



# Policy and praxis of principals' appointment: The case of Palestinian-Arab minority education in Israel

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## ABSTRACT

The research investigated the appointment of principals in the Arab education system (AES) in Israel and the challenges they facing candidate. Interviews gathered from 40 currently serving principals and six rejected principalship candidates. Findings indicated that principalship candidates were motivated to become principals due to their quest for self-realization, a sense of social mission, professional advancement and managerial promotion. The research identifies outside interventions that frequently overcome professional criteria including political priorities. A filtering process is recommended before the principals' course as part of the appointment process. Further conclusions and implications are discussed.

## 1. Introduction

School principals appointment process is complex, necessitating policy and pedagogic considerations and candidates must comply with various demanding requirements (Bush, 2016; Daresh, 2006; Cottrell and James, 2016; Hao, 2013). In recent years, there has been increasing research interest in the appointment of principals in the AES (Arar et al., 2017; Elli-Cherif et al., 2012; Koyama, 2014) voicing serious criticism concerning policies and practices of principal appointment (PA) in the AES, especially the interference of foreign political considerations (Abu-Saad, 2006; Arar and Abu-Asbah, 2013) in these appointments.

Academic discourse on the appointment of school principals in other countries (Bush, 2016; Cottrell and James, 2016; Daresh, 2006; Hao, 2013) relates to professional policies and criteria that are employed in selecting principals. However, few of these scholars indicate any political considerations that influence PAs. The lack of research attention for this issue is especially evident with regard to appointments to the AES in Israel. Thus, the purpose of the present research was to identify factors intervening in the PA process in AESI and to clarify challenges encountered by principalship candidates at the stages before and after the appointment, in the transition from the role of teacher to principalship and coping strategies that they devise and employ.

To clarify these issues, I have chosen qualitative methodology, employing in-depth interviews with 40 serving principals in the AES. Additionally, a further six rejected candidates were interviewed, in order to cross-check the data obtained from the serving principals. The article begins with a review of extant literature, followed by a

description of the methodology employed and presentation of the research findings. The article concludes with a discussion of the main findings, drawing conclusions for future research.

## 2. Principals' appointment process

The appointment process for school principals has recently been the object of much research interest (Arar et al., 2013; Ellili-Cherif et al., 2012; Koyama, 2014; Spillane and Lee, 2014; Walker and Qian, 2006) including the challenges faced by candidates for the principalship and interest in the way in which vacancies for this role are filled (Morrison, 2013). Scholars have found that the transition from teaching to educational management is a sharp, significant and critical turning point for the individual, necessitating a change in the former teacher's conceptualization of time, space and content (Spillane and Lee, 2014). The new role is very demanding and complex and requires structural synchronization and coordinated consideration of educational, pedagogic, cultural, administrative, technical, human and other dimensions including managerial and leadership skills (Crow, 2006; Murphy and Vriesenga, 2006).

In addition to describing the complexity of the principal's role, researchers have tried to identify the challenges facing principalship candidates (Spillane and Lee, 2014; Walker and Qian, 2006; Wildy and Clarke, 2008). For example, in a study in New Zealand, Brooking (2004) examined how trustees on selection committees for new principals interpret and act upon often contradictory and conflicting official discourses from self-managing policies and Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) legislation, as well as populist discourses mobilized by

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the media. Another study also in New Zealand by Morrison (2013) investigated the involvement of students' parents in the selection of the school principal, finding that 'the appointment of a principal with the capacity to exercise highly effective, contextually specific educational leadership is more likely to occur in higher decile schools' and that therefore 'targeted support and a review of governance arrangements will be necessary for inequity in PA' (p. 29).

Policies for principal selection, vary from state to state and those involved in the selection process may include professional bodies, students' parents or government officials, depending largely on the extent of decentralization and self-government afforded to the schools (Morrison 2013). Although, Arar et al. (2017) found that in world states with centralized education systems such as Turkey and Egypt, principal selection processes neutralize outside influences such as parents' involvement or the views of professional bodies in the choice of principals and leave the choice in the hands of the Ministry of Education (ME) administrative offices, which are not always driven by professional considerations.

Furthermore, researches have tried to identify the factors pulling educators to school management career (Arar et al., 2017; Crow, 2006; Oplatka and Waite, 2010; Spillane and Lee, 2014). Nevertheless, DeAngelis and O'Connor (2012) examined how many graduates of educational management courses were appointed to principalships. Approximately one third of the respondents became school principals within two years after the course, and a half were employed as principals after six years. Many others applied for principalships but were rejected although they were found suitable, apparently because they were minority group members, teachers who did not receive support and encouragement from their peers to turn to management.

Teachers' decision to apply for school management stems from the desire 'to do something different for the school', to apply knowledge that they have acquired over years of work in the system and to break out of routine teaching work, aspiring to lead educational change, and/or improve the school (Pounder and Merrill, 2001).

In the three sectors of the Israeli education system (state-secular, state-Jewish religious and Arab) principals are more highly educated, have more teaching experience and female principals have less children in comparison to other members of the society. Most of those who apply to become elementary school principals in the Arab school system are women while most of those applying to manage secondary schools are men (Arar et al., 2013).

Despite various pull factors attracting teachers to management posts, other reasons deter them from undertaking this role, for example when schools have low achievement records (Winter et al., 2004). Teachers also avoid applying for principalship tenders when they perceive the principalship as preventing them from focusing on the students, or harming their quality of life (Oplatka, 2010).

Moreover, applying for a principalship requires various types of preparation: supplementary education and professional development in management, developing creativity, thinking about innovative ideas and testing them in the classroom, demonstrating initiative and curiosity and identifying opportunities in different contexts and pedagogic and administrative experience in the organization.

Promotion to a managerial post relies on objective criteria such as education and work experience, together with formal requirements for the selection of candidates for different positions in the education system and other considerations (such as the candidate's place of residence).

Once the teacher has decided to undertake school management, they begin a long path of professional training and try to build a reputation fitting for a principalship candidate, representing the characteristics needed for this role (Murphy and Vriesenga 2006; Spillane and Lee, 2014). At this stage, in Israel, the candidate is required to participate in a training program in the form of a Master's degree in Educational Administration and Policy, offered by universities or colleges. Alternatively, the candidate can enroll for certificate studies

under the supervision of the Avney Rasha Institute for Educational Leadership, in addition to a Master's degree in a specific discipline.

In the academic year 2014, a 'new program for principal training in academic institutions' was launched by the Avney Rasha Institute for principal qualification and in-service professional development. The 400 h training program lasts a year; 250 h are devoted to theoretical studies and 150 h for practicum experience. The training aims to allow principals to develop managerial skills, independent awareness and thinking skills that enable them to cope with new situations. The practicum involves assuming areas of responsibility in the organizational setting where the students are placed and interaction with different school role-holders (Avney Rasha, 2009; Arar et al., 2017).

At this stage, it is noted that some of the teachers who developed managerial aspirations and participated in the training decide to abandon plans to enter management and remain in teaching while others present themselves as candidate for principalship tenders (Bush, 2016; Oplatka and Waite, 2010).

### 3. Induction into the principalship role in the Israeli education system

Israeli society is largely divided into social, national, and political enclaves. For various reasons, Arab citizens find that their employment market opportunities are limited, due especially to security requirements of many large industries, geographical distance from commercial centers and the fact that they belong to a minority group. Only 47% of all Arabs are employed in the Israeli employment market in comparison to 69% of the Jewish population. There is a noticeable difference between proportions of males and females employed: approximately 5.3% of the Arab male population hold managerial positions in contrast to 1.6% of the Arab female population (contrasting with 6.2% of the Jewish female population) (Gharrah, 2016).

Israeli schools are segregated, with three separate state school systems the Jewish-secular education system, the Jewish-religious education system, and the AES, there are also some private religious Arab schools and a separate ultra-orthodox Jewish education system. Parents have the legal right to enroll their child in any of these systems.

The AES serves 26.3% of the children in Israel, all of which belong to the Arab minority, as can be seen in Table 1. The Jewish and AESs do not have equal inputs, and the resources allocated for Arab schools can be best described as a concentration of disadvantages, a difficulty augmented by a lack of defined educational aims (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

Although 58% of all Israeli school principals are women, while there is an evident difference in proportion of women principals between Jewish and Arab schools (67% and 33% respectively). In the Druze and Bedouin Arab schools, there are even fewer women principals (16% and 9% respectively). Comparatively, in the 2011–2012 school year in the USA, 52% of public school principals were female (Bitterman et al., 2013); while in England in 2012, 65% of head-teachers were female. Male Arab teachers reach principalship at an average age of 37.7, while women principals on average at age 41.1 years. The under-representation of women in Arab school principalship stems from their dual marginalization, as women in a patriarchal Arab society (AS) and as women who belong to a marginalized minority society.

In addition to the Israel's ME high standard threshold conditions,

**Table 1**  
Students in Israeli schools, by level of education and education sector.  
Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Annual Data 2016, Table 8.20.

	Total	Jewish education	Arab education	% Arab
Primary education	883,881	656,692	227,189	25.7
Secondary education	685,658	500,146	185,512	27.1
Total	1,569,539	1,156,838	412,701	26.3

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