

## Implications of Principals' Teacher Performance Appraisal and Decision-Making in Arab Schools in Israel

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### Abstract

*This paper addresses perceptions and implications of teacher evaluation by Arab school principals in an era of accountability. Analysis of semi-structured interviews with 26 Arab principals showed that teacher evaluation as a strategy keeps the school accountable in an era of reform. Additionally, most principals recognize the tool's possible uses to improve the level of teaching and learning in an effort to increase students' achievements. Nevertheless, it was found that when teacher evaluation is the key tool, the principals' efforts to develop the teaching abilities of excellent teachers decrease. This study offers conclusions as to the (socio-cultural, perception-based, and personal-professional) factors that inhibit the implementation of a valid and reliable teacher evaluation process.*

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## Introduction

Dissatisfaction with education outputs in different countries have increased financial support from policymakers, but this is accompanied by consequent demands for greater accountability for student outcomes, expressed in the development of international education standards such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Sanders, 2008) and attempts to reform administrative methods and tools (Hamilton et al., 2009; Mandinach, 2012).

In this era of change, and according to the principles that organize the roles and relationships of management, teachers, students, parents, the school, the community, local government, and the public education system – all of which are stake-holders of the education system and partners that have a say – fundamental changes have occurred regarding the nature of the principal's relationships and interactions with the teaching staff (Arar, 2014; Bower, Shoho & Barnett, 2014; Sergiovanni, 20007; Spillane et al., 2011). Reviews of the changes and extensions of the principal's role vis-à-vis the teaching staff during the last thirty years (Bowers et al., 2014; Hamilton et al., 2009) indicate a number of significant milestones:

The prevalent perception up to the mid-1980s viewed the principal as a glorified administrator, who efficiently executed a given list of duties, and who operated mainly in the areas of organization, training, supervision and control (Cosner, 2012; Downey & Kelly, 2013).

During the first decade of the third millennium, following increased democratization processes in schools, affected by postmodern and post-materialistic values that permeated the education system, the "new principal" was expected to fill roles that required, on top of management skills, leadership skills, communications skills, management of group processes, diagnosis and appraisal, feedback, and team development (Arar, 2014; Cosner,



2012; Marzano et al, 2005). Additionally, considerable political skill is required to successfully navigate among all of the system's beneficiaries (Arar & Abu-Rome, forthcoming; Bowers et al., 2014; Means et al., 2011; Sergiovanni, 2007). This variety of knowledge fields, skills and abilities are relevant and essential to the principal's role (Bowers et al., 2014; Demski, 2014; Glickman, Gordon and Ross-Gordon, 2003).

In order to fill the gap in the above shortcoming, this paper addresses one of the principal's key roles vis-à-vis the teaching staff – appraisal and evaluation (Hamilton et al., 2009). Through this role, the links and affinities to the principal's other roles are discussed (Alghanabousi & Idris, 2010; Arar, 2014). Following Arar & Oplatka, (2011) and Arar (2014), teacher appraisal has a number of objectives: 1) Quality control – follow-up of the teaching and learning level at school, by means of visits to classrooms, tour of school, and cross-section conversations with students (Sergiovanni, 2007); 2) Professional development – helping teachers grow and develop regarding teaching and classroom life, improving basic teaching skills and widening their knowledge, and how they use available teaching tools; 3) Teacher motivation – building and nurturing motivation and commitment to teaching, the school's general goals, and its educational concept (Arar & Massry-Herzallah, 2016). Teacher appraisal also has a psychological role to satisfy the teachers' need for achievement and reinforce their wish to succeed and gain recognition (Hamilton et al., 2009; Mandinach, 2012).

The decentralized approach common today in the education system raises the question whether the principal is cognizant to manage an appraisal system that meets professional standards, and what it should include (Bowers et al., 2014; Goldring et al, 2007). On a practical level, is it realistic to expect principals to use a complex appraisal system within the time constraints that they deal with fulfilling all their other obligations?

Parallel to applicability questions, context questions were asked to examine socio-political and cultural issues associated with operating a teacher appraisal system as a management tool with instrumental goals of improving the teaching level and students' achievements, and as a leadership tool by which the principal can express appraisal systems' transformational aspects that convey messages of constant improvement, excellence and the teacher's responsibility (Bailes & Schrepfer-Tarter, 2012; English & Steffy, 2011).

Recent research has examined the use of computerized data for evaluation processes in schools in different states (Downey & Kelly, 2013; Lai & McNaughton, 2013). Data-driven decision-making is recommended by scholars and policymakers to support instructional improvement and to enhance student achievements.

However, research also suggests that although school leaders have access to a broad range of data (results from formative classroom, common grade, district interim, and state standardized assessments; student work; and observations of teacher instruction), they do not always know how to use data to engender deep changes in instruction and improve student outcomes (Heritage et al., 2009; Olah et al., 2010); they often lack skills and knowledge to formulate relevant questions, select indicators, and identify solutions from the collected data (Cosner, 2012), and to make sense of the data in relation to their current beliefs and expectations (Young, 2006).

Given the decentralization of the Israeli educational system, and implicitly the reconstruction of the principal's role as an evaluator, coupled with past research that pointed to principals' lack of expertise in evaluation and assessment (e.g., Goldring et al., 2007; Kersten & Israel, 2005), the current study sought to reveal the range of perceptions and applications of teacher evaluation among Arab elementary school principals in Israel.

The research aimed to respond to three research questions: (1) What are the status and perceptions of teacher evaluation among Arab school principals in an era of accountability? (2) How do Arab



principals employ teacher evaluation procedures in practice - what are the resources and tools that principals employ to evaluate teachers? (3) Which cultural obstacles hinder Arab principals' usage of teacher evaluation?

### Theoretical Framework

Teacher evaluation has increased greatly in an era of school reforms in recent decades (Arar & Oplatka, 2011; English & Steffy, 2011). Teacher evaluation is defined by Kersten and Israel (2005) as a process that identifies the different actions, dimensions and components required for successful performance of work in educational institutions. Research found that teacher evaluation is an important tool for improving teacher effectiveness (Arar, 2014; Downey & Kelly, 2013; Muijs, 2006).

The evaluation tool widely employed by principals (Goldring et al., 2007) is the evaluation scale used to examine to what extent the teacher fulfills role demands and in what way. Teachers are graded according to parameters of input (precision, fairness, trustworthiness, etc.), behavior (autonomy at work, effective relationships with colleagues, concern about what occurs in school) and/or performance level (the teacher's students reach high achievement levels in relation to those of colleagues and standard examinations) (Kersten & Israel, 2005).

The quality of teacher evaluation in school is influenced by many factors including the evaluator's subjectivity, whether there is a search for teachers' behaviors that comply with the principal's goals of evaluation, the extent of the evaluator's experience, the organizational climate, the extent of hostility between the principal and teachers, and more (Arar & Oplatka, 2011). Yet, differences in quality of the evaluation (reliability, its ability to accurately reflect the characteristics/ behaviors/ products of the teacher, etc.) depend mainly on the characteristics of the evaluator (Arar, 2014; Hamilton et al., 2009; Kersten & Israel, 2005).

## **The School Principal's Teacher Appraisal Role in Light of Responsibility-Based Reforms**

They often transfer responsibility and authority from government agencies to the school, constructing a system of supervision, evaluation and accountability, so that school management autonomously determines school policy and goals together with other stake-holders (Spillane & Coldren, 2011). Yet, this also increases pressure on school principals to comply with new goals without any additional provision of material and temporal resources (Harris et al., 2003).

It has been seen that enhanced managerial quality improves educational quality and facilitates change, and the school principal plays a leading formative role in reforms. Many principals are now responsible for planning teaching, supervision and performance follow-up, staff evaluation and development (Arar and Oplatka, 2011). Advanced technology provides sophisticated, computerized data collection and analysis to help principals in teacher evaluation. Principals, administrators and even teachers find themselves increasingly required to employ data-driven decision-making, "systematically collecting and analyzing various types of data ... to guide a range of decisions to help improve the success of students and schools" (Downey & Kelly, 2013, p. 119). However, they may not always be sufficiently trained to do so effectively.

One characteristic shown to be essential for successful school leadership is the ability to conduct high level decision-making. This necessitates both organizational and individual judgment (Bailes & Schrepfer-Tarter, 2012); a matter especially difficult when principals need to provide support to teachers while still ensuring their accountability (DiPaola, 2012). Teachers often cite their principal's support as an important contributor to their job satisfaction and effectiveness (Arar, 2014). DiPaola (2012) argued that principal support (including the instrumental, emotional, evaluation and



informational dimensions) is an important aspect of principal behavior that has been neglected in research.

Part of principal support is the evaluation process. Evaluation of teachers' performance is an important tool for improving teacher effectiveness. However, using "evidence-based practices" to guide teachers to comply with demands for increased accountability is a complex task (Hargreaves & Stone-Johnson, 2009).

Moreover, data use theory suggests that data alone do not ensure effective use (Mandinach, 2012). Data must be collected, organized, and analyzed to become usable information then combined with stakeholder understanding and expertise to become actionable knowledge. A principal is expected to apply this knowledge to instructional practice. Yet, the same raw data may point to very different solutions and actions depending on the situation and data users' judgment. After tutoring, teacher outcomes can be assessed to judge the effectiveness of actions, leading to a continuous cycle of collection, organization, and synthesis of data (Cosner, 2012; Means et al., 2011). Data can be used for supervision and control, but also as a tool for teachers' personal development and to improve their pedagogic skills (Conley & Glasman, 2008).

In order to become leaders who help teachers to develop and provide continuous feedback, principals are expected to improve their knowledge and tools for teacher evaluation and guidance, and their skills for the performance of diagnostic processes and follow-up with continuous reflective feedback (Sergiovanni, 2007). Effective use of evaluation and teacher guidance can shape the school's organizational culture and lead the school to achievements, thus helping principals to comply with the expectations of outside stakeholders (Goldring et al., 2007). The principals' role therefore becomes very complex. Effective principals spend a large part of their time observing, instructing and mentoring teaching staff, while still fulfilling their administrative functions and developing connections within and outside the organization (Arar & Oplatka, 2011).

For the purpose of this study, two models need further consideration. The first, Mutual Benefit Evaluation (Arar, 2014), relates to formative teacher evaluation in the different areas in which teachers work: effective teaching techniques, classroom management, interpersonal relations in the classroom, and teachers' behavior in school. Evaluation aims to enable teachers to examine themselves and their abilities in different areas and to become aware of these abilities, clarifying their position according to known achievement standards (Heritage et al., 2009; Olah et al., 2010).

The second, Management by Objectives Evaluation, which is driven by the New Horizon reform in Israel (Arar, 2014; Cosner, 2012), consists of a group of assessment methods (gauges) developed by Israel's National Authority for Measurement and Evaluation in Education (2010) together with the Institute for Educational Leadership "Avney Rosha", in which areas of evaluation are determined according to the school's objectives on one hand and according to accountable criteria defined the Ministry of Education. The teacher and evaluator plan a work program together and develop indices for evaluation, suggesting strategies for improvement, aiming towards outcome-based evaluation. In addition, the "New Horizon" teacher evaluation process also employs Mutual Benefit Evaluation relying on the collection of a large variety of evidence concerning the teachers' work, including evaluation by the school principal, the teachers' self-evaluation through a portfolio that they present for external evaluation, and evaluation by an external entity – superintendent or mentor (Arar, 2014).

These two models, Mutual Benefit Evaluation and Management by Objectives Evaluation, represent two different perceptions of teacher evaluation. The first is a broad-based evaluation of the teacher to support professional development, and the second is evaluation according to fixed and measurable objectives. This distinction guided the data collection and analysis.





### **Research Context: Arab Education in Israel**

Arabs are an indigenous ethnic minority in Israel constituting 20.2% of the state's population. The Arab population typically lives in communities separate from Jewish communities, apart from a few towns with mixed ethnic populations. The Arab minority is composed of three main groups (82.1% Muslims, 9.4% Christians and 8.4% Druze) (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2015). Economically, they constitute 53% of the population below the poverty line, and the average living standard of the Arab population is 60% less than that of the Jewish population. The education system in Israel is divided into five main types of schools: (1) State schools, attended by the majority of the pupils; (2) State religious schools, which emphasize Jewish studies, tradition and observance; (3) State Arab schools; (4) State recognized but not official schools – partly funded by the state. This category includes both Arab and Jewish schools which are funded by the state to a lesser extent than official state institutes of education (75%). These institutions have greater freedom with regard to student acceptance criteria, employment of teachers, and determination of learning contents (these include part of the ultra-orthodox Jewish education, Christian Arab schools, and schools belonging to private associations in the Jewish and Arab sectors). (5) There are also a few independent private Arab and Jewish schools exempted from state supervision.

Most Arab schools are public, authorized schools, under the full supervision and funding of the Ministry of Education and they belong to some extent to the stream of state education; these schools are the focus of this research (Arar, 2014). The language of instruction for Jewish children is Hebrew, and for Arab children - Arabic. Despite a steady increase in the proportions of young people studying in Arab schools since 1948, Arab students' achievements are 28.5% lower in Grade 4, and 29% lower in Grade 8. In 2012, the proportion of students who were entitled to a matriculation certificate in the public Jewish system (excluding the ultra-orthodox schools) was 67%. In comparison the proportion of students in the

public Arab system who were entitled to a matriculation certificate was 42% (Balas, 2014). While there is a dire need for teachers in the Jewish education system (in 2013 it was estimated that there was a need for 10,658 teachers), the reality is opposite in the Arab education system, where 12,375 qualified teachers await placement in teaching positions. Arab leadership is largely excluded from state decision-making and policy decisions (Arar & Abu-Asbe, 2013). As noted, Arab society is mainly a traditional-patriarchal, male-dominated, collectivist and less egalitarian culture. This is a society that views strict hierarchy and control as the “correct” form of social organization; and the villages' micro-politics have a strong influence on school decision-making (Arar & Oplatka, 2011).

The Israeli education system has increasingly demanded teacher performance evaluation (Arar, 2014). The “New Horizon” reform (2006), implemented in elementary and middle schools, altered the teachers’ role definition, increasing their hours in school to 36 hours, allotting six hours for individual teaching in addition to regular classroom teaching. New ranks were created for teachers, and, for the first time, the roles of principals and deputy principals were defined. Accountability was increased and measured by student achievements in standard national exams in Grades 4 and 8. As noted above an evaluation gauge was constructed to guide teacher and principal evaluation, evaluating performance according to three levels: basic, skilled and excellent. Teachers considered unsuitable are rated as below basic. Teacher evaluation is evidence-based and at least three observations must be made of the teacher’s work. A personal portfolio is constructed regarding each teacher’s work, and the reform details the required contents and criteria for its evaluation (Hartef et al., 2011).

The use of the gauge mediates the tension between formative and summative evaluation, allowing formative evaluation. It describes expected behaviors along a continuum of professional development, yet it also facilitates distinction between different qualities of teaching performance (Arar, 2014).



The official goal of this tool is to enable principals and superintendents to evaluate eligibility of veteran teachers for rank promotion, and to establish the suitability of novice teachers for the teaching profession and to receive a permanent teaching license. However, beyond this formal aspect, the tool's designers hoped to create a productive pedagogical discourse on dimensions of success in school education (Hartef et al., 2011).

Given the deficiencies and difficulties of the Arab education system, and the demands and tools established by the "New Horizon" reform, the present study intended to understand how teacher evaluation is conducted in practice in Arab schools in Israel.

### **Methodology & Methods**

The goal of this study is to understand school principals' perceptions and implications of teacher evaluation. Thus, a qualitative methodology is appropriate for this research, as qualitative research can provide intricate and detailed understating of perceptions, meanings and intentions (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Specifically, the study employed semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, which allows participants to express how they regard situations of teacher evaluation from their own points of view (ibid). Interviews were designed to glean data on participant's work context, their views of teacher evaluation, anecdotes, and examples of teacher evaluation advocates in their practices.

Given the nature of the study, purposeful sampling strategy (Creswell, 2009) was used, as it allowed selecting participants who manage schools under the "New Horizon" reform in the Arab education system and have over five years of principalship job experience. It also allowed gaining insight into issues of central importance to this research. 26 school principals from the Arab education system in Israel were selected by taking into consideration their gender, districts, school size, and work experience. The participants are from 16 elementary schools (grades 1-6) and 10 junior

high school (grades 7-9), with at least five years' experience as principals (see Table 1). (High school principals were not included as they belong to another reform.) Most of the schools in this study are in Arab villages and towns with diverse student populations. Fourteen male principals and ten female school principals were interviewed. All interviews were conducted in Arabic by two M.A. students; each interview lasted between 90 minutes and two hours. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Table 1 describes the characteristics of the interviewees.

Table 1.

*Profile of Participants (N= 26)*

School Type*	Principals	N	Total	Comments
Elementary School	Ahmad, Saed, Shady, Rabea, Sari, Najwan, Adnan, Aref	Male 8	16	Including village and town schools; one special needs school; one Catholic school; 10 schools with multi-ethnic students (Muslim, Christian and Druze).
	Fatina, Muntaha, Fida, Eman, Khadeja, Ranen Ikram, Samar	Female 8		
Junior High School	Mowafaq, Rami, Hussein, Kadir, Husny, Rafeq	Male 6	10	
	Odit, Seren, Yasmin, Donia	Female 4		

\*The number of students in each school ranges from 400 to 700 students.

The average age of the respondents was 38 (ranging from 35 to 56); most had more than 5 years' role experience. There was equal



representation for both genders and almost equal representation for elementary and junior-high schools. All principals and teachers had academic degrees. Average size of the participating schools' populations was approximately 500 students (ranging from 400 to 700 students).

Each interviewee received an explanation of the objective of the study and was assured anonymity and consensual participation; they were able to terminate the interview if they chose to. Interview questions included open questions, for example: "Can you complete the sentence: Teacher evaluation is ..."; questions aimed at clarifying the interviewee's descriptions such as "Can you expand slightly on this matter"; and interpretative questions such as "If I have understood you correctly, in your view, the teachers perceive their evaluation as ..., is that correct?..."

### **Data Analysis**

Since the collected data consisted of recorded interview transcripts, including varied responses to open questions, content analysis procedures were used to organize the data and allow inferences to be drawn concerning the characteristics and meanings of the data. The interview transcripts underwent the four stages of content analysis delineated by Marshall and Rossman (2012): 'organization of findings', 'construction of categories and themes, and associations between themes', 'examination of emergent hypotheses' and a search for 'different meanings of the themes'. The findings were organized and coded by comparative analysis including comparison within categories between their component themes and between the different categories as expressed in the interviewees' words. A comparison between all findings was conducted by the author in discussion with the interviewer, providing perceptions and meaning to the findings. This cross-checking of interpretations was employed to reinforce the reliability and internal validity of the findings, and eventually led to the formation of a set of inter-related categories

(Marshall & Rossman, 2012). In order to articulate and highlight the major themes, representative voices and quotes that most accurately represent the themes are reported in the research findings. As the study is based on a small sample from a specific group of school principals, the reader should be aware of the limitations of the findings as applied to other social and educational arenas.

### Findings

The analysis produced five central themes, as follows:

#### 1. Principals' appraisal perceptions

The "New Horizon" reform initiated clear policy regarding data-related teacher performance evaluation, and required regular evaluation. The research findings show that principals perceive teacher evaluation as an important aspect of the principal's role in order to enhance school effectiveness, even though different perceptions arises from principals' interviews.

The principals expressed the necessity of using formative appraisal in addition to summarizing evaluations, but the distinction between control and supervision processes and appraisal roles seems indistinct.

*Ahmad explained:*

*It could radiate to the teachers and produce new norms and a learning culture that promotes achievements, creating an effective control mechanism that would advance teaching and learning and consequently achievements. The reform requires me to provide an accounting to my superintendents that did not exist before.*

Some principals saw formative evaluation as an administrative tool to develop teachers' professional abilities and reduce isolation experienced during the teacher's work in the enclosed classroom, also using it as an important tool to establish and improve team processes (Conley & Glasman, 2008).



Aref noted how evaluation contributed to professional development and accountability:

*Evaluation is essential to improve the education system if it is applied according to objective principles, it promotes a different discourse. A good evaluation is worthwhile and you develop professionally, you are valued and receive financial rewards. Yet if the evaluation is subjective it can destroy the teacher's role. It should be based on recorded data and professional parameters, using evaluative feedback, observations, a portfolio and student achievements.*

In one school, peer groups of novice teachers played a role in teacher evaluation, working together to analyze assessment results and plan responses to the principal's instructions. This is a structured data collection process, documented in their personal portfolios. The male principal Shady sharpened the picture of teacher evaluation following the "New Horizon" reform:

*I used to perform the evaluation in an inconsistent, non-orderly manner. After the principals' course I formed an evaluation team to guide evaluation in the school. I evaluate teachers according to a structured program of three observations, collecting evidence on examinations the teacher constructed and student achievements, and reports from the subject coordinator. I then meet the teachers and present them with a reflection of their work to show them how to advance."*

The female principal Samar described her own structured evaluation process for teachers' professional development:

*The evaluation serves as a tool for the collection of evidence and describes the teachers' work in its natural environment; I also use it as a tool to outline the teachers' professional development.*

Similarly, Muntaha clarified her perception of the evaluation's necessity:

*Utilizing the personal potential of every teacher is perceived as part of school principals' role. I believe in the potential of each teacher. They all graduated the same colleges, with the same achievements and diplomas, but ultimately there success is linked to the school climate. An empowering climate engineers empowerment. From this starting point, evaluation is evaluation for the sake of improvement.*

However, formative evaluation is viewed as a long-term process that requires the principal's time, a resource that is not always available. Eman told us:

*Constant dialog with the teacher for the purpose of a meaningful learning process requires time I do not have. I have a staff of 55 teachers. In some I see potential for professional development. With them I have many discussions whenever I find the time, but I don't get to the others.*

The principals envisaged that it was part of their role to help teachers realize their personal potential. They chose different strategies for their evaluation activities, appropriate for particular situations. Some used supervision to tighten lax relationships through improved communication and to establish their control and authority. In one school a data analysis team gave individual teachers the opportunity to assert their own evaluative expertise within the group setting, while the vice-principal mentored the induction of novice teachers, in both classroom work and individual meetings. One principal spoke about performing "heavy" coaching in a group setting to avoid individual teachers' defensive posturing, leaving the "light" coaching to one-on-one interactions, while others felt that only one-on-one interactions were suitable for potentially emotionally charged conversations about individual data and practice.

## **2. Obstacles of teacher evaluation**

The importance given to accountability in education, and the declarations of the Israeli Ministry of Education for the "New Horizon" reform in preliminary education, appears to have influenced most of the principals, who emphasized the existence of an evaluation culture in their schools expressed by the formulation of regulations for regular evaluation and different evaluation procedures.

Principals who were involved in the school, motivated by pedagogic considerations and directed towards improvement of students' academic achievements and the school's development, had a clear influence on evaluation and on the fostering of teachers. However, the evaluation culture presented by the principals is





mainly symbolic and merely reflects the school's need to appear to be “transparent”. Thus the principals maintain legitimacy for their schools and ensure the continued flow of resources needed for its functioning.

The school principal's difficulty in establishing a culture of teacher evaluation, is also exacerbated by several dilemmas stemming from the cultural context in which the Arab educational system operates that restrict the principal's freedom of action and decision-making, including the governance of the micro-politics of the hamullah (extended family), especially since the educational system is one of very few occupational openings available for educated Arabs (Arar, 2014, p. 189). From the principals' testimony it is clear that under these circumstances professional decisions are often pushed aside.

Principals in Arab society in Israel vacillate between responsibility for the students and consideration of the teacher's work overshadowed by a constraining culture and values that emphasize managerial hierarchy and control as the “correct” way to organize society (Arar & Oplatka, 2011). Thus, values that advocate authoritarian leadership, prevalent in traditional societies, influence the way in which the evaluation is performed.

The interviews revealed difficulties involved in decision-making, especially for female principals, in the attempt to reconcile concern for students' welfare and attainments with collegial relations with teachers who are the subject of the evaluation.

### **3. Resources, tools and procedures for evaluation**

The findings indicated that few principals apply an orderly teacher evaluation procedure backed by data use and complying with the new teacher training and professional development requirements, although the “New Horizon” reform provided clear stipulations. Aref, a male principal, is one of these few:

*Today, evaluation relates to the teachers' mastery of the subject matter, use of varied teaching methods, quality of the teacher-student relationship, improvement of student*

*achievement, level of knowledge acquired by students, teachers' felt presence in the school, participation in courses, and quality of their relations with colleagues.*

The interviews indicate that some principals obtained resources and developed various tools and means for teacher appraisal, which they use to evaluate the teachers' work at school. "This year I sent a teacher to an 'evaluation trustee' training course, and another teacher is doing an M.A. in management and evaluation. I teach measurement and evaluation at Beit-Berl College, and we perform authentic tasks at school" (Eman). Similarly, Ahmad clarified the reform's emphasis on professional development regarding teacher appraisal: "Training courses today take appraisal very seriously, and we naturally use the assistance of the coordinator and trainers. The trainers supply evaluation of the teachers. The National Test of School Efficiency and Success Indices, which examines 8<sup>th</sup> grade students' knowledge in four subjects, as well as school climate, is an evaluation tool, as are the five-year tests. This is a resource that reflects the quality of teachers' performance, and which the school should use to become more efficient".

Several principals emphasized effective communication with teachers as a formative evaluation strategy including conducting class observations, while others used students' achievements for evidence-based evaluation. Ahmad explained: "No principal will today retain a teacher whose students have weak achievements; it's considered an important guideline in data-based teacher evaluation that's no longer based on tales."

Several principals applied a data-based evaluation cycle, as witnessed in Rami's words:

*We have built a worksheet to record analysis, to help teachers engage in the process of teaching and negotiate meaning from teaching processes. We examine data as an instructional step to develop collaborative learning teams and professional learning communities. These norms promote shared values and vision, a sense of collective responsibility.*



Most of the principals understood that there should be formal criteria and resources for teacher evaluation in order to meet demands for accountability, as Najwan explained:

*Teacher evaluation is required by law today; the school must present documented evidence of the teacher evaluation process according to clear criteria and detailed plans for improvement of teaching methods to improve student achievements. This culture has become part of the school discourse.*

Muntaha, on the other hand, sees evaluation as a holistic process that expresses a number of communication layers with teachers: general evaluation criteria, learning program, teacher-student interaction, how students react in class, whether the teacher takes their diversity into account, and if there is group work or face-to-face teaching.

Besides evaluation norms, it seems that the reform has not yet assimilated the validity and reliability of teacher appraisal, as indicated by the interviewees. For example, Fida sees evaluation of the students' achievements and their perception of the quality of learning as a feedback tool regarding the quality of the teaching process:

*Evaluation is performed after report cards, when the child evaluates him/herself. If there is a high rate of students in one class that points to difficulties with a certain teacher, I have a meeting with the homeroom teacher. If a student says he has difficulty concentrating in English lessons, it requires examining that lesson. That is evaluation that follows a situation described by students.*

At the same time, Adnan described an initiated process of functional teacher appraisal:

*I have a gauge for teacher evaluation, a closed, organized questionnaire that I distribute. The nature of my observation is open, focused on attitude to diversity, instilling values, relationship with students. There is the professional aspect of planning and didactics.*

The measured data show the variance of the principals' perceptions of the tools, norms and standards teacher evaluation, thus indicating that the road to assimilating a uniform appraisal tool is still long. Many interviewed principals clearly stated the lack of appropriate training and guidance by the Ministry of Education, and

the lack of uniformity of the appraisal tools. There is considerable variance in the perceptions of the evaluation process and ways. Some see the teachers' consideration of the diversity among the students as one of the tools of his/her success, alongside use of the training resource offered by the supervision to professionally perform teacher evaluation. The problems mentioned by the principals include paucity of evaluation resources provided by the Ministry of Education, and lack of sufficient time to take a personal part in the school evaluation processes.

#### 4. School's evaluation culture

Principals, who were perceived as non-avoidant leaders, namely involved in school life, motivated by pedagogic considerations, and oriented toward improving the schools development and achievements, tended to affect the evaluation and the nurturing of teachers, as exemplified by Ikram:

*At our school, appraisal is a regular procedure. This year I asked the teachers to evaluate themselves and pass it on to the subject coordinator, with whom I discuss them. Concerning student evaluations, we built an Excel sheet a norm for questions like in the National Test of School Efficiency and Success – for each student, class and the entire level. When a class has good average grades, it is often the teacher's achievement, and that's an important part of my evaluation.*

Hussein also described how he used National Test of School Efficiency and Success results to reflect and develop the teachers work at school:

*I present the results on slides. I emphasize the averages data, the climate, school policy, priorities, and the uncertainty factor. We then discuss ways to improve. We improve together and individually. If teachers connect to priorities, the program, it is good feedback that provides the school with a reliable picture of them.*

At the same time, some principals see evaluation as the main tool to establish a culture of accountability at school. Ahmad's narrative represents a number of principals:

*My goal is to promote the organization in general. Under this umbrella, everyone at school needs to develop. The teachers have to develop, and this helps the children to*



*develop. I need someone who fits my organization, its development and style, in congruence with the school culture and the students.*

For some principals, evaluation combines the school's value-oriented, process-oriented and output-oriented strata, as exemplified by Seren's statement:

*The school instills values and is also achievement-oriented. Appraisal and school culture that are clear to the educators contribute to focusing on achieving the school's goals and targets, and raising the resources to accomplish this. This way, we can discover educational problems in time, divert additional hours and other resources, split the class into groups, and focus the staff on achieving the school's overall objectives.*

The findings show that principals are not of one mind regarding the establishment of an organizational evaluation culture in school. Some principals view the students' scholastic achievements as proof that the teacher meets the school's goals, whereas schools that have an evaluation culture aim to reinforce the school as a learning organization guided by clear objectives and standards.

## **5. Providing feedback and sharing expertise**

Feedback in the evaluation process may be used in two ways: in a vertical learning strategy where a principal observes a novice and provides advice on how to advance the practice or in horizontal learning situations among peers and across communities. Several principals expressed teachers' desires to get feedback on their work, as the principal Saed explained: "The evaluation process is a tremendous opportunity to hear about the quality of teachers functioning, to develop professionally, and to receive suitable guidance and pedagogic instruction, apart from enabling financial and rank promotion [...] these are some of my teachers' expressions."

However, the principal Rami voiced teachers' reservations concerning evaluation: "Some of the teachers see the evaluation process as a threat; they think that they need to report to the principal and the office; for them evaluation means something fateful".

Some of the principals evaluated novice teachers in different disciplines, and then assigned a mentor to guide their teaching, providing them with feedback on teaching improvements, building on critical observations of their teaching, as the principal Ikram explained:

*As a junior-high principal, I confess that I'm not so familiar with all the different disciplines, so I appoint a mentor-peer for each new teacher, and they assist the teacher's absorption process, showing them how to evaluate students, discussing their achievements; this allows me to construct an open but structured plan for the teacher's development, using evaluation for the school's organizational and pedagogic functioning.*

One principal pointed out the difficulty involved in a more considerate approach:

*When you show concern for the teachers, ask to bond with them as their colleague, ask their counsel in any matter or find a reason for any regression in a teacher's work, they think that you are weak or avoiding hurtful decision-making. Sometimes I simply take the approach of "that's what I want to achieve and that's what you will do". (Ranen)*

To summarize, feedback may be used in teacher evaluation to assist capacity building, develop data-based understanding, content knowledge and personal values, by discussing experiences and expectations as part of a dialog, and helping teachers to select effective responses to data.

### Discussion and Implications

The current study traced the range of perceptions and applications of evaluation of teachers among Arab elementary and junior-high school principals in Israel in an era of accountability reform, acting in a system that holds traditional and conservative views of the principal's roles and functions.

Firstly, there were obvious differences in the perception of data-based evaluation and employment reflecting a mix of control, follow-up and evaluation processes. The way in which the principal uses teacher evaluation appears to reflect the principal's role perception (Arar & Oplatka, 2011). Some may see the role as principally administrative so that teacher evaluation is considered a supervisory



follow-up tool, applied as a ceremony demonstrating the principal's authority (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). This evaluation model was disliked by teachers and was found to simply increase tension (Heritage et al., 2009).

Alternatively, principals may see the principalship mainly as a leadership role, and will then view teacher performance evaluation as a tool to characterize and encourage the organizational culture they wish to shape, using shared data and documented evidence as an empirical basis for progress (Downey & Kelly, 2013). This was expressed by involving various levels of school staff in the evaluation, so that subject coordinators and peers assisted teacher development (Cosner, 2012; Means et al., 2011).

Principals who were pedagogy-oriented knew how to distinguish between supervisory and follow-up practices and evaluation practices that constitute a basis for the development of teaching and learning. This finding correlates with the claims of various researchers that there are different scholastic orientations between principals who follow product-driven as opposed to process-driven principalship (Arar & Oplatka, 2011; Downey & Kelly, 2013).

Secondly, the findings indicate that certain core practices were performed by the interviewed principals: assessing teacher needs; observing; providing feedback and sharing expertise; dialogue and questioning; and brokering. These practices were applied to multiple stages of the data-based evaluation process (Lai & McNaughton, 2013). Data teams were formed to conduct joint assessments as part of a goal-setting process, helping to identify where they needed to channel their time and energy, as discussed in Young (2006). However, staff found it difficult to implement the results of these assessments in practice. Principals used a range of observational practices, both formal (e.g., lesson study using protocols) and informal (e.g., walkthroughs) (Lai & McNaughton, 2013; Schildkamp & Kuiper, 2012)

Our findings indicate that some principals were convinced that evaluation programs are essential to ensure consistent accountability for all that happens in the school, and that this allowed them to construct goal-oriented learning-teaching processes in the school, based on data collected in a professional and scientific way (Cosner, 2012; Means et al., 2011). This contrasted with the use of a constructivist model by other principals who saw the use of evaluation as part of the optimal growth and training process for the teacher (Arar & Oplatka, 2011; Kersten & Israel, 2005).

Thirdly, the evidence clearly indicated that the product-driven model of evaluation determined by the “New Horizon” reform model of teacher evaluation, which stresses professional principles, often clashes with school culture and Arab society’s cultural norms (Arar & Oplatka, 2011). These include a culture of appeasement rather than accountability; the expectation that the principal should be an authoritarian figure; local political influences dominated by *hamullah* (extended family) interests that hinder principals’ ability to manage the school according to administrative and pedagogic needs; and lack of appropriate role definitions. These factors obstruct the use of data-driven decision-making and evaluation as a tool for constructive approaches, and delay efforts to improve teaching and learning (Anderson et al., 2010; Cosner, 2012; Hamilton et al., 2009; Mandinach, 2012).

Finally, we found that effective principals actively follow the implemented processes in an effort to improve the quality of teaching, for example by allocating time to shared planning or discussing professional development. The effective leadership follow-up of professional development by examining the staff’s teaching practices has changed and improved, and its results have positively affected the students’ learning and outcomes (Arar, 2014; Spillane, 2006). These results can be divided into two – promoting the teachers and promoting the students. Teacher promotion means that assimilating a school-wide appraisal tool is a chance to instill a culture of dialog, in which decisions are made about the evaluation indices inspired by



Table 2.

*Perceptions, Patterns and Goals of Principals' Teacher Evaluation*

Perception of Principal's Role Perception of Evaluation's Role	<b>Management</b> (results-oriented)	<b>Leadership</b>
<b>Formative</b>	Teacher evaluation is the basis for providing each teacher with personal feedback, to develop and nurture the teacher's teaching abilities (developing feedback), and building a plan for personal improvement.	The indices by which teachers' success is measured reflect the characteristics of the organizational culture that the principal wants to instill in the school.
<b>Instrumental</b>	<p>Teacher evaluation is for follow-up and control purposes (goal-oriented management).</p> <p>Teacher evaluation is a ceremonial display of formal authority by the principal.</p>	<p>1. Building an evaluation questionnaire is an opportunity to instill a culture of dialog, in which decisions are made about the evaluation indices inspired by the principal, and the commitment of all dialog participants to the joint values grows.</p> <p>2. By determining the evaluation measures, the principal passes on his/her outlook and values concerning the areas on which the teachers will be evaluated, and teachers focus their educational efforts according to the same measures.</p>

the principal, and the commitment of all dialog participants to the joint values grows (Cosner, 2012; Hamilton et al., 2009; Mandinach, 2012). By determining the evaluation measures, the principal passes on his/her outlook and values concerning the areas on which the teachers will be evaluated. Consequently, teachers focus their educational efforts according to the same measures (Anderson et al., 2010; Spillane, 2006). This situation is demonstrated in Table 2.

Thus, the way the teacher evaluation task is performed also reflects the principal's perception of his/her role. The role could be perceived as primarily administrative, in which teacher evaluation is for follow-up and control purposes goal-oriented management, and is in fact a ceremonial display of formal authority by the principal. Alternatively, the principal could perceive his/her role as a leadership role, and view teacher evaluation as a tool to characterize and formulate the school's organizational culture.

Studies corroborate the argument that effective educational leaders devote time to examine teaching plans regularly by giving teachers feedback (Bowers et al., 2014), and supporting teachers to improve their teaching methods (Arar, 2014; Koran & Karlson, 2014). These principals have a key role to focus the team on meticulous success criteria, which are part of performance standards. They do so by frequent attention and use of criteria determined in staff meetings, performance appraisal, classroom observations, discussions of the study program and teaching strategies, and other interactions with the teaching staff (Spillane et al., 2011).

Since the principal is the central figure at school, and to a large extent determines its culture (Sarson, 1982; MacBeath, 2003), it can be assumed that the evaluation message could be powerful if accompanied by policy oriented toward professional standards and criteria (Cosner, 2012). Prior knowledge and training programs are crucial to dealing with the evaluators' perceptions and views pertaining to evaluation. This can be accomplished by building a clear reference framework, detailing a wide variety of behaviors,



through workshops that demonstrate examples of appraisals and effective behaviors of employees. This is missing in the existing training programs (Arar & Oplatka, 2011; Arar, 2014).

Further questions relate to the degree of variety that principals should be allowed when choosing the approaches and tools in view of the professional knowledge regarding their nature, knowledge that the principal does not necessarily have. Another question relates to allocated (and budgeted) time devoted to evaluation and its relevant partners.

Although the research sample was small and unrepresentative, it demonstrates the tension that exists when there are few resources available to minority groups with similar cultural characteristics, also representing the difficulties encountered by principals working in schools that serve populations with a low-medium socio-economic status.

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