

BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY

The Autonomy of High School Principals and Its
Distribution to the Teachers' Team from a Bureaucratic
Point of View

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Abstract

School autonomy is a process of decision-making, authority giving and responsibility granting, which is transferred from the top management level to the local management - the school principals. This process was designed following the educational reforms that have taken place in recent decades in Israel and around the world following the changes in the definition of the leadership, managerial and educational role of school principals, for the purpose of improving school management and efficiency in three main areas of autonomy: pedagogy, budget management and human resources. Both the schools' conduct and the quality of their efficiency are dependent on the type of bureaucracy dictated by the stakeholders, school guarantors. In Israel there are three stakeholders: The Ministry of Education, the local authorities and in some schools also the educational network (such as Ort, Amal, Tsvia, Atid). The common usage of the term "bureaucracy" is often associated with procrastination, formal procedures, autocratic superiors, alienated and indifferent employers. However, organizations of all sizes, including schools, have bureaucratic structures as they need properly planned formal procedures, and hierarchical structures to prevent chaos and promote efficiency (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001).

This study researches the autonomy of high school principals and its distribution to the school teaching staff from a bureaucratic point of view, focusing on three goals: a) examining how principals regard to the areas of school autonomy granted to them; b) examining how principals relate to the impact of school autonomy on the members of teaching staff and their conduct at schools; c) examining how principals regard their conduct with the various stakeholder (Ministry of Education, local authority, education network) in light of the schools' autonomy. All these goals are examined in the areas of school autonomy: pedagogy, budget and human resources, according to the Hoy & Sweetland's bureaucracy model (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001), both enabling bureaucracy and hindering bureaucracy, which has been expanded in the current study to hindering bureaucracy - enforcing procedures and circumventing procedures.

Twenty high school principals participated in this qualitative study, which began with a "Convenience" sample and continued with a "Snowball" sample through an extensive social network. The interviews with them were semi-structured, and the findings were analyzed according to Corbin & Strauss' qualitative research method (Corbin & Strauss, 1998), content analysis and sorting by topics and categories. In these analyzes, the areas of autonomy: pedagogy, budget management and human resources, are examined according to enabling bureaucracy and inhibiting bureaucracy that enforcement / circumvent procedures.

According to the findings, the relative flexibility areas in implementation of the procedures and guidelines of the Ministry of Education, and which gave principals greater autonomy are pedagogy and budget management. The interviews show that in recent years, efforts have been made in the Ministry of Education to promote the system and develop a culture and discourse of innovation and entrepreneurship in these areas. However, principals see the Israeli Education System as an over-centralized system caused by the Ministry of Education. In the field of pedagogy, there has been great difficulty in enforcing procedures on the issues of "exhausting regulation and filling out many forms ..." and in "directed learning in matriculation." In the area of the budget management, relative flexibility was found in the possibility of managing the supplementary budget management, the culture basket and the undesignated budget, but despite the bureaucracy that exists in these areas, the budgets transferred by the Ministry of Education are few and very limited. The area that is most problematic in terms of the flexibility of its procedures and guidelines is the area of human resources, and the issue defined as non-autonomous in this area is "teacher dismissal" due to the administrative centralization of the Ministry of Education and due to the intervention and power of teachers' organizations.

The conclusions that emerge from these findings are that school autonomy that is currently given to high school principals in Israel is selective and insufficient. The work of school principals involves a restraining bureaucracy that does not allow them to fulfill their work faithfully and at the level to which they aspire. These principals, who perform a multi-responsibility role as educational leaders, carry a great deal of responsibility for the well-being and functioning of their students and their teaching staff, expect the education system to know how to give them trust, to appreciate their work and will allow those who are interested in full autonomy in all areas: pedagogy, budget management and especially human resources, to implement this in their schools under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, which will not restrict, but encourage, these schools to advance graduates who will be ready for personal and professional life in the 21st century, and will encourage quality people to take on the role of educational leadership in schools.