

# An Evaluation of the Quality of Service of the Israeli State Education System

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## Abstract

*Over the years, countries have existed in response to the sense of obligation and commitment of the citizens to the government and vice versa; otherwise chaos would rule. Moreover, the performance and strength of the nation depend on the public services. The state's responsibilities to the citizens include setting priorities to promote living standards, increasing efficiency and the level of quality of the service it provides in addition to preserving public morality [5]. A modern and democratic state should provide equal opportunities in education, health, welfare and so on. Raising the quality of service of public administration will contribute to the relationship between government and citizens. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the quality of service of the Israeli education system. This evaluation is based on the perception of the education system as a service provider, a service which relates to a large and varied population of interested parties (such as students, parents, teachers, authorities, the economy, employers, and society, present and future), a relationship that will influence those parties' quality of life and well-being in the future. Educational systems have an important role to play in determining the character and quality of human infrastructure, in all its social strata, in any country.*

## 1. Introduction

Israel is a country with limited natural resources; and its future and economic stability depend on know-how, industry and export. Therefore, reinforcement of the quality of human welfare in Israel is essential for its economic growth and survival. Improvement of the quality of service in its educational systems should provide society with solutions to some of the problems which it faces, which include socioeconomic social gaps, internal decomposition, as well as the creation and establishment of a value system. Thus, an investment in education is expected to influence a country's development in areas such as creativity, entrepreneurship and innovation [17].

The State of Israel's education system is a national governmental system, financed by taxes. In order to understand the various tendencies that influence the development of quality in this system, we reviewed the development of quality in some public governmental systems around the world as well as in Israel. In addition, for the sake of comparison, we studied the development of some parallel education systems around the world, such as those in the USA, Hong Kong, Japan, Finland and England.

The current research examines the quality of service of the education system from a public system perspective, according to the criteria of the Baldrige model - Baldrige National Quality Program (2011-2012), which defines the criteria for assessing the quality of teaching [2]. The research questions ask whether there is a written and distributed accepted definition in the system for mission, vision, goals, destinations, customer definition, process setting, the existence of a strategic plan, knowledge management procedures, evaluation and measurement.

The contribution of this study is to draw an outline and propose a model for evaluating the quality of service of the education system. This pattern will help to implement structured processes for creating improvements in the quality of service for the individual, for the society and for the State. Moreover, we will reconstruct and define key terms such as *mission*, *vision*, *effectiveness*, and *quality* in terms of education systems as well as emphasis on the importance on the concept of accountability by stakeholders in the system.

A state education system is committed to teach and educate every child from the cities, the outlying areas and the country as a whole. At the helm of a continuous developmental process of young people during the most important phase of their lives, the education system has to deal with the resistance of some of its clients [4, 15].

The system must consider the diversity of the students who are trying to play by the rules, provide education for all, create coherence despite the range of cultures and variance of capability. Support for emotional development is an essential condition for creating a productive citizen in society [8].

This learning process involves experiences and actions which sometimes lead to mistakes; the system must be flexible in order to encourage improvement [13]. Pedagogical change is a long-term process that requires various adjustments to different populations. The system needs time to change, to correct mistakes and to put into practice new and various teaching methods.

One of the major problems of the state education system in Israel stems from its connection to the political system, which defines the goals, objectives and policies of the education system. Such intervention creates difficulties in running the system. The political system is administered differently from the education system: it contains a culture of slogans and statements which influence the public consciousness. The direct relationship between the political and the educational systems often impedes the education system's ability to change and learn; moreover, it frequently prevents it.

The state education system, like other public services in Israel, must continually adapt itself to the changes in society's needs, as well as operate among trends and significant changes in the political and economic sphere [11]. Economic trends and changes demand that the individual, in many cases, bypass the limitations of public funding by using private funding as an alternative supplier, if necessary. Stakeholder pressures (such as local authorities, parents, principals, and others) in the system are gaining strength and attempting to prevent the separation of the personal interests from political interests.

Quality recognition is universal and absolute; it refers to uncompromising standards and high achievement. In order to create quality in an organization, the organization must identify and define the product it provides to its clients so that it will meet the clients' needs, expectations and qualifications [14]. Defining customer service needs is more complex than defining a product; its quality and organizational responsibility is to understand the needs of all types of customers. The education system's clients are the business community, the present and future society, students, families, teachers and principals.

## 2. The Development of the Israeli State Educational System

The power of the Israeli education system and its operational capacity are derived from its legal infrastructure, its legislation, which regulates the logic of the system, the principles and the rationale behind its function. In 1949 the Mandatory Education Act was enacted, a law which determines that the state is responsible for providing free and compulsory education to every child from age five to seventeen. Parents must send their children to

educational institutions which aim to provide equal opportunities for education, without discrimination based on ethnic and economic background [18].

In 1953 the Law of State Education was passed; it aimed to abolish the different movements in the system (ideological-partisan). The law defines what "state education" is: an education that is provided by the State in accordance with a curriculum, without affiliation, ethnic or other, to any organization other than the government, and must be supervised by the Minister or a person authorized by him. In addition, the law defines the goals of State Education: "To establish in primary education, the values of Israeli culture and its achievements in science, to establish patriotism and loyalty to the state and to the people of Israel, to trust in agriculture and labour, striving to create a society based on freedom, equality, tolerance, mutual help, and the love of humanity". In 2000, changes and revision were made in the goals of the system. Moreover, a law dealing with pupils' rights was passed; the law sets out the principles of confidentiality, the prohibition of discrimination, of the use of degrading physical discipline, of expelling a pupil from educational institutions without providing an opportunity for the student and his or her parents to dispute their case, and the right to matriculation exams. Over the years, additional laws have been enacted [18].

The development of the education policy took place in three phases: first, the policy of equality inputs (the allotment of material and pedagogical resources in an equitable manner). The second phase, the development of the integration policy, was a response to resentment concerning ethnic discrimination in the field of education. The third phase evolved in the 1980s and was characterized by the privatization and decentralization processes which emphasized the concepts of "self-management", "excellence" and "academic achievement", modified and adjusted to the business world, rather than the world of education. These phases have increased the development of gaps and inequality in scholastic and educational institutions. The accepted valuation index now includes matriculation and dropout percentages. The rise in the matriculation certificate index indicates neither the qualifications of the certificate holders nor the level of the quality of education [10].

As a result, the system found itself dealing with failing students, poor academic achievements, and with facilitating the transition from grade to grade. Thus, students learned that there is no connection between the learning culture and academic achievement. Furthermore, they began to realize that, in any case, they would finish high school and graduate [1].

### 3. The Structure of the Education System

The system is divided into four main operating levels: the Executive Offices of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Education districts (seven in number), the local authorities and the schools. The education system includes formal education and informal education, which is also called "supplementary education" or "extra-curricular activities". Informal education is composed of educational programmes for children and teenagers outside the school curriculum (youth movements, for example) as part of their overall education in order to encourage or implement social values for the sake of the community [16].

The framework of informal education is based on community interests and is meant to serve all social levels and ages. The principles of informal education are different from those of formal education in order to facilitate the interaction between institutional interests and personal/social interests. Moreover, informal education is meant to achieve goals that cannot be achieved by the formal system. The main goal in creating a non-formal system is to achieve a pleasant educational environment and answer the needs of society.

The structure of the formal educational system can also be displayed by dividing it into four main sections: a division according to age, a division according to the legal status of the institution, a division according to the type of inspection and a division according to the religious sector to which it is affiliated [18].

There are four main educational stages where the system is divided by age: ages 3-5 represent pre-primary education; ages 6-11 belong to primary education; ages 12-17 include secondary education and over 18 relates to academic studies.

The legal status of an institution is divided into three types: formal educational institutions, unofficially recognized educational institutions, and those defined as exempt institutions. Formal educational institutions are any educational institutions that are owned by the state or the local authorities, supervised by the state and whose teachers are state employees. Unofficial recognized education refers to any educational institution that is not owned by the state, but is under its supervision umbrella. Exempt institutions are those educational institutions, usually religious orthodox in nature, not under state control.

Division according to the type of inspection: state inspection, state-religious inspection or "other" inspection. State inspection applies to the non-religious institutions in different sectors; state-religious inspection applies to Jewish educational institutions (Zionist-religious); "other" inspection includes the ultra-orthodox unofficial educational institutions.

The last way to divide the system is by the type of religious sector to which it is affiliated: Jewish or non-Jewish.

A total of 2,131,521 children study in the system as a whole (2015).

### 4. Key Concept Definitions

Over the years, educational systems worldwide have become aware of the needs of improving processes and recognizing the fact that they provide a service to the citizens of the country. This recognition required the state education system to adopt world standards; some were more successful and others less so. One of the problems in implementing quality systems in education is the adoption of quality models from industry and commerce [6].

An essential requirement of establishing quality systems is to create clear communication between all those involved, leading to understanding and approbation of the definitions of key concepts such as education; teaching; excellence; effectiveness; accountability; customers and quality of education.

**Education** includes all the processes which a person needs in order to develop skills, attitudes, and behaviours of positive values to the community [19]. In addition, education is a social process given to people, and supervised, developed and impacted by the existing national environment. The term, "education" comes from two Latin roots: "e" meaning out and "ducere" to lead, direct or to bring. Education means to bring out or to direct the student's knowledge or personality. Education is development and growth, primary objective of the process is to design the "human shape" in order to achieve accomplishment [19].

**Teaching** provides knowledge; the source of most knowledge is based on books [9]. Teaching is to tutor someone; it can exist only when one learns something new through the mediation of the other. The core of teaching aims at giving the student knowledge, concepts and skills [3].

**Excellence** is a high achievement of human activity in a specific field. Most basic talents leading to excellence are related to intelligence (IQ); moreover excellence emphasizes the desire to surpass, rather than to be like everyone else [22]. Excellence is a competitive situation in which an individual or a group is superior to others based on defined relative criteria; therefore it is not absolute.

**Effectiveness** is producing a product as it should or needs to be, producing a desired or intended result. Since the 1960s, education systems in the West have been dealing with the issue of the "products" of schools [12]. As a result, supervision in school systems began to use terms such as: outcomes, outputs, inputs, efficiency and the effectiveness of schools. Effectiveness refers to the

level of implementation of the process according to its intended purpose. The determination of effectiveness requires assessment of the needs and the evaluation of process outputs [2].

**Accountability** is the obligation of a school to report on its actions, achievements and level of activities, to set goals, to determine priorities and report on themes [20]. The use of this concept in the education field is to define the need of an individual/group in a specific outcome or output context. The expectation is that the duty of a school to report will apply not only to the context of student achievements, but also to the context of the needs of the society. Eventually, the expectation is that accountability will increase the efficiency of schools as it relates to the external factors such as parents, the Ministry of Education, local authorities and others.

**Customers** is the general name for the organization's stakeholders. An organization must know what the type of product it provides is, and who its customers are, their needs, their expectations and qualifications. An organization will have the right to sustainability only if it determines its customers' expectations and provides them with the service they need [14]. Customer service in the education system requires from schools to define the final product and its quality. Customers of the education system are: the business community, the society, the student, the family, teachers and principals.

## 5. Mission, Vision and Goals of the System

In May, 2009, the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute (VLJI) held an International Conference of Educational CEOs entitled: "From Vision and Policy to Performance", one of the most significant educational events in Israel, to understand the success and failure of educational reforms. During this conference, the Israeli General Director of the Ministry of Education, Dr. Shimshon Shoshani, admitted that "the Israeli educational system has no vision and is required to operate in a deeply divided society, a fact that hinders the implementation of vision". Moreover, he claimed that a "consensus cannot be reached; every political minister comes with a different educational ideology; there are different group interests with different understandings of the role of the system. In this condition we cannot apply any vision". This statement was made despite the fact that in 2004, the General Director of the Educational Ministry (Ronit Tirosh) published a booklet that summarized the prior three years of work, entitled: "The Educational Vision".

**Vision** is a declaration relating to the organization's desired future. The vision describes the organization's path and profile, and includes the future intentions and goals. Vision is a set of contexts, strategic objectives and programmes for action; it is short, focused, clear and inspiring [2].

A visionary organization is one that knows how to lead its people, the employees, towards the goals.

**Mission** is a term which refers to the overall role of the organization and answers the questions: "Why are we in this business?" or "What role does the organization fulfill?". Mission in the educational system defines the students, the stakeholders, the market requirements, the product and the customers. Furthermore, mission could serve as a guideline for the development of a strategy and decisions, define the uniqueness of the organization or the organization's core of skills[2,6].

**Goals:** Goals are the organization's intentions and targets to reach objectives that are related to the organization's vision. The main role of goals is to encourage the employees and to lead them to fulfill the determined organizational values. Goals are usually written in a manner which is broad, comprehensive and long-term.

In the Israeli educational system there are various definitions for the terms, *mission* and *vision*, which are not agreed upon by all partners. These different definitions have been written by ministers or CEOs and distributed at conferences or as a variety of documents. In many schools we can find the school's vision, written by the teaching staff, the students and their parents and are publicized in the school.

The Israeli Educational System also defines its goals; these are also modified and updated from time to time. Moreover, defined goals can also be found in the budget proposal of the Ministry of Educational. An overview of the mechanism in this situation raises the problem that develops: there is no consensus among the people defining these objectives and thus there are different definitions, even contradictions regarding the purposes of the system. Hence, the general conclusion is that there is a disagreement over the interpretation of key concepts throughout the educational system, a disagreement that is deeply rooted. Concepts in the context of mission, vision and goals are not structured, or clearly and uniformly defined among all concerned in the system. It is important that the goals be determined by the educational system national leadership; these targets should stem from long-term goals, the vision and mission.

## 6. Method

Literature in this field deals with the development stages and changes experienced by the education system between 1949 and 2013, describing the structure of the system and its division into different

sections, presenting its various departments and its currently accepted performance measurements. In addition, we have defined key concepts in this research, which we consider to be important to the quality process analysis in the organization. We differentiated between "teaching" and "educating", we defined "quality" and examined why "accountability" is a significant norm in the system.

We gathered the data based on interviews with position holders (ministers, general directors, academicians, office department managers, district directors, office advisors, authority managers, school principals, teachers and other functionaries), and used documented data from the system, including professional literature, the minutes of various committees, Ministry of Education committees as well as those from outside and more.

To gather data for the processing of the statistics we used a questionnaire that measured the variables of quality of service as they appear in the criteria of the Baldrige model, "Baldrige National Quality Program" (2011-2012): vision, leadership, strategy, culture, manpower, clients' needs and organizational learning. Teachers from thirty secular state schools from the Haifa District participated in the research and answered the questionnaire.

We chose to focus on the Haifa District of the Ministry of Education. The district contains fifty-seven state schools which are relevant to this study; only thirty schools agreed to cooperate (52%). The teachers' questionnaire examines the quality of service variables, including school results. A total of 380 teachers from thirty schools participated in the research. Satisfaction surveys and opinion polls taken among citizens, relating to the public services can be found at the Central Bureau of Statistics - CBS. The purpose of these surveys is to study public opinion in relation to the central governmental administration systems.

In the first stage we conducted a pilot study in two schools; thirty questionnaires were collected. The questionnaires were coded into a database in order to run reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha SPSS software, Cronbach's Alpha  $\alpha=0.93$ .  $r_{wg}$  index represents the level of group identification; the index compares the different responses of individuals in the study groups with respect to a specific variable (Cohen, Doherty, Eick, 2001). The calculation formula relates to the number of options in each response in the questionnaire (1-5)  $r_{wg}=0.79$ . Moreover, we confirmed our results of analysis using HLM software for ICC index (Hierarchical Linear and Nonlinear Modeling), which was found to be ICC=0.473. These ICC results stem from three variables: the labour force  $p<0.013$ ; customer focus  $p<0.012$  and organizational learning  $p<0.005$ . The meaning of these results is that 47.3% of the variance can be explained by the variable due to the between groups variance, and 52.7% are due to the in group variance.

References that deal with measuring the "organizational culture" variable in schools were based on an extensive literature review of the previous studies, showing that "organizational culture" has a significantly high impact on the quality of service that the organization provides. In the current study, we also considered the results of the "school climate" questionnaire, an indicator measuring the "organizational culture" in schools that is used by the Ministry of Education.

In addition, to report on the quality of service, the student's parents in each school were given a parental satisfaction questionnaire which we had developed. This questionnaire consists of fourteen statements, i.e. nine statements related to the goals of the Ministry of Education, and five statements taken from the SERVQUAL questionnaire – the quality of service model. We met the parents after the school day. Most of the parents were thrilled to cooperate in the survey and willingly responded. We succeeded in collecting 205 questionnaires referring to twenty schools from the list.

Regarding the reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) of the Parents' Satisfaction Questionnaires ( $n=205$ ), we found Cronbach's Alpha for fourteen of the statements from the Ministry of Education goals was  $\alpha=0.880$  and Cronbach's Alpha for nine of the statements taken from the Servqual model were found to be  $\alpha=0.846$ . The overall Cronbach's Alpha of the Parents Satisfaction Questionnaire was found to be  $\alpha=0.924$ .

## 7. Findings

One of the most important procedures in an organization is the establishment of a policy as a result of decisions based on principles and priorities [21]. The consequences of the lack of organizational policy is the development of a "partial policy", struggles for power and prestige, deficient and inefficient performances, the wasting of resources and other damage [13,21]. Our findings indicate that the Ministry of Education has no defined and clear policy. Interviewees also led us to the conclusion that there is a need for a clear policy regarding students' obligations.

Israel's education system contains many changes, some of which are the result of political situations (as we heard from various interviewees), and some of which stem from the opinion that the new situation is always better than the current one. Often, when there are changes as a result of necessity, these changes are interrupted due to political interest or resistance, caused by fear. Experience shows that the nature of reforms and changes is that, first of all, they always have an impact; the change itself creates interest and leads to improvement. In most cases, the problems in implementing reforms are due to political intervention. According to one of the former

education ministers: "Everything that I instituted was cancelled and the opposite was done by the next minister; each minister makes his mark by erasing the actions of his predecessor. The previous ministry reforms were cancelled because the new minister wanted to have them credited to him." In addition, he claims that "If the system had taken care of small and continuous changes, it would not have reached the point where there was a need for sweeping reforms to the system as a whole".

Analysis of our findings regarding the Ministry of Education shows that there are no written, known and accepted mission statements and vision. This means that the education system has made no declaration regarding the desired future, the path it chooses to follow, its future intentions and the manner in which its goals are to be realized. Strategic destinations and lines of action are derivatives of vision; its lack of existence explains why we were unable to find a clear definition of effective results or an agreement regarding evaluation measurements of the performance of the national education system in Israel.

The Ministry of Education has no department that manages existing data in the system that is responsible for organizational learning and for constructing a perennial strategic programme.

We discovered that, in most cases, the minister and the general-director, who are frequently being replaced, cancel previous programmes and determine new moves that are based on personal interests. We also discovered that the system has no clear policy, no internal communication and no stable leadership. We can therefore say that it "moves along, but is not being steered along".

Our conclusion regarding the work of the Ministry of Education is that as a primary and basic condition for the creation of a quality education system, there is a need to think and to define the mission, vision and main goals of the education system, while separating the ministry's operational layer and its branches, from the professional scientific educational-pedagogical layer. Change is therefore required in the organizational structure of the system, mainly the fortification of the professional-scientific layer, so that it will lead to an appropriate response to the formation of the image and function. In addition, we see meaningful budgetary and operational needs to reduce the duplicate functions that exist within the areas of the Ministry of Education and the local authorities. We believe it is necessary to choose goals and measurements suitable to the missions and goals of the Israeli education system, which will mirror the level of effectiveness of the services it is meant to provide.

Despite our findings relating to the Ministry of Education, individual school procedures present a totally different picture.

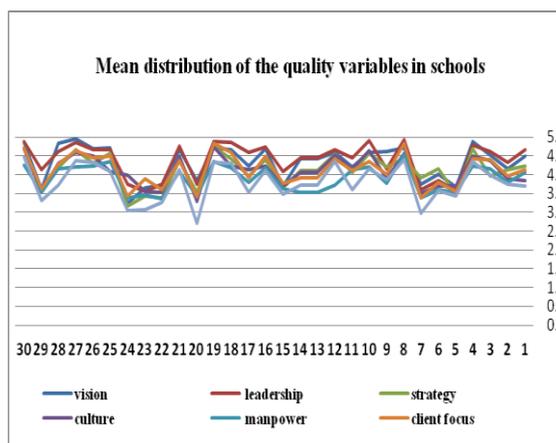


Figure 1. Mean distribution of the quality variables in schools

In all the schools that participated in the research, the seven criteria of quality service were found to be higher than those of the Ministry of Education. The negative image of the public organizations was discovered to be wrong vis-a-vis schools, which showed better performances of quality service than those of the Ministry of Education itself (see Figure 1).

The observations that we conducted showed that the schools in the study are being run according to methodical procedures, with regular weekly meetings, including determining the school's vision, and having a dialogue with the parents. Moreover, findings show that there is a clear tendency among the variables (Pearson showed strong relationships between all variables); thus it can be deduced that whenever one of the variables in the school is high, the other variables will also be high, and vice versa.

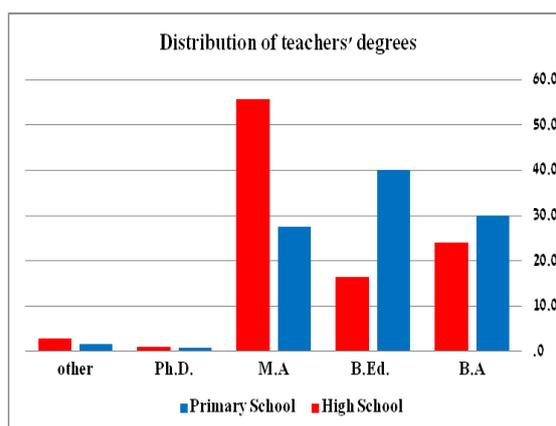


Figure 2. Distribution of teachers' degrees

The additional data we collected showed the differences, known to exist, in the education system, dealing with the degrees held by teachers in primary schools compared to those held by teachers in high schools. 40% of the primary school teachers are college graduates, not university graduates, compared to 16% among the high school teachers

(the others are university graduates). 55.8% of the high school teachers hold masters degrees, compared to 27.5% among the primary school teachers (see Figure 2).

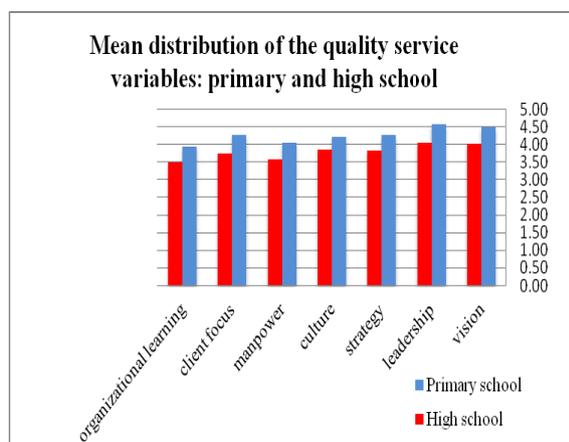


Figure 3. Mean distribution of the quality service variables: primary and high school

Despite our suspicions of these findings and the widely-held belief about the difference in the quality of teachers with regard to their degrees, analysis of the data showed the opposite picture. A deeper examination of the data exposed the difference between the quality of service variables relating to the type of school: primary school and high school. According to the data, in all the seven quality of service variables, primary schools showed a significantly higher performance than that of the high schools (see Figure 3).

This finding means that the primary schools are able to maintain a higher quality of service than that of the high schools. Moreover, primary school principals manage to create a higher quality of service compared to that of the executives of the Ministry of Education.

Analyzing our findings emphasizes what many of the professionals and research participants think, say and feel. The system structure is too large and contains a duplicity of roles and departments that do not communicate with one another, a situation that causes a waste of financial resources. The Ministry of Education has a quality supervision position. According to the interviews we conducted, there are currently nine units that have implemented the EFQM Excellence model (The European Foundation for Quality Management) but, due to various constraints, the system does not implement the model entirely, nor is it implemented in other departments.

Harpaz [7] discusses the role of the education system leader; the author concludes that the education system in Israel has no leadership and, therefore, it has no direction. The path of the system seems to be extremely unclear; the system is

struggling between different objectives and is busy surviving.

A strategy requires clear goals and the development of an approach to achieve them, relating to resources and responding to independent variables which appear unexpectedly. Planning a policy in the education system is an integral part of governance in highly developed countries in the world. In the Israeli government, planning departments can be found in some of the offices, while in most of them, the policy construct is not strong or situated at the centre of management consideration. According to the findings, the Israeli Education System has no clear policy for strategic planning or for setting objectives; each time there is a new minister, he decides on new targets and changes the plans requiring action. There are, therefore, no long-term objectives, as is necessary in pedagogical practice.

We found a number of different definitions of the 'educational customer', depending on the perception of the respondent. Within the Ministry of Education, we found that there is a dialogue between various divisions in order to create better service to teachers, students and parents. In the pedagogical staff meetings at school, the teachers discuss the students in order to identify problems and make decisions concerning the students' needs. In addition, results of a variety of tests during the year help to diagnose a child's learning difficulties, which the staff are committed to take into consideration. We also found that the Ministry of Education is undergoing a process of change; the goal of one of these changes is to define customer needs.

From the interviews we conducted, we also found that there is no comprehensive system for analyzing and managing experience and information; there are many professional publications and a passive archive, instead of active knowledge management that produces a synthesis between the field and the organization, in order to improve processes and move forward.

These and other findings in this study raise many questions regarding the performance of the Israeli state education system. On the one hand, there is harsh criticism of the size of the system and the enormous waste of resources in supporting it; on the other hand, the fact is that the schools function better than the executive board of the Ministry of Education itself. We believe that if schools had greater resources, they could reach even higher achievements. An obvious conclusion from the study is that the executive board of the Ministry of Education, its large system and disruptive conduct, is detrimental to the schools, both financially and operationally.

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