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To cite this article: Haim Shaked (2022): Expanding Instructional Leadership: How Elementary School Principals in Israel Ensure the Right Teachers are in the Right Places, Leadership and Policy in Schools, DOI: [10.1080/15700763.2022.2081215](https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2022.2081215)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2022.2081215>



Published online: 30 May 2022.



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## Expanding Instructional Leadership: How Elementary School Principals in Israel Ensure the Right Teachers are in the Right Places

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### ABSTRACT

The available frameworks of instructional leadership do not include functions aimed to ensure that teachers are suited for their position, such as hiring appropriate teachers, placing teachers effectively, and firing ineffective teachers. This study explored how principals link their responsibility of ensuring that existing teachers are the right people for the job with their instructional leadership. Data was collected through interviews with 29 Israeli principals. Findings show that, unlike the available frameworks of instructional leadership, ensuring that the right teachers are on staff was perceived by principals as essential to their instructional leadership. Potential explanations for this gap are discussed.

Instructional leadership is an educational leadership approach in which school leaders are consistently and actively involved in a wide range of activities aimed at improving teaching and learning for all students (Neumerski et al., 2018). Instructional leadership demands school leaders to focus their efforts directly on the core activities of schooling – teaching and learning – so that students can achieve academic success (Hallinger et al., 2020). According to this leadership approach, school leaders are expected to demonstrate extensive and direct involvement in promoting best teaching practices and intensive engagement in curricular and instructional topics (Stronge et al., 2008). Top priority should be given to student learning and academic outcomes, while everything else should be given lower priority (Glickman et al., 2017).

As will be reviewed below, researchers worked to determine the components of instructional leadership (e.g., Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Stronge et al., 2008; Weber, 1989), examining how school leaders influence their students' results (e.g., Leithwood & Louis, 2011; Robinson, 2007). Surprisingly, principals' efforts to ensure that their teachers are the right people for their job are rarely mentioned in the research literature as components of instructional leadership (Shaked, 2019a). Although models of instructional leadership incorporate several ways for achieving improvement in teachers' practices, functions such as hiring the best available teachers, placing teachers effectively, and firing inappropriate teachers have been omitted from these models.

The goal of the current study was to answer the following research question: How do principals attach their responsibilities related to ensuring that the right people have the right job to their instructional leadership role? Specifically, this study was conducted in the Israeli national school system, which serves about 1.8 million students in nearly 5,000 schools. The Israeli school system consists of three levels: elementary school (grades 1–6, ages 6–12), middle school (grades 7–9, ages 12–15), and high school (grades 10–12, ages 15–18). Compulsory education takes place from kindergarten through twelfth grade (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2020). In this study, Israeli principals were

questioned regarding their hiring, placing, and firing practices as part of their attempts to demonstrate instructional leadership (Capstones – The Israeli Institute for School Leadership, 2008; Shaked, 2019a, 2019b).

## Theoretical Background

### *Conceptualizations of Instructional Leadership*

Over the years, researchers have attempted to capture the meaning of instructional leadership via a multitude of frameworks. The framework of instructional leadership presented by Hallinger and Murphy (1985), which has been used in more than 500 empirical studies (Hallinger et al., 2020), consists of three major dimensions: *A. Defining the school mission* – refers to the responsibility for ensuring a clear task that is focused on students' academic progress and for sharing this task with the school community. This dimension consists of two functions: (1) framing the school goals and (2) communicating the school goals. *B. Managing the instructional program* – refers to the responsibility for controlling and monitoring the school's academic program. This dimension is made up of three functions: (3) coordinating curricula, (4) supervising and evaluating teaching, and (5) monitoring student progress. *C. Developing a positive learning climate* – refers to the responsibility for creating a culture of continuous improvement and high expectations and standards for both teachers and students. This dimension is divided into 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. Similarly, Weber's, (1989) framework outlines five dimensions of instructional leadership. (1) defining the school's mission. (2) managing curriculum and instruction. (3) supervising teaching. (4) monitoring student progress. (5) assessing the instructional climate.

Stronge et al. (2008) relied on a broad literature review to summarize five essential elements of instructional leadership that principals apply to meet instructional objectives: (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: using evidence-based data in instructional decision-making. (5) Monitoring curriculum and instruction: checking on and promoting the implementation of curricula and quality teaching methods by spending time in classes.

Without specifying "instructional" leadership, several other authors have described relevant aspects of school leadership, which have been found to particularly affect student learning. For example, Robinson (2007) identifies five dimensions of school leadership that affect various student outcomes: (1) setting goals and expectations. (2) resourcing strategically, which involves aligning resource allocation with prioritized teaching goals. (3) planning, coordinating and evaluating the teaching and curriculum. (4) promoting and participating in teacher learning and development. (5) ensuring an orderly and supportive environment. Leithwood and Louis (2011) argue that the 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 abilities of members of the organization to pursue these directions. (3) redesigning the organization – changing the organization to align with and support the members' work. (4) managing the instructional program – improving teaching and curriculum.

Table 1 summarizes the different frameworks reviewed above. As shown in the table, the principal's responsibilities for setting instructional goals, managing curriculum and instruction, and cultivating learning among the staff occupy a central place in all of the reviewed models. Developing an orderly

**Table 1.** Dimensions and functions common to various frameworks of instructional leadership.

Hallinger & Murphy, 1985	Weber, 1989	Stronge et al., 2008	Robinson, 2007	Leithwood & Louis, 2011	
Dimensions	Functions				
<i>Defining the school mission</i>	Framing school goals Communicating school goals	Defining the school mission	Building and sustaining a school vision	Establishing goals and expectations	Setting directions
<i>Managing the instructional program</i>	Coordinating the curriculum Supervising and evaluating instruction Monitoring student progress	Managing curriculum and instruction Supervising teaching Monitoring student progress	Monitoring curriculum and instruction	Planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum	Managing the instructional program
<i>Developing a positive school learning climate</i>	Protecting instructional time Providing incentives for teachers Providing incentives for learning Promoting professional development Maintaining high visibility	Assessing the instructional climate	Leading a learning community Sharing leadership Using data to make instructional decisions	Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development Resourcing strategically	Developing people Redesigning the organization

and supportive environment appears in three models. Other elements are each mentioned in one model only (e.g., maintaining high visibility, sharing leadership, using data, resourcing strategically, and redesigning the organization).

Overall, the similarities between the different frameworks of instructional leadership are significant. They all share the same vital components and differ from each other only in relatively marginal elements. Unexpectedly, hiring good teachers, placing teachers optimally, and maintaining only suitable teacher employees are not mentioned in the literature as components of instructional leadership. Ensuring that the right teachers are placed in the most suitable positions in their school does not occupy a central place in these frameworks. The current study, which aims to explore this gap, investigates how and whether instructional leadership models reflect what effective principals actually do by examining how principals link their responsibility of ensuring that each of the teachers fits his role with their instructional leadership duty. To lay the foundation for this, the following section reviews the literature on the principal's responsibilities to make sure the right teachers are fulfilling the right roles.

## ***Ensuring that the Right Teachers are in the Right Places***

The research-informed knowledge base available on teacher hiring is growing (Engel et al., 2018). Much of the research focuses on the criteria administrators care about, the tools they utilize, and the processes they engage in when hiring teachers (e.g., Cannata et al., 2017; Ellis et al., 2017; Giersch & Dong, 2018). Are teacher hiring decisions made centrally, at the district level, or are they distributed to schools? Evidence suggests that principals have some autonomy in hiring but are also limited by district staffing practices (Engel, 2013; Liu et al., 2008). District central offices can play several key roles in teacher hiring, including handling applications, managing a database of applicants, and recruiting and screening applicants (Engel et al., 2014). In some cases, the first contact that an aspiring teacher may have is with a district human resources office official rather than with a school principal (Balter & Duncombe, 2008). Moreover, district rules and regulations regarding topics such as teacher transfers and vacancy notifications can constrain principal autonomy in deciding which teachers to hire to fill positions (Levin et al., 2005; Liu et al., 2008). The extent to which teacher hiring is decentralized varies across districts and states (Engel & Finch, 2015; Liu & Johnson, 2006; Rutledge et al., 2010). However, in recent decades, principals report having an increased influence on teacher hiring. They can and do offer jobs to prospective teachers (Engel et al., 2018).

Dismissing poor teachers may be considered the antithesis of the deeply-held belief in the ability of all teachers to improve. From this perspective, school leaders must believe in the learning potential of all teachers, keeping in mind that teaching ability can be significantly developed, as Darling-Hammond (2006, p. ix) asserted:

One of the most damaging myths prevailing in American education is the notion that good teachers are born and not made. This superstition has given rise to a set of policies that rely far too much on some kind of prenatal alchemy to produce a cadre of teachers for our nation's schools—and far too little on systematic, sustained initiatives to ensure that all teachers have the opportunity to become well prepped.

It also may be argued that ensuring teachers' job suitability represents neoliberalism, which is "capitalism with the gloves off" (McChesney, 2011, p. 8). Neoliberalism was initially viewed as an essential step in ensuring prosperity and increased economic growth around the world. The prevailing critique of neoliberalism, however, is that it sacrifices social and political rights in favor of economic competitiveness. Neoliberalism focuses on economic efficiency while workers' rights are considered obstacles to maximum performance (Fleming, 2016). From this point of view, when we replace less effective teachers with more effective ones, we treat them as mere commodities rather than as human beings (Ginsburg, 2012). Since in most countries an absolute majority of teachers are women, commodification and exploitation might be two sides of the same gendered coin (Mezzadri, 2016).

Against this backdrop of the complexity involved in the principal's responsibility to ensure that each teacher fits his position, the current study seeks to explore how principals frame this responsibility with regard to the expectation from them to become instructional leaders.

## **The Israeli Context**

The Israeli school system is similar to that of the United States in pursuing 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 determined at the national level (Gal-Ezer & Stephenson, 2014). This includes Israeli policies regarding the responsibilities, preparation, and professional development of principals (Berkovich, 2014).

The central role of Israeli school principals is to serve as instructional leaders in order to improve the education and learning of all students. Four areas of dimensions constitute the Israeli framework for instructional leadership: (1) designing the school's future image – developing a vision and bringing about change; (2) leading the staff and nurturing its professional development; (3) focusing on the individual; and (4) managing the relationship between the school and the surrounding

community (Capstones – The Israeli Institute for School Leadership, 2008). Although instructional leadership has occupied a central place in educational discourse in the United States for over half a century (Bridges, 1967), it immigrated to Israel less than a decade and a half ago. Therefore, it may be seen as a case of policy borrowing, which 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 waste time trying to do something that has already been done successfully by someone else, reduces uncertainties associated with implementation, and offers previously tested justifications that may reduce resistance to change. However, policy borrowing can also introduce unanticipated problems that arise from differences between the originating and receiving societies regarding their socio-cultural values and institutional policy frameworks (Pan et al., 2017; Qian et al., 2017; Steiner-Khamsi, 2016). While this is not a study of the efficacy of policy borrowing with instructional leadership the domain in which borrowing is happening, but rather a study of how and whether models of instructional leadership reflect what instructional leaders do in the field, the concept of policy borrowing is important for the discussion of the research findings.

Implementation of this instructional leadership policy framework has profoundly impacted the preparation of Israel's principals. Indeed, preparation programs for Israel's school principals were recently redesigned in order to train aspiring principals as instructional leaders (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2018). The preparation program is based on the following five pillars: (a) the improvement of teaching and learning; (b) the design of future schools; (c) team leadership and professional development; (d) evidence-based management; and (e) budget and resource management (Berkovich, 2014). A significant portion of the curriculum (about 25% of the 440 program hours) is dedicated to diagnosing school pedagogical issues. For example, participants learn how to analyze internal and external test results for instructional and school improvement purposes, as well as how to conduct data-based teacher evaluations. These examples reflect a broader implementation of "evidence-based leadership" (Capstones, 2012a). Nonetheless, a disconnect remains between the emphasis on instructional leadership evident in their preparation programs and the principals' subsequent training and socialization experiences. For example, the mentoring provided to novice principals often focuses more on technical and administrative issues rather than on issues related to instructional leadership (Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018). Similarly, instructional leadership receives far less emphasis in the professional development programs offered to in-service principals (Nets, 2017). The gap between the instructional leadership emphasis in principals' training and professional development may explain why not all Israeli principals see themselves as instructional leaders (Shaked, 2019b).

In Israel, hiring new teachers is primarily the responsibility of principals. As in many Western countries, a teacher tenure policy is in place in Israel that limits the ability of principals to dismiss teachers. Beginner teachers are automatically placed on probation for two years, during which time they are evaluated. During their second year of practice, the principal must decide whether beginning teachers should be given tenure. From the moment the tenure is granted, it is transferable from district to district so that a teacher who moves from one district to another will retain that tenure. A tenured teacher who is facing dismissal gets a chance to defend their case. Removing poorly performing teachers is so difficult that most schools end up keeping their bad teachers (Lavy, 2010; Yariv & Coleman, 2005).

## Method

Qualitative research methods are needed to answer questions about experience, meaning, and perspective, most often from the participant's standpoint, and are valuable in providing detailed descriptions of complex phenomena. These methods, which seek to reveal participants' practices, thoughts, and feelings, are most appropriate when existing knowledge about the phenomenon under

investigation is limited (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, this was the method chosen for the current study. The following sections describe this study's sample, how information was gathered, and analytical strategies.

### **Participants**

Instructional leadership differs between elementary schools and high schools (Louis et al., 2010). This difference can be related to various school characteristics, such as the fact that high schools are often more crowded than elementary schools or that teachers at high schools are usually specialized in one particular subject matter (Hallinger, 2012). Since instructional leadership cannot be examined in the same manner in elementary schools as in high schools (Gedik & Bellibas, 2015), this study focused on elementary schools.

The sampling for this study aimed to create a sample similar to the Israeli population of elementary school principals in terms of age, sex, seniority, and education. Two-thirds of Israeli principals are women, and one-third are men. The average age of Israeli principals is 50. 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 (Capstones, 2012b).

The goal was to "interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 113). Therefore, the current study included 29 principals. To build the study sample, six superintendents from all six Israeli school districts were asked to recommend possible participants. Because the aim of this study was to understand the components of effective instructional leadership, the superintendents were asked to base their recommendations on the effectiveness of principals in terms of school performance and student achievement. However, the principals recommended for participation in the study were included only if their participation matched the characteristics of the larger population of elementary school principals in Israel. Accordingly, the current study included 19 females and ten males between 34 and 61 years old, and their average age was 49. They had 2 to 29 years of school leadership experience, and their average experience was 11 years. One principal had no academic degree, seven principals had a bachelor's degree, 20 principals had a master's degree, and one principal had a doctorate.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through interviews because they provided unique access to the actual world of the study participants, who describe their activities in their own words (Mann, 2016; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). To obtain descriptive answers, open-ended questions were used in the interviews, such as: "What ensures quality instruction in your school?"; "What do you as a principal do to improve teaching and learning in school?"; "What qualities do you desire most in your teachers? How can these qualities be recognized?"; "Do you think your performing teachers are the best available – and why?"; "What do you do when you have a teacher who lacks the proper skills for the job?" While participants were asked to answer predefined questions, the semi-structured interviews were also conversational. The researcher as an interviewer changed the order of questions based on participants' responses, encouraged participants to clarify and expand their answers, and added questions that stemmed from previous answers. This allowed the interviewer to "respond to the situation at hand, to the respondent's emerging worldview and to new ideas on the subject" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 111). The interviewer tried to come to the interviews with deliberate naiveté, which means to "exhibit openness to new and unexpected phenomena, rather than having readymade categories and schemes of interpretation" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 28).

For ethical reasons, all the 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.

The average length of an interview was about an hour. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Follow-up interviews were also conducted, as needed, to clarify questions that arose during a review of the transcripts of the interviews.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was a three-step process: sorting, coding, and categorizing. It began with the necessary sorting (Miles et al., 2014) to search for statements related in some way to the principal's actions to improve teaching and learning. Subsequently, the statements identified in the previous step were coded. Each statement was connected to a named code that represented an idea or concept to reflect the activities of the principals who participated in this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). After capturing their essence, similar statements were gathered into clusters to generalize their meanings and produce categories. These categories formed the basis for the Findings chapter. Then, the member-check method (Koelsch, 2013) was employed, in which interviewees were asked to review the data analysis to ensure accuracy and interpretation.

The influence of the researcher's positionality, which describes the researcher's worldview and the position he adopted about the research task (Holmes, 2020), was considered in the data analysis. Therefore, attention was paid to how the personal experience as a school principal and lecturer in a principal preparation program might affect his data interpretation. Recognizing the importance of reflective journals in qualitative research (Ortlipp, 2008), the author wrote a personal reflective research log to ensure critical thinking throughout the study.

### **Findings**

The current study explored how principals of Israeli elementary schools include their responsibility to ensure that teachers are suited to their position within their instructional leadership role. Data analysis revealed that the principals saw their responsibility to hire good teachers, place teachers effectively, and fire poor teachers as an integral part of their instructional leadership commitment. For them, ensuring that the right teachers are on staff and that each teacher is in the position that suits them best is essential to their role as instructional leaders. These findings are presented next, supported by the participants' excerpts.

#### **Hiring Effective Teachers**

The principals who participated in this study argued that: "To have a good school, you need to have good teachers" (Albert, with 12 years of principalship experience), claiming that "Once you have good teachers, you almost don't have to worry anymore, and if the teachers you have are not good, a lot of things you do won't help" (Cynthia, with six years of principalship experience). Therefore, they viewed teacher recruitment and selection as a critical component in their efforts to improve teaching and learning. From their perspective, enhancing the teaching quality of the teachers working in the school is not a satisfactory fulfillment of their role as instructional leaders; there is paramount importance in choosing the right people. "I believe that teaching quality is at the core of schooling, so I ascribe great importance to teacher selection because hiring the right teachers can make or break a school" (Donna, with 22 years of principalship experience). "The best way to improve teaching, learning, and assessment is to improve teachers, and the best way to improve teachers is by wise selection" (Jacob, with four years of principalship experience). This notion was mentioned by 18 participants.

These principals viewed teacher selection and student results as related to each other. For them, selecting the right teachers is vital to ensure students' academic success: "A good choice of teachers is a necessary condition for high-achieving students" (Gloria, with 23 years of principalship experience).



“The individual classroom teacher is the key to a successful education, so teacher selection has a lot of power to improve student accomplishments” (Gary, with eight years of principalship experience). “Any principal you ask will tell you that there is a huge difference in student learning and results between lessons with an effective teacher and those with an ineffective one” (Esther, with three years of principalship experience).

The principals believed that great care was required in choosing teachers. Therefore, they devoted time and thought to hiring. Despite the many chores that demanded their attention, they kept to a careful and meticulous process. “A bad hire could cost me more than I can count at first glance” (Elizabeth, with 11 years of principalship experience). “I believe in Jim Collins’ statement: ‘when in doubt, don’t hire – keep looking.’ I do not just fill a position because I’m desperate. I keep looking” (Douglas, with seven years of principalship experience). “I must carefully examine who comes on board” (Marilyn, with 14 years of principalship experience).

Some principals said they wanted to hire better teachers, but the school did not get enough quality applicants. In addition, the principals said they facilitated the integration of new teachers into the school, emphasizing the supports put in place to assist the novice teachers in adapting to new workplace culture: “Beginning teachers need support in developing teaching practices” (Lisa, with 19 years of principalship experience). “Our beginning teachers are often ‘Help! We’re clueless! Tell us how to teach!’ For this reason, we maintain a comprehensive support system for new teachers throughout the school year” (Doris, with four years of principalship experience).

### **Placing Teachers**

The participating principals devoted much thought to the question of which teachers would teach which subjects in which classrooms. Since they believed that placing teachers wisely is essential to their responsibility as instructional leaders to improve student learning and outcomes, they asked themselves questions of principle, such as whether it was better for one teacher to teach all disciplines or whether it was preferable to have a different teacher for each field of knowledge, and whether it was better for students to have one teacher in each lesson or whether models of co-teaching were preferred. The principals tried to improve the quality of teaching and learning by optimally matching each teacher with the appropriate field of knowledge and age group. With 10 years of principalship experience, Dorothy said: “I am having a series of discussions with the management team members about who will teach what and where next year. To me, these are decisions that have a lot of impact on our school performance.” Similarly, Dale, with 16 years of principalship experience, said: “I have to look for the best fit of the right teacher in the right place at the right time.” This notion was mentioned by 12 participants.

Looking for the best arrangement, the principals moved teachers into their field of expertise or preference. They also transferred them to higher or lower grades, believing that the cognitive and behavioral differences between different age groups could significantly affect teachers’ teaching success: “I changed grade levels because the teacher was better suited for a different age level of students” (Bruce, with nine years of principalship experience). Anne, with 12 years of principalship experience, explained: “I think it should always be for the benefit of the students. My job is to create the best educational experience for my students, and that should always be the priority, not the personal preferences of the teachers.” According to Karen, with 19 years of principalship experience, principals have to make sure “they do not have someone in the wrong seat.”

In some cases, moving teachers to a different age level or subject area resulted from the difficulty of dismissing them (see below). These principals sought not only to get the right teacher in the right class but also to minimize the academic damage, as expressed by George, with three years of principalship experience: “I tell you honestly. This teacher is our weakest link, and I’m making sure she inflicts the least amount of damage on students.” Kathleen, with ten years of principalship experience, said: “I’m

forcing a teacher to switch grade levels because I'm trying to run her off or force early retirement." David, with 13 years of principalship experience, asserted: "Sometimes moving a teacher to a higher or lower grade can work wonders."

### **Removing Ineffective Teachers**

The study participants have made many efforts to dismiss poorly performing teachers. From their perspective, the quality of the teacher matters more than the class size, the textbook, or even the curriculum. Thus, they saw the weak teachers as a factor that adversely affected students' learning and success and their dismissal as a key element of their instructional leadership role. "Although most teachers are effective, the small percentage of teachers who are chronically ineffective is important, because they inhibit the learning and depress the achievements of large numbers of students over time" (Kathryn, with nine years of principalship experience). "A class with a bad teacher may not catch up to their peers for years" (Danny, with four years of principalship experience). "A bad teacher not only makes it difficult for students to learn but also impairs their desire to learn" (Kelly, with 19 years of principalship experience). "I do not allow poor service to students. Students deserve teachers who help them grow in their education" (Carl, with 12 years of principalship experience). This notion was mentioned by 14 participants.

The principals took on the complex task of dismissing ineffective teachers because of the great importance they ascribe to the quality of teaching. They often claimed that teacher dismissal is very difficult because of the teacher tenure policy; however, they fired substandard teachers who did not yet have tenure and were also willing to go through the arduous process required to fire a tenured teacher. When teachers were either unable or unwilling to make the necessary steps to improve their instruction, principals either coach them out of the school or dismiss them, if required. "I can't say 'You're fired!' to a bad teacher. However, I find a way to get rid of her" (Mary, with seven years of principalship experience). "There is no such thing as a perfect teacher. It is the nature of the profession to improve continually. But some teachers are chronically ineffective and do not improve even when they receive support. I don't want these teachers in my school" (Margaret, with 18 years of principalship experience).

The principals dealt with the dismissal of teachers who were not good enough despite the interpersonal discomfort involved. "Removing a tenured teacher from the classroom requires years of quarreling, during which the atmosphere in the staffroom becomes ugly. But I am not willing to compromise because teachers need to know that the quality of teaching is above all" (Pamela, with five years of principalship experience). "Since we grew up alongside each other, it's not easy for me to tell her to go home. But I know it's my duty, and I'm doing it" (Phyllis, with 14 years of principalship experience). When a teacher was harming students with poor instruction, these principals felt morally and professionally obligated to do something about it.

## **Discussion**

Investigating the activities of Israeli principals whose purpose was to improve teaching and learning, this study found that principals of elementary schools in Israel saw their responsibility to ensure that the right teachers are in the right places as an essential component of their role as instructional leaders. They considered their responsibility to hire good teachers, place them effectively, and fire poor teachers as part of their instructional leadership.

When we compare these findings with the available frameworks of instructional leadership (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood & Louis, 2011; Robinson, 2007; Stronge et al., 2008; Weber, 1989. See, Table 1 above), the question of who teaches is not found in the existing frameworks of instructional leadership, which have not mentioned school leaders' practices for hiring effective teachers, replacing poorly performing teachers, and matching each teacher with the appropriate

field of knowledge and age group. While the principals who participated in the current study saw the human resource management task as an integral part of their efforts to improve teaching and learning, the available literature did not include it in the frameworks of instructional leadership.

Why is this area not included in the existing frameworks of instructional leadership? Several explanations can be offered. First, it can be argued that ensuring the fundamental suitability of teachers is not emphasized because it seems to stand in opposition to the deep belief in the ability of all teachers to be effective. Instead of focusing on dismissing bad teachers, principals should focus on making them good teachers. The principals' goal should be to get these teachers better rather than get them out. Moreover, principals have to invest most of their energy in teachers who do a fantastic job rather than going after the teachers who are currently ineffective.

It can also be argued that ensuring teachers' job suitability is pushed to the margins of instructional leadership because it is considered as representing neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is grounded in an understanding of all aspects of society in economic terms of competition in markets and return on investment (Fleming, 2016). A common area of concern is the "human cost" of neoliberalism, claiming that neoliberalism sacrifices worker rights in the interests of economic effectiveness. Namely, neoliberalism policies are accompanied by reduced job protection for workers. When it comes to education, replacing struggling teachers with more effective ones may be interpreted as focusing on the bottom line rather than on human considerations (Ginsburg, 2012).

Another explanation may lie in contextual influences. It can be argued that the existing frameworks of instructional leadership were developed in a context in which hiring teachers is the responsibility of the district and not the principal, and teacher dismissal is almost impossible because of tenure policies. Thus, these frameworks did not see teacher hiring and firing as functions of instructional leadership. The current study was conducted in Israel, where hiring new teachers is mainly the principal's responsibility. Teacher tenure policy limits Israeli principals' ability to fire poor teachers. Still, Israeli principals who participated in this study described themselves as finding ways to end the employment of unwanted teachers. This explanation raises the question of policy borrowing. Although instructional leadership was developed in the United States more than fifty years ago, it has only spread to other parts of the world since the beginning of the 21st century (Hallinger et al., 2020). This study shows that failure to consider the complex characteristics of each national context may result in an incomplete framework of instructional leadership.

In addition, one may claim that the literature does not overlook the principal's role in teacher selection and evaluation (e.g., Jacob, 2016; Sautelle et al., 2015; Stronge & Tucker, 2020). It is just discussed separately, not as part of the conceptual frameworks of instructional leadership. This study, however, claims that human resource management should be seen as an integral part of instructional leadership. School leaders should know that hiring, firing, and placing decisions directly affect student learning and academic success. Principals as instructional leaders cannot be satisfied with attempts to develop the existing teachers' abilities. They should also carefully examine teacher candidates, dismiss ineffective teachers, and find the right place for each teacher. Thus, the literature on instructional leadership and human resource management should point to the overlap of these two frameworks and how they complement each other both conceptually and practically.

Compared to prior research, this study provides new data on the functions of instructional leadership. However, the study has several limitations. First, since the findings were collected within the Israeli context, their cross-cultural validity cannot be proven. This study should be replicated in different socio-cultural contexts, examining the international validity of this study's findings to make a universal statement. Second, this study is based on self-reporting qualitative data. As with any self-reporting, there is not much control over the possibility that respondents provide socially desirable responses. Further research could complement the principals' self-reporting with more objective measures of principals' instructional leadership practices, such as direct observations. Quantitative data could also be used for the generalization of the qualitative findings. Third, this study did not

identify a correlation between instructional leadership perceptions and characteristics of the study participants, such as gender, experience, and education. Such differences may be detected in a study using a larger number of participants.

## Conclusion

Instructional leadership is a school leadership approach whereby the principal is involved in various activities to ameliorate teaching and learning (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Stronge et al., 2008). Surprisingly, the literature about instructional leadership does not mention the practices of school leaders aimed at hiring the best available teachers, firing inappropriate teachers, and finding the best subject and age level for each teacher. Although models of instructional leadership incorporate several ways for achieving improvement in curriculum and instruction, these models do not include the fundamental role of human resource management. This study claims that enhancing the existing teachers' teaching capacity is insufficient for the instructional leadership framework. Principals as instructional leaders should also be expected to ensure that the right people – those with the optimal characteristics for success and, crucially, those who do not possess destructive or disruptive characteristics – are those actually teaching in the classrooms, in charge of imparting knowledge and skills to students.

## Disclosure Statement

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

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