

Sheikhocracy and Israel's Arab Bedouin schools: Tribal versus educational accountability

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This research examines the duality of accountability as perceived by twelve principals of elementary schools in the Bedouin education system in Israel who are implementing a self-management policy requiring a mechanism of accountability in their schools. This study also explores the impact of accountability on the effectiveness of the functioning of the school where that concept is implemented. The twelve principals who participated in an in-depth interview found it difficult to distinguish between responsibility and accountability. My research indicates the existence of a different kind of responsibility, tribal accountability, which is dominant in the culture of the Bedouin school system and hinders the implementation of processes of organisational change.

Introduction

In some traditional societies, commitment and accountability toward education form the cornerstone of societal progress and continuity. The commitment to education is not merely an individual endeavour but a collective accountability woven into the fabric of the community. Elders pass down knowledge, emphasising the duty of each generation to preserve and augment the wisdom accumulated over centuries. This commitment fosters a sense of belonging and continuity, where education becomes a sacred trust, safeguarded and perpetuated for the betterment of the community. Accountability in education transcends personal gains; it becomes a duty to honour the sacrifices of ancestors, ensuring that the flame of knowledge continues to illuminate the path for future generations.

Within these societies, the accountability for education extends beyond the classroom. It encompasses the holistic development of individuals, nurturing not only intellectual prowess but also moral character and societal values. Each member shoulders the responsibility of not only learning but also teaching and mentoring. This creates a harmonious cycle where the experienced guide the inexperienced, fostering a sense of interconnectedness and interdependence crucial for societal cohesion. Such a commitment and accountability for education cultivates a profound respect for learning, enabling the transmission of cultural heritage while adapting to the evolving world — a testament to the resilience and sustainability of traditional societies.

Sheikhocracy

Sheikhocracy or tribal leadership is dominant in Bedouin culture. The Ottoman autocratic and the British Mandate's colonial bureaucratic systems, as well as tribalism, gave rise to what can be termed "sheikhocracy", a term that is a modified version of what Abdel-Khaliq (1984) and others called "bedoucracy" - a leadership mode that solves

contemporary problems with the use of traditional methods. According to Al-Kubaisy (1985), a “sheikhocracy” is invariably a product of the interaction of bureaucratic and tribal orientations and behaviours. In such a system, Al-Kubaisy (1985) explained, industrialisation and the introduction of modern organisations in the Arab world have led managers to adapt to new demands, such as clarification of authority and responsibility, efficiency, and civil laws, while, at the same time, acting in accordance with traditional values and norms, such as a focus on interpersonal relations, preference for individuals from influential tribes, and the implementation of an “open door” policy. The characteristics of a sheikhocracy include hierarchical authority, rules and regulations that are contingent on the personality and power of the individuals who make them, implementation of an “open door” policy, subordination of efficiency to human relations and interpersonal connections, indecisiveness in decision-making, informality among lower-level managers, and a generally patriarchal approach.

Although in a sheikhocratic system, nepotism is often evident in the selection of upper-level managers, qualifications are emphasised in the selection of middle and lower-level personnel. The *sheikh* and the tribe’s leadership determine all aspects of the daily lives of the tribe’s members, leaving no room for individualism. The tribal affiliation of the tribe’s members impacts their identity, their loyalties, and their awareness of the need for accountability. According to some scholars, charismatic school principals can change this reality, change this approach, and neutralise their community’s tribalism (Ali, 1990; Joseph, 2002). On the other hand, there are scholars who argue that Arab school principals find it difficult to work with situations of uncertainty and that they do not permit significant upward mobility within their schools.

The Bedouin education system

Bedouin society in general and particularly Bedouin society in Israel’s southern region, the Negev, provide us with a very interesting context for the examination of the concept of accountability.

The structure of Israel’s Bedouin society, which is part of the Palestinian Arab community that remained within the country’s borders after the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948, is unique and is based on the tribalism that is characteristic of an attribution group where immense importance is attached to personal dignity, where the hierarchical structures are rigid, where obedience is expected *vis à vis* male-only authority (Mizel, 2011), and where the commitment of the tribe’s members to the tribe takes precedence over their commitment to the state’s institutions (Mizel, 2016).

By the end of the second decade of the 21st century, 200,000 Bedouin were living in the Negev, with nearly 64,000 of them residing in unrecognised communities (Ben Asher, 2020; Eyal & Tirosh, 2018). All the Bedouin communities in the Negev belong to Israel’s lowest socioeconomic cluster, according to the socioeconomic index of the country’s Central Bureau of Statistics (2019).

The professional literature refers to the many challenges with which the Bedouin education system must cope (Eyal et al., 2018). The Bedouin education system is an integral part of Israel's Arab education system, with its own unique goals and content, and is separate from the country's education system. The professional literature calls especial attention to the gaps that exist at all levels on the one hand between the Western education system, and on the other hand, Israel's education system in general, Israel's Jewish education system, and its Arab education system (Weissblau, 2017; Mizel, 2005; 2009a; 2009b).

Over the past two decades, there has been a steady increase in the number of Bedouin children and youth in the Bedouin education system and in the number of schools in that system. In 2017, there were 118 schools in the Bedouin education system with over 75,000 pupils and students. Most of these schools were located in recognised communities, while 11 educational institutions were located in unrecognised villages (Weissblau, 2017; Rotem & Gordon, 2017).

Israel's Bedouin schools deal with problems such as a lack of adequate structures, gradually deteriorating infrastructure, a shortage of secondary school teachers (Weissblau, 2017), gaps in scholastic achievements between the Bedouin education system and Israel's education system as a whole, a relatively low percentage of matriculation certificate recipients in comparison with the national average, and a relatively high percentage of school dropouts.

One obstacle facing the Bedouin education system is the traditional Bedouin society's tribal structure, which has an impact on the internal hierarchies in Bedouin schools, on the appointment of teachers, and on the functioning of those schools from the organisational standpoint, in areas such as teaching methods, striving for excellence, accountability, and teacher-pupil relations, which in the Bedouin education system, are founded on strict obedience, on a rigid hierarchy, and on an absence of initiatives on the part of teachers or pupils/students (Alkashala & Alsanah, 2008).

As in traditional Bedouin families, which are patriarchal and where the father is the authority figure, teaching methods in Bedouin schools follow a patriarchal pattern, where the teachers and principals are authority figures, a situation that is contrary to modern perceptions of pedagogic leadership that facilitates and nurtures (Kaplan, 2017).

Up until recently, every Bedouin school has borne the name of the tribe in which it functions and has been perceived as belonging to that particular clan or tribe. Given this kind of reality, it is understandable that all members of the teaching staff as well as the principal are expected to show a stronger commitment to the tribe/clan than to the educational institution that employs them, or to the Ministry of Education, which has overall responsibility for all the country's education systems.

Exploring accountability in Bedouin schools is crucial for several reasons. Bedouin communities often have unique cultural, social, and educational dynamics that require specific attention when it comes to accountability in education (Mizel, 2009a; 2009b):

1. *Cultural sensitivity*
Bedouin communities have distinct cultural norms and values that might differ from mainstream educational practices. Understanding and respecting these cultural nuances while ensuring accountability in education is essential for effective learning outcomes.
2. *Equitable education*
Ensuring accountability in Bedouin schools promotes equitable access to quality education for all students, irrespective of their cultural background. It helps in identifying and addressing gaps in educational resources and support.
3. *Community engagement*
Engaging the Bedouin community in holding schools accountable fosters a collaborative environment where stakeholders—including parents, teachers, and community leaders—actively participate in improving educational standards.
4. *Tailored educational approaches*
Accountability measures can be customised to suit the specific needs of Bedouin students, considering their cultural context, language, and learning styles. This can lead to more effective teaching methodologies and curriculum development.
5. *Empowering students and teachers*
Creating accountability mechanisms empowers both students and teachers. Students can benefit from a more inclusive and supportive learning environment, while teachers can receive better support and resources to meet students' needs effectively.
6. *Long-term development*
Accountability in Bedouin schools contributes to the overall development of the community by investing in education, which is crucial for economic growth and social progress.

Exploring accountability in Bedouin schools involves not just ensuring adherence to standards but also understanding and respecting cultural diversity while promoting inclusive and effective educational practices.

Tribal culture and the perception of leadership in Bedouin society

This section briefly reviews the concept of leadership in Israel's Bedouin community and the connection between that concept and issues of responsibility and accountability, focusing on concepts of leadership in Arab society in general.

Parallels exist between Western theories of leadership and concepts of leadership in traditional societies. One of those Western theories is the typology proposed by Bush et al. (2011), who noted the success of the leadership model adopted in South Africa after the termination of its apartheid regime. Bush and colleagues identified six models of management and ten models of leadership.

In most definitions of leadership, there is a common factor: exertion of influence on others to attain the organisation's goals (DuBrin, 2012; Haggai, 2009).

Bedouin society is tribal in nature, and all its members are Muslims. Numerous scholars have discussed the essence of leadership in a Muslim society. In their discussion of leadership in a Muslim society, Brooks and Mutohar (2018) presented a conceptual framework of leadership in an Islamic school as a starting point for an empirical research study. Their model included clear directives characteristically followed by Islamic educational leaders: ability to provide sensible counsel, sincere leadership, readiness to consult with others, accountability, and transparency. These are important values in Islam, and the question is whether they are applied today. Several questions are relevant to the subject of this study: Is tribal culture stronger than these values? Does tribal culture negate Brooks and Mutohar's model? Can Islamic communities in non-Islamic countries—such as, in the case of this study, Israel—translate the values of their tribal culture into the reality of their daily lives?

To answer these questions, the nature of leadership in Arab tribal society must first be explained. Organisations, including schools, are culture-linked. Culture has a major impact on a school's day-to-day functioning. Thus, school principals must not be severed from the influence of the culture on which they were brought up. Research studies of Arab organisations stress the fact that Arab school principals are reluctant to delegate authority to their staff members, try to avoid risk-taking and the assumption of responsibility, prefer a stable way of life to remunerative work, and take social, religious, and tribal factors into consideration when they must make decisions (Hofstede, 1993; Al-Haj, 2012; Sabri, 2004).

Arab school principals attach immense importance to the maintenance of stability and tranquility, and to the preservation of social harmony in their schools, because lack of harmony can lead to internal conflicts and confrontations and could have implications for the schools' functioning. Hofstede (1993, 2011) noted that Arab school principals excel in self-defense but not in the taking of initiatives, that their activities are primarily responses to events, and that the local culture in which they live influences their day-to-day functioning.

Tribal culture is highly complex from the standpoint of day-to-day functioning, and tribal leaders are expected to act in accordance with their tribal culture's values. Since schools represent a newer kind of organisation that does not have the complexity of tribal culture and which is intended to serve as an agent of change *vis à vis* the society in which it is located, the issue of leadership constitutes a challenge for school principals.

In many Bedouin communities, schools are funded and supported by the tribal leader; thus, the principals in these schools feel their commitment is, first and foremost, toward the *sheikh* and the tribe. In numerous cases, the criteria for a school's funding are not professional but rather are based on factors considered important from the tribal perspective, such as the principal's intelligence, age, courage, tribal affiliation, and loyalty to the tribe. When school principals feel they are, first and foremost, committed to the tribe and to its *sheikh*, their commitment to the Ministry of Education is naturally considerably diminished. Arab principals do not think in institutional terms: Their first consideration is not toward their own school (Ali, 1990).

In Arab tribal societies, age is considered a major factor in leadership. In general, leadership in the tribe is assigned to senior individuals, while young people are barred from significant leadership roles. Under such circumstances, young people have fewer opportunities than in general society to be hired as school principals.

In tribal societies in the Islamic world, women are barred from leadership positions, and men have a much higher status than women. The rationale behind this approach is the belief in Arab tribal society that men are more capable than women in the performance of leadership tasks, particularly when decision-making is involved (Alsraiha, 2020; Hesham Hael, 2017).

In recent years, leadership has emerged as a prominent theme in many research studies (Painter-Morland & Deslandes, 2017; Chen et al., 2016) and has become a major factor in the competitive dynamics of organizations. According to Petrick and Quinn (2001), corporate leadership influences the moral capability and performance of organisations, and, since the 1990s, some scholars have become interested in the promotion of leadership as a solution to the problems of agency failure (Wallis and Gregory, 2009).

Educational reforms in Bedouin society

In recent years, reforms being carried out throughout the world in the field of education have naturally impacted the Bedouin community in Israel's Negev region. Excluded from Israel's mainstream in national and sociopolitical terms, the Negev's Bedouin community continues to maintain tribal frameworks, and any innovation or adaptation creates awkward feelings among its members, undermining the authority of the community's decision-makers.

The reforms in Israel's educational system in general, and in its Bedouin community in particular, are intended to improve scholastic performance, to reduce the number of dropouts, and to enable all the country's population groups, on the one hand, to be partners in that system and, on the other hand, to be responsible for the educational system operating in their respective communities.

The investment in these reforms is massive and requires extensive resources. Thus, the educational system and the leading figures in each community must assume responsibility for the system's operation and for the changes that will take place in it. Accountability, especially personal accountability, is a vital factor needed to streamline a community's educational system. To develop in each community's leaders a sense of responsibility and a capacity for accountability regarding what happens in their community's educational system, they must be taught how to translate that sense of responsibility into practical activities.

Efforts to reshape the leadership of the educational system in Israel's Bedouin community may perhaps encounter considerable difficulties because the traditional tribal leadership might regard the educational leadership as a threat to classical Bedouin authority.

Accountability

The use of the term “accountability” is becoming increasingly frequent in management, economic, and public-political discourse. The term expresses a complex concept with diverse applicability and is therefore confusing (Scherer and Palazzo, 2011).

The accepted meaning today of the term “accountability” has deviated significantly from the areas in which it first developed (Sinclair, 1995; Mulgan, 1997) and indicates accountability’s link to broad social processes and to its impact on different fields (Morrow, 1999). From the standpoint of economics, accountability means the obligation of every organisation to supply information on its management of fiscal affairs and to thereby enable non-members of that organisation to determine whether it has properly used the monies at its disposal (Biesta, 2010). From the organisational standpoint, accountability refers to the study of the actions and achievements of an organisation’s workers in systems evaluated based on collected data. The demand for accountability attempts to link an individual’s work with its results (Frink and Ferris, 1998), and to clarify to all employees that they are responsible for their actions in the workplace and are required to account for them. The aim is to create a framework that encourages accountability.

Different types of accountability systems can be found in the field of education. Anderson (2005) distinguished between the following three main types: (1) detailed institutional regulation of educational activities and compliance with it; (2) acknowledgement of professional norms and adherence to them; and (3) specification of expected results and evaluation of performance.

The connection between accountability and responsibility

Although there is a close connection between accountability and responsibility (Argyrou, 2000), they are two distinct concepts. Whereas accountability entails the individual employee’s accounting for his/her actions, for the nature of those actions, and for his/her correction of flaws in those actions, responsibility is something the employee senses internally, and it relates to commonly accepted norms and to actions based on value-oriented perceptions. The concept of responsibility clearly defines when the individual employee is expected to account for his/her actions and when he/she is not expected to do so (Bovens, 1998).

While responsibility is the link between an action and its outcome (Inbar, 1982), accountability is expressed in the evaluation of the outcome of a given action. Accountability creates a dialogue between the individual who must bear responsibility for his/her actions and those who must share in the outcome of those actions (Schedler, 1999).

Responsibility does not always lead to accountability (Lessinger, 1971), and responsibility for something or some person can exist without accountability regarding that something

or that person (Schedler, 1999). Accountability is a social phenomenon that exists in public, social, political, and constitutional contexts; it is not a phenomenon that exists in one's private life (Schedler, 1999).

Accountability in Islamic and tribal cultures

Islam is a religion with unique principles; in addition to it being a religious affiliation, it is also an identity and a way of life (Sabri et al., 2014). It places emphasis on membership in a group, in a culture, and in a common history. According to Lewis (2001), accountability is of central importance in Islam, especially *vis à vis* God. Accountability is referred to more than eight times in the *Quran* (Clarke, 2001). Despite Schedler's (1999) claims, Lewis argues that accountability in Islam exists on two levels: the individual's responsibility for him/herself and for his/her actions, and the responsibility of managers toward their employees. In Islam, God is the ultimate judge of human actions, and His judgment is dominant in the next world.

In the Muslim world, tribal society is a closed patriarchal entity based on tribal membership and on the idea that the leadership of each tribe is in the hands of a tribal leader (*sheikh*). Traditionally, the *sheikh* has been perceived as a highly respected, charismatic, dominant figure in the tribe whose every word must be obeyed by all the tribe's members and who has the authority to decide on every matter in the private lives of all the tribe's members (Mizel, 2009a; 2009b). The degree of obedience toward the *sheikh* has diminished a little in recent years. As the tribe's spiritual father and its leader, the *sheikh* is the sole figure in the tribe who is authorised to represent the tribe in its contacts with the outer world; he determines the rules by which the tribe must operate, and he guides the tribe's members as to how they must behave in their daily lives.

Educational accountability

Accountability is a concept that is difficult to define, especially in the educational field, and a wide range of definitions exists. The differences between the various definitions stem from the differences between the social and economic values of each society and from the unique characteristics of the education system in each country. Public education has become the primary arena in which the concept of accountability serves as the central strategy for dealing with what appears to be a gradual decline in the functioning of public education systems (Sahlberg, 2007).

Many countries have adopted different organisational structures for their public schools. One of the most important of these organisational structures is school-based management (SBM), one of whose goals is to measure the quality of a school's achievements through the construction of a mechanism of accountability.

In the field of education, assumption of responsibility plays a central role in the attempt to prevent education officials from trying to cover up their unacceptable actions. According to Freeman et al. (2007), the assumption of responsibility offers many benefits, one of

which is the improvement of work performance and the raising of the level of scholastic achievement.

The need for transparency in the field of education and the fact that exam scores have become a dominant factor for decision-makers have caused educators to assume more responsibility and, on the other hand, have led parents and the community in general to take a greater interest in what occurs in the public education system (Turchi et al., 2002), in addition to making educators and the general public more aware of both the problems schools must cope with and the need to enhance the functioning of public schools so that they can continue to effectively operate (Gregory, 2012).

In the Bedouin education system, various factors influence accountability; one of them is the existence of an external centre of control in Bedouin society that attributes any successful attainment, any failure, or any accident to external elements over which no one has any control. Islam teaches its followers that everything happens in accordance with God's will (Uddin et al., 2013; Uddin, 2003).

The exalted status of the *sheikh*, who has no official role in the Bedouin education system in Israel, nonetheless grants him immense control over almost everything that happens in each school in that system, such as the appointment of school principals and teachers, especially if the school belongs to the tribe (Mizel, 2005); however, he exerts no influence on curricula.

In tribal culture, tribal accountability is regarded as more important than educational accountability (Mizel, 2009a; 2009b).

Accountability of school principals

Accountability means the assumption of responsibility, and this concept applies to all people who occupy a position of responsibility, including, of course, school principals, who, in the context of their work, are responsible for various spheres of activity. The social and public expression of such responsibility for one's work is accountability (Mizel, 2009a; 2009b)

An important component of accountability is reporting or giving an account of one's activities to others (Turchi et al., 2002). All people whose position requires accountability are expected to express their commitment to their role and to therefore consent to be regarded as responsible for the results of their actions.

Considering the above, it can be said that the accountability of school principals has three components:

1. Direction of accountability – that is, the wishes of those players who consider the school principal accountable for various areas of activity in the context of their role.
2. Areas of accountability – the various areas of activity for which school principals are considered accountable.
3. Depth of accountability – the degree to which school principals are willing to consider themselves accountable.

The direction of accountability

Since the concept of accountability emphasises the relationship between people with positions of responsibility and their immediate and not-so-immediate setting, the definition of accountability includes the relevant players in the setting within which principals and teachers operate. The component of direction of accountability is another way of asking the question, “To whom should school principals be accountable?”

To provide a comprehensive answer to that question, I propose three categories of direction: (1) accountability toward one’s superiors (2) accountability toward one’s colleagues (3) accountability toward the recipients of the services of a person in a responsible position.

Areas of accountability

The basis of all definitions of accountability is the assumption that a person in a position of responsibility is responsible for a number of areas of activity. Since school principals are responsible for many areas of activity, it is vital to discover how principals themselves perceive these areas of activity.

Depth of accountability

The extent to which principals are prepared to consider themselves accountable for their professional activities depends on the extent to which they consider themselves solely responsible for their actions. In other words, there are certain areas for which principals consider themselves accountable (considering the policy of self-management in the education system and the political context, namely, the presence of several minority groups in Israel), while there are other areas for which principals do not consider themselves accountable and for which other players—in the opinion of the principals—should assume responsibility.

Method

The purpose of this research study is to increase our understanding of the ability of principals of elementary schools in Bedouin society in Israel to apply the fundamental ideas of accountability regarding activities undertaken in their respective schools. I wanted to acquire a greater understanding of the subject of accountability in Bedouin schools in Israel because of recent reforms in the Bedouin education system and to discover to what extent principals of Bedouin elementary schools are able to implement those reforms.

The methodology I employed was the technique of the qualitative paradigm combined with open interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). According to Marshall and Rossman, the advantage of the open interview is that it enables researchers to explore and understand the subject matter they are interested in investigating because, in an open interview, the interviewee is free to express opinions and to refer to ideas that the researcher might not have considered prior to the interview. The interviewer makes no attempt to guide their answers (Patton, 1999; McAdams, 1995). Thus, new directions might emerge, and these new directions might lead to a more profound understanding of both the phenomenon under study and the findings of the research study.

Research questions

In light of the theoretical background of accountability and the formation of a clearcut concept of accountability, I asked the following questions:

1. How do principals perceive their areas of responsibility, and to whom do they consider themselves accountable?
2. How do principals perceive the idea of providing an account of their actions?

The research group

The research group for this study consisted of twelve principals of Bedouin elementary schools in Israel who were implementing the policy of self-management in their respective schools and who, in accordance with the requirements of this reform, were obligated to give a thorough account of the activities conducted in their school. The twelve principals included nine males and three females; the age range was 25 to 55. All twelve of the principals hold a bachelor degree, and three hold a masters degree. All of them live in Bedouin communities.

As I explained above, I chose all of the twelve schools in the Negev, Israel's southern region, that are implementing the self-management model. I wish to add here that, as someone who has an extensive knowledge of the Bedouin education system accumulated through forty years of experience gained in working with that system, I am familiar with Bedouin culture and its unique codes. This familiarity with the Bedouin education system and my expert knowledge of the new reforms in Israel's education system made it easier for me to explore the topic of the present research study. Since pupils and students in the Bedouin education system were not involved in my study, I did not require the authorisation of the Ministry of Education, and, since only school principals were involved, I required only their consent to be included in the study.

The research process

As part of the preparations for the interviews, all the principals were asked where and when they wanted their interview to be conducted. In response to the requests of a considerable number of the principals and because of cultural sensitivity, I arrived at the understanding with all the principals that the interviews would not be recorded. Thus, the

interviewees' responses and my questions were all written down during the interview. The duration of each interview did not exceed 60 minutes. All the principals were interviewed in their natural surroundings (that is, their respective schools). Eight of the twelve principals were interviewed early in the morning—before the start of the school day—between 7:00 and 8:00 am. Four principals were interviewed after the end of the school day, in their offices, between 2:30 and 3:30 pm. Because of personal reasons, one of the principals was interviewed over the telephone.

All the interviews were conducted in Arabic, which is my first language and also first language for the interviewed principals. In some instances and following the transcription of the interview, I required clarifications and further comments from the interviewee; in those cases, I spoke to the interviewee by telephone in order to ensure that all of my questions had been clearly understood and that the answers the interviewee had provided accurately reflected his or her thoughts and attitude, and in order to ensure the objectivity of my presentation of the interviewee's responses.

Credibility and validity

This section deals with the credibility and validity of the research process. The analysis of the interviews, which included the discovery of significant themes, helped me to identify categories and patterns that kept on repeating. The patterns were edited to provide me with significant themes, which were then linked to a comprehensive system of significance.

The research study included two stages of analysis and analysis interpretation. In the first stage, I analysed the revealed and direct content that had been gathered, formulated the categories for screening, chose analysis units, and identified content segments in the different themes. In this stage, there was almost no interpretation. In the next stage, I relied on my understanding and intuition: as a member of Bedouin society, I am very familiar with the context and codes of Bedouin culture and was able to interpret the themes that emerged from the interviews and recognise the implications of the revealed and concealed content (Tzabar Ben-Yehoshua, 1997).

It should be pointed out here that the twelve schools whose principals were interviewed were remarkably similar: all of them were located in Bedouin communities, all of them were elementary schools, and all of them were headed by principals who are members of the culture under study—Bedouin culture—and who were implementing the recent reform in the Israeli education system (the introduction of school-based management). All the above components provided me with a methodological edge because of the large capacity for inclusion (external validity).

The use of Arabic—the principals' first language—as the language of communication on the part of both the researcher and the subjects for study (that is, the principals) enabled the interviewees to feel at ease and to express themselves fully and freely, and increased their self-confidence. At the end of the interview, the interviewees were asked to comment on the interview as a whole; thus, they were given the opportunity to raise issues

that the researcher had not anticipated prior to the interview process. I felt that the interviewees were eager to tell their personal stories.

Professional ethics

Qualitative research studies demand the application of a strict ethical code that protects the privacy of the members of the target population being studied. In addition, the researcher must display a high degree of sensitivity toward the members of the target population and must ensure stringent enforcement of the relevant ethical rules. In this research study, the following principles were meticulously observed:

1. All twelve principals were informed prior to the interview of (a) the goals of the research (b) the research method. They were asked to provide their consent to the conducting of the interview and were told that they could terminate their participation in the study at any time if, for whatever reason, they found that their participation was unsuitable for them.
2. In the researcher's report, the participants are anonymous. As noted above, the principals were promised complete anonymity with regard to both their personal identity and the identity of their school. Only the researcher knows the personal details of the participants in the study.

Findings

The findings of my research study indicate the presence of various conflicts involving accountability.

The principals' answers show that the vast majority (nine) experience a conflict as to whom they must be committed regarding educational reforms that are not congruent with Bedouin tradition and culture. According to these principals, some of the educational reforms are diametrically opposed to Bedouin tradition and the values of Bedouin society. One principal gave a concrete example of one predicament in which he found himself:

The Ministry [of Education] wanted us to adopt a program of education aimed at promoting healthy sexuality; however, both the tribe and Bedouin society as a were very unhappy with this idea and, therefore, declared a total ban on the program. As a result, it was never implemented. We could not assume responsibility for that program (Principal 2).

Another principal noted:

In order to avoid a clash with the Ministry, we reported that we were adopting part of the program [of education aimed at promoting healthy sexuality], although the program as a whole is not suited to the principles of Bedouin education (Principal 4).

The findings can be grouped in accordance with the following three categories of accountability.

1. Accountability of female versus male principals

In the Bedouin education system, the attitudes of female principals are different from those of male principals because of several social and gender-related factors. As the interviews indicated, all the female principals feel more accountability toward their pupils and see themselves more as mothers than as teachers; thus, they pay an immense amount of attention to the welfare of their pupils.

One of the female principals said in her interview:

The moment I enter the classroom and I look into the eyes of the pupils, I feel that I have an important mission to carry out. Do I feel this way out of pity? No, absolutely not. The reason for that feeling is my awareness of the fact that, if I will not be in the classroom, none of the pupils will be there. Because of the pressure of having to make a living, the parents do not have much time to take care of their children (Principal 5).

Another female principal told me:

We leave the other areas of accountability to the male teachers. For the male principals, the important thing is to teach our pupils as best as they can and to prepare them for the tribal frameworks in which they live.

In contrast, the male principals pointed out that they felt responsible not only to the Ministry of Education inspector but also to their tribe and their *sheikh*. They prefer to be committed to the tribal framework, which has considerable power and/or which has provided them with special benefits (Principal 8).

One of the principals admitted:

I cannot ignore my tribe. When I submitted my candidacy for the position of school principal, my tribe supported me more than the Ministry, and therefore today I am a school principal. This doesn't mean that I wasn't qualified for the job; however, it is clear to me that, without the tribe's backing, I could never have become a school principal (Principal 10).

2. Religious accountability

Four of the principals claimed that the entire topic of accountability has nothing to do with this or that official framework. In their view, God is the supreme power, and He protects everyone. For them, their sense of accountability stems from the belief that God protects their pupils and their school. The principals as teachers believe in God and so do the pupils. That belief is the only real guarantee of success, as far as they are concerned. These principals attribute the success of their pupils to external factors, such as religion, and they believe that, if they remain loyal to their religious values, they will succeed. One of the principals expressed this attitude eloquently:

I recently received a prize for the existence in my school of an educational climate in which there is no violence. True, I worked hard, but God helped me to get that prize; I

am a religious person, and God, the supreme power, is protecting us and our pupils (Principal 6).

3. The false impression of showing accountability

Five of the principals claimed that they were forced to develop and employ survival tactics to be on good terms with their tribe and with the Ministry of Education because of a number of factors: (1) the complexity of the situation of school principals in the Bedouin education system; (2) the clash between the Ministry's values and those of both their tribe and Bedouin culture; and (3) the absence of a suitable infrastructure in Bedouin schools in Israel in general and the schools in the unrecognised Bedouin villages of southern Israel in particular. These principals convey a false message: they give the impression that they are doing certain things that the Education Ministry has requested them to do, while, in practice, they do very little or nothing at all. One principal recounted:

In one program that we were asked [by the Education Ministry] to implement, adolescent boys and girls were supposed to work together in small, mixed gender groups. We knew that this request would be opposed by the tribe. To avoid a clash, we brought both the boys and girls into one room, thereby conveying the message to the ministry that we were implementing the program as it requested, although, inside the room, we conveyed to the tribe the message that there would be no gender mixing. How did we do that? We divided the students into two single-gender groups that were positioned in opposite corners of the room, with a male teacher working only with the male students and a female teacher working only with the female students (Principal 11).

Sheikhocracy and accountability

In schools in Bedouin society in Israel, due to the tribe's immense power and influence in Bedouin society, the principals always feel that they must be more accountable to their tribe and to the tribe's leader than to the Ministry of Education. The tribe's values and ethical code have a profound impact on the daily lives of the tribe's members and on the school that is affiliated with the tribe. As is the case with Bedouin society throughout Israel, the leaders of the tribe and the local leaders, in contrast with the Education Ministry, are very familiar with the culture and needs of the pupils and students attending the local school.

The principals of Bedouin schools are expected to make decisions that will reflect local objectives and values, such as the tribe's perception of what a productive and reinforced education system should look like and the need to strengthen the local community and improve the quality of life in the tribe. It is their responsibility to continually upgrade the local school system and to serve the needs of their students in an optimal manner, while, at the same time, always considering local traditions and values.

Regarding accountability, six of the principals stated that they owed their loyalty to the tribe and to its sheikh rather than to the Education Ministry, in cases where the educational reforms adopted by the Ministry might clash with the values of their traditional society. In cases where the educational reforms do not clash with the values of

their society, the principals accept the reforms and feel themselves accountable first and foremost to the Ministry.

At the same time, we are today witnessing a new phenomenon: Some school principals have become veritable *sheikhs* within the walls of their respective schools. One of the principals I interviewed succinctly described this situation:

The new reforms have given me considerable power vis-à-vis my tribe and the Education Ministry, especially in view of the fact that I am a member of the tribe in whose area of jurisdiction my school is located. Since I am able to manoeuvre between the tribe's demands and those of the Ministry and to arrive at a balance between them, I find myself functioning both as a *sheikh* and as the principal of a *sheikhocratic* school (Principal 10).

On the other hand, six principals stated that they felt more committed to their tribe than to the Education Ministry and that, in many cases, they listen to what the tribe has to say, especially when the issue is values or male-female relations. Although this was not the opinion of all the principals I interviewed, one told me:

If they [the officials of the Education Ministry] want to reduce the degree of intervention on the part of the tribe's leaders, then I think there should be separate educational frameworks for male and female students, particularly at the secondary school level (Principal 9).

Discussion

My findings shed light on the intricate dynamics of accountability within Bedouin society, highlighting its susceptibility to influence from *sheikhocracy*. The evident impact on accountability underscores the intricate interplay between traditional hierarchical structures and the mechanisms of responsibility within this cultural framework.

In Bedouin society in Israel, educational accountability manifests itself deeply and intricately within the fabric of daily life. Education is considered sacred and essential in Bedouin culture, and tribes and families play a significant role in passing knowledge and values from generation to generation. Responsibility in education goes beyond academic success; it involves the preservation and enhancement of cultural identity.

Bedouin communities adhere to the concept of gratitude, valuing education as a legacy that has been inherited from their ancestors and that must be safeguarded for future generations. However, the education system in these communities faces challenges as they attempt to balance the preservation of Bedouin traditions and values with the need to integrate into modern society and into a rapidly changing world of technology. Educational accountability serves to maintain a balance between Bedouin cultural assets and the challenges of the modern era. Education authorities and Bedouin communities need to work together to develop innovative educational methods that will preserve traditional values while enabling Bedouin students to keep up with continual changes and future challenges.

A clear conflict exists between the principals of Bedouin schools and the Ministry of Education. In the educational process, Bedouin schools heavily rely on their communities and on Bedouin values and view themselves as vital centres for the preservation of Bedouin identity and culture.

The Ministry of Education, on the other hand, considers itself responsible for the provision of quality education in accordance with national standards, and for the delivery of necessary resources for the facilitation of quality education. The conflict between the ministry and Bedouin culture arises primarily from differences in objectives and methodologies, with Bedouin school principals focusing on the preservation of Bedouin culture and identity in educational contexts, while the Ministry aims to implement standardised educational curricula and to provide educational services consistent with official requirements.

The experiences of Bedouin female principals and teachers who see themselves more as mothers rather than as pedagogical personnel can have a significant impact on their students' level of academic achievement. In contrast with Bedouin male principals, the female principals possess a deeper understanding of their students' needs, capabilities, and educational potential. Their personal experiences can help their students develop effective study methods and can encourage them to tap their full potential. Additionally, Bedouin female principals and teachers may possess cultural and social expertise that can enable them to interact more effectively with their students and their community. They may have a better understanding of the values, traditions, and social dynamics in the background of these students and the capacity for enabling students to form strong interpersonal and social connections, thereby exerting a positive influence on the growth and development of their students.

The introduction of reforms in the education system can create numerous challenges regarding accountability, especially in the relationship between the Ministry, school principals, and the Bedouin community. These reforms might seek to standardise educational practices, curricula, or evaluation methods, and can sometimes clash with the unique cultural and societal aspects present within the Bedouin community. The result might be the creation of tension between the Ministry's educational objectives and the community's values and traditions.

Additionally, school principals, both male and female, acting as intermediaries between the Ministry and the local community, must cope with the challenge of implementing these reforms while maintaining a connection to the cultural and educational needs of Bedouin students. The principal's role involves the balancing of official mandates with the community's expectations, which means navigation between the preservation of Bedouin cultural identity and compliance with national educational standards. The Bedouin community, however, may perceive these reforms as potentially disrupting their traditional educational approaches and values. There might be concerns about the loss of cultural heritage or cultural identity because of the implementation of standardised systems that do not necessarily align with that community's specific needs.

Hence, the achievement of accountability within this context requires a delicate balance that will necessitate dialogue, collaboration, and a deep understanding of cultural sensitivities so that the reforms will enhance rather than diminish the educational experience of Bedouin students. Collaboration between all the stakeholders and the incorporation of cultural nuances within the reform process could lead to more effective and inclusive educational policies.

This conflict creates tension between the parties involved, as Bedouin school principals demand the right to maintain control over the educational process and make independent decisions without excessive interference from the Ministry. Conversely, the Ministry seeks to implement national educational policies and to comprehensively develop the education system in line with approved standards.

The emergence of self-managed schools in Israel's Negev region and the introduction of new reforms for the entire education system (up to the final year of secondary school studies) in Israel, especially regarding accountability, and the impact of these two developments on Israel's traditional societies in general and on the country's Bedouin community in particular, shed light on the manner in which traditional societies deal with Western reforms, and lead one to conclude that traditional communities, including Israel's Bedouin community, can adopt new ideas in education if their adoption can be executed gradually and if there is a determined effort, on the one hand, to preserve traditional values and, on the other hand, to encourage these traditional communities to slowly internalise changes in their respective educational systems.

The resolution of this conflict between innovation and tradition requires continuous cooperation and dialogue between Bedouin schools and the Ministry of Education, respect for Bedouin culture and its traditions, and the development of an education system that can meet the demands of the modern era and educational progress.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this research highlights a complex landscape of conflicts in accountability faced by principals within the Bedouin education system. Three prominent categories emerged from the findings.

Firstly, the divergence between the accountability felt by female principals versus their male counterparts illuminates a stark contrast rooted in societal and gender dynamics. Female principals emphasise a maternal responsibility toward their pupils, while male principals prioritise allegiance to the tribe and *sheikh*, considering it instrumental for their positions.

Secondly, religious accountability plays a significant role for a subset of principals who attribute their success to divine intervention. They view God as the ultimate protector of their pupils and school, anchoring their accountability within religious values.

Lastly, a subset of principals resorts to strategic maneuvers, projecting a façade of compliance with educational directives while navigating the intricate clash between Ministry values, tribal norms, and Bedouin culture. These survival tactics often involve superficial adherence to Ministry guidelines while internally maintaining practices aligned with tribal beliefs.

These findings underscore the intricate web of competing accountabilities faced by principals. The clash between educational reforms and traditional values necessitates delicate balancing acts, where principals navigate between societal expectations, religious convictions, and official mandates. The complexities within the Bedouin education system demand nuanced approaches that acknowledge and negotiate these multifaceted layers of accountability.

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