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How Israeli Principals Foster Social Justice Among Teachers

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ABSTRACT

The existing literature on promoting social justice in schools primarily focuses on social justice for students, with limited attention to social justice for teachers. This study aims to conceptualize how principals promote social justice among teachers. Data were collected from 28 principals in Israel using semi-structured interviews, and the analysis involved four stages: sorting, coding, categorizing, and theorizing. The findings reveal that the dimensions of organizational justice – distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice – are applicable to school leadership. These findings indicate that while social justice for students is largely rooted in moral values, principals view social justice for teachers not only through an ethical lens but also as a practical strategy that can lead to increased motivation, stronger cooperation, and enhanced trust.

Introduction

The research literature on social justice in education encompasses various aspects of student learning, including the opportunities available to each student, the outcomes they achieve, and the distribution of resources that support their learning (Levinson et al., 2022; Major & Briant, 2023). Additionally, it delves into social justice across a wide range of student experiences, such as disciplinary practices, support services for students with disabilities, and social inclusion (Blanden et al., 2023; Cochran-Smith & Stringer Keefe, 2022). Furthermore, it seeks to examine how numerous factors – such as gender, race, national origin, sexual orientation, native language, and other potentially marginalizing characteristics – influence the design and effectiveness of students' learning environments (Kuteesa et al., 2024; Kyriakides, 2020).

This body of literature is comprehensive, broad, and diverse. However, it predominantly focuses on students. While existing research extensively discusses achieving social justice for students, there is a notable lack of discourse on how social justice is applied to teachers. This gap motivated the present study, which aims to explore social justice for teachers. By addressing this overlooked aspect, the study seeks to provide a more holistic understanding of social justice in education.

Specifically, this study investigates the perceptions of school principals regarding their efforts to foster social justice among teachers. It is well-established that principals should act as social justice leaders, as they “are vital to ensuring excellent educational opportunities and outcomes for each student, especially students of color, those living in low-income circumstances, students eligible for English language learning services, and others historically underserved in public school systems” (Honig & Honsa, 2020, p. 192). However, there is limited understanding of the ways principals can support and enhance social justice within their teaching staff. Therefore, this

study addresses the following research question: How do principals promote social justice for teachers?

The present study was conducted within the Israeli school system, which serves approximately two million students across three educational levels: elementary (grades 1–6, ages 6–12), middle school (grades 7–9, ages 12–15), and high school (grades 10–12, ages 15–19). Education is mandatory from kindergarten through 12th grade (Blass, 2018). The school system encompasses nearly 170,000 teachers and 5,500 principals (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2023). Developing a social justice orientation is rarely emphasized in Israeli principals' preparation and professional development. Training programs often lack comprehensive modules on promoting social justice in diverse school settings (Sabbagh & Resh, 2018). Consequently, principals' perspectives on social justice are deeply rooted in their personal values and educational beliefs. Their formative experiences and convictions shape their vision for social justice within their schools (Arar, 2019).

Background: Social Justice in Education and Organizational Justice

The exploration of social justice for teachers intersects with two primary research areas. These are social justice in education and organizational justice.

The first research area, social justice in education, refers to the pursuit of fairness and equity within the educational system (Martínez-Valdivia et al., 2020). It involves recognizing and addressing systemic inequalities and oppressive practices that affect learning experiences and opportunities (Canlı & Demirtaş, 2022). This includes efforts to ensure access to quality education, resources, and support for all students, creating inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments, and actively working to dismantle barriers related to race, class, gender, ability, and other factors that contribute to educational disparities (Theoharis, 2024; Wang, 2018). The goal is to foster equitable outcomes and promote the inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in all aspects of education (Bertrand & Rodela, 2018). It entails “understanding the inequities that persist in schools and taking action” (DeMatthews, 2015, p. 145). Put differently, it requires “identifying and undoing these oppressive and unjust practices and replacing them with more equitable, culturally appropriate ones” (Furman, 2012, p. 194).

Striving for social justice in education is fundamentally driven by a commitment to addressing inequities within the educational system. Specifically, it focuses on three key areas of inequity: learning opportunities and academic outcomes, a sense of belonging, and disciplinary practices (Celeste et al., 2019; Pearman et al., 2019). When it comes to learning opportunities and academic outcomes, schools should operate on the belief that all students can succeed academically. They should transform into environments where all students receive high-quality educational opportunities tailored to their individual needs (Wang, 2015) and achieve proficiency, regardless of their characteristics (Brooks et al., 2017; Copur-Gencturk et al., 2020). When fostering a sense of belonging, schools must embrace the idea that every student brings unique cultural strengths to the classroom (Muñiz, 2019). They have to promote inclusive education, where all children, regardless of their differences or special needs, attend the same schools and classrooms (Amor et al., 2019; Flores & Bagwell, 2021), and create genuine learning opportunities for traditionally excluded groups such as children with disabilities and immigrants (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2018; Messiou, 2017). In terms of discipline, schools must address punishment gaps (Dutil, 2020; Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2018) and implement disciplinary practices aimed at keeping all students in learning environments (Johnson & Constant, 2021). This requires adopting an approach that emphasizes positive reinforcement over punishment, as it promotes greater social justice compared to traditional, punishment-oriented methods (Oxley & George, 2021).

The second research area, organizational justice, refers to how employees perceive workplace procedures, interactions, and outcomes to be fair. It is “the study of employees' perceptions of justice in the workplace” (Adamovic, 2023, p. 762), which “highlights fairness issues within and across the organizational cycle” (Avery et al., 2023, p. 390). Organizational justice has emerged as one of the most

prominent and frequently studied topics in industrial-organizational psychology, organizational behavior, and human resource management (Rupp et al., 2017).

Cropanzano et al. (2007, p. 34) assert that “organizational justice – members’ sense of the moral propriety of how they are treated – is the “glue” that allows people to work together effectively . . . In contrast, injustice is like a corrosive solvent . . . hurtful to individuals and harmful to organizations.” Particularly, the literature on organizational justice highlights its correlation with various organizational outcomes (Adamovic, 2023; Bobocel, 2021). Due to its relevance to achieving economic goals, task performance is frequently analyzed as an outcome of organizational justice (Colquitt et al., 2013). Another widely studied outcome of organizational justice is organizational citizenship behavior, which are voluntary behaviors exhibited by employees that are not part of their formal job requirements but contribute positively to the overall functioning of the organization, such as helping colleagues, being flexible with work requirements, and demonstrating initiative (Organ, 2018). Organizational citizenship behavior is often used to illustrate the effects of organizational justice (Fassina et al., 2008). Managers can also leverage organizational justice as an effective tool to reduce the need for retaliation and minimize counterproductive work behaviors, such as conflict or theft (Rupp et al., 2017). Additionally, research has linked organizational justice to organizational identification, suggesting that higher perceptions of organizational justice enhance identification, leading to increased cooperation and extra-role behavior (Blader & Tyler, 2009). Moreover, high organizational justice boosts employees’ job satisfaction (Colquitt et al., 2013), while low organizational justice has been associated with higher turnover intentions (Conlon et al., 2013). Furthermore, longitudinal field studies have shown a strong relationship between organizational justice and trust in supervisors (Colquitt et al., 2015). Treating employees with justice is essential for establishing effective relationships (Cropanzano et al., 2017).

The research literature on social justice in education examines how schools can mitigate inequities both within educational institutions and in society (Martínez-Valdivia et al., 2020). In contrast, the literature on organizational justice focuses on how it influences organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, work performance, and turnover (Bobocel, 2021). This suggests that the literature on social justice in education views the pursuit of social justice within the educational system primarily as a moral imperative, emphasizing a commitment to creating an inclusive and just environment for all. Conversely, the literature on organizational justice emphasizes social justice as a means to enhance productivity and effectiveness within organizations.

As mentioned above, the extensive and diverse research literature on social justice in schools primarily focuses on social justice for students, leaving a gap in understanding how these standards apply to teaching staff (Gümüş et al., 2021). The limited existing research on social justice for teachers is rooted in the organizational justice literature (Desrumaux et al., 2023; Hermawan et al., 2023). Therefore, this study employs the dimensions of organizational justice as a theoretical framework to analyze its findings.

Theoretical Framework: Dimensions of Organizational Justice

Organizational justice encompasses three core dimensions: distributive justice, procedural justice, and interpersonal justice (Adamovic, 2023; Rupp et al., 2017). These dimensions are detailed below.

Distributive Justice

Distributive justice in the workplace refers to the perceived fairness of how rewards and costs are apportioned within an organization. To achieve distributive justice, resources, benefits, responsibilities, and requirements should be impartially allocated among employees (Bala Subramanian et al., 2022).

Distributive justice can be founded on the foundations of either equality or equity (Minow, 2021). Equality refers to the uniform distribution of resources to all individuals, regardless of

their specific needs or circumstances. In contrast, equity involves the fair allocation of resources tailored to each individual's unique needs and challenges to ensure an equal outcome (Berdine, 2023). While equality aims for uniformity, equity seeks to recognize and address individuals' diverse conditions and barriers, thereby fostering true fairness (Wolbring & Lillywhite, 2021).

One primary foundation of distributive justice is equity theory (Adams, 1965). This theory posits that employee motivation is determined by comparing the ratio of inputs – such as hard work, skill level, determination, efforts, and enthusiasm – to outputs – such as salary, benefits, performance appraisals, status symbols, and satisfaction (Al-Zawahreh & Al-Madi, 2012). When employees perceive a fair balance between their inputs and outputs relative to others, they are more likely to be motivated and satisfied with their jobs. Conversely, perceived inequities can lead to demotivation and dissatisfaction, negatively impacting productivity and engagement (Colquitt et al., 2013). While many of these factors cannot be precisely quantified or perfectly compared, the theory asserts that achieving equity regarding employees' inputs and outputs across the organization is essential for shaping their relationship with their work (Bratton et al., 2021).

Procedural Justice

Procedural justice in the workplace involves apparent fairness and consistency in applying policies among all organization members. For procedural justice to be attained, employees should be treated with dignity and respect and given an opportunity to voice their concerns. Employers are expected to act with neutrality and transparency, make ethical and unbiased judgments, and convey trustworthy motives (Colquitt et al., 2013).

While distributive justice emphasizes fairness in outcomes, procedural justice emphasizes fairness in the decision-making processes. Procedural justice can sometimes outweigh distributive justice, as employees may accept an unfavorable outcome if they believe the decision-making process was conducted fairly. For instance, workers who receive low scores in performance evaluations and, therefore, are not promoted may be more accepting if they trust that the evaluation system is impartial and clear. This belief in the fairness of the process can help mitigate dissatisfaction with the outcome (Baldwin, 2006). However, it can also have a negative effect. Adverse outcomes received through fair procedures, as opposed to unfair ones, are more likely to make employees blame themselves, which can diminish their self-regard.

Organization members value procedural justice not only as a means to achieve fair outcomes but also because it demonstrates that the organization itself is trustworthy. Procedural justice reduces uncertainty and makes decisions more predictable. It helps employees understand their responsibilities for outcomes and ensures that managers are committed to upholding normative standards of moral conduct (Bobocel & Gosse, 2015).

Interactional Justice

Interactional justice in the workplace focuses on the treatment and attitude toward employees. Within the organizational justice framework, distributive justice concerns the fairness of outcomes, procedural justice addresses the fairness of decision-making processes, and interactional justice deals with the perception of fairness in the execution of decisions (Bhattacharya, 2014). In fact, the notion of interactional justice has continually evolved and deepened alongside the development of organizational justice theory. In the beginning, researchers exploring organizational justice highlighted distributive justice. Subsequently, some researchers argued that distributive justice neglected procedures used to determine outcome distributions or allocations. Then, the concept of interactional justice was introduced, addressing the employees' perception of justice during the policy implementation process (Dai & Xie, 2016).

Specifically, interactional justice is divided into two components: interpersonal justice and informational justice. Interpersonal justice pertains to whether managers treat employees with respect, sensitivity, and empathy when implementing policies, and informational justice involves managers providing relevant information to employees, including explanations for the decisions made and the resulting outcomes (Bies, 2015).

The literature has linked perceptions of interactional justice to various individual-level outcome variables. Studies indicate that when employees perceive high levels of interactional justice, they are more likely to develop trust in their supervisors, demonstrate stronger organizational commitment, and experience greater job satisfaction. Conversely, low interactional justice levels can result in active and passive counterproductive work behaviors (Thompson et al., 2021).

Overall, while the concept of organizational justice is well-established in administrative literature, it remains largely overlooked in the field of educational administration. Hoy and Tarter (2007), who underscored the symbiotic relations between trust and organizational justice in schools, said (p. 292):

Our essential argument is that matters of justice and fairness in the school workplace should not be taken lightly. Anyone who doubts the validity of this statement simply needs to visit a school and to question teachers about how fairly they are treated on the job; then stand back and listen to the lively discussion that ensues.

Despite its relevance to creating fair and effective educational environments, the application of organizational justice tenets in schools has not received sufficient research attention (Burns & DiPaola, 2013). This deficiency highlights the need for further research on how principals can promote social justice for teachers, ensuring a more equitable and supportive work environment (Burns & DiPaola, 2013). The current qualitative study aims to narrow this knowledge gap.

Method

Participants

The participants in this study were 28 school principals from Israel. The Israeli school system is divided into a Jewish sector and an Arab sector. This division is arguably a social justice issue in itself. However, this study does not address social justice in the overall structure of the school system but rather focuses on social justice within individual schools. Given the significant differences between the two sectors (Arar, 2019), this study specifically examined Jewish schools, leaving the study of Arab schools for future research.

To identify study participants, the researcher contacted 12 superintendents, provided them with a brief explanation of social justice in education, and asked them to recommend principals who exemplified social justice promotion. This approach, while involving a form of reputational sampling via superintendents and carrying the potential for bias and invalidity, was part of a purposive sampling strategy to select “information-rich” cases – a method considered more effective than random sampling in qualitative research (van Rijnsoever & Derrick, 2017). Each superintendent suggested 2–3 principals, resulting in 32 potential participants. Four principals declined to participate, leaving a total of 28 participants, comprising 20 women and eight men. The average age of the participants was 50.46 years (ranging from 39 to 59), and they had an average of 7.82 years of experience as principals (ranging from 2 to 15 years). All participants except one held a master’s degree. Table 1 outlines participant demographics, school characteristics, and the dimensions of organizational justice they mentioned (see the Findings section below).

For ethical considerations, participants confirmed that their involvement was voluntary. While the superintendents nominated potential participants, they were not informed about which individuals ultimately chose to take part in the study. They were guaranteed confidentiality, with pseudonyms used, and provided written consent after an explanation of the study’s procedures.

Table 1. Participants' demographics, school information, and dimensions.

	Demographics					School Characteristics		Dimensions		
	Pseudonym	Sex	Age in years	Years of Experience	Education	District	No. of Students	Distributive Justice	Procedural Justice	Interactional Justice
1	Alma	Female	43	6	MA	North	300		✓	
2	Ana	Female	52	8	MA	South	400	✓	✓	
3	Clara	Female	56	14	BA	Tel Aviv	150			✓
4	Dana	Female	56	3	MA	Haifa	250		✓	✓
5	Danielle	Female	49	12	MA	South	350		✓	
6	Danny	Male	50	11	MA	Haifa	250		✓	
7	Edna	Female	56	6	MA	Haifa	300	✓		✓
8	Eleanor	Female	55	4	MA	Tel Aviv	250			✓
9	Erez	Male	49	9	MA	Jerusalem	400	✓		
10	Jack	Male	46	6	MA	Haifa	500		✓	
11	Jonathan	Male	51	4	MA	Jerusalem	350	✓		
12	Joseph	Male	44	5	MA	Center	350			✓
13	Leah	Female	57	11	MA	Jerusalem	150		✓	
14	Linda	Female	52	4	MA	Jerusalem	400	✓		✓
15	Maya	Female	48	2	MA	Jerusalem	150			✓
16	Michael	Male	52	9	MA	North	300		✓	
17	Nathaniel	Male	59	8	MA	Tel Aviv	300	✓	✓	
18	Rachel	Female	56	15	MA	Jerusalem	450		✓	
19	Rafael	Male	54	13	MA	North	250	✓		
20	Ravit	Female	48	3	MA	Haifa	450	✓		
21	Rina	Female	55	14	MA	Center	250		✓	✓
22	Ruth	Female	49	3	MA	Jerusalem	450	✓		
23	Sarah	Female	51	8	MA	Tel Aviv	200	✓		
24	Sharon	Female	39	6	MA	Center	450			✓
25	Sherry	Female	51	8	MA	South	250	✓	✓	
26	Sonia	Female	39	9	MA	North	400	✓		
27	Sylvia	Female	49	7	MA	Center	650			✓
28	Tamara	Female	47	11	MA	Center	350		✓	✓
Total mentions of domain								12	13	11

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through Zoom interviews designed to explore how principals promote social justice among teachers. The interview questions were derived from the author's professional understanding of the challenges and dynamics within schools, ensuring that they addressed practical, context-specific aspects of social justice as experienced by principals. Questions included: What does social justice for teachers mean to you? How do you integrate social justice considerations for teachers into your role as a principal? Can you describe any specific actions you have taken to ensure social justice among your teaching staff? When and why might social justice not be maintained for teachers in your school? The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for the adaptation of pre-prepared questions to accommodate new insights as they emerged (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach facilitated dynamic interactions, making the interviews more conversational than rigid Q&A sessions. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, with an average duration of about an hour. In three instances where uncertainties arose during transcript analysis, supplementary interviews were conducted, each lasting approximately 15 minutes.

Data Analysis

The data analysis included four phases: sorting, coding, categorizing, and theorizing. Initially, the data were sorted to identify statements related to the research question of how principals promote social justice for teachers. This phase was crucial, as each decision about which statements to include was based on analytical discernment (Miles et al., 2014). During the coding phase, these statements were assigned short descriptors (2–5 words) reflecting the responsibilities of principals

in promoting social justice (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The coding approach was data-driven, allowing concepts to emerge organically from the text rather than starting with a predetermined set of codes (Saldaña, 2021). In the categorization phase, similar codes were grouped into clusters, enabling the identification of patterns and the formation of broader interpretative categories. In the theorizing phase, the goal was to develop a theory that could explain the relationships between the different clusters, providing a comprehensive understanding of how the various groups of codes formed a cohesive whole. Various theoretical frameworks were examined, including those related to school leadership and social justice. This process required multiple rounds of re-coding and re-clustering, making the data analysis nonlinear. Ultimately, the organizational justice framework was identified as the most suitable for organizing the collected data. Consequently, the findings section is structured according to this framework.

Findings: Dimensions of Organizational Justice in School Leadership

This study aims to conceptualize how principals promote social justice for teachers. The data analysis revealed that the dimensions of organizational justice – distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice – are applicable to school leadership. These dimensions effectively classify and explain the actions taken by principals to promote social justice, as described and illustrated below.

Distributive Justice

Interviews with the study participants illustrated how principals ensured distributive justice among teachers by maintaining equity in the distribution of workloads, rewards, and resources. Although all teachers were subject to the same work requirements and received salaries based on a standardized salary scale, the study participants described themselves as actively influencing teachers' working conditions. They highlighted the importance of managing these conditions equitably, ensuring fairness across all aspects of the teachers' professional environments. Edna explained:

It may seem that I have no influence over teachers' work requirements and salaries, but I actually have a significant impact on their comfort at work and overall compensation. It is my responsibility to ensure fairness in these matters.

While some study participants contended that social justice for teachers was structurally ensured through standardized work requirements and a uniform salary scale, most underscored the critical need for equity in various areas where they shape teachers' working conditions, such as the structure of the teacher's schedule (Ruth), the student groups they teach (Sarah), their free days during the week (Erez), the specific classroom or building where they teach (Ana), permissions for absences (Jonathan), and other pertinent factors.

The study participants argued that fairness for teachers is crucial not just from a moral standpoint but also because it impacts their motivation. Sonia explained:

If a teacher feels they are not valued equally compared to their peers, they may become less inclined to invest their full energy into teaching. This can lead to decreased enthusiasm and participation in classroom activities, professional development opportunities, or school initiatives.

Equity was also evident in the research participants' expectation that middle leaders in the school meet the same requirements as ordinary teachers, as said by Linda:

When I assumed the principal role at this school, I found that the vice principals were exempt from yard duty, unlike the other teachers. They argued that breaks were essential for meeting with teachers, which I understood, but it wasn't fair that only regular teachers had these duties. I insisted that all team members, myself included, participate in yard duty.

The research participants also stressed the importance of uniformly rewarding various middle leaders within the school, aligning these rewards with established norms in other schools. Similarly to Sonia, Nathaniel justified it not only on moral grounds but also due to its positive influence on teachers' morale and their trust in the principal:

When you reward one incumbent more, you gain one satisfied individual but risk dissatisfaction among all others. They might feel overlooked and undervalued, which can negatively impact their confidence in you and their willingness to put effort into their work.

Another area where justice was implemented was resource allocation. Ravit ensured that individual student help was provided to students from all classes, not just those with the most vocal teachers. Rafael made certain that all teachers received the necessary supplies for their classes, including textbooks, technology, lab equipment, and other learning materials. Additionally, he prioritized maintenance and upgrades in the areas that needed them most, avoiding favoritism toward specific parts of the school.

Procedural Justice

The interviews conducted for the current study revealed that the participants implemented procedural justice for teachers. Regarding teacher evaluations, Danielle stated, "I must ensure that evaluation processes are consistently applied across all teachers; otherwise, they will not trust the process." Michael described himself as actively addressing his biases to prevent them from affecting teacher evaluation outcomes:

I became aware of a potential prejudice toward one of the teachers, which prompted me to reflect deeply on my personal beliefs, values, and experiences that could be influencing this. Additionally, I proactively sought feedback from senior management team members to gain an external perspective on any biases.

The study participants emphasized the need to implement fair procedures for promotion, aiming to provide every teacher with an opportunity to contribute to the school community. When a middle leadership position became vacant, Tamara informed all the teachers that she would be selecting a new position holder, inviting anyone who felt qualified to apply. Leah kept documentation of the entire selection process, including the criteria used, the evaluation of each candidate, and the final decision-making process to maintain transparency and accountability. Rachel ensured that promotions were based on verified achievements and contributions rather than subjective opinions or favoritism. She explained:

The teachers don't have to agree with me that the chosen office bearer is the best, but it is very important to me that they believe I select office bearers based on who I genuinely think is most suitable, without any external influences.

For the research participants, using data was an effective way to ensure equality, consequently increasing teachers' trust and reducing their resentment. While Sarah asserted that she did not need to explain her considerations to the teachers, Jack elaborated:

At our school, everyone wants Wednesday as a free day. When I had to decide who would get Wednesday off, I reviewed the previous years' schedules to see which days off each teacher had and compiled the information into an Excel file. This approach allowed me to make a fair decision and increased the teachers' confidence in the outcome.

The study participants also advocated involving teachers in school decision-making processes. Ana said:

I believe that involving as many teachers as possible in decision-making is crucial, ideally including everyone whenever feasible. This approach prevents a small group from consistently making the school's important decisions and increases the likelihood of widespread acceptance of the final decision.

For Ana, involving teachers in school decision-making served a dual purpose: it is a fairer way to make decisions while also enhancing cooperation and reducing objections.

Interactional Justice

Qualitative data analysis indicated how interactional justice was applied by the study participants, who emphasized the importance of providing clear explanations for their decisions. They asserted that it helps build trust between principals and teachers: “When teachers understand the rationale behind decisions, they are more likely to view me as fair” (Sharon). Additionally, it promotes a culture of openness and honesty: “It reduces rumors and misinformation” (Dana). Furthermore, it is crucial to implement policies and initiatives successfully: “Teachers are more likely to support and implement decisions when they understand the reasons behind them” (Edna).

Furthermore, the study participants asserted that it is not recommended for a principal to hide decisions from teachers. Maya emphasized the importance of early communication regarding employment decisions for the next school year: “Lack of information can lead to speculation, which disrupts the school environment.” In contrast, Joseph preferred to delay announcing employment decisions until the last minute, concerned about potential changes. However, he explained that if teachers hear about school decisions from students rather than directly from the administration, they are less likely to support and effectively implement them.

In a slightly different sense of interactional justice, Sylvia, who was a teacher in the school for many years before becoming a principal, ensured equal closeness with all teachers. Despite having known some of the old teachers for many years and having worked closely with some, she deliberately managed her relationships with teachers equitably:

There are teachers with whom I had close friendships when I was an ordinary teacher. We would have coffee, go shopping after work, or even go on vacation abroad together. However, as a principal, I have had to cool these relationships. Initially, these teachers felt free to enter my room just to say hello, hug me if they hadn't seen me for several days, and ask about my children. I noticed that other teachers did not do this, so I had an open conversation with them, explaining that to foster a sense of equality and build trust, I need to maintain the same level of closeness with them as I do with other teachers.

For Rina, maintaining close relationships with specific teachers can pose a challenge to making impartial decisions. She explained:

For example, I consciously try to sit with different teachers at each team event to maintain an equal rapport with all team members. If a teacher requests time off for a personal or family need that I believe isn't justified, or if I have already denied a similar request from another teacher, it becomes more challenging to refuse the request of a teacher who is closer to me than others.

Discussion

Promoting social justice is a fundamental objective for schools. However, existing literature predominantly addresses social justice for students, leaving the area of social justice for teachers underexplored. The present study aims to conceptualize the ways in which principals promote social justice among teachers. The findings chapter demonstrates how the dimensions of organizational justice categorize the actions taken by principals to advance social justice.

The first dimension, distributive justice, involves the fair and impartial allocation of workload, rewards, and resources within an organization (Bala Subramanian et al., 2022; Wolbring & Lillywhite, 2021). In the school context, this study revealed that even though all teachers adhere to the same work requirements and receive salaries based on a standardized scale, distributive justice remains highly relevant for principals. The participants in this study asserted that, as principals, they significantly impact teachers' working conditions by determining their schedules, the student groups they teach,

the specific buildings where they work, and the allocation of various resources. Consequently, they have ample opportunity to implement distributive justice.

The second dimension, procedural justice, pertains to fairness and consistency in the decision-making process. Managers must make decisions with neutrality, employ ethical and unbiased judgments, treat employees respectfully, and give them a voice (Bobocel & Gosse, 2015; Colquitt et al., 2013). The study participants implemented procedural justice in processes such as teacher evaluation and promotion. Moreover, they perceived involving teachers in school decision-making not only as a means to make teachers feel valued and ensure smoother implementation but also as an expression of social justice, promoting more democratic school decisions.

The third dimension, interactional justice, comprises two elements: interpersonal justice, which refers to whether managers treat employees with respect and consideration when implementing policies, and informational justice, which involves managers providing employees with clear explanations for their decisions (Bies, 2015; Dai & Xie, 2016). The current study's findings suggest a new aspect of interactional justice: ensuring equal closeness with all teachers and managing relationships with them equitably. This aspect of interactional justice is crucial for creating a fair and supportive school environment where all teachers feel valued and can thrive.

It is important to note that the study revealed differences in how participants approached social justice for teachers. For instance, while some participants argued that social justice was structurally ensured through standardized work requirements and a uniform salary scale, the majority emphasized the need for equity in areas where they directly influence teachers' working conditions. Additionally, while one participant stated they felt no need to explain their decisions to teachers, others highlighted the use of data as an effective tool to promote transparency, foster trust, and reduce resentment among teachers. There were also differing views on communication practices. While some participants stressed the importance of not withholding decisions from teachers, others preferred to delay announcements regarding employment decisions until the last minute, citing concerns over potential changes. Despite these variations, the findings demonstrate that the three dimensions of organizational justice – distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice – are highly applicable to school leadership. While not all principals exhibited every dimension consistently, the study underscores that each dimension plays a meaningful role in fostering fairness and equity within the school setting.

Importantly, the findings of the current study suggest that principals often view social justice for teachers as both a virtuous goal and a strategic tool for more effective staff management. The research literature on social justice in education, which predominantly focuses on students, anchors the commitment to social justice within the school system in moral motives (Gümüő et al., 2021). From this perspective, ensuring fairness and equality in schools is fundamentally a matter of right and wrong (Theoharis, 2024). Social justice is seen as an end in itself rather than a means to achieve other goals (Martínez-Valdivia et al., 2020). However, the current study reveals that when it comes to teachers, principals perceive social justice differently. In the context of teachers, principals view social justice as both an ethical obligation and an instrumental tool. They justify the importance of social justice among teachers on moral grounds as well as for its practical benefits.

Specifically, the study participants identified three operational benefits of social justice among teachers: increased motivation, greater cooperation, and enhanced trust. First, the study participants considered social justice among teachers as a critical factor in boosting their motivation. This aligns with Adams (1965) theory, which posits that employers must cultivate equity to boost employee motivation (Colquitt et al., 2013). According to this theory, the importance of equity lies not only in its moral value but also in its practical contribution to teacher motivation. For the participants of this study, social justice for teachers is both an ethical obligation and a strategic approach to creating a motivated teaching staff that improves school performance.

Second, the study participants viewed social justice for teachers as a key factor in mobilizing teacher support and fostering cooperation. They believed that when principals treat teachers fairly, make decisions justly, and provide clear explanations for those decisions, teachers are more likely to

collaborate and less likely to resist. This increased collaboration and reduced resistance leads to more effective implementation of school initiatives and policies, ensuring smoother transitions during changes and enhancing overall school performance.

Third, the study participants saw social justice as a way to cultivate trust in both the principal and school processes. Hoy and Tarter (2007), in their study on trust and organizational justice in schools, predicted a strong relationship between trust and justice. However, they were surprised by just how strong this relationship turned out to be. They noted that “Although we used faculty trust (...) to predict organizational justice, the relationship can be seen as going the other way, that is, as justice producing trust . . . If the teachers perceive their principal as acting ethically and fairly, then they are more likely to trust him or her” (pp. 306–307).

As previously mentioned, the existing literature on social justice in education primarily views the pursuit of social justice as a moral imperative, emphasizing a commitment to reducing inequities and fostering an inclusive and equitable educational system (Canlı & Demirtaş, 2022; Theoharis, 2024). Conversely, the organizational justice literature frames social justice as a strategy to enhance productivity and organizational effectiveness (Adamovic, 2023; Colquitt et al., 2013). The current study suggests that for principals, social justice for teachers serves both moral and pragmatic purposes. Ensuring fairness for teachers is not only an ethical imperative but also essential for achieving tangible outcomes such as enhanced job satisfaction and improved performance. Therefore, social justice for teachers merges the two theoretical perspectives of social justice in education and organizational justice.

Figure 1 illustrates the relationships between different literature perspectives and the subareas of social justice in education. The literature relevant to the current study has two

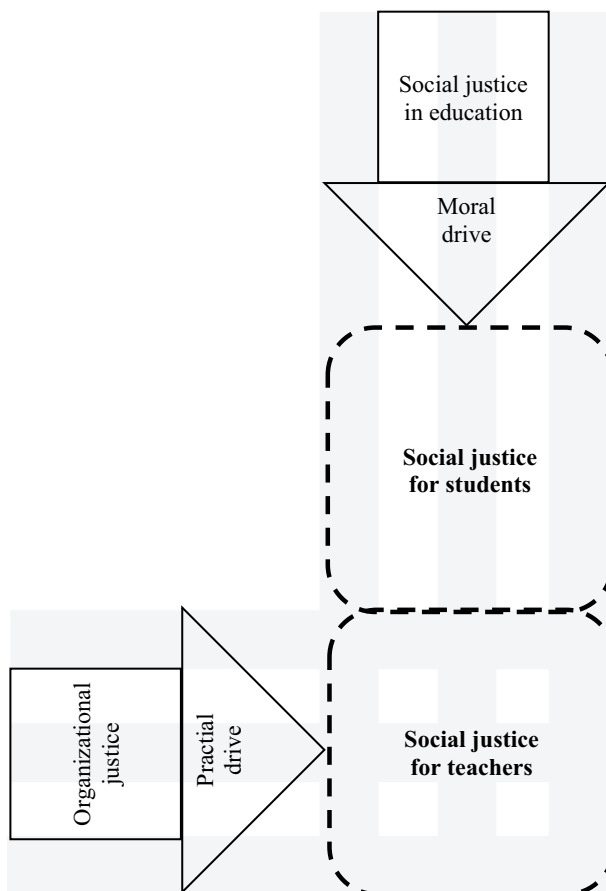


Figure 1. Motivations for social justice for teachers.

Table 2. Dimensions of organizational justice and the benefits of social justice for teachers.

Organizational Justice Dimensions	Practical Benefits of Social Justice for Teachers		
	Increased Motivation	Greater Cooperation	Enhanced Trust
Distributive Justice	✓		✓
Procedural Justice		✓	✓
Interactional Justice		✓	✓

main focal points. The literature on social justice in education (represented by the upper arrow on the right side of the figure) anchors social justice in moral drive (the arrowhead). Conversely, the literature on organizational justice (represented by the lower arrow on the left side of the figure) anchors social justice in practical drive (the arrowhead). While social justice for students is driven solely by moral considerations, social justice for teachers is influenced by both moral and practical considerations.

The three practical benefits of social justice for teachers mentioned by the study participants intersect with the three dimensions of organizational justice. The first benefit, increased motivation, was linked by the study participants to one dimension of organizational justice: distributive justice (see the statements of Sonia and Nathaniel). The second benefit, greater cooperation, was associated with two dimensions of organizational justice: procedural justice (see Ana's statement) and interactional justice (see the statements of Edna and Joseph). The third benefit, enhanced trust, was mentioned across all three dimensions of organizational justice: distributive justice (see Nathaniel's statement), procedural justice (see the statements of Danielle, Rachel, and Jack), and interactional justice (see the statements of Sharon and Dana).

Table 2 illustrates the intersection of the three dimensions of organizational justice and the practical benefits of social justice for teachers. As can be seen, all three dimensions of organizational justice were mentioned by the study participants as contributing to enhanced trust. This finding reinforces Hoy and Tarter's (2007) assertion that organizational justice and trust "are so consistent that they vary together in harmony; they are different but they are intertwined and likely not separable" (p. 307). The current study concurs with their conclusion: "Justice and trust are inseparable; you cannot have one without the other" (p. 309).

This study offers new insights into social justice for teachers, but it has several limitations. First, it was conducted within the Israeli context, where social justice leadership development is rarely emphasized in the preparation programs and in-service professional learning for principals. Training programs often lack comprehensive modules on promoting social justice in schools, leaving principals inadequately equipped to address this challenge (Arar, 2019; Sabbagh & Resh, 2018). This gap in training may explain why Israeli principals view social justice for teachers more as a tool for effective school leadership rather than as a moral value. Future comparative research should investigate how principals in various countries promote social justice for teachers, as understanding these differences can provide valuable insights into effective strategies for developing holistic social justice leadership in schools. In addition, the data relied on principals' self-reported information, which may be influenced by their subjective perspectives and recall accuracy. To improve research outcomes, future studies could incorporate interviews with teachers and direct observations to gain a deeper understanding of how principals promote social justice among teachers. Furthermore, this study did not explore potential relationships between principals' perceptions of promoting social justice for teachers and their personal characteristics, such as gender, experience, and education. Future research, including a larger number of participants, should aim to uncover any possible associations among these variables.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the limited body of research on promoting social justice for teachers by examining how principals conceptualize and implement it within their schools. By analyzing data from 28 Israeli principals, the findings demonstrate the relevance of organizational justice – distributive, procedural, and interactional justice – to school leadership. While social justice for students is often framed in moral and ethical terms, this study highlights that principals perceive social justice for teachers as both an ethical imperative and a practical strategy to foster motivation, cooperation, and trust within the teaching staff. These insights emphasize the dual importance of moral considerations and pragmatic leadership approaches in achieving equitable school environments. Further research could explore how these principles manifest in different cultural or systemic contexts.

Disclosure Statement

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

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