

Integrating Instructional Leadership With Social Justice Leadership: Insights From Israel's Principals

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Abstract

Purpose: This study explores how school principals can effectively integrate instructional leadership with social justice leadership, recognizing their dual roles in promoting academic excellence and fostering a socially just school environment. **Research Methods:** Participants in this qualitative study were 32 principals from elementary schools in Israel. Data collection involved one-on-one interviews and focus groups. Data analysis followed a comprehensive four-stage process, including sorting, coding, categorizing, and theorizing. **Findings:** The study identified four interrelated perspectives on the relationship between instructional leadership and social justice leadership: (1) instructional leadership and social justice leadership have divergent foci; (2) instructional leadership inherently contributes to social justice; (3) social justice leadership defines the teaching approach required by instructional leadership; and (4) social justice leadership shapes the purpose of instructional leadership. **Implications:** This study suggests that to encompass the entire range of integration between instructional leadership and social justice leadership, principals must consider two aspects: the influence of social justice leadership on instructional leadership goals and its impact on instructional leadership practices.

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The concept of instructional leadership is about to celebrate its centenary, with one of its earliest research studies dating back to 1926 (Gray, 1934). Despite its long history, it continues to dominate the discourse of educational leadership (Hallinger et al., 2020). Today, school principals are still expected to demonstrate instructional leadership, which has been proven essential in improving students' academic performance (Cox & Mullen, 2023; Hou et al., 2019). As instructional leaders, principals are required to prioritize the school's implementation of effective teaching and learning (Shaked, 2023), which necessitates principals' extensive and direct involvement in a wide range of activities aimed at enhancing the curriculum and supporting teaching strategies that contribute to successful student learning (Bellibaş et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2021). For the purpose of this study, instructional leadership is broadly defined as the principal's active involvement in improving teaching, learning, and academic outcomes (Goldring et al., 2015; Murphy et al., 2016).

At the same time, contemporary school principals are also called upon to serve as social justice leaders in their schools. In today's Western school systems, significant achievement gaps persist for non-white, LGBTQ, economically disadvantaged, and differently abled students compared to their peers (Hutchings, 2021). Our schools are saturated with inequities in terms of disciplinary practices and the sense of belonging experienced by minoritized students (Copur-Gencturk et al., 2020; Dutil, 2020). Therefore, principals must carefully examine how issues of race, gender, family income, national origin, ability or disability, sexual orientation, native language, and other potentially marginalizing characteristics can and do influence their learning environments' design and effectiveness (Gay, 2018; Theoharis, 2007; Wang, 2018). In this study, social justice leadership is broadly defined as the principal's acknowledgment of the inequities that exist in the school coupled with proactive engagement in fostering equity, fairness, and inclusivity to ensure all students have the opportunities, resources, and support they need to succeed (DeMatthews, 2015; Shields & Hesbol, 2020).

Considering the detrimental effects arising from the often fragmented nature of school leadership, which lacks cohesion, coordination, and a clear, unified direction, elucidating the relationship between these two essential roles of principals—instructional leadership and social justice

leadership—becomes imperative. Therefore, this study aims at investigating how (if at all) these two facets of leadership can converge and mutually reinforce one another within the framework of school administration. To this end, the study seeks to answer the following research question: How do principals understand the nature of the connection between instructional leadership and social justice leadership? By examining the ways in which these two aspects of leadership influence each other, the study aimed to reveal how principals can effectively support students from marginalized backgrounds and foster a more equitable learning environment.

In particular, the current study is expected to elucidate possible connections between these leadership domains given the context discussed before. The Israeli school system caters to approximately two million students attending about 5,500 schools (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2021). Israeli educational policy clearly expects principals to demonstrate instructional leadership (Capstones, 2008; Shaked, 2023) while operating within an educational system grappling with numerous social justice issues (Arar, 2019; OECD, 2019). Thus, the aim of this study was to gather insights from Israeli principals regarding the relationship between their responsibilities as instructional leaders and as social justice leaders.

Theoretical Background

To establish a solid foundation for this study, the following theoretical review will delve into the concepts of instructional leadership and social justice leadership and discuss their intersection.

Instructional Leadership

Principals, in their role as instructional leaders, play a pivotal but predominantly indirect role in fostering high levels of student academic achievement. Their influence is exerted through mediating factors, such as the instructional program, school culture, and, most significantly, through the teaching strategies employed by teachers (Murphy et al., 2016). Instructional leadership exercised by principals focuses on maximizing the utilization of instructional time for effective and high-quality teaching alongside fostering the continuous professional development of teachers (Hallinger et al., 2020). The instructional leadership approach is predicated upon the established correlation between the quality of teachers' instruction and students' academic performance. Research indicates that the quality of teaching is the foremost school-related determinant impacting student outcomes (Burroughs et al., 2019; Gershenson, 2016), surpassing other educational factors, such as curricular

programs or student grouping structures. Attaining high-quality instruction, a crucial factor for student success, necessitates ongoing support and direction from the principal in their capacity as an instructional leader (Bellibaş et al., 2022).

We know school leadership is second only to classroom teaching in influencing student learning (Leithwood et al., 2020). Extensive research has consistently linked instructional leadership with positive educational outcomes, notably enhancing teaching quality and boosting student performance (Hou et al., 2019; Mitchell et al., 2015). This correlation is evident across various educational settings, including elementary, junior high, and high schools, as well as in different types of schools such as public, private, and charter institutions. The effectiveness of instructional leadership extends to diverse geographic and social contexts, including both urban and suburban environments (Cox & Mullen, 2023; Shatzer et al., 2014).

The established empirical connections between principals' active engagement in instructional processes, the quality of instruction, and student achievement have led scholars to advocate strongly for instructional leadership as a principal priority in modern education (Hallinger et al., 2020). As a result, both academic and practical voices in the field agree that contemporary school principals should prioritize instructional leadership as a fundamental aspect of their role. Today's principals are increasingly expected, and in some cases required, to take a leading role in instructional leadership, focusing on teaching and learning, and involving themselves extensively in curricular and instructional matters (Bellibaş et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2021). Ultimately, as instructional leaders, principals bear the responsibility for cultivating an environment that nurtures classroom instruction, thereby driving enhanced student learning and improved academic results (Glickman et al., 2017).

While instructional leadership is a broad role, instructional supervision is more specific and focused. It involves directly observing, evaluating, and improving classroom teaching practices. The goal of instructional supervision is to enhance the effectiveness of teaching methods and strategies, thereby directly impacting student learning experiences in the classroom. According to Mette (2019), there is a need for a "more critical analysis of supervision" to explore "the impact supervision could have on addressing issues of social justice" (p. 5).

Over the years, researchers have attempted to capture the meaning of instructional leadership via several frameworks. The first framework, presented by Hallinger and Murphy (1985), is the most common one utilized in the instructional leadership research literature (Hallinger & Wang, 2015; Hallinger et al., 2020). It includes three dimensions that comprise ten functions.

The first dimension, *defining the school mission*, consists of two functions: (1) framing the school's instructional goals and (2) communicating those goals to all necessary parties. The second dimension, *managing the instructional program*, is broken down into three functions: (3) coordinating the school's curriculum; (4) supervising and evaluating instruction; and (5) monitoring students' progress. The third dimension, *developing a positive school learning climate*, comprises five functions: (6) protecting instructional time from threats; (7) providing incentives to motivate teachers; (8) providing incentives to encourage students' learning; (9) promoting staff members' continual professional development; and (10) maintaining high visibility for quality interactions with teachers and students.

Similar to Hallinger and Murphy's work (1985), Weber (1989) presented a second framework. It delineates five key dimensions of instructional leadership: (1) defining the school's mission; (2) managing curriculum and instruction; (3) supervising teaching; (4) monitoring student progress; and (5) assessing the instructional climate.

The third framework, identified by Blase and Blase (2000), includes two themes and 11 strategies of instructional leadership that influence changes in teacher practices. The first theme is "talking with teachers to promote reflection," which encompasses five strategies: (1) making suggestions; (2) providing feedback; (3) modeling; (4) utilizing inquiry and seeking advice and opinions; and (5) giving praise. The second theme highlights "promoting professional growth," which consists of six strategies: (1) emphasizing the study of teaching and learning; (2) supporting collaboration among educators; (3) fostering coaching relationships among educators; (4) encouraging and supporting program redesign; (5) incorporating principles of adult learning, growth, and development into all aspects of staff development; and (6) utilizing action research to inform instructional decision-making.

The fourth framework, developed by Stronge et al. (2008) through a comprehensive literature review, identifies five crucial features of instructional leadership that principals employ in achieving instructional goals. These five features are (1) building and sustaining a clear vision for the school that outlines learning objectives and garners support from the community to achieve those goals; (2) sharing leadership responsibilities by empowering teacher leaders and enhancing their expertise; (3) leading a collaborative community of professional learners, facilitating meaningful staff development opportunities; (4) utilizing factual information and evidence to inform instructional decision-making processes; and (5) monitoring instruction to promote the implementation of curricula and effective teaching methods.

Given that the various frameworks of instructional leadership are fundamentally congruent, synthesizing them may be beneficial. By conducting a

thorough and comprehensive review of existing frameworks, identifying their common elements, and integrating these into a cohesive framework, it becomes possible to identify four key elements that are central to the concept of instructional leadership. These elements can be defined as follows: (1) *Instructional vision*: This element involves constructing and rallying support for a school vision that is centered around goals for student learning and achievement. (2) *Instructional program*: Principals coordinate, supervise, guide, and monitor teaching and learning within the school to ensure effective instructional practices and outcomes. (3) *Instructional climate*: Creating a positive and achievement-oriented academic environment is essential for fostering a conducive atmosphere for teaching and learning. (4) *Developing teachers*: Principals play a crucial role in supporting the ongoing professional growth of faculty members, ensuring that they continually enhance their teaching practices throughout their careers (Shaked, 2023). Table 1 illustrates how the dimensions, functions, and features of instructional leadership, as outlined in existing frameworks, align with the proposed four key elements of instructional leadership.

Social Justice Leadership

Educational researchers consistently emphasize that principals are responsible for promoting social justice within their schools. The principal must “make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions... central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 223). The principal must believe that each and every student can thrive and that the school should be organized to provide equal learning opportunities for all students (Wang, 2018). School leaders must “foster successful, equitable, and socially responsible learning and accountability practices for all students” (Brown, 2004, p. 80).

The necessity for social justice leadership is underscored by the empirical evidence about disparities in Western schools, as evidenced by the fact that white, straight, middle-class, and physically able students typically achieve higher levels of academic success, have lower dropout rates, and are more likely to attain higher education compared to their peers who lack these attributes (Blanden et al., 2023; Pearman et al., 2019). Educational inequality is a major policy issue because quality education is not only an aspect of well-being in itself but also a crucial component of an individual’s ability to succeed and thrive. This often results in improved health, extended life expectancy, and increased earnings (Celeste et al., 2019; Kyriakides, 2020).

Table 1. The Proposed Four Key Elements of Instructional Leadership Deriving From Prevalent Frameworks of Instructional Leadership (Shaked, 2023).

Frameworks' Dimensions/Functions/Themes/Strategies				
Key Element	Hallinger and Murphy (1985)	Weber (1989)	Blase and Blase (2000)	Stronge et al. (2008)
Instructional vision	Defining the school mission	Defining the school mission		Building and sustaining a school vision
Instructional program	Framing school goals Communicating school goals			
	Coordinating the curriculum	Managing curriculum and instruction	Talking with teachers to promote reflection	Monitoring curriculum and instruction
	Supervising and evaluating instruction	Supervising teaching	Making suggestions Giving feedback Modeling Using inquiry and soliciting advice and opinions	Using data to make instructional decisions
	Monitoring student progress	Monitoring student progress		

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Frameworks' Dimensions/Functions/Themes/Strategies				
Key Element	Hallinger and Murphy (1985)	Weber (1989)	Blase and Blase (2000)	Stronge et al. (2008)
Instructional climate	Developing a positive school learning climate	Protecting instructional time Providing incentives for teachers	Assessing the instructional climate	Giving praise Providing incentives for learning
Maintaining high visibility				
• Developing teachers	Promoting professional development		Promoting professional growth	Emphasizing the study of teaching and learning Supporting collaboration efforts Developing coaching relationships Encouraging redesign of programs
				Leading a learning community

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Frameworks' Dimensions/Functions/Themes/Strategies			
Key Element	Hallinger and Murphy (1985)	Weber (1989)	Blase and Blase (2000)
			Stronge et al. (2008)
			Applying the principles of adult learning, growth, and development and implementing action research
			Sharing leadership

According to Wang (2018), principals committed to social justice lead in a very proactive way with a focus on people in an effort to build a socially just community. Their people-centric approach includes putting students at the center, embodying the role of a social justice leader, cultivating individuals' capacities for social justice, shaping a school climate rooted in social justice principles, and nurturing strong, positive ties with families and the wider community. Shields (2013) presented eight principles of transformative social justice leadership: a commitment to profound and fair change; challenging and reshaping existing knowledge structures that maintain inequality and injustice; prioritizing liberation, democracy, equity, and justice; confronting imbalances in power distribution; focusing on both individual and collective benefits; highlighting the significance of interdependence, interconnectedness, and global consciousness; maintaining a balance between critical analysis and optimistic vision; and demonstrating ethical bravery.

The literature commonly portrays social justice leadership as involving both reflection and action, a concept Furman (2012) describes as *praxis*. To become a social justice leader, the principal must focus on both "understanding the inequities that persist in schools and taking action" (DeMatthews, 2015, p. 145). Thus, the principal needs to integrate deep understanding with vigorous action. To achieve deep understanding, the principal must thoroughly investigate and identify the hidden inequalities within the everyday management of the school and reflect on why and how the school may be unfair to certain students (Canlı & Demirtaş, 2022; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014). This understanding is important because "leadership without an understanding of systemic inequity can reproduce oppression" (Bertrand & Rodela, 2018, p. 14). At the same time, to act vigorously, the principal must also actively work to replace existing unequal structures with more equitable ones and should actively implement inclusive education practices (Capper & Young, 2014). There is a significant need for "the exercise of altering these arrangements by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions" (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002, p. 162). In other words, principals must be actively involved in "identifying and undoing these oppressive and unjust practices and replacing them with more equitable, culturally appropriate ones" (Furman, 2012, p. 194). In sum, DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014, p. 846) claimed that in the literature "there is a clear consensus that social justice leadership involves the recognition of the unequal circumstances of marginalized groups with actions directed toward eliminating inequalities."

The ways through which a principal can implement social justice leadership include prioritizing the needs of marginalized students and ensuring

that they have access to the same resources and opportunities as their peers; addressing the unconscious biases and stereotypes that can negatively impact students; and supporting a culture of inclusivity and diversity in the school, where all students feel valued and respected (Furman, 2012; Gay, 2018). Santamaría (2014) pointed to nine characteristics common to social justice leaders: (1) holding critical conversations, (2) using a critical race theory lens, (3) group consensus building, (4) being conscious of the threat of stereotyping, (5) engaging in academic discourse, (6) honoring constituents, (7) leading by example, (8) developing trust with the mainstream, and (9) practicing servant leadership.

Specifically, principals must address two key areas of inequity: outcomes and belongingness (Celeste et al., 2019; Pearman et al., 2019). First, they should focus on closing achievement gaps by transforming the school into an environment where all students can achieve academic proficiency regardless of their characteristics (Brooks et al., 2017; Wang, 2015). This involves encouraging teachers to maintain high standards, fostering a growth mindset and preventing unconscious biases in assessments (Copur-Gencturk et al., 2020). The goal should be to reduce both the achievement gaps between schools as well as between different socioeconomic groups within schools (Gümüş et al., 2022). Moreover, principals should concentrate on creating an empowering educational environment that leverages the unique strengths and potentials of all students, fostering academic proficiency through a diversity of approaches and resources tailored to each student's individual characteristics (Copur-Gencturk et al., 2020).

Second, principals must be committed to closing gaps in students' sense of belonging. They need to promote culturally responsive teaching that connects teaching content to students' diverse customs, languages, and life experiences (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2018; Gay, 2018). Recognizing the unique cultural strengths that each student brings to the classroom is essential (Flores & Bagwell, 2021; Muñiz, 2019). Principals should also advocate for inclusive education, where students of all backgrounds and abilities learn together (Amor et al., 2019; Messiou, 2017). Moreover, they must address inequities in discipline by paying attention to punishment gaps (Dutil, 2020; Government Accountability Office, 2018). Principals should strive to eliminate such disparities and promote disciplinary practices that furnish all students with a positive learning environment (Johnson & Constant, 2021). This involves shifting toward a disciplinary approach focused on positive reinforcement, proactive strategies, and collaborative decision-making rather than punitive measures (Oxley & Holden, 2021).

Overall, demonstrating social justice leadership requires a proactive and ongoing commitment from the principal and other school leaders to ensure

that all students have the support they need to thrive and reach their full potential (DeMatthews, 2015). Principals as social justice leaders are dedicated to establishing a new social order that ensures equal access to opportunities and resources for all students (Gay, 2018; Jean-Marie et al., 2009).

Relationship Between Instructional Leadership and Social Justice Leadership

The preceding sections have explored two educational frameworks that inform the roles of school principals: instructional leadership and social justice leadership. However, the interplay between these two frameworks remains insufficiently addressed in the existing literature. This gap in the literature can be partially attributed to a perception of instructional leadership as inherently promoting social justice (as discussed next). Moreover, it can be attributed to the fact that social justice leadership arose as a critique of the instructional leadership paradigm. The latter, predominantly concerned with the technical facets of education, has frequently been criticized for its oversight of the resultant inequities, an issue that social justice leadership aims to address by bringing equity and inclusivity to the forefront of educational leadership.

Although the existing research literature has not emphasized the connection between instructional leadership and social justice leadership, this study deems this discussion crucial. School leaders often face challenges of fragmentation and overload when there is a lack of coherence in their roles. Coherence ensures that various responsibilities are seamlessly integrated, forming a cohesive whole that is greater than the sum of its parts (Fullan & Kirtman, 2019). Exploring the interplay between instructional leadership and social justice leadership has the potential to help leaders achieve this necessary coherence.

To date, only a limited number of researchers have delved into the link between instructional leadership and social justice leadership. As described next, these few researchers have proposed a certain relationship between the two, claiming that social justice leadership outlines teaching methods rooted in fairness and equity, which should be implemented under instructional leadership.

Specifically, several researchers have referenced the concept of “culturally responsive instructional leadership” (e.g., Hartung & Reimer, 2019; Marshall & Khalifa, 2018; Webb-Johnson, 2006), which refers to an instructional leadership approach where school leaders actively recognize, understand, and value the cultural backgrounds and experiences of students, families, and

staff (Khalifa et al., 2016). For example, Mugisha (2013), who conducted a two-week fieldwork program in three New Zealand schools, claimed that culturally responsive instructional leadership encompasses purposeful, well-intentioned, creative, and collaborative actions undertaken by principals to enhance the academic engagement and achievement of students from minority cultures. These actions involve motivating teachers to utilize students' culturally rooted strengths and cognitive styles, appreciating the cultures and pedagogies of minority students, and integrating these cultural assets into the curriculum and instructional practices. Additional actions may include providing relevant continuous professional learning opportunities for teachers, mentoring them in implementing culturally responsive instruction as effective classroom practices, and actively involving the community in the education of minority students.

Similarly, Howley et al. (2019) used the concept of "inclusive instructional leadership" to describe a form of instructional leadership that focuses on promoting inclusive education. In this form of instructional leadership, social justice serves as a guiding principle, directing instructional leadership toward intentionally prioritizing inclusivity in educational practices. In the Howley et al. study, principals engaged in a professional development program aimed at transforming attitudes toward inclusion and cultivating behaviors aligned with inclusive instructional leadership. These principals developed positive attitudes toward inclusion and reported implementing inclusive instructional leadership practices.

Although not all of these studies explicitly used the term "social justice," they all asserted that the role of principals goes beyond solely instructional leadership. Social justice leadership emphasizes the importance of principals' focus on promoting culturally responsive beliefs and pedagogy, creating inclusive classrooms, and valuing diversity. More broadly, Rigby (2014) suggested social justice as a possible logic of instructional leadership. Based on content analysis of various sources, including research literature, reports, news articles, and websites, Rigby identified three alternative logics of instructional leadership: prevailing, entrepreneurial, and social justice. The prevailing logic of instructional leadership entails a broad, flexible approach without explicit goals or directions. The entrepreneurial logic involves the principal's adoption of innovative strategies and practices inspired by the private sector. The social justice logic focuses "on the experiences and inequitable outcomes of marginalized groups, challenging the current 'neutral' systems that engender the reproduction of inequity in our schools" (Rigby, p. 610). According to the social justice logic, the principal as an instructional leader should establish structures that facilitate inclusive classrooms; offer teachers the time, resources, and support needed to collaboratively develop

equity-based beliefs and pedagogy; and hold teachers accountable for implementing fairness-oriented teaching methods. This logic “puts forth a set of instructional leadership practices for raising the academic achievement of all students, preparing students as critical citizens, and ensuring heterogeneous, inclusive classrooms” (Rigby, p. 618).

As seen so far, only a few studies have examined the connections between instructional leadership and social justice leadership. Specifically, no research was uncovered that examines the intersections of instructional leadership and social justice leadership in the Israeli context. Furthermore, not all existing studies are empirical, and some have discussed this topic in conjunction with other focal points. Given the significance of instructional leadership in school leadership discourse and the essentiality of social justice in schools, there is a need for further research on how these two frameworks are interconnected. To address this gap in the existing literature, the present study aimed to explore the perceptions of Israeli principals concerning the interplay between instructional leadership and social justice leadership.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach to explore principals’ perceptions of the relationship between instructional leadership and social justice leadership. Through the collection and analysis of rich, detailed data, the study aims to provide insights into the intricate ways principals perceive and navigate the interplay between instructional strategies and social justice principles in their professional practices.

Research Context

The current study was conducted in the Israeli school system, which consists of three tiers: elementary education (grades 1–6, approximately ages 6–12 years), middle school (grades 7–9, approximately ages 12–15), and high school (grades 10–12, approximately ages 14–19). Compulsory education takes place from kindergarten through 12th grade (Halevy-Feldman & Setiawan, 2020). Israel’s student population has increased by about 44% in the last two decades (an increase of about 2% per year), which is exceptional compared to other developed countries (Blass, 2018). The primary driver behind this substantial growth is predominantly attributed to Israel’s notably high birth rate, a trend distinguishing it from its global counterparts.

The Israeli school system requires educational leaders who advocate for both effective teaching-learning processes and social justice. The achievement scores of Israeli students in the Programme for International Student

Assessment (PISA) tests consistently fall below the OECD average in all areas of literacy: science, reading, and mathematics (OECD, 2019). Consequently, the commitment of principals to instructional leadership is of paramount importance to enhance teaching, learning, and overall student outcomes. Simultaneously, it is crucial to address the significant inequality in academic performance across different groups of Israeli students, which ranks highest among all participating countries and economic entities in the PISA study (OECD, 2019). As such, promoting social justice in schools becomes an equally vital goal for school principals.

The inequality in academic performance is closely related to the socioeconomic and ethnocultural divides within Israeli society (Dadon-Golan et al., 2019). In Israel, significant socioeconomic disparities exist, including differences between communities of high and low socioeconomic status, and between central regions and peripheral areas. Furthermore, the Israeli education system is divided into Jewish and Arab sectors, a split primarily based on language, with Jewish schools primarily using Hebrew and Arab schools using Arabic. Within each of these sectors, both the student body and school leaders typically share the same ethnic and linguistic background (Halevy-Feldman & Setiawan, 2020). This segregation in the education system contributes to the disparities in academic outcomes observed across different communities (Resh & Blass, 2019).

The primary responsibility of Israeli school principals was determined by Capstones, the national institute responsible for defining the content of principal preparation programs and novice principals' mentoring. Capstones (2008) explicitly expressed the expectation that principals should serve as instructional leaders to enhance education and learning for all students. The Israeli Ministry of Education (2019, p. 5) stated that for principal preparation programs, "instructional leadership will be the main axis of learning" so that "the program will provide up-to-date and applied knowledge in this field, and especially on the subject of the relationship between the improvement of education, teaching and learning, student achievements and the role of the school principal." In line with this policy, principal preparation programs are based on the following five pillars: (a) improving teaching and learning; (b) designing future schools; (c) team leadership and professional development; (d) evidence-based management; and (e) budget and resource management (Berkovich, 2014).

As can be seen, instructional leadership takes precedence in Israeli principals' preparation programs, whereas social justice leadership is conveyed more implicitly. As mentioned above, Capstones (2008) has hinted at the social justice role of Israeli principals as instructional leaders with the mission to enhance the education and learning of "all students." This

individualized focus on students is further evident in the four dimensions of Capstones' (2008) school leadership framework: shaping the school's future image through vision development and change implementation; leading and nurturing the staff's professional growth; prioritizing the needs of individual students; and managing the school's relationship with the surrounding community. However, the promotion of equity for diverse individual students tends to be secondary to the main emphasis on instructional leadership in these preparation programs. Consequently, principals often shape their approach to social justice leadership based on their personal values and educational perspectives. Their formative experiences, worldview, and personal ethos significantly influence their organizational vision (Arar, 2015; Oplatka, 2013; Yoeli & Berkovich, 2010). Given the limited existing empirical knowledge about the relationship between instructional leadership and social justice leadership, qualitative research methods were considered ideal as they allow participants to share their experiences and offer researchers valuable insights into their perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Participants

To avoid addressing differences in instructional leadership between elementary and secondary (middle/high) schools (Gedik & Bellibas, 2015; Hallinger, 2012), this study specifically focused on elementary school principals. The sampling approach employed was purposive, which is more effective than random sampling in qualitative research (van Rijnsoever, 2017), aiming to select "information-rich" cases. Therefore, to locate principals, the researcher approached 21 superintendents from all six Israeli school districts. The superintendents were provided with a brief explanation of instructional leadership and social justice leadership and were asked to identify principals who demonstrate both. Each superintendent then recommended one to four principals, resulting in a total of 44 principals recommended for the study.

Because of significant differences between the sectors in the Israeli education system in the understanding of leadership for social justice (Arar, 2015), the participants of this study were all from the Hebrew-speaking sector, while principals from the Arabic-speaking sector will be studied separately. It should be noted that the perspectives outlined in this study were discerned during the interview process, rather than predetermined prior to the interviews, and as such, they did not influence the composition of the sample.

To involve "as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 113), the current sample included 32 principals out of 35 who were asked to participate (the remaining seven identified principals were not invited to participate in the study as the required

number of participants had already been reached). Of them, 21 were women and 11 were men. Their average age was 51 (range: 39–61), with an average of 17 years of experience as teachers before becoming principals (range: 4–27) and nine years of experience as principals (range: 2–17). As for their education, one principal had a doctorate, 26 principals had a master's degree, and five principals had a bachelor's degree. Table 2 presents information on the study participants' demographic background and school characteristics. The nurturing index, developed by the Israeli Ministry of Education, represents the socioeconomic level of a school. This index ranges from 1 to 10, where a higher score indicates a school with a larger proportion of children from families with low socioeconomic status. The table also details the data collection method used (interview or focus group) and indicates which of the four perspectives found in this study were mentioned by each study participant (refer to the findings section below).

Data Collection

Data were collected by the researcher through semistructured, one-on-one Zoom interviews and face-to-face focus groups, which aimed to explore how principals perceive the relationship between instructional leadership and social justice leadership. The interviews and focus groups included questions such as “How do your efforts to promote student achievement involve offering support to students that address possible barriers?;” “In your opinion, how should social justice issues influence your work to improve the quality of teaching?;” and “From your point of view, how does fairness relate to the management of the school's instructional program?” The interviews' and groups' semistructured format allowed the researcher to be responsive to the unique context and emerging insights (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While key questions were preplanned, the interviews and focus groups maintained a conversational atmosphere, allowing questions to naturally flow from previous responses whenever possible. This conversational approach facilitated engaging discussions akin to conversations rather than rigidly structured exchanges of questions and answers.

All study participants were presented with the option of joining a focus group, yet only some could participate, mainly due to logistical challenges. There were two focus groups, each with four participants, held in different districts. Some of the focus group participants were already acquainted with each other. The remaining 24 study participants were interviewed individually. All interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The duration of interviews was about 1 h on average, and the duration of focus groups was about 1.5 h on average. A total of three follow-up

Table 2. Study Participants' Information and Data Categories.

	Demographics			School Characteristics			Method	Perspective					
	Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Years of experience as a teacher	Years of experience as a principal	Education	District (North, Center, South, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa)	School size (No. of students)	Nurturing index	Interview/Focus group	Instructional leadership and social justice have divergent foci	Instructional leadership inherently contributes to social justice	Social justice leadership defines the teaching approach required by instructional leadership
1	Abigail	F	59	22	13	BA	N	250	6.69	In	✓		
2	Benjamin	M	51	20	4	MA	J	350	7.23	FG		✓	✓
3	Daniel	M	54	16	13	MA	N	250	5.87	In	✓		✓
4	David	M	49	4	9	MA	J	400	9.12	In	✓	✓	
5	Deborah	F	57	23	11	MA	J	150	5.59	In	✓	✓	
6	Diana	F	49	22	3	MA	J	450	6.44	FG			✓
7	Dina	F	48	19	3	MA	H	450	3.23	FG			✓
8	Ella	F	49	12	12	MA	N	250	4.95	In		✓	
9	Ethan	M	46	8	12	MA	N	500	7.91	In			✓
10	Esther	F	48	13	11	MA	S	300	7.88	In	✓		✓
11	Hannah	F	55	16	14	MA	C	250	8.49	In	✓		
12	Jonathan	M	57	19	12	BA	TA	400	6.16	In	✓		
13	Joseph	M	45	5	8	MA	S	450	4.29	In		✓	
14	Joshua	M	44	13	5	MA	C	350	3.96	In		✓	
15	Judith	F	52	25	4	MA	J	400	2.99	FG			✓
16	Leah	F	48	13	7	MA	N	550	4.09	In	✓		✓
17	Lily	F	51	19	8	MA	TA	200	4.49	In		✓	
18	Linda	F	56	18	14	BA	TA	150	9.06	In	✓		✓
19	Lisa	F	56	27	3	MA	H	250	7.26	FG	✓		

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

		Demographics			School Characteristics			Method	Perspective				
Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Years of experience as a teacher	Years of experience as a principal	Education	District (North, Center, South, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa)	School size (No. of students)	Nurturing index	Interview/Focus group	Instructional leadership and social justice leadership have divergent foci	Instructional leadership inherently contributes to social justice	Social justice leadership defines the teaching approach required by instructional leadership	Social justice leadership shapes the purpose of instructional leadership
20 Lydia	F	48	20	2	MA	J	150	3.17	FG		✓		
21 Maya	F	57	18	13	MA	S	300	2.76	In			✓	✓
22 Michael	M	61	22	17	BA	S	300	1.96	In	✓		✓	✓
23 Miriam	F	39	10	6	MA	C	450	6.21	In			✓	
24 Naomi	F	48	11	13	PhD	S	200	3.49	In	✓			
25 Nathan	M	46	12	6	MA	H	500	7.15	FG				✓
26 Noa	F	56	26	6	MA	H	300	2.98	FG		✓		
27 Noah	M	52	18	9	MA	N	300	8.01	In	✓		✓	✓
28 Rachel	F	56	16	15	MA	J	450	3.23	In			✓	✓
29 Rebecca	F	49	17	7	MA	C	650	4.47	In	✓			
30 Ruth	F	60	20	16	BA	S	250	6.19	In		✓		
31 Sarah	F	47	13	11	MA	C	350	5.92	In		✓		
32 Samuel	M	50	15	11	MA	H	250	7.13	In				✓
Total mentions of perspective by participants										13	7	9	15

interviews were conducted to clarify questions that emerged during the review of the transcripts (averaging a 15-min duration).

The interviews and focus groups were conducted in Hebrew and subsequently translated into English by an expert to ensure that the nuances and specific details of the participant's responses were accurately captured and conveyed in English. For ethical reasons, all participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could leave the study at any time, but none did. The researcher clarified that the superintendent who had recommended them as possible participants would not know whether they participated in the study. They were assured of confidentiality (pseudonyms were used) and signed a written consent based on an understanding of the study's purpose. The study was reviewed and approved by an institutional ethics committee.

Data Analysis

The four-stage data analysis process entailed sorting, coding, categorizing, and theorizing. First, sorting was performed to seek out the relevant utterances that might represent the relationship between instructional leadership and social justice leadership, such as "Ensuring high student achievement and ensuring equal opportunities for all students are two fundamental elements of our educational mission that serve different purposes;" "I will not accept achievement gaps between my students [from low socioeconomic backgrounds] and students from more privileged areas;" "My primary goal is to enhance the quality of teaching. However, I am committed to fostering an environment where all students can thrive academically." This sorting "is not something separate from the 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" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 12).

In the coding stage, the previously identified statements were coded to associate with specific "essence-capturing" words or short phrases, such as "separation between the two leadership frameworks" or "instructional leadership as narrowing between-school gaps" or "social justice leadership as complementing instructional leadership." These codes represented the ideas or concepts reflecting study participants' perceptions about the relationships between instructional leadership and social justice leadership (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The coding approach was data driven, where the researcher did not begin with a predetermined set of codes but instead allowed concepts to emerge from the text during analysis (Saldaña, 2021). The coding process involved maintaining a master list of all the codes utilized throughout the research study, ensuring consistent application to new statements whenever relevant.

In the categorization stage, the researcher proceeded to group similarly coded statements together into clusters. First, all codes assigned to the data were thoroughly reviewed to ensure their accuracy. Subsequently, recurring patterns, themes, or concepts within these codes were identified. This step was crucial, as it involved synthesizing the codes into broader thematic categories that captured significant or recurring ideas present in the data. Once these patterns were recognized, they were developed into clear and descriptive themes, which encapsulated the essence of the data's content. The themes were then examined in the context of this study, focusing on how they contribute to answering the research question. This categorization process was not a one-time task but involved multiple iterations of creating clusters in various configurations, akin to "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). Through this iterative process, the researcher could discern meaningful connections and overarching themes, leading to a deeper understanding of the relationships between instructional leadership and social justice leadership as perceived by the study participants. The Findings section presents four perspectives that are derived from the four categories identified at this stage.

Finally, in the theorizing stage of data analysis, the focus shifted toward achieving a conceptual construct of the categories that emerged during the previous stage. This critical phase aimed to delve deeper into the relationships and connections among the identified categories and how they interacted with each other as integral components of one abstract construct (Miles et al., 2014). By examining the interconnections and interdependencies between the categories, the goal was to develop a coherent and comprehensive theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, which in this case was the relationship between instructional leadership and social justice leadership in the context of the Israeli school system. During this stage, the researcher sought to move beyond the surface-level descriptions of the categories and explore the underlying theoretical framework that unified them, which is presented in the "Discussion" section.

My perspective as a researcher in the fields of instructional leadership and social justice leadership is shaped by a blend of my personal and professional journeys. My tenure as a school principal has endowed me with firsthand experiences, providing me with a deeper understanding of the intricacies and pivotal role of instructional leadership and social justice leadership within educational environments. These experiences have not only enriched my comprehension but have also reinforced my belief in their vital importance in the realm of education. My academic research in these areas, conducted over recent years, has further strengthened my convictions. Moreover, my intimate familiarity with

the Israeli education system stems from a dual background—my direct administrative involvement and the extensive research I have carried out within this framework. These combined experiences have honed my sensitivity to the subtle aspects of instructional leadership and social justice leadership, especially within the unique context of the Israeli educational landscape.

Findings

Qualitative analysis of Israeli elementary school principals' perceptions revealed four perspectives concerning the relationship between instructional leadership and social justice leadership: (1) instructional leadership and social justice leadership have divergent foci; (2) instructional leadership inherently contributes to social justice; (3) social justice leadership defines the teaching approach required by instructional leadership; and (4) social justice leadership shapes the purpose of instructional leadership. Table 2 indicates which of the four perspectives were mentioned by each study participant. These four perspectives are presented below, supported by participants' comments. It should be noted that 11 of the 32 principals (34.4% of the sample) mentioned more than one perspective in their interviews or focus groups: Ten principals mentioned two perspectives, and one principal (Noah) mentioned three perspectives. In this section, the four perspectives are delineated as distinct viewpoints. The subsequent Discussion section will explore the interplay and interconnectedness of these perspectives.

Instructional Leadership and Social Justice Leadership Have Divergent Foci

The first of the four perspectives espoused by principals on the relationship between instructional leadership and social justice leadership is to view them as addressing different areas. For 13 of the 32 study participants (40.6%; see Table 2), instructional leadership primarily focuses on the principal's responsibility to improve teaching quality, whereas social justice leadership primarily emphasizes the principal's duty to promote fairness, equality, and inclusivity in other areas of the educational environment, such as school discipline, student participation in school activities, and communication with parents. The study participants did not provide detailed explanations regarding the reasons for the divergence in the focal areas of instructional leadership and social justice leadership. However, they distinctly articulated their perspective on this divergence.

David explained: “I have to monitor how teachers teach and how they treat students, and these are two different questions. I have a teacher who excels pedagogically but has an issue with treating certain students unfairly through disciplinary actions” (see Table 2 for details of David’s and the other principals’ demographic and school characteristics). From David’s perspective, instructional leadership and social justice leadership are different core tenets: instructional leadership requires him to focus on how effectively teachers teach, while social justice leadership requires him to pay attention to how fairly teachers treat their students. Similarly, Ella said:

We have to be intentional and proactive in providing information to culturally diverse families. I have teachers who teach exceptionally well and still don’t get it. It’s really important that we bridge this gap by implementing ongoing cultural competency training for our staff.

When Ella referred to culturally diverse families, she meant families originating from a range of cultural backgrounds. This diversity includes variations in ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, or socioeconomic status. For Ella, teachers should be evaluated based on two different criteria: the quality, innovation, and effectiveness of their teaching, and teachers’ evenhandedness in their interactions with and treatment of students and parents.

Likewise, during a focus group, Lydia argued: “Ensuring high student achievement and preventing teachers from taking actions based on prejudices are two fundamental elements of our educational mission that serve different purposes. They are not really related to each other.” For her, improving student academic outcomes and promoting unbiased and equitable practices among teachers both comprise essential aspects of her educational endeavor, yet they represent distinct dimensions that operate independently. Judith, who also participated in the focus group, agreed: “I concur with Lidia. Fostering high student achievement and guarding against teacher prejudices represent critical yet distinct components of our educational objectives.”

To support their claim that instructional leadership and social justice leadership are not entirely related, the study participants noted that they sometimes do conflict. Sarah addressed social justice challenges regarding her instructional team: “I find myself in a dilemma between selecting the most skilled teacher among the candidates who applied, those with exceptional teaching abilities, or prioritizing diversity within my teaching staff.” Regarding precious educational time resources, Deborah said: “Social justice is important, but dedicating time to discussing inequality in our society takes away from the time available for studying core learning materials.” From her standpoint, protecting instructional time meant ensuring that

the school day was utilized effectively for teaching and learning and minimizing non-academic distractions, including discussions on social issues. To be noted, these principals did not claim that instructional leadership essentially contradicted social justice leadership. However, they pointed out instances where instructional leadership and social justice leadership push school leaders in different directions, creating conflictual situations.

Instructional Leadership Inherently Contributes to Social Justice

An alternative perspective emerging from the current qualitative data on the relationship between instructional leadership and social justice leadership is to see instructional leadership as intrinsically promoting social justice. Of the 32 study participants, seven principals (21.9%; see Table 2) believed that instructional leadership fosters social justice because it helps students to unlock their full potential and achieve grades that accurately represent their unique abilities and motivation rather than being constrained by their backgrounds.

Principals of schools serving students from disadvantaged backgrounds (schools with a high nurturing index, please see the Participants section) claimed that it is essential for their schools to aim for high academic achievement. From their perspective, although their students face challenges that make it harder for them to succeed academically, the school must provide the conditions that allow them to unleash their maximal capabilities. Therefore, the principal needs to be an instructional leader who promotes excellence in teaching and learning that can improve even these students' outcomes. Like David, who said (above) that he would not accept achievement gaps for his students, Lisa declared: "My goal is that even though my students come from disadvantaged backgrounds, their achievements will be just as high as their peers who have a comparatively favorable position in terms of economic or social circumstances." Hannah explained how instructional leadership practices inherently meet social justice goals:

By implementing best teaching practices, we break down the barriers that might hinder students from fully exploring their talents and strengths, which can stem from factors such as limited parental support or lack of access to resources. It creates an environment where every student, regardless of background, has the opportunity to thrive.

Overall, these participants expressed their determination to ensure equitable opportunities and academic success for students from disadvantaged backgrounds through the implementation of effective teaching practices,

thereby bridging the achievement gaps between disadvantaged and privileged peers.

The elementary school principals excepted here mainly perceived instructional leadership as a means of promoting social justice in the context of the interschool achievement gap. Thus, they described the role of an instructional leader who can ensure that the achievements of students in their school who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds or rural areas are no less high than students from more privileged schools. Other study participants, who were principals of schools serving students from advantaged backgrounds, referred to the intraschool achievement gap, arguing that their instructional leadership is particularly crucial for the underprivileged students within their schools, who have fewer resources. Naomi said: "All my efforts to improve achievement are specifically important for those of our students who come from disadvantaged families. The others would have been fine without us." Linda asserted: "While it may be true that all students can benefit from high-quality teaching and a supportive learning environment, some students face more obstacles. We are here mainly for these students." Dina claimed: "The quality education we provide here is particularly transformative for students from less privileged backgrounds." Naomi, Linda, and Dina emphasized that their efforts to enhance achievement were particularly significant for students from disadvantaged families and communities who were attending their more privileged schools.

Social Justice Leadership Defines the Teaching Approaches Required by Instructional Leadership

Another perspective on the relationship between instructional leadership and social justice that principals revealed in their semistructured interviews suggests that social justice precepts are what instructional leaders utilize to define which teaching methods are just and suitable for implementation. According to nine of the 32 study participants (28.1%; see Table 2), principals as instructional leaders are responsible for applying the teaching methods that social justice leadership has identified as coinciding with the principles of fairness, equality, and inclusivity in education. From this perspective, the study participants expected their teachers to adopt culturally responsive teaching approaches. They asked their teachers to incorporate literature written by diverse authors representing various cultures and parts of the world. They believed that all students should be able to read about characters who resemble them or their families. Simultaneously, they emphasized the importance of students reading texts that fostered understanding and knowledge about others.

For example, Linda explained: "I want protagonists from different countries of origin to be visible in the classroom and authors from different countries of origin to be represented in the classroom library." Linda expected her teaching staff to expose students to different cultural experiences and narratives. She believed such representation could contribute to a more comprehensive and well-rounded education, encouraging students to develop empathy, understanding, and appreciation for various perspectives. Samuel also valued enriching students' understanding and appreciation of different cultures to broaden their perspectives and promote acceptance and respect for diversity within society. He said: "It's important to me that students learn about the diverse ways different families and communities celebrate holidays, beyond just those observed in mainstream populations."

Further evidence of how social justice leadership was seen as defining teaching approaches required by instructional leadership emerged from these study participants' descriptions of their best instructional practices. They believed that students with diverse abilities and cultural backgrounds should be taught together in the same classroom. Therefore, they encouraged their teachers to create a welcoming classroom atmosphere and ensure equitable opportunities for all students to participate and engage in the educational process. Rachel explained:

I want teachers to use a variety of instructional formats and transition to flexible groupings because it provides various students with the opportunity for optimal learning within the classroom. This diversity in teaching methods allows us to address the unique learning needs and preferences of each student, making education more personalized and effective.

During a focus group, Diana said: "I encourage teachers to utilize flexible groupings, which may include small groups, stations/centers, and paired learning. For younger students, these groupings are often teacher led, while for older students, they can be student led with teacher monitoring." Benjamin, who also participated in that focus group, added:

I want teachers to consider how tasks can be tailored to accommodate different student goals, strengths, and learning profiles. This can be achieved through various strategies, such as providing concrete examples, using simplified text, and breaking tasks into smaller components.

Benjamin claimed that offering flexibility in how students approach tasks creates a space where each student feels empowered and supported, leading to a sense of belongingness.

Social Justice Leadership Shapes the Purpose of Instructional Leadership

Based on the qualitative data gathered on the relationship between instructional leadership and social justice leadership, almost half of the principals espoused the perspective that social justice leadership helps specify the purpose of instructional leadership. Traditionally, instructional leadership's purpose is seen as enhancing learning, teaching, and results within a school. However, 15 of the 32 study participants (46.9%; see Table 2) argued that social justice leadership brings greater precision to instructional leaders' definitions of this purpose. Social justice leadership emphasizes that instructional leadership is not solely focused on improving teaching, learning, and results in general but also on ensuring that every student, regardless of their abilities or marginalized characteristics, can achieve their highest potential.

This integration can significantly transform the nature of instructional leadership. By ensuring that every student achieves their full potential, it broadens the focus of instructional leadership to guarantee that educational improvements benefit all students, especially those from marginalized or underrepresented groups. This transformation involves adopting teaching practices that are both effective and sensitive to the diverse needs of students. It also includes the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, ensuring that students from various backgrounds have equal access to high-quality education. The primary motivation for this integration is to foster an educational environment that not only pursues academic excellence but also upholds the principles of fairness and inclusivity, thus ensuring the success of every student.

Study participants acknowledged that a sole focus on raising the whole school's average achievements does not guarantee improved outcomes for all students. In some cases, the increase in average grades could be attributed to improvements seen only among high-performing students, leaving others behind. Noah asserted: "I am committed to fostering an environment where *all students* can thrive academically. We consistently strive to improve teaching and learning practices, intending to enable *every student* to succeed academically" [italics added]. For Noah, social justice leadership intervenes to refine the goal of instructional leadership, highlighting the critical need for principals to ensure that every student experiences academic growth and achieves their full potential.

Accordingly, the study participants reported that they expand their school's instructional mission to include not only overall school performance but also the achievements of all students. Miriam noted that: "The school's

mission statement must not deal with education in general, such as ‘our mission is to provide high-quality education,’ or even with students in general, such as ‘our mission is to foster our students’ love for learning.’” Instead, “It must refer to all students, such as ‘our mission is for each child to build skills that set them up for success.’” For Miriam, the school’s instructional mission was relevant to everyone attending the school because social justice leadership compels instructional leaders to broaden their focus beyond the overall grade point average.

In pursuit of the goal of academic success for all students, the study participants expressed concerns about those school structures that focus on enhancing student achievements, which appear to favor specific students while neglecting the achievements of others. For instance, Rachel voiced her disagreement with ability grouping, despite its positive impact on the school’s performance in national tests. She stated: “Dividing students into different instructional groups based on their perceived abilities or achievement levels may lead to higher school results, but it restricts the growth and development of certain students, which is simply unfair.” Ruth decided against implementing a fee-based STEM enrichment program at the school, stating, “Not everyone can afford to pay, and I don’t want to deepen the gaps within the school. I aim to enable every student to succeed.”

Moreover, these study participants expected their teachers to assume responsibility for the academic success of all students, including those who begin at a lower starting point. They required teachers to set high expectations for all students and support struggling students to meet those expectations. Maya explained: “I want teachers to demonstrate a belief in each student’s ability to succeed and communicate that belief to them regularly. Teachers should assign challenging but achievable tasks that push students to reach their full potential.” According to her viewpoint, teachers should consistently show faith in each student’s ability to succeed, thus assigning challenging yet manageable tasks and encouraging students to strive for their highest potential.

Discussion

This qualitative study aimed to address the previously mentioned gap in the literature concerning the relationship between instructional leadership and social justice leadership in schools. It investigated the perceptions of Israeli elementary school principals, who were recommended by their superintendents for effectively implementing these two leadership approaches in their schools. In their interviews and focus groups, these successful principals shared four different perspectives on how the two leadership frameworks

may interrelate in their everyday work, emphasizing (1) instructional leadership and social justice leadership have divergent foci; (2) instructional leadership inherently contributes to social justice; (3) social justice leadership defines the teaching approach required by instructional leadership; and (4) social justice leadership shapes the purpose of instructional leadership.

A Unifying Theoretical Framework Connecting the Four Perspectives

The four perspectives, rather than being incompatible, exhibit a capacity to coexist and complement each other within the context of this study. In fact, the empirical finding that about one-third of the principals were not confined to choosing just a singular perspective about these two leadership frameworks' interrelations (see Table 2) suggests that many principals are able to simultaneously uphold multiple perspectives. This shift from a trade-off (either/or) to a paradoxical (both/and) approach (Russ, 2018) supports the complementarity of principals' four perspectives.

Moreover, as illustrated in Figure 1, these four perspectives can be seen as intricately interconnected in that they represent distinct areas that arise from two essential questions: To what extent does social justice leadership influence instructional leadership goals? And to what extent does social justice leadership impact instructional leadership practices? Namely, the figure's vertical arrow represents perspectives that demonstrate the ascending influence of social justice leadership on the *goals* of instructional leadership (from perspective 1 to 2 and from perspective 3 to 4). As indicated in the accompanying explanation, this entails redefining the objectives of instructional leadership to emphasize social justice, aiming for high achievement across all student groups. The desired outcomes focus on narrowing both in-school and between-school achievement gaps as well as integrating social justice into the school's instructional vision, program, and teacher development initiatives. The horizontal arrow represents perspectives that demonstrate the ascending influence of social justice leadership on the *practices* of instructional leadership (from perspective 1 to 3 and from perspective 2 to 4). As outlined in the accompanying explanation, this requires adapting instructional practices to be more culturally responsive, equitable, and inclusive. The desired outcomes aim to improve every student's sense of belonging, particularly for those who are marginalized or excluded, as well as incorporating social justice into the school's instructional program, fostering an inclusive instructional environment, and enhancing teacher development practices to support these objectives.

Specifically, the first perspective (i.e., viewing the two leadership frameworks as divergent in focus; see bottom left quadrant of Figure 1) asserts

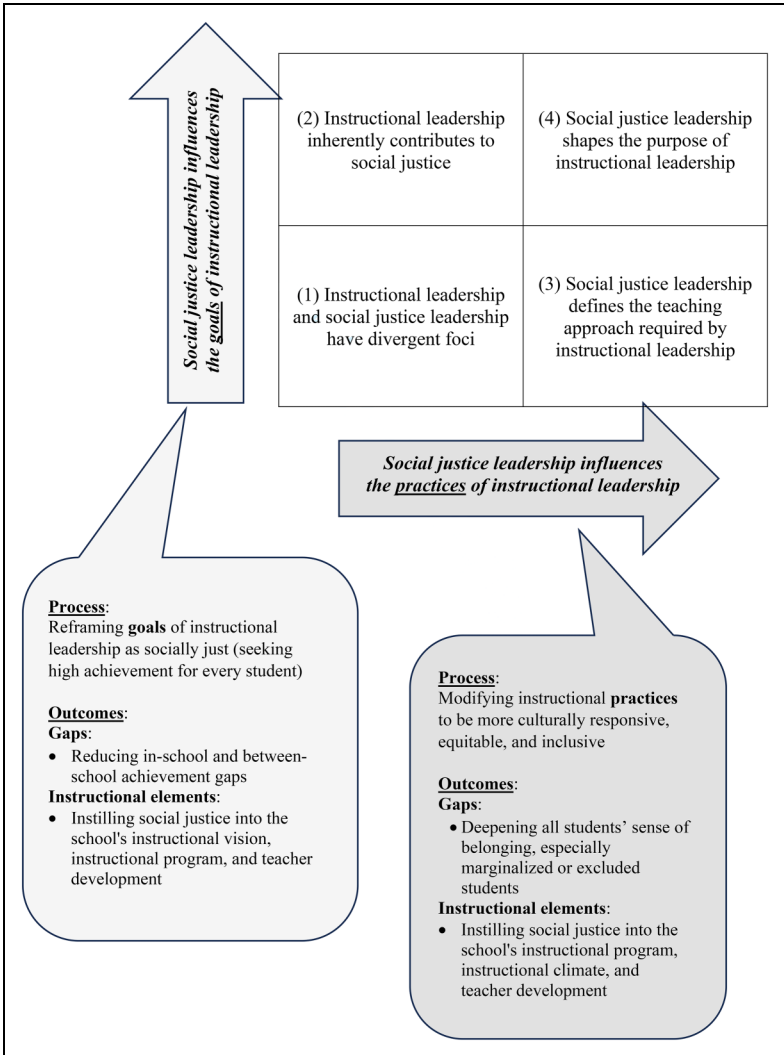


Figure 1. Unifying framework for principals' four perspectives: Social justice leadership's influence on instructional goals and practices.

that instructional leadership and social justice leadership are distinct frameworks, operating independently without interaction. Consequently, social justice leadership has a limited effect on both the goals and practices of instructional leadership. The second perspective (top left quadrant) contends

that instructional leadership is inherently aligned with social justice, promoting it without requiring adjustments. Thus, social justice leadership shapes the goal of instructional leadership but does not alter its practices. The third perspective (bottom right quadrant) posits that social justice leadership defines appropriate teaching methods to be applied by instructional leadership. Consequently, social justice predominantly impacts the practices of instructional leadership. The fourth perspective (top right quadrant) views social justice leadership both as expanding the goal or purpose of instructional leadership—to encompass all students—and as influencing its practices—to now expect teachers to strive for high achievements by all students.

Therefore, it may be argued that school leaders who wish to attain full integration of the two leadership frameworks must consider the significant impacts of social justice leadership on both the goals and the practices of instructional leadership. If principals do consider both the influence of social justice leadership on instructional goals and its implications on instructional practices, it appears that they can nurture every student's unique assets while addressing two major types of disparities faced in school principalship: achievement gaps, referring to disparities in academic performance and among different groups of students (Brooks et al., 2017; Copur-Gencturk et al., 2020), and belongingness gaps, referring to feelings of exclusion or alienation experienced by some students within the school community (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2018; Flores & Bagwell, 2021). By recognizing and valuing the individual strengths and contributions of each student, principals can create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment that fosters a sense of belonging and achievement for all and addresses these two types of gaps. Although these gaps are interrelated, the process of reframing the goals of instructional leadership to account for the academic success of every student primarily contributes to reducing between-school and in-school achievement gaps (Wang, 2015), while the process of modifying instructional practices to be more culturally responsive and inclusive is a primary means for deepening the sense of belonging of all students, particularly those who have historically been excluded (see Figure 1).

Furthermore, when principals take into account both the impact of social justice leadership on instructional goals and its ramifications on instructional practices, they infuse social justice factors into each of the four elements of instructional leadership (Shaked, 2023) as presented in Table 1 (instructional vision, instructional program, instructional climate, and developing teachers). The process of redefining the objectives of instructional leadership to encompass high achievement for every student instills social justice in creating the school's instructional vision and coordinating the instructional program. Adapting instructional practices to be more culturally responsive, inclusive,

and equitable enables coordination of the instructional program and cultivation of the instructional climate to become means for promoting social justice. Both involve developing teachers to effectively implement best practices of teaching based on social justice principles (see Figure 1).

Study Implications, Limitations, and Directions for Future Research and Intervention

This study expands available knowledge on principals' perspectives about the connections between instructional leadership and social justice leadership. The existing body of literature tends to treat instructional leadership and social justice leadership as distinct and separate entities (Hallinger et al., 2020; Wang, 2018). One reason for this distinction could be the belief that instructional leadership inherently supports social justice objectives by empowering students to achieve their full potential (DeMatthews, 2015). Conversely, the delineation might also arise from the emergence of social justice leadership as a critical response to the instructional leadership paradigm. Instructional leadership, typically centered on the technical aspects of education, has faced criticism for neglecting the inequities in educational outcomes. In contrast, social justice leadership focuses on promoting equality and inclusion, actively working to bridge the gaps overlooked by traditional educational methodologies (Canlı & Demirtaş, 2022; Shields & Hesbol, 2020).

The limited available literature about the relationship between instructional leadership and social justice leadership has predominantly represented the third perspective (Hartung & Reimer, 2019; Mugisha, 2013), which asserts that social justice leadership delineates the appropriate and equitable teaching methods that the principal should implement as an instructional leader (Chen, 2017; Howley et al., 2019; Marshall & Khalifa, 2018). The current findings suggest that social justice can serve as a logic of instructional leadership (Rigby, 2014) in multiple ways as depicted in the four different perspectives voiced by the current study participants. Hence, for successful integration of instructional leadership and social justice leadership frameworks in schools, principals need to proactively consider the two key influences of social justice leadership: on instructional goals and on instructional practices. When the impact of social justice leadership on both the goals and practices of instructional leadership is deeper and more significant, principals' integration between these two frameworks will become more comprehensive.

The contextual limitations of this study should be noted (Hallinger, 2018). The context of the Israeli school system is one where principals are clearly

expected to serve as instructional leaders (Capstones, 2008; Israeli Ministry of Education, 2019), while explicit requirements for demonstrating social justice leadership are not in place (Arar, 2015; Oplatka, 2013). The absence of direct training for principals to integrate instructional leadership and social justice leadership may account for the diversity of perspectives found in this study regarding the relationship between the two frameworks. It could be speculated that if principals had undergone systematic training for social justice leadership, a more cohesive understanding of its relationship with instructional leadership could be attained. Future comparative research would be valuable in examining how principals integrate instructional leadership and social justice leadership not only in other countries but also in diverse contexts. Additionally, the focus of social justice leadership among Israeli principals primarily revolves around addressing disparities linked to socioeconomic status and ethnic backgrounds. As noted earlier, the Israeli education system is segregated into Jewish and Arab sectors, distinguished by the language of instruction—Hebrew in Jewish schools and Arabic in Arab schools. Therefore, while discussions about social justice issues concerning the differences between Jewish and Arab communities are pertinent in the context of the wider Israeli society, these disparities are generally not evident within individual schools due to this linguistic and cultural division. This unique set-up significantly influences the nature and extent of social justice leadership within Israeli educational institutions. Importantly, due to notable variances in perceptions of leadership for social justice within different sectors of the Israeli education system, as highlighted by Arar (2015), this study exclusively focused on participants from the Hebrew-speaking sector. Exploring the perspectives and experiences of principals from the Arabic-speaking sector represents a valuable avenue for future research. Such a study could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between instructional leadership and social justice leadership within various educational contexts in Israel. Additionally, it could offer comparative insights and enhance the generalizability of findings across different cultural and linguistic educational settings.

Additionally, future research can address the limitations of the current study. While this study presents new data on how principals perceive the connection between instructional leadership and social justice leadership, it was limited to elementary school principals to avoid addressing disparities between elementary and secondary (middle/high) schools (Gedik & Bellibas, 2015; Hallinger, 2012). To overcome this limitation, researchers could replicate the study with secondary (middle/high) school leaders. Furthermore, the data collected for this study relied on self-reported information, which may be influenced by participants' subjective perspectives and

recall accuracy. To enhance the research outcomes, future studies could utilize direct observations and interviews with teachers to describe their experiences with principals in relation to instructional leadership and social justice leadership. Moreover, the current study did not consider potential relationships between principals' perceptions about the connections between the two leadership frameworks and their personal characteristics, such as gender, experience, and education. Therefore, future research could be directed towards uncovering any potential associations among these variables.

Becoming a social justice leader requires the principal to possess not only an unwavering commitment to take action but also a profound comprehension of the inequities that persist in today's schools (Bertrand & Rodela, 2018; Canlı & Demirtaş, 2022). Therefore, this study suggests the importance of addressing the relationship between instructional leadership and social justice leadership across different stages of a principal's career. The presence of divergent or even conflicting views among several study participants suggests that these perspectives are not necessarily fixed and could be subject to change. This variability indicates that holding a particular viewpoint may still be a matter of choice. As such, individuals might be influenced by new information or different experiences to adjust their opinions. Consequently, it is possible to facilitate discussions or interventions that encourage people to reconsider their positions and possibly adopt alternative viewpoints. First, during preparation programs designed for aspiring principals, there should be a deliberate emphasis on the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively combine social justice leadership with instructional leadership. Induction programs for novice principals should also focus on providing support and mentorship that nurtures the integration of instructional and social justice leadership. Finally, professional development meetings for in-service principals, serving as on-the-job training, should continue to foster and reinforce the connection between instructional leadership and social justice leadership. These meetings can be utilized as platforms to discuss and reflect on real-world challenges and successes experienced by principals in their leadership roles. By exchanging best practices, sharing resources, and engaging in collaborative problem-solving, in-service principals can enhance their ability to merge instructional leadership with social justice leadership. Holding these discussions across the various stages of a principal's career ensures that school leaders are equipped to effectively navigate the complexities of incorporating instructional leadership and social justice leadership so that they can create learning environments that are more equitable, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of all students, regardless of their background or circumstances.

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