

Beyond Language: Exploring the Hidden Curriculum's Contribution to the Language Development of English Language Learners

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Abstract

The hidden curriculum involves the implicit values, behaviors, a collection of concepts, and mental processes that are conveyed through the educational process, often outside the formal curriculum. The current study explored the influence of the hidden curriculum on the development of English language learners in Saudi Arabia. A questionnaire was designed to gather school principals' opinions on English teachers' influence on learner development across six domains: National Identity and Loyalty; Professional Commitment and Discipline; Ethical and Professional Behavior; Digital Awareness and Cyber Safety; Learning and Self-Education; and Intellectual Awareness. The research involved a sample of 168 school principals. The findings indicated that the overall mean score across the six domains is notably high. Additionally, the findings showed no statistically significant differences in the perceptions of school principals concerning the role of English language teachers in the hidden curriculum, regardless of teacher-related factors such as academic qualifications, years of experience, or gender. The study highlighted the crucial role of English language teachers in transmitting values, attitudes, and behaviors through the hidden curriculum, extending their contributions beyond linguistic competence to encompass national allegiance, ethical conduct, digital citizenship, self-education, and intellectual discernment.

Keywords: hidden curriculum, English language education, cognitive development, behavioral development

1. Introduction

The burdens on schools have increased due to rapid technological advancements, social media, and electronic games. What primary school pupils learn often extends beyond the formal curriculum to include values and behaviors acquired through the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum can be defined as the unwritten, informal lessons and messages that students absorb from their experiences in school (Li, 2019). This curriculum is often implicit, conveyed through indirect means rather than explicit teaching. It can promote positive behaviors—such as responsibility and hygiene—when educators model these values. Conversely, it may also lead to negative habits, like smoking or inappropriate language (Small, 2020).

Understanding the hidden curriculum is particularly crucial in today's educational landscape, where students are exposed to a variety of influences outside the traditional classroom. The values and behaviors imparted through the hidden curriculum can significantly shape students' social interactions and self-perceptions. As they navigate their educational journey, these informal lessons can impact their emotional and social development, influencing how they relate to peers and authority figures.

Moreover, Hu and Dai (2025) highlighted that teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the hidden curriculum through their actions and interactions with students. By consciously modeling positive behaviors and values, educators can create an environment that fosters growth and resilience. In the context of language learning, the hidden curriculum plays a vital role in shaping students' attitudes toward communication and cultural understanding. Through interactions with peers and teachers, students absorb not only language skills but also the social norms and values that influence their ability to engage effectively in diverse linguistic environments.

The hidden curriculum framework by Rossouw and Frick (2023) emphasizes the interplay between several key components in education (see figure 1). At its core, the hidden curriculum encompasses the aspects of learning that occur outside the formal curriculum, influencing students' overall educational experience. It intersects with the formal curriculum, which outlines the structured content and objectives, and the world of work, highlighting the competencies required for professional success. Additionally, Rossouw and Frick (2023) noted that it involves the student learning experience and the lecturer's role in facilitating this process. They added that by acknowledging the hidden curriculum, educators can enhance relevance, ensuring that students not only acquire knowledge but also develop essential skills and competencies necessary for their future careers. This holistic approach fosters a more comprehensive educational environment that prepares students for real-world challenges.

In the Saudi Arabian context, there is limited research on how the hidden curriculum affects language learners. A notable example is the study by Almairi et al. (2021), which examined the learning experiences of medical students alongside formal education, influenced by

the behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs of teachers and peers. This qualitative study at Alfaisal University in Riyadh involved focus groups and semi-structured interviews with 24 students, 8 faculty members, and 4 teaching assistants to explore perspectives on the hidden curriculum. The analysis identified six core themes: role and behavioral modeling, value-based teaching, interpersonal faculty-student interactions, effects of diversity and socialization, teaching methodologies, and mentoring. While some themes echoed previous studies, unique aspects included diversity, socialization, and interpersonal interactions. The study highlights the importance of addressing hidden curriculum issues for developing medical students and instilling the desired values in future physicians.

In terms of the present paper, this research explores how recognizing and integrating the hidden curriculum can help educators better support the holistic development of language learners, ultimately guiding them toward becoming accomplished and motivated learners. Specifically, it examines the ways in which English language teachers influence student character through the hidden curriculum. The paper identifies various elements of this curriculum that teachers impact, including discipline, values, loyalty, and digital safety. It also analyzes how teachers' qualifications, experience, and training affect their ability to engage with the hidden curriculum. Finally, the paper offers recommendations for enhancing the English teacher's role in promoting character development among students through these informal lessons.

Significantly, the following questions guided the study:

1. What is the role of the English language teacher in the hidden curriculum in shaping students' character from the perspective of school principals?
2. Do school principals' perceptions of the English teacher's role in the hidden curriculum differ according to teacher-related variables (academic qualification, years of experience, gender)?

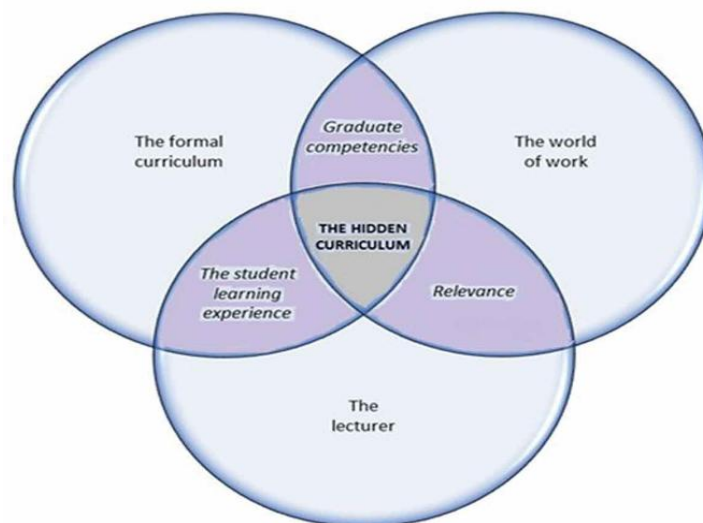


Figure 1. The hidden curriculum framework

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of the Hidden Curriculum

In 1968, Philip Jackson first introduced the concept of the hidden curriculum in his seminal work, *Life in Classrooms*. He articulated that schools serve roles beyond merely transferring knowledge from one generation to the next (Azimpour et al., 2015). The hidden curriculum is referred to by various names, including the implicit or informal curriculum. While educators may not agree on a precise and unified definition, there is a general consensus on the significance of the hidden curriculum.

The hidden curriculum encompasses the behaviors, values, and meanings imparted to students by teachers and schools in an unstructured manner. It consists of a collection of concepts, mental processes, attitudes, and behaviors that learners acquire outside the formal curriculum through interactions with peers, teachers, and school administrators, as well as through extracurricular activities and observational learning (Azimpour et al., 2015).

Educators recognize that the values and attitudes students encounter in school activities, procedures, and behavioral expectations constitute the hidden curriculum (Lee et al., 2023). These elements are not integrated into the academic curriculum but are instead absorbed almost subconsciously. Students internalize these behaviors and attitudes through direct interactions with teachers and administrators, as well as through their observations of others. This influence also extends to extracurricular activities, such as targeted lectures from external speakers or school-sponsored outdoor events, where teachers play a pivotal role. Consequently, the hidden curriculum can significantly shape students' attitudes, often more so than the formal academic curriculum. Teachers hold a position of authority, and students frequently assimilate these values without questioning them, particularly when teachers ardently advocate specific

principles (Almairi et al., 2021).

Small (2020) noted that the hidden curriculum significantly influences students' performance, growth, and attitudes. For example, students often emulate the actions of their instructors. Compared to the explicit curriculum, the effects of the hidden curriculum tend to have a longer-lasting impact on students. Each school's hidden curriculum is unique, shaped by the interactions and experiences of its students and faculty. Additionally, the hidden curriculum evolves gradually and requires considerable effort to develop and change. Its nature is characterized by a continuous cycle of creation and destruction (Andarvazh et al., 2017; Kamasak et al., 2020).

2.2 Sources of Hidden Curriculum

School Resources: The sources of the hidden curriculum can be identified in several key areas. First, the teacher plays a significant role as a major source of the hidden curriculum due to their personal, professional, and academic traits. Teachers can positively influence students by promoting values such as discipline, honesty, and punctuality, while negative behaviors, such as tardiness, absenteeism, smoking, or unconventional hairstyles, can also shape students' attitudes and actions.

Effective teaching aids that are relevant to the subject matter and appropriate for students' levels enhance the learning experience. Engaging multiple senses can improve retention and recall of information. Additionally, modern assessment methods, known as alternative evaluation, emphasize diverse approaches beyond traditional tests. These methods may include projects, portfolios, and other forms of assessment, providing a broader understanding of student learning (Basyiruddin, M., 2020).

Finally, the overall school environment is crucial in shaping the hidden curriculum, encompassing the attractiveness of the school and the conditions that facilitate effective learning. A supportive environment fosters positive interactions and encourages students to absorb valuable lessons beyond the formal curriculum (Alsubaie, 2015).

Non-School Resources: Social, cultural, political, and economic aspects contribute significantly to the hidden curriculum, particularly through the role that educators play in instilling values in the minds and hearts of young people. This influence can be observed in various forms, such as sermons, religious and cultural lectures, and the behaviors of public figures like athletes, whose lifestyles and appearances on social media often reflect certain values, including hairstyle choices and personal conduct (Giroux & Penna, 1979; Kian et al., 2020).

The distinctions between the formal curriculum and the hidden curriculum can be summarized as follows. The hidden curriculum is not intentional, while the planned or formal curriculum is a deliberate method of instruction. Students often experience a deeper and broader scope of learning through the hidden curriculum, whereas the formal curriculum tends to offer a more focused and limited perspective (Kian et al., 2020). Additionally, the effects of the hidden curriculum are disseminated more rapidly than those of the formal curriculum. While the hidden curriculum can yield both positive and negative outcomes, the formal curriculum primarily produces favorable results (Zaman et al., 2023).

2.3 The Hidden curriculum in the Educational Process

Zaman et al., (2023) indicated that the hidden curriculum plays a crucial role in the educational process, often exceeding the influence of the formal curriculum. Its significance is evident not only in the additional cognitive experiences it provides to students but also in the diverse educational experiences encompassing religious, intellectual, social, ethical, and behavioral dimensions. In the Arab world, the importance of the hidden curriculum is increasingly apparent, particularly in light of the negative effects of globalization and the challenges it presents in intellectual, economic, social, and technological realms. The pervasive influence of social media further amplifies the need to focus on the hidden curriculum within our educational institutions.

To effectively harness the potential of the hidden curriculum, it is essential to complement the formal educational efforts undertaken by entities such as the Ministry of Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Ministry has made significant strides in developing curricula that acknowledge the contemporary challenges faced by students, including the rapid obsolescence of knowledge and the convergence of distant cultures. Initiatives such as the Programs of Kindness (رفق) and E'rtiqa (ارتقاء) exemplify the Ministry's commitment to integrating the hidden curriculum with formal education. By addressing these challenges, educators can better equip students to navigate the complexities of modern society.

Moreover, the hidden curriculum addresses essential educational needs, including the development of critical and creative thinking skills, as well as the comprehension and application of modern technology for societal advancement (Lee, 2023). By fostering an environment where students feel motivated to pursue their educational goals, teachers can leverage the hidden curriculum to enhance student engagement and success. This approach not only enriches the learning experience but also prepares students to contribute meaningfully to their communities (Cubukcu, Z., 2012).

According to Alsubaie (2015), the hidden curriculum significantly and positively impacts students, highlighting its value in schools. However, it can also pose challenges for educators, particularly those who may struggle to engage with this type of curriculum effectively. Therefore, it is imperative for schools to provide training and resources that inform teachers about the importance of the hidden curriculum and equip them with the necessary skills to navigate its complexities. By raising awareness of both its positive and negative impacts, schools can create a more supportive and effective learning environment.

Incorporating the hidden curriculum into educational practices not only enriches the student experience but also aligns with broader educational goals. By recognizing its significance, educators can promote values such as empathy, collaboration, and resilience. Research

has shown that a strong hidden curriculum can enhance students' social skills and emotional intelligence, which are vital for success in both academic and personal spheres (Noddings, N., 2013). Furthermore, as the educational landscape continues to evolve, integrating the hidden curriculum will become increasingly essential to addressing the multifaceted needs of learners in a rapidly changing world (Kain, M., 2021; Smith, 2022).

2.4 The Hidden Curriculum Experiences in Learning and Teaching

Given the unpredictable nature of hidden curriculum experiences, teachers require specific resources to effectively engage with their students. School administrators should understand how the formal curriculum and hidden curriculum are interconnected. Educators and administrators must recognize the importance of providing students with ample opportunities to interact with hidden curriculum experiences. There should be a variety of learning materials available, along with the capability of both students and teachers to utilize them effectively. Monitoring both in-class and out-of-class activities is crucial to ensure that students gain diverse experiences related to the hidden curriculum.

Instructors should develop appropriate assessment instruments to evaluate the learning objectives associated with these experiences (Bandini et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2023). Measuring learning outcomes—whether from formal or hidden curriculum experiences—requires a robust evaluation process that adheres to scientific standards. Since hidden curriculum experiences are often subtle and unpredictable, teachers must possess the necessary training and experience to create effective assessment tools. These may include tests, checklists, interviews, observations, and other instruments, which should be employed at the appropriate time (Langhout et al., 2008).

Ultimately, the hidden curriculum serves as a powerful tool for shaping well-rounded individuals. By actively engaging with its potential, educators can foster a holistic educational experience that prepares students not only for academic success but also for meaningful participation in society.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The researchers employed a descriptive method to gain insights into the role of English language teachers in the hidden curriculum. This approach allowed for a comprehensive investigation into the perceptions of school principals regarding the influence of teachers on the personal development of English language learners. By utilizing a descriptive design, the researcher aimed to provide a clear understanding of how these educators contribute to shaping student character beyond the academic curriculum. The study was guided by specific research questions aimed at uncovering the perspectives of school principals on the hidden curriculum's impact. These questions focused on identifying the key roles that English language teachers play and how their interactions with students contribute to personal growth. By targeting these questions, the research sought to illuminate the ways in which the hidden curriculum operates within the context of English language instruction.

3.2 Participants

The total study population was 828 school principals from five cities in Saudi Arabia: Yanbu, Al-Baha, Ahad Rafidah, Al-Leath, and Qilwah. The research sample consisted of 168 school principals. The sample was categorized based on participants' personal variables: academic qualifications, years of experience, and gender.

Table 1. Distribution of the Research Sample According to Demographic Variables

Research Variables	Variable Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Academic Qualifications	Bachelor's	145	86.3%
	Master's	17	10.1%
	Doctorate	6	3.6%
Years of experiences	Less than 5 years	23	13.7%
	From 5 to 10 years	38	22.6%
	More than 10 years	107	63.7%
Gender	Male	98	58.3%
	Female	70	41.7%

The research sample comprised 168 school principals, with the majority held a Bachelor's degree (86.3%), followed by a Master's degree (10.1%), and a Doctorate (3.6%). In terms of professional experience, most participants had over 10 years of experience (63.7%), while 22.6% had between 5 and 10 years, and 13.7% had less than 5 years of experience. As for gender distribution, the sample comprised 98 male principals (58.3%) and 70 female principals (41.7%). This demographic diversity contributes to a well-rounded perspective on the study topic, reflecting varied professional backgrounds and experiences.

3.3 Instruments of the Study

An electronic questionnaire was designed to gather school principals' opinions on English teachers' influence on learner development across six domains: National Identity and Loyalty; Professional Commitment and Discipline; Ethical and Professional Behavior; Digital Awareness and Cyber Safety; Learning and Self-Education; and Intellectual Awareness.. The questionnaire is self-constructed and has been thoroughly tested to ensure its reliability and validity.

3.4 Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaire

3.4.1 Validity of the Questionnaire

To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, the Internal Consistency Validity method was employed by calculating the Pearson correlation coefficients between the scores of each domain and the total score of the questionnaire. The instrument was administered to a pilot sample of 23 school principals (male and female) who were not part of the main research sample. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used to assess the degree of consistency between each domain and the overall score. Table 2 presents the results obtained.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Each Dimension of the Questionnaire and the Total Score

Dimensions	Pearson Correlation	Sig.level
Domain 1: National Identity and Loyalty	0.655	0.01
Domain2: Professional Commitment and Discipline	0.679	0.01
Domain3: Ethical and Professional Behavior	0.873	0.01
Domain 4: Digital Awareness and Cyber Safety	0.907	0.01
Domain 5: Learning and Self-Education	0.923	0.01
Domain6: Intellectual and Cultural Awareness	0.850	0.01

The results presented in Table (2) indicate statistically significant and positive correlations at the 0.01 level between each domain of the questionnaire and the total score. The Pearson correlation coefficients ranged from 0.655 to 0.923, which reflects a high level of internal consistency among the questionnaire dimensions. These findings confirm that all domains are appropriately aligned with the overall construct measured by the questionnaire and contribute effectively to its internal structure. This strong consistency supports the instrument's validity and suitability for use in the main study.

3.4.2 Reliability of the Questionnaire

To verify the reliability of the research instrument, two statistical methods were employed. First, Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of items within each domain of the questionnaire. Second, the Split-Half Reliability method was applied to examine the consistency between two equivalent halves of the instrument. The resulting coefficient was then corrected using the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula to obtain a more accurate estimate of reliability. Table (3) presents the reliability coefficients for each domain as well as the overall reliability of the questionnaire.

Table 3. Reliability Coefficients of the Questionnaire

Domains Using Cronbach's Alpha and Split-Half

Domain	N	Cronbach's Alpha	Correlation Coefficient	Corrected by Spearman-Brown
Domain 1: National Identity and Loyalty	6	0.890	0.787	0.881
Domain 2: Professional Commitment and Discipline	6	0.860	0.732	0.846
Domain 3: Ethical and Professional Behavior	6	0.902	0.723	0.839
Domain 4: Digital Awareness and Cyber Safety	8	0.873	0.669	0.802
Domain 5: Learning and Self-Education	8	0.891	0.683	0.811
Domain 6: Intellectual and Cultural Awareness	6	0.833	0.779	0.876
Total Score	40	0.931	0.756	0.861

Table (3) presents the reliability coefficients of the questionnaire across its six domains and total score. The values of Cronbach's Alpha ranged from 0.833 to 0.931, indicating a high level of reliability. The overall reliability coefficient for the questionnaire was 0.931, reflecting excellent consistency. Additionally, the split-half method produced correlation values ranging from 0.669 to 0.787, and after correction using the Spearman-Brown formula, the values ranged from 0.802 to 0.881. These findings confirm that the questionnaire is reliable and suitable for application in the main research study.

4. Results

4.1 Results of the First Question

The first question states: "What is the role of the English language teacher in the hidden curriculum in shaping students' character from the perspective of school principals"?

To answer the first research question, the overall mean of the school principals' responses to the questionnaire- which addresses the role of the English language teacher in the hidden curriculum in shaping students' character from the perspective of school principals-was calculated. This was done by computing the arithmetic means of the sub-dimensions included in the questionnaire. These sub-dimensions were then ranked in descending order based on their mean values. The overall results are presented in the following table :

The following figure provides a visual representation of these results

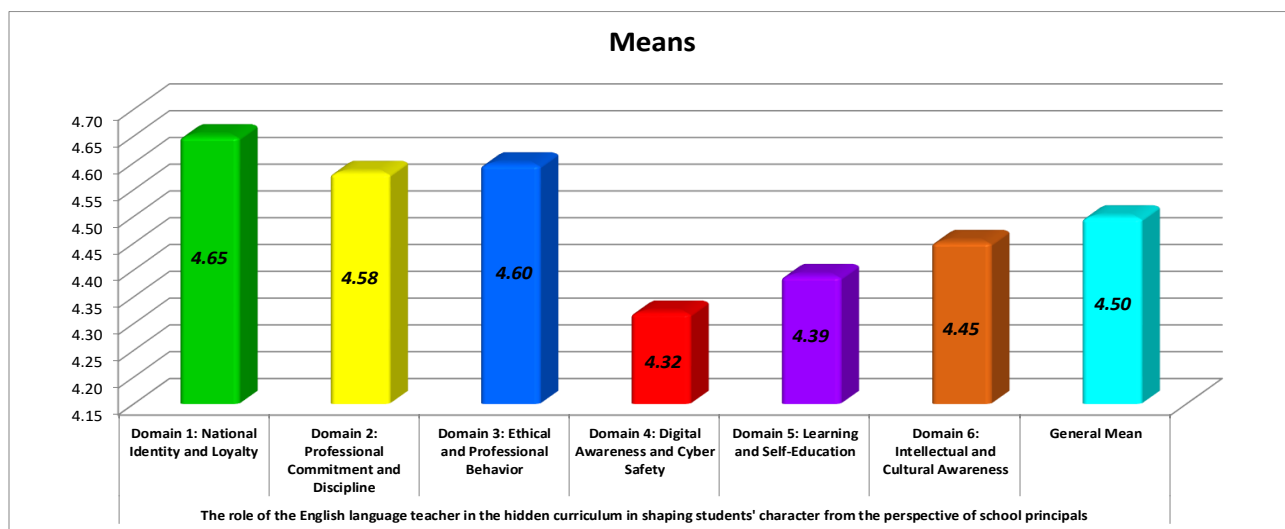


Figure 3. Arithmetic Means for "The Role of the English Language Teacher in the Hidden Curriculum in Shaping Students' Character from the Perspective of School Principals"

To present the detailed results related to each domain, frequencies, percentages, arithmetic means, standard deviations, and relative weights were calculated for the participants' responses to each statement within the domain. Additionally, the statements of each domain were ranked in descending order based on their mean scores. The results are presented as follows :

4.1.1 Results of Domain 1: National Identity and Loyalty

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of School Principals' Responses on Domain 1: National Identity and Loyalty (n = 168)

N	Statements	Ratios and frequencies	Response alternatives					Means	Standard deviations	Relative Mean	Role Level	Ranks
			Very high	High	Moderate	Low	Very low					
1	He/ She uses technology to defend the homeland.	F	134	17	17	0	0	4.70	0.6	93.9%	Very High	2
		%	79.8	10.1	10.1	0.0	0.0					
2	She/ He uses technology to express loyalty to the leadership of Saudi Arabia.	F	132	28	8	0	0	4.74	0.54	94.8%	Very High	1
		%	78.6	16.7	4.8	0.0	0.0					
3	She/ He participates in national events via electronic platforms.	F	118	32	14	4	0	4.57	0.75	91.4%	Very High	6
		%	70.2	19.0	8.3	2.4	0.0					
4	He/ She participates in national events at school.	F	127	29	8	4	0	4.66	0.68	93.2%	Very High	3
		%	75.6	17.3	4.8	2.4	0.0					
5	He/ She encourages students to celebrate the country's religious and global status.	F	120	34	14	0	0	4.63	0.63	92.6%	Very High	4
		%	71.4	20.2	8.3	0.0	0.0					
6	He/ She fosters pride in national achievements, especially technological ones (e.g. Absher).	F	118	34	16	0	0	4.61	0.66	92.1%	Very High	5
		%	70.2	20.2	9.5	0.0	0.0					
		General Mean						4.65	0.65	93.0%	Very High	

It is evident from Table (4) that the overall mean score for Domain 1: National Identity and Loyalty was (4.65), with a relative weight of (93.0%). These values indicate that English language teachers perform a very high-level role in fostering students' national identity and loyalty, from the perspective of the school principals in the sample.

The means of participants' responses for this domain ranged from (4.57) to (4.74). In terms of relative weights, the values ranged between (91.4%) and (94.8%). The highest-rated statements were statement (2): "She/He uses technology to express loyalty to the leadership of Saudi Arabia" with a mean of (4.74) and a relative weight of (94.8%), and statement (1): "He/She uses technology to defend the homeland" with a mean of (4.70) and a relative weight of (93.9%). These results indicate that English language teachers play a very high role in promoting loyalty and patriotic values, particularly through the integration of technology into classroom practices.

By contrast, the relatively lower-rated statements-though still evaluated at a very high level-were statement (4): "She/He participates in national events via electronic platforms" and statement (3): "She/He participates in national events via electronic platforms", both of which had a mean score of (4.57) and a relative weight of (91.4%). Although these statements ranked lower within the domain, they still reflect a strong level of role performance, emphasizing the importance of teachers' digital participation in national events, even if perceived as slightly less prominent compared to more direct expressions of national loyalty.

4.1.2 Results of Domain 2: Professional Commitment and Discipline

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of School Principals' Responses on Domain 2: Professional Commitment and Discipline (n = 168)

N	Statements	Kattos and frequencies	Response alternatives					Means	Standard deviations	Relative Mean	Role Level	Ranks
			Very high	High	Moderate	Low	Very low					
1	The teacher is committed to arriving early at school.	F	110	42	10	6	0	4.52	0.77	90.5%	Very High	5
		%	65.5	25.0	6.0	3.6	0.0					
2	The teacher is committed to entering classes on time.	F	123	33	10	2	0	4.65	0.65	93.0%	Very High	2
		%	73.2	19.6	6.0	1.2	0.0					
3	She/ He manages the classroom with high efficiency.	F	124	36	8	0	0	4.69	0.56	93.8%	Very High	1
		%	73.8	21.4	4.8	0.0	0.0					
4	She/ He manages time with high professionalism.	F	102	49	15	2	0	4.49	0.71	89.9%	Very High	6
		%	60.7	29.2	8.9	1.2	0.0					
5	He / She monitors students absences from the first day.	F	113	39	16	0	0	4.58	0.66	91.5%	Very High	3
		%	67.3	23.2	9.5	0.0	0.0					
6	He/ She shares the course syllabus with students from the first day.	F	108	50	6	4	0	4.56	0.68	91.2%	Very High	4
		%	64.3	29.8	3.6	2.4	0.0					
General Mean								4.58	0.67	91.6%	Very High	

It is evident from Table (5) that the overall mean score for Domain 2: Professional Commitment and Discipline was (4.58), with a relative weight of (91.6%). These values indicate that English language teachers perform a very high-level role in demonstrating professional commitment and disciplined conduct, from the perspective of the participating school principals.

The participants' responses within this domain showed mean scores ranging from 4.49 to 4.69, with relative weights ranging from 89.9% to 93.8%. The highest-rated statements were statement (3): "She/He manages the classroom with high efficiency" (M = 4.69, RW = 93.8%) and statement (2): "The teacher is committed to entering classes on time" (M = 4.65, RW = 93.0%), followed by statement (5): "He/She monitors students' absences from the first day" (M = 4.58, RW = 91.5%). These top-rated statements collectively indicate that English language teachers play a very high-level role in effective classroom management, punctuality, and active student monitoring-all of which are key aspects of professional discipline and commitment.

On the other hand, the relatively lower-rated statements-while still reflecting a very high level of role performance-included statement (6): "He/She shares the course syllabus with students from the first day" (M = 4.56, RW = 91.2%), statement (1): "The teacher is committed to arriving early at school" (M = 4.52, RW = 90.5%), and statement (4): "She/He manages time with high professionalism" (M = 4.49, RW = 89.9%). Although these statements received slightly lower ratings, they continue to demonstrate that English language teachers uphold a strong professional presence through consistent time management and early readiness, albeit with slightly less emphasis than on direct classroom practices.

4.1.3 Results of Domain 3: Ethical and Professional Behavior

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of School Principals' Responses on Domain 3: Ethical and Professional Behavior (n = 168)

N	Statements	Ratios and frequencies	Response alternatives					Means	Standard deviations	Relative Mean	Role Level	Ranks
			Very high	High	Moderate	Low	Very low					
1	A good role model in attire and appearance.	F	138	25	5	0	0	4.79	0.48	95.8%	Very High	1
		%	82.1	14.9	3.0	0.0	0.0					
2	A good role model in behavior.	F	130	36	2	0	0	4.76	0.45	95.2%	Very High	2
		%	77.4	21.4	1.2	0.0	0.0					
3	He/ She interacts positively with students.	F	107	53	6	2	0	4.58	0.62	91.5%	Very High	3
		%	63.7	31.5	3.6	1.2	0.0					
4	He/ She demonstrates his approach in dealing with students from the first day of school.	F	104	48	12	4	0	4.50	0.73	90.0%	Very High	5
		%	61.9	28.6	7.1	2.4	0.0					
5	He / She provides continuous advice and guidance to students.	F	91	60	15	2	0	4.43	0.71	88.6%	Very High	6
		%	54.2	35.7	8.9	1.2	0.0					
6	He / She raises students 'awareness about bad behaviors.	F	107	43	18	0	0	4.53	0.68	90.6%	Very High	4
		%	63.7	25.6	10.7	0.0	0.0					
General Mean								4.60	0.61	92.0%	Very High	

It is evident from Table (6) that the overall mean score for Domain 3: Ethical and Professional Behavior was (4.60), with a relative weight of (92.0%). These values indicate that English language teachers perform a very high-level role in demonstrating ethical conduct and professionalism, from the perspective of the participating school principals.

The mean scores of participants' responses for this domain ranged from 4.43 to 4.79, with relative weights between 88.6% and 95.8%. The highest-rated statements were statement (1): "A good role model in attire and appearance" (M = 4.79, RW = 95.8%) and statement (2): "A good role model in behavior" (M = 4.76, RW = 95.2%), followed by statement (3): "He/She interacts positively with students" (M = 4.58, RW = 91.5%). These top-ranked responses indicate that English language teachers play a very high-level role in setting an example for students through their professional appearance, ethical conduct, and supportive relationships-core aspects of ethical and professional responsibility.

Conversely, the statements with slightly lower-but still very high-mean scores included statement (6): "He/She raises students' awareness about bad behaviors" (M = 4.53, RW = 90.6%), statement (4): "He/She demonstrates his/her approach in dealing with students from the first day of school" (M = 4.50, RW = 90.0%), and statement (5): "He/She provides continuous advice and guidance to students" (M = 4.43, RW = 88.6%). Although these statements ranked lower within the domain, they nonetheless reflect a strong level of role performance, highlighting the teacher's active contribution to ethical guidance and behavioral awareness, albeit with slightly less emphasis compared to visible role modeling.

4.1.4 Results of Domain 4 Digital Awareness and Cyber Safety

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics of School Principals' Responses on Domain 4: Digital Awareness and Cyber Safety (n = 168)

N	Statements	Ratios and frequencies	Response alternatives					Means	Standard deviations	Relative Mean	Role Level	Ranks
			Very high	High	Moderate	Low	Very low					
1	He / She educates students about the importance of technology.	F	88	64	16	0	0	4.43	0.66	88.6%	Very High	3
		%	52.4	38.1	9.5	0.0	0.0					
2	He/ She familiarizes students with modern educational platforms.	F	62	75	27	2	2	4.15	0.82	83.0%	High	7
		%	36.9	44.6	16.1	1.2	1.2					
3	He / She promotes awareness of ethical technology use.	F	94	60	12	2	0	4.46	0.68	89.3%	Very High	2
		%	56.0	35.7	7.1	1.2	0.0					
4	He / She clarifies the penalties for technology misuse.	F	92	52	20	4	0	4.38	0.79	87.6%	Very High	4
		%	54.8	31.0	11.9	2.4	0.0					
5	He/ She informs students about different types of cybercrimes.	F	80	53	33	0	2	4.24	0.85	84.9%	Very High	6
		%	47.6	31.5	19.6	0.0	1.2					
6	He/ She encourages students not to save personal data during online purchases.	F	67	54	41	4	2	4.07	0.92	81.4%	High	8
		%	39.9	32.1	24.4	2.4	1.2					
7	He/ She warns students about suspicious links.	F	106	38	24	0	0	4.49	0.73	89.8%	Very High	1
		%	63.1	22.6	14.3	0.0	0.0					
8	He / She advises students to avoid dealing with fake accounts on social media.	F	95	42	27	2	2	4.35	0.88	86.9%	Very High	5
		%	56.5	25.0	16.1	1.2	1.2					
		General Mean						4.32	0.79	86.4%	Very High	

It is evident from Table (7) that the overall mean score for Domain 4: Digital Awareness and Cyber Safety was (4.32), with a relative weight of (86.4%). These values indicate that English language teachers perform a high-level role in promoting digital awareness and ensuring cyber safety among students, although this domain received comparatively lower ratings than the other domains in the study.

The mean scores of participants' responses for this domain ranged from 4.07 to 4.49, with relative weights ranging from 81.4% to 89.8%. The highest-rated statements were statement (7): "He/She warns students about suspicious links" (M = 4.49, RW = 89.8%), statement (3): "He/She promotes awareness of ethical technology use" (M = 4.46, RW = 89.3%), and statement (1): "He/She educates students about the importance of technology" (M = 4.43, RW = not specified). These results demonstrate that English language teachers play a high-level role in enhancing students' awareness of digital threats and promoting ethical and responsible behavior in online environments.

By contrast, the relatively lower-rated statements included statement (5): "He/She informs students about different types of cybercrimes" (M = 4.24, RW = 84.9%), statement (2): "He/She familiarizes students with modern educational platforms" (M = 4.15, RW = 83.0%), and statement (6): "He/She encourages students not to save personal data during online purchases" (M = 4.07, RW = 81.4%). While these statements still reflect a moderately high level of role performance, they suggest that English teachers' contributions to platform literacy and online privacy awareness are somewhat less emphasized than their more prominent role in fostering digital safety and ethical use of technology.

4.1.5 Results of Domain 5 Learning and Self-Education

Table 8. Descriptive Statistics of School Principals' Responses on Domain 5: Learning and Self-Education (n = 168)

N	Statements	Kanos and frequencies	Response alternatives					Means	Standard deviations	Relative Mean	Role Level	Ranks
			Very high	High	Moderate	Low	Very low					
1	He/ She follows up on students' assignments.	F	107	52	9	0	0	4.58	0.59	91.7%	Very High	1
		%	63.7	31.0	5.4	0.0	0.0					
2	He / She demonstrates academic integrity and ensures proper citation of sources.	F	92	53	21	2	0	4.40	0.75	88.0%	Very High	4
		%	54.8	31.5	12.5	1.2	0.0					
3	He / She trains students on research skills.	F	70	67	24	5	2	4.18	0.87	83.6%	High	8
		%	41.7	39.9	14.3	3.0	1.2					
4	He / She encourages his students to learn foreign languages.	F	89	59	14	6	0	4.38	0.79	87.5%	Very High	5
		%	53.0	35.1	8.3	3.6	0.0					
5	He / She promotes students towards originality and innovation, especially in the technological field.	F	79	57	30	2	0	4.27	0.79	85.4%	Very High	7
		%	47.0	33.9	17.9	1.2	0.0					
6	He / She encourages self-learning through technology.	F	99	47	20	2	0	4.45	0.75	88.9%	Very High	3
		%	58.9	28.0	11.9	1.2	0.0					
7	He/ She respect students' opinions and provides constructive feedback.	F	106	46	16	0	0	4.54	0.66	90.7%	Very High	2
		%	63.1	27.4	9.5	0.0	0.0					
8	He/ She ensures effective communication between teachers and students.	F	93	45	23	7	0	4.33	0.87	86.7%	Very High	6
		%	55.4	26.8	13.7	4.2	0.0					
General Mean								4.39	0.76	87.8%	Very High	

It is evident from Table (8) that the overall mean score for Domain 5: Learning and Self-Education was (4.39), with a relative weight of (87.8%). These values indicate that English language teachers perform a high-level role in promoting students' independent learning, self-education, and academic engagement, as perceived by school principals.

The mean scores of participants' responses in this domain ranged from 4.18 to 4.58, with relative weights ranging from 83.6% to 91.7%. The highest-rated statements were statement (1): "He/She follows up on students' assignments" (M = 4.58, RW = 91.7%), statement (7): "He/She respects students' opinions and provides constructive feedback" (M = 4.54, RW = 90.7%), and statement (6): "He/She encourages self-learning through technology" (M = 4.45, RW = 88.9%). These responses indicate that English language teachers play a high-level role in supporting students' academic development through regular follow-up, fostering autonomy, and integrating technology to enhance independent learning.

Conversely, the relatively lower-rated statements-while still reflecting a moderately high level of role performance-included statement (8): "He/She ensures effective communication between teachers and students" (M = 4.33, RW = 86.7%), statement (5): "He/She promotes students towards originality and innovation, especially in the technological field" (M = 4.27, RW = 85.4%), and statement (3): "He/She trains students on research skills" (M = 4.18, RW = 83.6%). These results suggest that while the overall commitment to encouraging self-education is evident, slightly less emphasis is placed on cultivating innovation and explicitly training students in research competencies.

4.1.6 Results of Domain 6: Intellectual and Cultural Awareness

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics of School Principals' Responses on Domain 6: Intellectual and Cultural Awareness (n = 168)

N	Statements	Ratios and frequencies	Response alternatives					Means	Standard deviations	Relative Mean	Role Level	Ranks
			Very high	High	Moderate	Low	Very low					
1	He / She encourages students to verify news before sharing it.	F	80	64	22	2	0	4.32	0.74	86.4%	Very High	5
		%	47.6	38.1	13.1	1.2	0.0					
2	He / She Warns against disseminating official documents.	F	100	43	23	2	0	4.43	0.77	88.7%	Very High	4
		%	59.5	25.6	13.7	1.2	0.0					
3	He / She warns against photographing and publishing events that harm the homeland.	F	100	53	15	0	0	4.51	0.66	90.1%	Very High	3
		%	59.5	31.5	8.9	0.0	0.0					
4	He/ She avoids discussing political matters.	F	118	31	17	2	0	4.58	0.72	91.5%	Very High	2
		%	70.2	18.5	10.1	1.2	0.0					
5	He/ She avoids sports fanaticism.	F	83	53	24	6	2	4.24	0.91	84.9%	Very High	6
		%	49.4	31.5	14.3	3.6	1.2					
6	He/ She avoids discussing sectarian or religious issues.	F	113	49	6	0	0	4.64	0.55	92.7%	Very High	1
		%	67.3	29.2	3.6	0.0	0.0					
General Mean								4.45	0.73	89.1%	Very High	

It is evident from Table (9) that the overall mean score for Domain 6: Intellectual and Cultural Awareness was (4.45), with a relative weight of (89.1%). These values indicate that English language teachers perform a very high-level role in promoting intellectual and cultural awareness, from the perspective of the school principals in the sample.

The participants' responses in this domain had mean scores ranging from 4.24 to 4.64, with relative weights between 84.9% and 92.7%. The highest-rated statements were statement (6): "He/She avoids discussing sectarian or religious issues" (M = 4.64, RW = 92.7%), statement (4): "He/She avoids discussing political matters" (M = 4.58, RW = 91.5%), and statement (3): "He/She warns against photographing and publishing events that harm the homeland" (M = 4.51, RW = 90.1%). These results indicate that English language teachers play a very high-level role in promoting national unity and intellectual responsibility by consciously avoiding sensitive topics that could lead to division or controversy in the classroom.

In contrast, the relatively lower-rated statements-though still reflecting a high level of role performance-included statement (2): "He/She warns against disseminating official documents" (M = 4.43, RW = 88.7%), statement (1): "He/She encourages students to verify news before sharing it" (M = 4.32, RW = 86.4%), and statement (5): "He/She avoids sports fanaticism" (M = 4.24, RW = 84.9%). While these statements received comparatively lower scores, they still reflect teachers' active contributions to developing students' critical thinking and cultural discernment, albeit with slightly less emphasis than on avoiding politically or religiously sensitive discussions.

4.2 Results of the Second Question

The second question states: "Do school principals' perceptions of the English teacher's role in the hidden curriculum differ according to teacher-related variables (academic qualification, years of experience, gender)?"

To answer this question, the researchers conducted a series of statistical analyses using appropriate tests based on the nature of each variable. The Kruskal-Wallis Test was employed to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in the participants' responses regarding the English teacher's role in the hidden curriculum that could be attributed to the variable of academic qualification. Additionally, the One-Way ANOVA test was used to examine the significance of differences in perceptions related to the variable of years of experience. Lastly, the Independent Samples T-Test was applied to explore whether differences in responses could be attributed to the variable of gender. The results are presented in the following section.

4.2.1 First: Results of Differences According to the Academic Qualification Variable

Table 10. Kruskal–Wallis Test Results for Differences in Principals' Perceptions Attributed to Academic Qualification

Dimensions	Academic Qualification	N	Mean Rank	df	Chi-Square	P-value	Statistical significance
Domain 1: National Identity and Loyalty	Bachelor's	145	85.51	2	4.016	0.134	non-significant
	Master's	17	88.21				
	Doctorate	6	49.67				
Domain 2: Professional Commitment and Discipline	Bachelor's	145	83.34	2	4.461	0.107	non-significant
	Master's	17	103.18				
	Doctorate	6	59.67				
Domain 3: Ethical and Professional Behavior	Bachelor's	145	84.45	2	0.604	0.739	non-significant
	Master's	17	89.35				
	Doctorate	6	71.92				
Domain 4: Digital Awareness and Cyber Safety	Bachelor's	145	84.67	2	4.507	0.105	non-significant
	Master's	17	70.74				
	Doctorate	6	119.42				
Domain 5: Learning and Self-Education	Bachelor's	145	84.53	2	0.221	0.896	non-significant
	Master's	17	87.09				
	Doctorate	6	76.33				
Domain 6: Intellectual and Cultural Awareness	Bachelor's	145	84.94	2	5.081	0.079	non-significant
	Master's	17	68.47				
	Doctorate	6	119.33				
Total	Bachelor's	145	84.99	2	0.108	0.947	non-significant
	Master's	17	81.15				
	Doctorate	6	82.25				

It is evident from Table (10) that there are no statistically significant differences in school principals' perceptions regarding the role of the English language teacher in the hidden curriculum that can be attributed to the variable of academic qualification, across all domains of the study: (National Identity and Loyalty, Professional Commitment and Discipline, Ethical and Professional Behavior, Digital Awareness and Cyber Safety, Learning and Self-Education, and Intellectual and Cultural Awareness) - as well as the total score.

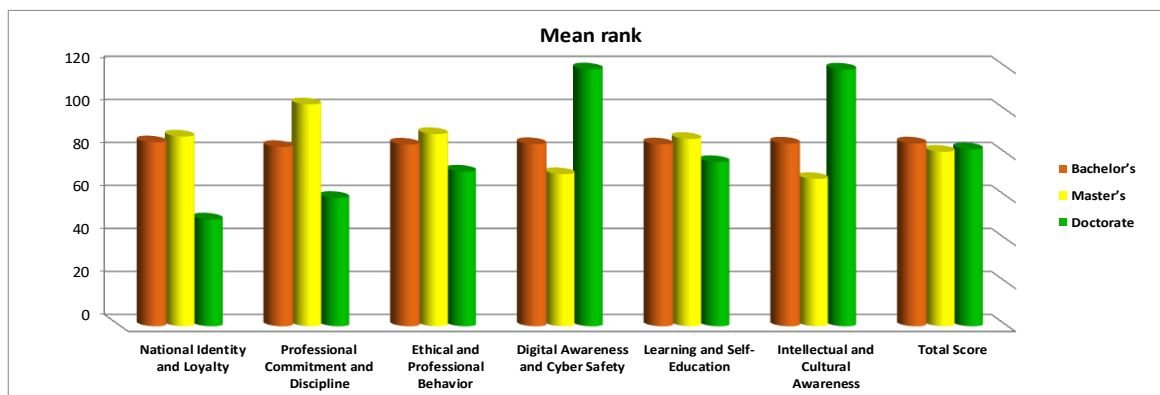


Figure 4. Illustrates the Differences in School Principals' Perceptions According to the Variable of Academic Qualification

4.2.2 Second: Results of Differences According to the Variable of Years of Experience

Table 11. One-Way ANOVA Results for Differences in School Principals' Perceptions Attributed to Years of Experience

Dimensions	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P-value	Statistical significance
Domain 1: National Identity and Loyalty	Between Groups	36.36	2	18.18	1.856	0.159	non-significant
	Within Groups	1616.11	165	9.79			
	Total	1652.48	167				
Domain 2: Professional Commitment and Discipline	Between Groups	55.40	2	27.70	2.783	0.065	non-significant
	Within Groups	1642.59	165	9.96			
	Total	1697.99	167				
Domain 3: Ethical and Professional Behavior	Between Groups	12.43	2	6.22	0.906	0.406	non-significant
	Within Groups	1132.23	165	6.86			
	Total	1144.66	167				
Domain 4: Digital Awareness and Cyber Safety	Between Groups	29.18	2	14.59	0.684	0.506	non-significant
	Within Groups	3517.97	165	21.32			

Dimensions	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P-value	Statistical significance
Domain 5: Learning and Self-Education	Total	3547.14	167				
	Between Groups	5.37	2	2.68			
	Within Groups	2794.25	165	16.93	0.159	0.854	non-significant
Domain 6: Intellectual and Cultural Awareness	Total	2799.62	167				
	Between Groups	47.57	2	23.79			
	Within Groups	1878.28	165	11.38	2.089	0.127	non-significant
Total	Total	1925.85	167				
	Between Groups	578.09	2	289.04			
	Within Groups	45458.19	165	275.50	1.049	0.353	non-significant
Total		46036.28	167				

It is evident from Table (11) that there are no statistically significant differences in school principals' perceptions regarding the role of the English language teacher in the hidden curriculum that can be attributed to the variable of years of experience, across all domains of the study : (National Identity and Loyalty, Professional Commitment and Discipline, Ethical and Professional Behavior, Digital Awareness and Cyber Safety, Learning and Self-Education, and Intellectual and Cultural Awareness) - as well as the total score.

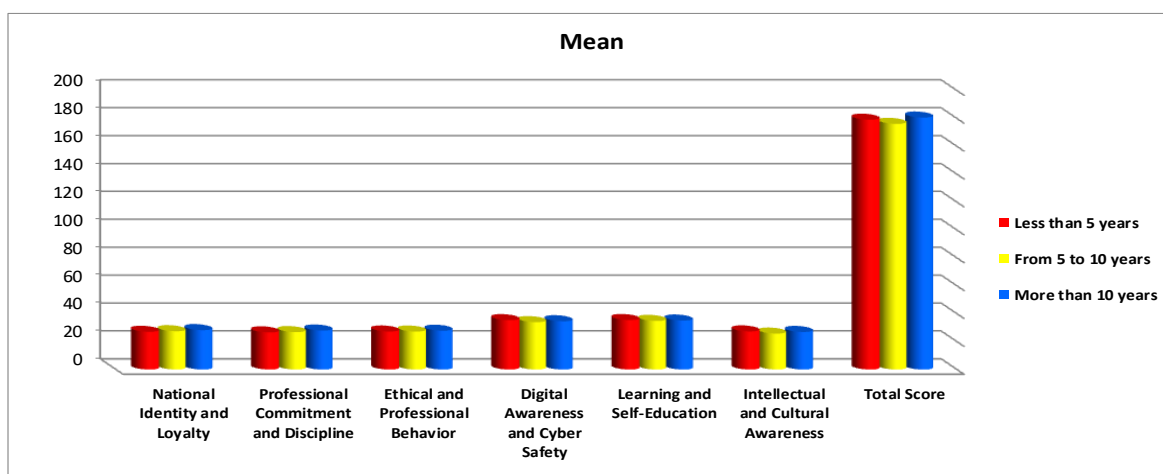


Figure 5. The Differences in School Principals' Perceptions According to the Variable of Years of Experience

4.2.3 Third: Results of Differences According to the Gender Variable

Table 12. Independent Samples T-Test Results for Differences in School Principals' Perceptions Attributed to Gender

Dimensions	Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t	P-value	Statistical significance
Domain 1: National Identity and Loyalty	Male	98	27.92	2.87	166	0.660	0.947	non-significant
	Female	70	27.89	3.52				
Domain 2: Professional Commitment and Discipline	Male	98	27.45	3.10	166	0.216	0.829	non-significant
	Female	70	27.56	3.33				
Domain 3: Ethical and Professional Behavior	Male	98	27.48	2.72	166	0.641	0.522	non-significant
	Female	70	27.74	2.48				
Domain 4: Digital Awareness and Cyber Safety	Male	98	34.22	4.85	166	1.156	0.249	non-significant
	Female	70	35.06	4.24				
Domain 5: Learning and Self-Education	Male	98	35.06	4.17	166	0.216	0.829	non-significant
	Female	70	35.20	4.02				
Domain 6: Intellectual and Cultural Awareness	Male	98	26.78	2.98	166	0.249	0.804	non-significant
	Female	70	26.64	3.93				
Total	Male	98	178.91	16.64	148.73	0.452	0.652	non-significant
	Female	70	180.09	16.65				

It is evident from Table (12) that there are no statistically significant differences in school principals' perceptions regarding the role of the English language teacher in the hidden curriculum that can be attributed to the variable of gender, across all domains of the study : (National Identity and Loyalty, Professional Commitment and Discipline, Ethical and Professional Behavior, Digital Awareness and Cyber Safety, Learning and Self-Education, and Intellectual and Cultural Awareness) - as well as the total score.

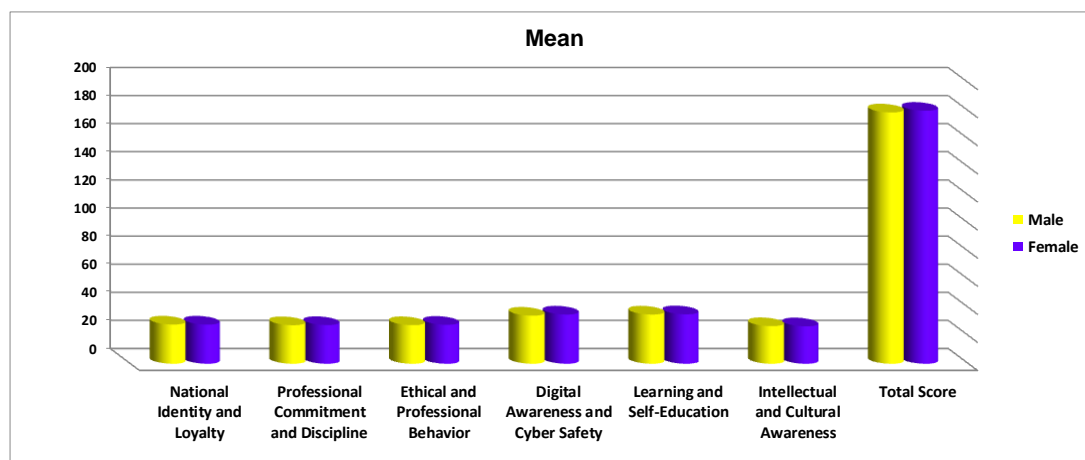


Figure 6. Illustrates the Differences in School Principals' Perceptions According to the Variable of Gender

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provide critical insights into the role of the hidden curriculum, particularly the English language teacher's influence on building learners' personalities, as perceived by school principals. Across all six domains—National Identity and Loyalty, Professional Commitment and Discipline, Ethical and Professional Behavior, Digital Awareness and Cyber Safety, Learning and Self-Education, and Intellectual and Cultural Awareness—the responses consistently indicated a very high level of perceived teacher engagement. This reinforces the belief among school principals that English teachers play significant roles beyond academic instruction, actively shaping the moral and personal development of learners.

In the first domain, English language teachers were recognized for their effectiveness in fostering national identity and loyalty, with a strong emphasis on using technology to express patriotism and celebrate national achievements. This aligns with Saudi Arabia's broader educational goals, which aim to cultivate a unified and loyal citizenry through innovative teaching methods.

The second and third domains reaffirmed that English teachers exemplify professionalism, demonstrating punctuality, effective classroom management, ethical behavior, and serving as moral exemplars. These domains underscore that the hidden curriculum is embedded in routine professional practices that model discipline and integrity for students.

The fourth and fifth domains, which focus on digital awareness and self-directed learning, received slightly lower, though still very high, ratings. While teachers are viewed as vital in promoting cyber safety and technological literacy, there is slightly less emphasis on deeper aspects like fostering innovation or research skills. This suggests a potential area for professional development to enhance teachers' engagement in cultivating 21st-century competencies more effectively.

The sixth domain, centered on intellectual and cultural awareness, also reflected strong perceptions of teacher involvement, especially in maintaining classroom neutrality on politically or religiously sensitive topics and promoting critical thinking. This restraint indicates that teachers are seen as guardians of a cohesive and respectful learning environment.

Regarding the second research question, which examined whether perceptions of the English language teacher's role varied according to academic qualifications, years of experience, or gender, no statistically significant differences were found. This indicates a broad consensus among school principals, regardless of background, reinforcing the reliability and consistency of the responses across demographic variables. The universality of these perceptions suggests a shared professional culture and common expectations for English language teachers throughout the educational landscape.

In conclusion, the study highlights the multifaceted and influential role of English language teachers in transmitting values, attitudes, and behaviors through the hidden curriculum. Their contributions extend beyond linguistic competence to encompass national allegiance, ethical conduct, digital citizenship, self-education, and intellectual discernment. These findings advocate for continued investment in English language education—not just as a tool for global communication, but as a strategic avenue for character formation and nation-building. Future research may benefit from qualitative methods to explore the specific strategies teachers employ to fulfill these roles and how students internalize these subtle yet powerful educational messages.

6. Implications and Recommendations

In light of the results, the researchers recommended several actions to enhance the role of the hidden curriculum in schools. First, it is essential for all English language teachers, principals, and English language supervisors to study and understand the characteristics of the elementary stage. This understanding ensures that these factors are considered during interactions with students, allowing educators to respond effectively to their developmental needs.

To effectively promote the hidden curriculum, English language teachers should serve as exemplary role models, embodying positive values

and behaviors that students can emulate. This sets a standard for students and reinforces the importance of character development alongside academic achievement. Encouraging students to express their opinions fosters discussions that help develop their critical thinking skills, further enhancing their engagement in the learning process.

Good preparation for English language teachers is crucial, both scientifically and culturally. This preparation can be achieved through comprehensive pre-service teacher programs and ongoing in-service training courses. Such initiatives not only raise awareness of both the positive and negative aspects of the hidden curriculum but also ensure that teachers are well-equipped to navigate its complexities and understand its impact on student learning. Because the hidden curriculum can lead to the development of unfavorable attitudes and behaviors that shape students' personalities and influence their actions both inside and outside the classroom (Ipek et al., 2019).

School leadership plays a vital role in this process by actively monitoring teachers, identifying their training needs, and facilitating periodic meetings and workshops. Establishing professional communities among teachers can foster collaboration and continuous improvement. Additionally, conducting workshops and periodic meetings within the school will help identify positive behaviors to reinforce and negative behaviors to address effectively. Pupil counseling should also be prioritized to observe and understand students' behaviors, allowing for tailored interventions that support their development.

A harmonious balance between curricula, societal demands, and educational goals is essential. Schools must ensure that their facilities and resources are adequately maintained and consistent across institutions. Furthermore, promoting positive and friendly interactions between teachers and students, as well as between teachers and parents, is critical. This collaboration helps educators gain insight into students' social and environmental contexts, enabling them to address challenges effectively. Educators and experts must differentiate between the pressures from educational administrations and the expectations of parents while also recognizing the realities of necessary educational development. The insights of elite educators should be considered when planning curricula to ensure that the hidden curriculum is effectively integrated into the overall educational framework (Koutsouris et al., 2021).

To ensure that both the formal and hidden curricula contribute positively to students' development, several strategies should be implemented. Promoting values rooted in piety and Islamic principles can help students develop a moral framework for making decisions. This enables them to critically assess the ideas and values presented in the hidden curriculum. Additionally, students should be guided to make informed choices, requiring strong willpower to navigate the complexities of the hidden curriculum. While it may be challenging to prevent exposure to negative influences, continuous supervision from trusted individuals can help mitigate adverse effects (Behmanesh et al., 2025).

Instilling a sense of moderation and guiding students to adhere to ethical paths can help them resist regressive tendencies. It is also crucial to select leaders in various sectors who exemplify middle-class values as outlined in the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet, reinforcing positive societal norms (Gazi, 2020). Educational settings must avoid promoting values that deviate from the moderation defined by religious teachings, ensuring respect for authentic cultural and religious values.

Both formal and informal educational institutions should commit to fostering national belonging and unity, recognizing that discrimination undermines social cohesion. Additionally, implementing programs that promote scientific thinking and creative problem-solving can enhance students' social reasoning skills, moving away from traditional, authoritarian educational practices (Birgili, 2016; Rossouw and Frick 2023).

Finally, through reviewing previous studies, it becomes clear that there are challenges facing English language teachers in particular and educators in general when dealing with the hidden curriculum. Therefore, the researchers suggested conducting quantitative and qualitative studies with teachers and school principals across various majors to address these challenges.

7. Limitations of ther Study

The research has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study involved a sample of 168 school principals, which may not fully represent the diverse educational contexts across Saudi Arabia. Consequently, the perspectives captured might not reflect the views of all educators in different regions or types of schools. Additionally, the qualitative methodology used, while providing in-depth insights, may limit the generalizability of findings, as the subjective nature of responses can introduce bias based on personal experiences.

Furthermore, the study primarily gathered data from school principals, potentially neglecting the voices of English language teachers and students who are directly involved in the hidden curriculum. This oversight may result in an incomplete understanding of its dynamics. The research also examined only five specific domains—National Identity, Professional Commitment, Ethical Behavior, Digital Awareness, and Intellectual Awareness—excluding other critical areas such as emotional and social development, which further limits the comprehensiveness of the findings. Moreover, the study reflects a snapshot of opinions at a specific time, meaning that changes in educational policy, social dynamics, or technological advancements could alter the relevance of the findings over time.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the critical role of the hidden curriculum in the development of English language learners, as perceived by school principals in Saudi Arabia. The findings reveal that English language teachers significantly influence students' character formation and the transmission of values, attitudes, and behaviors beyond mere linguistic competence. Despite a shared understanding among principals regarding the importance of these educators, the research highlights the need for enhanced professional development to better equip teachers in navigating the hidden curriculum effectively.

The limitations of the study, including the focus on principal perspectives and the specific domains examined, point to the necessity for further research that incorporates the voices of teachers and students. Expanding the inquiry to explore additional dimensions of the hidden curriculum could provide a more comprehensive understanding of its impact on student learning and development. Ultimately, recognizing and integrating the hidden curriculum into educational practices can lead to a more holistic approach to teaching, fostering an environment that not only promotes academic success but also prepares students to become responsible and engaged members of society.

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Authors' contributions

All authors contributed equally to the study.

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No additional data are available.

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