

Article

Management Skills and Styles of School Principals during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: The present study investigated a significant issue among a population with unique characteristics. This research and discussion centered on the challenges of running a school during the COVID-19 pandemic. The central question in this study was, how do school principals perceive their abilities and the skills required to run schools during the pandemic? In addition, this study aimed to assess the awareness of the teachers that were subordinate to these same school principals and the impact of their leadership style. The current study involved 151 teachers and 18 school principals from 18 governmental Bedouin schools in Israel. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data and measure the research variables. To analyze the data, indices and statistical tests were applied using SPSS software. The main research findings indicated that the teachers perceived the leadership styles of their school principals as a formative and rewarding part of their personality and not as an evasive style. The principals reported a high level of availability and accessibility and appropriate communication levels with all of the relevant parties. Moreover, the principals reported their level of decision-making ability as high, their judgment calls as sound, and their organizational planning skills and knowledge-development abilities as excellent. Additionally, cultivating the organizational structure was a priority for the principals; they believed that they could develop a comfortable and supportive organizational atmosphere and that this was the core of their work. The school principals perceived themselves as having the requisite skills, including a high level of ability and efficient team management. Self-confidence and a high level of competence helped the school principals cope with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and traverse them safely.

Keywords: principals' leadership; school climate; pandemic challenge (COVID-19); self-efficacy

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1. Introduction

A school principal has a significant role in the educational activities of a school. A principal's style and how they are perceived by teachers greatly influence the teachers' perceptions and approaches to everything related to school activities. Principals serve as role models in the educational field. As such, they impact the school's atmosphere and the formation of an ethical climate, which can influence the behavior of teachers and students and the effectiveness of their work for the better [1].

In the State of Israel, school principals face many difficulties, such as adverse school climates, a lack of control over teacher training, political intervention in education, and many other pressures and challenges. Therefore, principals must be aware of the management skills they have, adapt them to the nature of the school and, if necessary, develop them through advanced training. In addition, supervisors working for the Ministry of Education should be aware of the talents that each principal has and whether these capabilities could be improved through training. School principals are faced with a dynamic and constantly renewing environment, which requires them to innovate, upgrade, and adapt themselves to the challenges they face in the 21st century.

The present research is a pioneer study in this important field. It has particular implications for the studied population regarding the place of the Northern Bedouin society in the State of Israel and the points at which this social group meets the dominant Jewish culture of Israel. The Bedouin culture in Northern Israel is a minority within a minority. According to [2], the Arab-Israeli education system is separate but not autonomous; it serves Druze, Bedouin, Circassian, Muslim, and Christian citizens whose first language is Arabic. The Arab-Israeli education system operates according to the Israeli national curriculum, with adjustments for the teaching of primary language, religious and cultural concentrations. Bedouin school principals face organizational challenges that are the result of social changes in the Bedouin communities, which, in turn, mirror social upheavals in the social fabric of Israeli society. In recent decades, Bedouin society has undergone a transition from a traditional agrarian, nomadic social system to an urban, modern social system. Bedouin principals experience conflicting social forces and find themselves experiencing conflicts between internal tribal forces and interests and the national Israeli education system that they follow.

This study examined the knowledge, skills, strategies, and tools needed so that leaders can manage the new situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent distance learning. The COVID-19 pandemic brought with it structural and personal changes, with a new, complex reality emerging. The transfer of learning information from teachers and teaching aids to students needed to be accomplished through an online platform. This situation, in which these interfaces formed the basis for lecturers and students to impart information correctly and efficiently, must be re-examined. The attitudes and feelings of teachers toward the transition to distance learning during the pandemic are of critical importance as part of educational activities.

The present study also examined teachers' perceptions of the principals' management styles, their trust in them, and their effects on teachers' organizational commitment and motivation.

1.1. Teaching and Managing during the COVID-19 Pandemic

School principals are required to prepare and make learning accessible to students through an open online space that allows them to learn remotely anytime and anywhere. Indeed, school principals and teachers have had to go through a fundamental change in processes, especially regarding learning, training, and teaching online (e-learning). E-learning is the transmission of educational knowledge via computer or smartphone platforms [3]. Online learning models continue to grow and gain support in institutions of higher education, where they aim to adapt the curriculum to postmodern times while creating educational flexibility and opportunities for students [4]. However, high school students and teachers have been slow to adopt these technological platforms. Both students and teachers have found that learning and the evaluation of educational outcomes are more complex than before.

Many school principals believe that online learning in schools brings with it significant benefits. During the global COVID-19 pandemic, findings from research [5] regarding regular online teaching indicated that most school principals, including in the Bedouin sector, believed that the current crisis was an excellent opportunity for rethinking and assimilating different methods of education. Ultimately, education during the pandemic was a growth experience that decision makers in the world of education and the labor market embraced with some hesitation. Once the benefits of distance learning became clear, they were adopted and assimilated into the arsenal of teaching strategies that were designed to meet various learning needs [4]. Indeed, this type of learning included many benefits, such as flexibility, accessibility, and creativity, which enabled a varied pace of education. As students, teachers and school principals developed the needed skills, school principals found it possible to influence the success rate of information transfer through these technologies and facilitate knowledge creation [3].

School principals and teachers experienced difficulties and challenges in adopting distance learning that sometimes made them doubt its effectiveness. Indeed, the method of transmitting information via digital means often encounters stubbornness and barriers;

difficulties in adapting existing learning infrastructures to distance learning; and difficulties in understanding, absorption, and effective education [6].

1.2. The School Principal and Their Skills

Over time, the role of the school principal has evolved into that of an educational leader and, more recently, a technological guide [7]. The evolution seen in the role of a principal was accelerated by the rapid development of educational technology and information. This phenomenon in which the educational system was renewed and underwent fast and significant changes has challenged school principals' roles and abilities. Hence, the role of a school principal and the repertoire of skills required from them has changed significantly [8]. This role is complex and includes many tasks of a diverse nature: (1) shaping the future picture of the school vision, overseeing the management of change, and implementing the 'educational act' in all of its aspects; (2) introducing up-to-date educational, teaching, and learning processes; (3) providing leadership and empowerment to educational staff and overseeing the management and professional development of the teaching team; and (4) overseeing the management of the relationships between the school and the parents, the community, and the Ministry of Education supervisors [9].

A recent study by [10] examined the management of Bedouin teachers' feelings of responsibility in schools serving the Bedouin population in traditional communities within the southern communities of Israel. Semistructured interviews with 14 primary school teachers for Bedouin students emphasized the central place of local culture in shaping teachers' emotional management and the dilemmas they face between modern and traditional rules. The regulation and management of emotions in Bedouin schools are very different from the practice in Western schools. When living in a society whose culture praises formality and masculinity, a Bedouin teacher tends to suppress their emotions at work, especially those perceived as positive in Western cultures, such as happiness and joy, and sometimes presents those perceived in Western cultures as unwanted, such as anger toward students [2].

1.3. School Principal Leadership Styles: Formative and Transactional Leadership

Ref. [11] defined leadership as a process of transferring symbols that create meaning because different people give different interpretations to symbols. The leadership behavior of a school principal is exposed to perceptual differences and a diverse range of purposes. The school principal needs to be a manager and have a repertoire of skills that lead to the team's cohesion and move the group toward a common goal [12].

The formative leader changes the face of reality and gives personal attention to employees, and at the same time, expects employees to achieve beyond what is required. Formative leadership is expressed on the following levels: the psychological need for autonomy, self-realization, self-esteem, valuable questions, morality, honesty, justice, duty and commitment [9].

Formative leadership skills are defined as the process of creating substantial changes in the attitudes and assumptions of the members of the organization while building an internal commitment to the vision or goals of the organization. The hallmark of formative leadership is the extent to which leaders influence or shape their followers [13].

1.4. School Climate and Organizational Environment

Ref. [14] reported that some researchers use the term 'organizational environment' in the educational context. Indeed, different researchers give different definitions of school climate and measure it with different tools [14]. Others have referred to the concept of 'environment' in very general social structures, pointing to the effects of diverse experiential conditions, ranging from the influences of others and patterns of socialization to the functioning and evolution of school cultures [14]. The growing recognition of the effects of the environment on human emotional and social responses has led, in turn, to the recognition that changes in the environment can result in improvements in quality of life.

Changes in the environment were found to lead to a change in human responses that produced far-reaching improvements in students' and the community's quality of life.

The research questions that were investigated were the following:

- (1) How do teachers perceive the leadership styles of their school principals? Are there differences in the perception of leadership style based on the teachers' characteristics?
- (2) How do school principals describe and perceive their effectiveness and skills? Are there differences in their perception of their level of ability and skills?

2. Methodology

2.1. Population and Sample

This study aimed to describe how Bedouin schools were run during the COVID-19 pandemic and answer the following central question: how do school principals perceive their surroundings, roles, and ability to cope with the COVID-19 crisis? At the same time, the study aimed to describe the teachers' perceptions of their school principal's leadership style and examine how this related to the more general management styles of school principals during the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, the participants studied were school principals and teachers in the Bedouin sector.

The Bedouin population in Israel, whose religion is Islam, is a dual minority group, both within the general population of Israel and, at the same time, within the Arab minority of Israel. As such, the Bedouin are an important part of the mosaic of cultures, religions, and languages of Israel [15,16].

The Bedouin population of Israel has a cultural, historical, social, and political uniqueness that distinguishes it from other subgroups. About two-thirds of the Bedouin population live in the Negev, in the Beersheba–Arad Valley area, in southern Israel, while the other third lives in the Givat Alonim–Shefar'am area, in the Western Galilee, in northern Israel [17,18]. This second concentration of Bedouin tribes and families was the subject of this study.

For this study, 20 schools from ten Bedouin localities were selected using a volunteer sampling method to sample all parts of this Bedouin community and ensure an adequate representation of all relevant components, including socioeconomic levels, the locality size, and the place of residence. From these, 18 schools responded, along with 151 teachers and 18 school principals.

Tables 1 and 2 describe the distribution of the participants according to the variables of their professional and personal backgrounds. About 26% of the participating teachers were male, the majority (85%) were married, about 85% had a master's degree and more than half of them did not occupy another role as teachers. About 78% of the participating principals were male and 72% defined their school as being of low socioeconomic status.

The teachers' ages ranged from 25 to 66 years old, with 1 year to 46 years of experience. The principals' ages ranged from 41 to 59 years, with 12 to 37 years of experience.

Table 1. The distribution of teachers and school principals according to their backgrounds.

Group	Variable	Number	Percentage	
Teachers	Gender	Male	39	25.8
		Female	112	74.2
	Family status	Single	19	12.6
		Married	128	84.8
		Divorced	2	1.3
		Widowed	2	1.3
	Education	Bachelor's degree	25	16.6
		Master's degree	126	83.4
	Role	Classroom teacher	14	9.3
		Coordinator	20	13.2
Teacher		77	51.0	
Counselor		31	20.5	
School Principal/deputy		3	2.0	
More than one role		6	4.0	

Table 1. *Cont.*

Group	Variable	Number	Percentage	
Principals	Gender	Male	14	77.8
		Female	4	22.2
	Area	North	8	44.4
		Center	2	11.1
		South	8	44.4
	Socioeconomic status	Low	13	72.2
Medium		1	5.6	
High		4	22.2	

Table 2. Description of the age, seniority, and other variables among the participating teachers and school principals.

		Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teachers (N = 151)	Age	25	66	41.49	8.84
	Teaching experience	1	46	16.37	8.90
	Seniority within the school	1	35	12.64	8.47
School principals (N = 18)	Age	41	59	47.39	5.54
	Teaching seniority	12	37	22.17	6.77
	Management seniority	1	20	6.83	5.69
	Number of students	260	800	505.89	171.83
		20	70	44.78	15.49

2.2. Instruments

In this study, two questionnaires were used: a questionnaire distributed to the school principals and another to the teachers.

The school principals' questionnaire was a structured questionnaire that examined their self-reported level of self-confidence and management skills. The questionnaire was derived from the studies of [19–21]. It was related to the skills and knowledge in various areas of the school principals' work. The areas covered included decision making, planning, group dynamics, morale, motivation, management, organization, originality, creativity, conflict management, self-reliance, dedication and involvement, activity in stressful situations, and more. The questionnaire consisted of 57 statements, which made up nine aspects according to a factor analysis conducted in accordance with a correlated variable conceptual structure. Each of the answers was given on a seven-point scale. Table 3 presents the dimensions of the questionnaire according to the conceptual structure of the constituent statements, with the level of reliability determined according to Cronbach's alpha.

The alpha index values for internal consistency were found to be high; this indicated the high degree of reliability of the questionnaire. Therefore, the dimensions were constructed by calculating the average responses of the school principals to the statements that made up each dimension. Each school principal received a value ranging from one to seven in each dimension. A high value indicated an increased positive perception of the dimensions and skills. Ability meant the capacity to produce a desired result or effect, i.e., effectiveness.

The teachers' questionnaire was a structured questionnaire that tested the teachers' self-reported perception of the leadership style of their school principal. This questionnaire was built by [22] and was based on the questionnaire of [13]. The questionnaire consists of twenty-eight statements that make up four dimensions, and the answer scale has five levels. Table 4 presents the dimensions of the questionnaire, the constituents of each dimension and the level of reliability according to Cronbach's alpha.

Table 3. The dimensions of the questionnaire and the associated Cronbach's alphas.

Dimensions	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Communication skills, availability and accessibility	42, 38, 37, 34, 31, 19	0.942
Decision-making skills	13, 10, 8	0.836
Planning skills	16, 6, 5, 1	0.936
Employee care skills	56, 46, 36, 15, 7	0.944
Organizational skills	47, 45, 17, 9, 2	0.934
Skills in the field of group dynamics; the atmosphere and organizational climate	50, 11, 4	0.866
Skills in morale development and team motivation	33, 24, 22, 18, 14, 13, 12, 57, 41, 39, 35	0.967
Informational and developmental skills	49, 48, 44, 43, 40, 30, 23, 3, 55, 54, 53, 52, 51	0.966
General personal skills (setting goals, challenges, perseverance, self-observation, and coping with stress)	28, 27, 26, 25, 22, 21, 20, 32, 29	0.897

Table 4. The dimensions and make-up of the questionnaire that investigated the teacher-perceived school principals' leadership qualities. The statements and questions that make up each dimension and the level of trustworthiness according to Cronbach's alpha.

Statement	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Formative leadership	25, 24, 23, 22, 17, 14, 12, 7, 1	0.885
Charismatic leadership	28, 27, 19, 11, 10, 8, 5	0.947
Transactional leadership	20, 18, 16, 3	0.631
Leadership avoidance	26, 21, 15, 9, 6, 4, 2	0.825

The alpha index values for internal consistency were found to be high, indicating the high reliability of the questionnaire. Therefore, the values were constructed by calculating the average teacher's response to the statements that made up each dimension. Each teacher received a value ranging from one to five in each dimension. A high value indicated a very positive perception of the dimension of the school principal's leadership style.

2.3. Procedure

The study was conducted according to the quantitative paradigm, and is a descriptive study, which applies quantitative tools (questionnaires) to collect the data that were analyzed by using tests and statistical measures. Quantitative research is an objective study that describes the reality being studied [23].

In the first stage, the principal was approached by the researcher in a coordinated visit to explain the research, its goals, and its importance. All the principals expressed consent except for two, who did not agree to cooperate. During the visits, the principals gathered the teachers in the teachers' room during a break, where they presented the researcher and the research and asked the teachers to cooperate with the researcher. Then, a date was set for the distribution of the questionnaires and the collection of the data at each school. At that time, the researcher personally contacted and attended the school, distributed the questionnaires to the selected teachers and the school principal, and answered any questions or inquiries. Upon completion of the questionnaires, the researcher collected them. It is important to note that the code of ethics was maintained in the present study. The participants were guaranteed complete confidentiality and anonymity, with no possibility of identification. They were also accorded the right not to participate or to stop participating at any stage, in addition to prearranging participation with each of them according to their schedule and conditions. Therefore, the principles of research ethics anonymity and confidentiality were respected according to Helsinki Committee (1975).

2.4. Data Analysis

After collecting the data, they were typed into SPSS version 25 software. All the appropriate indices and statistical tests were conducted to describe the sample and the questionnaires, test the research hypotheses, and produce the findings. Descriptive statistics were performed (averages and standard deviations, as well as percentages); statistical tests, variance analyses, *t*-tests, and correlation scores were performed using Pearson's correlation coefficient, and Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the internal reliability.

3. Results

Table 5 shows the averages and standard deviations of the school principals' leadership styles, which indicated the perceived level of each leadership style.

Table 5. Averages and standard deviations for teachers' perceptions of the different styles of leadership (N = 151).

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Formative leadership	1.33	5	3.26	0.91
Charismatic leadership	1	5	3.79	1.08
Transactional leadership	1	5	3.33	0.87
Leadership avoidance	1	4.43	2.28	0.87

The findings presented in the table above indicated that the teachers perceived their school principals' leadership at an above-average level. The average perception of the formative leadership style of the school principals by the teachers equaled 3.26 on a scale of 1–5. It was also found that the teachers perceived the charismatic leadership of their principals at an above-average level, with the average perception equal to 3.79 on a scale of 1–5. Additionally, it was found that the teachers perceived the transactional leadership of the principals at an above-average level and equal to 3.33 on a scale of 1–5. However, it was found that the teachers' perceptions of the leadership avoidance by the principals were below average, with an average of 2.28. In conclusion, it was found that the dominant leadership style was charismatic, and the weakest was avoidance.

To examine the differences in the perceptions of leadership styles based on the teachers' level of education and the roles they played, a one-way ANOVA variance analysis was conducted. Table 6 presents the perception of leadership styles based on the teachers' levels of education.

It was found that there was a significant difference between teachers with a bachelor's degree and teachers with a master's degree in the perception of charismatic leadership ($f = 4.139, p < 0.05$). Additionally, it was found that the teachers with a master's degree perceived charismatic leadership style to be of a greater extent than the teachers with a bachelor's degree. Furthermore, it was found that the teachers with a master's degree perceived the formative and transactional leadership style to be of a higher degree than the teachers with a bachelor's degree; however, the difference between them was not significant.

It was also found that the teachers with a master's degree perceived leadership avoidance to be of a lesser extent than the teachers with a bachelor's degree; however, the difference between them was not significant.

Table 6. Averages and standard deviations for the perception of leadership styles based on the teachers' levels of education.

	Education	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	f
Formative leadership	Bachelor's degree	25	3.11	1.18	0.785
	Master's degree	126	3.29	0.85	
Charismatic leadership	Bachelor's degree	25	3.39	1.43	4.139 *
	Master's degree	126	3.87	0.99	
Transactional leadership	Bachelor's degree	25	3.18	1.02	0.85
	Master's degree	126	3.36	0.84	
Leadership avoidance	Bachelor's degree	25	2.38	0.93	0.388
	Master's degree	126	2.26	0.86	

* $p < 0.05$.

Table 7 presents the perceptions of leadership styles based on the teacher' role. There was a significant difference in the perception of the avoidance-style leadership based on the teachers' roles ($f = 3.195, p < 0.05$). It was found that the teachers with more than one role perceived the transactional leadership style to a higher degree. However, no significant differences were found in the perception of the other leadership styles among the teachers based on their roles.

The relationships between the teachers' seniority and their perceptions of leadership styles were examined, where a correlation test was conducted using Pearson's correlation coefficients.

The findings presented in Table 7 indicate a significant positive relationship between the teachers' seniority in teaching and in the school and their perceptions of formative leadership ($r = 0.192, p < 0.05$ and $r = 0.160, p < 0.05$, respectively). This showed that as school seniority increased, the teachers' perceptions of the school principals' formative leadership style became more positive.

Additionally, there was a significant positive relationship between teaching seniority and the perception of charismatic leadership ($r = 0.174, p < 0.05$). This meant that the greater the teaching seniority, the more positive the teacher's perception of charismatic leadership.

The findings presented in Table 8 indicate a significant positive relationship between seniority in teaching and in the school and the perception of transactional leadership ($r = 0.261, p < 0.01$ and $r = 0.224, p < 0.01$, respectively).

This meant that as their seniority increased, the teachers' perceptions of the principals' transactional leadership became more positive. A significant negative relationship was also found between seniority in teaching and the perception of leadership avoidance. ($r = -0.178, p < 0.05$). This means that the greater the teaching seniority, the lower the perception of the school principal's leadership avoidance.

The second set of research questions was as follows:

How do school principals describe and perceive their abilities and skills? Furthermore, are there differences in the perceptions of the level of ability and skills based on the characteristics of school principals?

The findings presented in Table 9 indicate a high level of ability and skills of all types. Averages between 5.29 and 5.84 on a scale of 1–7 were also found, meaning that the school principals' abilities and skills (available and accessible communication skills, decision-making skills, planning skills, employee care, organizational skills, dynamics and organizational climate skills, morale and motivation skills, information and development skills, personal skills, and general ability) were all at a very high level.

Table 7. Averages and standard deviations for the perceptions of leadership styles based on the teacher's role.

	Role	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	f
Formative leadership	Classroom teacher	14	3.16	0.93	0.842
	Coordinator	20	3.39	0.81	
	Teacher	77	3.14	0.93	
	School counselor	31	3.48	0.97	
	School principal or deputy	3	3.3	0.26	
	More than one role	6	3.52	0.69	
Charismatic leadership	Classroom teacher	14	3.68	0.97	1.145
	Coordinator	20	4.09	0.84	
	Teacher	77	3.62	1.23	
	School counselor	31	3.99	0.89	
	School principal or deputy	3	3.86	0.74	
	More than one role	6	4.24	0.78	
Transactional leadership	Classroom teacher	14	3.29	0.63	3.195 *
	Coordinator	20	2.74	0.9	
	Teacher	77	3.48	0.92	
	School counselor	31	3.38	0.65	
	School principal or deputy	3	2.5	0.43	
	More than one role	6	3.54	0.84	
Leadership avoidance	Classroom teacher	14	2.24	0.73	1.99
	Coordinator	20	2.15	0.73	
	Teacher	77	2.47	0.88	
	Counselor	31	2.07	0.95	
	School principal or deputy	3	2.24	0.66	
	More than one role	6	1.6	0.64	

* $p < 0.05$ **Table 8.** Pearson's correlation coefficients for the relationships between the teachers' seniority and their perception of the school principals' leadership styles.

	Seniority in School	Seniority in Teaching
Formative leadership	0.160 *	0.192 *
Charismatic leadership	0.083	0.174 *
Transactional leadership	0.224 **	0.261 **
Leadership avoidance	-0.132	-0.178 *

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.**Table 9.** Averages and standard deviations for ability and managerial skills (N = 18).

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication skills are available and accessible	2.17	7	5.84	1.11
Decision-making skills	2.33	6.67	5.41	1.2
Planning skills	2	7	5.29	1.25
Employee care skills	2.2	7	5.83	1.19
Organizational skills	2	6.6	5.5	1.11
Dynamic and organizational climate skills	2	6.67	5.72	0.16
Morale and motivational skills	2.18	6.73	5.67	1.05
Information and development skills	2.08	6.77	5.61	1.13
Personal skills	2.67	7	5.33	0.85
Skills and general ability	2.19	6.82	5.59	1.05

A *t*-test was conducted to examine the difference between male and female school principals in their perception of ability and skills. The findings of this test indicated that there were insignificant differences between the male school principals and the female school principals in their perceptions of different levels of ability and skills. However, it is important to note that the perceptions of the levels of ability and the various skills among

the female school principals were higher than among the male school principals, although these differences were not significant.

In addition, there were moderate and above-average positive relationships between seniority in school management and the perception of school principals' abilities and skills. However, these relationships were not found to be significant. This lack of significance was due to the small number of male school principals.

4. Discussion

This study investigated a fundamental issue among a population with unique characteristics, where the research and discussion centered around the challenges of running a school during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The central set of questions in the research was as follows: how do school principals evaluate their abilities and the skills demanded of them when managing their schools during the pandemic? Furthermore, in what manner do school principals interact with their surroundings, function, and view their ability to cope with the crisis? In addition, the study aimed to describe the perceptions of teachers that were subordinate to the same school principals and their leadership styles. In this manner, the managerial skills and competence of the school principals based on the school principals' leadership style, as perceived by the teachers, were determined.

According to the teachers' perceptions, the main research findings indicated that the dominant leadership style of school principals was the charismatic style, and the weakest style was the avoidant style. In addition, it was found that school principals reported high levels of availability and accessibility, as well as proper communication management, with the groups relevant to their work. The school principals also reported a high level of decision-making ability and appropriate judgment, in addition to their high standard of organizational planning skills and information and development skills.

Generally, school principals gave first place to their employee care skills and believed that they had the necessary skills and abilities to manage their subordinates. Furthermore, cultivating the organizational climate was a priority for the school principals; they believed they could develop a pleasant and supportive environment. This was their primary job, along with increasing the teachers' motivation and bettering their morale.

The school principals saw themselves as having a high standard of abilities and the necessary qualities for team management. These findings were consistent with those of a study by [24], who found that when a school has a skilled principal with recognizable interpersonal, business, and strategic skills, then teachers' participation in decision making and commitment to the organization increases. This is reflected in the high standards in the school climate that, in turn, promoted a high level of students' achievements. This finding was consistent with the person–organization theory, which holds that superior performance is achieved when a person's abilities match the requirements created by the environment in which they operate [10].

Additionally, the findings of the present study reinforced the findings that emerged from another study [25] of school principals' ability to meet and manage challenges regarding their skills and competencies, where it was found that school principals with skills and competencies in a variety of fields may effectively address challenges and changes in the education system.

Challenges, different and familiar, small and significant, have had to be faced during the present times of the COVID-19 pandemic by educational systems in general and school principals, in particular.

The findings of [26] indicated that school principals were able to cope with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The changes that entered the education system in light of the pandemic were due to the school principals' skills and abilities.

The Israeli educational system and its school principals were asked to overcome the challenges that COVID-19 presented. This was a critical dimension that helped the principals implement fundamental changes in the school's education climate. All the

findings of the current study indicated that the school principals knew that they were skilled in fostering and developing a positive environment and group dynamics, which led to success in coping with the new situation. These findings supported the findings of [27], which showed that significant learning occurred when the school climate and culture encouraged the use of ICT (information and communications technology), was open to the introduction of innovative pedagogies, and maintained teamwork by providing appropriate support for the teaching staff and the school administration.

Education is at the forefront of Jewish and Bedouin communities and families in Israel. The school is the most important socializing agent after the family. It affects students' education, integration into society, and future behavior as citizens [28]. School principals are central and influential figures in many aspects of the engineering of the school climate, and their skills are recognized as having a significant impact on student achievement [29].

The present study's findings also showed that the charismatic leadership style of school principals, as perceived by teachers, had a significant impact on the creation of a feeling of school affiliation, motivation and high morale among teachers, as well as cooperation and reciprocity. The teachers thereby became partners in the decision-making process, and the school principals demonstrated their ability to care for subordinates with constant consultation and cooperation. Other studies have indicated that the principle of informality refers to learning outside the physical framework of the school and permits learning in any space and at any time, with almost no limitations, allowing for quick adaptation to changing conditions. The current COVID-19 pandemic is a tangible and topical example of this. Students are encouraged to study at home, in parks with a teacher and in small groups at school [2]. The principle of universality is reflected in the balance within learning processes between global content and other content that strengthens students' local identity. In the digital world, learners are required to acquire comprehensive universal knowledge skills that include, among others, familiarity with different languages and religions. At the same time, there is a preservation of community, which strengthens the community identity of the student. This combination of the two is balanced by universal and community sentiments, which allows students to find their personal balance points [30].

In the current study, the school principals reported on their enterprise and creativity and their ability and desire to adopt new ideas. These traits, characteristics, and skills had an impact on the school principals' ability to cope with the challenges of the period. In a previous study by [21], it was found that when school principals consider the implementation of a new idea, they must think carefully about the type of environment required to support the change. In addition, change can be crucial for both the leaders and the team that implements it. Change can be brought about if the people involved see a school principal as having the skills that are required to meet innovation challenges.

It should be noted that an important finding in this study was the competence of the school principals, particularly their proficiency in the fields of information and development and the introduction of innovations and educational changes. The school principals demonstrated and reported mastery and expertise in introducing educational changes into the teaching and management of their schools.

Prior studies have pointed out the important role of school principals in directing schools during difficult times, along with introducing necessary changes to galvanize staff and students securely. It has been reported in previous studies that the school principal is perceived as a key figure in the implementation of change. When school principals support and commit to change, there is a greater chance of success, and when they ignore or are indifferent to it, innovation is not usually successfully introduced into the school or fades quickly [31].

To ensure the success of the change process in a school, the school principal must be responsible for including staff in the school vision at all stages of its implementation. The involvement of the school principal is essential for the implementation and success of the process over time. The rapidly changing global environment and the need to interact with an open market with sophisticated and advanced technology are changing the

characteristics of managerial roles. Until the 1970s, the work environment was relatively stable, where changes and innovations were relatively slow. With the emergence of rapid change in all areas of life, an approach has emerged that emphasizes the role of the manager in the field of change and the development of the skills needed to reach the organization's goals [32].

The most important observation that summarizes all of the findings that emerged from the current study was that school principals could manage the challenges of the COVID-19 period. These factors, along with successful planning, organization, and management ability, supported the research of [33], who suggested that the most important thing school principals need to know in the 21st century is how to manage change. This emphasis on managing change stems from the assumption that difficulties accompany any change, but proper management can facilitate the process and reduce the difficulty [34]. According to Taylor's approach (in [32]), school principals must constantly engage in the control and measurement of performance and processes aimed at continuous improvement. This approach classifies school principals according to the degree of change that they are willing to assume and how they see their role as leading a process of change or initiating and driving change in their school. This type of school principal is called a 'change agent', i.e., a person who pushes for, initiates, and directs change.

This study addressed important aspects of a principal's work and teachers' perceptions of their leadership style during the COVID-19 crisis. However, the study was conducted quantitatively, and it would have been helpful to incorporate a qualitative part that included interviews with teachers to allow them to describe their perceptions. Future research could integrate this qualitative dimension.

5. Conclusions

The positive relationships that were observed in this study suggested that as the seniority of school principals increased, their abilities and skills also increased.

The school principals reported a high level of availability and accessibility, as well as good communication with the parties relevant to their work. Additionally, the school principals reported high levels of decision-making abilities, appropriate judgment, organizational skills, and information and planning skills.

Employee care skills were ranked first; the school principals believed that they had the skills and competence required to supervise their subordinates. Cultivating the organizational climate was also a priority for the principals. They believed that they could develop comfortable and positive support for the organizational atmosphere. The school principals believed that this was at the core of their work, and through this, they also increased the motivation of teachers and their morale. The school principals saw themselves as having high standards with excellent personal team-management skills and abilities, which aided them in coping with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and traversing them safely. Therefore, it was reasonable that the teachers' perceptions of the school principals' leadership styles were charismatic, formative and transactional rather than evasive. This less avoidant style exhibited by the principals was consistent with their self-perception of their high ability. Furthermore, the school principals reported high levels of availability and accessibility to all the relevant parties to their work.

The considerable contribution of the study lies in the fact that it may shed light on the leadership style of school principals and their managerial skills during crises, and how these styles may affect the organizational climate. Also, the research may contribute to identifying the successful profile of a school principal with an appropriate leadership style and who applies managerial skills that lead the school during crises and exceptional situations.

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