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Haim Shaked

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Haim Shaked 

Hemdat College of Education

ABSTRACT

Instructional leadership is an educational leadership model in which principals are directly and continually involved in curricular and instructional issues. This study aimed to identify the relationships needed for principals' instructional leadership, a topic that has not been sufficiently explored. Participants of this qualitative study were 26 Israeli school principals. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Findings suggest that instructional leaders do not only focus on ensuring that educational work is carried out adequately but also on intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships. The basis for instructional leadership is four relationships that principals need to cultivate: (1) with themselves; (2) with school middle leaders; (3) with teachers; and (4) with external stakeholders. Implications and further research are discussed.

Introduction

The research literature on leadership distinguishes between task-oriented and relationship-oriented leadership (Ayman & Lauritsen, 2018; Miner, 2015). Task-oriented leadership focuses on getting things done to achieve defined standards and meet particular goals. On the other hand, relationship-oriented leadership focuses on motivating and supporting team members and ensuring their job satisfaction (Breevaart & De Vries, 2019; Henkel et al., 2019). A meta-analytical study found that both were effective: task-oriented leadership was marginally more aligned with leader job performance and group/organization performance, while relationship-oriented leadership was more strongly related to follower satisfaction, motivation, and leader effectiveness (Judge et al., 2004).

Instructional leadership is an educational leadership model in which school leaders are regularly and actively involved in a wide range of activities aiming to improve teaching and learning (Boyce & Bowers, 2018; Glanz, 2005). This leadership model is primarily characterized as a task-oriented leadership that emphasizes setting specific goals, coordinating the instructional program, and monitoring teaching methods and student achievement, rather than motivating teachers, building lasting relationships with them and ensuring their satisfaction and general well-being (Glickman et al., 2017; Hallinger et al., 2015). As a person who is expected to focus first and foremost on the work that needs to be carried out and on the end results, the principal as an instructional leader engages mainly in task-oriented leadership (Neumerski, 2013).

However, the relational nature of the school leader role cannot be ignored (Miller, 2018). Almost every task assigned to a school principal requires some degree of relational behavior (Lasater, 2016). Therefore, this study seeks to identify the relationships needed for the principal's instructional leadership, a topic that has not yet been adequately researched (Robinson, 2010). Exploring how relationships fit into instructional leadership may allow us to understand which relationships school principals create and maintain to enable instructional leadership and how they see the benefit that grows from these relationships.

Specifically, this study was conducted in the Israeli educational system, which serves about 1.6 million students (Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020). The research on principalship in Israel lacks a unified, cumulative knowledge base (Oplatka, 2016). Israeli principals cultivate relationships with a variety of stakeholders, inside and outside the school (Sagie et al., 2016). They navigate and balance among the various external agencies that influence schools (Addi-Raccah, 2015). The primary responsibility of Israeli principals is to serve as instructional leaders to improve the education and learning of all students (Capstones – The Israeli Institute for School Leadership, 2008). At the same time, Israeli schools are characterized by the type of organizational culture defined by Cameron and Quinn (2011) as a *clan culture* (Katriel, 1991; Shaked et al., 2020; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2009). This culture, which was explored in various education systems worldwide (e.g. Berkemeyer et al., 2015; Daud et al., 2015. See also Sugrue, 2015), views the organization as an extended family, held together by loyalty, commitment, and strong, close interpersonal relationships (Gulosino et al., 2017; Heritage et al., 2014). Within the Israeli school system, the current study seeks an answer to the question of how relationships play a role in principals' instructional leadership.

Theoretical background: instructional leadership and interpersonal relationships

Instructional leadership is about the extensive and direct involvement of principals in promoting high-quality teaching and learning for all students (Boyce & Bowers, 2018; Glanz, 2005; Neumerski, 2013). A broad research base correlates instructional leadership with better school results, including improved teacher practices and higher student achievement (e.g. Glickman et al., 2017; Jacobson, 2011; May & Supovitz, 2011; Quinn, 2002; Supovitz et al., 2010). Therefore, the expectation from principals to see instructional leadership as their top priority has spread worldwide (Kaparou & Bush, 2016; Shaked, 2018).

The conceptual framework of instructional leadership developed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985), which is the most prominent in the research literature on instructional leadership (Hallinger & Wang, 2015), is made up of task-oriented, rather than relationship-oriented, elements. This framework consists of three dimensions that include ten functions. *A. Defining the school mission* – the responsibility for ensuring a clear mission, focusing on the academic progress of all students, and for sharing this mission with the school community. This first dimension comprises two functions: (1) framing the school's goals and (2) communicating the school's goals. *B. Managing the instructional program* – the responsibility for regulating and controlling the academic program in the school. This second dimension comprises three functions: (3) coordinating curriculum,

(4) supervising and evaluating instruction, and (5) monitoring student progress. C. *Developing a positive school learning climate* – the responsibility for creating a culture of ongoing improvement and high standards and expectations for both students and teachers. This third dimension comprises five functions: (6) protecting instructional time, (7) providing incentives for teachers, (8) providing incentives for learning, (9) promoting professional development, and (10) maintaining high visibility. This conceptual framework does not assign fundamental importance to relationships. Instead, it emphasizes aspects of authority and control, such as supervision, evaluation, and monitoring, and therefore instructional leadership is ‘a directive and top-down approach to school leadership’ (Hallinger, 2003, p. 337).

It should be noted that Stronge et al. (2008) pointed to five essential elements of instructional leadership: (1) *Building and Sustaining a School Vision* – Developing a school vision that sets clear learning goals, and gaining community support for those goals. (2) *Sharing Leadership* – Distributing leadership roles by strengthening the expertise of teacher leaders to enhance school performance. (3) *Leading a Learning Community* – Steering a collaborative community of professional learners that provides meaningful staff development. (4) *Using Data to Make Instructional Decisions* – Collecting and using facts and evidence in instructional decision-making. (5) *Monitoring Curriculum and Instruction* – Keeping tabs on and promoting the implementation of curricula and quality teaching methods by spending time in classes. 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. (4) *Managing instructional program* – improving teaching and curriculum. These frameworks include some relationship-oriented functions among instructional leadership core areas, such as sharing leadership, leading a learning community and developing people. Nevertheless, instructional leadership’s main components are setting direction, making data-based decisions, and monitoring instruction, which reflect task-oriented leadership.

However, school leadership is inherently based on relationships (Lasater, 2016), which are the cornerstone of many school leadership aspects (Miller, 2018). The relationships involved in the principal’s instructional leadership have not been studied so far; hence this study’s motivation. Specifically, instructional leadership is now perceived as more decentralized. In the past, this model was considered incompatible with shared or distributed leadership, considering the principal as the only one coordinating and controlling, without significant bottom-up participation (Hallinger, 2003). However, instructional leadership requires skillsets that typically go beyond those possessed by any individual in the school, and time constraints do not allow the principal to do everything. Therefore, it became clear that instructional leadership cannot be a solo performance: ‘It is essential to reformulate instructional leadership both as a collective identity and in terms of a set of shared functional responsibilities’ (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013, p. 16). The application of instructional leadership in a distributed manner

(Halverson & Clifford, 2013) highlights the importance of research into the relationships needed for the principal's instructional leadership.

Although principals as instructional leaders are central figures in promoting high levels of academic achievement for students, their influence on students is mainly indirect, mediated by the instructional program and the school culture (Murphy et al., 2016). The degree to which the principal pays attention to teaching and learning sends a message about their importance to the staff. The priorities espoused by the principal that accentuate teaching and learning are felt by the entire team and become the priorities throughout the school (Glanz, 2005). Moreover, principals who implement instructional leadership influence teachers' teaching strategies and support the development of factors such as motivation, loyalty, and satisfaction among teachers, which, in turn, influence student outcomes (e.g. Supovitz et al., 2010; Thoonen et al., 2012). Therefore, the capacity to build good relationships with teachers may be seen as vital for instructional leadership. Positive principal-teacher relationships constitute the basis for effective instructional leadership (Robinson, 2010).

Positive relationships with teachers enable the principal to be an authentic and open instructional leader, with the capacity to listen, empathize, interact, and connect with teachers in productive, helping ways. Through such relationships, the principal as an instructional leader can engage with teachers in constructive and respectful conversations about teaching and learning (Le Fevre & Robinson, 2015). Principals' relationships with their teachers affect principals' and teachers' satisfaction, cohesion, and commitment levels (Price, 2015). Healthy principal-teacher relationships have been found to help teachers adopt more effective teaching practices (Alsobaie, 2015). Moreover, they have been found to significantly contribute to improving student achievements (Edgeron et al., 2006).

The existing literature on the principal-teacher relationship often ignores the special relationship between principals and teachers serving as school middle-leaders, who have management responsibility for a team of teachers or an aspect of the school's work (Fleming & Amesbury, 2012). These teachers, who implement the policies determined by the principal (Bennett et al., 2003), are often the driving force at improving the quality of teaching and learning (Heng & Marsh, 2009). While we seem to know quite a bit about principalship, we know relatively little about the leading work of middle leaders (Grootenboer, 2018). Specifically, we do not know enough about how the principals' relationship with middle-leaders is different from that of the schoolroom teachers. Besides, while the existing literature stresses the importance of a healthy principal-teacher relationship for effective school leadership, other instructional leaders' relationships have not been sufficiently explored (Robinson, 2010). Instructional leaders focus not only on activities taking place within the school but also on importing resources, support, and knowledge needed for improving academic results from outside the school (Shaked & Benoliel, 2020). To this end, they cultivate good relationships with various stakeholders from the outside-school world (Ewy, 2009). Therefore, a broader examination of the relationships of the principal as an instructional leader is needed.

Method

Qualitative methods, seeking to reveal participants' practices, thoughts, and feelings, are most appropriate when the available knowledge about the phenomenon under study is

limited (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, this study was of a qualitative nature. Specifically, this study was interview research. Interviews are widely held to be a fundamentally useful way to understand informants' beliefs, experiences, and worlds because they provide unique access to the lived world of study participants, who in their own words describe their activities and opinions (Mann, 2016; Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Study participants

The sampling for this study aimed to create a sample similar to the Israeli principals' population in terms of age, sex, seniority, academic degree, and school level (elementary, middle, high). The average age of Israeli principals is 50. Two-thirds of Israeli principals are women, and one-third are men. They have an average of 11 years of school leadership experience. As for their education, 65% of Israeli principals hold a master's degree or higher, 35% hold a bachelor's degree, and 8% do not hold an academic degree. Regarding the school level, 61% of Israeli principals work in elementary schools, while 39% work in middle and high schools (Capstones – The Israeli Institute for School Leadership, 2012).

To build the study sample, the author's colleagues and students were asked to recommend possible participants. Four participants recommended other participants from among their acquaintances. However, the principals recommended for participation in the study were included only if their participation matched the larger Israeli principals population's characteristics. Accordingly, the present study included 26 principals, 18 females and eight males. They were between 36 and 61 years old ($M = 49.31$, $SD = 6.69$) and had 2 to 29 years of school leadership experience ($M = 11.04$, $SD = 6.54$). Two principals had no academic degree, nine principals held a bachelor's degree, 14 principals held a master's degree, and one principal was a Ph.D. They worked in elementary schools ($n = 16$), middle schools ($n = 3$), and high schools ($n = 7$), scattered throughout all six Israeli school districts. Table 1 presents the information of the study participants.

Data collection

The author collected the data through semi-structured interviews. The participants were asked to answer preset, open-ended questions, but the interviews were also conversational, with questions arising from previous answers whenever possible. This allowed the interviewer '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). In writing the Interview protocol, open-ended questions were used to get descriptive answers, using language that participants can easily understand and keeping questions positive and as short as possible. The interview protocol is provided in Appendix A.

For ethical reasons, all participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could exit the study at any time. They were assured of confidentiality (pseudonyms were assigned) and were asked to provide written consent based on an understanding of the research aim. Interviews generally lasted one hour and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Follow-up interviews were also

Table 1. Studyparticipants' information.

	Pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Leadership Seniority	School Level	Academic Degree	District
1	Alice	Female	49	19	Elementary	Bachelor's	North
2	Anne	Female	48	11	Elementary	Master's	Center
3	Bob	Male	55	16	High	Doctorate	Haifa
4	Carol	Female	52	11	Middle	Master's	Jerusalem
5	David	Male	39	3	Elementary	Master's	Center
6	Deborah	Female	41	6	Elementary	Master's	Jerusalem
7	Elizabeth	Female	40	2	High	Master's	South
8	Esther	Female	51	15	Elementary	Bachelor's	Tel Aviv
9	George	Male	61	29	Elementary	N/A	Jerusalem
10	Gloria	Female	53	15	High	Bachelor's	South
11	Jacob	Male	49	8	Elementary	Master's	Tel Aviv
12	James	Male	46	8	Elementary	Master's	South
13	Jennifer	Female	47	12	Elementary	N/A	Haifa
14	John	Male	56	16	Elementary	Bachelor's	North
15	Karen	Female	36	2	High	Master's	Haifa
16	Kimberly	Female	39	2	Elementary	Master's	Tel Aviv
17	Lisa	Female	50	12	High	Master's	North
18	Margaret	Female	43	2	Elementary	Master's	North
19	Martha	Female	55	12	High	Bachelor's	Haifa
20	Michael	Male	46	7	Elementary	Master's	Tel Aviv
21	Michelle	Female	55	14	High	Bachelor's	Center
22	Monica	Female	59	19	High	Bachelor's	Tel Aviv
23	Patricia	Female	56	14	Middle	Master's	South
24	Philip	Male	56	14	Elementary	Bachelor's	North
25	Ruth	Female	53	14	Elementary	Bachelor's	Jerusalem
26	Sandra	Female	47	4	Elementary	Master's	Center

conducted, as needed, to clarify questions that arose during a review of the transcripts of the interviews.

Data analysis

Data analysis, which was conducted by the author, was a three-stage process. The first stage of data analysis was sorting. All the transcribed data were carefully read and reread, line by line; each segment of data (i.e. utterance – word or short phrase) that expressed any aspect of instructional leadership and interpersonal relationships was located; and data that were not relevant were eliminated. This stage was explained by Miles et al. (2014): 'Data condensation is not something separate from analysis. It is a *part* of analysis. The researcher's decisions – which data chunks to code and which to pull out ... *are all analytic choices*' (p. 12). The second stage of data analysis was coding (Tracy, 2013), which is 'the action of identifying a passage of text ... that exemplifies some idea or concept and then connecting it to a named code that represents that idea or concept' (Gibbs, 2007, p. 148). In this stage, each segment of data was marked with a code that symbolically represented and captured the aspect of systems-thinking that it expressed. Sometimes a single utterance was coded with more than one code. During coding, a master list of all the codes which were used in the research study were kept, and the codes were reapplied to new utterances each time an appropriate utterance was encountered. The coding process was data-driven because it did not use a priori codes but inductive ones, developed by directly examining the participants' perspectives as they expressed them. The third stage of data analysis was categorizing. After capturing the

essence of utterances in the previous stage, this stage clustered them together according to similarity, in order to generalize their meanings. A confounding property of category construction in qualitative research is that data within the categories cannot always be precisely and discretely bounded; however, utterances were grouped and regrouped together when their codes had something in common, until satisfactory categories emerged. It was like ‘decorating a room; you try it, step back, move a few things, step back again, try a serious reorganization, and so on’ (Abbott, 2004, p. 215). The categories emerged in this stage were utilized in the Findings chapter.

Limitations

This study has two main limitations. First, its participants all worked within a specific context, which is the Israeli education system. Thus, it is necessary to replicate this study in various socio-cultural contexts to examine its findings’ generalizability. Since national characteristics shape the application of instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2018; Shaked et al., 2020), further research would do well to explore differences among countries around the world. Particularly, Israeli schools are characterized by the *clan* organizational culture, which ascribes great importance to family-like, close relationships (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Future research would do well to compare this study’s findings with other educational systems, which are not characterized by the *clan* culture. Second, this study is based on self-reporting. Future research using techniques such as direct observation could complement the principals’ self-reporting with more objective data on the knowledge utilized for instructional leadership. Interviewing various stakeholders, both in and out of schools, about the relationships related to instructional leadership, may also complement the principals’ self-reporting. Furthermore, interactions between the principals’ perceptions regarding relationships related to instructional leadership and variables such as gender, experience, education, and school-level were not significant in this sample. However, such interactions may be found in a future study using a larger number of participants.

Findings

The current study sought to identify the relationships involved in the principal’s instructional leadership. Qualitative data analysis revealed that four relationships form the basis of instructional leadership: (1) principals’ relationship with themselves; (2) principals’ relationship with school middle leaders; (3) principals’ relationship with teachers; and (4) principals’ relationship with external stakeholders. These relationships are presented, supported by segments that characterize participants’ voices.

Principals’ relationship with themselves

The interview data suggested that the first relationship needed for instructional leadership is the principals’ relationship with themselves. According to the study participants, a healthy relationship with themselves enables the principal to engage effectively in other relationships required for instructional leadership. Seven participants mentioned this idea.

The participants emphasized the importance of self-awareness, referring to an inwardly-focused evaluative process in which individuals develop a better understanding of their own character, feelings, motives, and desires. Lisa said her awareness of her own weaknesses allowed her to be less critical of teachers' work: 'I know I'm wrong too, and that I'm not perfect either, so I do not expect my teachers to be perfect, even when I criticize their work.' Lisa's self-awareness made her more humble, and therefore also more forgiving. David also utilized his self-awareness to make it easier for teachers to accept criticism of their work: 'I put my tensions on the table so that no one would get hurt. I explain to teachers that part of my criticism is because of my "craziness", and these are not necessarily the most critical components of quality teaching'. David was not only aware of the influence of his 'craziness' on his reactions but also shared it with the teachers, thus enabling them to understand that part of his criticism was related to his personal preferences regarding quality teaching. Anne talked about self-awareness of hidden biases. She said honestly: 'I used to have many biases about teaching candidates. I formed a negative opinion of a candidate because she was a single mother, or spoke with an accent that expressed, in my eyes, low intelligence, or even because of being overweight'. She recounted: 'I went through a process of rooting out prejudice, which was not easy'. Anne's self-awareness and self-change allowed her to make better, bias-free decisions about teaching candidates.

The participants also mentioned that self-regulation, referring to the ability to monitor and manage emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in ways that produce positive results, is needed for instructional leadership. Karen said: 'When a teacher does not submit mapping or grades on time, it really annoys me, but I know how to avoid an impulsive reaction, which is really not helpful'. Karen's self-regulation helped her respond more effectively to teachers' failures. Similarly, self-discipline, referring to the ability to push yourself forward constantly, was also perceived by study participants as necessary for instructional leadership. Deborah did not despair when the academic results of her school went down: 'I encouraged myself. I talked to someone I trusted, venting my frustrations, and reminded myself that it was temporary. I knew for sure that I could improve our results if I put in the effort to do so'. Deborah stayed not only motivated but also was kind and understanding toward herself, rather than being overly self-critical.

Principals' relationship with school middle leaders

Qualitative analysis of data collected for this study revealed that an additional relationship required for instructional leadership is that of the principal with school middle leaders. From the study participants' perspective, since school middle leaders play a critical role in leading teams of teachers to ensure that curricula are developed, delivered, and reviewed, that programs are assessed, and that teachers are evaluated, the principal's good relationship with them is a necessary condition for leading instructional improvement processes in the school. This idea came up in interviews with 11 principals.

The participants considered the school middle leaders to be their prominent supporters. Therefore, the principals shared planned changes or decisions with them before discussing them with other teachers. James said: 'When I set new standards for teaching

and learning in school, an opposition may emerge. This is why I first persuade the closest circle – the year heads and heads of departments – so that they will support me later’. The principals expected school middle leaders to support their learning requirements in formal and informal teacher discussions: ‘I don’t want to stand alone in front of all the teachers. I want there to be more voices to support my side, and to me, that’s exactly the role of middle leaders’.

The principals who participated in this study viewed school middle leaders as secret partners. Esther told the school middle leaders about the district’s critique of the school’s achievement level: ‘Our superintendent said she was not happy with our results on the national tests. I did not tell all the teachers about it, but I did share it with the management team members’. Ruth told the middle leaders about her plan to fire a pedagogically weak teacher: ‘It’s important for me to know what the grade-level coordinator thinks, and I trust her not to reveal my plans to those who do not need to know about them.’ The study participants also saw the school middle leaders as close friends. Michelle explained: ‘I don’t go to the family celebrations of all the teachers in the school, but I do go to the events of the school middle leaders because they are the people closest to me.’

The principals mentioned mainly formal middle leaders, who have a defined responsibility for a field of knowledge, a group of teachers, or an aspect of the school’s work. However, they also mentioned relationships with informal middle leaders, teachers who do not have an official role in the school, but who are valued both by the management team and by the teaching staff and therefore have an influence in the school, as said George: ‘She doesn’t hold any formal position, but I really appreciate her experience and wisdom, so I keep in touch with her continuously to hear her opinion on the instructional topics at hand.’ The topic of formal and informal teacher leadership requires additional research. Moreover, focusing on relationships may predispose principals to talk ‘teacher leadership’ only in a manner about those proximal to them, as opposed to the more distal members of their ‘network’ who may also be leading. Further research on this topic is needed.

Principals’ relationship with teachers

The participants’ interviews showed that their relationship with the teachers is an important one, necessary for instructional leadership. As mentioned by 22 study participants, instructional leadership practices are not feasible without a healthy principal-teacher relationship.

According to the study participants, a good relationship with teachers is required to mobilize support for the school’s instructional goals. Sandra explained: ‘I can wave a flag of pedagogical goals, and find that no one is following me. If I am not connected to the teachers, I will be left standing alone with my goals’. Good relationships also reduce opposition to new instructional initiatives, as Patricia said: ‘When there is a good relationship between the teachers and me, they are much less opposed to new programs and new ideas that I bring up’.

For the study participants, a good relationship with teachers creates a balance with the need to supervise the teachers’ practice, as Bob explained: ‘Observations and conversations with teachers about the quality of their practice naturally create tension. To complement this, it is important to have a good relationship with them’. Similarly,

Kimberly argued: ‘I have to evaluate teachers, and I don’t want it to spoil my relationship with them. So I find opportunities to show them that we are also in a good relationship.’

Moreover, the study participants perceived positive principal-teacher relationships as necessary to enable a fruitful discourse on the methods used by teachers. John claimed: ‘If you are not respectful and supportive, they will not agree to learn from you’. Margaret saw good relationships as a prerequisite to openness: ‘If my relationship with a teacher is not good, she will not be honest with me about her difficulties. A teacher who feels the need to defend herself does not share her weaknesses’. Also, a good relationship with the principal increases the teachers’ motivation to improve their teaching quality. Elizabeth argued that there is a reasonably broad congruence between a teacher’s feeling toward the principal and her feeling toward the school: ‘The centrality of the principal in the school means that if, as a teacher, you get along well with him, you feel good in school and will be committed to doing your job properly, and vice versa’.

The study participants mentioned both the principal’s relationship with all teachers as a group, as well as the relationship with each teacher individually. From their point of view, the principal should cultivate the relationship with the entire teaching staff and pay special attention to teachers who have a unique need or difficulty, as said Alice: ‘I invest in cultivating the relationship with each of the teachers but also know how to invest especially in a teacher who for some reason needs special attention’.

Principals’ relationship with external stakeholders

Data analysis pinpointed that instructional leadership requires not only good relationships with school staff – middle leaders and other teachers, as mentioned above – but also with stakeholders from the outside-school world. From the study participants’ perspective, to ensure instructional improvement and success, the principal must create healthy relationships with various external agents, who influence the school’s instructional function. Ten participants raised this idea.

Good relationships with the parents enabled the study participants to mobilize support for the school’s instructional goals. While Monica prioritized learning and academic success, the parents of some of the students at her school did not have the same opinion. She described parents that ‘What matters most to them is that their children will be happy’. These parents wanted to reduce homework, the number of exams, and the workload in school. She claimed that ‘only thanks to my good relationship with them was I able to explain to them that it is impossible to achieve the happiness of their children without studying at a high level’. Michael emphasized his good relationships with the school parents’ committee: ‘I have built an excellent relationship with the members of the school’s parents’ committee, and thus I get legitimacy for all my instructional programs.’

Good relationships with principals of other schools allowed principals to gather information about teaching methods, learning materials, and related issues. Speaking about colleagues in her city, Carol said: ‘Although we compete with each other for students, we are also good friends and share ideas and initiatives that may enhance our accomplishments’. Similarly, close relationships with other school principals made it possible for Jennifer to gather information about teaching candidates: ‘I’m in close

contact with quite a few principals, so when I ask them about the teaching quality of teachers I want to hire, I know they will tell me the truth.'

Good relationships with local authority officials helped Philip to raise resources for instructional initiatives: 'To implement new instructional programs, we need a budget. I have become the best friend of the person in charge of the local authority budget, and I get from him almost everything I want'. Generally speaking, good relationships were seen by the study participants as a critical capability needed when seeking financial support for instructional enterprises. Gloria said: 'Fundraising is ultimately very much based on a personal relationship. No matter how great the instructional idea you have, if you do not create a connection with the person you are meeting, they won't help you.'

Discussion

The current study's goal was to explore the relationships that contribute to the principal's instructional leadership. Based on a systematic categorization of the transcripts of interviews with 26 Israeli school principals, this study identified four relationships required for instructional leadership: (1) principals' relationship with themselves; (2) principals' relationship with school middle leaders; (3) principals' relationship with teachers; and (4) principals' relationship with external stakeholders.

Identifying the fundamental importance of instructional leaders' relationship with themselves (the first relationship required for instructional leadership) contributes to the existing literature on instructional leadership. Researchers found that self-awareness positively impacts principals' leadership behaviors over time (Notman, 2012). The principals' self-awareness is related to school culture and change (Devos et al., 2013), as well as to leader effectiveness, followers' supervisory satisfaction, and followers' self-leadership (Tekleab et al., 2008). However, self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-discipline were not discussed in the context of instructional leadership. This study's findings suggest that principals' relationships with themselves support their instructional leadership because they enable the formation of other necessary relationships. Within the research literature on understanding what makes school principals successful, the main emphasis has focused on the principals' capabilities, skills, practices, and activities, while less attention has been paid to intrapersonal characteristics (Crow & Møller, 2017). In particular, this is true of instructional leadership. The relationships of instructional leaders with themselves have hardly been explored (Shaked, 2020). The current study expands understanding of this topic by shedding light on how the instructional leader's relationship with themselves facilitates other relationships that enable further enactment of this leadership model.

Identifying instructional leaders' close relationships with middle leaders (the second relationship required for instructional leadership) also expands the instructional leadership literature. Middle leaders are under the senior management team and are responsible for a group of staff or an aspect of the school's work (Heng & Marsh, 2009). While the senior management team shapes the school's ethos, sets policy, and establishes guidelines, the middle leaders are responsible for making the decisions a reality (Fleming & Amesbury, 2012). School middle leaders are 'the frequently forgotten tier' in schools (Fitzgerald, 2004; Grootenboer, 2018). However, the current study found that

principals as instructional leaders attach particular importance to their relationship with the school middle leaders, seeing them as the first circle of influence, which helps to lead the entire team in improving teaching and learning. This allows for a distributed approach to instructional leadership, in which talented teachers are empowered to take leading roles, assume responsibility, and act independently (Spillane et al., 2015).

The instructional leader's relationships with the teachers (the third relationship required for instructional leadership) have been extensively discussed in the literature. Fundamentally, leadership is seen as a reciprocal leader-followers process, in which both the leader and the follower play an active role in the relationship (Martin et al., 2019). Thus, the importance of principal-teacher relationships for instructional leadership 'is evident from the fact that leadership is, by definition, a social process' (Robinson, 2010, p. 16). As noted above, the principals' influence on students is primarily indirect. Principals as instructional leaders impact teachers' teaching methods, as well as on their organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and other factors that affect student learning and results (Glanz, 2005; Murphy et al., 2016). Accordingly, this study supports the argument that healthy principal-teacher relationships constitute the basis for effective instructional leadership. Through such positive relationships, instructional leaders can involve teachers in achieving the school's instructional goals and engage with them in productive and respectful conversations about the quality of teaching and learning (Le Fevre & Robinson, 2015). It should be noted that the principal's desire to create positive relationships with teachers might serve as an inhibitor of instructional leadership, especially under the clan culture characterizing the Israeli school system. Inasmuch as principals are preoccupied with the potential damage caused by instructional leadership to their good relations with teachers, they somewhat reduce their involvement in improving teaching and learning (Shaked, 2019).

The instructional leader's relationships with external stakeholders (The fourth relationship required for instructional leadership) are often ignored. In many cases, the existing literature on instructional leadership does not go beyond the school's confines. It concludes that principals should be focused primarily on the internal processes of teaching and learning. However, this study suggests that instructional leadership involves not only an internal focus but also a significant outward focus. Instructional leaders not only concentrate on teaching, learning, and assessment activities taking place within the school but also on building positive relationships with parents, officials, colleagues from other schools, and additional external stakeholders. This is to explain the school's instructional mission to various stakeholders, create partnerships that help student learning, search for external innovative instructional knowledge and mobilize support for instructional programs from outside the school (Shaked & Benoliel, 2020). Notably, the relationships with the exogenous allow leaders to promote and protect the indigenous. In other words, it is not dichotomous: one needs good relationships external to the organization with those authorities who exert influence on it as system leaders in order to have good relationships with those internal to it when focusing on instruction (Shaked & Benoliel, 2020).

The four relationships that form the principal's instructional leadership, found in this study, are presented in [Figure 1](#). The innermost circle represents the principal's relationship with themselves. The next two circles represent the principal's relationship within

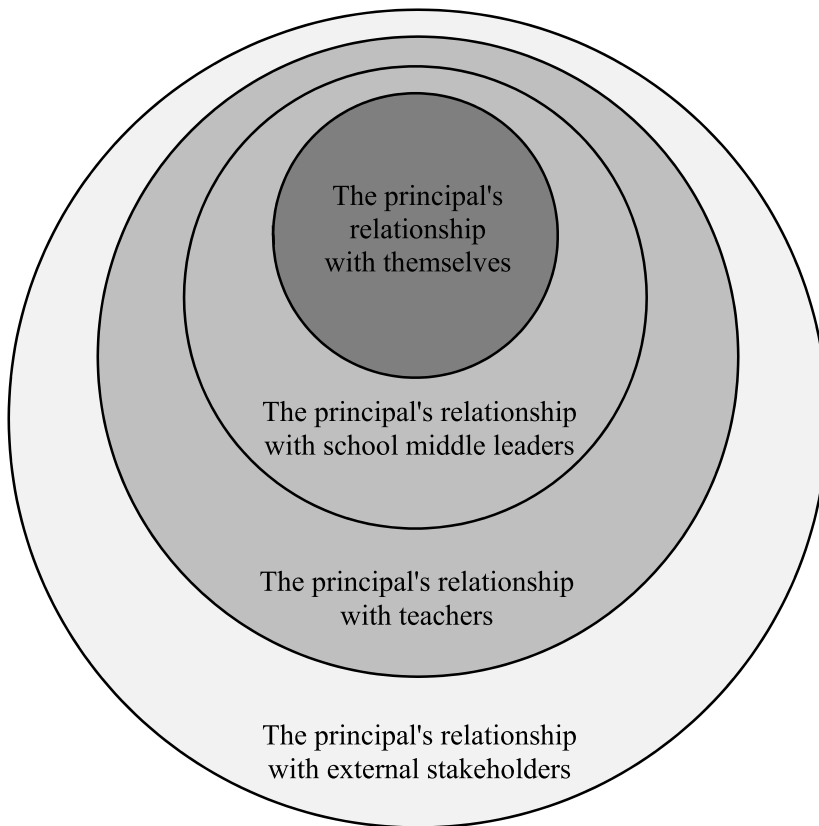


Figure 1. The relationships involved in the principal's instructional leadership.

the school – the second circle represents the relationship with school middle leaders and the third circle with all the teachers. The outer circle represents the principal's relationship with the extra-school world, including various stakeholders such as individual parents, the school parents' committee, principals of other schools, and local authority officials.

Instructional leadership mainly focuses on setting expectations and supervising teacher work rather than cultivating close relationships (Glickman et al., 2017). Increased motivation, commitment, and inspiration are not among its main foundations (Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger et al., 2015). In this sense, transformational leadership is still different from instructional leadership. As noted by Urlick and Bowers (2014) in reviewing the literature on the differences between transformational and instructional leadership: 'Transformational principals do not practice the guidance of curriculum and instruction or the monitoring of student learning'. Instead, they 'spend more time directly building community through support of the needs of teachers and the community and through transfer of school goals to personal goals' (p. 101). However, the current study argues that healthy relationships are essential for instructional leadership and that it involves a wide range of relationships. Instructional leaders do not only focus on getting the job done but also on intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships.

Healthy relationships are necessary but insufficient for instructional leadership. Instructional leaders cannot meet expectations without close interpersonal relationships, because instructional leadership as an organizational function extends beyond the sole position of the principal. At the same time, close interpersonal relationships in themselves are not sufficient to drive improvement in teaching and learning. Without a focus on setting goals and controlling their implementation, there will be no real progress in school performance. The role that relationships play in instructional leadership, found in this study, reinforces the claim that since leadership is multi-dimensional rather than dichotomous, effective principals know to integrate attention to relationships with instructional leadership functions (Bowers, 2020; Kwan, 2016).

Practically, it seems advisable to help instructional leaders develop their self-awareness, as well as their capability to create and maintain healthy relationships both in and out of the school. These skills should be developed in prospective and current principals, in various stages of their educational careers, such as preparation programs, mentoring programs provided to beginning principals, and professional development as principals. Discussions with a wide range of school stakeholders on this issue are also recommended.

Conclusion

This qualitative study's purpose was to identify the relationships required for instructional leadership, which were hardly discussed in the existing literature. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 26 Israeli school principals. Data analysis revealed that four relationships form the foundation of instructional leadership. The first relationship needed for instructional leadership is the principals' relationship with themselves. The second relationship needed for instructional leadership is that of the principal with school middle leaders, who are responsible for making the instructional policy a reality. The third relationship needed for instructional leadership is the principal's relationship with the teachers. And the fourth relationship needed for instructional leadership is the principal's relationship with stakeholders from the outside-school world. Overall, although instructional leadership concentrates on setting goals and monitoring the teachers' work, cultivating various relationships is essential for instructional leadership.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Prof. Haim Shaked, Ph.D., is the President of Hemdat College of Education, Sdot Negev, Israel. As a scholar-practitioner with seventeen years of experience as a school principal, his research interests include instructional leadership, system thinking in school leadership, and education reform. haim.shaked@hemdat.ac.il

ORCID

Haim Shaked  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3998-7696>

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Appendix A: The interview protocol

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. The information you provide in this interview will contribute to my study, which aims to better understand school leadership.

Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form and sign to confirm your consent to participate. You may stop at any time you wish.

I will keep the information you give me confidential. Your name will not appear in my articles. To facilitate my note-taking, it would be helpful to me if I taped our interview. Is that okay with you?

The interview takes about one hour, depending on you. If you need to take a break at any time, let me know.

- (1) Please tell me about your work as a principal. What does it mean to be a principal?
- (2) If you could, what would you omit from your work as a principal?
- (3) As a principal, what are your priorities in your work?
- (4) As a principal, how do you rate instruction among the various areas requiring your attention – and why?
- (5) What guarantees quality instruction in your school?
- (6) With whom do you lead an improvement of the quality of teaching in the school, and how?
- (7) How do you build trust with people inside and outside the school? For what purposes?
- (8) How do you develop and maintain effective working relationships? About what issues?