through a complex web of values, norms, and informal expectations that are internalized through both training (e.g., preparation and development programs) and socialization as a teacher and school leader (Crow, 2007; Cuban, 1988).

Cross-cultural researchers conclude that deep-rooted national values guide, justify, and serve as guiding principles in our lives (Benoliel & Berkovich, 2018; Brewer & Venaik, 2010; Hofstede, 2001). A cultural lens emphasizes the implicit pressures that principals feel to identify with and reflect local values and norms of their societies (Bajunid, 1996; Benoliel & Barth, 2017; Walker & Dimmock, 2002). Indeed, both superordinates and subordinates make implicit judgments of a principal's leadership effectiveness by the extent to which observable practices align with normative expectations of desirable role behavior (Benoliel & Barth, 2017; Cuban, 1988; Hallinger, 2018a; Hallinger & Truong, 2014).

With this in mind, we note that the instructional leadership approach emerged in the historical, institutional, cultural context of the United States in the 1980s (Bossert et al., 1982; Cuban, 1988; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). There was a national consensus that "urgent action" was required to improve the learning outcomes of America's education system. Formulation of a clear instructional leadership role for school principals responded to policy makers' concerns for a "nation at risk" from an inadequate education (Hallinger & Wang, 2015).

Over time, however, conceptualizations of instructional leadership have evolved from "principal-centered" to more distributed models (Hallinger, 2011; Halverson & Clifford, 2013; Klar, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2010; Marks & Printy, 2003). This trend acknowledges limitations imposed by structural features of the principal's role and the need to increase the "density of leadership capacity" in schools (e.g., Cuban, 1988; Murphy et al., 2016). In a parallel trend, over time, international scholars began to surface cultural assumptions of the American instructional leadership approach (Aas & Brandmo, 2016; Ng et al., 2015; Qian et al., 2017; Salo et al., 2015). These analyses highlighted academic achievement as the implicit goal of the instructional leadership model as well as its assumption that principals *should* provide the academic direction for the school and *should* engage directly with teachers on curricular and instructional development. Recognition of these cultural assumptions has led to nuanced adaptations of the instructional leadership approach that more closely conform to the values and norms of other societies (Hallinger & Walker, 2017).

The Israeli Context

The current study was conducted within the Israeli national school system, which serves about 1.6 million students (Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2013). Israel's student population has increased by about 44% in the past two decades (an increase of about 2% per year), which is exceptional compared with other developed countries (Blass, 2018). Participants in this study were Israeli school principals from the Hebrew-speaking sector. This sector constitutes 74% of the Israeli school system (Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2013). Due to significant differences between the two sectors consisting the Israeli school system, principals from the Arabic-speaking sector were not included in this study, and will be the subject of a separate study.

The achievement scores of Israeli students in the PISA tests are lower than the OECD average in all areas of literacy—science, reading, and mathematics. However, Israel is among the countries whose results have improved significantly over the cycles of PISA. The achievement gaps within the Israeli school system, which are very large, have hardly diminished over the years (OECD, 2016). These gaps are closely related to socioeconomic inequalities (BenDavid-Hadar, 2016), and therefore may be seen as a social justice issue. While many countries have adopted test-based accountability policies in the past decades, Israel has not implemented such policies. Although there is a set of large-scale examinations, surveys and polls, which evaluate the success rate of students across Israel in key subjects, assessments are not used to make decisions about principal or teacher employment and rewards and about resource allocation, and results are only partially communicated to parents and the general public (Grinshtain & Gibton, 2018).

The United States and Israel share the pursuit of excellence and high standards in K-12 education. However, while in the United States educational policy decisions are distributed across the national, state, and even the school district levels, in Israel the education system is highly centralized. Educational policy is set at the national level (Gal-Ezer & Stephenson, 2014). This includes Israeli policies regarding principal preparation and professional development (Berkovich, 2014).

The primary role of Israeli school principals, as articulated by Capstones, the institute responsible for training school principals in Israel, is to serve as instructional leaders in order to improve the education and learning of all students. Four areas of dimensions comprise the Israeli framework for instructional leadership: designing the school's future image—developing a vision and bringing about change; leading the staff and nurturing its professional development; focusing on the individual; and managing the relationship between the school and the surrounding community (Capstones, 2008).

The perception of the principal's role in Israel still reflects the "principal-centered" model of instructional leadership, rather than the distributed instructional leadership approach.

At the same time, however, the Israeli model also emphasizes indirect instructional leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Kleine-Kracht, 1993). This refers to leadership that focuses on creating norms, routines, and conditions which support quality teaching. This contrasts with "direct instructional leadership" which emphasizes face-to-face intervention with individual teachers and students (Nettles & Herrington, 2007). Two implications flow from the focus on indirect instructional leadership. First, this approach to leading learning is enacted through gaining support for a common vision of learning among stakeholders, developing a school-level framework of instructional leadership responsibilities, and changing school norms and structures to support the ability of teachers to teach effectively (Dwyer, 1984; Hallinger, 2011; Ng et al., 2015). Second, a focus on indirect instructional leadership further implies that principals will lead learning through and with the cooperation of mid-level school leaders who work directly with teachers (Bendikson et al., 2012; Hallinger, 2010b, 2011; Lambert, 2002).

Implementation of this instructional leadership policy framework has profoundly affected the preparation of Israel's principals. Indeed, preparation programs for Israel's school principals were recently redesigned were to train aspiring principals as instructional leaders (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2018). The screening process for the preparation programs, which is conducted for candidates from all over the country together, focuses on instructional perceptions, systems thinking, and interpersonal capabilities. This process is challenging and selective; only 20% of applicants are accepted into the program.

The preparation program rests on the following pillars: (1) the improvement of teaching and learning, (2) the design of future schools, (3) team leadership and professional development, (4) evidence-based management, and (5) budget and resource management (Berkovich, 2014). A significant portion of the curriculum (about 25% out of the 440 hours of the program) is dedicated to school pedagogical diagnostic issues. For example, participants learn how to analyze internal and external test results for the purposes of instructional and school improvement, as well as how to perform data-based teacher evaluation. These examples reflect a broader enactment of "evidence-based leadership" (Capstones, 2012a).

Nonetheless, there remains a disconnect between the instructional leadership emphasis evident in their preparation programs and in subsequent training and socialization experiences of principals. For example, the mentoring provided to novice principals often focuses more on technical and

administrative issues than issues related to instructional leadership (Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018). Similarly, instructional leadership receives far less emphasis in the professional development programs offered to practicing principals (Nets, 2017).

Thus, policy-driven efforts to reorient Israeli principals around a new framework of instructional leadership have yielded mixed results. Indeed, recent studies have suggested that Israeli school principals continue to demonstrate only limited involvement in instructional leadership (Glanz et al., 2017). Moreover, they do not see themselves as fully committed to the established instructional leadership policy. Instead, they continue to interpret their leadership role in broader more diverse ways (Shaked, 2018).

Method

The current study was qualitative in nature, in order to provide rich textual descriptions of instructional leadership implementation. This approach is most appropriate when the overall aim is to describe a phenomenon and when existing literature or theory on the phenomenon is limited. This section describes this study's sample, how information was gathered, and analytical strategies.

Participants

The sampling for this study was both opportunity-based and purposive (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants were recommended by colleagues and students of the first author. Therefore, it was an opportunity-based sampling. Eight participants recruited other participants from their acquaintances, making it also a snowball sampling. However, a purposive sampling technique also was implemented in this study, where the purpose was for the sample to be similar to the larger body of Israeli principals who work in the Hebrew-speaking sector. Principals recommended for participation in the study were included only if their participation matched the characteristics of the larger population in terms of sex, age, years of experience, education, and school level (elementary, middle, high).

Within the Hebrew-speaking sector, 67% of the Israeli principals are females and 33% are males. Principals have an average of 11 years of principalship, and their average age is 50 years. Regarding their education, 8% of principals have no academic degree, 35% have a bachelor's degree, and 65% have a master's degree or higher. As for the school level, 61% of principals work in elementary schools, while 39% work in middle and high schools (Capstones, 2012b). Thus, the study involved 46 principals, 31 females and

15 males. Participants had 12 to 42 years of educational experience ($M = 25.46$, $SD = 7.73$), which included 1 to 31 years of experience as principals ($M = 10.22$, $SD = 5.87$). They were between 33 and 64 years old ($M = 49.72$, $SD = 7.95$). Most of the 46 participants ($n = 30$) held a master's degree, with 11 principals holding only a bachelor's degree, 3 principals holding doctorates, and 2 principals without an academic degree. Participants were principals of elementary schools ($n = 28$), middle schools ($n = 3$), and high schools ($n = 15$), working in all seven Israeli school districts.

The appropriate number of interviews is a common question when designing a qualitative study. In this study, the goal was to "interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 113). When we noticed that recent interviews did not add significantly insights, we realized that we had reached saturation.

Data Collection

The original goal of data collection was broader: to explore how instructional leadership operates among Israeli principals. Utilizing data collected to explore how national context influenced instructional leadership implementation was an idea that came up during the data analysis process described below.

Data were collected through interviews and focus groups. All 46 participants were offered the option of participating in a focus group. The 16 principals whose schedules allowed them to participate formed three focus groups of 5 to 6 principals each. Focus group participants did not know each other. The remaining 30 principals who could not participate in the focus groups were interviewed individually. Although one-on-one interviews and focus groups were conducted similarly, focus groups produced richest data because, despite the lack of privacy, listening to others' verbalized experiences stimulated participants' memories, ideas, and experiences. Insofar as a focus group may be dominated by one or two people leading to a marginalization of some participants, attention was paid to ensure an opportunity for self-expression for each of the participants.

Both individual and focus group interviews were semistructured. This "allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 111). The key questions were preplanned, but the interviews and focus groups were also conversational, with questions flowing from previous responses when possible. The interviews and focus groups proved to be like conversations, rather than a "ping-pong" of questions and answers.

Although the interviews sought to explore principals' enactment of instructional leadership, the interviewers intentionally omitted the term

“instructional leadership.” This was to avoid priming participants to frame their discussions in this light. Thus, questions were asked such as “As a principal, what are your priorities in your work, and how were they determined?” “If you could, what would you omit from your work as a principal?” “Who is responsible for improving teaching practices in your school, and why?” and “As a principal, how do you rank instruction among the various areas requiring your attention—and why?” Interviews with principals generally lasted 1 hour, and focus groups generally lasted 2 hours.

Interviews and focus groups were audiotaped for later transcription. In order to evaluate the soundness of the data, all transcripts were sent back to participants along with a request that they evaluate their responses and make any necessary additions or modifications (Koelsch, 2013).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was a four-stage process—condensing, coding, categorizing, and theorizing. First, the necessary sorting and condensing were performed (Miles et al., 2014), seeking out the relevant utterances that might represent instructional leadership. These utterances (e.g., “Every single minute of the school day should be devoted to maximizing student learning”; “I make sure teachers use innovative teaching methods”; “Teaching and learning are not the things that interest me most”) were related to instructional leadership in many ways, reflecting both implementation and lack of implementation of instructional leadership.

On completion of this stage, the study was divided into several substudies, because data collected could answer several research questions concerning the implementation of instructional leadership among Israeli principals. These questions, dealing mainly with inhibitors of instructional leadership, were discussed separately and published elsewhere (Shaked, 2018, 2019). A rereading of interviewees’ responses suggested that they might be indicative of the effects of national context. Therefore, among other research branches, the data was analyzed in this direction as described below.

At the second stage—coding—the utterances identified at the previous stage were investigated to see if they reflected any influence of the Israeli context. At this stage, a wide range of features that were discussed in the literature as characterizing the Israeli context, aforementioned, were examined as possible influences on instructional leadership. After having captured the essence of the statements in the second stage, in the third stage—categorizing—similar utterances were assembled into clusters in order to generalize their meanings and derive categories. Finally, the theorizing stage sought to reach a conceptual construct of the categories derived in the previous stage,

and to explore how they were interconnected and influenced each other as parts of one abstract construct (Miles et al., 2014).

Findings

Instructional Leadership Enactment in a Low Power Distance Culture

One significant force shaping the enactment of instructional leadership in Israel was the low power distance that describes Israeli social culture. This notion was mentioned by 18 participants (see Table 1). Power distance refers to the extent to which a society expects and accepts that power is distributed unevenly among people. Individuals in societies with “low power distance” tend to assume that all people are created equal. In contrast, individuals in high power distance societies tend to rely on status differentiation and hierarchy to define social and work relationships (Hofstede, 2001).

Israel is at the very low end of the PDI compared with other countries. For Israelis, respect is something that you earn by demonstrating hands-on expertise rather than by rank, age, social class, or gender. Israeli workplaces tend to have an informal atmosphere with direct communication among individuals who operate on a first name basis. Power is decentralized and managers rely on the experience and expertise of their subordinates. Employees in Israel expect consultation from their superiors and feel free to question them directly and openly (Hofstede, 2001; Litchka & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2016; Zibenberg, 2018).

Our qualitative data clearly revealed numerous ways in which the low power distance norms of Israeli society shape the principals’ enactment of instructional leadership in their schools. Norms of workplace equality set unwritten boundaries around the extent to which principals could enact instructional leadership as a “top-down” leadership approach. Indeed, the influence of this cultural norm was evident with respect to the enactment of all the dimensions of instructional leadership.

For the first dimension, *Defining the School Mission* (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; similar to *setting directions*—Leithwood & Louis, 2011), study participants ascribed singular importance to the “collaborative development” of the school’s mission. They believed that it was untenable for senior management to dictate the school’s instructional goals. Instead, they assumed that the school’s goals should be defined through a collaborative process that involves stakeholders, especially teachers. As said Christopher, an experienced elementary school principal: “An inspiring and compelling vision is worth nothing if I created it alone.” This, however, had three consequences. First, the

Table 1. Study Participants' Information.

Pseudonyms	Gender	Age, years	Educational experience	Leadership experience	School level	Education	District	Data collection	Low power distance	Clan culture	Incomplete identification with schools' academic mission
1 Alice	Female	40	17	5	Elementary	Master's	North	Focus group 1	✓		
2 Anne	Female	50	24	11	High	Master's	Center	Interview	✓	✓	
3 Barbara	Female	45	20	7	Elementary	Master's	Tel Aviv	Focus group 2			
4 Bob	Male	38	13	2	High	Master's	Jerusalem	Interview	✓	✓	✓
5 Carol	Female	37	15	2	Elementary	Master's	Jerusalem	Focus group 3			✓
6 Charles	Male	51	26	19	High	Doctorate	Settlement	Interview	✓	✓	✓
7 Christopher	Male	57	26	18	Elementary	Bachelor's	Center	Interview			
8 Daniel	Male	64	42	31	Elementary	N/A	Tel Aviv	Interview	✓	✓	
9 David	Male	38	14	3	Elementary	Master's	Haifa	Focus group 1	✓	✓	
10 Deborah	Female	44	19	6	Elementary	Master's	South	Focus group 3			
11 Donald	Male	59	33	13	Elementary	Master's	Center	Focus group 2	✓	✓	
12 Dorothy	Female	46	24	4	Elementary	Master's	South	Interview			✓
13 Ebony	Female	54	30	16	Elementary	Master's	North	Interview			
14 Elizabeth	Female	59	31	15	Elementary	Bachelor's	Haifa	Interview			
15 Esther	Female	51	28	9	Elementary	Master's	South	Interview			
16 George	Male	44	19	5	Middle	Master's	Jerusalem	Focus group 3	✓	✓	
17 Gloria	Female	57	24	15	High	Master's	Settlement	Interview			✓
18 Jacob	Male	53	30	10	High	Doctorate	South	Interview			✓
19 James	Male	34	12	1	Elementary	Bachelor's	Tel Aviv	Focus group 2	✓	✓	
20 Jennifer	Female	42	18	7	High	Master's	South	Interview	✓	✓	
21 John	Male	58	33	15	High	Master's	Haifa	Focus group 1			✓
22 Karen	Female	33	12	2	Elementary	Bachelor's	Settlement	Interview	✓		
23 Kate	Female	47	24	8	Elementary	Master's	North	Interview			✓
24 Kimberly	Female	53	30	15	Elementary	Bachelor's	North	Interview			

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Pseudonyms	Gender	Age, years	Educational experience	Leadership experience	School level	Education	District	Data collection	Low power distance	Clan culture	Incomplete identification with schools' academic mission
25 Laura	Female	64	41	11	Middle	Master's	Settlement	Interview	✓		
26 Linda	Female	54	30	13	High	Master's	Settlement	Interview			
27 Lisa	Female	52	26	12	High	Doctorate	Tel Aviv	Focus group 2			
28 Margaret	Female	38	17	2	High	Master's	Center	Focus group 2			
29 Maria	Female	56	34	7	Elementary	Bachelor's	Jerusalem	Focus group 3			✓
30 Martha	Female	57	33	10	High	Master's	Haifa	Interview	✓		
31 Mary	Female	48	24	8	Elementary	Bachelor's	Center	Interview			
32 Melissa	Female	52	27	9	Elementary	Master's	North	Interview			
33 Michael	Male	49	22	12	Elementary	Bachelor's	Haifa	Focus group 1	✓	✓	✓
34 Michelle	Female	58	35	14	High	Master's	South	Interview			
35 Monica	Female	62	40	15	Elementary	Master's	Tel Aviv	Interview			
36 Nancy	Female	46	22	11	High	Master's	South	Interview			
37 Patricia	Female	55	30	14	Elementary	Master's	Center	Focus group 2			
38 Phillip	Male	44	20	4	Elementary	Master's	Jerusalem	Interview	✓	✓	
39 Richard	Male	47	22	8	Elementary	Bachelor's	Settlement	Interview	✓		
40 Robert	Male	61	38	20	High	N/A	Haifa	Interview			
41 Ruth	Female	49	24	14	High	Master's	Haifa	Interview	✓		
42 Sandra	Female	53	30	12	Middle	Master's	Center	Interview			
43 Sara	Female	45	22	8	Elementary	Master's	North	Focus group 1			
44 Sharon	Female	55	32	15	Elementary	Master's	Jerusalem	Focus group 3			✓
45 Susan	Female	43	16	6	Elementary	Bachelor's	Tel Aviv	Interview	✓		
46 William	Male	45	22	6	Elementary	Bachelor's	North	Interview	✓		

process of setting the school's goals often took longer than the principals would have liked ("Reaching an agreed vision takes longer than I thought"—Alice, an elementary school principal with 5 years of leadership experience). Second, the results were not always exactly what the principal might have wanted ("I can't force my vision on them. I have to compromise"—Bob, a novice high school principal). Third, the resulting mission and goals may not necessarily prioritize student learning outcomes at the school's mission ("My teachers attach great importance to imparting values"—George, a middle school principal with 5 years of leadership experience). Moreover, consistent with the tenets of a low power distance culture, study participants did not expect "total compliance" from teachers with the school's instructional mission. Instead, they left room for teachers who disagreed with the mission to pursue somewhat differently weighted goals and approaches. "In the end, I can't really force my opinion on teachers" said Kimberly, an experienced principal of an elementary school. James, a novice principal of an elementary school, believed teachers should be involved in determining the school mission and vision. However, he complained that "they don't understand that in the end I'm supposed to be leading the school's direction. They see the school as belonging to them, expecting me to adapt."

The impact of a low power distance culture on instructional leadership enactment was even stronger with respect to the second dimension, *Managing the Instructional Program* (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; similar to *managing the instructional program*—Leithwood & Louis, 2011). Some scholars have characterized instructional leadership as a "top-down school leadership model" due to functions embedded in this dimension such as supervision and evaluation of teaching (e.g., Aas & Brandmo, 2016). Israeli principals, however, tend to deemphasize and even avoid instructional supervision in the belief that teachers should be allowed to act in accordance with their own teaching experience and discretion.

Our data clearly illustrated the influence of low power distance in this domain. As explained by Anne, an experienced high school principal: "I give my teachers wide latitude so that they can do their teaching job as they know best. Otherwise, I simply distrust them." More broadly, principals gave limited guidance on what needed to be taught, when it should be taught, and how it should be taught (i.e., Coordinating the Curriculum, Monitoring Student Progress).

Classroom observations were similarly perceived as problematic by study participants. Richard, an experienced elementary school principal, avoided observations because they created fear among teachers: "It doesn't matter how long in advance I notify them and how I explain the goals of observations. It's the practice itself that evokes anxiety in teachers." Laura, an

experienced middle school principal, chose to act as a consultant rather than an authority: "I never tell them: 'Don't teach that way!' It's always like 'If it were me, I'd teach this way.'"

Low power distance also shaped the enactment of the third dimension of instructional leadership, *Developing a Positive School Learning Climate* (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Participants did not see it as an element of their role to set boundaries or expectations for how teachers used instructional time. Margaret, a novice high school principal, said honestly: "Sometimes I see how my teachers go back to their classrooms after a break. I know they miss almost 10 minutes, but I say nothing." The principals also refrained from requiring teachers to participate in professional development activities of the school. Instead, they relied on persuasion and encouragement to gain teachers' participation in further learning. While they also noted that their attempts were not always successful, this was accepted as part and parcel of power relationships within this context. Thus, even when unsuccessful, the principals did not view it as acceptable to use "position power" to gain teacher participation.

As to the instructional leader's responsibility of *Developing People* (Leithwood & Louis, 2011), although nurturing the professional development of teachers is a main role of Israeli principals as instructional leaders (Capstones, 2008), study participants found it difficult to get their teachers to participate in professional learning. Michael, an experienced elementary school principal, clearly articulated the low power distance: "I am required to make sure that teachers develop professionally, but in fact if a teacher doesn't want to—she won't go."

Similarly, principals faced difficulties in applying their instructional leader's responsibility of *Redesigning the Organization* (Leithwood & Louis, 2011). Philip, an elementary school principal, who wanted his school to move to a block schedule, was disappointed with his lack of success: "I'm still convinced that this is the right step, but we [me and the teachers] were in disagreement and I couldn't force my mind on them." Both the opposition of the teachers to the school change and the feeling of Philip that he could not impose his opinion expressed the low power distance.

It is interesting to note that low power distance was equally evident in the surprisingly low level of principals' commitment to meeting superintendents' instructional leadership demands. For example, the principals knew they were expected to demonstrate 'instructional leadership' as defined by the Ministry of Education. Yet mirroring their own relationships with teachers, the principals believed that their approach to leadership could not be dictated from above. Therefore, even in the face of pressures from above, they tended to rely on their own professional judgment.

Leading Teaching and Learning in a Clan Culture

Another force identified in our study was the tendency to cultivate a “clan culture” in schools. This notion was mentioned by 13 participants (see Table 1). Cameron and Quinn (2011) defined a clan culture as an extended family, held together by loyalty, commitment and strong, close interpersonal relationships. In clan cultures, leaders are perceived as mentors and perhaps even as parent figures. All employees are equal, and success is defined in terms of perceptions of the internal climate and concern for people. Ascribing importance to shared goals and values, as well as teamwork and consensus, clan culture is more collaborative than competitive (Brewer & Venaik, 2010; Heritage et al., 2014). Thus, whereas policies, rules, and procedures represent the “glue” that holds hierarchies together, participation, relationships, and a sense of “we-ness” are the linchpins of clan-type organizations (Cameron & Quinn, 2011).

Critics of clan cultures argue that they are vulnerable to abuse if employees use tolerance as an opportunity to relax rather than to contribute to shared goals. Similarly, freedom and autonomy may be used to loaf or even conduct personal business on company time (Hartnell et al., 2011). It may also be problematic when staff lack consensus on an important issue. Finally, without a strong authority figure, good ideas that need a champion may be abandoned simply because they do not get a majority vote (Büschgens et al., 2013).

The education system in Israel operates along the lines of clan culture, as observed in previous studies (Katriel, 1991; Shaked, 2019; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2009), and as the findings of this study, presented below, also indicate. Within this culture, Israeli principals found it difficult to enact the approach to instructional leadership officially adopted by the education system. Indeed, the clan culture tended to strengthen the effects of low power distance by furthering emphasizing the primacy of interpersonal processes, reducing the perquisites of formal authority, and diminishing the influence of control mechanisms such as goals, rules, and policies.

The clan culture of Israeli schools led principals to give primary importance to the maintenance of positive principal–teacher relationships (Yariv, 2009), as Michelle, a high school principal, explained clearly: “For me, success is not only in terms of achievements and grades; it is mainly in terms of team climate and teacher sense of belonging.” Within the context of instructional leadership, many of the principals feared that principal–teacher relationships might be undermined if they were to outline a clear path for the school or engaged in a frequent close-up inspection—collegial or otherwise—of their teachers’ practice. Study participants claimed that “Building up a school’s productivity requires not only discovering how to get the job

done effectively but also fostering positive principal–teacher relationships” (Linda, a high school principal). Accordingly, they avoided leadership practices that could have been interpreted by their “followers” as attempts to coordinate or control the work of teachers. When it came to *Redesigning the Organization* (Leithwood & Louis, 2011), Gloria, an experienced high school principal, described herself as avoiding school changes so as not to hurt her relationship with teachers: “I wanted to change the distribution of teaching subjects among the teachers, but I saw that it concerns some teachers at a very sensitive point, so I gave it up.”

This is not to say that the principals were unaware of the trade-offs inherent in this stance. Indeed, this caused a real dilemma for some of the principals. Kate, an experienced elementary school principal, said,

To produce school graduates with the highest possible achievements, we necessarily have processes designed to monitor teaching quality . . . [however] good principal-teacher relationships are [also] important for student achievement, and these two things are not really compatible, because close monitoring inevitably spoils relationships.

George gave voice to a similar tension. On one hand, he espoused monitoring teacher performance: “To lead my school to academic success, I have to follow the advice of the old adage, ‘Don’t expect what you don’t inspect.’ If teachers’ work is not inspected, I should not expect real improvements.” However, if he inspected his teachers repeatedly, it would not create “a friendly place to work, where people share a lot of themselves.” Jennifer, a high school principal, understood the problem, though she did not know how to solve it: “There is a vicious circle, in which my undelivered direct feedback doesn’t reach the weak teachers, who mistakenly believe that if nothing is said everything is ok, and therefore continue their poor performance.”

Clan culture supports equal treatment of all employees without giving priority to one over the other (Hartnell et al., 2016). Consequently, these Israeli principals found it difficult to implement some practices associated with *Developing a Positive School Learning Climate*. They claimed, for example, that providing incentives for teachers might inspire envy among teachers, and undermine the family atmosphere. Dorothy said that she wanted to encourage the protection of teaching time, and therefore considered giving prizes to teachers who were the least absent during the school year. However, her management team advised her not to do it, because “Putting up one teacher on top may make other people resentful, so while making one teacher happy you make others unhappier.” This perspective also carried over to the principals’ relationships with students. Again, viewing the school as a big family, the

participants shied away from providing incentives for learners because they wanted struggling students to also feel good.

The “school as family” metaphor was a powerful lens through which the principals conceptualized their role. For example, Bob, who was in his second year as a high school principal, stated, “Our school is like one big family. Teachers feel at home here almost right away. If I were to observe classrooms regularly, like I’m asked to do, it might substantially change our family-like community.”

Incomplete Identification With the School’s Academic Mission

The third force influencing the enactment of instructional leadership by Israeli principals was an incomplete identification with the school’s academic mission. This notion was mentioned by 9 participants (see Table 1). This reflected “a cultural emphasis on children’s personal welfare rather than academic excellence, since most children will face two-three years of rigor and possible danger in army service” (Wolff & Breit, 2012, p. 14). The Israeli State Education Law, first enacted in 1953, outlines multiple objectives for the public school system (The State of Israel, 2000). There is no explicit prioritization as to what is most, or more, important on this list, or how the different goals may interact with one another. It is an ambiguous and vague policy; hence, its impact on principals’ practices is limited (Gibton, 2011).

More broadly, the Israeli public traditionally believes that “good” education strives toward socialization no less than qualification. Israelis do ascribe importance to the academic goals of schooling, such as broadening students’ knowledge base, developing learning skills, and sparking curiosity. However, there is a pervasive expectation in Israeli society that schools will also foster students’ emotional well-being, develop the social tools they need to function within the society, and promote their humanistic and adaptive character traits (Shaked, 2018; Wolff & Breit, 2012).

The beliefs of Israeli principals about the ultimate objective of schools caused instructional leadership to be pushed down the ladder of priorities. More specifically, there was a sense among the principals that “ensuring students’ learning and academic success is not the most important purpose of a school” (Jacob, a high school principal). Interviewees who highlighted the nonacademic goals of schooling ascribed primary importance to the school’s role in developing students’ welfare, including their sense of belonging and safety, happiness in the present, and optimism about the future. Moreover, they argued that while schools must indeed achieve academic achievement, their first and foremost goal should be to develop students morally and promote valued aspects of their behavior such as responsibility, self-control, integrity,

decency, and good manners. These principals wanted their students to learn to become tolerant and accept people who differed from them.

Sharon, an experienced elementary school principal, claimed, "High achievements are essential, but they are foundations only. Above them, we have to build the really important thing, which is the personality of the student." Michael, an experienced elementary school principal, clarified this view during a focus group: "Yes, schools should teach students literacy, math, foreign languages, and science, but above all and before anything else, we must develop students' ability to distinguish between right and wrong." Thus, the development of values and social competency ranked higher than academic achievement in the eyes of many of the principals.

This perspective also shaped the principals' perspective toward the monitoring of teaching and learning. Gloria, an experienced high school principal, asserted,

An ongoing pursuit of teachers to see what they are teaching is based on a narrow point of view, which considers schools as only preparing students for college and the workforce. Raising young people of values is no less important.

These participants described themselves as devoting a significant part of their time to humanistic value-driven leadership. Carol, who was in her second year as an elementary school principal, described during a focus group a lack of insufficient time for instructional leadership. However, she admitted sincerely: "In fact, time is a matter of priority. I know how to find time for areas that are important to me, such as imparting good values and making my students responsible society members."

This prioritization of student socialization also carried over to the principals' approach to curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. Rather than place an explicit emphasis on "protecting instructional time," the principals gave equal emphasis to the aesthetic and spiritual development of students. They believed that their "mission" must include fostering students who would "become active, energetic and moral citizens" (Ruth, a high school principal). When John, an experienced high school principal, was expected to appoint an instructional coordinator, he preferred to appoint a social activity coordinator. Fulfilling his responsibility of *Redesigning the Organization* (Leithwood & Louis, 2011), he prioritized the nonacademic school goals.

Thus, while instructional leadership prioritizes the academic goals (*qualification*) over nonacademic goals (*socialization*), this diverged from the belief system of these Israeli principals. They did not accept that student learning and academic success (*qualification*) was the most important goal of

schooling. This characteristic of instructional leadership implementation was more evident in high school principals, and in male principals more than in their female counterparts.

Discussion

With its roots in American education culture, instructional leadership emerged during the 1980s as an increasingly potent feature in the role of principals (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). Over the ensuing decades, the salience of this role has gradually spread to all corners of the world (Bush, 2013). Nonetheless, until recently, scholars have offered relatively few insights into how instructional leadership is enacted in and shaped by the context of different societies (Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2017; Hallinger, 2018a). The current qualitative examination of instructional leadership enactment in Israel was undertaken with the goal of building on other recent efforts to address this issue through empirical research (e.g., Aas & Brandmo, 2016; Ng et al., 2015; Pan et al., 2017; Qian et al., 2017). In this section, we identify several limitations of the study, and interpret the findings, and highlight several implications for research and practice.

Limitations

While the qualitative methods used in this study offered insights into the link between context and school leadership, the findings cannot be generalized to all Israeli principals. Moreover, because this study only focused on the Hebrew-speaking sector, we cannot speculate on the extent to which the findings would reflect leadership practices in the Arab education sector. Future research will be required to verify our findings using a broader cross-section of Israeli principals.

Furthermore, this study reflects the situation at a specific point in time. Most of the study participants (like the larger body of school principals in Israel) had been serving as school principals before the systemic emphasis on instructional leadership. Assimilating a new meaning of their role as principals may take many years, was the case in the United States (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). In addition, future research would do well to explore the interactions between the extent and manner in which Israeli principals adopt a more active instructional leadership role and variables such as gender, experience, education, and school level. The current study suggested some gender differences, where Israeli female principals revealed more active instructional leadership than their male counterparts. These differences, which should be verified by using a larger sample and quantitative methods, are

consistent with the existing literature (Hallinger et al., 2016). Other differences were not found to be significant, but might be detected in a study using a larger number of participants.

This study's method offered limited control over the possibility that participants might provide socially desirable responses. Observations, as well as interviews and surveys with other stakeholders about principals' instructional leadership, would provide useful data for comparison. In addition, future research should more directly examine *why* Israeli principals sidestep instructional leadership.

Interpretation of the Findings

This study documented how the national context of Israel shapes the enactment of instructional leadership. Our findings reinforce theoretical assertions that national context influences the practices of school leaders not only through institutional rules, regulations, and job descriptions, but also through values, shared beliefs, and social norms (Bajunid, 1996; Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2017; Hallinger, 2018a). We found that principals were not enacting the instructional leadership role in a manner that was consistent with prescriptions embedded in policy frameworks and training curricula. We suggest that low power distance, clan culture, and an incomplete identification of principals (and teachers) with their schools' academic missions cohered into a set of social forces that made it difficult for principals to conform to formal expectations of their role as instructional leaders.

The Israeli principals in our study often expressed discomfort with the "authoritative approach" they felt was implied in some elements of the adopted instructional leadership framework. They feared that the use of these instructional leadership practices could damage the quality of their relationships with teachers, which the authors came to perceive as the paramount factor underlying the leadership prototype of these Israeli principals. The principals also evinced an abiding skepticism in the wisdom of giving primacy to student academic achievement—the lodestone of instructional leadership—in formulating the mission of their schools. Thus, a socially constructed belief system shaped the principals' interpretation of their role as instructional leaders. This resulted in practices that often ran contrary to formal expectations of their designated role as "instructional leaders."

While the initial preparation for aspiring principals is definitely focused on instructional leadership, the expectations conveyed as principals take office are far less explicit. The widely varying expectations that stakeholders have for their principals produces conflicting pressures that often dilute the normative presence press conveyed through policies and initial training experiences (Addi-Racah, 2015). Moreover, the professional development offered to

practicing principals often fails to reinforce and embed instructional leadership perspectives into their day to day routines (Dwyer, 1984; Hallinger, 2010b; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018). Lack of adequate training may be one of the reasons why Israeli principals viewed teaching leadership as inherently hierarchical.

As aforementioned, the literature has proposed three key barriers to the enactment of instructional leadership: time to lead learning, knowledge to lead learning, and organizational norms of privacy that create “force fields” around classrooms (Camburn et al., 2010; Cuban, 1988; Goldring et al., 2015; Marshall, 1996; Murphy et al., 2016; Prytula et al., 2013). Findings uncovered in the current study suggest that the cultural values and norms of a society represent a complementary explanatory factor.

Thirty years ago, Cuban (1988) offered a detailed explanation for why instructional leadership had failed to gain a firm foothold in the role set of American principals, even when professional discourse suggested its potency. Cuban highlighted the overriding influence of “organizational norms” that cohered to form the DNA of the American principalship. This DNA gave primacy to the principal’s managerial role and assigned instructional leadership to an auxiliary role. This auxiliary role was largely comprised of activities aimed at resource allocation, organization (e.g., scheduling, teacher assignment etc.), and teacher support, rather than coordination and development of teaching and learning.

As noted earlier, the instructional leadership role emerged from an American education policy context in the 1980s that demanded improvement in learning outcomes for students. New research on “instructionally effective schools” serving underachieving students (e.g., Edmonds, 1979) served as the basis for the instructional leadership approach. Although Hallinger and Murphy (1986) highlighted the “context limitations” of the instructional leadership approach, illustrating how “effective instructional leadership” was shaped by and enacted in different social contexts, instructional leadership gained primacy in American education due to a reorientation of the educational goals of the society. Decade by decade policy makers tightened their embrace of “academic achievement” as the primary goal of education. This was evident in a series of reform reports and policies aimed at increasing educational accountability as measured by achievement results (e.g., *A Nation at Risk*, *No Child Left Behind*, and *Race to the Top*). Only through a multidecade policy effort that redefined the aims of American education was it possible for instructional leadership to increase its market share in the principal’s role orientation. Indeed, it was only when education policies in the United States made teacher and principal contracts contingent on student achievement outcomes in their classrooms and schools that the normative barriers to instructional leadership were actually breached.

Thus, the resistance of Israeli principals to give primacy to academic achievement resonates with the United States prior to the 1980s. In fact, the United States is also a moderately low power distance culture, which also explains why American principals traditionally avoided an authoritative role in relation to curriculum and instruction, and honored the “privacy” of the classroom (Cuban, 1988; Marshall, 1996). Thus, our findings refine prior explanations for principal role behavior in two ways.

First, they highlight the critical importance played by the broadly accepted “aims of education” within a society. A policy emphasizing instructional leadership may be seen as a substantial cultural mismatch in Israel because it is counter to the enacted mission of the schools. This mismatch was not intentionally created as an attempt by the Israeli Ministry of Education to focus on learning and achievement gaps by mandating instructional leadership. While an in-depth discussion on the relationships between national values and goals of education is not taking place in Israel, the education policy, which is based, in part, on borrowed policies, comes to conflicts and contradictions. Differences on the socially constructed purposes of schooling between the United States, the “home” of instructional leadership, and Israel may account for differences in the acceptance by principals of instructional leadership as a core role in the respective contexts. This explanation receives support from research on principal instructional leadership in Vietnam, which found that the primacy of political and moral socialization turned instructional leadership into a secondary or even tertiary role in the eyes of Vietnamese principals (Hallinger et al., 2017; Hallinger & Truong, 2014).

Moreover, building on Cuban’s (1988) metaphor, our findings suggest that when the “environment” in which principals work undergoes significant medium to long-term change, mutations may occur in the DNA of their job role. Thus, for example, in order to “survive,” American principals were forced adapt to a new job role orientation even if it felt distinctly uncomfortable (see Marshall, 1996). In contrast, policy prescriptions for Israeli principals to adopt a “stronger instructional leadership role” are still interpreted in the context of a less unified focus on student achievement as the primary aim of education.

Our findings refine Cuban’s (1988) decontextualized explanation of how organizational norms shape the contours of principal leadership practice by linking them to broader cultural values and norms. Placing organizational norms in the broader context of societal values and norms provides enhanced theoretical leverage. First, it offers scholars and policy makers a means of analyzing the suitability of an imported model of instructional leadership for a given national context. Thus, for example, the “authoritative” model of

instructional leadership that caused such angst among Israeli principals has been more readily accepted in “high power distance” cultures such as Malaysia (Jones et al., 2015), Taiwan (Pan et al., 2017), and Singapore (Ng et al., 2015). It also suggests a means of refining an imported model such that mutual adaptation allows for a more culturally appropriate interpretation of the role.

With these conclusions in mind, our findings exemplify the complexity of policy borrowing. By drawing on policy solutions that “worked” in another society, borrowed policies incur a smaller risk, reduce uncertainty, and shorten the planning process (Nir et al., 2018; Steiner-Khamsi, 2016). However, this study illustrates that borrowed policies are not free of limitations. Failure to take into account the complex characteristics of each national context may result in resistance, partial implementation, and unanticipated outcomes (Nir et al., 2018). Therefore, the current study’s findings suggest that several versions of instructional leadership could be needed across different national contexts. Instead of a one-size-fits-all framework of instructional leadership, a variety of frameworks, suitable for different contexts should be developed. This recommendation finds support from a program of “contextualized research” on principal instructional leadership in East Asia (see Hallinger et al., 2017; Hallinger & Truong, 2014; Jones et al., 2015; Ng et al., 2015; Pan et al., 2017; Qian et al., 2017).

For example, in the Israeli context a suitable version of instructional leadership would need to be compatible with the nonauthoritative mentality and family-like organizational atmosphere of Israeli schools. To this end, we must distinguish between the essence of instructional leadership and its contextual elements. The core of instructional leadership is the principal’s deep involvement in improving teaching and learning for all students (Hallinger, 2018b). However, the authoritative versus distributed form of instructional leadership (Aas & Brandmo, 2016) could be adapted to be consistent with local values and norms.

This study holds both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the results suggest the importance of research on the application of instructional leadership approach in diverse social/national contexts. Moreover, we propose that a more nuanced understanding of instructional leadership, tailored to different contexts, is required (see also Hallinger et al., 2017; Hallinger & Walker, 2017). Therefore, this study sheds light on the complexity of policy borrowing, highlighting the value of adopting a comparative approach to research on school leadership.

Practically, this study implies that policy makers around the world should consider how to optimize and refine instructional leadership to the goals, values, and norms of the local context. Making necessary policy adjustments may ease acceptance and enhance the impact of instructional leadership in

different national contexts. Furthermore, the present study highlights the necessity of developing a coherent approach that reduces the gap between policy intentions and implementation practices. This suggestion would focus, for example, on ensuring the principal selection, preparation, in-service training, and socialization experiences are mutually reinforcing. Helping principals understand the contextual interpretation of instructional leadership is critical even for experienced principals as they consolidate their leadership role in an era of dynamic change.

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