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Principal Engagement in the Teacher Evaluation Process in Remote Schools: A Narrative Inquiry of Language Teachers

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ABSTRACT

States and districts mandate teacher evaluation systems in schools. However, research indicates that compliance with the law alone does not assure quality performance in evaluations. In addition, not all schools across different districts—urban and remote—perform at the same level or quality. This research paper offers a subjective view of six Arabic and English language teachers working in remote schools by examining their experiences with school principals in their capacities as evaluators in the teacher evaluation process. It further investigates how evaluation outcomes influence teacher retention, morale, and instructional growth. It also explores the factors that make principals effective evaluators. Narrative inquiry was utilized as the research methodology in which teachers' stories were used to uncover their values and expectations regarding their principals' involvement. All data were obtained through interviews and school documents and were analyzed individually and then collectively, using narrative analysis techniques and coding strategies. Additionally, the study highlights the necessity for structured professional development to enhance principals' evaluation effectiveness. In their counter-stories, teachers unveiled the extent of principals' engagement throughout the process, portraying them as either entirely absent or unserviceably present. They provided a list of practical actions necessary for principals to serve as instructional leaders and evaluators in the 21st century. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Teacher evaluations have been a source of tension for educators and researchers for many years. District- and state-level reform efforts have made substantial changes to teacher evaluation systems that United States public schools have experienced in decades [1]. These initiatives were driven, in large part, by research showing that teachers play a significant role in student achievement [2] and by evidence that existing evaluation systems were largely perfunctory and overly focused on compliance [3]. Under the Obama administration, teacher evaluation reforms became central to major education initiatives such as Race to the Top and state waivers from No Child Left Behind. As a result, 46 states have enacted new legislation designed to strengthen and expand teacher evaluation systems in public schools [4].

In similar steps, many educational organizations around the globe, such as the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC), have established evaluation systems to maximize educational benefits. ADEC seeks to enhance education in the United Arab Emirates by discarding the former evaluation system in Abu Dhabi and replacing it with a more effective model [5, 6]. However, sustaining the momentum and impact of teacher evaluation remains challenging.

For instance, in a study examining the evaluation systems of four U.S. states, Weisberg et al. found that teacher evaluations were typically episodic, based on only a few annual classroom observations lasting 60 minutes or less [3]. More detrimentally, these evaluations were conducted by administrators who had not undergone sufficient training to be considered qualified evaluators. Consequently, the teacher evaluation systems failed to underscore the differences in performance among teachers, leaving excellent teachers unrecognized and lower-performing teachers without the support and development needed to thrive in their profession [3].

The goal of teacher evaluations is to maximize teaching quality, student learning, and professional contributions in schools [7, 8]. Principals who possess critical skills and an unwavering commitment to school improvement can forge better relationships with teachers and convey a sense of trust [9, 10]. For example, only when school principals are knowledgeable educators are they able to review and evaluate teachers [6]. In addition, from a psychological standpoint, teachers who regard their principals as incompetent evaluators are less likely to internalize principal evaluation reports [11]. For these reasons, it is important for Emirate policymakers and educators to examine the effectiveness of their principals in the teacher evaluation process. Doing so will aid principals as they adjust to their evolving roles, which emphasize instructional leadership over managerial responsibilities [6].

School leaders have the potential to unleash latent capacities in their schools through their direct influence on seminal factors contributing to student learning, including school climate, teacher performance, and instructional quality [12–14]. However, Alkaabi noted that the call to become an instructional leader is not new to principals; rather, it is the unequivocal meaning of becoming such a leader [6]. After all, teachers are critical players in the success and effectiveness of their schools. When teachers understand and feel a high level of confidence in their principal and the evaluation process, it is more likely that the intended goals of the process will improve teaching and learning [7]. In the last two decades, there has been a drastic change in how stakeholders—including teachers, administrators, and policymakers—view the teacher evaluation process [15]. In fact, numerous studies have addressed various aspects of the teacher evaluation process worldwide [3, 16–21]. These studies largely involve evaluating current teacher evaluation systems in multiple U.S. states, with only two qualitative studies conducted in the UAE that explore certain aspects of teacher evaluation [7, 22]. However, research employing a narrative methodology to explore principals' practices in teacher evaluation—especially in remote school contexts—remains scarce both globally and within the United Arab Emirates. This gap underscores the need for further investigation into how principals' supervisory roles unfold in less-examined regions, ultimately informing and refining educational policies and practices in these areas. Moreover, no studies have examined how principals specializing in Arabic or English

subjects engage in teacher evaluation.

The purpose of this study is to uncover the meaning behind Arabic and English teachers' narratives regarding their principals' engagement and support as primary evaluators throughout the teacher evaluation process in remote schools. Additionally, this study explores how principals conduct formative supervision cycles within the teacher evaluation process and examines the nature of their supervisory practices from teachers' perspectives. The research questions that guided this study are as follows: How do Arabic and English teachers view the involvement of the principal as a primary evaluator in the evaluation process? What makes a principal an effective evaluator?

This study provides real stories from the field for educators to help them determine how to make principals more effective in the teacher evaluation process. It illustrates how principals conduct formative supervision cycles in remote areas and aims to reveal the nature of supervisory practices implemented throughout the evaluation process from the perspectives of both Arabic and English language teachers. Determining whether principals' approaches are effective in the eyes of teachers is of utmost importance since educators strive to increase both student performance and teacher accountability. Nonetheless, if principals are not adequately prepared to bolster and accurately measure teaching quality, the process does little to meet the increasing demands of the highest international standards [23]. In the following section, the literature review will explore teacher evaluation systems—addressing the limited research on foreign language instruction—alongside the broader implementation of evaluation practices before transitioning to a discussion of how principals engage in the evaluation process.

1.1. Review of Relevant Literature

1.1.1. Teacher Evaluation Systems

Teacher evaluation has been a topic of discussion and debate throughout the last century. Frameworks for the teacher evaluation process vary from state to state and from country to country. However, the most commonly used teacher evaluation frameworks in mainstream education are those developed by Marzano and Toth and Danielson [24, 25]. Marzano and Toth's model, which is grounded in teacher growth and student achievement, encompasses four domains: "classroom strategies and behaviors," "planning and preparing," "reflecting on teaching," and "collegiality and professionalism" [24]. On the other hand, Danielson offered a widely recognized baseline, comprising 22 main components organized into four domains and encompassing 76 smaller elements. These domains included planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities [25]. When embedded into an evaluation system, these four domains facilitate the development of a shared understanding and provide opportunities for self-assessment. In addition, the framework can be used for multiple purposes, but its true value is realized as a foundation for professional conversations between administrators and teachers as they enhance their skills in the complex task of teaching.

Nevertheless, most research indicates teacher evaluation as if it were universal—a one-size-fits-all approach—even across different subject areas [26]. However, foreign language teachers are still teachers first, and to be considered effective, they should exhibit many of the same qualities that define good teaching in other subjects. Meanwhile, numerous studies have examined the components that should be included when evaluating foreign language teachers. For instance, Bell investigated effective foreign language teaching through the perspectives of 457 postsecondary French, German, and Spanish instructors [27]. Over 95% of these participants highlighted enthusiasm for the target language and culture, competence in using the target language, frequent integration of authentic materials, and the use of group work in the classroom [27]. Çelik et al. examined 998 Turkish undergraduates' views on what makes an effective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher, revealing that personal qualities, content- and pedagogy-specific knowledge, professional skills, and classroom behavior were key criteria [28]. Likewise, Khaksefidi found that 90 Iranian students and EFL teachers agreed on 13 essential components that characterize an effective EFL educator [29]. Ultimately, other studies have examined the impact of implementing teacher evaluation systems.

One critical and comprehensive study that tackled several angles of teacher evaluation was The Widget Effect, in which Weisberg et al. indicated numerous failures in the evaluation systems of several school districts in Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, and Ohio [3]. Some major findings included the fact that half of the 12 districts in the Widget

Effect study did not dismiss non-probationary teachers for poor teaching performance in the previous five years; 99% of 28 teachers were rated good or excellent; 73% of teachers received no written feedback regarding improvement on their evaluations; no recognition was established for high- or low-performing teachers; and no proper individualized professional development was in place for teachers [3]. These findings suggest that an improved, refined, and carefully designed teacher evaluation system is necessary to further the development of teacher capacity [3].

The United Arab Emirates is no exception. In a qualitative, multi-phase study, Al Maktoum and Al Kaabi revealed four themes related to teachers' experiences as recipients of the evaluation process in the UAE: (1) unreliable indicators for judging teacher quality, (2) lack of motivation to provide evidence of performance, (3) episodic superficial feedback, and (4) compliance versus the "satisficing" mindset of teachers and evaluators [7].

To expand the scope and include triangulated perspectives, some evaluation systems adopt an approach that integrates multiple data sources, thereby strengthening teacher evaluation. For example, in a study of Urban Teacher Residency programs, Kawasaki et al. aimed to help educators better understand and assess teacher quality and performance by integrating several critical measures [30]. They collected data from seven distinct sources: (1) observation rubrics, (2) teaching artifacts, (3) instructional logs, (4) value-added measures, (5) assessment-based pedagogical content knowledge, (6) surveys of teachers and mentors, and (7) teacher portfolios. Although gathering such a wide array of data presented substantial challenges, these measures collectively offered a multifaceted view of teaching quality. As a result, the combined use of these measures addressed the complex nature of teaching in ways that were both theoretically and empirically grounded, ultimately supporting more effective program improvement. Maktoum and Al Kaabi suggested that teacher evaluations should draw on multiple data sources to provide a holistic picture of teacher performance [7].

Nevertheless, Kawasaki et al. found no ideal, entirely scientific, or purely objective method for weighting or combining multiple teacher evaluation measures [30]. Any proposed framework inevitably contained a degree of subjectivity; however, the critical issue lay in identifying where, how, and to what extent these nonscientific judgments entered the process. By explicitly articulating the assumptions and decisions underpinning a teacher evaluation system—its objectives, components, and procedures—educators could more effectively oversee its implementation, make necessary modifications, and ultimately provide evidence supporting the validity of conclusions about teacher effectiveness and the system's value in enhancing teaching practices.

In light of teacher development, Goe et al. concluded that the lack of reliability in the evaluation process can result in ineffective professional development, thereby preventing teaching quality from evolving in the school [31]. In addition, over time, school districts have come to agree that designing an evaluation system capable of influencing teacher practices is challenging. However, over the last few decades, it has become undeniably evident that the evaluation process has improved significantly and become more reflective of actual teaching practice, yet it has not reached its full potential.

In Chicago, for example, Sartain et al. observed that administrators often dominated post-observation discussions, rarely posing open-ended, higher-order questions to prompt teacher reflection [21]. Principals who viewed the evaluation process primarily as an accountability tool tended to devote minimal time to providing constructive feedback [32]. Consequently, the frequency and quality of teacher feedback within the evaluation process depends substantially on the skills, capacity, and objectives of school leaders [11].

1.1.2. Principal Engagement in the Evaluation Process

Despite various definitions, models, and frameworks for teacher evaluation, researchers have agreed that it should be conducted in a regular and formative manner to ensure the achievement of institutional goals, focused educational improvement, and accountability of educators for their instruction [33]. Even if educators and policymakers arrive at a promising and sound evaluation system, additional reliable, knowledgeable, and dedicated principals (or other evaluators) who are committed to guiding and coaching teachers throughout the evaluation process are needed. Marshall identified reasons for the oversight of both principals and teachers in supervision embedded in the evaluation process [19]:

(1) Principals see only a fragment of what occurs during classroom observation.
(2) Short and brief evaluations provided by principals have

less impact and yield limited benefits.

(3) Principals typically do not witness a "normal" lesson delivered by a teacher.

(4) Isolated lessons observed constitute only part of the overall instructional process.

(5) Teacher evaluation often fails to emphasize student learning.

(6) High-stakes evaluation deters adult learning and increases anxiety about final evaluation scores.

(7) Implemented evaluation and teacher supervision foster isolation among teachers, preventing shared learning and experience exchange.

(8) Evaluation methods can interfere with effective teacher supervision.

(9) Principals frequently do not provide professional feedback to teachers.

(10) Principals cannot devote their full attention to teacher evaluations due to heavy workloads and the daily operations of the school.

In a district that reformed its teacher evaluation system, Kraft and Gilmour conducted interviews with 24 principals to explore the impact of these changes [32]. Their analysis revealed that, although a shared framework enhanced feedback conversations, placing sole responsibility for evaluations on principals resulted in unintended consequences that ultimately compromised feedback quality. The authors proposed five remedies: targeting evaluations strategically, reducing principals' operational burdens, providing robust training, hiring instructional coaches, and introducing peer evaluation systems [32]. Similarly, Guba and Lincoln identified several major flaws in the evaluation process, primarily associated with principals [34]:

(1) Principals were typically absent from the evaluation process.

(2) Principals were followed blindly by teachers who were not encouraged to participate.

(3) The system encouraged teacher collusion with the principal, leading to stagnant practices.

In Zimmerman and Deckert-Pelton's study, participants described the teacher evaluation process as ineffective when evaluators (primarily principals) were not sufficiently motivated toward school improvement [35]. Participants also expressed concerns regarding inconsistent evaluation methods across multiple schools within the same district. However, some teachers believed in their principals' capacity to judge their instructional practices [35]. Several respondents commended their principals for demonstrating a high level of content knowledge, pedagogical experience, and evaluative skills in areas such as support, supervision, communication, and constructive feedback aimed at shaping and refining teachers' instructional quality [35]. Principals' true capacity and knowledge can be observed not only in school meetings but also through formative and summative principal evaluations.

As important as any other aspect of the teacher evaluation process is the need for researchers and educators to understand the functionality of both formative and summative evaluations. The formative evaluation of teachers is aimed at improving their instructional practices [7]. It focuses on teachers' needs, shaping and refining their approaches. One way in which administrators can leverage formative evaluation is by employing clinical supervision through pre-conferences, classroom observations, and post-observations [6]. In contrast, summative evaluation represents the culmination of the assessment process, used emphatically to determine whether a teacher has met minimum requirements. Often, it informs critical decisions about teacher placement for many years [36]. Glickman et al. differentiated between formative and summative evaluation, noting that the former assists teachers' professional growth and the improvement of teaching, while the latter determines whether a teacher has met minimum expectations [37].

Over the years, educators have witnessed a tug-of-war relationship between formative and summative aspects of supervision and evaluation [38]. Drawing on evidence from the literature, Zepeda argued that when evaluators provide formative assessment and then switch to summative evaluation of a supervisee's performance, they risk conflict, eroded trust, and mixed messages [33]. To avoid such undesirable outcomes, Popham suggested that supervisors should implement both types of evaluation, but do so separately [39]. In other words, by embedding formative elements into daily practice and viewing them as a pathway leading to summative milestones, leaders can identify underperforming educators while also devising professional development plans [7, 33]. These plans help ensure that instructional decisions and actions are implemented in ways that promote growth [7, 33].

In summary, no studies conducted as part of this research regarding principals' involvement in the teacher evaluation process employed narrative inquiry. Additionally, no studies found in the United Arab Emirates measured the effectiveness of principals in the evaluation process. To address this gap in the literature, the present study spotlights principal engagement in the evaluation process as narrated and described by Arabic and English language teachers who are evaluated by these principals in remote schools.

2. Materials and Methods

Qualitative research methods have the potential to address the research questions of this study, which encompass the "what," "why," and "how"[40]. According to Patton, qualitative methods are designed to provide an in-depth, interpretive understanding of the social world from participants' perspectives by considering the sense they make of their social and material surroundings, experiences, perspectives, and histories[41]. Furthermore, as this study's research questions suggest, it aims to comprehend what and how Arabic and English language teachers in remote schools perceive their principals' current practices in the teacher evaluation process. Anticipated responses include detailed descriptions of the phenomena under investigation, centered on participants' perspectives and accounts while preserving the complexity and uniqueness of each individual[40].

In this study, narrative inquiry is employed as a research methodology in which individuals' stories are used by the researcher to answer the primary research questions. Narrative stories are among the most commonly used forms of data in efforts to help "people make sense of their lives and the lives of others"[42]. Additionally, accessing the personal experiences of the storytellers (i.e., the participants) can reveal more in-depth and valuable information[43]. According to Riessman, narrative inquiry represents an organized compilation of experiences that is examined and analyzed with a focus on linguistic and contextual factors[44]. However, when providing a well-designed narrative study, the researcher should present a clear beginning, middle, and end to enable readers to understand the study's interpretation directly[45].

Kramp added a caveat for researchers who implement narrative inquiry, stating, "the researcher who engages in narrative inquiry is interested in determining the meaning of a particular experience or event for the one who had it, and tells about it in a story"[43]. Moreover, each story is confined within social, cultural, political, and historical boundaries. Such stories can enrich and inform the reader, especially once the storyteller's experiences are uncovered. However, this can be futile if the participant's personal experiences are missing from the narratives[46].

The rationale for employing narratives in this study was to understand the meanings teachers constructed regarding their principals' involvement as the primary evaluators in the teacher evaluation process. Six narratives were collected to provide detailed insights into how teachers viewed their principals in this context. The researcher's role at this stage involved collecting and interpreting these meanings in collaboration with the storytellers. He co-constructed meaning with teachers who recounted their experiences of principal engagement in the teacher evaluation process. In addition, as asserted by Johnson-Bailey, researchers should use narratives to convey participants' accounts by focusing on cultural contexts[47].

Purposeful sampling was employed in this study to identify and select individuals who were well-versed in teacher evaluations[48]. Various designs of purposeful sampling were included, such as criterion sampling, in which a "check-list of requirements" was used to choose participants[41]. Each participant underwent a "vetting" process and had to meet the following criteria to be considered for this study: (1) currently working in remote schools; (2) teaching English language subjects; (3) having experienced the full teacher evaluation process; and (4) having been evaluated by a school administrator at the end of the year. The selection of participants was purposeful in that the researchers identified teachers who could offer the most useful and in-depth information regarding principal engagement in the evaluation process (**Table 1**). Furthermore, all selected teachers received an email invitation to participate in an interview. The email included information about the research, a consent form, the requirements for participation, the researcher's contact information, and a space for a signature.

Table 1. Participant information.

Pseudonym	Gender	Nationality	Level Taught	Subject Taught	Years of Experience	Employment Status
Susan	Female	Emirati	Middle	English	11	Working Full-time
Rami	Male	Jordanian	Middle	Arabic	8	Working Full-time
Sami	Male	Sudanese	Primary	Arabic	5	Working Full-time
Ali	Male	Emirati	Primary	Arabic	9	Working Full-time
Nora	Female	Emirati	Primary	English	10	Working Full-time
Sara	Female	Egyptian	High	English	6	Working Full-time

2.1. Interviews

To pose critical interview questions that elicit detailed and essential information from participants, a thorough understanding of the phenomenon is required. The researcher immersed himself in the literature to learn more about the topic and reduce uncertainty regarding the principal evaluation process. He also developed a semi-structured interview protocol to allow for flexibility and natural flow while maintaining focus on the overarching purpose[41]. A less rigid design, known as the semi-structured interview process, allows the researcher autonomy to ask follow-up questions[49].

The interviews enabled an exploration of not only teachers' experiences regarding their principals' engagement in the teacher evaluation process but also the interactions that occurred, in their own words, within the school and evaluation setting. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. Before each meeting, the researcher contacted participants via email to select a mutually convenient time for their schedules. Participants signed consent forms agreeing to be recorded and were reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they were under no obligation to answer any question. They were also informed that they could terminate the interview at any time.

2.2. Document Review

The school evaluation instruments, artifacts, samples of teachers being evaluated, written feedback, evaluation forms, and tools used in the evaluation process were reviewed as a first step in understanding the general context of evaluation systems and the ways in which they promote teachers' professional growth and learning. Throughout the duration of the study, some teachers' formative and summative evaluation documents were examined to explore how principals engaged in developing and evaluating teachers.

2.3. Data Management

All data were categorized as tapes and interview notes, protected by password encryption, and stored in ATLAS.ti. Additionally, all identifying information was coded to safeguard the confidentiality of participants. For instance, a labeling system—including "name of file," "name of interviewer," "date of interview," "place of interview," and "time of interview"—was established to provide descriptive details for tapes and field notes, facilitating easy retrieval and usage. For auditing purposes, process notes were formatted using codes. Finally, participants' signed informed consent forms were secured in a locked filing cabinet.

2.4. Data Analysis

All data gathered were analyzed individually and then collectively to obtain the most useful information. The researcher employed the analysis-of-narrative technique to review the data. Narrative analysis aims to identify common themes or conceptual elements within the collected stories. This approach requires multiple narratives and necessitates an examination of the different accounts to discern recurring notions. Because analysis-of-narrative techniques were sufficiently broad, the researcher borrowed several coding strategies—including open coding, line-by-line coding, and axial coding—from grounded theory methodologies to achieve more filtered and useful data.

The first step involved becoming familiar with the data, followed by open coding during the second reading. In accordance with Charmaz's guidelines, the text was read line by line, and summarizing phrases were assigned to each segment of text[50]. Similar segments were then grouped together into codes, ensuring that all segments of text were classified. The various meanings in each segment contributed to the properties of their respective codes. The purpose of grouping

the data was to reduce the number of categories by merging similar pieces of information into broader, higher-level categories or themes.

Next, axial coding was employed to examine the relationships among the open codes (see **Table 2**). This process validated existing connections among codes and refined any groups needing further development. The data were subsequently integrated to form a coherent theme capable of conveying a complete, unified narrative. In addition to coding strategies, analytic memos documenting relationships, cases, events, or categories were recorded throughout the project. The primary purpose of these memos was to stimulate the researcher's thinking and encourage connections to the data[51]. The data analysis process was organized using a combination of ATLAS.ti, spreadsheets, handwritten notes, and outlines.

Table 2. Data analysis demonstrating the implementation of open and axial coding.

Research Questions	Open Coding	Axial Coding	Participants' Words	Theme
Q1: What are the types of principals as described and narrated by school teachers?	-Being physically absent in the process -Being visibly absent regardless of his/her presence in school -Ignoring teacher matters regarding the evaluation process	Absent throughout the evaluation process	-"My principal was absent two terms." -"She just ended the conversation by saying 'Ok, Ok. Ok. I am busy." -"The most important person in the building is not visible." -"What's the purpose of the evaluation process if the principal is not completely involved?"	The principal in absentia
	-Being there but not enough -Rusty knowledge with no update -Lack of training in supervision and evaluation	Ineffective engagement toward the process	-"I get nothing and learned nothing." -"It is pointless, no matter how many observations are conducted by principals." -"There was no regular checking or scrutiny to ensure the quality of the documents."	The principal in limbo
Q2: What makes a principal an effective evaluator?	-Regularly tracking teacher's work to pass fair evaluation scores -Being an expert at conducting classroom observations -Providing evidence-based feedback -Linking feedback to professional development -Clearly communicating ideas and opinions	Being masterful in supervisory practices	-"There should be training with principals to show [the] various types of situations in the classroom." -"Providing teachers with meaningful feedback…" -"The principal must connect teacher evaluation to professional development." -"For the principal to be [an] effective evaluator is being able to communicate her ideas and opinions."	The principal in the twenty-first century

2.5. Establishing Trustworthiness

Two criteria were employed to establish trustworthiness: credibility and confirmability. Credibility pertains to the internal validity of the study[52]. Merriam and Associates highlighted that one way to ensure validity is by continuously comparing the data against emergent themes and personal judgment[45]. The researcher ensured internal validity by developing thick, rich descriptive themes, supported by clear interpretation and effective presentation of findings. To enhance consistency, member checks were conducted with participants, during which major themes and findings were reviewed collaboratively[41]. Discussions with educational researchers conducting similar studies further helped identify and address potential biases.

Triangulation was also used to reduce bias and support the interpretation of events in schools. Following Denzin's framework, four types of triangulation were applied: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation[52]. However, as interviews and document analysis were the primary data sources, the researcher focused on cross-referencing these sources for consistency. This process included comparing documents used in formative and summative evaluations with interview data provided by participants.

Confirmability was achieved through maintaining an audit trail to ensure unbiased findings. The researcher disclosed his prior experience as a schoolteacher in similar contexts, acknowledging how this background informed his understanding of teacher evaluations and supervision. Bogdan and Biklen emphasized the role of biases, which are influenced by researchers' opinions, prejudices, and experiences, necessitating regular reflection and monitoring[49]. Similarly, Peshkin described subjectivity as an intrinsic characteristic

researchers must actively manage throughout their work [53]. By disclosing his background and potential biases, the researcher offered transparency about his relationship to the study. His prior experience in remote schools, including undergoing the teacher evaluation process, provided insight into the challenges posed by the absence of principal engagement.

Moreover, the researcher critically examined the formative evaluation processes intended to foster supervision, professional development, and reflective dialogue. Despite being well-defined in handbooks, these processes were often inconsistently implemented by principals. His perspectives on principal engagement and its significance in teacher evaluations evolved over time. As a novice teacher in 2009, he faced the challenge of meeting expert-level expectations without adequate support. This experience shaped his understanding of the teacher evaluation system as deeply interconnected with effective principal involvement, motivating him to seek a deeper understanding of its implications [53].

2.6. Study Limitations

One limitation of this study is the small number of participants, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Qualitative research is designed to deeply explore the phenomenon under investigation as experienced by the participants. Therefore, the results of this study are not intended to provide definitive outcomes applicable to all circumstances. Instead, the study offers thoughtful insights that may serve as a foundation for reflection and further exploration.

3. Results

Three themes emerged as representative of the principal types engaged in the teacher evaluation process. The data suggest that two themes represent the types of principals teachers encountered during the evaluation process, while a third theme reflects the type of principal teachers envisioned as an effective evaluator throughout the process (see **Table 2**). A clear disconnect exists between best practices and actual practices.

3.1. Theme One: The Principal in Absentia

"The day the soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help them or concluded that you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership" [54].

Clear manifestations of the inaccessibility of school principals in supporting teachers during the evaluation process were found in teachers' day-to-day school experiences. This inaccessibility, described as the principal's disengaged demeanor, was categorized as "the principal in absentia." This theme was prevalent among half of the participants, particularly those teaching English, who described their principal as either being absent for long periods due to health issues or being physically present in the school building but emotionally disengaged. Such principals were perceived as not offering ideas, support, or even a simple smile to affirm a teacher's practices.

Teachers' perceptions of their principals stemmed from collective experiences, beginning with formative evaluation sessions—intended to help teachers shape and enhance their teaching practices—and culminating in summative evaluations, which determined the final score for teacher evaluations at the end of the academic year.

Figure 1 illustrates how principals are absent throughout the teacher evaluation process (including both formative and summative evaluations), yet they may appear at the end. It is as though principals circumvent the process and fail to contribute to teacher growth. Nora is a 35-year-old teacher with 10 years of English teaching experience who primarily taught in an elementary mixed-gender school setting, where boys and girls studied together in a conservative culture. Nora was eager to improve and sought the skills to provide a high-quality learning experience for her students. Her narrative depicted the prolonged absence of her principal and her feelings of being overlooked and ignored during the evaluation process. Nora identified an engaged principal as essential for refining her teaching skills. In her words:

> My principal was absent two terms because of her pregnancy although it was her first year at our school site. She even exceeds her allowed leaving limit, to linger her leaving. But any way she came back eventually after one year. Throughout her leaving, she never called or communicated to her teachers.

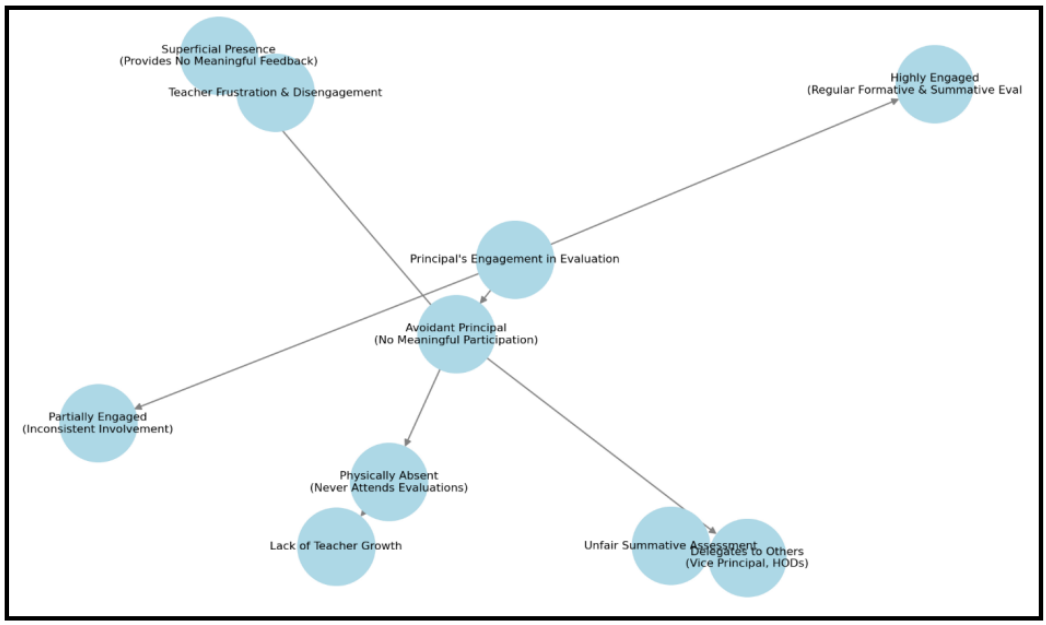

Figure 1. The avoidant engagement of the principal in absentia in the evaluation process as narrated by teachers.

In this scenario, the principal rejoined the school after a lengthy absence. While Nora initially hoped for positive changes upon her principal's return, she later realized that she might have been better off without the principal's presence. This conclusion stemmed from Nora's feelings of rejection during the formative evaluation phase, especially when requested and welcomed feedback from the principal regarding classroom observation was not provided. Nora explained:

> I was in the rush to catch her and asked her about what she thinks fared well and bad in my classroom. I felt happy because I think I performed well and wanted to hear from the expert [her school principal]. However, she just ended the conversation by saying Ok. Ok. Ok. I am busy. She left me in shock. Since that day, we never had what you called post-observation conference to discuss the classroom observation, to discuss my weakness and strength so I can avoid [mistakes] in the next observation. My feelings were combined with sadness and anger because this was the first time my principal sat in my classroom for formative evaluation… I really do not understand what the meaning behind it. The formative evaluation is built to improve my teaching skill but seems is left out.

Nora's desire for feedback became more pronounced after being ignored and not taken seriously, despite her initiative. If a principal is not supportive of their teachers during the formative evaluation process—intentionally structured to facilitate learning and improve teaching quality—then they fail both the educational system and the teachers they lead. Nora's account revealed that the formative evaluation conducted by her principal lacked critical post-conference review and follow-up, which are inseparable components of the process. These steps are typically discussed and planned in prior principal-teacher conferences. A school principal should dedicate specific time to help teachers address weaknesses, demonstrating a commitment to formative evaluations that are essential, commendable, and generally beneficial for refining teaching skills and achieving set goals before the summative evaluation.

Susan, an English language teacher, shared her perspective regarding what it means to engage and participate in the teacher evaluation process as an evaluating principal. She frequently emphasized the phrase "not present" to symbolize how the principal's absence as an evaluator diminished their influence and to highlight the importance of visibility during the evaluation process. According to Susan, a visible principal gives the evaluator not only leverage but also a voice capable of challenging final decisions or addressing conflicts that may arise during the summative evaluation meeting. Susan noted:

> The most important person in the building is not visible. She [my principal] had not been visible as much as she should be. However, the official score she may have should weigh less input because she is not present, you know. She cannot have much input if she is not present in the evaluation so any information given to her will be through the people [vice principal or head of faculty] who have observed me.

Susan's perspective suggested that an unavailable principal in the evaluation process loses the privilege to pass professional judgment on teachers or to have input on their performance during the summative evaluation. In Susan's case, the principal's final professional judgment should have been voiced and communicated through other evaluators who maintained consistent visibility in her classroom, such as the vice principal or head of faculty, rather than the principal.

Rami, an Arabic school teacher, expressed concerns similar to those of Nora and Susan regarding his principal's failure to allocate time for classroom visits as part of the evaluation process. Rami's aspiration to improve his teaching repertoire was hindered by a lack of leadership support, particularly from those tasked with overseeing and positively influencing his professional growth. Rami stated:

> My principal could not make it to observe my classroom. Besides, he did not spend an adequate amount of time observing teachers. He may be fully focused on school management. I wonder what the purpose of the evaluation process is if the principal is not completely involved.

Rami observed that his principal often prioritized administrative tasks, such as school budgeting, managing buses, meeting with parents, and attending external office meetings, over classroom observations. This raises concerns about the potential consequences of delegation visits among the administrative team and highlights the need for strategies to help principals better prioritize and balance their workloads, allowing them to dedicate sufficient time and attention to their teachers. Similarly, Sara, an English language teacher, frequently felt overlooked by principals during evaluations. She described feeling invisible in this way:

> Two out of three principals never visited my classroom to evaluate me. I know these two principals had limited English proficiency and barely greeted me. I'm not sure if that's the real reason they didn't observe any of my classes throughout the entire academic year.

For some teachers, it remained unclear why these principals were largely absent from the evaluation process. Overall, participants expressed frustration with their principals' absence during evaluations and highlighted the broader implication that, when principals fail to participate in the teacher evaluation process, the process becomes ineffective and ultimately a worthless practice.

A teacher's interactions and impressions of the evaluator change with their gender. The narratives of the study recount notable differences in the interaction male and female teachers have with their principal during evaluation. Female teachers, in particular, were more vocal about their expectations for certain feedback as well as an emotional engagement from their principals. They vented a lot of frustration when their principals were cold or distant, arguing that this disengagement stifled their professional development and instructional growth (English teachers Susan and Nora reported feeling unsupported during assessments because their principals were emotionally absent). From this experience, it may be suggested that female teachers tend to emphasize more collaborative and relational aspects of the evaluation process.

Nevertheless, male teachers like Rami and Sami seemed more preoccupied by the gaps in the processes and procedures of the evaluation activities more than the emotional involvement of their superiors. They were more willing to blame inefficient assessment practices to faulty administrative work, excessive workload, or insufficient training rather than voluntary apathy of the evaluators. They accepted the role of the principal, but they seemed to be more concerned about ensuring that the assessments were objective and orderly than the emotional or personal approachability of the principals. These results correspond with other studies indicating that while the female lecturers would prefer more interaction and relationship evaluation style, the male counterparts tend to emphasize more on the evaluation guidelines and its procedural and structural logic.

An even deeper layer of the principal in absentia is how the absence of the principal has ramifications on the

professional learning culture of the school. If principals do not actively and meaningfully participate in the evaluation of the teachers, professional development initiatives are likely to be missing or greatly fragmented. The teachers in this study voiced feelings that without an active principal, there was no vision for improvement and as a result, stagnation in teaching was prevalent. Some teachers even said that they were forced to rely on self-directed learning with some peer collaboration as a form of professional development because they could not find any principal-led initiatives.

As such, the principal absence from the evaluation process has ramifications on the morale and job satisfaction of the teachers. The absence of any principal evaluation or acknowledgment leads to teachers feeling apathetic, disenfranchised, and, in some cases, spread thin. A number of teachers in this study said that in the absence of any principal support or recognition, they felt unwilling to try out new teaching approaches or additional effort in innovating teaching in the classroom. In some more dire instances, teachers expressed the possibility of moving to different schools in the hope that there would be stronger leadership and better professional support.

3.2. Theme Two: The Principal in Limbo

"Instructional leadership requires principals to free themselves of bureaucratic tasks and focus their efforts on improving teaching and learning"[55, 56].

In this theme, principals were neither exemplary nor ineffective; rather, they were characterized by indifference. Half of the participants expressed a desire for more substantial engagement from their principals. They yearned for leaders who went beyond merely being present, conducting observations, or adhering to the written rules and policies dictated by the teacher evaluation process. These principals were described as being in limbo—fulfilling their duties as outlined in their job descriptions, yet without purpose, passion, or meaningful outcomes. They fell short of crossing the threshold of authentic instructional leadership, which requires a significant amount of passion, deep knowledge, and commitment.

Sami, an Arabic teacher with nearly five years of teaching experience, spent the majority of his career in rural schools. His teaching day was split between two different schools, where he taught for four hours in one school and another four hours in the second. Consequently, he worked under the supervision of two different principals. While one principal eventually evaluated Sami's classroom instruction, the other principal made no effort to observe or monitor his work. Sami believed that even if these observation activities were not officially counted in the evaluation system, principals should ensure that teaching quality prevails among all teachers, including visiting ones.

Reflecting on his experiences, Sami noticed recurring patterns in his interactions with principals. He observed that despite their presence in the classroom, principals often lacked the knowledge and expertise necessary to provide meaningful feedback. The formative evaluation process became a rote exercise devoid of learning or improvement. Sami stated:

> Frankly, I cannot count how many times my principals have entered my classroom to observe me. It was a lot, and I appreciate it. But what bothers me is I get nothing and learned nothing. It is pointless no matter how many observations conducted by principals because what matters is quality which does not exist… My old blood principals will talk on and on about things that I should do in my classroom, but their examples are outmoded and not applicable to the 21st century. Everything is completely different from five years ago. Sometimes I seek suggestions about some issues with my kids, they would say Google it and you might find the answer, or refer me to a teacher. Where are they in this? I just quit asking anyway.

Sami's statement highlights the limitations of principals who fail to embrace the instructional leadership role. He appreciated the frequency of classroom visits but emphasized the lack of quality in these interactions. The outdated examples and suggestions provided by his principals failed to align with contemporary educational practices, leaving him feeling unsupported and disillusioned. Ultimately, Sami's experience underscores the necessity for principals to go beyond superficial compliance and to actively engage in meaningful, informed instructional leadership that fosters professional growth and improves teaching quality.

Sami's disappointment with the attitudes of his prin-

cipals toward supervising and coaching teachers is evident. The term "old blood" refers to those principals who have experienced the old, traditional system and continue to adhere to outdated practices in the new system. In this era, the role of the principal is more complex than merely conducting classroom observations without possessing content knowledge or supervisory skills.

Sami shared, "When we discussed subject-matter knowledge, the conversations sometimes became tense, especially regarding Arabic grammar. It's not the principal's area of expertise, yet I felt compelled to accept his feedback."

For Sami, it is insufficient for principals to merely identify the strengths and weaknesses of their teachers. More importantly, principals should serve as reliable resources whom teachers can trust for guidance on content knowledge and effective instructional practices. Sami expressed confusion and dissatisfaction at not receiving the guidance or proper treatment he expected from his principals. He highlighted the need for principals to provide current, relevant information to sustain teachers' learning. In other words, teacher trust is predicated on quality professional development that draws upon principals' instructional expertise. If such expertise is lacking in content-specific areas, principals should enlist the support of other administrators or department heads with relevant specialization to observe teachers and provide accurate, constructive feedback.

Similarly, Ali, an Arabic teacher, lamented the practices employed by his principal when reviewing teaching portfolios and evaluating teachers during summative evaluations. He attributed the failure to thoroughly review necessary information and assess its validity to insufficient training. Ali noted:

> When we are finally evaluated, we have to present evidence like artifact or supplementary pictures that supported the requirement of a particular standard of our evaluation. If we fulfill the requirement, we will get higher scores. Sometimes teachers make these pictures up to get higher ratings without lifting a finger. There was no regular checking or scrutiny to ensure the quality of the documents. Principals need in-depth training in how to determine what is real and a fake by regularly checking teacher's work during the observation.

Ali's frustration is understandable, as the mandatory teacher portfolio is not revisited as regularly as it should be during the year. Instead, it is typically reviewed at the end of the year, specifically during the summative evaluation. Principals should recognize that not all portfolios accurately reflect the work of their teachers. The evaluation process, as currently implemented, contains loopholes that some teachers exploit. For instance, when portfolios go unchecked throughout the year, teachers are given the opportunity to create false artifacts or supplementary materials shortly before the summative evaluation to secure higher scores. Ali's response suggests that his principal's approach fails to differentiate between teachers who produce honest work and those who do not. He calls for mandatory training and more rigorous vetting procedures for principals to address these issues effectively.

For Sara, her frustration stemmed from the minimal and superficial feedback provided by her principal during observations and evaluations. Even though her principal conducted evaluations, the feedback focused only on a few isolated aspects, neglecting other critical elements of her teaching practice. She explained:

> My current principal has limited English proficiency and could not fully understand the classroom dynamics or the flow of the observation. As a result, we discussed everything in Arabic during the post-observation session. She barely looked at the interactions between me and my students, and she missed the deeper meanings of our discussions. It was hard to address multiple elements of the lesson because it was in English, which she did not comprehend. She only grasped a few technical points like warm-up transitions, activities, and assessments.

Finally, the field that a teacher teaches primarily influences his or her participation in the evaluation process. This research shed light on the non-English speaking principals had problems evaluating English teachers. For instance, Sara and Susan noticed that their supervisors had difficulty evaluating the quality of their courses and would frequently leave out more sophisticated pedagogical comments in favor of superficial remarks about the lesson's opening and progression and the teacher's overall management of the class.

The absence of adequate knowledge made the evaluation non helpful for the participants because the comprehensible feedback provided was irrelevant to their teaching techniques.

On the other hand, the teachers of Arabic had different perceptions regarding the expectations and the responses from the administrators. While Ali and Rami did agree that their principals spoke Arabic very well, they thought that the evaluation procedure was too simplistic and rigid. In their explanation, they gave examples of times when principals used old-fashioned methods of teaching, which rendered their suggestions irrelevant to contemporary teaching practices. These outcomes indicate that the relevance of subject content has a great bear on how teachers view the quality of the examinations. Teachers of subjects for which the principals are incompetent are more likely to be dissatisfied and frustrated with the evaluations because the critique they receive tends to be irrelevant to their instructional practices and, therefore, superficial.

In summary, the participants' narratives highlighted the necessity for principals to undergo specialized training on the evaluation process and remain informed about issues and current trends in supervision, student challenges, and effective assessment practices. Professional development focused on the teacher evaluation process should be established as a mandatory component of a principal's job responsibilities. The participants identified a range of needs that demand significant attention from principals when engaged in the evaluation process. Furthermore, principals require a certain level of proficiency in language subjects, particularly English, to enhance their ability to provide effective supervision and evaluation. Lastly, principals should leverage the expertise of other knowledgeable individuals within the school, such as department heads or instructional specialists, to deliver more robust formative and summative evaluations for both Arabic and English language teachers.

Perhaps the most significant consequence of having a principal in limbo is the wide gap between formal evaluation feedback and the practical insights needed to address real classroom challenges. Teacher respondents noted that, when present, their principals actively participated in evaluation meetings, yet their comments were overly general—such as saying "for my class" or simply advising them to "do something"—without addressing subject-specific teaching and learning needs. Many STEM and language teachers pointed out that their principals appeared to disregard these subjects because they did not understand them, and therefore, offered no relevant suggestions.

Furthermore, participants who experienced working with a principal in limbo reported that they coped with many instructional problems with little or no help from the principal. Some teachers reported that they attempted to obtain some guidance from some colleagues in their school or from other professional contacts. The lack of active instructional mentorship by the principal may create an unhealthy professional development environment where teachers are left to their own devises, unassisted and unaccompanied by any assessment or direction from the institution.

One additional challenge that is often neglected is the loss of trust and credibility within the evaluation system. In the case where instructors suspect that school heads do not have sufficient operational knowledge to aid them, they start to doubt the evaluative process. This doubt can result in a passive workforce that attends to a teaching position while nominally fulfilling the evaluation processes without any real engagement or impact of the feedback provided. Thus, because of the principal's unclear function in instructional leadership, the evaluation in most cases does not achieve its intended purpose which is enhancement. Instead, evaluations become a formality devoid of the essential purpose of aiding individual development.

3.3. Theme Three: The Principal in the Twenty-First Century

"True leadership must be for the benefit of the followers, not to enrich the leader"[57].

The third and final theme emerged from teachers' narratives, highlighting the kind of principal they aspire to see—one who is actively present, knowledgeable, and deeply invested in their professional growth. In stark contrast to the principal in absentia or the principal in limbo, this type of school leader exhibits dynamic engagement by consistently tracking teachers' progress, serving as an expert observer, and providing evidence-based feedback linked to meaningful professional development opportunities. Many participants emphasized that effective principals must receive robust training in contemporary supervisory practices, ensuring that classroom observations are grounded in current educational research.

The participants highlighted that an evaluator's credibility largely hinges on the skillful execution of the full formative evaluation process, coupled with expertise in delivering timely, constructive feedback that teachers can immediately apply to improve their instructional methods. Rami articulated this need, stating, "There should be training for principals to address the various types of classroom situations so they can identify what data to collect during observations and then use that information in the feedback session."

Nora further elaborated that data gathered from multiple observations should inform professional development tailored to individual teacher needs, cautioning that generic or repetitive training sessions often yield minimal benefit. Ali similarly stressed the importance of linking teacher evaluation to professional development: "The principal must connect teacher evaluation to professional development." Participants underscored the necessity of distinguishing clearly between formative and summative evaluations to enhance the clarity and effectiveness of the evaluation process. Susan shared her concerns: "I feel intimidated during the year when my principal enters the classroom. Is it for growth or for evaluation? Perhaps both?"

The participants expressed the importance of principals understanding the distinct purposes of formative and summative evaluations while establishing a clear pathway transitioning from one to the other. They also emphasized the critical role of regular, transparent communication. Open dialogue enables educators to see the direct connection between evaluation outcomes and actionable strategies for improvement. Essentially, the participants envisioned a principal who not only identifies areas for growth but also empowers teachers to address them. Sami summarized this ideal by stating, "For the principal to be [an] effective evaluator is being able to communicate her ideas and opinions."

In a twenty-first-century school setting, the principal's role extends beyond administrative responsibilities to that of an instructional leader who enhances teaching practices through mentorship, professional development, and consistent application of research-based supervisory skills. Such principals model lifelong learning by staying informed about innovative teaching methods and ongoing educational reforms. By combining deep pedagogical expertise with empathy and a clear vision for school improvement, they serve as catalysts for teacher development and student success.

Sara further emphasized the importance of principals' language proficiency, particularly when evaluations involve knowledge-based competency components: "If the principal doesn't understand what's going on in my classroom, I'm doomed. I'd rather have a qualified peer or another administrator join the evaluation so it's fair." Arabic teachers, such as Sami and Rami, emphasized that leveraging the expertise of other "knowledgeable individuals" can substantially enhance both the "guidance and fairness of teacher evaluations." They also highlighted the importance of ensuring that the responsibility for evaluating teachers does not rest solely with principals. Instead, they advocated for a collaborative, team-based approach involving multiple stakeholders to achieve more impactful results. Effective "distributed leadership" is crucial for improving the overall outcomes of the teacher evaluation process.

Additionally, teachers' expectations and interactions with their principal evaluators are influenced by their years of experience. This study identified three distinct patterns based on teachers' levels of expertise. Teachers in their early careers (0–5 years) looked on their principals for mentorship and organized advice. Simple summative results were not as important to less experienced teachers like Sami as direct mentoring, comments from classroom observations, and suggestions for professional development. They anticipated that principals would actively assist them in honing their teaching techniques and tactics. They felt unprepared and lost interest in the evaluation process when this help was lacking.

Teachers in their mid-career (6–10 years) complained about assessments that were shallow and unsubstantial. Moderately experienced educators like Nora and Ali want fair, fact-based criticism that recognized both their areas of strength and growth as teachers. They anticipated that their principals would give more than checklist-based tests; rather, they would provide them with individualized, perceptive feedback that would enable them to improve their teaching strategies.

Ten-year or more experienced teachers were cynical about the assessment process and often saw it as a formality rather than a means of fostering personal growth. Teachers like Susan and Rami had high expectations for their principals because they viewed them as future instructional leaders. However, when principals failed to meet these standards, experienced teachers tended to withdraw entirely from the

evaluation process. Instead of relying just on principle feedback, they sought out alternative professional development opportunities to enhance their instruction. To ensure successful involvement across experience levels, principals should adapt their evaluation methods to teachers' developmental needs. For instance, they ought to provide early-career educators with mentorship, mid-career educators with comprehensive feedback, and seasoned educators with collaborative professional talks.

Ultimately, the teachers who participated in this study expressed a desire for principals who genuinely embody instructional leadership—forward-thinking individuals who allocate time and resources to strengthen instructional quality, encourage reflective practices, and champion teachers' professional growth. In this vision, the principal of the twenty-first century serves as a linchpin of sustainable school improvement, consistently bridging the gap between best practices and actual practices. Additionally, teachers underscored the importance of distributed leadership, calling for the involvement of other well-rounded professionals to further support and enhance the teacher evaluation process.

4. Discussion

The teachers' narratives revealed three types of principals involved in the evaluation process: absent principals, who were either physically absent or visibly present but disengaged; indifferent principals, characterized by their passive approach and lack of purposeful feedback; and the ideal principals, whom teachers desired—actively engaged in daily teaching activities and the evaluation of their staff. Both the absent principals and those who appeared but failed to engage actively were perceived as ineffective participants in the evaluation system and process. Teachers in this study described their ideal principal as one who orchestrates the evaluation process. In essence, the participants asserted that principals could either enhance or hinder the success of teacher evaluation and subsequent teacher improvement.

The first group of participants described their principals as absent figures in the evaluation process, often referring to them as "absent," "not present," and "busy" during formative and summative evaluations. These principals missed critical phases essential for teachers to enhance their instructional practices. This finding aligns with research indicating that principals undermine the evaluation system by being absent or, more detrimentally, by ignoring teachers and failing to allocate sufficient time to conduct the full cycle of formative evaluation sessions [32]. Similar to Weisberg et al.'s findings, participants in this study observed that absent principals—whether physically or otherwise—diminished the effectiveness of both formative and summative evaluations by neglecting to provide the essential feedback necessary for teachers' professional growth [3].

This finding is further reflected in Horng et al.'s research, which indicated that principals dedicate less than 10% of their time to instructional tasks, such as classroom observations and professional development for teachers [58]. Conversely, nearly 50% of their time is consumed by administrative obligations and organizational management, including student supervision and scheduling duties. The cumulative effect of principals' absences and neglect fosters frustration and disappointment among teachers, diminishing their willingness to seek principal input in the evaluation process. These findings underscore the claim that the evaluation process becomes ineffective in developing and improving instructional practices when principals fail to invest in the experience [58].

Zimmerman and Deckert-Pelton concurred, noting that when principals leave teachers to navigate the evaluation process independently and fail to commit to meaningful formative evaluations, the entire process becomes fundamentally flawed [35]. Thus, the literature's emphasis on the importance of visible and engaged leadership resonates with the teachers' experiences of abandonment, which highlights that a lack of principal presence can render even the best-designed evaluation frameworks ineffective.

The second type of principal described in the participants' narratives was the principal in limbo. Although these principals participated in the evaluation process, teachers recounted negative experiences of their ineffective involvement. Words such as "not enough," "quality," "lack of training," and "learned nothing" frequently emerged in their accounts, highlighting the need for principals to go beyond mere physical presence. When teachers perceived their evaluators as lacking the pedagogical knowledge necessary to provide meaningful feedback and critically assess teaching practices, their trust in both the evaluators and the process diminished, ultimately depleting any potential benefits. Phys-

ical presence alone does not equate to active engagement [5].

Participants highlighted several valid concerns regarding the evaluation and supervision provided by principals. Evaluations were often deemed unhelpful for teacher development due to the evaluators' lack of training in conducting the full cycle of formative evaluation, as well as the absence or poor quality of feedback. These failures to provide accurate and actionable feedback, combined with irrelevant suggestions for improvement, effectively closed the door to meaningful enhancement.

As Alkaabi concluded, one significant issue exacerbating the evaluation process was principals' insufficient instructional competence and supervisory skills [6]. Al Maktoum and Al Kaabi emphasized that for principals to be regarded as reliable leaders in the evaluation process, they must demonstrate mastery in supervision and effectively deliver constructive feedback to teachers following evaluations [7]. Bukko et al. similarly found that teachers are more likely to internalize principal evaluation reports when principals exhibit a high level of competence in their evaluative roles [59]. These conditions are essential to avoid undesirable consequences stemming from incompetence or lack of experience.

One critical consequence identified by participants was principals' failure to differentiate between teachers who demonstrated strong commitment and fidelity to their work and those who did not. This finding aligns with prior studies, which revealed that inadequately trained evaluators failed to distinguish between varying levels of teacher performance, leaving high-performing teachers unrecognized and low-performing teachers without the support necessary to grow professionally [3, 11, 32]. These results underscore the need for specialized training, particularly in teacher supervision and coaching, as well as proficiency in English for principals evaluating teachers in English classrooms [60–62]. The multifaceted skill set required of principals to conduct thorough and supportive evaluations necessitates deliberate and targeted professional development [3, 32].

Finally, the third theme aligns with broader calls in the literature for principals to transition from administrative roles to becoming true instructional leaders [8, 62]. Participants envisioned an actively engaged principal—one who consistently observes classrooms, provides targeted feedback grounded in contemporary educational research, and tailors professional development opportunities to address teachers' specific needs [19, 37]. These findings are consistent with studies advocating formative evaluation cycles that culminate in fair and balanced summative judgments [63]. Participants in this study stressed the importance of clear communication, language proficiency, and collaborative dialogue, all of which are integral to effective teacher evaluation. Ultimately, these findings reinforce the growing body of literature identifying strong instructional leadership as critical to effective teacher evaluation and overall school improvement [64, 65]. There has been a shift from traditional school administration to a more integrated role of leadership today concerning the position of a principal, which now involves instructional activity, guidance, and building a professional learning community. Unlike the traditional model where a principal performed only the supervisory functions, in the modern model he or she takes an active role in the development and enhancement of the pedagogy [66, 67]. For the teachers, the ideal principal was someone who is available, participation, and understanding—not an observer, but rather a coach and a guide in professional development activities [68, 69].

Among the most important traits that the effective principal of the twenty-first century should possess and be ready to exercise is that of an instructor. A principal's responsibility is not just administrative; he or she is involved in the school's teaching and learning in a more direct manner and is responsible to make sure that there is teaching and learning taking place in the school he or she is managing. For example, an engaging principal undertakes informal formative observations of lessons and then follows them up with post-observation conferences where he or she tells the teachers how they can improve their lessons. Rather than using non-specific simple phrases like "Good job", an instructional leader should seek to make the feedback as constructive as possible, like suggesting better differentiated instruction which can have a greater effect on student achievement [70].

Alongside being an instructional leader, a principal in the twenty-first century needs to be proficient in making data-based decisions. Rather than relying on gut feelings, they used student performance data, teacher evaluations, and classroom observations to inform their instructional choices [71]. Additionally, With the rapid pace of technology integration in education, principals are expected to be flexible regarding their integration. They also must adopt educational technologies themselves, not just support their adoption [72, 73].

5. Conclusions

This study provides a narrative account of six Arabic and English language teachers working in remote schools, examining their experiences with school principals as evaluators and exploring the characteristics that make principals effective in this role. The findings, derived from participants' shared experiences, revealed three main themes: the principal in absentia, the principal in limbo, and the ideal principal they aspire to have. These insights hold significant implications for both practice and research, emphasizing the necessity for principals to continuously assess and improve their knowledge, skills, and abilities in teacher evaluation. As participants highlighted, principals must be actively present, engaged, and committed to meeting the educational standards of the 21st century. Effective principals provide evaluations that are inspired, knowledgeable, and imaginative, meeting the logistical and dynamic needs that teachers expect from evaluators. Comprehensive reform initiatives in schools are more likely to succeed when school leaders are committed, consistent, knowledgeable, and, without question, skilled evaluators.

Even in demanding school environments, visibility remains essential for principals involved in the teacher evaluation process[74]. By actively participating in classroom observations, offering timely feedback, and maintaining open communication, principals demonstrate their commitment to improving instructional quality and fostering teacher growth. However, when principals face overwhelming administrative responsibilities or lack subject-specific expertise—such as proficiency in particular languages—they should collaborate with assistant principals, department heads, or other qualified administrators to share evaluative responsibilities. This collaborative approach not only reduces the principal's workload but also broadens the evaluative perspective, leading to more accurate and beneficial assessments of teachers, particularly in areas where principals may lack expertise. Principals also benefit from targeted training in teacher evaluation, enabling them to remain informed about best practices and effectively communicate these updates to their staff. Such efforts establish a transparent and supportive environment where teachers feel understood, guided, and empowered to improve their instructional methods.

Additionally, principals should distinguish clearly between formative and summative evaluations, recognizing that formative evaluation is a continuous process aimed at fostering growth. By incorporating formative assessments into daily classroom interactions—such as brief observations, timely feedback, and targeted coaching—principals can help teachers refine their instructional practices before final summative evaluations occur. This approach cultivates a supportive culture in which professional development becomes an integral part of daily teaching routines, ultimately enhancing teacher performance and improving student outcomes.

Principals can further utilize the teacher evaluation process as a foundation for tailoring professional development to the specific needs of their teachers. Instead of offering generic, one-size-fits-all training, principals should analyze evaluation findings to identify individual strengths and areas for improvement. From this analysis, they can design or recommend targeted professional development sessions, workshops, or mentorship opportunities that address observed challenges directly. By leveraging evaluation data in this way, principals ensure that teacher support is both relevant and effective, leading to improved instructional practices and stronger student outcomes.

For future research, an important area of inquiry would be to investigate whether Arabic and English language teachers in urban schools experience teacher evaluation differently from those in remote settings. Another valuable direction for research involves adding principal narratives to explore their perspectives on the evaluation process. These narratives could provide insight into how principals delegate evaluative tasks and responsibilities to other administrators and the professional development they receive to improve their evaluation practices. While this study primarily evaluated principals from the teachers' perspectives, future research should consider evaluating principals from their own perspectives to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their roles in the teacher evaluation process.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, A.M.A. and A.K.A.; methodology, A.M.A. and A.K.A.; software, R.A., M.A.H., and A.M.; validation, A.K.A. and A.M.; formal analysis, A.M.A. and A.K.A.; investigation, R.A., M.A.H., and A.M.; resources, R.A.; data curation, A.M.A., A.K.A., R.A., M.A.H., and A.M.; writing—original draft preparation, A.M.A., A.K.A.,

R.A., M.A.H., and A.M.; writing—review and editing, A.M.A. and A.K.A.; visualization, A.K.A.; supervision, A.M.A. and A.K.A.; project administration, A.M.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

This study involved teacher participants working in remote school settings within the United Arab Emirates, representing various nationalities. Ethical approval was obtained from the United Arab Emirates University's Research Ethics Review Board (RERB). All participants were fully informed about the purpose and scope of the research, and informed consent was obtained prior to participation. All data were treated with strict confidentiality. The study adhered to established ethical guidelines to ensure the protection of participants' rights and well-being throughout the research process.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study. All participants were fully informed about the purpose, scope, and nature of the research, and their participation was entirely voluntary. Written informed consent was obtained to ensure that participants understood and agreed to their involvement, as well as the use of anonymized data for publication purposes. Participants were assured of confidentiality, and no identifying information was included in the study or its publication.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical restrictions, as they contain sensitive information. For any inquiries regarding data access, please contact the corresponding author.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this article. Additionally, no external funders were involved in the design of the study; the collection, analysis, or interpretation of data; the writing of the manuscript; or the decision to publish the results.

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