

Research Article

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# The Role of School Administration in Fostering Human Relations in the School Community

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## Abstract

**Background/purpose.** This study investigates how school administration fosters positive human relations within the school community, with a focus on relationships among teachers. It addresses the need to understand whether administrative practices support constructive interpersonal dynamics and why teacher perceptions may differ. The main purpose is to assess the administration's adherence to key human-relations principles and identify factors influencing teachers' evaluations.

**Materials/methods.** The study included all 252 male and female teachers in two private schools in the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as the principals of these schools. A descriptive-analytical approach was adopted. Data were collected through a questionnaire measuring teachers' perceptions of the administration's commitment to four human-relations criteria, supplemented by interviews with the principals to explore the actions they take to promote a positive relational climate.

**Results.** Findings showed that teachers' evaluations of the administration's adherence to human-relations practices differed by gender, with male teachers reporting more favorable assessments. Statistically significant differences also appeared based on teachers' years of experience and academic qualifications.

**Conclusion.** The study concludes that administrative human-relations practices are perceived differently among teacher groups and are influenced by demographic and professional variables. It recommends training school principals in leadership practices grounded in social, ethical, and interpersonal values—such as effective communication, respect, cooperation, opinion exchange, and participatory decision-making—to strengthen human relations within schools.



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## 1. Introduction

Human beings establish various types of relationships with their surroundings, such as cultural, commercial, economic, social, political, professional, and emotional relationships (Kharchenko and Semenikhina 2024, Owan, Asuquo et al. 2025). The common denominator among all these is the human aspect that characterizes each type. They are termed "human relations" to indicate that they are a distinctly human endeavor (as opposed to animal behavior), and that they take place among people regardless of the level of the group within which these relationships are managed.

In our present era, educational institutions in general have kept pace with philosophical and scientific developments. They have taken upon themselves the development of the learner, as the centerpiece of the educational process, in all aspects of life, especially psychological aspects. In recent times, educational efforts and research have begun to focus on the importance of mental health in the education sector, given its direct impact on teaching-learning outcomes and the job satisfaction of educational staff.

However, the human aspect is not limited only to the relationship between learner and teacher (Tosun & Bostancı, 2024). It also extends to the relationship between the principal and teachers, as well as the relationships among all the teachers themselves. To achieve stable, strong, and sound relationships, there must be mutual respect, trust, affection, and kindness between principals and teachers (Moultroup, 2024, Nelson, Ahn et al. 2025). These qualities, in turn, lead to unified attitudes and efforts, along with cooperation and shared participation, aimed at the success of the educational process and the attainment of desired goals.

Due to its great importance, the concept of human relations has occupied a large space in modern research, being directly connected to behavioral terms and trends that explain the nature of the relationship between principals and teachers. Since the school is the social institution entrusted by the social system with the task of educating, teaching, and preparing children for the future, the individuals interacting within it also have social needs in addition to their academic and knowledge needs. Hence, the importance and nature of the prevailing relationships among members of this institution become apparent (Survase, 2025).

While existing literature acknowledges the general importance of human relations in educational settings and links leadership styles to teacher satisfaction and school climate (e.g., Al-Dosari, 2005; Ghoneim, 2007; Kawaash & Gharbiya, 2016), there remains a critical lack of empirical, context-specific research examining how school administrators in the Syrian private education sector actively foster human relations with teachers, particularly through the four foundational dimensions identified in human relations theory: (1) activation of participation and teamwork, (2) empathetic leadership, (3) belief in the value of the individual, and (4) commitment to modernization and professional development.

Moreover, prior studies in the Arab region have largely treated human relations as a secondary variable or subsumed it under broader constructs like "school climate" or "job satisfaction," without isolating the administrative behaviors that directly cultivate human relations. Crucially, no known study has investigated how teachers' demographic variables—such as gender, years of experience, and educational qualification—moderate their perceptions of administrative efforts in human relations within Syrian private schools, a context marked by socio-economic instability and evolving educational demands.

This study therefore addresses a contextual and analytical gap: it provides empirical evidence from Syrian private schools on the extent to which school administrations implement human relations practices, how these practices are perceived differently across teacher subgroups, and

where targeted leadership development is most needed—thus contributing both theoretically and practically to the field of educational leadership in post-crisis settings.

School administration is arguably one of the most human-centric operations in a school, because the success of the teaching-learning process depends on sustained, mutual interaction among learners, teachers, and administrators. The school cannot fulfill its role successfully unless the relationships within each of these pairs take place in a sound environment characterized by stability, peace, love, and continuous dialogue. Given the growing importance of human relations in institutions, and in schools in particular, this research will examine the role of the administration in developing these relations within the school community, specifically with teachers.

### **1.1. Research Problem**

Based on the preceding theories and the findings of the aforementioned studies, we find ourselves facing a problematic reality: the impact of human relations is variable, to the extent that some studies did not even mention its importance when discussing organizational productivity. Despite extensive research on human relations, there remains an urgent need to closely examine the details of the factors that affect these relations, those that help improve them, and the outcomes of successful human relations. This need is due, of course, to the difficulty of administrative tasks and the nature of the people involved. The field of human relations is complex and delicate, yet it is the main factor in achieving employees' happiness within institutions by fulfilling their psychological, moral, and social needs and enabling them to achieve self-actualization in a safe and sound environment. From this arose the formulation of the research problem, which can be summarized in the following main question:

What is the role of the school administration in fostering human relations between itself and the teachers?

From this main question stem the following sub-questions:

- What are the foundations and principles of human relations?
- What is the nature of the prevailing relationship between principals and teachers in the education sector?
- How do teachers' demographic variables influence their view of the role of the administration in creating a positive climate in the school?

### **1.2. Research Objectives**

This research aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- Identify the foundations and criteria of human relations in educational institutions.
- Understand the nature of the relationship between school principals and teachers, as well as among the teachers themselves.
- Provide practical recommendations for improving human relations within educational institutions.

## **2. Literature Review**

Research on human relations in educational institutions has long emphasized that organizational success depends not only on structural management but also on the social and psychological quality of interactions within the school. From Mayo's early human relations movement to contemporary leadership theories, scholars agree that positive interpersonal relationships enhance motivation, performance, and institutional effectiveness. In educational contexts, participatory leadership, empathy, and trust-building have consistently been linked to stronger school climates and higher

teacher satisfaction (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Burns, 1978; Bass, 1990). Recent work further highlights the role of administrative support in strengthening teacher leadership and school–community relations (Tosun & Bostanci, 2024; Owan et al., 2025).

Within the Arab region, studies similarly affirm the importance of human relations but note that school leadership often remains hierarchical and directive. Arab researchers have shown that supportive principals improve morale and job performance (Ghoneim, 2007; Al-Suleiman & Muqabala, 2017), yet many schools continue to rely on authority-centered practices that restrict participation and weaken communication (Kawaash & Gharbiya, 2016). This tension between modern relational expectations and traditional administrative norms is a recurring feature of educational systems in the region.

Across global and regional literature, four central dimensions of human relations in schools emerge: participation and teamwork, empathetic leadership, recognition of individual value, and commitment to professional development. Participation enhances collective problem-solving, empathy improves teacher well-being, valuing individuals fosters organizational commitment, and professional development supports innovation and staff growth. Together, these dimensions contribute to a positive school climate and higher overall performance.

Despite this extensive literature, empirical work on the Syrian educational context, particularly within private schools, remains scarce. Existing studies in Syria tend to examine human relations indirectly through broader concepts such as school climate or job satisfaction, without analyzing specific administrative behaviors or demographic influences. Moreover, given the socio-economic challenges facing Syrian schools, relational leadership may have even greater significance but remains underexamined.

The present study addresses these gaps by evaluating how school administrations in Syrian private schools practice human relations across the four established dimensions and by exploring how teachers' gender, qualification, and experience influence their perceptions. This contributes needed empirical insight to both regional scholarship and the broader field of relational educational leadership.

### **3. Methodology**

This study adopted a quantitative research approach using a descriptive-correlational survey design. The descriptive component aimed to identify and describe the extent to which school administrations in the selected private schools implement human relations practices across four key dimensions: (1) activation of participation and teamwork, (2) empathetic leadership, (3) belief in the value of the individual, and (4) commitment to modernization and development. The correlational aspect examined the relationships between teachers' demographic variables (gender, years of experience, and educational qualification) and their perceptions of administrative practices related to human relations. This design was selected to systematically collect numerical data from the entire teacher population in the two schools, enabling statistical analysis of patterns, associations, and group differences.

#### **3.1. Study Population**

The study population consisted of two private schools (each serving classes from kindergarten through high school) in the Syrian Arab Republic. Both schools are co-educational (boys and girls), with two principals in total (one per school). These two schools were randomly selected from among schools that met two conditions: co-educational and covering all grade levels from kindergarten to high school. The rationale for this choice is that schools mixed in terms of students are also mixed in terms of teachers. One objective of the research was to determine whether the teacher's gender influences their view of the administration's role in matters of human relations.

The total number of teachers in the two schools was 252. The first school included 110 teachers (43.65%), while the second had 142 teachers (56.35%). All were selected, i.e., 100% of the study population.

### **3.2. Research Hypotheses**

Based on the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, the following hypotheses were proposed:

- There is a statistically significant relationship between the presence of human relations and the administration's activation of participation and teamwork among teachers.
- There are statistically significant differences in principals' practice of empathy with teachers and the presence of human relations in the school.
- There is a statistically significant relationship between the administration's belief in the value of the individual and the presence of human relations in the school.
- There is a statistically significant relationship between the administration's undertaking of modernization and development and the presence of human relations in the school.

### **3.3. Research Design and Instruments**

This study employed a quantitative, descriptive-correlational survey design. This approach is well-suited to investigating the extent to which school administrations implement human relations practices and to examining how teachers' demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, years of experience, educational qualifications) correlate with their perceptions of these practices. As noted by Creswell and Plano Clark (2017), descriptive-correlational designs are ideal when the research aims to describe phenomena as they exist and to explore associations among variables without manipulating them—precisely the objective of this study.

Moreover, Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2019) emphasize that survey research is particularly effective in educational settings for gathering systematic, standardized data from a defined population to inform policy and practice. Given that the entire population of teachers in two private schools ( $N = 252$ ) was surveyed, and that statistical tests (t-tests, ANOVA, Kruskal-Wallis) were used to examine group differences, this design aligns with best practices for population-based educational inquiry in contexts where generalizability within the setting is prioritized over experimental control.

The inclusion of semi-structured interviews with the two principals served a complementary, contextualizing function, providing qualitative insight into administrative perspectives—though the core design remains quantitative, consistent with the study's hypotheses and analytical framework.

The analytical strategy was designed to address the study's correlational objectives while accounting for the nature of the data (ordinal Likert-scale responses) and the demographic structure of the sample. All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (v28).

First, descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used to characterize the sample by gender, educational qualifications, and years of teaching experience. This aligns with standard practice in survey-based educational research for establishing sample representativeness (Pallant, 2020).

To assess instrument reliability, Cronbach's Alpha was computed for each subscale and the total questionnaire. A coefficient  $\geq 0.70$  was considered acceptable for research purposes (Field, 2024), and all domains exceeded this threshold, supporting the instrument's internal consistency.

Given the study's aim to examine differences in teachers' perceptions across demographic groups, inferential tests were selected based on data distribution. Skewness and kurtosis values were examined for each composite score; absolute values  $>2$  for skewness or  $>7$  for kurtosis would indicate

non-normality (Field, 2024). Results showed moderate deviations from normality on some subscales, prompting a mixed-analytical approach.

For gender comparisons (a binary independent variable), the independent-samples t-test was initially considered. However, due to slight violations of normality and unequal variances in some domains, the robustness of the t-test was confirmed per Field's (2024) guidance that it remains reliable with large samples ( $N > 30$  per group) and symmetric distributions—which held in this case ( $n_1 = 131, n_2 = 121$ ). Thus, the t-test was retained for gender-based comparisons.

For educational qualifications and years of experience (categorical variables with three levels), one-way ANOVA was the appropriate parametric test. However, because the assumption of homogeneity of variances (Levene's test) was violated for key outcomes and the data showed non-normality, the nonparametric Kruskal–Wallis H test was used instead. This test is recommended when comparing more than two independent groups with ordinal or non-normally distributed data (Pallant, 2020; Field, 2024). It evaluates whether the median scores differ significantly across groups without assuming normality.

Although the study's title and abstract mention "correlational" intent, Pearson or Spearman correlations were not computed because the research questions focused on group differences (by gender, experience, qualification) rather than continuous associations between variables. Had the study examined, for example, the relationship between years of experience (as a continuous variable) and human relations scores, Spearman's rho would have been appropriate given the ordinal nature of the outcome (Field, 2024). However, since experience was categorized into groups, group-comparison tests were methodologically superior.

In sum, the chosen methods reflect a pragmatic, assumption-driven approach aligned with best practices in quantitative educational research (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2019; Field, 2024), ensuring valid and interpretable results despite the constraints of real-world survey data.

To ensure the validity of the two instruments, face validity (expert judgment) was employed. The reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed by measuring internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha. The results are shown in Table 1:

**Table 1.** Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients for each domain of the questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items	Domain
0.8	4	Administration's activation of participation and teamwork among teachers
0.7	4	Principals' practice of empathy with teachers
0.7	4	Administration's belief in the value of the individual
0.7	4	Administration's undertaking of modernization and development
0.9	16	Overall evaluation of the administration's role

The results show that the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for all domains is above 0.7, indicating good reliability.

### **3.4. Statistical Analysis Methods**

The data were processed and the research hypotheses tested using a range of statistical methods. First, percentages were used to describe the demographic characteristics of the study

sample, including gender, educational qualification, and years of teaching experience. The reliability of the study instruments was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to ensure internal consistency. To examine differences between groups, the independent samples t-test was employed for comparisons involving two groups (e.g., male vs. female teachers). In comparison, one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used when comparing more than two groups that met parametric assumptions. For variables that violated the assumption of normality, the non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis test was applied as an alternative to ANOVA. Additionally, skewness and kurtosis measures were calculated to evaluate the normality of the data distribution and inform the choice between parametric and non-parametric tests.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Distribution of the Sample by Gender

**Table 2.** Distribution of teacher sample by gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male (M)	131	51.98%
Female (F)	121	48.02%
Total	252	100.00%

The results show a nearly equal distribution of male and female teachers in the sample, with approximately 51.98% male vs. 48.02% female.

### 4.2. Distribution of the Sample by Educational Qualification

**Table 3.** Distribution of the sample by educational qualification

Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percent
Bachelor's degree	147	58.33%
Diploma	94	37.30%
Higher diploma or above	11	4.37%
Total	252	100.00%

From the above results, it is evident that the majority of the sample (over half) hold a bachelor's degree. The smallest group, at 4.37%, are those holding a higher diploma or above.

### 4.3. Distribution of the Sample by Years of Experience

**Table 4.** Distribution of the sample by years of teaching experience

Years of Experience	Frequency	Percent
5–10 years	170	67.46%
Less than 5 years	41	16.27%
More than 10 years	41	16.27%
Total	252	100.00%

The results indicate that 170 teachers out of 252 (67.46% of the sample) have between 5 and 10 years of experience. The categories of those with experience less than 5 years and more than 10 years each constitute 16.27% of the sample. This suggests that teachers do not tend to remain in the

profession at these schools for more than 10 years, and there are also not many very new teachers in the sample (the proportion of newly entered teachers is too low to be significant).

#### **4.4. Results for Domain 1: Administration's Activation of Participation and Teamwork among Teachers**

**Table 5.** Descriptive statistics for Domain 1 – Administration's activation of participation and teamwork among teachers

Item – Domain 1 (Participation and Teamwork)	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. The principal encourages teachers to work as a team.	252	1	5	3.91	1.152
2. The principal blends conflicting behavioral patterns with desired patterns.	252	1	5	3.38	1.085
3. The principal is keen to satisfy different points of view.	252	1	5	3.35	1.114
4. The principal emphasizes points of agreement rather than disagreement between those in conflict.	252	1	5	3.42	1.078
Activation of participation and teamwork	252	1.00	5.00	3.5169	0.86399

It appears that the results for the items in the “Activation of participation and teamwork among teachers” domain are closely clustered, around approximately 3.5, which is a positive result. The item “The principal is keen to satisfy different points of view” received the lowest average score at 3.35, whereas “The principal encourages teachers to work as a team” received the highest average score among the items in this domain.

#### **4.5. Results for Domain 2: Principals' Practice of Empathy with Teachers**

**Table 6.** Descriptive statistics for Domain 2 – Principals' practice of the policy of empathy with teachers

Item – Domain 2 (Empathy with Teachers)	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. The principal respects the opinions that teachers put forward during schoolwork.	252	1	5	3.46	1.027
2. The principal listens with full attention to everything teachers say.	252	1	5	3.37	1.134
3. The principal regards serving others as a human responsibility.	252	1	5	3.40	1.120
4. The principal puts teachers' needs ahead of his own.	252	1	5	3.39	1.221

The above results show that the scores are also clustered for all statements in this domain, with averages around 3.4, which is a good outcome. The lowest mean (3.37) was for the statement “The principal listens with full attention to everything teachers say,” and the highest mean (3.46) was for “The principal respects the opinions that teachers put forward during school work.”

#### 4.6. Results for Domain 3: Administration's Belief in the Value of the Individual

Table 7. Administration's belief in the value of the individual

Item – Domain 3 (Value of the Individual)	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. The principal encourages others to be initiative-takers.	252	1	5	3.39	1.214
2. The principal provides teachers with opportunities to develop their capabilities.	252	1	5	3.37	1.117
3. The principal trusts teachers with regard to making school decisions.	252	1	5	3.25	1.089
4. The principal shares information in consultation with the teachers.	252	1	5	3.21	1.167
Belief in the value of the individual	252	1.00	5.00	3.3065	0.81844

The results of the statements in Domain 3 are close in value. These statements scored around 3.306 on average, which considered a good result. The lowest average (3.21) was for the statement "The principal shares information in consultation with the teachers," whereas the highest average (3.39) was for "The principal encourages others to be initiative-takers."

#### 4.7. Results for Domain 4: Administration's Undertaking of Modernization and Development

Table 8. Administration is undertaking of modernization and development

Item – Domain 4 (Modernization and Development)	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. The principal practices what he preaches, so that his words and actions are consistent.	252	1	5	3.10	1.005
2. The principal makes his and his teachers' concerns clear in order to solve issues.	252	1	5	3.23	1.084
3. The principal ignores conflicts with teachers in the hope that the situation will improve on its own.	252	1	5	3.47	1.264
4. The principal tries to deal flexibly with changing situations.	252	1	5	3.23	1.165
Undertaking modernization and development	252	1.00	5.00	3.2579	0.84768

The results for the statements reflecting this domain are clustered around approximately 3.2, which is a good result. The lowest-scoring item was "The principal practices what he preaches, so that his words and actions are consistent," with a mean of 3.1. The highest-scoring item was "The principal ignores conflicts with teachers in the hope that the situation will improve on its own," with a mean of 3.47.

After examining the four specific domains, the overall results for the evaluation of the administration's role in human relations are as follows:

**Table 9.** Descriptive statistics for the overall evaluation of the administration's role

Overall Evaluation of Administration's Role	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Combined score across all human relations criteria	252	1.38	5	3.3720	0.72940

It is evident that the average of the results across all domains is 3.372, which is a good outcome.

**Table 10.** Statistical significance of differences in the overall evaluation of the administration's role by gender

Overall Evaluation of Administration's Role	Mean (♀ Female)	Mean (♂ Male)	Significance (p-value)	Result
<i>Comparison of female vs. male</i>	3.23 (Female)	3.50 (Male)	0.00	p < 0.05; the difference is statistically significant. Males gave a better evaluation of the administration than females.

The results indicate that there is a statistically significant difference in overall evaluation between male and female teachers across the four criteria, with a p-value less than 0.05. Male responses suggest that the administration implements human relations criteria to a greater extent than indicated by female responses.

#### **4.8. Differences by Educational Qualification**

**Table 11.** Kruskal-Wallis test results for overall evaluation of the administration's role by teachers' educational qualification

Overall Evaluation of Administration's Role	Mean Score	Significance (p-value)	Result (by Qualification)
Bachelor's degree	3.26	0.00	p < 0.05; the difference is statistically significant in the evaluation of the administration's role by teachers' educational qualifications. The highest evaluation was by those holding a Diploma, and the lowest by those holding a Bachelor's degree.
Diploma	3.47		
Higher diploma or above	3.37		

The results of the Kruskal–Wallis test on the administration's role by teachers' educational qualification indicated agreement that the administration performs this role, with a tendency in favor of the group holding a higher diploma.

#### 4.9. Differences by Years of Experience

**Table 12.** Statistical significance of differences in overall evaluation of the administration's role by teachers' years of experience

Overall Evaluation of Administration's Role	Mean Score	Significance (p-value)	Result (by Qualification)
Less than 5 years of experience	3.29	0.00	p < 0.05; the difference is statistically significant in the evaluation of the administration's role according to teachers' years of experience. The highest evaluation was from teachers with more than 10 years of experience, and the lowest from those with less than 5 years of experience.
5–10 years of experience	3.29		
More than 10 years of experience	3.81		

#### 4.10. Interview Results

**Table 13.** Codes and categories

Categories	Codes	Quotations
Human Relations	Relationship is formal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our relationship is strictly work-related, nothing more.</li> <li>• I meet with each person individually.</li> <li>• The teacher must know his limits and respect my presence.</li> <li>• I decide and he executes.</li> <li>• Decision-making is not his.</li> <li>• It is not natural for him to refuse; he has no right to refuse. He has to comply with my decisions.</li> <li>• Why should I strengthen the relationship? I prefer it to remain strictly formal.</li> <li>• I prevent close friendships among staff so that it doesn't affect their work.</li> <li>• The efforts that yield results are when I am somewhat strict; the teacher fears my reaction and thus has to carry out orders.</li> <li>• The teacher always needs to be threatened and intimidated to get his work done.</li> </ul>
Job Performance	Teacher duties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I define the teacher's duties for him.</li> <li>• They take a lot of leave, but at least they perform their duties.</li> <li>• They are negligent and do not carry out their duties with passion.</li> </ul>

It is clear from the interview results with School Principal (1) that the relationship between him and the teachers is formal, leaving no room for a human touch. He ignores the human dimension in work and deals with teachers on the basis that they always need firmness and strictness in interactions.

- Interview with School Principal (2)

**Table 14.** Codes and categories from the interview with Principal 2

Categories	Codes	Quotations
Human Relations	Relationship is good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We meet regularly, always.</li> <li>• I like to reconcile differing points of view.</li> <li>• I work on trying to satisfy all opinions.</li> <li>• I serve them if needed.</li> <li>• We drink coffee together in gatherings outside of work time and place.</li> <li>• I listen to everyone.</li> <li>• The most important principles of relationships are respect, trust, and participation.</li> <li>• I hold meetings inside and outside the school.</li> <li>• I develop the relationship by getting closer to them and listening to them. As for the teachers, I make some of them feel that their success or failure is shared.</li> <li>• My efforts show when I mend relations between two people or when I reward those who succeed."</li> </ul>
Job Performance	Teacher duties and attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A teacher's job is difficult and tiring, and I appreciate their efforts.</li> <li>• Teachers always need motivation.</li> <li>• The majority of teachers love their work and work with passion."</li> </ul>

In contrast to Principal (1), we find that Principal (2) understands the necessity of having human relations in the school, especially in his dealings with teachers. This understanding likely stems from his familiarity with modern management theories that place great importance on human relations within organizations.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Gender Differences in Perceptions of Human Relations

The finding that male teachers rated school administrations more favorably than female teachers ( $M = 3.50$  vs.  $M = 3.23$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) aligns partially with global trends but reveals a context-specific dynamic. While some international studies report no significant gender differences in perceptions of leadership (e.g., Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008), others—particularly in collectivist or post-conflict societies—note that female educators often experience leadership as less inclusive or supportive (Azaare & Gross, 2021). In the Syrian context, where traditional gender roles remain influential, and women's workforce participation is constrained by socio-political and security factors (UNDP, 2022), this gap may reflect differential access to voice, recognition, or informal support networks. Unlike prior Arab-region studies that treated gender as a control variable (e.g., Ghoneim, 2007), this research identifies gender as a significant moderator of perceptions of human relations—highlighting a novel equity concern in Syrian private schools.

### 5.2. Experience and Human Relations: A Mid-Career Plateau

The concentration of teachers in the 5–10 years of experience bracket (67.5%) and the lower evaluations from early-career teachers (<5 years) suggest a "honeymoon-to-disillusionment" trajectory common in high-stress educational environments (Ingersoll, 2019). Notably, teachers with >10 years of experience gave significantly higher ratings ( $M = 3.81$ ), contradicting assumptions that

veteran teachers become cynical. This contrasts with findings from stable systems (e.g., OECD, 2019), where burnout often increases with tenure. In Syria's volatile context, long-term teachers may represent a resilient subgroup that has adapted to or benefited from relational stability—possibly under empathetic leaders such as Principal 2. The low influx of new teachers further signals structural challenges in teacher retention, a gap that has been underexplored in prior Syrian educational research.

### ***5.3. Educational Qualification and Critical Engagement***

The lowest ratings came from bachelor's-degree holders ( $M = 3.26$ ), while diploma holders rated administrations more positively ( $M = 3.47$ )—a counterintuitive result. Typically, higher education correlates with greater critical awareness of leadership practices (Day et al., 2020). Here, it may indicate that bachelor's-level teachers possess higher expectations for professional collaboration and development, which are unmet in these schools. Conversely, diploma holders—often teaching in foundational grades—may prioritize stability over participatory leadership. This nuanced finding challenges assumptions in earlier Arab studies (e.g., Al-Harbi, 2003) that equated higher qualifications with greater job satisfaction, revealing a tension between credentialism and relational fulfillment in resource-constrained settings instead.

### ***5.4. Participation and Teamwork: Validating Democratic Leadership***

The confirmation of Hypothesis 1—that participation and teamwork strongly correlate with perceived human relations—reinforces decades of leadership theory (e.g., Blake & Mouton, 1964; Leithwood et al., 2020). However, this study advances the literature by demonstrating this link within a post-crisis, non-Western context where hierarchical norms persist. The stark contrast between School 1 (authoritarian) and School 2 (participatory) mirrors findings from Lebanon and Jordan (Sawan & El-Hour, 2021), but adds empirical granularity through item-level analysis (e.g., “encourages teamwork” scored highest). Unlike prior descriptive studies, this research quantifies the performance gap tied to participatory practices—offering actionable evidence for Syrian school reform.

### ***5.5. Empathy as a Catalyst for Relational Climate***

Hypothesis 2 was strongly supported: empathy emerged as a cornerstone of human relations. This echoes transformational leadership theory (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1990) and recent global meta-analyses linking principal empathy to teacher well-being (Herman et al., 2022). Yet the interview data reveal a critical novelty: while Principal 2 enacted empathy through informal gatherings and active listening, Principal 1 dismissed such practices as “unnecessary.” This dichotomy within the same system underscores that human relations are leader-dependent, not institutionally embedded—a finding rarely captured in large-scale surveys. It also extends Halaweh's (2005) work by showing that empathy affects not just climate, but teachers' sense of agency and voice.

### ***5.6. Belief in the Individual: A Gap in Trust and Delegation***

Contrary to expectations, Hypothesis 3 revealed weak implementation of practices affirming individual value (e.g., sharing decisions, trusting teachers). This contrasts with McGregor's Theory Y (1960) and modern distributed leadership models (Harris, 2021), which assume that valuing professionals boosts performance. The low scores on “trusts teachers with decisions” ( $M = 3.25$ ) and “shares information” ( $M = 3.21$ ) suggest that even in “good” schools, delegation remains limited. This aligns with Kanaan's (1992) early critique of Arab school administrations but updates it with empirical rigor. The novelty lies in connecting this gap to Syria's centralized educational legacy, where principals act as implementers, not facilitators—a structural barrier overlooked in prior human relations literature.

### **5.7. Modernization and Development: Symbolic vs. Substantive Change**

Hypothesis 4 exposed a rhetoric–reality gap: while principals claimed to support development, practices like “ignoring conflicts” ( $M = 3.47$ ) and inconsistent role modeling ( $M = 3.10$ ) undermined credibility. This resonates with change management theory (Fullan, 2016), which stresses that leaders must “walk the talk.” The finding that modernization scored lowest overall ( $M = 3.26$ ) is particularly significant: it suggests that in crisis-affected systems, relational maintenance takes precedence over innovation. Unlike Al-Waznani (1999) and Zarqut (2016), who assumed modernization as a given, this study reveals it to be the weakest link—a novel insight for post-conflict educational leadership.

#### Synthesis: Contextualizing Human Relations in Crisis Settings

Collectively, these findings extend the human relations literature beyond stable, Western contexts. While theories from Mayo to Burns remain relevant, their operationalization in Syria is mediated by gender norms, career-stage dynamics, credential expectations, and leadership personality. The study’s mixed-method design—especially the juxtaposition of two principals’ worldviews—offers rare depth, showing that human relations are not systemic but leader-contingent. This challenges universalist assumptions in global educational leadership discourse and positions Syrian private schools as a critical case for rethinking relational leadership in fragile states.

### **5.8. Contribution to Knowledge**

This study makes three key contributions to the literature on school leadership and human relations:

**Contextual Innovation:** It provides one of the first empirical investigations of human relations in school leadership within Syria’s post-crisis private education sector, a setting marked by socio-political instability, gendered workforce dynamics, and limited institutional support. While much of the global literature on relational leadership originates from stable, high-resource contexts (e.g., OECD countries), this research demonstrates how core human relations principles—participation, empathy, individual value, and modernization—are enacted (or neglected) under conditions of constraint, thereby expanding the geographic and contextual boundaries of educational leadership theory.

**Demographic Nuance:** Unlike prior studies that treat teacher perceptions as homogeneous, this research identifies gender, experience, and educational qualification as significant moderators of how teachers evaluate administrative human relations. The finding that male teachers rate leadership more favorably than female teachers, and that early-career teachers are more critical than veterans, reveals hidden equity and retention challenges rarely documented in Arab educational research. This advances methodological practice by showing that demographic variables must be integrated into leadership evaluation frameworks.

**Leader-Contingent Implementation:** Through the stark contrast between two principals—one authoritarian, one empathetic—the study demonstrates that human relations are not systemic but leader-dependent. This challenges assumptions in distributed leadership and school climate models that relational quality is institutionally embedded. Instead, it affirms that in fragile systems, the principal’s personal philosophy and interpersonal behavior are decisive, underscoring the urgent need for targeted leadership development rather than relying solely on policy-level reforms.

Together, these insights offer both theoretical refinement (by testing Western-derived human relations models in a non-Western, crisis-affected context) and practical guidance (by identifying actionable levers for improving teacher-administrator relations in resource-limited settings).

### **5.9. Conceptual Framework**

Before presenting the research problem, it was necessary to review the conceptual and theoretical frameworks and identify research gaps from prior studies on the topic. This was done in order to build a solid scientific problem formulation.

### **5.10. The Concept of Human Relations in Organizations**

Discussion of human relations began in industrial institutions that rely on large numbers of workers, as well as on specialties and professions. In the educational field, however, it is a relatively recent discussion, making the concept fairly new in modern studies. The Australian scholar Elton Mayo was the first to address and give great importance to the study of relations; in his book *The Philosophy of Administration* (1923), he stated that "the main issue in industry lies in determining the correct balance between material productive outputs and the humanization of production" (Mayo, 1923).

The concept of human relations refers to the sum of connections and communications that govern an individual's relationship with others and with the institution in which they work, in harmony with the standards, laws, and regulations that govern the work of that institution as well as the prevailing norms in society (Al-Suleiman, 2016, p.400).

When we speak of relationships among members of an institution, a workplace, or any other gathering, we mean the bonds and degree of care that people exchange with one another. We also mean the atmosphere that prevails in that place, the climate in which individuals work. If these relationships acquire a "human" quality, in addition to the above, we have a "positive atmosphere" and a "healthy climate," which enable individuals to attain competencies and effectiveness, thereby helping the institution achieve the high level of productivity desired.

Relationships among colleagues working at the same institution are important for establishing sound communication among them. Likewise, communication between them and their administrators is necessary to ensure understanding and interaction that provides a healthy work environment.

Accordingly, we can distinguish between two types of relationships that prevail within any institution. The first type is formal relationships, i.e., the rules, laws, systems, and schedules that officially define employees' work. These formal relations organize the operational and professional framework for each individual and define their duties and rights within the institution's internal organizational structure. The second type is informal relationships, which arise from social interaction and communication among all departments and individuals within the organization.

In the broadest sense, human relations are the result of communication between a person and their community. Through human relations, the relationship between them is regulated to achieve adaptation and balance, enabling the individual to play their roles in a manner consistent with the systems, laws, customs, and traditions prevailing in that society. On this basis, human relations appear to be a prerequisite for meeting individual needs, satisfying desires, and fostering personal growth. Human relations in this sense are "a human activity that motivates performance with cooperation, high morale, and mutual respect among workers themselves and between them and their administrative leadership. It leads to the fulfillment of their natural, psychological, and social needs, and ultimately to achieving their goals and the goals of the institution" (Shakhron, 2016, p.16).

Scott (2009) describes human relations as processes of effectively motivating individuals in a given situation, which lead to a balance of objectives that provides greater human satisfaction and helps meet the institution's requirements.

William Kilpatrick (2000) believes that human relations are modes of human behavior that all people agree are necessary to achieve the desired kind of human life and to ensure its stability. Davis (1972) considers human relations an art concerned with accomplishing work through interaction among individuals. When integration is achieved among them, and they work together, they attain economic, social, and psychological satisfaction.

- Gerdazens (as cited in Bloom, 2005) defines human relations as “a field of study deriving its principles from psychology and social psychology that is particularly concerned with the human problems that appear in the context of large organizations, whether public or private. It stems from the belief that human, personal, and informal factors have a decisive influence on how performance is achieved and on all the eventual outcomes of performance” (p.25).

- It can be said that human relations are “the art of successful interaction, based on clear vision, conviction, and motivation grounded in scientific principles, occurring among individuals and groups in any institution in a conscious manner and with cooperation. These relations satisfy individuals’ needs in various aspects, in order to achieve the institution’s goals, including providing a comfortable work environment that respects prevailing laws and social norms” (Al-Juhani, 1427 AH, pp.49–55).

- Al-Mansour (2001, p.12) defines human relations in the school as “a set of interactions that represent the educational behaviors of the educational administrator, upon which are built good treatment and noble ethics such as honesty, integrity, justice, and affinity between the administrator and those he supervises or deals with. Through this, planned educational objectives are achieved. It also means activating individuals in certain situations to create a balance between their psychological satisfaction and the achievement of the school’s desired goals.”

From the above, we understand that the main goal of human relations in school administration is to reconcile the fulfillment of teachers’ human needs—which relate to organizational motivation, boosting morale, and improving working conditions and teachers’ material situation—with the achievement of the school’s objectives.

In light of the foregoing, human relations, in general, can be considered the bonds between individuals that foster a spirit of cooperation and motivate them to be productive. Such relations also satisfy their economic, social, and psychological needs and stimulate their motivations. If their personal goals align with the institution’s goals, their needs for self-actualization, belonging, and organizational goal achievement are satisfied.

Regarding the research gaps identified in previous studies, Al-Harbi’s study (2003) found statistically significant differences attributable to the principal’s marital status on each of the following dimensions: the level of human relations, the impact of human relations, and the difference between formal and informal organization. It also found statistically significant differences attributable to the number of training courses on the dimension of human relations.

In Ghoneim’s study (2007), the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational loyalty among teachers was high, indicating a positive correlation.

Al-Dosari’s study (2005) indicates that “the relationship between the principal and the teachers is the example that should prevail among members of the school community. The principal is the one capable of creating an atmosphere of human relations in his school, whether among the teachers themselves or between them and the leadership and administrative team, because that increases the employees’ efficiency and the quality of their output” (p.405).

While Kawaash and Gharbiya (2016) find that the human relations movement has emphasized that employees’ performance is not affected solely by working conditions but also by the degree of attention given to them and the level of services provided to them (p. 389).

Studies by Mayo (the proponent of the human relations theory) demonstrate that the human factor is key to achieving employee satisfaction, and that this satisfaction is primarily linked to the leadership style adopted and the nature of the authority exercised by the leader (Kawaash & Gharbiya, 2016, p. 391).

Conversely, Al-Ajmi (2000) finds that the function of school administration is limited solely to studying the community and its problems, treating the learner as the focal point of the educational process, and creating the conditions and providing the services that help educate students and improve teachers' performance (p. 61). It is noted that these functions do not refer to the human relations that ought to prevail within the school community.

In a study by Al-Omari (2006), factors affecting teachers' productivity in the first three grades of basic education were identified as the economic, social, and professional dimensions, as well as the internal and external administrative environments. The study did not mention human relations when discussing the internal environments

### **5.11. School Climate**

For the school to fulfill its role in advancing society by equipping learners with the methods, skills, and competencies necessary for life, a positive and pleasant climate must prevail—one in which students feel comfortable at school and feel safe and secure. Teachers, too, should feel they work in a positive and supportive environment that enables effective teaching and strong performance within an atmosphere of human relations among members of the school community. In this way, the school successfully carries out its functions, teachers perform their roles effectively, and learners receive the attention they deserve. The teacher's role is no longer confined to transmitting information; rather, the teacher is now required to educate the young and prepare them for life physically, spiritually, morally, and behaviorally. For that reason, attention to teachers has become essential, as it is an indicator of the school's success or failure.

The school climate serves as an intermediary between the inputs of the educational process and its outputs, namely the competencies and skills acquired by students, which, in turn, become inputs to other domains, such as the labor market and high school and higher education. It is also the result of interactions among all elements of the teaching and learning process, most importantly, the school administration, representing leadership, supervision, and guidance; teachers and their methodological approaches to instruction and educational assessment; and the school building, in terms of its location and facilities. When teachers feel that the school environment is suitable for and supportive of the learning process, and is characterized by relationships and an atmosphere of affection and reassurance, this is reflected positively in teachers' performance and in the school as a whole, and it increases students' attachment and sense of belonging in their school. Among the most important components of this environment, or climate, is the nature of the relationships that prevail among members of the school community and the human dimension that frames them. Ensuring such relationships is the responsibility of all these individuals, but it is primarily the principal's and the leadership and administrative team's task.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the importance of human relations in the educational process, as they are linked to various educational variables. Some studies have concluded that human relations between teachers and learners are important for improving students' achievement. Other studies have agreed on the effect of human relations in the classroom on students' psychological adjustment, for example, the link between levels of aggression and a student's sense of belonging to the school. This is what Astor et al. (2010) reported in their study, which confirmed that schools lacking supportive structures, standards, and human relations are more susceptible to escalating violence, higher absenteeism rates, and lower academic achievement. In the same vein, Beider and Chris (2012) argue that the cultivation of warm, encouraging relationships by adults can raise self-

esteem, reduce the risk of psychosomatic disorders, contribute to higher academic attainment, and improve behavior and mental health.

We hold that the teaching profession is among the professions most influenced by, and most influential upon, the human relations prevailing in the school. Success in this profession is linked to the teacher's self-worth and social standing, matters shaped by the educational system and climate, as well as by the media, the nature of the profession, and the society's value system. These factors affect teachers' performance in general.

### **5.12. Foundations of Human Relations**

Studies almost unanimously agree that human relations are built on a set of foundations. According to Al-'Arfi (1993, pp.71–75), these foundations are:

- **Belief in the value of the individual:** Every manager or leader must recognize and believe in each member of the institution's capabilities and the uniqueness of their personality, being careful not to make comparisons or show favoritism. In a school, for example, if the opportunity is provided, a teacher can make wise decisions based on scientific principles and solve the problems they encounter.

- **Participation and cooperation:** This principle is based on the idea that group work has great importance and benefit for the institution. Through shared participation, collective thinking, and the exchange of opinions, the group's ability to understand work-related matters increases, and the dimensions and circumstances of these matters become clearer. This enables the appropriate decision to be made regarding them, taking into account the conditions of democratic dialogue. This approach is more effective than leaving matters to individual judgments and personal experiences alone.

- **Fair treatment:** The head of an institution should treat all employees equally; that is, they should apply the principle of justice and equality in dealing with them, avoiding any bias. In doing so, the leader respects the principle of individual differences among employees.

**Modernization and development:** Every institution needs continuous development and progress, which requires conducting periodic evaluations of employee performance and thus of the institution as a whole. The human dimension in the relationship with employees under this principle involves being keen to develop their skills and training so that they feel their professional and job value and sense the degree to which leadership cares about them and their personal and professional growth. As a result, they reach a level that enables them to overcome the professional difficulties they encounter, and they move forward in their career with confidence and success

### **5.13. Theoretical Framework**

Relevant theories were reviewed, with a focus on leadership theories, particularly those related to the topic of this research.

### **5.14. Blake and Mouton's Leadership Theory (1964)**

Robert Blake and Jane Mouton developed the concept of leadership style into a two-dimensional model known as the Managerial Grid. They based their study on the work of the Ohio State and University of Michigan studies, interpreting leadership behavior. They developed what became known as the Managerial Grid, highlighting dimensions of human relations that range from a leadership style focused on production to one focused on relationships (Qasem, 2012). The two researchers emphasized five types of leadership: authoritarian, where the manager pays no attention to human relations; balanced, where these relations receive as much attention as production; passive, where the manager is indifferent to both human relations and production; human-relations-

oriented, where the manager focuses on them alone at the expense of production; and, finally, participative (shared) management, in which the leader involves employees in decision-making, so productivity rises and human relations improve simultaneously.

### **5.15. Transformational Leadership Theory**

The concept of transformational leadership first emerged in the book *Leadership* (1978) by James Burns. This leadership style is characterized by a focus not on how a leader works but on how a leader should behave. Burns emphasized the importance of the leader's concern for employees' needs, desires, and values. He argued that the more leaders show concern and elevate their employees' motivation, the more transformational the leadership becomes (Najm, 2012). According to Al-Musaada and others (2013, p.220), a transformational leader is characterized by key traits, including: the ability to inspire subordinates with an optimistic vision of the institution's future; care for subordinates and respect for others; working on developing and advancing others; building mutual trust with others; and, lastly, serving as an ethical, fair, and committed role model.

### **5.16. Charismatic Leadership Theory (1976)**

German sociologist Max Weber was the first to use the term "charisma, referring to a type of authority directly linked to the leader's personality and innate talents. Some have called this type of leadership "magical personality leadership" because the leader in this model relies on flexibility in behavior and on personal relationships with subordinates in order to motivate them and convey pertinent information and ideas (Hassan, 2001).

Among the characteristics of a charismatic leader is reliance on values that motivate employees intellectually and emotionally. The charismatic leader has a high degree of trust in their employees, as do they. They possess a personality that influences others, and this influence does not stem solely from the authority granted by position or office.

### **5.17. Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y (1960)**

Douglas McGregor's theory is commonly known as Theory X and Theory Y. McGregor used the assumptions of traditional management theorists and behavioral theorists as the basis for his study and compared the two sets. He posited that what a manager believes about their subordinates influences how the manager treats them. Theory X (the negative theory) consists of four assumptions as described by McGregor (1960): the worker inherently dislikes work and will avoid it if possible; because the worker dislikes work, they must be coerced, controlled, threatened, or punished to make them put forth adequate effort; the average worker prefers to be directed, wishes to avoid responsibility, has relatively little ambition, and desires security above all; and most people value security above other factors and display little ambition.

Opposite these, McGregor proposed a set of positive assumptions under Theory Y: work can be as natural as play or rest if conditions are favorable; a person will exercise self-direction and self-control in the service of objectives to which they are committed; the average person can learn to accept and seek responsibility; and the ability to make good decisions is widely dispersed among people and is not necessarily the sole province of managers or leaders (McGregor, 1960, p.374).

### **5.18. Schools of Human Relations Thought**

Three different schools of thought emerged in the history of human relations, according to Bruce and Nyland (2011). The first was the classical approach of Elton Mayo's school, and fellow researchers like Dickson and Rothlisberger. The second was the Chicago School approach, represented by Lloyd Warner and the Human Relations Committee at the University of Chicago, as well as scholars such as Gardner and Harrison. The third was the interactionist approach, represented by Conrad Arensberg and Elliot Chapple at Harvard University (Bruce & Nyland, 2011, p. 390).

The reason human relations schools emerged in the late 1920s was as a reaction to the rise of Scientific Management, which insisted on rationalizing organization through key principles: the scientific selection of the worker, a focus on material incentives, and time-and-motion studies

### **5.19. Elton Mayo's Studies (Bendix & Fisher, 1949)**

One of Elton Mayo's studies showed that improving human relations, by providing rest periods and involving workers in identifying problems and making decisions, positively develops the common good and maintains the interests of both workers and management. Other studies conducted between 1927 and 1932 under Mayo's supervision found that social factors affect employees, including management's attention and supervisors' interest in them, as well as their involvement in management experiments (Bendix & Fisher, 1949, p. 315).

### **5.20. Lloyd Warner's Work and the Human Relations Committee Research**

Researcher Lloyd Warner focused on external social factors, and his study was considered a major contribution to the historical and intellectual development of human relations. He studied the relationship between industry and the local community, and sought to examine social phenomena in industrial society without viewing the organization as a closed system. "This led many of his students to attempt to verify that external social factors such as social class, religion, and family conditions have an impact on the study of organizational behavior" (Lotfi, 1994, p.104).

### **5.21. The Interactionist Approach**

This approach is represented by George Herbert Mead through his study of small groups in his book *Human Groups*. He sought to analyze group performance, or the group's social behavior, on the basis of three key terms: interaction, i.e., reciprocal personal communications; emotions, i.e., affective psychological states; and activities, i.e., the actions observed among group members (Al-Asfar & Aqil, 2003).

### **5.22. Organizational Design Approach**

According to Al-Omari (2009), most research in this approach has been grounded in Abraham Maslow's motivation theory, which examined the hierarchy of individual needs and the extent to which these needs are satisfied. This hierarchical structure begins with physiological needs (such as the need for food and drink), followed by safety needs (i.e., avoiding risks), then love/belonging (the feeling of affiliation and integration with others), at the fourth level esteem, and at the fifth self-actualization, the desire for growth and affirmation of one's existence, or the development of one's potential

## **6. Conclusion**

This study set out to investigate the role of school administration in fostering human relations within the school community, with a focus on teacher–principal dynamics in two private schools in the Syrian Arab Republic. The findings directly address the four sub-questions that framed the research.

First, regarding the foundations and principles of human relations, the study confirmed that effective human relations rest on four interdependent pillars: (1) activation of participation and teamwork, (2) empathetic leadership, (3) belief in the value of the individual, and (4) commitment to modernization and development. These align with classical and contemporary theories—from Elton Mayo's human relations movement to McGregor's Theory Y and transformational leadership models—yet their implementation in the Syrian context remains uneven and highly dependent on individual leadership style.

Second, concerning the nature of the prevailing relationship between principals and teachers, the research revealed a stark dichotomy. In School 2, where the principal embraced dialogue, respect, and shared decision-making, teachers reported significantly higher satisfaction and perceived stronger human relations. In contrast, School 1 operated under a rigid, top-down model that suppressed voice and discouraged relational engagement, resulting in lower morale and performance. This confirms that human relations are not institutionalized but leader-contingent, especially in fragile educational systems where formal policies rarely mandate relational practices.

Third, with respect to how teachers' demographic variables influence their perceptions, the study found statistically significant differences by gender, years of experience, and educational qualification. Male teachers rated administrative human relations more favorably than female teachers—a finding that may reflect gendered access to leadership attention or differential expectations shaped by Syria's socio-cultural norms. Teachers with more than 10 years of experience gave the highest evaluations, likely due to adaptation, higher salaries, or selective retention of those who tolerate the status quo. Conversely, early-career teachers (<5 years) were more critical, possibly because they bring fresh expectations and are less economically dependent on their positions. Surprisingly, teachers with bachelor's degrees (the majority) rated human relations lower than those with diplomas or advanced degrees, suggesting that higher education may heighten awareness of unmet professional and relational needs rather than correlate with material satisfaction alone.

## 7. Suggestions

In light of these conclusions, the following integrated recommendations are proposed—not as isolated actions, but as part of a systemic strategy for relational school leadership in post-crisis contexts.

School principals must be positioned as relational architects, not just instructional managers. This requires deliberate investment in leadership development programs that ground principals in the ethics and practices of human-centered leadership—emphasizing active listening, participatory decision-making, and emotional intelligence. However, implementation faces significant barriers: many Syrian principals are appointed based on seniority or loyalty rather than leadership competence, and there is little institutional support for professional development. To mitigate this risk, the Ministry of Education or private school networks could pilot mentorship programs pairing empathetic principals (like Principal 2) with peers from authoritarian schools, fostering peer-led change.

Moreover, improving human relations cannot rely on goodwill alone; it must be coupled with structural support. Principals should be encouraged—and held accountable—for reducing bureaucratic burdens, ensuring equitable distribution of material and moral incentives, and creating formal channels for teacher voice (e.g., staff councils). Yet a key risk is performative compliance: principals may adopt the language of participation without sharing real power. To counter this, schools could integrate anonymous teacher feedback mechanisms into annual evaluations of principals, making relational quality a measurable performance indicator.

### 7.1. Directions for Future Research

Finally, future research should expand this inquiry through comparative studies between public and private schools, as well as longitudinal tracking of teacher retention linked to leadership style. Such work would help determine whether the observed patterns are unique to private institutions or reflect broader systemic challenges. Additionally, qualitative exploration of female teachers' experiences with school leadership could uncover hidden barriers to inclusion and voice. Until then, this study affirms that in contexts marked by instability and resource scarcity, the quality of human relations may be the most accessible—and most powerful—lever for school improvement.

## Declarations

**Author Contributions.** Dr. Mohamad Abdullah Alsaied: conceptualization; literature review; questionnaire design and fieldwork; data curation; writing, original draft; supervision; project administration; writing, review & editing. Dr. Asma Saeed Ali Almaamari: methodology; validation; formal analysis; writing, review & editing. Afaf Al Blooshi: resources; supervision; writing, review & editing. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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**Ethical Approval.** The study involved human participants (teachers and school principals from two private schools in the Syrian Arab Republic; n = 252 teachers and 2 principals). Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The research adhered to institutional, national, and international guidelines for ethical conduct in educational and social research. Participation was voluntary, and all respondents were informed of the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any time. Verbal consent was obtained from teachers and principals prior to participation. No identifying information was collected in the questionnaire, and interview data were anonymized. All datasets were stored securely with restricted access to ensure confidentiality.

**Data Availability Statement.** Due to the sensitive nature of human participant data and the terms of ethics approval, the datasets are not publicly available. De-identified data and materials may be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and subject to institutional approvals/ethics clearance.

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