

## *Original Paper*

# The Impact of Stakeholders on Schools for Improving Students' Performance: The Case of Israeli Students Performance in the PISA Test

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### **Abstract**

*This study examines the pressure employed by stakeholders on the management of schools and the insertion of reforms in the education system. The article analyzes the case-study of Israeli stakeholders' reaction to the Israeli students' performance in the PISA test. The argument of the article is that the media in Israel deals extensively with the performance of Israeli students in these tests, and the media turns into the main source that feeds Israeli parents knowledge of the test results. Consequently, pressure is employed by parents in particular on the government and schools to do all in their capacity to improve the results and to raise Israel's ranking on these international tests. As a result, the government has created a commission to reform the education system. Following the implementation of the commission's recommendations, Israel managed during the last two decades to improve the performance of Israeli students in the PISA test.*

### **Keywords**

*Stakeholders, School as an organization, Media, PISA test, Students' performance*

## **1. Introduction**

Stakeholders in a school organization could be divided into two: internal stakeholders that include teachers, principal, as well as students, and external stakeholders that include parents, activists, non-governmental agencies, local municipality and central government officials and policymakers (Odhiambo & Hii, 2012). The principal in a school including the committee of management assume a job of guaranteeing that the school creates solid interrelationship with the school external and internal stakeholders. Likewise, the principal and committee create extensive and intensive corresponding

channels with the various stakeholders and that in order to maintain transparency and meet the diverse interests of various stakeholders. Some scholars legitimize the stakeholders' activity on management that shores up the capacity to anticipate and control the outer reality of the school (Odhiambo & Hii, 2012). In this sense, the idea of board of executives associating with stakeholders would empower the school management committee and allow it to keep up teaching and foreseeing conceivable core interest from the external actors and set forth best policies for improving communication with these actors. These studies assume that through legitimate correspondence channels set up by the board of the executives it would be possible to improve cooperation among the various stakeholders (Henry, Dickey, & Areson, 1991).

## **2. Analysis**

### *2.1 Globalization and the PISA Exam*

This article investigates how school organization stakeholders working inside an intensive international testing conditions define their jobs and goals in a nation that is immersed in the forces of globalization (Feniger, Livneh, & Yogev, 2012). Globalization is defined as the free movement of information across borders, where the communication revolution makes such free movement feasible and the mushrooming of international governmental as well as non-governmental organizations made it possible. Globalization rendered state borders porous in terms of the free movement of information and cross border collaboration. Under these conditions, various non-state actors between various states can freely communicate with other each other without state mediation (Reyes & Gopinathan, 2015). Besides, this study in particular deals with how stakeholders interact, regulate complex interactions and see globalization as significantly more than a procedure, but as the ability to construct cross border alliances among these stakeholders, based on shared interests.

PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) is an international large-scale assessment which intends to assess education performance worldwide by examining the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students. PISA evaluates three main areas: reading, mathematics, and science (Zamir & Sabo, 2012). The questions that the PISA test and other international ones seek to address include: how well are young students are prepared to meet the challenges of the future? Are they able to analyze, reason, and communicate their ideas effectively? Do they have the capacity to continue learning throughout life? Parents, students, the public are those who run education systems need to know.

Education stakeholders in our era of highly interconnected globalization system are exposed to an international education context continuously find themselves amid global juncture. One of these global standards of comparing how students and schools perform is the PISA exam (Feniger et al., 2012). The main question of this article is how stakeholders cope with these global challenges that assess students, schools, cities and state performances in these international exams.

By and large, PISA intends to illuminate stakeholders, such as educators, parents, principals, and those who run the education system at the municipal as well as the national level of the status of the

education system in their state. Research shows that officials refer to PISA results when they dispatch and formulate education changes. Up to date, notwithstanding, it is unclear whether PISA is effectively advising the parents, which are the major stakeholders in each and every school. Even though parents of school students in Israel as a whole have remained not much informed about the PISA outcome, substantial portion of parents endorse PISA and international standardized tests more generally and find them as adequate tests to measure the education skills of their children. In this sense, the test turns into a tournament among states and each wants and aspires to be the “champion”. The stakeholders in this sense perceive the results of the PISA test as a genuine indicator about the future development of their country. In their view, the results point to the future ability of their country to compete in the world market against other states.

The evaluation of PISA intends to survey the degree to which junior high school students approaching the finish line of their compulsory education grade can apply information to reality and be prepared for full integration in public life. The general objective of PISA is to illuminate stakeholders in the education system about the performance of their students (Baroutsis & Lingard, 2017). PISA evaluations lay out the areas in which students are assessed. Yet, the most important thing is not mainly the individual assessment, but the performance of one school in comparison to another and the performance of one country relative to others.

### *2.2 The Media and International Test Coverage*

The international distribution of PISA results stimulates vocal local reactions that are spurred by intense media reports that calls for educational measures of reforms in order to close the gap with other countries. Undoubtedly, senior Israeli policymakers take very seriously the calls of the media for immediate reforms (Yemini & Gordon, 2017). By all means, the media plays a major task in bringing issues to light and as it bring to the fore the ramifications of the PISA results. From the media point of view, this test accurately portrays where every nation’s education framework stands in comparison to other nations. Based on the ranking of each nation, it can be recommended which are the best performing education frameworks that give solid proof about what is feasible in other countries.

Until now, not much is known about the degree in which parents are deeply knowledgeable about PISA outcomes, and how they see PISA. Researchers have investigated general discussions regarding PISA through the perspective of the media and other official reports examination of it. These sources give a valuable glance about the parents’ perception of PISA outcomes, however, the question is whether the media genuinely reflects the parents’ feelings or does it forge parents’ thoughts and feelings (Baroutsis & Lingard, 2017). News reports about PISA incorporate statements and opinions from political figures and academics, and to a less extent though from local principals, educators, students, as well as parents. In addition, researchers contend that the media is not objective, but is motivated by certain interests and its role is to exaggerate reports in order to stimulate public interest in certain issues (Stack, 2006).

Understanding parents perception and impression of PISA is significant for several reasons. PISA was initially created as an apparatus to advice policymakers, including the overall population. Along these

lines, researching parents' perceptions and awareness is one approach to survey the effects PISA. Further, parents in general endorse but also benefit from PISA. States that take part in the test fund PISA and pay for the outlays related to carrying out the PISA test in their country. Finally, information on PISA results could be viewed as a major aspect about or artificially connected to the minister's performance and the accomplishments of the ministry. In that capacity, information on PISA results may influence public opinion and activate them to take action if necessary (Yemini & Gordon, 2017). Researches have demonstrated that educated and publicly aware residents are bound to define their preferences and project their desires to policymakers, and influence the policy procedures. At times, well-informed parents are likewise prone to follow up on their consciousness and readjust their commitment to public school by picking private ones (Stack, 2006).

In comparison to their fellows in other developed countries, Israeli students were placed low in math, science, and reading-comprehension during the decade of 2010s. However, there are indications of progress across time in on all three fronts, yet to a less extent in reading (Blass, 2018). When contrasted to their fellows in all countries taking part in PISA, Israeli students were positioned in the low-middle ranks till late 2010s in all three spheres of science, math and reading (Shavit & Blank, 2012; Zamir & Sabo, 2012). Given this trend, it was expected that parents as stakeholder will have mixed feelings if not disappointment about the general accomplishment of Israeli students on the PISA test.

With the publications of the PISA 2010 results, the Israeli newspapers emphasized the low performing of students and the increasing accomplishment disparity between Israeli Jewish and Arab sectors. In fact, Israel was ranked 41 out of 65 countries in OECD education survey and then it improved its ranking to 37 in 2015 (Blass, 2018). The Education Ministry as well as the media highlighted the differences between the Arab and Jewish sectors (Hemmings, 2010). Even Though the overall atmosphere was similar in reports of the PISA 2011 results, the media also reported on the required progress in all three domains of the test. Given these relatively low performance, it is expected that parents that follow the news will be more involved in public debates and set measures of actions to be implemented in order to improve the results. Thus, stakeholders that follow the news more often are more likely to blame the low performance of 15-year-olds students in the PISA tests on the government and place Israel's overall performance toward the low end of the table. After many years of conducting the PISA test and the major coverage of the test results by the media, one can expect to find that the parents as stakeholder are well informed about the performance of Israeli students in comparison to other countries.

In reference to PISA's role in directly or indirectly stimulating stakeholder of the conditions of education and teachings in their nation, the question is whether the parents as stakeholders are aware and knowledgeable is key to assessing the effects of PISA. Parents' engagement with PISA results are mediated through the media that plays a major role in interpreting the results of the PISA test, especially in non-English speaking countries, such as Israel (Yemini & Gordon, 2017). This study analyzes the disparity in parents' knowledge views toward PISA and how misinformed parents employ

pressure on schools and policymakers to implement reforms in order to improve students' performance in the PISA test. To what extent the public is aware about students' performance on PISA? Some studies demonstrate that parents are misinformed or even unaware about the performance of their children on PISA and their response to the test results is mediated by newspapers interpretations and recommendations. Thus the pressure that stakeholders employ on policymakers is a result of media pressure and discourse.

How do parents as stakeholders conceive PISA? Overall, parents in Israel approve PISA and back Israel's participation in this international test assessment. Israelis desire for PISA to have more influence on the curriculum setting and education policy in Israel, and the bulk of parents endorse prescription, especially by international agencies that recommend implementing in order to meet the international standards set by PISA (Yemini & Addi-Raccach, 2013).

The question in this regard is To what extent there are socioeconomic variations associated with the parents' awareness of Israeli students' performance on PISA? The parents' awareness of PISA outcomes stems from reading and listening to news media outlets (Yemini & Gordon, 2017). Parents from upper middle class, who usually happen to be Ashkenazi secular Jews are more likely to report that they are well aware of how Israeli students performed on PISA. However, they also lean to underrate the performance and to suppose that it is below the average of developed countries. Additionally, parents who follow the news more are often inclined to say that they are well aware of how Israeli students performed on PISA in comparison to other countries. The trend, nevertheless, is more ambiguous. In Israel, parents who read the newspapers more often are more likely to think that Israeli students are ranked near the bottom of the PISA table. The question that remains to be deal with is how schools and the Ministry of Education are supposed to react to this type of misinformation or misinterpretation of the international tests, such as PISA?

The newspapers' dealings and interpretation of the PISA performance and their impact on the perception of parents is inevitable in every country and especially in a small country such as Israel that has the highest per capita journalists in the world (Yemini & Gordon, 2017). The media analysis of PISA rankings frequently undervalue and tarnish the country's achievement through a simplified newspapers headlines and shallow reporting by journalists (Welenski, 2019). Further, given that the PISA outcomes are circulated in various languages and setups, these reports cannot be read by the general public, given the language barrier and inability to interpret the results by ordinary parents. As such, parents must rely on journalists for simplifying the results and interpretations. Moreover, the ongoing reporting of PISA results and other international and national assessments might create a form of assessment-exhaustion of the public, where the parents are not able to recognize the meanings of the stream of outcome from various local and international media outlets. In addition to PISA, parents in Israel are exposed to the results from other international and national assessments. Results from different international assessment agencies differ due to the design of the tests and curriculum and the makeup of the countries that take part in each test. It is probable that after many years of intensive

engagement with international reports, the stakeholders—parents, students, teachers, principals and policy makers—are confused.

### *2.3 Parents' Actions*

In Israel, a large portion of the parents is not well aware about Israeli students rank on the PISA test in comparison to their counterparts in other developed countries. In case that parents compare Israel to other developed countries, then they tend to misjudge the performance of the Israeli students. In the case that the parents made the comparison of Israel to the whole model of PISA counties then the parents tend to underrate the performance of the Israeli students.

Furthermore, school discipline policies have been the theme of academic research for many years, with most of the writing looking at the discipline practices of children of low socioeconomic backgrounds. Parents tend to think that there is a link between the PISA outcome and the lack of discipline at schools and the parents tend to blame the school and its management committee for both: lack of discipline and poor outcomes in the PISA test. Some studies show that teachings at high school level does not prepare pupils to be able to be accepted to a university and pass the test and skills requirements of PISA (Bolte, 2008). Subsequently, these studies state that parents and educators' jobs ought to complement each other and create a type of division of labor among them, where parents ought to be keen on what their kids study at school and teachers should convey the knowledge to the children and discipline them. In this sense, the knowledge that is required is the one that is needed to pass the international tests, such as PISA.

Thus, the mutual empowering conditions between parents and teachers, according to scholars who examined the poor performance international tests, ought to be made in order to stimulate educators' pledge to their work. They also argue that there ought to be likewise responsibility of all stakeholders including the government that must show authentic enthusiasm for school activities. Educating curriculum ought to be recomposed so that students are urged to build up their potential and pass these internationally standardized tests that include PISA among others (Feniger et al., 2012). Some scholars state that traps to educational programs can be avoided if the government organizes instructions, prepares schools and provides welfare for educators in poor and low middle-class societies (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darenbourg, 2011). They state that instructing strategies ought to be changed in order to make them compatible with and tuned to the requirements of international standards and tests. Educators and stakeholders ought to be permitted to take a role during the setting of educational plans and policies. The substance of the educational plans ought to be explored to mirror the requirements of society that is the requirements in this case to pass the international tests.

### *2.4 Altering the Government Policy on the Allocation of Resources*

Israel takes part in various international tests, and the outcome is repeatedly met with people's disappointment. Israel has continually been one participating country with the largest achievement performing disparity between its affluent and poor students, and its overall medium marks are around international average if not below. These results are well-known and documented (Ben-David, 2010).

What is not much known is that, since 2010 Israel has managed to improve its test scores and to narrow down the score gaps among its various population segments, including secular Jews, Arabs, Bedouins, and ultraorthodox Jews. Yet, given these results, there are non-governmental agencies that operate as stakeholders and seek to influence and change the government policies on education issues. One of these agencies is the Taub Foundation, a think tank centre for policy studies in Israel (Blass, 2018).

There are several motives for the emphasis on educational performance: one fundamental and the other practical. The fundamental motive is that academic teachings are still conceived by the parents as the main goal of schools, and that academic success is mostly measured by scholastic accomplishments and performance. The practical motive is that educational performance and disparities in scores among the different social groups are extensively studied and measured, and prescribe coherent data for drawing recommendations and making assessments. This trend does not mean that people and institutions assess what is measurable and ignore what is crucial. Educational accomplishments are a main part of the ends of each and every school. One can only hope that the other issues will also be inquired to the same depth, and its recommendations implemented.

The debate about educational performance in Israel is based mainly on the results of the Meitzav test, and the outcome of international tests, such as PISA. Given the wide media coverage of these results and the pressure employed by stakeholders and the media, policy makers and schools in general then focus on identifying the source of the problem in the poor achievements, the segments that fared poorly, and prescribe the needed reforms.

Given the extensive exposure to international tests and the debate that it generates, we witness since 2014 a sharp rise the Ministry of Education's budget. This major rise is a result of the recommendation implementation of the Oaz Letmorah "Courage to Reform" agreement, the enactment of the Compulsory Education Law for the age range between 3-4, and the implementation of a number heavily-funded programs that entail diminishing the number of students in each class, applying the variation in budget standards in primary schools, and initiating activities over school breaks for students in primary education etc.

Given these developments, Israel has increased of government outlays per student in order to narrow the gap in these outlays between Israel and other developed countries. The question is whether the government has adopted this policy in order to satisfy the main school stakeholders, i.e., parents. In other words, there has been a public pressure on the government to narrow down the gap in terms of achievements between Israel and these countries and the government has implemented several measures in order to close the gap. Given these policies, it is highly probable that the average government funding per student in Israel will equalize the average outlays in other developed countries. In 2015, the government funding per student in primary education in Israel was \$8000 in comparison to \$8,600 in other developed countries (Blass, 2018). The parallel data in high school level were \$8'000 and \$10,000, respectively. In other words, given the comparison of Israel to foreign states in terms of students performance, the government of Israel had no choice but to readjust its expenditures to those

of developed countries, hoping that such measures would close the gap in the performance of Israeli students in international tests, such as PISA.

All in all, the era between 2001 and 2017 is highly important in the history of the Israeli education system with respect to teaching employees. The government created in 2003 a commission headed by Shlomo Dovrat, called the Dovrat Commission. The commission submitted its report in 2004. Based on the recommendation of the commission, the government implemented in 2007, the Ofec Hadash policy or “The New Horizon”. This policy entailed a new agreement between the government and the Israeli Teachers Union. Further, in 2011, the Oaz Letmora agreement was extended to high school teachers. The prescriptions of the Dovrat Commission affected many educational areas, yet their main impact was on altering the employment conditions and salary of teachers and, consequently reforming the composition of the teaching employees, by attracting high quality university graduates.

Given these reforms, the results in the international exams started to improve too. In all of the local and international tests, except of the reading section in the PISA test, it has been evident that Israel scored major progress in achievements. For instance, in terms of narrowing down the gap from other countries, Israel was first in the PISA test in mathematics and sciences, yet, to a less extent in reading.

### 3. Conclusion

This article shows that pressure employed by stakeholders could be effective in altering the policy of the government, the education curriculum and school management policies and even the nomination of new teachers. Although the media is not objective and it tends to underrate the performance of Israeli students in the PISA test, yet, the allocation of more resources and the attraction of better teachers have resulted in improving the performance of Israeli students in the PISA test between 2000 and 2017.

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