How to get through hard times: Principals' listening buffers teachers' stress on turnover intention and promotes organizational citizenship behavior

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Abstract
When principals listen to their teachers, they may foster an open and receptive work environment that helps teachers adapt during stressful times. Two studies examined the role of perceived principals' listening to teachers on workplace outcomes. Study 1 ($N = 218$) was conducted during the first nationwide lockdown in Israel. Study 2 ($N = 247$) was conducted during a later lockdown and controlled for social support to test the independent effects of the two distinct interpersonal experiences. Findings supported our hypothesis that principals' listening would relate to lower teacher turnover intention. In addition, in line with our hypothesis, teachers high on perceived stress generally reported higher turnover intentions. However, the detrimental effect of perceived stress was not observed when teachers evaluated their principals as good listeners. Finally, we anticipated and found that principal listening is associated with organizational citizenship behavior. Specifically, teachers were more likely to help one another when feeling listened to by their principals.

Keywords Teachers · Principals · Listening · Stress · COVID-19 · Turnover Intentions · OCB

Introduction

Even in the best of times, teaching is a demanding profession that requires emotional and cognitive resources (Simbula, 2010). The COVID-19 pandemic brought about many changes in the education system, effectively increasing demands on teachers while reducing their available resources (Daniel, 2020; Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020). Teachers were asked to adapt and re-adapt their teaching for online and masked in-person learning amidst economic and health uncertainties (Kim & Asbury, 2020). For example, when the COVID-19 pandemic began, teachers were asked to teach from their homes, although many did not possess a computer suited to their new needs or a webcam, were unfamiliar with video conferencing platforms, and received little or no technical assistance (Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020; Hebebci et al., 2020). They spent hours developing new lesson plans tailored to online teaching while maintaining daily contact with students and parents without receiving additional pay (Turner & Adame, 2020),

These changes were stressful (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Talidong & Toquero, 2020) and consequential for teachers (e.g., Kulikowski et al., 2022). According to the job demands-resource model, when psychosocial stressors at work are more substantial than the employee's resources, their turnover intention increases (Demerouti et al., 2001). During COVID-19, teachers' stress level has increased (Diliberti & Kaufman, 2020). Stress has been associated with adverse outcomes for teachers within the education context, notably including higher turnover intention (Califf & Brooks, 2020; Räsänen et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016). In practice, this process undermines the wellness of those responsible for delivering child education (i.e., the teachers) and the organization itself because turnover requires investing significant resources to recruit and train new educators and adjust to a changing workforce (Jackson, 2012).

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Principals' listening to teachers

Teachers' stress comes at a great cost to them and, when they leave, to their schools. It is, therefore, worthwhile to identify ways to mitigate the detrimental outcomes of such, often unavoidable, workplace stress. The current paper aimed to do so by examining whether feeling listened to is a consequential source of relational support in the education workplace. We tested the notion that an important resource that may help teachers cope with pandemic-induced stress is experiencing high-quality listening from their school principals.

From the speakers' perspective, listening is a multi-dimensional construct (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022; Worthington & Bodie, 2018) that includes attention, comprehension, and positive intention (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017a). Attention includes non-verbal signals, known as backchannel communication (Bavelas et al., 2000), such as head-nodding, constant eye contact (Bavelas et al., 2002), and body orientation toward the other (Bodie et al., 2014), which convey that the listener is focusing on the speaker. Comprehension refers to the degree to which the listener understands the speaker's cognitive and emotional standpoint (Imhof, 2010) and is conveyed through verbal signals such as paraphrasing (Weger et al., 2010), reflecting back the speaker's feelings (Nemec et al., 2017), and asking open-ended questions (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018). Finally, positive intention refers to the degree to which the listener promotes the needs of the speaker while avoiding a judgmental response (Rogers, 1951; Rogers & Roethlisberger, 1991/1952). The more listeners convey attention, comprehension, and positive intention, the more they signal their good listening to the speaker (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022).

In the present research, we sought to examine whether the perceived listening quality of the school principal, an influential figure for teachers in their roles (e.g., Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008), serves as a buffer against one particularly harmful consequence of work stress, namely turnover intentions and whether it can promote a desired organizational consequence—organizational citizenship behavior (hereafter, OCB). Although these links have not been studied outright, in the past, when principals listen well, they help their teachers feel supported, cared for, and more tolerant of their own negative emotions (Hanko, 2002). They are perceived as more respectful when encountering a conversation involving complaints (Robinson & Le Fevre, 2011). Moreover, teachers who perceive their principals as good listeners report higher job satisfaction (Falcione et al., 1977). Arguably, principals' listening quality promotes positive emotional change for teachers and enhances their ability to reframe negative

events at work (Berkovich & Eyal, 2018). These theorizing and nascent results suggest that principals who are perceived as good listeners promote positive outcomes for teachers at work. We focus on two important outcomes: organizational citizenship behaviors, which foster a positive work environment (Bogler & Somech, 2004; Somech & Ron, 2007), and turnover intentions, which undermine the stability of the school (Pomaki et al., 2010).

Listening and OCB

Organizational citizenship behavior (hereafter OCB) is defined as a behavior that promotes the social and psychological environment at work, which can be directed toward individuals or the organization (Williams & Anderson, 1991). OCB usually refers to an employee's nonmandatory behavior, exceeds core obligations, and is performed due to personal choice and proactive initiative (Organ, 1988). Simply put, OCB can be thought of as voluntarily helping others and the organization. OCB enhances the organization's performance and success (Williams & Anderson, 1991).

Teaching is an intensive and multifaceted profession, and it is quite difficult to provide a clear definition of the many formal tasks that teachers undertake. Therefore, it can be unclear if teachers' tasks and behaviors are part of their jobs or extend beyond their required role (e.g., Barnett, 1994). Therefore, the culture of schools is arguably distinct from most ordinary organizations because the teachers' job description is unclear regarding what constitutes mandatory behavior and OCB. Furthermore, in many circumstances, OCB is required to achieve the school's goals (Lev & Koslowsky, 2012; Zeinabadi, 2010). For example, school trips require multiple teachers to volunteer several times a year, whereas according to the job description, only the homeroom teacher is required to do so. Teachers' tendency to invest in school beyond their mandatory requirements contributes to school functioning and performance (e.g., Orr & Orphanos, 2011). Indeed, schools count on teachers going beyond the mandatory expectations and could not achieve their goals if teachers limit their contributions to only those specified in their job descriptions (Dipaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2001).

The original definitions of OCB treated it as an individual behavior of an employee (Organ, 1988; Williams & Anderson, 1991). However, later definitions expanded the construct to refer also to group behaviors or a climate of OCB that impacts the organization, which is termed Group OCB (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2007; hereafter GOCB). There is reason to believe that principals' listening would promote GOCB (OCB culture) in schools. When individuals feel listened to, they are likely to feel a greater sense of loyalty to and engagement with their colleagues and the school in general. Principals are the leaders in their schools and play

a large role in determining the school's values, norms, and organizational culture (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Therefore, they can promote helping norms, thus enhancing the cooperation between teachers (Van Dick et al., 2007). School principals can also facilitate activities in the school that increase teachers' willingness to display OCB (Somech & Ohayon, 2019). Arguably, when school principals listen well to their teachers, they set an example to other teachers that such behavior is desirable in the school. Speakers' perception of the listening they receive is the key predictor of organizational outcomes such as increased performance (Johnston & Reed, 2017), job satisfaction (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012), and reduced burnout (Itzchakov et al., 2022). This perception can occur during dyadic conversations (i.e., where only the teacher and principal converse) or during group discussions when the principal listens to what the teacher says. Listening does not include the teacher's perception of the principals' listening quality to colleagues.

This view is also supported through nascent work coming from contexts other than schools. Specifically, previous research with sports companies has related managers' listening quality to employees' OCB. For example, Lloyd et al., (2015a), conducted two field studies and found that employees' perception of their direct managers' listening quality positively correlated with employees' self-reported OCB in Study 1, r (214) = 0.34, and Study 2, r (245) = 0.31. Similarly, Kluger et al. (2021) found that employees' perceptions of their colleagues' listening quality predicted helping behaviors. Arguably, GOCB may be affected by different pathways in schools than in other organizational contexts because the culture in schools is distinct from other organizations (Thapa et al., 2013). For example, schools rely more on teachers volunteering relative to organizations in different fields. To our knowledge, previous work has not examined the association between principals' listening quality and teachers' GOCB. It is therefore important to examine whether listening plays a role in OCB culture in the school workplace.

Hypothesis 1: Principals' listening quality will be positively associated with GOCB culture during the outbreak of the COVID-19.

Listening, turnover intentions, and the moderating role of stress

We hypothesize that teachers who feel listened to and cared for are more likely to stay at their job even in a time of crisis, such as during COVID-19 lockdowns. Building from research in other work domains, good listeners facilitate high-quality connections (Stephens et al., 2012) and relational coordination at the workplace (Gittell, 2016). Relational coordination is characterized by mutual respect,

shared goals, shared knowledge, and reduced turnover intentions (Falatah & Conway, 2019). The experience of high-quality listening signals to employees that they are cared for and accepted in the organization, making them more likely to stay with the organization (Morrison, 2009).

Empirical work supports the role of listening in reducing turnover intentions. Reynolds-Kueny and Shoss (2020) found that when employees experienced good listening when sharing negative emotions, their turnover intentions were reduced. On the other hand, when employees experienced negative listener reactions—for example, responses characterized by a judgmental nature or lack of interest—their turnover intentions increased. Of importance to the present study, Lloyd et al., (2015a) found negative associations between employees' perception of their supervisors' listening quality and turnover intentions, rs = -0.66, -0.53. Yet, it is still unclear whether principals have similar effects on teachers in their schools and whether the model holds true during high-stress times, such as during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Hypothesis 2: Principals' listening quality will be negatively associated with teachers' turnover intention during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Alongside Hypothesis 2 regarding the main effects of principals' listening on turnover intention, we also anticipated a moderation effect wherein the relationship between principals' listening quality and teachers' turnover intentions would depend on teachers' stress levels at work. Specifically, the positive effects of listening have been theorized (Rogers, 1962, 1980) and empirically found to operate through the reduction of speakers' anxiety (Itzchakov et al., 2016, 2017, 2018) or, relatedly, increasing their psychological safety (Castro et al., 2018). In the context of teachers' stress, when there is little stress to reduce, feeling listened to may not influence the speakers' burnout or commitment to the workplace, both proximal precursors of turnover intention (Nagar, 2012; Pretorius, 1993). On the other hand, we speculated that principals' listening would matter more when teachers were under high levels of stress. Supporting this view, Itzchakov et al. (2017) found that high-quality listening had a larger effect on attitude change for speakers with high anxiety.

Hypothesis 3: Principals' listening quality will be negatively associated with teachers' turnover intentions and will be moderated by stress such that the effect will be stronger when the teacher's stress level is higher.[1]

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[1] Note that we do not hypothesize a moderation effect on GOCB culture because we measured teachers' evaluations of their colleagues' behavior to avoid social desirability issues. Perceptions of colleagues' behavior should not vary by the stress levels of the teacher, who rates the extent to which the principal listens.

Figure 1 presents the entire theoretical model.

Overview of the present studies

Little is known about the role of feeling listened to as a buffer of stress. However, there is reason to believe that perceiving significant others, especially managers in the workplace, genuinely listening to one would reduce the burnout associated with workplace stress and encourage OCB (prosocial behaviors) during stressful periods. Specifically, a recent longitudinal study suggests that managers who are perceived as good listeners strengthen their employees' perceived control, which consequently reduced affective job insecurity, a proxy of stress (Kriz et al., 2021). Affective job insecurity refers to distress over a potential job loss (Huang et al., 2012).

We conducted two field studies to test the research hypotheses to address this gap in our understanding and identify the potential role of perceived high-quality listening. Study 1 ($N = 218$) took place during the first nationwide lockdown in Israel. During this time, teachers of all grades were forced to move and adapt to online teaching quickly. Data collection for Study 2 took place during the third nationwide lockdown in Israel ($N = 247$). Teachers of all grades, once again, had to move from in-person to online teaching. In both studies, we examined all research hypotheses.
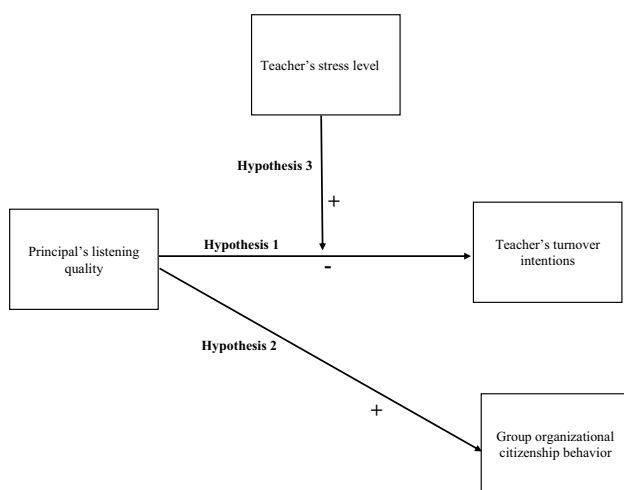
Fig. 1 Model for the effect of principals' listening behavior on teachers' organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intentions and the moderating role of stress

Study 1

Method

Participants and procedure

Participants were 221 Israeli teachers from the center of Israel (Tel-Aviv metropolitan area). The first and second authors sent a redistributable link, programmed in Qualtrics, and an invitation to participate in a study about teachers' emotions and perspectives during the pandemic. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. Out of those teachers, three were employees of kindergartens and were excluded from the data analyses (final sample size: $N = 218$, 78.5% female). The participants were teachers who taught in elementary schools (35.2%), middle schools (14.2%), and high schools (50.7%). The average age of the teachers was $M = 43.41$ years, $SD = 10.87$, and the average seniority in teaching was $M = 13.28$ years, $SD = 10.40$. The data collection took place in the central area of Israel during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the first nationwide lockdown. During this time, the teachers, for the first time, had to move most of their lessons to online platforms.

Teachers were able to observe their colleagues' OCB behaviors during the lockdowns in several ways: Phone conversations, meeting via Zoom, and other platforms for group chats, shared documents, and lesson plans in their educational cloud (e.g., Google drive, Google classroom, OneDrive). School teaching is one of the few professions in Israel that did not close or move entirely online during the lockdown. Therefore, some classes were taught in a hybrid model, and some entirely online. In addition, few meetings were held in person. Hence, teachers were able to observe the colleague's organizational citizenship behaviors during the lockdowns.

Power analysis Sensitivity analysis indicated that the smallest effect size for an interaction that this sample size can detect with a power of 80% was *Cohen's f* = 0.036, which is equivalent to $R^2_{change} = 0.001$. That is, the sample size had sufficient power to detect an interaction of a small magnitude (Faul et al., 2007).

Measures

All measures were administered in Hebrew, and ratings ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much*) on a Likert-type scale.

Principal's listening quality We assessed teachers' perceived listening quality of their principals with six items from the constructive listening behavior scale (Kluger &

Table 1 Study 1: Descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4
1. Principals' listening quality	6.56	2.27	(.97)			
2. Organizational citizenship behavior	5.80	2.17	.49**	(.94)		
3. Turnover intentions	2.88	2.22	-.27**	-.19**	(.90)	
4. Work stress	4.97	2.59	*-.12*	-.03	.32**	(.88)
5. Job security	N/A	N/A	-.03	.06	.00	.05

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$ values in italics $p < .10$; Job security was coded as 0- no tenure 1- tenure; Reliabilities in parentheses

Bouskila-Yam, 2018). Example items were, "When my principal listens to me most of the time, he or she: "Tries hard to understand what I am saying," "Listens to me attentively," and "Allows me to express myself fully" (α = 0.97).

Group organizational citizenship behavior Group organization citizenship behavior was measured with three items from the Group Organizational Citizenship scale (GOCB; Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2007). This measure captures the extent to which teachers perceive that *their colleagues* demonstrate helping behaviors. Because questions were about other people's behavior, teachers should be relatively free from social desirability concerns, which can arise when people report their own prosocial behavior (Uziel, 2010). The items were: "The teachers in my school help other teachers who have heavy workloads," "The teachers here volunteer to help other teachers even when not formally required to," and "The teachers at the school go out of their comfort zone to help other teachers" (α = 0.94).

Turnover intentions We assessed teachers' turnover intentions with three items from a validated scale (Mobley et al., 1978). The items were: "I will probably look for a different workplace next year," "I plan to leave my school at the first opportunity I will have," and "I often contemplate on leaving my current workplace" (α = 0.90).

Work stress We assessed teachers' stress levels at work with two items from the Perceived Stress Scale developed by Cohen et al. (1983). The items were: "In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and 'stressed' because of something that happened at work?" and "In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly at work?" (α = 0.88).

Job security Job security served as a control variable. The pandemic brought about financial uncertainty, which might be associated with our moderator, work stress (Kahn et al., 2006; Malik et al., 1991; Tang et al., 2001). Specifically, we asked the teachers if they had tenure, which is a proxy of job security in the education system. Out of the teachers in the sample, 72.6% had tenure.

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables in the study. As predicted, the correlation between the listening quality of the principals and organizational citizenship behavior was strong, positive, and significant, $r (216) = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$ (for updated correlational benchmarks in organizational behavior, see Bosco et al., 2015). Furthermore, as Table 2 shows, principals' listening quality was associated with group organizational citizenship behavior above and beyond job security (tenure), $\beta = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$. These results are consistent with Hypothesis 1 and suggest that as principals listening quality increases, teachers feel that their schools' OCB climate is better.

Second, as predicted, the listening quality of principals had a moderately negative and significant association with teachers' turnover intentions, $r (216) = -0.27$, $p < 0.001$.

Principals' listening quality was significantly associated with turnover intentions above and beyond stress, Listening × Stress interaction, and job security, $b = -0.17$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = 0.006$, 95%CI [-0.30, -0.05], providing support for Hypothesis 2 regarding the main effect of listening on turnover intention.

As can be seen in Table 3, the Listening × Stress interaction (with principals' listening and stress mean-centered) was also significant when turnover intentions was defined as a dependent variable, $F (1, 213) = 9.43$, $R^2_{change} = 0.04$, $b = -0.07$, $SE < 0.01$, $p = 0.002$, 95%CI [-0.12, -0.03].

Following the interaction effect between principals' listening and teachers' stress, we examined the simple slopes

Table 2 Study 1: Multiple regression: predictors of Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Variable	β	*t*		*p*	95% *CI*
Principals' listening quality	.49		8.29	< .001	[0.36, 0.58]
Job security	-.03		-0.08	= .93	[-0.21, 0.93]
	$R^2 = .25$	$F (2,215) = 34.91$		$p < .001$	

CI confidence intervals

Table 3 Study 1: Multiple regression analysis with turnover intentions as a dependent variable

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	β	t	p	β	t	p
Constant	NA	4.88	$< .001$	NA	4.09	$< .001$
Principals' listening quality	$-.23^{**}$	-3.66	$< .001$	$-.18^{**}$	-2.78	$= .006$
Work stress	$.29^{**}$	4.58	$< .001$	$.30^{**}$	4.78	$< .001$
Listening × Work stress	NA	NA	NA	$-.20^{**}$	-3.07	$= .002$
Job security	$-.02$	-0.29	$= .77$	$-.005$	$-.08$	$= .93$
Model summary						
		F_{change}		R^2	ΔR^2	p
Model 1		12.73		.15	.15	$< .001$
Model 2		9.09		.18	.03	$= .003$

Continuous variables that define the product are mean-centered. $^{**}p < .01$. Model 1: $df_1 = 3$, $df_2 = 217$, Model 2: $df_1 = 1$, $df_2 = 216$

with the recommendations by Hayes (2017) to probe the simple slopes at these percentiles to ensure that the probed points are always within the data's observed range (For example, see Goldstein et al., 2020; Holley et al., 2020; Morton et al., 2020).

The simple slope for teachers with low-stress levels (16th percentile) was not significant, $b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = 0.73$, 95% CI [-0.17, 0.24]. The simple slope for teachers with moderate levels of stress (50th percentile), was negative and significant, $b = -0.18$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = 0.005$, 95% CI [-0.30, -0.05]. The strongest simple slope was for teachers with high-stress levels (84th percentile), $b = -0.39$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-0.55, -0.23]. As shown in Fig. 2, perceived principals' listening quality was associated with a greater reduction in the turnover intention for teachers with high levels of stress than for teachers with low levels of stress. Moreover, the floodlight technique (Johnson & Neyman, 1936; Spiller et al., 2013) indicated that the interaction became significant when teachers' stress levels were higher than -0.57 SDs from the mean, 95% CI [-0.28, -0.02][2]. This result lends support to Hypothesis 3.

Auxiliary analysis

We examined Hypothesis 3 when GOCB was added as an additional control variable. As Model 2 in Table 3 shows, the Listening × Stress interaction remained significant when adding GOCB as a covariate, $\beta = -0.21$, $p = 0.001$. As in the original analysis, the association between principal's listening and teachers' turnover intentions was negative and significant for teachers with high-stress levels (84th percentile), $b = -0.33$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < 0.001$, but not for teachers with low stress levels (16th percentile), $b = 0.12$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = 0.27$.

Floodlight analysis indicated that interaction became significant when teachers' stress levels were 0.32 SDs from the mean and above (56.88th percentile), 95% CI [-0.28, -0.01]. The main effect of the principal's listening was not significant, $p = 0.11$, as well as the main effect for GOCB, $p = 0.10$ (Table 4).

Study 1 provided support for all research hypotheses. The listening quality of school principals was associated with a higher organizational citizenship behavior climate in schools and reduced turnover intentions. Notably, the teachers' stress levels moderated the relationship between listening and turnover intention. A significant decrease emerged in teachers with high perceived stress when they perceived their principals to be good listeners. On the other hand, teachers with low perceived stress did not report a significant decrease in their turnover intentions when they perceived their principals as good listeners. These findings support a view of stress as an antecedent in turnover intentions (Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2012). Specifically, listening had little or no effect on stress-related outcomes when there was no stress to reduce. This finding is consistent with previous research identifying
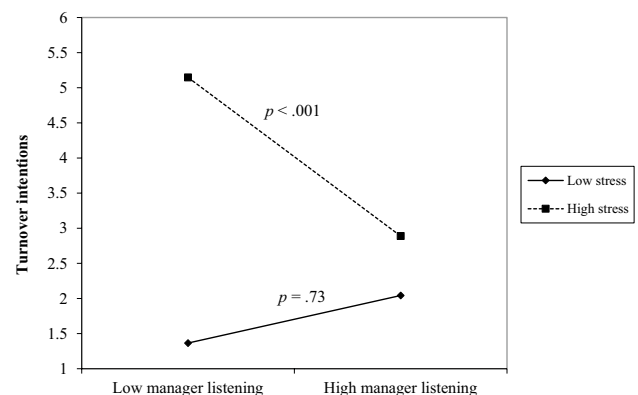
Fig. 2 Study 1: Interaction of teachers' turnover intentions by principals' listening quality and teachers' work-stress controlling for job security. Simple slopes represent ± 1 SD from the mean

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[2] This confidence interval, and all other confidence intervals which will be reported next to the floodlight analysis, represents the lowest value of stress from there the interaction became significant.

Table 4 Study 1: Multiple regression analysis with turnover intentions as a dependent variable with GOCB as an additional covariate

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	β	t	p	β	t	p
Constant	NA	7.51	<.001	NA	4.35	<.001
Principals' listening quality	–.23**	–2.98	.003	–.12	–1.59	.11
Work stress	NA	NA	NA	.30**	4.85	<.001
GOCB	–.08	–1.10	.27	–.12	–1.65	.10
Listening × Work stress	NA	NA	NA	–.21	–3.24	.001
Job security	–.002	–0.03	.98	–.005	–.08	.93
Model summary						
	F_{change}	p	R^2	ΔR^2		
Model 1	5.85	.001	.08	.08		
Model 2	16.43	<.001	.20	.12		

Continuous variables that define the product are mean-centered. **$p < .01$. Model 1: $df_1 = 3$, $df_2 = 214$, Model 2: $df_1 = 2$, $df_2 = 212$

the benefits of listening for reducing stress and its related aversive feelings such as state anxiety (Itzchakov, 2020), state social anxiety (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017b; Itzchakov et al., 2017, 2018), and negative affect (Lloyd et al., 2015b). Although the magnitude of the interaction effect size, 0.04, is small according to Cohen (1988), a 30-year review of 261 interaction effects in applied psychology and management indicates that it is in the 88.90[th] percentile (Aguinis et al., 2005).

Although our analyses with turnover intention as an outcome identified beneficial effects of principal listening to highly stressed teachers even when controlling for GOCB, Study 1 did not directly measure social support to account for its possible confounding effects on principal listening. It left an important question unanswered: Will supervisor listening still benefit teachers when controlling for the broader construct of social support? The link between teachers' stress and social support is well-established (Griffith et al., 1999), and relying on meaningful others is the most frequently used technique teachers use to cope with stress (Richards, 2012). Distinguishing listening from general social support is important because the two constructs, though conceptually and operationally distinct, are often highly correlated (Pines et al., 2002). Listening, by definition, includes social support. The reverse is not true; social support does not necessarily involve listening. Namely, listening requires a conversation between a speaker and a listener. In contrast, teachers can perceive social support without a conversation, for example, by offering a hug, helping a teacher with the burden of classwork, receiving a letter following a difficult event, or receiving a dinner when one is sick (for a review see; Weinstein et al., 2022). Thus, we cannot attribute the significance of listening by measuring perceived social support more broadly. Namely, it is impossible to infer the effects of listening by measuring global social support because it includes additional behaviors besides listening.

Study 2

The goals of Study 2 were threefold. First, we aimed to replicate the results of Study 1 during a later stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, after some adaptation to the pandemic had taken place, to test for generalizability of the effects across stressful situations. Therefore, this study occurred in northern Israel during the third nationwide lockdown, when teachers were still under high strain and uncertainty but were more familiar with new teaching methods as compared to the first lockdown.

Second, we sought to test whether the main research hypotheses were supported when the sample included only full-time teachers. Study 1 data did not measure work status. This oversight meant that we could not distinguish those teachers likely to be most affected by both principals and by the transition to online teaching (i.e., full-time teachers). In order to address these questions, we conducted Study 2 with full-time teachers.

Finally, to account for the potentially confounding role of social support, we examined if principals' listening quality influences organizational-citizenship behavior climate in schools and teachers' turnover intentions above and beyond social support.

Method

Participants and procedure

Data collection took place in northern Israel during the third nationwide lockdown. During this time, the teachers once again had to move from in-person to online teaching. We recruited 266 full-time employees who worked in educational institutions in northern Israel. Of these employees, 88.3% of the teachers had tenure. Nineteen were not schoolteachers (e.g., secretaries, custodial workers, kindergarten teachers, principals) and hence were not included

Table 5 Study 2: Descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Principals' listening quality	6.40	2.23	(.97)				
2. Organizational citizenship behavior	5.72	2.05	.51**	(.95)			
3. Turnover intentions	2.41	2.00	−.19**	.27**	(.90)		
4. Work stress	3.93	1.85	−.07	−.10	.43**	(.88)	
5. Job security	N/A	N/A	.04	−.04	.00	.05	(NA)
6. Social Support	6.65	2.13	.54**	.69**	−.26**	−.03	−0.2

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$ values in italics $p < .10$; Job security was coded as 0- no tenure 1- tenure; Reliabilities in parentheses

in the analyses (final sample size: $N = 247$) ($M_{age} = 41.71$, $SD = 10.34$, 82.1% female).

Power analysis Sensitivity analysis indicated that the smallest effect size for an interaction that such a sample size, $N = 247$, can detect with a power of 80% was *Cohen's $f = 0.032$*, equivalent to $R^2_{change} = 0.001$. As in Study 1, the sample size had sufficient power to detect a weak interaction effect (Faul et al., 2007).

Measures

All measures were administered in Hebrew and ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much*) on a Likert-type scale. We used the same measures as in study 1: $\alpha_{principals' listening} = 0.97$, $\alpha_{GOCB} = 0.95$, $\alpha_{turnover intentions} = 0.90$, $\alpha_{stress} = 0.88$.

Social support New to this study, we assessed teachers' perceived social support received from their colleagues at work as a control variable with three items from a scale developed by Zimet et al. (1988). The three items we used were: "I can share my joys and difficulties with my colleagues.", "When I have a problem, I have a colleague I can turn to for help." and "I get emotional help and support I need from my colleagues" ($\alpha = 0.94$).

Results

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables in the study. In addition, the correlation between principals' listening and GOCB controlling for social support was positive and significant, $r_{partial}$ (245) = 0.22, $p < 0.001$. Results (summarized in Table 6) were consistent with Study 1 findings. Listening was associated with GOCB when the effect size was smaller than in Study 1, when we controlled for job security, $\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.001$. The effect held after controlling for social support as well. Principals' listening quality was significantly associated with organizational citizenship behavior above and beyond social support and job security (tenure).

Supporting Hypothesis 2, the correlation between principals' listening and turnover intention was negative and significant, r (245) = -0.19, $p = 0.003$ (see Table 4). As Model 1 (Table 4) shows, similar to Study 1 principals' listening quality was associated with lower turnover intention when controlling for job security, $\beta = -0.19$, $p = 0.003$. In Model 2, where social support and the Listening × Stress were added as independent variables, the main effect of social support was significant, $\beta = -0.27$, $p < 0.001$, whereas the main effect of principal's listening was no longer significant, $\beta = 0.02$, $p = 0.97$. There was a significant interaction between Principal Listening × Stress, $\beta = -0.13$, $p = 0.027$, providing support for Hypothesis 3 (Table 7). Specifically, the simple slope for teachers with low-stress levels (16th percentile) was not significant, $b = 0.14$, $SE = 0.09$, $p = 0.15$, 95% CI [-0.05, 0.33]. The simple slope for teachers with moderate levels of stress was also not significant, $b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = 0.89$, 95% CI [-0.11, 0.13]. However, the simple slope for teachers with high-stress levels (84th percentile) was negative and marginally significant, $b = -0.14$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = 0.06$, 95% CI [-0.30, 0.00].

The floodlight technique (Johnson & Neyman, 1936; Spiller et al., 2013) indicated that the interaction became significant when the value of stress exceeded 3.39 SDs above the mean (87.04th percentile), 95% CI [-0.326, -0.004]. As shown in Fig. 3, perceived principals' listening quality was negatively associated with turnover intentions for teachers with high levels of stress to a greater extent than turnover intentions for teachers with low levels of stress. This result lends support to Hypothesis 3.

Table 6 Study 2: Multiple regression: predictors of Group Organizational Citizenship Behavior

| Variable	β	t		p	95% CI
Principals' listening quality	.19		3.58	< .001	[0.08, 0.27]
Social support	.59		10.99	< .001	[0.46, 0.67]
Job security	−.03		−0.69	= .49	[−0.75, 0.36]
	$R^2 = .50$	F (3,246) = 82.96		$p < .001$	

Table 7 Study 2: Interaction of Principals' listening and Stress on Turnover intentions controlling for Job security and Social Support

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	β	t	p	β	t	p
Constant	NA	6.72	<.001	NA	5.09	<.001
Principals' listening quality	−.19	−2.98	.003	.002	0.03	.97
Social support	NA	NA	NA	−.27**	−3.88	<.001
Work stress	NA	NA	NA	.42**	7.50	<.001
Listening × Work stress	NA	NA	NA	−.13*	−2.23	.027
Job security	−.04	−0.70	.49	−.05	−0.84	.40
	Model summary					
	F_{change}	p	R^2	ΔR^2		
Model 1	4.82	.009	.04	.04		
Model 2	23.85	<.001	.26	.22		

Continuous variables that define the product are mean-centered. $^*p<.05$, $^{**}p<.01$. Model 1: $df_1=2$, $df_2=243$, Model 2: $df_1=3$, $df_2=240$

Auxiliary analysis

As in Study 1, we tested Hypothesis 3 when adding GOCB as an additional control variable. As Model 2 in Table 8 shows, the Listening × Stress interaction remained significant when adding GOCB as a covariate, $\beta=-0.15$, $p=0.014$. Simple slope analysis indicated that, the association between principal's listening and teachers' turnover intentions was negative and marginally significant for teachers with high-stress levels (84th percentile), $b=-0.14$, $SE=0.08$, $p=0.08$, while being positive and marginally significant for teachers with low stress levels (16th percentile), $b=0.19$, $SE=0.10$, $p=0.06$. Floodlight analysis (Johnson & Neyman, 1936) indicated that the interaction became significant when teachers' stress levels exceeded 3.68 SDs above the mean (87th percentile) 95% CI [−0.35, −0.07]. The main effect of the principal's listening was not significant, $p=0.65$. The main effect of GOCB was marginally significant, $p=0.09$. Yet, the main effect of social support was significant, $p=0.02$.
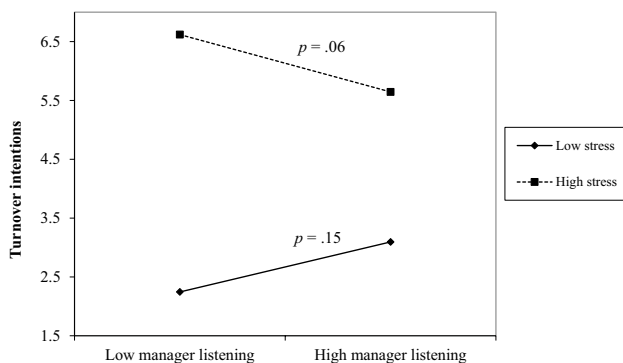

Fig. 3 Study 2: Interaction of teachers' turnover intentions by principals' listening quality and teachers' work-stress controlling for job security and social support; Simple slopes represent ± 1 *SD* from the mean

Table 8 Study 2: Interaction of Principals' listening and Stress on Turnover intentions controlling for Job security, Social Support and GOCB

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	β	t	p	β	t	p
Constant	NA	7.74	<.001	NA	5.33	<.001
Principals' listening quality	−.04	−0.47	.64	.03	0.46	.65
Social support	−.13	−1.43	.15	−.19*	−2.34	.02
GOCB	−.17!	−1.94	.05	−.14!	−1.72	.09
Work stress	NA	NA	NA	.41**	7.31	<.001
Listening × Work stress	NA	NA	NA	−.15*	−2.48	.01
Job security	−.06	−0.95	.34	−.05	−0.89	.37
	F_{change}	p	R^2	ΔR^2		
Model 1	5.87	<.001	.09	.09		
Model 2	29.29	<.001	.27	.18		

Continuous variables that define the product are mean-centered. $^!p<.10$, $^*p<.05$. ^{a} Model 1: $df_1=4$, $df_2=241$, Model 2: $df_1=2$, $df_2=239$
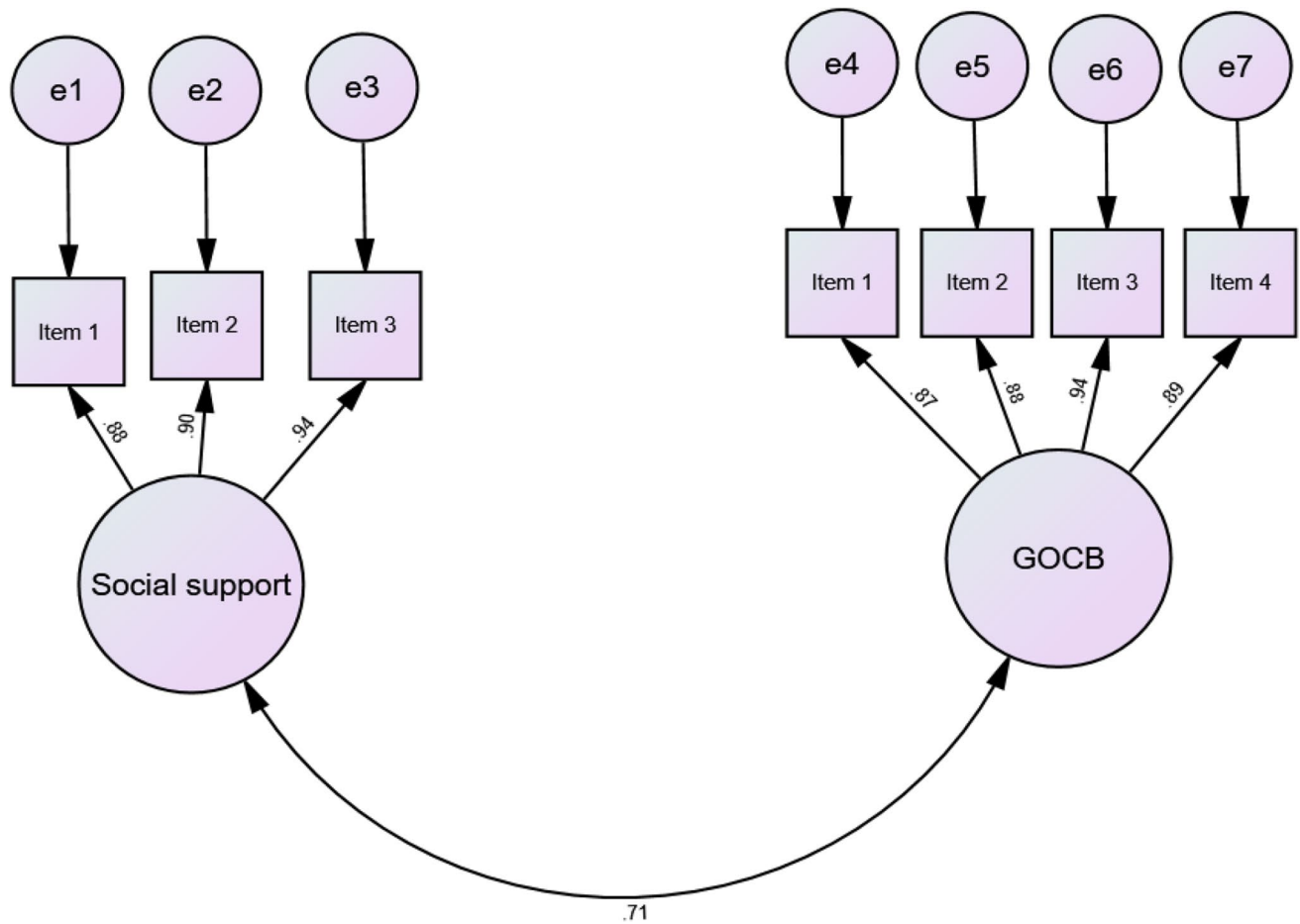
Fig. 4 Study 2: Structural model of social support and group organizational citizenship behavior (GOCB)

Convergent and discriminative validity

Because social support and GOCB are forms of helping others, we conducted convergent and discriminant validity analyses. Figure 4 presents the standardized factor loadings for each measure. The composite reliability (CR), which indicates the internal consistency of factors, was 0.93 for social support and 0.94 for GOCB, both well above the threshold of 0.70 for good reliability (Hair et al., 2010). The criterion for convergent validity is that the average variance extracted (AVE) is at least 0.50 and lower than CR. The AVEs for social support and GOCB were 0.82 and 0.80, respectively. Hence, the measures show convergent validity. The criterion for discriminant validity is that the AVE is higher than the maximum-shared squared variance (MSV) between constructs. As Fig. 3 shows, the latent correlation between social support and GOCB is 0.71; thus, MSV is $0.71^2 = 0.50$. The AVEs of social support and GOCB are greater than 0.50, indicating discriminant validity. Finally, the model fit indices indicated a good fit of the data to the model. The ratio between χ^2 and the *df* was 4.452. Hu and

Bentler (1999) recommend a value of 5 or less as a benchmark for good fit, CFI = 0.985, TLI = 0.968, *RMSEA* = 0.074.

In sum, the results of Study 2 were consistent with those of Study 1 and extended the model to a separate but still stressful workplace context: during a later pandemic stage, namely, a third nationwide lockdown. With this new sample, Hypothesis 2 concerning the relationship between principals' listening and teachers' turnover intentions was supported when controlling for job security, replicating Study 1. However, the main effect relation was no longer significant when controlling for social support. Conversely, Hypothesis 3 regarding the stress x listening moderation replicated even when accounting for social support and showed that principals' listening related to lower turnover intention for highly stressed teachers.

The study also revealed that social support might be as important as or even more critical than the listening quality of principals. The study's findings indicate that listening has a unique role in facilitating organizational-citizenship behavior above and beyond social support. The study sheds light on the unique contribution of principals' listening, above and beyond the perception of general social support, to teachers

Table 9 Demographic information for Study 1 and Study 2

	Study 1	Study 2
1. Gender	78.5% female	82.1% female
2. Age	43.41 (10.87)	41.71 (10.34)
3. Seniority	13.28 (10.40)	16.02 (10.53)
4. Tenure	72.6%	88.3%
5. School level elementary	35.2%	52%
6. School level middle school	14.2%	24.6%
7. School level high school	50.7%	14.7%
8. Homeroom teacher	N/A	59.5%

Standard deviations are in parentheses

with high-stress levels in reducing their turnover intentions during stressful times (see Table 9 for demographics data of participants across both studies).

General Discussion

Teachers face high demands, both in general and perhaps particularly so during the COVID-19 outbreak, when they have been required to redesign their work amidst economic and health uncertainties. Given the crucial role that teachers play in the lives of children, the importance of their own welfare, and the documented implications of supervisors' listening in other workplaces, this work explored the premise that listening is an important contributor to a positive climate within schools and teachers' own experiences. With this premise in mind, this study explored how schoolteachers' experiences of being listened to by their principals related to their turnover intention and OCB climate – the helping behaviors in their schools.

The results were largely in line with our three hypotheses in two field studies. Specifically, perceiving principal listening was associated with higher group organizational citizenship behavior in Study 1 and Study 2 when controlling for general social support. Moreover, teachers' perception of their principals' listening quality was associated with lower turnover intentions in both studies. Yet in Study 2, the listening-turnover relationship was no longer significant when we controlled for social support. This is perhaps because, across stress levels, social support was a more proximal influence than listening that shaped satisfaction with the workplace experience and, therefore, turnover intention.

Despite this, in both field studies, the relationship between teachers' perception of their principals' listening and their turnover intentions was moderated by work stress. Specifically, teachers who felt high levels of stress benefited more with regard to their turnover intentions when they perceived their principals to be good listeners. On the other hand, teachers who reported low stress consistently had low turnover intentions and were therefore not benefited by listening, per se. This finding is consistent with the view that turnover intention most commonly reflects burnout caused by high-demand, low-resource teaching environments (Goddard & Goddard, 2006) and links teachers' stress to their turnover intentions (Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2012; Ryan et al., 2017). Namely, perceived listening protected teachers from these increases in turnover intention under high stress. These interaction effects were evident in Study 1 and are still significant under more conservative analyses in Study 2 that controlled for social support alongside job security.

The independent effect of listening when teachers are high in stress should not be underestimated: turnover is consequential for teachers, who, when they change jobs, must pursue new economic opportunities, learn new skills when changing schools or professions, and lose familiar social contexts (Hanselman et al., 2016). Turnover is also consequential for schools, which must seek new teachers, train them, and assimilate them into the school's culture (Ingersoll, 2001). Our work suggests that principals – in their supervisory role – can promote teachers' commitment, a proxy of turnover intentions (Tett & Meyer, 1993), by listening to them. These findings align with and inform research in other organizational settings that link supervisory listening to employee commitment and turnover intention (Lloyd et al., 2015a). It suggests that supervisors at the upper management level (in this case, principals, who are responsible for teachers throughout the school) can affect employee well-being (Castro et al., 2016; Study 7).

Across the two studies, we provided the results of the interaction effects with Hayes (2017) 'pick a point' approach and the floodlight analysis. The latter provides more specific detail on the interaction effects. The results of the floodlight analysis in Study 2 indicated that when controlling for social support, stress moderates the association between teachers' perception of their principal's listening quality and turnover intentions only for teachers with relatively high stress levels (from 3.61 SD above the mean).

In addition, we found that principal listening was linked to more of a culture of (group) organizational citizenship behaviors (GOCB). Teachers' organizational citizenship behavior is directed toward pupils, the staff, and the school, contributing to the school climate (Dipaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2001). This finding is important because GOCB culture contributes to the effective education of students (Oplatka, 2006; Sockett, 1994). Although we could not test moderation by stress for these models because we assessed teachers' evaluations of their *colleagues'* GOCB, future research can develop this work by using objective, independent accounts of OCB. In this case, we would expect that when teachers feel listened to by their principal, OCB behaviors will be more in evidence in their schools, with

particular benefits of listening observed in the school during high-stress times.

The present findings are also consistent with previous work demonstrating that social support protects teachers in high-stress circumstances (Pomaki et al., 2010) and facilitates OCB (Kim et al., 2013). Principals' listening is likely a specific case of social support in that when principals listen well, they provide teachers with social support. However, social support can occur without listening. For example, a principal can provide teachers with social support by complimenting them when they feel down or providing tangible resources to help them do their job. It also bears noting that whereas social support is typically conceptualized as a multidimensional and often inherently subjective construct (Taylor, 2012), listening describes a behaviorally specific feature of teachers' interaction with their principals. This work, therefore, provides novel insights into the kinds of interaction that promote OCB culture in schools and reduce turnover intentions in teachers.

Limitations and future research

The main limitation of the current studies is that both involved a single time-point cross-sectional design. Future work using longitudinal data collection, informant reports, and experimental field studies training principles to listen more effectively will help establish causal and long-term effects of listening to teachers.

Moreover, we measured general perceived stress, but the teaching profession holds different types of stressors. For example, two types of stress that have consistently been mentioned in the literature are related to students' behavior, discipline, and workload (Chaplain, 2008; Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Future research should examine whether listening to disclosures regarding these particular stressors facilitates teachers' well-being. It may be that merely allowing teachers the opportunity to self-express their views related to these issues may benefit health and well-being and reduce turnover intention (see Pennebaker, 1997).

Another limitation is that we measured principals' listening quality through teachers' assessments. Yet, previous work has shown that the association between listening as perceived by the speaker is weakly associated with the listener's perception or a third party perspective (Bodie et al., 2014). Hence, teachers' perceptions are the preferred source when assessing the association of listening with their stress levels and behavioral intentions. However, it will be helpful to see how teachers' perceptions dovetail with those of the principals and independent observers.

Despite these limitations, this study highlighted the importance of teachers feeling listened to during the COVID-19 outbreak, when demands on teachers were higher than ever, highlighting the potential power that principals have to protect teachers' desires to leave their schools or professions by offering them a listening ear.

Because both studies were conducted during the outbreak of the COVID-19, many teachers may have shared stressors. In this case, a teacher might also benefit from observing a conversation when their principal listened well to another teacher who shared a similar stressor. The listening scale we used does not tap such experiences. However, it would be interesting to explore in a future study whether employees report lower turnover intentions and reduction in stress when they observe their manager listening to someone with similar concerns. Such a study would benefit the listening literature as, to the best of our present knowledge, no existing studies explore the effect of listening on an outside observer to a conversation.

An important point for discussion in the present work context is the source that provides social support. Listening has been theorized to be a specific social support behavior (Itzchakov & Weinstein, 2021; Weinstein et al., 2022). There are arguably potential differences when the person in a power position provides high-quality listening, such as the school principals in the present research, and when the person providing high-quality listening is a person of equal power, such as a colleague. Future studies should examine how these different listening sources (high power vs. equal power) affect the downstream effects of listening.

Furthermore, the present study suggests a practical implication for school systems—principals have scarce time. Our results hint it might be ok to focus more on the most stressed teachers because other teachers might have their stress alleviated through colleague social support.

Conclusions

Feeling listened to plays a crucial role in the work-life of teachers. Two field studies, which were conducted during a particularly stressful time for the education system, demonstrated that the principal's listening quality impacts helping behavior in their schools. Principals' listening quality was also negatively associated with teachers' turnover intentions, especially for teachers with high stress levels. We hope that the present work will open an avenue for more research on when teachers feel listened to and the effects these experiences have on teachers' work-related outcomes.

Data availability The data and code are available upon request from the corresponding author.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors have no conflict of interest.

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