

# How principals' instructional leadership impacts schools' middle leadership

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## Abstract

Instructional leadership is a school leadership approach that prioritizes enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. This study explores how the principal's instructional leadership influences the school's middle leadership. The study participants were 24 principals from elementary schools in Israel, and data collection involved conducting semi-structured interviews. The collected data underwent three stages of analysis: sorting, coding, and categorizing. The findings revealed three key areas in which the principal's instructional leadership influences the school's middle leadership: the expectations of middle leaders, the selection and appointment of middle leaders, and the hierarchical structure of middle leaders within the school. These findings highlight the comprehensive impact of instructional leadership on various organizational aspects of middle leadership in schools.

## Keywords

Instructional leadership, middle leaders, principals, the Israeli school system

## Introduction

The concept of instructional leadership refers to a school leadership approach that emphasizes the principal's responsibility for improving the quality of teaching and learning (Murphy et al., 2016; Shaked, 2023). As an instructional leader, the principal is heavily involved in defining the school's academic mission, coordinating the curriculum, supervising and evaluating instruction, facilitating professional development opportunities for teachers, and creating a school climate that promotes classroom teaching and student learning, leading to positive educational outcomes (Hallinger et al., 2020; Neumerski et al., 2018; Walker and Qian, 2022).

Research has extensively supported the effectiveness of the principal's instructional leadership in achieving the goals of student achievement and school improvement (Boyce and Bowers, 2018). It has been shown that the principal's instructional leadership plays a crucial role in facilitating and promoting students' academic progress (Murphy et al., 2016). A comprehensive body of research

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literature has associated principals' instructional leadership with increased teaching quality and improved student achievements across various organizational and geo-social contexts, such as elementary, junior high, and high schools; public, private, and public charter schools; and urban, suburban, and rural schools (Day et al., 2016; Hallinger et al., 2020; Hou et al., 2019).

The current study seeks to answer the question of how the principal's instructional leadership shapes the school's middle leadership. Middle leaders play a crucial role in leading and managing specific areas or departments of the school (Lipscombe et al., 2023). These individuals, such as curriculum coordinators, subject coordinators, and year-level coordinators, hold critical leadership positions below the principal and above classroom teachers (Edwards-Groves et al., 2019). Their responsibilities include supporting and guiding teachers, ensuring effective implementation of school policies and initiatives, and fostering a collaborative culture among staff (Harris et al., 2019). Without effective middle leadership, schools would struggle to achieve their goals and maintain high levels of student achievement (Grootenboer and Larkin, 2019).

To identify the ways in which the instructional leadership of the principal affects the school's middle leadership, this study investigates particular aspects of the principal's work, such as what strategies they employ to maximize middle leaders' contribution, how they collaborate with middle leaders to drive school improvement, and how they provide guidance to middle leaders. Specifically, the study participants were elementary school principals in Israel, who are required to demonstrate instructional leadership as a critical element of their job responsibilities (Capstones, 2008; Shaked, 2023). By conducting interviews with these principals to understand the impact of their instructional leadership on middle leadership, this study sheds light on how the internal dynamics of school leadership might contribute to efforts to improve teaching, learning, and student achievement. To establish the platform for this study, the following theoretical background reviews the literature on instructional leadership and middle leadership in schools.

## **Theoretical framework**

### *Instructional leadership*

The role of the principal has evolved significantly over time. In the past, principals were mainly tasked with managing administrative and organizational duties, such as ensuring student safety, upholding school policies, and overseeing facility maintenance. Day-to-day tasks like ordering supplies and creating bus schedules were typically the responsibility of principals (Glanz, 2021). However, the role of the principal has now shifted. Today, instructional leadership has emerged as one of the principal's most critical responsibilities, and they are no longer seen solely as managerial administrators (Murphy et al., 2016; Shaked, 2023). Despite being involved in numerous administrative tasks that can distract from this critical responsibility, effective principals recognize that focusing on instruction is the most impactful way to benefit students (Neumerski et al., 2018). Consequently, they prioritize instructional leadership and dedicate themselves to improving teaching quality and fostering a culture of learning that promotes student success (Glickman et al., 2017). Therefore, demonstrating instructional leadership is an essential expectation of today's school principals (Hallinger et al., 2020).

The conventional view of the principal's instructional leadership encompasses three dimensions, consisting of 10 functions (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985; Hallinger and Wang, 2015): The first dimension, defining the school mission, comprises two functions: (a) framing the school's instructional goals and (b) Communicating those goals to all necessary parties. The second dimension,

managing the instructional program, incorporates three functions: (c) Coordinating the school's curriculum; (d) Supervising and evaluating instruction; and (e) Monitoring students' progress. The third dimension, developing a positive school learning climate, consists of five functions: (f) Protecting instructional time from threats; (g) Providing incentives to motivate teachers; (h) Providing incentives to encourage students' learning; (i) Promoting staff members' continual professional development; and (j) Maintaining high visibility for quality interactions with teachers and students.

Blase and Blase (2000) introduced a comprehensive framework for instructional leadership, outlining two primary themes along with 11 distinct strategies for influencing changes in teaching practices. The first theme, "facilitating teacher reflection through dialogue," involves five strategies: (a) Offering suggestions; (b) Giving feedback; (c) Demonstrating techniques; (d) Engaging in inquiry while soliciting advice and viewpoints; and (e) Extending commendations. The second theme, "encouraging professional advancement," includes six strategies: (a) Focusing on the study of teaching and the learning process; (b) Promoting educator collaboration; (c) Developing coaching relationships among staff; (d) Supporting the redesign of programs; (e) Integrating adult learning, growth, and development principles into staff development initiatives; and (f) Applying action research for instructional planning.

In a similar vein, Stronge and his associates (2008) outlined five key characteristics of instructional leadership that principals employ to meet instructional goals, which are: (a) Establishing and maintaining a clear educational vision that defines learning goals and secures community backing to achieve these aims; (b) Distributing leadership roles to empower teacher leaders and augment their skills; (c) Leading a unified community of professional learners by offering valuable staff development opportunities; (d) Making decisions based on data and evidence to guide instructional strategies; and (e) Supervising teaching practices to ensure the effective application of curricula and pedagogical techniques.

Merging these foundational frameworks highlights four core elements integral to instructional leadership: Instructional vision, which involves developing and rallying support around a vision focused on student learning and success; Instructional program, which entails managing and enhancing the teaching and learning process to ensure effective instruction and learning outcomes; Instructional climate, which focuses on establishing a culture of academic excellence and Teacher development, which emphasizes ongoing professional growth of educators to continuously improve their instructional methods (Shaked, 2023).

Traditionally, principals were primarily responsible for implementing instructional leadership (Hallinger et al., 2020). However, recent research has shown that this role should be shared (Leithwood et al., 2020). Principals' other complex and numerous responsibilities leave them with limited time to fulfill this crucial role by themselves. In addition, principals may not possess sufficient knowledge of all academic subjects to effectively lead and support teachers in their instructional practices (Bush, 2023). Therefore, considering middle leaders as instructional leaders is crucial for school improvement (Lipscombe et al., 2023).

### *Middle leadership in schools*

Middle leadership and principalship have distinct differences in their roles and responsibilities. Middle leaders assume management and pedagogical duties but are not accountable for the overall functioning of the school, unlike principals who have organizational responsibility for all aspects of school operations (Harris et al., 2019; Lipscombe et al., 2023). Principals (sometimes

along with the senior management team) shape the school’s policies and set guidelines, while middle leaders work to implement these policies (Bryant and Rao, 2019; Edwards-Groves et al., 2019).

De Nobile (2018) proposed a comprehensive model for middle leadership in schools (see Figure 1). The model differentiates between the roles middle leaders perform (“What?”) and the methods they use to carry out those roles (“How?”). The central part of the model encompasses a variety of roles, ranging from management to leadership, including student-focused, administrative, organizational, supervisory, staff development, and strategic roles. Below these roles are the means middle leaders can utilize to achieve their roles: leading teams, managing relationships, managing time, communicating effectively, and managing self. The model also highlights inputs (on the left), such as people, processes, and circumstances, which can influence the work of middle leaders, and potential outputs (on the right) that can contribute to school effectiveness.

In their research, Tang et al. (2022) scrutinized the middle leadership literature to devise a framework that delineates the instructional leadership of middle leaders. The proposed model includes five distinct dimensions: defining departmental purpose and direction, managing and facilitating teaching and learning, creating and maintaining a positive culture, developing and improving the curriculum, and promoting teacher learning and professional development.

Against the backdrop of the well-proven importance of middle leadership to school effectiveness (Gurr, 2019), the current study explores how the principal’s instructional leadership shapes the school’s middle leadership. By exploring the relationship between the principal’s instructional leadership and the middle leadership, the study seeks to shed light on the relationship between the two forms of leadership and to provide insights into how schools can strengthen their leadership structures to promote quality teaching and positive student outcomes. Thus, this study highlights the

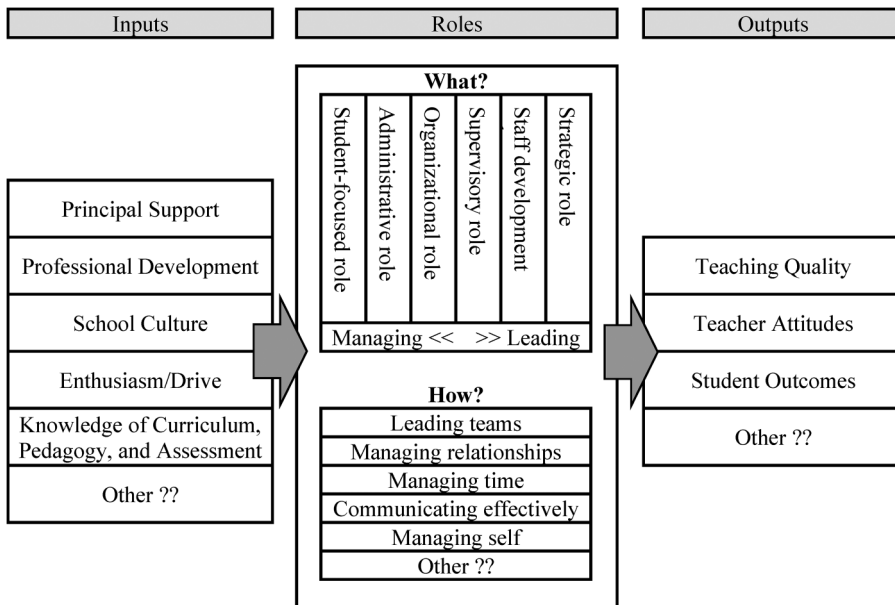


Figure 1. The middle leadership in schools model (De Nobile, 2018).

interrelationship between leadership roles at all levels of the school hierarchy and their role in creating a thriving educational environment.

## **Method**

When there is limited knowledge available on the studied topic, qualitative research methods are best suited since they collect and analyze non-numeric data to comprehend the behaviors and experiences of the studied individuals. (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The following sections provide a comprehensive account of the selection process for participants, the interview techniques utilized, and the analysis of the collected data.

### ***Study participants***

To ensure consistency in examining instructional leadership, this study specifically focused on elementary school principals, intentionally avoiding the inclusion of secondary (middle and high) school principals. This approach aligns with previous research conducted by Gedik and Bellibas (2015) and Hallinger (2012), who highlighted differences in instructional leadership between elementary and secondary schools. For participant selection, a purposive sampling method was used to identify cases that provide rich and valuable information. This method has been found to be more effective than random sampling in qualitative research (van Rijnsoever, 2017). Thus, 12 superintendents from all six Israeli school districts were asked to recommend individuals who they believed demonstrated instructional leadership.

It is important to acknowledge that the superintendents were not provided with a detailed explanation of the concept of “instructional leadership.” Consequently, there may have been variations in their understanding of these concepts, potentially resulting in a small proportion of study participants who did not entirely align with the intended focus of the study. However, the concept of instructional leadership is well-known in Israel, allowing us to assume that the diversity in understanding this term is minimal. In fact, nearly all the principals recommended by their superintendents to participate in this study demonstrated a strong commitment to instructional leadership during the interviews. This suggests that the superintendents had a solid grasp of the study’s focus.

In accordance with the principle of including “as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know” (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 113), a total of 24 principals were included in the current sample. Among them, 15 were women, and 9 were men. On average, the principals were 52 years old and had an average of 11 years of experience as principals. Regarding their higher education, one principal held a doctorate, 18 principals held a master’s degree, and five held a bachelor’s degree. Table 1 provides detailed information about the study participants, including the category of findings mentioned by each participant (refer to the categories below).

### ***Data collection***

In qualitative research, interviews are commonly used to gather in-depth information and viewpoints from study participants. For this study, interviews were conducted to explore how the principal’s instructional leadership influences the school’s middle leadership. The interviews were semi-structured, with a general plan and designated topics, but the interviewer remained flexible and open to deviation from the script to accommodate participant responses and feedback.

**Table 1.** Study participants' information

	Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Years of experience	Education	District	School size (No. of students)	Expectations from middle leaders	Appointment of middle leaders	Hierarchy of middle leaders
1	Alexander	Male	45	8	MA	South	450	✓		
2	Alice	Female	39	6	MA	Center	450		✓	✓
3	Andrew	Male	57	12	BA	Tel Aviv	400	✓		
4	Bella	Female	60	16	BA	South	250			✓
5	Benjamin	Male	49	9	MA	Jerusalem	400	✓	✓	
6	Caroline	Female	56	15	MA	Jerusalem	450			
7	Christopher	Male	46	12	MA	North	500			
8	Eleanor	Female	57	11	MA	Jerusalem	150	✓		
9	Ellie	Female	48	11	MA	South	300			
10	Gabriella	Female	56	14	BA	Tel Aviv	150			
11	Hannah	Female	55	14	MA	Center	250	✓	✓	
12	Harper	Female	48	7	MA	North	550			✓
13	Lydia	Female	51	8	MA	Tel Aviv	200		✓	
14	Lucy	Female	57	13	MA	South	300			
15	Maya	Female	49	7	MA	Center	650	✓		
16	Matthew	Male	61	17	BA	South	300	✓		
17	Nathan	Male	54	13	MA	North	250		✓	
18	Oliver	Male	52	9	MA	North	300	✓		
19	Penelope	Female	47	11	MA	Center	350			✓
20	Samantha	Female	48	13	PhD	South	200	✓	✓	
21	Scarlett	Female	59	13	BA	North	250			
22	Sebastian	Male	50	11	MA	Haifa	250			
23	Stella	Female	49	12	MA	North	250	✓		✓
24	William	Male	44	5	MA	Center	350	✓		

Follow-up questions were asked, and additional topics were incorporated as needed (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

To steer the interviewees' responses away from a specific direction, the interviewer purposefully refrained from using the term "instructional leadership" during the interviews. Instead, the interviewer asked open-ended questions such as: "What strategies do you employ to maximize the contribution of middle leaders?"; "Could you provide examples of how you collaborate with middle leaders to drive school improvement?"; "In what ways do you ensure that middle leaders are active partners in achieving the school's goals?"; and "How do you provide guidance and direction to the middle leaders within your school?" The interviews, which lasted for about an hour on average, were all recorded and transcribed verbatim. To ensure the thoroughness and precision of the data, any questions that arose during the review of the transcripts were addressed through additional follow-up interviews that lasted an average of 15 min.

### **Data analysis**

To analyze the data, the researcher employed a three-stage process consisting of sorting, coding, and categorizing (Bazeley, 2020). The first two stages were sorting and coding, which involved organizing and identifying relevant data, and the third stage, categorizing, was employed to reveal patterns and trends. The sorting stage was crucial to the analysis process as it entailed the researcher's first reading of the transcripts and making analytical decisions about which data chunks to code and extract. The primary aim of the sorting stage was to identify statements related to the research question and to ensure that all the data was examined. During the coding stage, the researcher read through the sorted data and assigned codes to data segments representing specific concepts or ideas. The researcher used open coding, meaning that essence-capturing codes were given to the data without any preexisting categories. The researcher utilized a constant comparison approach to compare the coded segments with others and refine the code definitions (Timmermans and Tavory, 2022). The third stage, categorizing, involved grouping the coded data segments into categories based on shared characteristics. The established categories formed the foundation of the study's findings (Bergin, 2018).

### **Findings**

This study explored how the principal's instructional leadership influences the school's middle leadership. Through qualitative analysis of interview data, three key areas were identified in which the principal's instructional leadership affects the middle leadership: expectations of middle leaders, the appointment of middle leaders, and the hierarchy of middle leaders. These findings are presented in the following sections, supported by quotes from the study participants.

#### ***Expectations from middle leaders***

The current study found that the first area in which the instructional leadership of the principal affects the middle leadership in the school concerned the expectations placed upon middle leaders (see Table 1). Given their role as instructional leaders, principals tended to emphasize the instructional responsibilities of middle leaders.

With instructional leadership, principals expected all middle leaders to be instructionally oriented, including middle leaders in positions that are not entirely instructional. For example,

the role of year-level coordinators, who are in charge of the teachers and students of a specific year-level group, is not essentially instructional. Year-level coordinators spend much time on non-instructional issues, such as handling disciplinary problems and coordinating activities. However, Maya asked them to pay close attention to teaching and learning: "I constantly remind our year-level coordinators to keep a close eye on the teaching and learning that is taking place in their respective year levels" because "It's not just about managing the students and their behavior, but also ensuring that our teachers provide high-quality instruction and our students make meaningful progress." For this reason, when Oliver had to choose a year-level coordinator, he considered the candidates' instructional skills. He explained: "A year-level coordinator makes many decisions regarding teachers and students, and I want these decisions to be based on instructional judgment" (see also the next section on the appointment of middle leaders).

Even middle leaders with non-instructional roles were required to scrutinize instructional factors. Eleanor said: "The trips and excursions coordinator should not only consider logistics and safety but also take into account instructional considerations because the school's trips should provide opportunities for our students to learn outside the classroom and reinforce the concepts they learn in their coursework." Stella said: "I made it clear to our activities coordinator that the extracurricular activities should not only be engaging, fun, and enjoyable but also related to our curriculum and aligned with our academic goals." Similarly, Andrew said: "The timetable must be a tool that helps us achieve our academic goals, so the timetable coordinator should not only create an efficient timetable but also design it in a way that allows optimal learning opportunities for students."

### *Appointment of middle leaders*

The second area which emerged in qualitative data analysis about how the principal's instructional leadership impacts the school's middle leadership, was related to the nomination of middle leaders (see Table 1). Due to constraints such as budget limitations that principals face when it comes to appointing middle leaders in their schools, principals cannot appoint all the middle leaders they would like to, and have to choose from among all the middle leadership roles those that are more important to them. As instructional leaders, principals tend to prioritize instructional roles over administrative roles. They are more likely to invest resources in roles directly related to improving teaching and learning in the classroom, such as curriculum or subject coordinators. Hannah explained: "I'd love to have all the coordinators I need, but I have to make difficult choices, so I prioritize instructional roles because I believe that we must make strategic investments that have the most direct impact on our students' success."

For example, study participants believed that the significance of the instructional field necessitates prioritizing the appointment of a curriculum coordinator over other coordinators. Even if it means that other areas might not receive the same level of attention, the instructional area should not be compromised. Nevertheless, Benjamin asserted that it is a matter of intention: "The question is why the principal appoints a curriculum coordinator. If they want to get the pedagogy off their mind so that they are free for the 'really important' things, that's a problem." However, "If they appoint a curriculum coordinator so that this area is handled in the best possible way—they are right."

In this context, some study participants argued that principals should delegate other areas while retaining control over the instructional area. Samantha asserted: "Many things I am willing to give to others, but when it comes to teaching and learning, I want to supervise it myself to ensure that



things are done the way I want.” Similarly, Lydia said: “Each principal decides which tasks they delegates and which he takes on personally. Personally observing the teachers is crucial for me, as it’s an area where I believe my direct involvement is essential.”

### *Hierarchy of middle leaders*

The third area, which was revealed by coding and categorizing the interview data about how the principal’s instructional leadership affected the school’s middle leadership, concerned the way middle leaders were organized into different levels of dominance (see Table 1). Principals who enacted instructional leadership elevated the importance of instructional positions and position holders within the school’s power structure.

By organizing middle leaders into varying levels of dominance, the school establishes a clear stratification of roles and responsibilities. This stratification indicates that certain positions hold more influence or authority over others, creating a tiered system of leadership within the institution. Thus, the organization of middle leaders and the emphasis on instructional leadership roles within the school’s power structure exemplify hierarchy through the creation of a tiered leadership system, the differential allocation of power and authority, and their impact on the school’s operational and cultural dynamics.

Harper said she meets regularly and frequently with subject coordinators who oversee specific subject areas. Principals who spend time in meetings with middle leaders responsible for enhancing pedagogy, despite the many demands on their attention and schedule, clearly demonstrate a prioritization of improving teaching and learning. Moreover, by having frequent meetings with the principal, these middle leaders are placed higher up in the school hierarchy and have a close and direct relationship with the principal.

Another way of positioning middle leaders who are in charge of improving instruction high up in the school hierarchy is by appointing them as members of the school’s management team. Some typical responsibilities of the school management team may include setting school goals and developing strategies to achieve them, developing and implementing school policies and procedures, and creating and managing the school budget. As members of the school management team, middle leaders who are accountable for improving teaching can impact the school’s overall success. Penelope explained: “By including them in the management team, I ensure that instructional considerations are integrated into the overall school leadership and decision-making process.”

When a principal is not at school, their duties and responsibilities are usually temporarily transferred to one of the middle leaders. When middle leaders tasked with instructional responsibilities are among those who replace principals in their absence, their status in the school hierarchy is more established. Bella explained: “When the instructional coordinator steps up to replace me in my absence, it not only ensures the smooth functioning of the school but also solidifies her status. By entrusting her with such critical responsibilities, I recognize her expertise and valuable contributions.”

## **Discussion**

This study aimed to investigate the impact of the principal’s instructional leadership on the middle leadership within a school. By analyzing qualitative interview data, three crucial aspects were discovered that demonstrate the influence of the principal’s instructional leadership on the middle

leadership: the expectations placed on middle leaders, the appointment of middle leaders, and the hierarchical structure of middle leaders.

The expectations placed on middle leaders were found to reflect the instructional leadership of their principals. Historically, the primary focus of expectations for instructional leadership has been on the principal (Hallinger et al., 2020). However, there is growing acknowledgment that this responsibility should be distributed among multiple individuals. The principal's extensive range of complex duties often restricts their ability to fulfill this critical role single-handedly (Leithwood et al., 2020). Furthermore, the principal may not possess comprehensive expertise in all academic subjects necessary to effectively guide and support teachers in their instructional practices (Lipscombe et al., 2023). Thus, recognizing middle leaders as instructional leaders is vital for fostering school improvement (Bush, 2023). Reinforcing this perspective, the current study demonstrated that the participants, who were instructional leaders themselves, had specific expectations for middle leaders in the school. They envisioned middle leaders taking an active role in driving effective teaching and learning practices, as well as guiding and supporting teachers by providing instructional strategies, resources, and opportunities for professional development. Collaboration between middle leaders and teachers to design curricula, implement effective instructional methods, and assess student progress was expected. Additionally, study participants anticipated middle leaders fostering a culture of continuous improvement, promoting innovation and research-based approaches in the classroom. They looked to middle leaders as models of exemplary instructional practices, serving as mentors and facilitators of professional growth for teachers. Ultimately, the study participants relied on middle leaders to play a pivotal role in ensuring high-quality instruction throughout the school, leading to improved student outcomes and overall academic excellence.

Moreover, in line with the perspective that middle leaders should be recognized as instructional leaders (Bush, 2023), the prioritization of appointing middle leaders further highlighted the impact of principals' instructional leadership. Principals often face constraints, including budgetary limitations, when selecting middle leaders for their schools. They must strategically navigate these challenges by making choices that prioritize positions of utmost importance. As instructional leaders, the study participants tended to prioritize roles directly related to instruction rather than administration. Their allocation of resources favored positions that enhanced teaching and learning within the classroom, such as curriculum or subject coordinators. This emphasis demonstrated their dedication to investing in roles directly impacting the quality of education provided to students.

Despite their involvement in various administrative tasks that can divert their attention, effective principals acknowledge that focusing on instruction is the most impactful way to benefit students (Neumerski et al., 2018). Thus, they dedicate themselves to enhancing teaching quality and fostering a culture of learning that facilitates student success (Glickman et al., 2017). Previously, principals were primarily responsible for administrative and organizational tasks (Glanz, 2021). However, the role of the principal has been transformed in contemporary education. Instructional leadership has now emerged as a pivotal aspect of their responsibilities, shifting them away from being solely managerial administrators (Murphy et al., 2016; Shaked, 2023). The study participants believed they should delegate responsibilities in other areas while retaining control over the instructional realm. Delegating non-instructional tasks, such as administrative or operational duties, allowed the study participants to focus their time and energy on the critical role of instructional leadership. By entrusting competent staff members with these tasks, the study participants could have the time to concentrate on enhancing teaching and learning practices. Being personally involved in the instructional area enables principals to develop a deep understanding of the educational processes within their school. This firsthand knowledge empowered them to

provide targeted feedback, identify areas for improvement, and offer tailor-made support to teachers.

The hierarchy of middle leaders also reflected the principal's instructional leadership. Study participants who enacted instructional leadership within their schools elevated the significance of instructional positions and the individuals who held them within the power structure. By prioritizing instruction and valuing the role of middle leaders in driving effective teaching and learning practices, these principals reshaped the organizational structure to reflect the importance of instructional leadership. Middle leaders with expertise in curriculum development, instructional strategies, and teacher support were given increased recognition, influence, and decision-making authority. After thoroughly reviewing the existing literature, De Nobile (2018) put forward an all-encompassing model for school middle leadership, as depicted in Figure 1. This model distinguishes between the various roles that middle leaders undertake ("What?") and the approaches they employ to fulfill those roles ("How?"). The current study shows that it is also important to ask which middle leaders fulfill these roles and what the hierarchy is between them.

It should be noted that De Nobile's (2018) model covers a broad spectrum of roles, from management to leadership, including student-focused, administrative, organizational, supervisory, staff development, and strategic roles. Within the context of this model, this study's interview data analysis indicates that the staff development role is highly significant. Additionally, the supervisory role is emphasized by the evidence. Moreover, incorporating middle leaders into the school's management team accentuates the importance of the strategic role.

Overall, the findings of this study strengthen previous arguments (Bush, 2023; Leithwood et al., 2020) about the comprehensive nature of instructional leadership, which extends beyond its pedagogical aspects and significantly impacts various organizational dimensions of middle leadership within schools. Instructional leadership shapes the expectations placed on middle leaders, redefining their role within the organization. By emphasizing instructional issues, instructional leaders influence the essential functions and responsibilities assigned to middle leaders to ensure they play a pivotal role in driving instructional improvement and student achievement. Moreover, instructional leadership plays a critical role in the appointment of middle leaders. By actively shaping the selection criteria and processes, instructional leadership contributes to building a team of middle leaders who can effectively support and advance the school's instructional goals. Furthermore, instructional leadership significantly impacts the hierarchy and organizational structure of middle leaders within the school. By establishing clear lines of accountability and decision-making processes, instructional leaders create a coherent organizational structure that allows for effective collaboration, coordination, and implementation of instructional initiatives throughout the school. Therefore, instructional leadership goes beyond its pedagogical roots and significantly influences various organizational aspects of middle leadership within schools. By actively engaging with human resources elements, instructional leaders make sure that middle leaders are equipped to drive instructional improvement, enhance student outcomes, and contribute to the overall success of the school.

Practically, this study underscores the importance of clearly defining and communicating instructional expectations for middle leaders. To promote effective teaching and learning, principals should establish a shared understanding of the specific roles and responsibilities assigned to middle leaders. Additionally, the study highlights the crucial role of principals in appointing middle leaders. Therefore, principals are encouraged to develop systematic and transparent appointment processes that take into account factors such as instructional expertise, leadership potential, and alignment with the school's instructional vision. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the need to

position middle leaders with instructional leadership responsibilities at higher ranking within the school hierarchy. As a result, principals should prioritize elevating the role of instructional positions and the individuals who hold them within the organizational power structure. By implementing these practical implications, principals can enhance their influence on middle leadership, leading to a more cohesive and effective instructional leadership framework. This, in turn, will contribute to improved teaching and learning outcomes throughout the school.

Compared to previous research, this study provides new insights into the influence of the principal's instructional leadership on middle leadership within the school. However, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. First, the study's context was limited to Israel, and given the significant impact of contextual factors on school leadership (Hallinger, 2018), caution should be exercised when generalizing the findings to other cultural contexts. Future research could conduct comparative studies across different countries to examine the factors that enable instructional leadership in subject coordinators. Second, it is worth noting that the data in this study relied on self-reported measures, which may have been susceptible to social desirability bias. To mitigate this limitation, future research could incorporate interviews with middle leaders to gather more objective data regarding their perceptions of their principals' instructional leadership. Additionally, direct observations of instructional leadership practices could provide valuable insights. Furthermore, this study did not identify significant correlations between principals' influence and their demographic characteristics, such as gender, experience, and education. However, future research with larger sample sizes may help uncover potential differences associated with these demographic factors. Addressing these limitations and conducting further research can enhance our understanding of instructional leadership's impact on middle leadership.

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