



Articulating School Principals' Leadership and Core Values: Evidence From Iran

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Abstract

This study sought to explore the core values articulated by principals with a focus on school leadership models. Considering the importance of values in educational leadership, very little research underpins the assumption of values in coupling with school leadership models. Therefore, this study employed a sequential explanatory, mixed-method research design in the Razaviyeh region located in the city of Mashhad, Iran to provide information on that topic. Data were drawn from a combination of methods, both quantitative (questionnaires administered to 350 teachers in 63 schools) and qualitative (a semi-structured interview with twenty school principals). The quantitative results first provided evidence consistent with the previous research from centralized education systems, suggesting the managerial leadership model is the dominant model in schools. The qualitative results indicated the core values articulated by principals and were categorized into terminal and instrumental values in each school leadership model.

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Introduction

Most studies in school leadership highlighted the role of values in underpinning approaches to school leadership (e.g., Bodley, 2011; Bush & Glover, 2003; Campbell et al., 2003; Hallinger, 2011; Kafa & Pashiardis, 2020). It has been argued that understandings and practices of school leadership were defined and driven by leaders' personal and professional values (e.g., Bodley, 2011; Gold, 2003; Hallinger, 2011; Kafa & Pashiardis, 2020). Scholars concluded that these values can influence a clear sense of institutional purpose and inspire others toward the achievement of a vision (Armstrong & Bryant, 2018; Campbell et al., 2003). For example, a study conducted by Newman (2005) indicated that care, social justice, and excellence emerged as dominant values that guided their understanding and practice of leadership. Specifically, Eikenberry (2010) asserted the importance of values for leaders, noting that they strengthen the ability to influence, act, reduce tension, and guide decision-making. As a consequence, principals are expected to remain committed to their personal, professional, and educational values. These values influenced the school principals' perceptions of their leadership, articulated their relationships with students, staff, and the local community, and their aspirations and expectations for their schools (Campbell et al., 2003).

The argument about the importance of cultural and national contexts for school leadership practices is widely accepted among practitioners and scholars (Veletić & Olsen, 2021). This likely indicates that school principals' values tend to be influenced by contextual factors including historical, cultural, social, economic, and religious factors (Armstrong & Bryant, 2018; Suyanto et al., 2020). Given the strong evidence on sensitivity to how school leadership is influenced by values

culturally embedded and contextually dependent, more research is needed to explore the indigenous perspectives and practices associated with successful leadership in different educational systems (e.g., Barth & Benoliel, 2019; Campbell et al., 2003; Kafa & Pashiardis, 2020; Veletić & Olsen, 2021). Given the centrality of values to principals' conceptualization of leadership models, the current study sought to explore the core values articulated by principals as being influential in their leadership role in leading students' learning in the context of Iran, known as a collectivist culture with a religious background. This study focused on school leadership models frequently used in educational research (Gumus et al., 2018), including managerial, instructional, distributed, transformational, and ethical leadership (Bush & Glover, 2003) which have been integrated into the recent leadership for learning model (Veletić & Olsen, 2021). In line with previous studies, this study has the potential to make contributions to school leadership research and practice both in contexts with cultural-religious differences (like that in Iran) and globally by exploring the values-driven school leadership models as a growing field of interest.

Conceptual framework

This study was guided by a conceptual framework proposed by Hallinger (2011) that also highlights the role of values in shaping school leadership. According to this model, values define both the ends towards which principals aspire as well as the desirable means by which they will work to achieve them. From this perspective, values are categorized into "terminal values" (e.g., learning growth, academic achievement, social development, virtue, community service, equity in learning, etc.) and "instrumental values" that principals manifest and nurture in working to achieve their goals (e.g., self-discipline, integrity,

fairness, caring, mutual respect, risk-taking, interdependence, etc.). Terminal values refer to desirable and end-state existence; the goals that a person would like to achieve during their lifetime may vary among different groups of people in different cultures and instrumental values refer to preferable modes of behavior (Tuulik et al., 2019).

School leadership models

As suggested by scholars, the critical focus of leadership ought to be on the values, beliefs, and ethics of principals (Bush & Glover, 2014). The common theme that emerged from the literature was that an effective school principal was a type of leader who paid considerable attention to the teaching and learning values of schools as an instructional leader, as a managerial leader who focuses attention on functions, tasks, and behaviors rationally to ensure the implementation of the school's vision and strategy, a leader who seeks to engage the teachers' support towards the school vision, a leader who enhance school's capacities and commitment to goal achievement, and finally, a transformational leader who provides to the school a stronger values-based perspective, that may be called as a spiritual or as an ethical leader (Bush & Glover, 2003).

Values in school leadership models

A review of the literature found that prominent values vary in school leadership models. For example, the most common terminal values in instructional leadership are commitment, fairness,

responsibility, monitoring, and control (Bush et al., 2022; Bassi, 2007). These values in managerial leadership content of building trust, intimacy, oversight, and initiative (Peterson & Peterson, 2015; Wenno, 2017), and in transformational leadership are freedom, and equal justice (Abu-Rumman, 2021). Moreover, support, cooperation, teamwork, and building trust are the most prominent terminal values in distributed leadership (Baloglu, 2012), and respect, fairness, trust, honesty, and responsibility are common in ethical leadership (Işik, 2020; Vikaraman et al., 2021). Furthermore, the most common instrumental values in instructional leadership are the academic achievement of students, developing awareness and improving learning, stakeholder participation, and providing educational facilities (Sindhvad et al., 2022; Shaked, 2021). These values in managerial leadership are high-level performance, and strong association with lecturers' jobs, and transformational leadership enhancing a culture of teaching and learning, support, and development of human resources (Burns, 1978; Shava & Heystek, 2020). Recognizing staff leading teaching and learning initiatives create learning opportunities for teachers are the most prominent terminal values in distributed leadership (Beckmann, 2017; Denee & Thornton, 2021), and job satisfaction and virtue are common in ethical leadership (Cansoy et al., 2021). (See Table 1.)

Table 1. The outstanding values in school leadership models

Leadership models	Terminal values	Instrumental values
Instructional leadership	Commitment, Fairness, Responsibility, Monitoring, and Control (Bush et al., 2022; Bassi, 2007).	academic achievement of students, developing awareness and improving learning, stakeholder participation, and providing educational facilities (Sindhvad et al., 2022; Shaked, 2021)
Managerial leadership	content of building trust, intimacy, oversight, and initiative (Peterson and Peterson, 2015; Wenno, 2017)	high-level performance; strong association with lecturers' jobs (Kiplanget et al., 2017)
Transformational leadership	freedom, and equal justice (Rumman, 2021)	enhancing a culture of teaching and learning; supporting and developing human resources (Burns, 1978; Shava & Heystek, 2020)
Distributed leadership	support, cooperation, and teamwork; build trust (Baloglu, 2012)	recognize staff leading teaching and learning initiatives; create learning opportunities for teachers (Beckmann, 2017; Denee & Thornton, 2021)
Ethical leadership	respect, fairness, trust, honesty, and responsibility (Negis & Jalgo, 2020; Siva Vikaraman et al., 2021)	Job satisfaction and virtue (Cansor et al., 2021)

Method

This study employed a sequential explanatory, mixed-method research design (Creswell, 2021). In this strategy, the quantitative phase was used to describe school leadership models and classify principals from teachers' perspectives. In the subsequent qualitative phase, interviews were conducted to gain insights into the articulated core values of selected principals (Yin, 2009), based on the data obtained by the teachers in the quantitative research phase.

The quantitative phase of this study was conducted in 63 schools out of 135 schools in the Razaviyeh region located in the city of Mashhad. This region is the largest educational region in Iran in terms of size as well as the mix of religions, cultures, and different contexts are unique features of this region. Teachers were selected in each school based on their years of experience working with the current principal. A total of 212 valid

questionnaires were obtained from teachers, which was a 100% response rate for teachers. In this study, 40% of participants were from primary schools and 60% were from high schools. Since female teachers are allowed to teach in boys' primary schools, 55.19% of participants were female and 44.81% were male. In addition, 7.2% of the teachers had less than a bachelor's degree, 84.43% had a bachelor's degree, and 8.37% had a master's degree. It is worth mentioning that 79.71% of the teachers who took part in the study were situated in rural areas and 20.29% of the teachers were situated in urban areas.

Consistent with a sequential explanatory design, identifying the qualitative sample took place following a preliminary analysis of the quantitative data. We have ranked the participating schools based on the average scores obtained from teachers in terms of school leadership models (Bush and Glover, 2003). Thus, four schools were identified

based on each school's leadership model. A total of twenty principals were interviewed.

Data collection and analysis

The school leadership scale administered in the quantitative phase measured the instructional, distributed, transformational, managerial, and ethical leadership practices of principals from the perspective of their teachers. This scale consists of a Teacher Short Form to measure instructional leadership developed by Hallinger and Heck (1998) with 22-item, 15 items distributed leadership (Spillane, 2012), 15 items transformational leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005), 11 items managerial leadership (Agasisti et al., 2020), and 13 items ethical leadership (Lenglois et al., 2014). The questionnaire utilized a five-point Likert scale to assess the frequency of leadership behaviors performed by the school principals. As noted above, qualitative data were collected to describe

the leadership core values articulated by Iranian school principals. Therefore, a semi-structured interview protocol was developed around literature that sought to understand principals' core values within the school context (Hallinger, 2016).

The measurement model was assessed for fit using teacher data and school leadership practices. The Chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio for instructional leadership was 1.028, distributed leadership was 1.132, transformational leadership was 0.969, managerial leadership was 1.078, and ethical leadership was 0.921. Based on the indices obtained in Table 2, we conclude that the conceptual model exhibited a good fit to the data Goodness of fit measures for the research constructs. Cronbach's alpha also exceeded the standard of 0.70 used for research instruments.

Table 2. Measurement model fit index

	X²	df	X².df	RMSEA	RMR	CFI	NFI	GFI	α
Acceptable values	-	-	3<	.1<	.1<	.9>	.9>	.9>	
Instructional leadership	18.174	176	1.028	0.011	0.059	0.996	0.874	0.931	0.873
Distributed leadership	7.171	62	1.132	0.025	0.068	0.987	0.904	0.956	0.793
Transformational leadership	7.732	73	0.969	0.027	0.091	0.999	0.848	0.959	0.822
Managerial leadership	3.181	28	1.078	0.019	0.05	0.993	0.915	0.973	0.792
	46.969	51	0.921	0.026	0.058	0.998	0.911	0.967	

We also analyzed descriptive statistics to gain insight into the perceived level of the variables in the school sample. These data were then used to identify two high-rated and two low-rated principals on the school leadership models. For the

qualitative part, data analysis proceeded with an inductive approach (Struss & Corbin, 1990), through the process of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Then, the emerging themes were integrated into two main categories, namely,

terminal values and instrumental values connected to the school leadership models. To ensure validity, the coding process was conducted by Lincoln and Guba (1986) the Four-Dimensions Criteria (credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability) to ensure the findings of this qualitative inquiry are credible and believable, repeatable, repeatable, confirmable, and can be generalized.

Results

The results are presented in two parts. Firstly, we present the descriptive analysis of the quantitative data to rate the school leadership practices of the school principals. Secondly, is the analysis of qualitative data to describe and interpret the core values that govern each of the school leadership models.

Descriptive analysis of teacher perceptions of the school principals' leadership

The values related to school leadership models were identified and extracted based on generating descriptive statistics from the ratings of principal leadership. To do this, the mean, minimum, maximum, and SDs for the 135 schools were then put into an Excel table, ranked on the mean teachers' perceptions of the school leadership (See Table 3). Overall, analysis of the descriptive statistics revealed that teachers rated the principals highly on managerial leadership (M= 4), ethical leadership (M=3.88), instructional leadership (M=3.75), distributed leadership (3.44), and transformational leadership (2.98), respectively.

Table 3. Description of leadership models by school

School	Managerial Leadership		Ethical Leadership		Instructional Leadership		Distributed Leadership		Transformational Leadership	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	4.57	.698	3.69	0.590	4.68	0.902	4.57	0.601	2.98	0.812
2	4.43	0.712	4.30	0.823	4.54	0.706	4.07	0.502	3.85	0.910
3	3.03	0.800	4.38	0.780	4.42	0.645	4.50	0.418	2.58	0.529
4	3.78	0.629	3.35	0.726	4.43	0.646	3.97	0.803	2.44	0.721
5	4.69	0.540	4.87	0.910	2.80	0.762	1.97	0.867	2.75	0.812
6	3.67	0.908	4.74	0.740	4.32	0.870	3.14	0.901	3.08	0.905
7	3	0.846	4.76	0.420	4.30	0.613	3.95	0.721	2.88	0.886
8	3.68	0.721	4.74	0.619	4.26	0.902	3.14	0.802	3.02	0.790
9	4.06	0.590	4.30	0.741	3.80	0.698	4.94	0.725	4.40	0.646
10	3.03	0.835	4.38	0.803	4.42	0.602	4.50	0.652	2.58	0.723
11	4.42	0.912	3.79	0.791	3.86	0.714	4.45	0.867	3.42	0.803
12	3.33	0.769	4.38	0.511	3.81	0.632	4.40	0.623	4.64	0.650
13	4.12	0.650	4.18	0.646	3.80	0.856	2.40	0.896	4.64	0.752
14	2.75	0.752	3.92	0.823	3.03	0.625	3.19	0.910	4.55	0.698
15	4.30	0.620	4.10	0.721	4.29	0.646	3.92	0.723	4.53	0.509
16	3.04	0.619	4.19	0.703	2.01	0.378	3.18	0.650	4.48	0.500
17	4.902	0.584	3.01	0.623	3.45	0.803	2.08	0.752	4.12	0.910
18	4.812	0.920	4	0.763	4.18	0.901	3.35	0.646	4.26	0.867
19	4.696	0.698	4.85	0.603	2.83	0.867	1.64	0.629	3.45	0.642
20	4.630	0.742	4.23	0.941	4.43	0.910	3.32	0.529	2.97	0.698

Dominant values in the managerial leadership model

The analysis of interviews showed that the core values articulated by principals based on managerial leadership include law and order, direct supervision, quantitative and result-oriented, and participation and interaction in school.

1. *Law and order:* Law and order are one of the common categories among all schools in which managerial leadership was the dominant model regardless of primary and high or urban and rural. The observance of the law in these schools has been extremely emphasized by principals. One school principal asserted the following: *“Because our students at school want to talk and control them, it's impossible, so what we do is apply a series of strict rules to control the students at school”* (P.R.P4).

2. *Direct supervision:* Direct supervision was another core value articulated by principals with a managerial leadership style. With direct supervision, there was no more intimate and friendly climate in the school, in which the school principal could be compared to a closed-circuit television camera that records the situation of the teachers in the classroom. This situation may turn the friendly climate of the school into a machine-like climate and prevents teachers from shirking their duties under the strict direct supervision of the vice-principal. One school principal acknowledged the following: *“We come every two weeks to evaluate each of our teachers, either directly from the classroom or through monthly reports and parental supervision. Weaknesses were not covered. We will affect the evaluation marks of that teacher at the end of the year”* (P.U.P2).

3. *Quantity and outcome-oriented:* Being outcome-oriented was one of the popular core values of principals who follow the model of managerial leadership. One reason is the administration's expectations of principals.

Another reason was the school principals' attention to outcome-oriented according to the expectations of parents, especially in high schools where parents only want admission of students to universities. In this setting, principals inevitably overshadow the main objective of the school in the acceptance of universities. Based on the aforementioned, one principal stated the following: *“Instead of focusing on the quality of attending competitions and festivals, our office states in circulars that, for example, 70% of students should participate in the Kharazmi Adolescent Festival. This makes us pay all our attention to maximum participation in competitions, even if the quality of work is low”* (H.U.P6).

4. *Participation and interaction:* Participation and interaction differ in schools where the model of managerial leadership was dominant there. This means most schools succeed in interacting with their teachers and staff but are unsuccessful in maximizing parental involvement. The fact that the school principal failed to interact with parents is more evident in high schools, especially urban high schools. This passivity in interaction stems more from parental expectations so, in urban high schools, high levels of expectation prevent two-way communication between the school and the parents. It should be noted that this particular interaction and participation take place hierarchically. A school principal mentioned the following: *“Although, here is a city, the culture of the people still has not changed. They think like a villager. For example, if we pay attention to someone's words, another one can complain about it. then, we decided that the parents should only be involved in financial matters so that no problem would arise there”* (H.U.P4).

Dominant values in the ethical leadership model

Findings showed that those core values coupled with ethical leadership include interaction and cooperation, empathy and empathy, behavior modification, sharing experiences, and empowerment in school.

5. *Interaction and cooperation:* Interaction and cooperation have been explored in schools in which principals emphasized their leadership on ethics. This value refers to the cooperation and interaction of teachers in school improvement. This value effectively leads to interactive problem-solving and interaction to improve students' academic status. The manifestation of interaction and cooperation, especially communication with parents, was more common in rural primary schools where parents were considered members of the school council in all cases. Also, in rural primary schools, most of the student's educational and behavioral problems were solved through parents' interaction with the school. One school principal described the following: *"In the first year, we identify the parent's specialty, for example, who knows who is a carpenter, who knows how to build a father, who is a painter, then we invite them and ask them to cooperate with us in their field"* (P.R.P5).

6. *Empathy and Compassion:* Empathy and compassion are core values that were extracted in schools in which principals promoted the role of ethical leaders. This means that a school principal listens to the teachers' concerns, careers, and personal problems at school and tries to get along with the teachers as much as possible. Also, the school principal supports teachers' mental confusion within the school. Along with the value of empathy that was evident in most schools connected to the ethical leadership model, it can be acknowledged that in primary schools, both urban and rural, intimacy and friendships have overcome

dry relationships to the extent that teachers feel safe at school and are satisfied. The following quotation from a school principal is characteristic: *"There is a calm and tension-free atmosphere in our school where every teacher helps other teachers and there is a less competitive atmosphere in the school"* (P.R.P7).

7. *Modifying student behavior:* One of the most important goals of education, in particular within school organizations is to improve student behavior. This particular value was articulated by principals as an ethical value within the school. Principals always emphasized this value in their school goals and programs. To correct students, high school principals, unlike primary principals promoted this particular value to address students' behavior. Furthermore, principals emphasized educating students and their parents more and based their promise of activities on the awareness and education of students. Based on that, one school principal acknowledged the following: *"In high schools, students have reached an age where they can put problems on their own, and in many cases, it has paid off. The side that concludes that if his behavior is corrected, his respect will be higher and he will be more successful"* (H.R.P5).

8. *Share experiences:* Sharing experiences was one of the common values in all schools in which principals have been identified as ethical leaders. In these schools, sharing experiences is often used as the key to solving problems in the school, to the extent that many principals base their programs at school on sharing experiences. One school principal mentioned the following: *"You have a class in the original teaching, if you do not have a class, teaching will not be done, and if it is done, it will not be productive"* (P.R.P7).

Dominant values in the instructional leadership model

According to our results, the instructional leadership reflected the values of student learning, instructional supervision and guidance, teacher empowerment, participation, and promoting a friendly climate in the school.

1. *Student learning*: One of the most important values that have made instructional leadership prevail over other leadership models was the value of student learning. This implies that principals were more focused on students' academic achievement and took a variety of ways to improve students learning. This value was more supported economically, socially, and educationally in primary schools, as well as high schools. This category represents the school principals' concern for students' comprehensive development. One school principal acknowledged the following: *"In all classes of the school, we placed students in a heterogeneous way, that is, we did not separate strong and weak students because it causes our weak students to set an example for stronger students and to progress"* (P.R.P5).

In addition, student dropout was a very important issue. This was especially evident in rural schools. Principals tried to change the attitude of parents towards education and try to break the chain of illiteracy in their schools by using various strategies such as preparation, providing facilities, and repeated follow-ups. It is worth mentioning that the cultural problems of the rural areas are the cause of many dropouts in schools. Specifically, principals stated that the unjustifiability and lack of communication with the parents have complicated the situation for the students to continue their studies. One principal described the following: *"Instead of us, the parents themselves do not want the children to study, for example, they say that a*

girl should not study and she should get married soon. This is why that clever student also loses their motivation" (H.U.P2).

2. *Instructional supervision*: Another important value related to instructional leadership was instructional supervision. Principals provided instructional supervision and guidance to improve the quality of teachers' teaching and learning process. Instructional counseling for teachers and analysis of the weaknesses of teachers was included in the principals' agenda. It refers to the role of a principal in providing instructional solutions for teachers. But the main point was that in primary schools, especially rural schools, instructional supervision became administrative supervision. In this type of supervision, more emphasis was placed on quantitative aspects of instruction including passing and acceptance rates such as scientific competitions and festivals. The following quotation from a school principal is characteristic: *"In our school, we divided teachers into two groups, successful and unsuccessful. From the point of view of the school staff, especially myself, a successful teacher is one whose pass rate is higher than other teachers, because the pass percentage of students shows the teacher's performance"* (P.R.P5).

3. *Teacher empowerment*: An important value articulated by principals within the instructional leadership model was teacher empowerment which has been encouraged through exchanging experiences among teachers and attending in-service courses and workshops. Principals also asserted to employ active and experienced teachers. A school principal stated the following: *"Many times, a few months after the school year, we see that there is a problem that some of our colleagues are involved in to serve"* (H.U.P1).

4. *Participation*: Participation was another value coupled with instructional leadership aimed

at improving teaching and learning. Principals often tried to make decisions based on collective wisdom and collaboration. One school principal mentioned the following: *“In competitions and festivals that are held at school, we, the office staff, alone cannot be successful, so we use the capacity of all teachers in the school because their participation makes the work better and the children get better results”* (H.U.P6).

5. *Intimate and friendly climate:* The value of an intimate and friendly climate was more prominent in high schools rather than in primary schools. According to participants, love and affection are rippling through the school staff as one of the principals described it as follows: *“My deputy and I are now trying to establish a friendly relationship with the children's parents and reassure them that we are aware of everything at school and do not worry about their dormitory students”* (H.U.P6).

Dominant values in the distributed leadership model

Analysis of interviews showed that distributed leadership represented values of consensus, sharing experiences, division of tasks, and supervision in the school.

6. *Consensus:* Co-thinking or consensus is one of the values explored in schools in which distributed leadership was the dominant leadership model. It was aimed at utilizing innovative and creative ideas of teachers in school affairs. This value in primary schools was more described as a friendly approach while in high schools. One of the principals acknowledged the following: *“Many times, when we encounter problems in school, we try to solve them by using consultation and consensus because the problem is solved better and faster and the school teachers feel good that they are involved in solving school problems”* (H.U.P4).

7. *Sharing experiences:* Sharing experiences was explored as a value within distributed leadership. Principals emphasized the use of the experiences of qualified teachers to improve teachers' teaching in the classroom. In primary schools especially in rural schools, sharing experiences was common between schools and the local community emphasizing the utilization of influential people. Based on that, one school principal acknowledged the following: *“Most of the time what we do is invite influential people in the village to school and we want them to explain to us how to deal with people and how to help them, but it is not just that I want to infiltrate people and achieve our goals. We often invite them to use their experience and expertise, both as teachers and as ourselves”* (P.R.P1).

8. *Division of tasks:* Division of tasks was very popular among principals who highly rated distributed leadership. It was identified as a key factor for improving school performance in particular in urban high schools. While it was based on interpersonal relationships in rural schools. Notably, the value of the division of tasks has been intertwined with supervision by principals in high schools. However, it seems that the value of the division of tasks in high schools is aimed at teachers' empowerment. One principal mentioned the following: *Every year when the department evaluates the school principals, one item that gives a very maneuverable method is which principal has fully answered the directives. That's why I entrusted the responsibility of the directives to my teacher because I really can't handle them alone”* (H.U.P6).

Dominant values in the transformational leadership model

According to the findings, transformational leadership represented the school principals' values of mutual respect and understanding, honesty and

transparency, support, social responsibility, and communication with the local community.

1. *Mutual respect and understanding:* The value of mutual respect plays a significant role in schools where the dominant leadership was transformational so most of the principals considered it the axis and pillar of the school administration for the overall school's progress and development. This value in high schools is mostly connected to the teacher's academic and professional degree. Principals often respect teachers who have higher academic degrees and qualifications. On the contrary, this value is less in primary schools since mutual respect is based more on friendly relationships between principals and teachers. One of the principals stated the following: *"Every teacher has a series of shortcomings and no one can claim to be perfect, but if we come and do not see these shortcomings, we have actually respected our teacher and she will respect us reciprocally"* (H.R.P5).

2. *Honesty and transparency:* The core value that was articulated by principals with the dominant approach of transformational leadership was honesty and transparency. This value was considered about the relationships inside and outside of school. It is very important for involving teachers in teaching and learning and increases their commitment to the school. Considering the value of transparency in communication between school and home, particularly in rural schools can help build mutual trust as one of the principals mentioned the following: *"The first day I came to school, the parents of the children did not come to school much and went to school one by one. We sat down and checked and saw that now the previous principals had spent a lot of money on financial matters, but because it was not clear to the parents, they were discouraged. We also decided to report*

our details to our parents and be in a so-called glass room" (H.U.P5).

3. *Support:* The value of support can be considered a common value in all schools where transformational leadership was the dominant leadership model. This value was promoted both to teachers in the school and to a wide range of students. The school principal's support for teachers and students increased students' interest in attending school and promoted teachers' freedom and security in schools. In addition, the value of support in primary schools, especially in rural primary schools, is considered spiritual. Thus, principals promote tools of empathy and listening to all the teaching staff in schools, in particular by providing compassionate support to all teachers beyond coercive reactions. The following quotation is characteristic: *"Our office has a lot of fluctuations. One day a new head will come, one day a new deputy will come, and well, finally, each of them has a special taste. Break the self-esteem of the school teacher"* (P.U.P7).

4. *Social Responsibility:* The most different value among transformational leaders was the value of social responsibility. Principals faced different social challenges some of which included challenges among students due to the: 1) lack of participation of parents in the school (2), mixed-gender education generally usually effective interaction between teachers and students (3), students' early dropout (4), students' marrying at a young age (5), students' learning disorders (6), boy students working (7), less-experienced teachers (8), lack of sufficient school infrastructure (9) familial and low-income marriages of students. Therefore, solving these challenges led principals to consider beyond the school's overall responsibilities to address, also, these kinds of topics. In particular, on school principal mentioned the following: *"The first year I was in school, I saw*

that most of the sixth-grade students either nominated or showed up, so we came and made a plan and spent almost a whole year for the mothers of the children in the training class, and finally, after a year, we were able to stop this process. If the children get married, let their husbands continue their education” (P.R.P3).

5. *Communication with the local community:* Communication with the local community especially with students’ parents was the core value of the transformational leadership model. This value was mostly articulated by principals in primary schools rather than in high schools. This important value is being promoted in various ways both in primary and high schools as well as in urban and rural areas. In rural schools, communication with the local community is mostly emotional. This means that the principal in rural areas is often recognized as an active member of the village’s

decision-making council. Furthermore, in primary schools, communication is mostly connected to the religious aspect of the local community by encouraging students to attend religious rituals. While in high schools, especially those located in urban areas, the relationship with the local community is more focused on students’ learning and education level without the presence of the emotional aspect. Based on that, one school principal acknowledged the following: “*At the beginning of the year, we identify the expertise of each parent and involve them in the school's affairs based on their expertise*” (H.U.P2).

To sum up, analyzing findings were organized into two categories of terminal values and instrumental values according to school leadership models. These core values emerging were summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Values emerged in school leadership models

Leadership Models	Instrumental values	Terminal values
Managerial leadership	Law and order; Direct supervision; Participation and interaction	Quantity and Outcome-oriented
Ethical leadership	Interaction and cooperation; Empathy and Compassion; Sharing experiences	Modifying student behavior
Instructional leadership	Instructional supervision; Teacher empowerment; Participation; Intimate and friendly climate	Student learning
Distributed leadership	Consensus; Sharing experiences; Division of labor	
Transformational leadership	Mutual respect and understanding; Honesty and transparency; Support	Responsibility and social communication; Communication with the local community

Discussion and conclusion

This study sought to explore the core values articulated by principals with a focus on school leadership models (instructional, distributed, transformational, managerial, and ethical leadership). It is concluded that the core values vary in different school leadership models. According to the purpose of this study, the findings were twofold. First, we aimed to reveal the predominant model of school leadership. In terms of the specific leadership models, consistent with the related evidence reported in Iranian schools, our findings indicated the managerial leadership model as the predominant leadership model exercised in the Iranian context. This finding is closely connected to the centralized education system that is implemented in Iran (e.g., Author, 2019; Hallinger et al., 2017). Based on this finding, it would be enlightening to undertake similar studies in other cultures to explore similarities and differences with a view of the bureaucratic system in the culture of Iran perspective. Following, the ethical leadership model was ranked second and the instructional leadership model was ranked third. As Oplatka (2004) noted in Asian countries, instructional leadership functions are relatively rare in schools, and principals are likely to adopt a stance in favor of management and administration. Therefore, this particular finding might be mainly interpreted based on the highly centralized educational system in these countries, together with the school principals' limited power by the system's rules. As reported by Author (2019), Iranian principals are always experiencing tension between managerial and instructional matters, while improving teaching and learning remains integral to their work.

Secondly, concerning the values articulated by school leaders in Iran, our findings extend prior research conducted internationally in this domain by revealing how prominent core values articulated

by principals vary in school leadership models. The findings from this study are contrary to some of the existing evidence (e.g., Peterson & Peterson, 2012; Wenno, 2017) that would suggest that the core values articulated by principals based on the managerial leadership model include the values of law and order, direct supervision, result-oriented, and participation and interaction in school. These particular values derived from this study are closely connected to the centralized education system that characterized the Iranian context. In centralized education systems, principals need to follow all the rules and regulations without really questioning the system (Pashiardis & Kafa, 2021). Therefore, values associated with law and order could promote a smoother leadership practice for school principals. Furthermore, values associated with interaction and participation in school exclude parental involvement, because principals are dedicated to adhering to these laws, rules, and regulations. Moving on to the ethical leadership model, the findings indicated that articulated values such as interaction and cooperation to further support the friendly climate of the school organization, values associated with empathy and compassion between the principals and the teaching staff, and sharing experiences to solve school problems. In literature, the instrumental values as presented in the literature, refer to job satisfaction and virtue (e.g., Cansoyet al., 2021; Negis & Ialgo, 2020; Vikaraman et al., 2021) and could be associated with the values that are being promoted by principals in Iran to further provide a satisfying environment for all internal school stakeholders.

The instructional leadership model or pedagogical leadership style (Pashiardis, 2013; Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2011) is connected to students' academically successful outcomes and the indirect support of principals towards this

aspect. In this study, principals promoted several values associated with this indirect support of the instructional leadership model that includes the focus on student learning, teachers' empowerment, and support to promote the teaching and learning process, the supervision and guidance of the teaching and learning process, etc. This particular finding is also presented in the literature. In particular, the instrumental values associated with this leadership model, include students' academic achievement, improvement of learning, etc. (Sindhvad et al., 2022; Shaked, 2021). Following that, the distributed leadership model advocated by Iranian principals is linked to the core values of sharing experiences and dividing school tasks to improve school organization. In particular, the important value of sharing experiences could be associated with the terminal values presented in the literature, within this model, and refer to the creation of learning opportunities for school teachers, etc. (Beckmann, 2017; Denee & Thornton, 2021). Finally, the transformational leadership style revealed values associated with honesty, transparency, mutual respect, support, etc. Values associated with support refer to the school principals' effort to support teachers by letting them feel comfortable and act freely within their school. This finding could be associated with the instrumental values of this leadership model, as presented in the literature, and include the development and support of human resources (Burns, 1978; Shava & Heystek, 2020), mainly referring to the teaching staff. Finally, an important value associated with this particular leadership model is the strong communication of the principals with the local communities. This kind of aspect is associated with the external leadership dimension of the school principals, or the adoption of the entrepreneurial leadership style (Pashiardis, 2013; Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2011).

The importance of a school principal's entrepreneurship feature, which encompasses the various external stakeholders, includes collaboration with the local community and it is considered an essential part of school leadership. Gurr (2015) supports the idea that successful principals do not lead alone. On the contrary, successful principals are people-centered and concerned with fostering collaboration. This collaboration includes the values of communication with external stakeholders and, in this case, the local community.

Overall, based on the aforementioned, this study revealed that principals in the Iranian context, within the various leadership models, promoted mostly instrumental values, as presented in the literature, rather than terminal ones. These instrumental values are being promoted and manifested by principals in the Iranian context to further achieve their goals and perhaps their school vision. Contextual factors as it is argued in the literature (e.g., Brauckmann et al., 2020), play an important role in general, and this particular manifestation of values in Iranian school principals' leadership practice could be associated with the important framework of leading a school organization within a centralized education system. In other words, principals promote several core values to achieve particular goals associated with the regulations of the context in which they live and operate. Based on that, further research could focus on contextual factors to provide a wider picture of how values affect the different school leadership models in various contexts.

These findings also have practical implications for principals both in Iran and other societies. Framed within the specific leadership models, our findings reinforce the need for principals to change their direction from relying on one model to leadership for learning as an integrated model of

instructional, transformational, distributed, and situational leadership models as well as considering inspiring, guiding, and directing teachers in such a way that enhances student learning outcomes and school improvement (Liu et al., 2016). Thus, preparation and professional development programs must also be aimed at developing capacities, such as setting goals, solving problems, coaching teachers, monitoring student achievement, and developing a positive school learning climate. Finally, we suggest that policymakers could take into consideration the findings of the research in solving the school principals' tension between administrative and managerial, and instructional matters to adapt to the changes in their role set (Author, 2019).

The main limitations of this study concern the sample and measures of the presented school leadership models. Firstly, the sample study is limited geographically. Though the schools of the Razaviyeh region share the same institutional and cultural context as those in other parts of Iran, there is no guarantee that similar results would be found in other parts of Iran or international settings. Accordingly, it would be of great interest to replicate this study utilizing a multi-national grouping of schools. In addition, despite the qualitative results supporting the finding of the high-ranked principals statistically, our findings should not be interpreted for other groups of school principals. The second limitation is related to measures and their validity. As our questionnaire on school leadership included a variety of leadership measures (instructional, distributed, transformational, managerial, and ethical leadership models), the length of the questionnaire might affect cooperation rates and a variety of indicators of data quality in the survey. Finally, it should be noted that while this study employed survey responses from teachers, testing data from

various levels of other relevant school stakeholders, such as parents, students, and principals can be useful for follow-up analyses.

Ethical considerations

During the implementation of this research and the preparation of the article, all national laws and principles of professional ethics related to the subject of research, including the rights of statistical community, organizations and institutions, as well as authors and writers have been observed. Adherence to the principles of research ethics in the present study was observed and consent forms were consciously completed by all statistical community.

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Conflict of interest

According to the authors of the present article, there was no conflict of interest.

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