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Leadership Matters: Fostering Teacher Resilience in Arab Schools Amid Crisis and Systemic Uncertainty

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Abstract

This study explores how school leadership styles are perceived to relate to teacher resilience during crises in Arab schools in Israel. Drawing on twenty semi-structured interviews with principals and vice-principals, findings show that transformational and participative leadership, characterized by emotional support, accessibility, active listening, and shared decision-making, are perceived to foster teachers' sense of security, self-efficacy, and collective resilience. In contrast, authoritarian and rigid approaches are described as contributing to increased stress, reduced motivation, and diminished coping capacity. The study highlights the significance of socio-cultural and political contexts, indicating that effective leadership in crises involves not only professional guidance but also cultural awareness, flexibility, and responsiveness to staff needs. These findings underscore the value of integrative leadership approaches and targeted professional development to support teacher well-being and organizational resilience in crisis-prone settings. By focusing on leaders' perspectives, the study contributes to understanding how culturally sensitive and adaptive leadership practices may support educational stability under conditions of uncertainty.

Keywords: school leadership; crisis management; transformational leadership; adaptive leadership; teacher resilience; Arab schools

1. Introduction

In recent years, education systems worldwide have been repeatedly disrupted by large-scale crises, including pandemics, natural disasters, and socio-political instability (Swindell et al., 2022). Such emergencies often result in abrupt school closures, rapid transitions to remote or hybrid learning, and heightened socioeconomic pressures on families and communities. These conditions place extraordinary demands on schools and, in particular, on teachers, who are required to sustain instructional continuity while simultaneously responding to students' heightened emotional and social needs (Sayed et al., 2021).

Teachers occupy a frontline position during crises, serving not only as educators but also as sources of stability, emotional containment, and support. However, prolonged exposure to uncertainty, increased workload, and emotional strain may significantly undermine teachers' well-being, contributing to stress, exhaustion, and professional burnout (Wright et al., 2023). These challenges underscore the importance of understanding the factors that enable teachers to cope, adapt, and continue functioning effectively under adverse conditions.

Within this context, teacher resilience has emerged as a critical construct. Resilience refers to teachers' capacity to withstand stress, recover from adversity, and maintain

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professional commitment despite ongoing challenges. Importantly, resilience is not solely an individual characteristic; it is shaped by social, organizational, and systemic factors, including the leadership practices enacted within schools (Gu & Day, 2013; Li, 2023). During crises, when institutional routines are disrupted and uncertainty prevails, school leadership becomes particularly salient.

School principals and vice-principals play a central role in shaping teachers' experiences during emergencies. Through their leadership practices, they influence school climate, communication patterns, emotional support structures, and teachers' perceptions of safety and efficacy (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2017). Leadership approaches that provide clarity, empathy, and collective direction may function as protective factors, whereas rigid, distant, or absent leadership may exacerbate stress and vulnerability.

Against this background, the present study investigates the perceived influence of leadership approaches on teacher resilience during crises. The inquiry is guided by an overarching research question: How do principals and vice-principals perceive the role of leadership practices in fostering or undermining teacher resilience during crisis situations? To provide a comprehensive answer, the study explores this central phenomenon through four specific dimensions: the conceptualization of resilience, specific supportive or detrimental practices, the role of the unique Arab-Israeli school context, and the sustainability of teachers' collective well-being. By addressing these integrated facets, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of leadership as a relational and contextual process enacted under conditions of uncertainty, with implications for teacher well-being and the sustainability of educational systems during periods of disruption.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teacher Resilience: Conceptualization and Contextual Dimensions

Teacher resilience has gained increasing scholarly attention as education systems confront escalating demands and recurring crises. Broadly defined, resilience refers to a dynamic process through which teachers adapt positively to adversity while sustaining their professional engagement and effectiveness. Rather than representing a fixed personal trait, resilience is understood as an evolving capacity shaped by interactions between individual characteristics and contextual resources (Mansfield et al., 2016).

Research highlights individual-level factors linked to resilience, such as self-efficacy, or teachers' belief in their ability to handle instructional and classroom challenges, which supports proactive coping and adaptability (Kavgaci, 2022). Emotional intelligence also plays a key role, enabling teachers to regulate emotions and manage stress, which contributes to positive classroom climates under pressure (Barnová et al., 2023; Jennings et al., 2017). Although individual resources matter, an exclusive focus on them risks overlooking the social, organizational, and cultural conditions that shape resilience. Social support, collegial collaboration, and a supportive school environment buffer stress and prevent burnout, fostering a sense of belonging and psychological safety (Collie et al., 2018; Kaihoi et al., 2022). Support from school leadership, colleagues, and families forms an essential safety net, enhancing teachers' coping capacity (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019; Chan et al., 2021).

Organizational conditions such as school climate, communication, and supportive leadership practices are central to enabling teacher adaptation and persistence, especially during disruptions (Mullen et al., 2021). Constructive feedback, opportunities for professional growth, and institutional recognition reinforce engagement and commitment, highlighting the relational and contextual nature of resilience.

2.2. Leadership Styles in Educational Contexts

Leadership styles refer to the patterns of behavior, values, and strategies leaders use to guide and support their organizations. While these styles are often categorized into distinct models, they are best understood as conceptual frameworks that describe the underlying repertoires of practice leaders draw upon in their daily work. In education, leadership styles have been consistently linked to teacher satisfaction, performance, and well-being. Collaborative and inclusive leadership approaches, which emphasize trust and teacher involvement, are associated with higher professional motivation and resilience, whereas disengaged or controlling leadership can undermine morale and well-being (Ferolino et al., 2024; Ortan et al., 2021).

Research distinguishes among several leadership styles commonly examined in schools, including transformational, transactional, democratic, autocratic, laissez-faire, and distributed leadership. Each reflects different assumptions about authority, decision-making, and the leader–teacher relationship, and each carries distinct implications for teachers' professional experiences.

Practices associated with transformational leadership emphasize vision, inspiration, and individualized consideration. Leaders adopting this approach seek to motivate teachers by articulating shared goals, fostering trust, and supporting personal and professional growth (Bashori et al., 2022). This style has been widely associated with reduced burnout, enhanced motivation, and stronger organizational commitment, particularly during periods of change or crisis (Alzoraiki et al., 2024).

Transactional leadership, by contrast, prioritizes structure, clear expectations, and performance monitoring through reward-and-punishment mechanisms (Hussain et al., 2017). While effective for maintaining order and routine, this approach often proves insufficient during crises, when teachers require emotional support, flexibility, and reassurance rather than procedural control (Hannah et al., 2020).

Similarly, democratic leadership manifests through practices of participation, shared decision-making, and open communication. By involving teachers in organizational processes, this approach fosters a sense of ownership and belonging, which can enhance motivation and resilience (Vincent & Baptiste, 2021). Autocratic leadership, characterized by centralized authority and limited consultation, may enable rapid decision-making in emergencies but is often associated with reduced motivation and increased burnout when used persistently (Lessy et al., 2024).

Laissez-faire leadership, defined by minimal involvement and guidance, has been consistently linked to negative outcomes in educational settings. Teachers working under such leadership often experience ambiguity, insecurity, and professional isolation, effects that are amplified during crises (López-Cabarcos et al., 2024).

Distributed leadership represents a collaborative approach in which leadership responsibilities are shared among multiple actors. By promoting collective problem-solving and shared responsibility, this model has been shown to enhance teacher efficacy, commitment, and adaptability, particularly in complex or crisis-prone environments (Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023; Hill & Bartol, 2016).

Emerging research also increasingly engages with leadership not simply as a style category but as a set of practices enacted in context, particularly in uncertain and disrupted environments. For instance, Izhar Oplatka's recent book *Educational Leadership in Times of Crisis* provides a historical and practical exploration of how leaders navigate crises, combining theoretical insights with narratives of figures who successfully coped with major disruptions, offering valuable conceptual tools for understanding crisis leadership in education (Oplatka, 2023).

2.3. Leadership Styles and Teacher Resilience During Crises

A growing evidence base underscores the role of leadership in shaping teacher resilience under conditions of uncertainty and disruption. Transformational and distributed leadership are consistently associated with higher levels of teacher resilience because they emphasize trust, emotional support, collaboration, and shared purpose, all critical in times of crisis (Liu & Watson, 2023). Democratic leadership supports inclusion and recognition, strengthening teachers' sense of agency and professional identity, whereas autocratic or highly directive leadership often undermines autonomy and motivation, especially when crises are prolonged (Ali, 2023; Mokhtar, 2023).

Beyond academic articles, recent edited volumes broaden the empirical and conceptual base for understanding crisis leadership. Gutman (2025) presents international and multicultural perspectives on leadership under conflict conditions, illustrating how resilience, decision-making, and inclusion are enacted on the ground in zones of ongoing social disruption, a particularly relevant contribution for contexts of conflict and political tension. Additionally, Barnes et al. (2026) offer global, comparative insights into how leaders and school communities respond to diverse emergencies, from natural disasters to conflict and pandemics, demonstrating the complex ways leadership interacts with culture, policy, and community resilience.

These recent textual contributions frame educational leadership not only in terms of predetermined styles but as adaptive, relational processes occurring in socially and culturally structured environments, deepening the analytic lens through which leadership during crises can be examined.

2.4. Rationale, Objectives, and Research Questions

Periods of crisis place extraordinary demands on schools, intensifying uncertainty, emotional strain, and organizational complexity. While previous research has established that leadership styles such as transformational or distributed leadership are generally associated with positive teacher outcomes, much of this work has relied on quantitative designs and normative leadership models, often examined outside of acute crisis contexts. Consequently, less is known about how leadership is enacted and experienced during crises, particularly in culturally and politically complex educational settings.

The present study seeks to address this gap by adopting a qualitative, context-sensitive approach. While the established literature provides a valuable vocabulary of leadership 'styles', this study moves beyond these static categories to focus on the situated 'practices' school leaders deploy. Rather than testing predefined leadership models or attempting to identify all determinants of resilience, this study concentrates on how principals and vice-principals understand, describe, and implement leadership behaviors in times of uncertainty, and how they perceive the effects of these practices on teachers' emotional and professional functioning.

This focus offers a distinct contribution to the literature in three ways. First, it shifts attention from leadership styles as abstract constructs to leadership practices as lived, situational responses to crisis. Second, it foregrounds the voices of school leaders operating within Arab schools in Israel, a context shaped by minority status, socio-political tension, and structural constraints that are rarely examined in leadership and resilience research. Third, by examining leadership during periods of disruption, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of organizational resilience in education, emphasizing relational, emotional, and cultural dimensions that are often underrepresented in crisis leadership models.

2.4.1. Research Objectives

Guided by an interpretive qualitative framework, the study aims to:

1. Explore how principals and vice-principals conceptualize teacher resilience during times of crisis.
2. Examine the leadership practices and approaches school leaders perceive as supportive or detrimental to teacher resilience under crisis conditions.
3. Identify contextual, organizational, and relational factors that shape leadership responses to crises in Arab schools.
4. Contribute contextually grounded insights that may inform leadership preparation and professional development for crisis-prone educational environments.

2.4.2. Research Questions

To address the overarching research goal described in the introduction, this study is guided by the following specific research questions designed to unpack the relational and contextual complexities of leadership during crisis:

1. How do principals and vice-principals perceive teacher resilience during periods of crisis?
2. What leadership practices do school leaders describe as fostering or undermining teacher resilience in crises?
3. How do contextual and organizational conditions within Arab schools shape leadership responses to crises?
4. How do school leaders understand their role in sustaining teachers' emotional well-being, professional functioning, and collective resilience during times of uncertainty?

3. Methodology

3.1. Method

The present study adopted a qualitative, interpretive research design aimed at exploring how school leaders understand and enact leadership practices during periods of crisis, and how they perceive the implications of these practices for teacher resilience. Grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, this approach assumes that reality is socially constructed and best understood through individuals' subjective interpretations within their specific cultural and organizational contexts.

In contrast to deductive or hypothesis-driven research, the purpose of this qualitative inquiry was not to test relationships between predefined variables or to assess the relative strength of leadership styles, but rather to generate an in-depth, contextually grounded understanding of leadership as it is experienced, interpreted, and enacted during crises. This approach is particularly appropriate when the research aim is exploratory and seeks to illuminate meanings, processes, and practices rather than to establish causality or generalizable effects.

Qualitative research is particularly well-suited to examining complex human experiences and organizational processes deeply embedded in social, cultural, and political contexts (Lim, 2025). In the current study, it enabled a nuanced exploration of school leaders' narratives, capturing how leadership practices unfold under conditions of uncertainty and stress. Such an approach allows for rich, multidimensional descriptions of phenomena that may be overlooked by standardized quantitative measures (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022).

Consistent with this orientation, data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis, which facilitates the systematic identification of patterns and meanings within textual data while preserving participants' voices and contextual specificity (Mayring, 2021). Rather than quantifying leadership styles or resilience levels, the analysis examined how principals and vice-principals described, justified, and reflected on their leadership practices, and

how these practices were perceived as influencing teachers' emotional and professional functioning during crises.

3.2. Research Instruments and Data Collection

Data were collected in June 2025, following a period marked by multiple, overlapping crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, regional military conflicts, and increased levels of community violence within Arab society in Israel (Ghanamah, 2025; Ghanamah & Eghbaria-Ghanamah, 2024). Participants were invited to reflect on their leadership experiences across these contexts, with a focus on how they managed ongoing uncertainty and supported their school communities during these challenging periods. Interviews were transcribed verbatim in the original language and subsequently translated into English for analysis and reporting. To ensure accuracy, a review by two bilingual experts was employed, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, a method well-suited to eliciting participants' subjective meanings, professional judgments, and reflective accounts of practice. Semi-structured interviews strike a balance between consistency across participants and flexibility to explore emergent topics, enabling participants to elaborate on issues they perceive as most salient (Kallio et al., 2016).

This method was chosen to enable school leaders to articulate their experiences of leading during crises in their own words, while ensuring that all interviews addressed core topics relevant to the research questions. The interviews focused on leadership practices, decision-making processes, emotional and organizational challenges, and perceived impacts on teachers' resilience.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face in a private setting to ensure confidentiality. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 min (M = 52 min). All interviews were conducted in Arabic, the participants' native language, and were audio-recorded with consent.

Development of the Interview Protocol

The interview guide was developed through a systematic, multi-stage process to ensure conceptual clarity, methodological rigor, and alignment with the study's aims.

First, a comprehensive review of the literature on teacher resilience, crisis leadership, and educational leadership styles informed the identification of key thematic domains (e.g., emotional support, decision-making, communication, collaboration, and coping under pressure). Second, these domains were mapped onto the research questions to ensure content relevance and coherence. Third, open-ended questions were formulated to encourage reflective, experience-based responses rather than evaluative or socially desirable answers.

To enhance clarity and cultural appropriateness, the interview guide was reviewed by two scholars with expertise in educational leadership and qualitative research. Minor revisions were made to refine wording and sequencing. The guide was then piloted with one school leader who was not included in the final sample, leading to additional refinements to improve flow and depth.

The final interview protocol consisted of broad, open-ended questions with optional follow-up probes, allowing the interviewer to explore emerging themes while maintaining consistency across interviews.

Sample interview questions included:

1. How would you describe your role as a school leader during periods of crisis?
2. What challenges do teachers face in your school during such times?
3. Can you describe leadership practices you believe help teachers cope emotionally and professionally during crises?

4. How do decision-making processes change during emergencies?
5. In what ways do you communicate with teachers during times of uncertainty?
6. Can you recall a situation in which your leadership approach positively or negatively affected teachers' resilience?
7. How do cultural, social, or organizational factors shape leadership responses in your school?
8. How do you understand your responsibility for supporting teachers' well-being during crises?

Probing questions were used as needed to encourage elaboration, clarification, or concrete examples.

3.3. Participants

Participants were recruited via convenience sampling through professional networks and direct contact with schools in Arab-majority communities, ensuring diversity in age, gender, school level, and professional experience. Inclusion criteria required participants to serve as principals or vice-principals in Arab schools in Israel during the study period. A total of 31 school leaders were approached, of whom 20 agreed to participate. Table 1 provides an overview of their demographic and professional characteristics.

Table 1. Demographic and Professional Characteristics of Study Participants.

Participant	Age	Gender	School Level	Role	Years Teaching	Years in Leadership
1 (P1)	48	M	Elementary	Principal	23	5
2 (VP2)	38	F	Elementary	Vice Principal	11	4
3 (VP3)	43	M	Middle	Vice Principal	20	5
4 (P4)	52	F	Middle	Principal	28	10
5 (VP5)	41	M	High	Vice Principal	18	7
6 (VP6)	36	F	Middle	Vice Principal	12	3
7 (P7)	55	M	Elementary	Principal	27	10
8 (VP8)	39	F	High	Vice Principal	15	4
9 (VP9)	35	F	Elementary	Vice Principal	8	5
10 (P10)	47	M	High	Principal	22	7
11 (P11)	40	F	Middle	Principal	18	8
12 (P12)	50	M	High	Principal	30	12
13 (VP13)	44	M	Middle	Vice Principal	19	6
14 (VP14)	37	F	Elementary	Vice Principal	10	4
15 (P15)	46	M	High	Principal	24	9
16 (VP16)	42	F	Middle	Vice Principal	17	6
17 (P17)	49	M	Elementary	Principal	26	11
18 (VP18)	41	F	High	Vice Principal	16	5
19 (P19)	53	M	Middle	Principal	29	12
20 (VP20)	38	F	Elementary	Vice Principal	12	4

Note: M = male; F = female.

The sample size was guided by the principle of information power (Malterud et al., 2016), which posits that studies with specific aims, a focused sample, and high-quality dialogue can achieve sufficient depth with fewer participants. Given the focused research questions, the relatively homogeneous sample, and the richness of the interviews, a sample of 20 participants was considered adequate. Thematic saturation was achieved, as no new themes or substantial insights emerged during later stages of coding.

All participants received a full explanation of the study's objectives, data collection procedures (semi-structured interviews), and the intended use of their responses. Participation was voluntary, based on informed consent, and participants signed a detailed consent form prior to the interview. Participants retained the right to withdraw at any stage

without providing justification or facing consequences, and could request the removal of their statements from the dataset.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, which allows for the systematic identification of patterned meanings across qualitative data while preserving participants' contextualized experiences. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and read multiple times to achieve immersion in the data. Initial coding was conducted inductively by the researcher, capturing meaningful units related to leadership practices, emotional support, coping strategies, organizational challenges, and perceptions of teacher resilience. These codes were then collated into broader categories, which were iteratively reviewed and refined to develop preliminary themes. Throughout this process, constant comparison across interviews ensured that categories accurately represented the data and captured variations in participants' experiences.

Preliminary themes were further refined with attention to internal coherence, conceptual boundaries, and relevance to the research questions, and illustrative quotations from participants were selected to ground interpretations in the data. Interviews were conducted by a researcher who had no prior professional relationship with the participants and was not affiliated with their schools. Although the researcher shared the broader cultural context of the participants, which may have influenced how responses were framed, reflexivity was maintained through a reflective journal documenting assumptions, impressions, and contextual observations after each interview. These notes guided coding and theme development, ensuring that interpretations remained grounded in participants' narratives.

Trustworthiness was further enhanced through methodological rigor and transparency. Credibility was supported by grounding interpretations in participants' words and integrating illustrative quotations. Dependability was addressed by documenting all analytic decisions, while transferability was facilitated by providing rich descriptions of participant characteristics and the socio-cultural context of Arab schools. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the study, with pseudonyms used, identifying details excluded, and all data securely stored and destroyed after the analysis period. The study was conducted with cultural sensitivity and respect, maintaining open communication and addressing participant questions or concerns throughout the research process.

4. Findings

This section presents findings from an in-depth thematic analysis of interviews with 20 principals and vice-principals from schools in the Arab community in Israel. Analysis revealed four central themes, each with subthemes illustrating how leadership styles affect teacher resilience during crises. Illustrative quotes from participants are integrated to convey authentic perspectives.

4.1. Inspirational and Supportive Leadership: The Leader as an Emotional and Professional Anchor

Participants described leadership during crises as extending beyond routine managerial functions, requiring leaders to act simultaneously as sources of direction, emotional containment, and symbolic stability. Central to this role was the expectation that leaders project confidence and clarity, even under conditions of uncertainty. As one principal noted, "Even when everything around is falling apart, teachers need to feel someone is steering the ship" (P1, elementary). Similarly, a vice-principal emphasized that "Leading with vision means inspiring, not just commanding; it helps teachers focus on shared goals despite chaos" (VP3, middle).

While such practices were widely perceived as stabilizing, the findings suggest that the ability to maintain this stance was fragile and context-dependent. Several participants acknowledged that ongoing uncertainty and rapidly changing conditions limited their capacity to provide consistent direction. As one vice-principal explained, "We wanted to give answers, but sometimes we simply didn't have them. That created frustration among teachers" (VP6, middle). This tension highlights that leadership in crisis involves not only projecting certainty but also managing the consequences of its absence.

4.1.1. Providing Direction Under Conditions of Uncertainty

Providing a clear vision and structured guidance was identified as a key mechanism for reducing anxiety and maintaining functionality. Leaders described how outlining concrete steps helped teachers remain focused: "When teachers understand the plan and see the path forward, even complex situations feel manageable" (P4, middle). Short, routine communications were also perceived as effective in restoring a sense of control: "Even a brief morning meeting explaining the day's steps can reduce anxiety" (VP2, elementary).

However, these efforts were frequently undermined by external instability. Participants described how shifting policies and unclear directives disrupted their attempts to create coherence: "Every day there were new instructions. It was hard to keep teachers confident when the plan kept changing" (VP5, high). This suggests that the effectiveness of visionary leadership during crises is contingent not only on leaders' actions, but also on the stability of the broader system, positioning leadership as a mediating rather than controlling force.

4.1.2. Emotional Support as a Double-Edged Practice

Accessibility, empathy, and emotional validation were consistently framed as essential for sustaining teacher resilience. Leaders described deliberate efforts to prioritize emotional check-ins: "I make it a priority to ask staff how they are feeling before discussing tasks" (P7, elementary). Such practices were perceived as normalizing vulnerability and strengthening trust: "Just allowing teachers to admit they are struggling. . . strengthened their ability to cope" (VP9, elementary).

At the same time, the findings reveal that emotional support functioned as a double-edged practice. While it enhanced teachers' coping capacity, it also placed significant emotional demands on leaders themselves. As one vice-principal reflected, "You absorb everyone's stress, and there is no space to process your own" (VP8, high). This dynamic points to an often-overlooked aspect of crisis leadership: the expectation to provide continuous emotional support may deplete leaders' own resources, potentially limiting the sustainability of such practices over time.

4.1.3. Professional Backup and Resource Provision: Enhancing Capacity

In addition to emotional support, participants emphasized the importance of providing practical resources and professional guidance. Leaders described how availability and hands-on support reduced uncertainty: "Being available to answer questions. . . removed a lot of pressure" (P10, high). The provision of technological tools and training was particularly critical during transitions to remote learning: "Providing laptops and digital tools reassured teachers that they were not navigating technology alone" (VP8, high).

However, access to such support was not always uniform. Several participants noted disparities in teachers' digital skills and resource availability, which limited the overall effectiveness of these efforts: "Not all teachers had the same access or skills, so support was not equal" (VP13, middle). This suggests that while leadership practices can facilitate resilience, their impact is mediated by structural and contextual constraints, highlighting the limits of individual leadership in addressing systemic challenges.

4.2. Collaboration and Autonomy: Building Resilience from the Ground Up

Empowering teachers through participatory decision-making and professional autonomy was widely described as a central mechanism for fostering resilience during crises. Leaders emphasized that involving teachers enhanced ownership, motivation, and persistence. As one principal noted, "When teachers are included in decisions, they feel ownership, which motivates them to contribute actively and persist through challenges" (P11, middle). Similarly, a vice-principal explained that "involving staff in discussions. . . made them feel respected and trusted, reinforcing their professional confidence" (VP14, elementary).

Beyond motivation, collaboration was also framed as a source of practical problem-solving, with leaders acknowledging that "teachers often have practical solutions that administrators may overlook" (P12, high). However, a deeper analysis reveals that collaboration during crises was not uniformly enacted, but rather shaped by ongoing tensions between inclusion and urgency, autonomy and ambiguity.

4.2.1. Involvement in Decision-Making: Enhancing Control and Engagement

Teachers' participation in significant decisions increased their sense of control, involvement, and commitment. A vice-principal described, "When teachers' voices are heard in planning, even if not every suggestion is implemented, they feel part of the solution and more empowered" (VP16, middle). Another principal added, "Decision-making inclusion reduces feelings of helplessness, particularly during crisis conditions" (P15, high). Leaders reported that this practice encouraged active engagement: "When teachers have input, they are more likely to take initiative and follow through, even under pressure" (VP18, high).

4.2.2. Encouraging Initiative and Peer Collaboration: Shared Responsibility

Leaders noted that autonomy to initiate projects and collaborate with peers strengthened collective resilience. One vice-principal shared, "I was given full autonomy to organize regular team reflection sessions. This created a safe space for sharing challenges and solutions, which built team cohesion and resilience" (VP20, elementary). Another principal emphasized, "Teachers sharing successful lesson strategies fostered mutual support and created a sense that no one faces problems alone" (P17, elementary). Leaders noted that peer-led initiatives, like mentoring or co-planning, also enhanced innovation and responsiveness to crises: "Collaboration generates new ideas quickly; it feels like everyone is holding the school up together" (VP3, middle).

4.2.3. Sense of Belonging and Community: Social Safety Nets

A strong sense of belonging was consistently identified as a key component of resilience. Leaders described how fostering a collaborative culture created emotional and professional safety nets: "A supportive community gives strength and reassurance" (P19, middle). Informal interactions and shared spaces were seen as strengthening cohesion: "It feels like everyone is holding the school up together" (VP5, high).

Nevertheless, this sense of community was not always stable. Prolonged stress and workload pressures sometimes weakened collaboration: "After some time, people were exhausted, and collaboration decreased" (VP9, elementary). This finding indicates that while the community can buffer stress, it is itself vulnerable to the cumulative effects of crisis conditions, requiring ongoing maintenance rather than being a fixed resource.

4.3. Emotional and Practical Support: Meeting Diverse Needs

Participants emphasized the importance of tailored emotional, psychological, and practical support during crises. Leaders created spaces for reflection and expression, ensuring that teachers could process difficult experiences. A principal stated, "We held regular open

discussions where teachers could share fears and frustrations. These sessions normalized their feelings and strengthened their coping capacity" (P4, middle). Another vice-principal explained, "Acknowledging that it's okay not to be okay created a safe atmosphere that helped teachers continue teaching effectively" (VP6, middle). One principal highlighted the power of consistent routines: "Knowing there is time set aside to talk and reflect helps teachers manage stress throughout the week" (P7, elementary).

4.3.1. Emotional Support and Validation: Safe Spaces for Expression

Leaders described making themselves available and approachable for discussing challenges. One vice-principal said, "When staff know there is someone to talk to without judgment, they gain confidence to face their daily challenges" (VP2, elementary). Another noted, "Even small gestures of empathy, like checking in personally, can significantly reduce emotional strain" (VP14, elementary). Several leaders described creating anonymous feedback channels, ensuring all teachers could voice concerns safely.

4.3.2. Practical and Logistical Support: Reducing Daily Burdens

Practical assistance, including technology access, schedule flexibility, and administrative facilitation, was crucial. A principal explained, "We ensured reliable internet connections and technical support for remote learning. Teachers knew help was available immediately if needed" (P10, high). Another vice-principal added, "Reducing bureaucratic burdens and providing necessary equipment allowed teachers to focus on teaching rather than logistics" (VP8, high).

4.3.3. Professional Development and Peer Learning: Strengthening Competence

Opportunities for professional development enhanced teachers' ability to manage crises. One principal described, "Workshops on trauma-informed practices helped teachers feel more equipped to support students while protecting their own well-being" (P12, high). A vice-principal explained, "Creating internal learning communities allowed teachers to exchange strategies and tips, which improved confidence and competence across the team" (VP13, middle). Leaders emphasized that these initiatives strengthened both technical skills and emotional preparedness: "When teachers feel competent, their resilience naturally improves" (P11, middle).

4.4. Factors Weakening or Hindering Resilience: Barriers to Teacher Resilience

Alongside accounts of supportive leadership, participants identified a range of interrelated barriers that constrained teacher resilience during crises. These challenges were not limited to individual factors but reflected the interaction between workload demands, uncertainty, leadership practices, and broader systemic pressures.

A central stressor concerned the intensity of the workload combined with ongoing uncertainty. Teachers were required to simultaneously manage instructional responsibilities, personal concerns, and rapidly shifting expectations. As one vice-principal noted, "Teachers were stretched to their limits, balancing student needs, family obligations, and personal fears" (VP5, high). Similarly, another participant explained, "Uncertainty about daily schedules or lesson formats created continuous stress, making it difficult to function effectively" (VP18, high).

While leadership practices aimed to mitigate these pressures, participants' accounts suggest that such efforts were often insufficient in the face of sustained and overlapping demands, highlighting the limits of leadership influence under crisis conditions.

Insufficient support and limited autonomy further undermined teachers' motivation and sense of efficacy. One principal stated, "Without trust and guidance, teachers struggle to make decisions, leading to frustration and disengagement" (P1, elementary). Likewise,

a vice-principal noted, "When staff doesn't feel backed by leadership, even competent teachers hesitate to take initiative" (VP16, middle). Importantly, these findings point to a non-linear relationship between autonomy and resilience. While autonomy was described elsewhere as empowering, in the absence of clear support and guidance, it could instead generate uncertainty and hesitation, thereby weakening rather than strengthening resilience.

Communication emerged as another critical yet fragile component. Although clear and consistent communication was viewed as essential, participants emphasized that frequent policy changes often disrupt stability. As one principal explained, "When directives change daily, teachers feel insecure and unsure of how to act, which amplifies stress" (P19, middle). Another vice-principal added, "Clarity and consistency in communication are anchors during crises; without them, teachers feel destabilized" (VP20, elementary). These accounts suggest that communication during crises involves not only transmitting information, but also managing instability, where even necessary updates may inadvertently contribute to confusion and stress.

Finally, participants highlighted the influence of external and systemic pressures that extended beyond the school context. Community expectations, social dynamics, and broader contextual factors were perceived as adding additional strain. As one principal reflected, "External criticism or social pressures can undermine morale" (P15, high). Another vice-principal noted, "Cultural and societal expectations sometimes added challenges, making leadership guidance even more crucial" (VP9, elementary).

These findings indicate that teacher resilience is shaped within a multi-layered ecological context, in which school leadership is only one component of a broader system of influences.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that supportive, inclusive, and adaptive leadership plays a key role in fostering teacher resilience during crises. Leaders who combined emotional support, practical guidance, and participatory decision-making strengthened teachers' sense of agency, efficacy, and belonging, whereas rigid or centralized leadership undermined these outcomes.

5.1. Transformational and Inclusive Leadership

Consistent with transformational leadership theory (Akbari et al., 2017; Hafeez & Bidari, 2022) and research on crisis leadership (Harris & Jones, 2023), leaders who inspired, supported, and empowered teachers functioned as emotional anchors, creating a safe and stable climate crucial for resilience. Practices such as active listening, validation of emotions, and clear, consistent communication reinforced stability and intrinsic motivation.

This study adds context-specific insight by illustrating how these leadership practices are enacted in Arab schools, where leaders must navigate minority status, community expectations, and systemic constraints. Micro-level behaviors, such as checking in on teachers' emotional states, providing timely guidance, and modeling calm decision-making, were consistently reported as effective in maintaining teacher resilience. These findings complement prior work by Leithwood et al. (2023), which emphasizes the importance of contextually grounded leadership in crisis settings, showing how abstract principles are operationalized in culturally and socially specific environments.

5.2. Autonomy and Collaborative Leadership

Participation in decision-making and fostering peer collaboration emerged as critical mechanisms for enhancing collective competence and resilience, aligning with studies

emphasizing shared responsibility and distributed leadership in education (Day et al., 2016; Imam, 2021; Spillane et al., 2023). Teachers' sense of agency was reinforced not only through formal structures but also through daily peer collaboration and initiative-taking, illustrating how micro-level leadership practices accumulate to support broader resilience.

Collaborative practices functioned as both motivational and practical tools. Teachers' inclusion in decision-making increased engagement, ownership, and commitment, while peer collaboration facilitated problem-solving and knowledge sharing. This demonstrates that resilience is strengthened not only by top-down directives but through dynamic, reciprocal interactions within the school community, reinforcing the importance of distributed and participatory leadership during crises.

5.3. Adaptive, Multidimensional Leadership

Leaders integrated emotional, practical, technological, and organizational support, reflecting adaptive leadership principles (Heifetz et al., 2009; Rachmad, 2022; Sott & Bender, 2025). The findings highlight that adaptive practices must be culturally responsive, balancing systemic demands and community expectations to sustain teacher resilience during crises. Flexibility, reduction of bureaucratic obstacles, and responsiveness to diverse needs enhanced teachers' coping capacity and instructional efficacy, supporting prior international findings on adaptive leadership (Fullan, 2016; Mullen et al., 2021).

The study demonstrates how adaptive strategies are influenced by the socio-cultural and systemic realities of minority schools. Leaders' decisions were shaped not only by pedagogical or administrative goals but also by the need to negotiate community expectations, minority-related challenges, and systemic constraints. This underscores the intersection of adaptive leadership and cultural sensitivity, providing empirical grounding for frameworks that stress contextualized leadership practices in crisis situations (Leithwood et al., 2023; Fullan, 2016).

5.4. Inhibiting Leadership Styles

Rigid, centralized, and unresponsive leadership styles were consistently reported as detrimental to teacher resilience. Such approaches caused confusion, disengagement, and a loss of agency, echoing literature linking authoritarian leadership to reduced well-being among educators (Carroll et al., 2021; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

The negative impact of inflexible leadership was compounded in minority school contexts, where systemic constraints and external pressures intensified teacher stress and vulnerability. These findings emphasize that leadership models must account for contextual sensitivity, particularly in schools facing minority and systemic challenges, complementing the literature on crisis management and educational leadership in culturally diverse contexts (Harris & Jones, 2023; Leithwood et al., 2023).

5.5. Socio-Cultural Considerations

Leadership in Arab schools in Israel involves navigating complex cultural, political, and systemic realities. Effective leaders balance authority with cultural expectations, mediate between community pressures and staff needs, and adjust leadership practices to both internal and external demands. These findings provide empirical support for hybrid leadership models in minority contexts (Arar & Oplatka, 2022).

By situating leadership practices within the specific socio-cultural context, this study illustrates how cultural and systemic factors intersect with leadership behaviors to influence teacher resilience. Compared to research in the majority of Western contexts, our findings highlight the importance of contextual adaptation, showing that effective crisis leadership

cannot be separated from cultural and systemic considerations (Fullan, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2023; Harris & Jones, 2023).

5.6. Study Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research relied on twenty semi-structured interviews with principals and vice-principals from a selection of Arab schools. While this approach provides rich, in-depth insights, it limits the generalizability of the results to the broader population of school leaders and teachers. The sample reflects specific perspectives rather than statistical representation, highlighting particular experiences rather than universal patterns.

Second, the study captures only the views of school leaders and does not include teachers' perspectives. As such, the findings reflect leaders' perceptions of teacher resilience and leadership effectiveness, which may differ from teachers' lived experiences. Future research should incorporate teachers' voices and expand the sample to include a larger and more diverse group of principals, vice-principals, and teachers across different regions and school types to provide a more comprehensive and representative understanding of the factors influencing teacher resilience during crises.

Third, the primary data source consisted of interviews with leadership personnel, meaning that findings primarily reflect the views of decision-makers rather than teachers themselves. A potential gap may exist between how leaders perceive the support they provide and how teachers experience it in practice. Future research should directly include teachers' perspectives to capture a more comprehensive understanding of leadership impact on resilience at different levels within the school.

Additionally, the study was conducted in Arab schools in Israel, which are characterized by distinctive cultural, political, and social features, such as traditional authority structures and minority status. Consequently, the findings may not fully generalize to other contexts, such as Jewish schools or international settings. Comparative and cross-cultural studies could help identify which leadership practices are universally effective versus contextually specific.

Finally, the interviews focused on crisis situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and security tensions. While these contexts provide valuable insights into leadership under pressure, findings may not fully translate to non-crisis periods. Leadership strategies that are effective during crises may not be equally suitable in routine or transitional circumstances. Longitudinal studies tracking schools over time could provide critical insights into the sustainability and long-term effects of leadership interventions on teacher resilience.

Future research could also explore the interaction between individual teacher characteristics (e.g., experience, coping strategies) and organizational factors (e.g., leadership style, decision-making structures, resource availability) in shaping resilience outcomes. Such investigations would inform targeted professional development programs for school leaders and help refine policies that strengthen both teacher well-being and institutional effectiveness.

6. Summary and Conclusions

This study underscores the critical role of school leadership in shaping teacher resilience, especially during crises. The thematic analysis of twenty interviews with principals and vice-principals in Arab schools in Israel indicates that educational leadership extends beyond administrative management to encompass emotional, social, and community responsibilities. Leaders employing supportive, inclusive, and empathetic styles functioned as emotional and professional anchors for teachers, enhancing their sense of certainty, efficacy, and self-worth amid stress, anxiety, and uncertainty.

Teacher resilience emerged as a product of interactions between individual, organizational, and social factors. Leadership practices that were reported as most effective included high availability, active listening, validation of difficult emotions, practical guidance, and the creation of safe spaces for dialogue and initiative. Conversely, authoritarian, rigid, or distant leadership approaches reduced teachers' sense of belonging and agency, increasing emotional vulnerability and stress.

The Arab community in Israel represents a unique cultural context, characterized by multi-level pressures—from social and community contexts, through family expectations, to systemic challenges arising from inconsistent policies. Within this context, principals' roles gain particular significance: they navigate professional responsibilities while mediating between cultural, community, and organizational demands. Supportive, culturally sensitive leadership was consistently reported as critical for sustaining teacher resilience.

The main conclusion is that school leadership during crises benefits from an integrative approach combining emotional support, clear guidance, and participatory practices. Leaders who fostered a climate of openness, inclusion, and collaborative decision-making enabled teachers to develop both personal and collective resilience. Professional autonomy, involvement in decision-making, and a sense of belonging to a supportive school community were repeatedly highlighted as key mechanisms.

While the study provides insights into leadership practices that support teacher resilience, the limited sample and convenience sampling approach constrain the generalizability of the findings. Future research with larger and more representative samples could further validate these observations and explore how such practices may inform broader organizational or policy-level interventions.

In conclusion, empathetic, available, and reflective leadership appears central to supporting teacher resilience in complex crisis contexts. Leaders acting with purpose, cultural sensitivity, and responsiveness to staff needs can meaningfully enhance both teacher well-being and the school's adaptive capacity.

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