



THE ARAB WOMAN AS A SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AND A LEADER: HOW DO ARAB FEMALE STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS PERCEIVE THE MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP STYLES OF ARAB FEMALE PRINCIPALS IN ISRAEL?

Sabrin Titi Nama

Girne American University (GAU),
Cyprus

Abstract:

This study examines the perceptions of Arab female students in higher education institutions regarding the management and leadership styles of Arab female school principals in Israel. Informed by the intersection of gender, culture, and institutional context in the field of school leadership, it analyzes the styles of Arab female principal leaders, their impact on students' academic and personal development, and their influence in the promotion of gender equity. Using qualitative methods of semi-structured interviews and focus groups, 40 Arab female students were consulted. The study also found that Arab female principals tended to adopt hybrid leadership styles to manage their leadership role within the patriarchal context of the Arab sector in Israel. The students described their principals as role models of influential leaders responding to cultural expectations by providing empowerment while remaining mindful of cultural expectations. The study concluded that Arab female principals have the potential to be leaders of change and offer their students as future leaders, despite the considerable structure and social barriers placed on them. Recommendations include culturally responsive leadership training, structural change in educational institutions, and mentor programs to support women developing careers in educational leadership. Theoretically, the study contributes to the debate of gendered leadership in contexts of conservatism, and practically, advocates for the development of educational spaces where all students are given the opportunity to flourish and develop as leaders.

Keywords: Arab female principals, educational leadership, gendered leadership, Arab society in Israel, higher education, student perceptions, hybrid leadership style, gender equality, women in leadership

1. Introduction

This study explores Arab female students' perceptions of Arab female principals' management and leadership styles in higher education institutions in Israel. It discusses

the various styles of leadership employed by Arab female principals; how their leadership affects students' achievements, and how the broader cultural, social, and institutional factors influence those leadership practices as well. Further, it highlights the role of Arab female principals in promoting gender equality and the challenges they face. The study collected qualitative data from 40 Arab female students through in-depth interviews and focus groups. The analysis revealed that Arab female principals employ hybrid leadership styles when leading students that combine strict guidelines for discipline, but provide emotional support for the students. It also noted that Arab female principals serve as role models who contest the cultural norms of gender. They do this while being embedded in a patriarchal system. Students perceived that leadership has a profound impact on their (students') motivation, and identity development, and reinforced the notion of gender equity.

This study centers on Arab female students in higher education who had Arab female principals in secondary school. The main concepts for this study are leadership—an influence process leading to organizational success (Tipurić, 2022), management—operational coordination of the tasks of an organization (Onyekwere *et al.*, 2023) and gendered leadership, which refers to the social norms and stereotypes concerning how women should behave when in a leadership capacity particularly in patriarchal cultures (Wolfram *et al.*, 2020; Tremmel & Wahl, 2023). The study also takes into account the double bind, when female leaders are expected to represent both masculine and feminine characteristics and are judged for not conforming to one or the other (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023). By using a thematic analysis approach (Lochmiller, 2021), the study identifies patterns regarding how students perceived their female leaders and showed how principals led through culturally responsive strategies, which were shaped by resistance, resilience and ambition.

This research adds to the increasing body of literature highlighting women in educational leadership, particularly in Middle Eastern minority contexts. It has filled a significant gap in understanding how Arab women in leadership positions are most often perceived and how they affect larger educational and gender issues. This study is significant not only because it shows that leadership can be empowering for students and a driver of social change, but also because it reveals the structural barriers which continue to restrict women in leadership roles. The research suggests that Arab female principals are highly productive change agents; nonetheless, their transformation is limited by narrow cultural and institutional confines. The study offered recommendations for more specialized leadership training, culturally relevant mentoring programs, and reforms to the institution to support female leaders. The recommendations are designed to support inclusive and equity-driven leadership and promote environments where future generations of Arab girls feel their own and others' leadership potential is recognized and nourished.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Leadership

Leadership is inseparable from management and development, and both are critical for outcomes. A person in a management position is responsible for getting things done in the day-to-day operations and for performance, but they must also see the opportunities in making changes happen (Tipurić, 2022). Whether it is good leadership, without good management practices, it would be difficult to achieve a meaningful vision. Similarly, whether it is getting the management aspect right, it would be difficult to achieve results through team motivation without the leadership function. Being able to master both leadership and management, for some, seems to be a rare skill, and while there are many managers, few are leaders (Onyekwere *et al.*, 2023).

Therefore, to be efficient and effective in managerial roles, both women and men need both skill sets (Buljan Šiber *et al.*, 2023). Managerial skills can be learned and trained, and this process is the same for both genders. However, leadership skills are harder to acquire and master. Additionally, women's leadership styles and skills often differ from men's (Ogona, 2021)

2.2 The School Principal and a Leader

The effectiveness of the leadership provided by the principal cannot be detached from the ultimate success of an educational organization. The principal occupies a critical role in influencing the improvement of school quality and an improvement in progress (Alene, 2025). The principal's ability to lead is important, as it is hoped they can develop and build school management, whose aim is to achieve educational goals (Jannah & Wahyuningsih, 2024). The policies established by the principal have a significant impact on education quality. Any improvement in education quality largely hinges on the principal's subsequent leadership ability (Kaso *et al.*, 2021). A range of studies support the notion that principalship leadership has a primary impact on improving the quality of education (Widadi *et al.*, 2021; Irawati *et al.*, 2020). Ultimately, any measure of success in an educational institution is heavily reliant on the effective, quality leadership of a principal, with quality leadership playing a direct role in the quality of education. By placing value on quality leadership, educational institutions can ensure progressive improvements to educational quality (Agyeman & Aphane, 2024).

The principal advances all the activities in the school through his conceptual skills, developing the vision and mission of the school (Pratiwi, 2023). With the help of social skills, they guide, facilitate and provide support and create a safe environment for all members of the school community and parties related to it outside of the school (Agyeman & Aphane, 2024). Regarding the technical skills, they guide in cooperating with colleagues, offer methods of implementing and conducting tasks, and distribute information about planning, implementing, and the results of work. There are efforts to build collaborative group cooperation, and as a leader, there was a clear commitment to carrying out the task and responsibility he fulfilled (Abson *et al.*, 2024).

Improving a school must be planned and executed in accordance with goals and objectives, and in accordance with the vision, mission and objectives that have been set, all within a timeframe (Priyambodo & Hasanah, 2021). To realize quality education that is better than before, an acute series of initiatives needs to be taken with high confidence and a commitment that may test the number of challenges that will arise. Just because someone wants to make a positive change doesn't mean that they want to change themselves for the better (Hidayat & Nurmila, 2024).

2.3 Women and Leadership

Women and leadership are a relatively new area of study because most historical research on leadership has centered on political figures and people described as 'great men', which has caused scholars to associate leadership primarily with male behaviors and styles (Kark & Buengeler, 2024). Using male behaviors or styles as the knowledge representation of leadership has contributed to referring to a "*male script*" of leadership within organizations (Wolfram *et al.*, 2020).

Research indicates leadership has always been examined by a male perspective, with early studies done by male authors looking at male leaders (Wolfram *et al.* 2020). Thus, when they define their leadership style, they support and represent styles that are based on characteristics that are traditionally accepted as masculine-oriented ones, by promoting direct dominance and assertiveness and resorting to masculine-oriented leadership practices, adopting these traits from prior biases that shaped their leadership styles (Tremmel & Wahl, 2023). These historical understandings and biases have likely contributed to women's slow advancement into leadership and the struggles they experience (Benmira & Agboola, 2021).).

Moreover, social norms and stereotypes have further reinforced the male script of leadership. Women often must navigate a "*double bind*" where they are expected to exhibit both traditionally male and female behaviors, leading to biased evaluations and additional hurdles in leadership roles (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023). The recognition of these biases and the push for more inclusive research in leadership studies are relatively recent developments aimed at addressing these historical disparities (Wolfram *et al.*, 2020).

2.4 The Arab Woman in Israel

The circumstances Arab women face in Israel are complex and characterized by tremendous challenges, as well as some potential for progress. Arab women live within a social structure that often discriminates against them, and they regularly face socio-economic barriers to full participation in education, health care, and employment (Refaeli *et al.*, 2022). The majority of Arab women are breaking boundaries and making strides on the educational and professional front. However, their representation in politics remains small; only a handful hold meaningful positions in senior-level government, and they continue to struggle to gain equal footing in the project of governance (Batshon, 2022). The question of violence affecting Arab women, as well as larger issues of socio-political

violence impacting their lives in everyday situations, is relevant in both historical and present contexts (Kattoura, 2020). The recent political conflicts and violence, as well as structural inequalities, are unresolved issues that diminish the lives of many Arab women. Yet, various organizations and community leaders are building connections and coalitions that provide support for at-risk Arab women who would like to dismantle the barriers they face in order to move toward becoming members of an inclusive and equitable society, and these groups are slowly forming budding support networks within Arab communities (Arar & Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2011).

3. Material and Methods

This study follows a qualitative research design to understand Arab female students studying in higher education institutions, in relation to their perceptions of the leadership and management of Arab female principals in Israel. A qualitative approach was utilized to facilitate a better understanding of how participants perceived their lived experience and cultural context in which they wanted to be understood by the researcher (Lim, 2025). The qualitative approach is useful to examine complex social phenomena, especially in exploring perceptions based on identity, gender and socio-cultural dynamics (Maxwell, 2021). A qualitative approach was a good fit because recent scholarly literature positions qualitative research as useful for educational leadership studies where understanding is nuanced and specific to context (Duggleby *et al.*, 2020).

This study collected data through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Semi-structured interviews were used to allow individual participants to share their own personal stories and perspectives with depth and flexibility while still providing a framework of questions to guide participants (Wakelin *et al.*, 2024). This not only allows participants to share expected insights, but also unexpected insights related to leadership styles (De Villiers *et al.*, 2021). Focus groups were used in parallel to facilitate interactive conversations between participants where they were able to discuss experiences with leaders in their lives (De Souza *et al.*, 2024). Thus, it allowed the researcher to see participants' shared beliefs, differences in opinions, and potential effects of group dynamics (Menary *et al.*, 2021). From previous research, focus groups can be an effective way to reveal consensus and variation in participant responses, especially in participants who share a similar social identity (Morgan, 2019). In this study, these data collection tools were used in tandem to allow the researcher to triangulate the data, which helped to increase the trustworthiness and depth of the data collected (Nowell *et al.*, 2017).

The population for this study consisted of Arab female students attending higher education institutions in Israel, where the principals were female. These participants were purposefully targeted due to their unique positioning as both recipients of school leadership during their secondary education and current observers of broader societal gender dynamics. From this population, we conducted a total of 40 students through snowball sampling, which is considered a non-probability sampling technique that is effective for recruiting participants from an identifiable community (Naderifar *et al.*,

2017). Snowball sampling contributed significantly to the current study, as it was deemed appropriate given the sensitivity of the context of the study and the collectivism of the topic (Ting *et al.*, 2025). The sample consisted of 20 participants for individual interviews and 20 for 4 focus groups of 5 students.

Ethical considerations were at the forefront of the research process. All stakeholders were given informed consent forms providing information for the research purpose, confidentiality options, and a reminder of voluntary participation (Mirza *et al.*, 2023). The data collection was done in Arabic, the participants' native language, which allowed for easier communication and comfort for participants, and all the sessions were audio-recorded with consent. The recordings were transcribed in Arabic and later translated into English by an Arabic-speaking professional for analysis purposes. As per Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis was chosen as a method of analysis because it allowed the researcher to determine salient patterns and themes in the data, which allowed the researcher to categorically code and interpret students' perceptions of Arab female principals' leadership and management styles as framed in their socio-cultural context (Lochmiller, 2021).

4. Results

The findings of the study are structured thematically according to the analysis where five themes make up the students' lived experiences and understanding. The themes capture various aspects of the principals' leadership styles, the academic and emotional impact of their students, the impact of the institutional and cultural contexts, and the challenges faced in achieving gender equality. The findings also represent a multi-faceted view of leadership embedded within a conservative cultural framework and highlight how these Arab female principals managed complex and often conflicting social expectations, all the while serving as role models and agents of change for the younger generation of Arab women.

4.1 Theme 1: Predominant Management and Leadership Styles of Arab Female Principals

Participants said that Arab female principals often include a hybrid leadership style, one that embraces strict discipline alongside deep emotional investment. Many students recognized these Arab female principals as extremely orderly and results-oriented, authoritative in ways that did not depict the cultural image of Arab women. One student relayed, *"She was so direct and ordered us, like a general. And I was surprised because here the women are expected to be quiet and follow the leader, and not to lead."* Another echoed, *"She clearly had an authority stronger than any male principal I had, but you could see her wearing all of the school..."* These accounts capture the tension between the social expectation of Arab women being modest and obedient, and the reality of them assuming authoritative roles in institutional leadership.

This contradiction invariably results in internal and external tensions for Arab female principals. As one female stated, *"The people in the community often would criticize her for being too 'manly' in running the school - but it was necessary to be that way to gain their respect."* This reflects the "male script" (Wolfram *et al.*, 2020) of leadership that many women often have to embrace in order to be perceived as competent observers within male-defined spaces. The downside of the male script is the loss of connection to their communities and/or the possibility of being misinterpreted as culturally inappropriate. The strictness these female principals adopted was not simply a managerial choice; it was a consequence of the intricate considerations involved in trying to convey authority as a woman in a singular social structure that historically depicts Arab women in subservient roles. Ogona (2021) and Tremmel and Wahl (2023) have both underscored that women leaders will often be judged for departing from gender-related norms even when it is essential for the effectiveness of the institution. The duality of being both a strict leader and a subordinate as a woman ultimately becomes the leadership identity of many Arab female principals in Israel.

4.2 Theme 2: Perceived Impact of Leadership on Academic and Personal Development

Most Arab female students viewed their female principals' leadership as essential to their educational experience related to attitudes towards their achievement in school and self-worth. The women were not only principals of their schools, but the students viewed them as agentic role models who contradicted the gender ideology of Arab culture. One student noted, *"Seeing a woman lead every day made me feel I can be more than what my family was expecting; she was evidence to me that we can also lead."* Another stated, *"She was not just our principal, she was evidence that women can rise and be respected. She let me know I could be proud to be a girl."* These comments articulate the transformational nature of female school leadership for students under conservative situations who had limited access to role models after they felt confined to specific ideals of gender.

The impact of the principal was also beyond academics and was emotional. Several students expressed that their principals provided care and encouragement that assisted them in coping with the pressures of society. *"She was always reminding us of how not to let anybody tell us we can't, as she said, 'you are as smart and as strong as any man.' That helped me keep studying, even when I had cousins dropping out,"* one student said. This aligns with research done by Jannah and Wahyuningsih (2024), who stated that school leaders foster an environment which reinforces students' confidence and development. In many of the Arab contexts described, which are patriarchal in nature, a visual representation of female leadership in public school settings allows for an example of an option and an alternative to traditional gender role expectations. Batshon (2022) explained that Arab women in leadership not only provide opportunities for themselves when barriers are filtered, but also filter barriers for subsequent generations when space becomes open for others.

4.3 Theme 3: Cultural, Social, and Institutional Influences on Leadership Approaches

Arab female principals' leadership practices are filtered through the cultural, social, and institutional contexts of Arab society in Israel, where women must be obedient, modest, and secondary to men. Participants described their principals as required to work twice as hard and use a more punitive and assertive style of leadership in the quest for validation and legitimacy, not traditionally afforded to female leaders. One student said, *"She was always the first to arrive and the last to leave. She had to demonstrate that she was stronger and more capable than everyone else, just because she was a woman."* Another student said, *"She was very strict and direct — not because she wanted to be feared, but because she about kindness and showed kindness. She knew people would say she was weak."* These statements illustrate the kinds of social pressures Arab female administrators are often forced to assume to counteract the stereotype of female legitimacy. This situation resembles the double bind noted by Galsanjigmed and Sekiguchi (2023), which is that women are asked to adopt dominant characteristics typically attributed to men to have any competence; no experience is real or described. However, there are risks associated with being considered incompetent for straying from characteristics that signify traditional femininity. In the conservative Arab social context, female leaders must grapple with their dual identities, requiring them to demonstrate discipline, control, and public sacrifice to garner professional legitimacy (Hassanein, 2025).

4.4 Theme 4: Role of Arab Female Principals in Promoting Gender Equality and Empowerment

The majority of participants strongly believed that Arab female principals played a strong role in developing gender equity, and in doing so, shaped students' perceptions of leadership through their leadership style and gendered messages. For example, students commented that their principals purposefully tried to show that women are capable of leadership, often with the added expectation to prove that women can lead equally or more effectively than men. Examples of the former were observed in strong commitments to competence and fairness. As one student described, *"She would constantly say, 'I want you to see women can do anything - manage, lead, and solve problems; no one should question our strength.'"* This effort to continually exhibit equality was displayed in their academic, cultural, and extracurricular activities. One example came from one of the study participants who said their principal pushed for a girls' football (soccer) team to form alongside boys. The participants said their principal was reprimanded for forming a football team for girls, as some community members and some staff laughed at the idea of girls and football.

Moreover, this study confirms Wolfram *et al.* (2020), who pointed out that women leaders in male-dominated systems often adopt a leadership style that includes high levels of empathy, support, and fairness to challenge the dominant *"male script"* of leadership. The Arab female principals in this research embodied such a style while simultaneously engaging in cultural negotiation—maintaining community respect while pushing gender boundaries. Their efforts to ensure that girls were equally represented,

encouraged, and treated in schools reflect what Agyeman and Aphane (2024) described as *"leadership with a social justice lens,"* particularly effective in transforming educational environments in contexts of gender inequality.

4.5 Theme 5: Perceived Challenges and Opportunities in Leadership and Recommendations for Improvement

The participants agreed that Arab female principals operate with difficulty related to the tension between community conservatism, bureaucratic institutionalism, and personal aspirations. One participant said, *"She worked harder than anyone, and yet people doubted her purely because of being a woman."* This finding illustrates the issues of structural and cultural barriers that underpin the experiences of Arab female leaders. Women often face a *"double bind"* (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023) because even if they conform to gender norms, they are still judged negatively, and if they don't conform, they are judged extraordinarily harshly. In the Arab sector, this challenge is compounded due to traditional perspectives on gender roles and an absence of institutional support. However, as Al-Naqbi and Aderibigbe (2024) found, a network of support and advocacy is taking a new shape among Arab women leaders. Participants suggested that additional leadership training, awareness campaigns in their communities, and mentorship programs would support future female principals. These suggested interventions demonstrate a recognition that change is possible but only if it is systemic and culturally responsive.

5. Discussion

The current study investigated Arab female students in higher education institutions' perspectives on the leadership and management styles of Arab female principals in Israel. The discussion draws on the voices of students who experienced these leadership styles during their schooling and offers a comparison of their comments against existing academic literature about women in leadership, especially within patriarchal and socio-politically complicated contexts. The study provides a complex examination of how Arab female principals bring leadership to life within cultural restrictions and provide role models for empowerment while navigating institutional, state, and social constraints. Data was analyzed thematically, and there were numerous key findings that highlight gender, leadership, and cultural expectations in the context of Arab society.

The findings highlighted that Arab female principals typically employed hybrid leadership styles that draw on imposed discipline and emotional investment amplified by the need to legitimize their existence in male-dominated contexts, even when doing so is contradictory or inconsistent with traditional Arab society's view of women as subordinate to men or passive. While these hybrid roles were in keeping with the male institutional context, Wolfram *et al.* (2020) identified a *"male script"* that women have to perform for others to see them as competent in the leadership role. Where male leaders may lead without any scrutiny, Arab female principals have to exert excessive control

due to the cultural constraints of their context—e.g., longer working hours, excessive performance, and stricter discipline—before they can be viewed as authoritative, creating the need to emphasize the hybrid approach for continued acceptance. Where Ogona (2021) similarly examined women's consideration of their contextual expectations and opted to pursue a more rigid framework in role, but at risk of being viewed as culturally inappropriate or un-feminine. The results of the study highlight how traditional notions of gender mixed with power inequities structure the very agency women have to enact gendered leadership in their role as principals.

The study also emphasizes the impact Arab female principals exert over their students' academic and personal trajectories, providing examples to illustrate the influences that the female principals had on the students. Students characterized their principals as role models and as visible possibilities, particularly within a cultural context that often seeks to limit women's opportunities and their presence in public roles. The current research supports Kamal *et al.*'s (2020) research, which demonstrated that school leaders encourage personal growth and confidence in their students. Cultural patriarchal Arab communities discourage young women from taking initiative, making it more impactful to see a visible woman leader who not only challenges gender norms but also illustrates what is possible for young women (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). Previous studies supported this phenomenon and support the notion of Arab women in leadership, suggesting that more than simply their own journeys, women leaders aid the cultural transition for others, thereby widening the perception of what is possible for Arab girls and women (Hodges, 2017)

The research also discussed cultural, social, and institutional expectations that created the expectation that Arab female principals must work harder and adopt more aggressive leadership styles to be perceived as professionally capable. The study suggests that leaders in this duality accomplish what Galsanjigmed and Sekiguchi (2023) describe as the "*double bind*," wherein women's demonstrated behavior must appear as an attitude to the masculine to be considered effective, while at the same time, there are severe consequences if they display personality traits that appear feminine. In the case of Arab female principals, longstanding cultural beliefs around gender roles and gender roles facing Arab women in educational leadership mean female principals have less space for flexibility (Arar, 2018). Refaeli *et al.* (2022) note that Arab women in Israel encounter lower levels of protection from systemic concerns and are faced with multiple disadvantages, such as cultural disadvantages, lack of public domain resources, and limited mobility options, that make their journey to professional leadership disproportionately difficult compared to their male equivalents. This means that the leadership practices of Arab female principals are about professional choice but rather more about strategizing through an environment that remains challenging and unequal.

One of the most important findings of this study is that the Arab female principals lead practices aimed at gender inequality and female empowerment. Through their actions of trying to treat males and females equally, pushing girls to become leaders, and even creating female sports teams, they disrupt gender norms and tell new stories of what

women can accomplish. This work is closely aligned with Agyeman & Aphané's (2024) description of educational leadership using a lens of social justice, especially in marginalized communities. The work these women lead is more than symbolic as they create structural changes in how people perceive gender roles in schools and in the community. The example about forming a girls' football team showcases an important action by Arab female principals who confronted the expectations of society for females and then actively remolded expectations about girls in schools. This acts to exemplify inclusive leadership for students of all genders while normalizing gender equality and disrupting the patriarchy in cases where patriarchal norms dominate public and private life.

The study also revealed the many challenges Arab female principals face, including issues of community disbelief, gender bias, and institutional neglect. The findings also corroborate the literature examining structural and cultural challenges that interrupt women's access to, and/ or impact as leaders in their institution. Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi (2023) describe being held to higher standards and being harsher in judgment by others, particularly when women deviate from gender norms. Nevertheless, many participants highlighted how resilient and creative their principals were throughout their attempts to advocate for students and/or reform institutions. Al-Naqbi & Aderibigbe (2024) describe the hope in forming mentorship networks, and that many Arab women nourished networks of leadership development in Israel represents a change with possibility for new generations of female leaders. While the participants offered ideas for community awareness to help with changing state and social structures, and increased leadership development opportunities, this implies that empowering women in leadership must involve moving beyond the constraints of the societal structures in which they reside.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has shown that Arab female students perceive Arab female principals differently in Israel—they view these leaders as situated at the intersection of gender, culture, and institutional rules. The principals' leadership style was seen as strict and compassionate, from the beginning of expected competence, and a hybrid style developed in response to the expectations of the world to which they were held accountable and, in many instances, undermined their authority as women. Students perceived their principals not only as educational leaders but as role models who expressed what it means to be a woman of power and resilience in a very conservative cultural landscape. These findings substantiate prior scholarship on women's leadership in patriarchal settings—as a result, these students experienced the necessity of performing the "*male script*" of leadership (Wolfram *et al.*, 2020), and negotiated the demand to prove their ability, or competence, with expectations framed by double standards (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023).

The study also supported the value of female leadership, particularly when guided by the principles of social justice and equity, on students' academic motivation and self-image. The students framed the efforts of Arab female principals (such as inclusive sports programs or advocating for gender equity) as transformative. These actions connect to Agyeman and Aphane's (2024) framework of justice-oriented leadership, especially with marginalized groups. Additionally, this kind of leadership also challenged inequitable historical stereotypes and exposed young Arab women to visible role models that widened their sense of what is possible. These findings also exhibited structural barriers that remain: conservative community expectations, persistent institutional disregard, and inadequate structural institutional support to enhance what has been initiated by female leadership within the Arab sector in Israel.

Further research is needed to explore the institutional policies and social support structures that can be reformed to support Arab female leaders. Longitudinal studies could track the sustained impact of such leadership on students' educational and career outcomes. There are also opportunities for additional research around mentoring models and community-based leadership networks that could offer examples of tangible pathways to sustain and increase women's leadership in education. Despite numerous obstacles, this study suggests that Arab female principals are more than school managers—they are change agents and narrative changers, and their leadership exemplifies both resistance and pathways to improvement for gender equity in education.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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