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DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL ACTIVITY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AMONG ISRAELI STUDENTS

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Abstract

Civil education at school plays a significant role in the development of civic engagement among students. Educational programs focused on values, positions, and critical thinking skills enable young people to become active and independent participants of civil and political activities. The scope of students' involvement in public life and the format of civic engagement often differ significantly from country to country. The article dwells on the results of implementing the innovative civil education program "Civil Initiative" for high school students in Israel. This program expands the competencies of students in the field of civil culture and civic engagement; it involves changes at the content and technological levels, as well as dismantling the hierarchical structure of managing the educational process and replacing it with participatory structures with elements of subsidiarity. The research results show that the program changes the students' understanding and perception of leadership, volunteering and participation in the life of the local community, choice of a future profession, effective use of leisure, a sense of involvement and belonging to society, compliance with rules and laws, and democracy values. Participation in the program allowed Israeli high school students to start socially important activities outside school for the benefit of local heterogeneous communities.

Keywords: Civic engagement, civil education, heterogeneous society, Israeli high school education

1. Introduction

Social activity creates the basis for the development of civic engagement, since active participation in socially significant activities enables a person to realize the importance of influencing the situation in civil society and to understand the need to use the right to influence this situation. From the point of view of social psychology, engagement is a complex phenomenon in which three main aspects can be distinguished: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. Engagement can be described as a multidimensional motivational concept that reflects a person's simultaneous contribution of physical, mental, and emotional energy to the process of performing personally meaningful activities (Kolesnichenko et al., 2017).

Developing the ideas of A. de Tocqueville and J. S. Mill, many researchers believe that engagement has the potential to educate and inspire citizens in expanding their consciousness and abilities (as cited in Macedo, 2005; Morricone, 2016). Civic engagement improves the quality of democratic governance. Democratic decision-making should consider the interests of the people. Citizens inform the society about their interests through various forms of civic engagement: by participating in voting, attending rallies and meetings, making inquiries to authorities, and volunteering. Higher levels of civic engagement, especially active group membership and inclusion in social networks, result in greater satisfaction of individuals with the quality of both their private life and life in the community (Gorshkov & Trofimova, 2016; Kuzin, 2010).

Considering the types of personal engagement in public life, Diligenskiy (1994) highlights a person's choice of the level and form of engagement. The extreme points of the continuum of such levels and forms are on the one hand, active participation in public life, understanding it as the main sphere of human activity; on the other hand, it is complete alienation from it, acceptance of the role of a passive object of social and political processes. This choice underlies the nominal differentiation of society into leaders, activists, and the masses, as well as a very mobile, unstable differentiation of the masses themselves on the basis of their stronger or less involvement in social and political life. In countries with developed civil society, the so-called value-oriented engagement is becoming widespread. It is fueled primarily by those values that are developed by various social groups in the process of realizing their interests and preferences. This form of social activity is one of the most important mechanisms for self-regulation of society and relations between citizens and government bodies (Diligenskiy, 1994).

At present, the feeling of frustration and cynical attitude towards traditional political processes and policies prompts many young citizens to focus their energies on specific aims and objectives that are of paramount personal importance to them. At the global level, the attention of young people all around the world is drawn to global warming, environmental pollution, global poverty, low-wage employment in developing countries, respect for human rights. At the local level, young people are concerned about graffito as a tool of political and civil strife, street crime, transportation, and garbage collection problems, youth-friendly infrastructure (Barrett & Pachi, 2019). Young people's concerns and the formats of civic engagement available to them often differ significantly from country to country. Moreover, these parameters can vary considerably even within one country, especially if it is highly heterogeneous. As noted in the analytical reports of the Council of Europe, ethnic minorities are more likely to participate in activities that directly affect their communities than the ethnic majority (Competences for democratic

culture: Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies, 2016; Learning to live together, 2019). Relationships in peer groups constitute one more significant social factor of influence, since a sense of solidarity with peers is of great importance for adolescents' acceptance of civil values. Membership in youth organizations and participation in organizations that create friendly conditions for such activities as public speaking, debate, and community services also determine the level of civil and political activity of young people for years to come.

School education is no less important for the development of civic engagement. According to Dewey's (2011) concept of progressive pedagogy, education is both a result and a factor in the interaction of an individual with the outside world. Moreover, the consistent and progressive development of society is ensured not by the direct imposition of certain ideals, identities, emotions and knowledge, but by the active interaction of the individual with the surrounding social environment, his/her direct participation in collective actions. If schools encourage students to discuss ethical, social, civic, and political issues, allow debate on sensitive topics, and support dialogue to explore diversity of views, their students demonstrate a higher level of political interest, trust and knowledge. Equally beneficial for students' engagement are the schools which function on a democratic basis, providing students with opportunities to participate in decision-making processes through student councils and student participation in working groups. Another school duty is the demonstration of the relevance of democracy and human rights for everyday life, "be it for resolving conflicts without violence, building cohesive societies through participatory decision making, successful integration of vulnerable groups or addressing disenchantment in democracy and the rise of populism" (Learning to live together. Council of Europe report on the state of citizenship and human rights education in Europe, 2019, p.20).

An additional measure for enhancing civic engagement is the implementation of educational programs aimed at developing the competencies necessary for civic and political participation of young people. The contents of these programs should be focused on developing students' civil position and critical thinking skills to enable young people to become active and independent participants of on-going civil and political activities as early as possible. The necessary competencies include understanding of political processes, analytical and critical thinking, education for citizenship, responsibility, empathy, communication and cooperation skills, and democratic values. A wide range of teaching methods can be used to develop these competencies, including group learning, project-based learning, and learning through social projects (Global citizenship education: topics and learning objectives, 2015).

2. Problem Statement

The concept of social and civic engagement of high school students is as a multidimensional phenomenon consisting of cognitive, value, and practical levels. In Israel, the school is expected to educate its students to the role of an active citizen who lives in a heterogeneous society. The cognitive level involves high school students' knowledge of the laws, norms, structures, and characteristics of Israeli civil society. At the value level, there is an awareness and recognition of the values of Israel's multicultural civil society. At the practical level, the leadership qualities of the educational process participants are actively developed and manifested through their involvement in social and civic

initiatives on a local and global scale. The given research underlines the problem of finding the most effective civil education program which could influence cognitive, value, and practical levels of social and civic engagement of high school students. While studying the development of social and civic engagement among students in Israeli schools, the authors supposed that the innovative civil education program could change the students' understanding and perception of leadership, volunteering and participation in the life of the local community, choice of a future profession, effective use of leisure, a sense of involvement and belonging to society, compliance with rules and laws, democracy values.

3. Research Questions

- How and to what extent can the program "Civil Initiative" and activities of Student Leadership Centre at one of Israeli high school influence the perception of different aspects of civil education among its students?

- What level of knowledge and understanding of different concepts of civil education do Israeli high school students demonstrate?

- What factors of influence help Israeli high school students acquire and develop the characteristics of an engaged citizen and expand the scope of their social activity?

4. Purpose of the Study

The complex of organizational and pedagogical conditions necessary for the effective implementation of the innovative model of civil education for high school students in Israel includes the interaction of all subjects of educational activities in achieving innovative changes; the development of the project and research culture of students; the formation of an intergenerational child-adult project community. The research purpose is to identify the impact of an innovative civil education program on the development of social activity and civic engagement of the program participants. Evaluation of the nature and level of social activity of high school students can serve as a criterion for the effectiveness of innovative models of civil education developed and implemented in Israeli schools.

5. Research Methods

Research methods include theoretical analysis of psychological, pedagogical, culturological, and sociological literature on the research problem, comparison, and generalization of information on the research topic. The empirical methods are diagnostic (observation of the functioning of the child-adult community, forecasting its future work, questioning, conversation, interviewing), methods of statistical processing of research results.

6. Findings

The high school civics curriculum in Israel educates a student as an active citizen. It consists of four interrelated components (knowledge acquisition, analysis of the needs, definition, and implementation of a practical task). The introduction of a practical component as an integral part of the civics curriculum in Israel has become a fundamental change in the formal education system in terms of teaching and assessment methods, teaching materials development and professional development of staff (Taha, 2016).

In Israel, the school is expected to explain to the students that the role of a citizen is not so much in pointing out different shortcomings but in finding out the reasons of difficult situations and in offering solutions to those who have the right to carry out necessary decisions. School students should see the difference between a passive complaining citizen and an active citizen seeking information and solutions to problems; schools should instill in students the desire to become socially active members of society (Agbaria, 2016; Zohar, 2013). Otherwise, the requirement for a young citizen to be active without explaining the nature of this activity, the scope of its intensification, and the way of its implementation turn social activity into an action not related to citizenship. Such activity, as Marquand (1994) justly noted, is gradually becoming pure charity, devoid of focus on strengthening civic values (p. 246).

Experimental innovative programs are being successfully implemented at some municipal secondary schools in Israel, whose leadership creates favorable conditions for fostering civic engagement among students. One of these schools is Galilee High School, founded in 1923 in Nazareth. After the establishment of the State of Israel it became one of the first and few schools in the Arab sector, which enrolled children from the north of the country to the Negev in the south. In this way, the school contributed to designing the face of Arab society in Israel on the educational, cultural, research, social, and professional levels. Among the school leavers, there are many Arab intellectuals and leaders. These historical contributions have placed, strengthened, and increased the prestige of the school and it was named "Um Al-Madras" - the mother of all Arab schools. After the establishment of high schools in most of the Arab villages in Israel, only children from the city of Nazareth come to study at Galilee High School. The number of students is 1023, out of which 38% are male and 62% female students. The school administration and staff strongly believe that most of their students will reach the high level of achievement, will develop universal social and cultural values, assimilate patterns of thinking that will enable them to integrate into the various life frameworks and to continue their studies at colleges and universities. The school strives for improvement of the educational achievements and promotion of excellence, design of an optimal educational climate that prevents violence; development as an educational institution contributing to the community life; work with children and youth at risk.

Galilee High School has developed and implemented the innovative model of civil education which involves changes at the substantive, technological and organizational-structural levels, as well as the interaction of the subjects of innovation built on the principle of complementarity and subsidiarity. A constituent part of the model is the pilot educational program called "Civil Initiative". Its curriculum is based on a project methodology and is aimed at encouraging active citizenship through developing the students' competencies in the field of civic culture and civic engagement. At the Galilee High School,

students work on socially significant projects of civic engagement with special attention paid to the dialogue with the "adult world", i.e., with teachers, school administration, parents and representatives of various municipal institutions. Some examples of civic engagement projects include:

1. Educational Projects: strengthening links between Galilee High School and other schools in the city to smooth the transition of students to Galilee High school; raising awareness of parents about the importance of their communication with their children; supporting female leadership at school; establishing a research center to raise awareness of the drug addiction problem; opening a club to support artistic talents among school students.

2. Environment and Health Projects: raising awareness among parents and students of the importance of visiting the dentist; raising students' awareness of the dangers of food coloring; efficient disposal of waste at school; organizing an association to improve conditions for physical education and sports at school.

3. People with Special Needs Projects: organizing an association for the rights of persons with disabilities at municipal educational institutions; raising awareness of the problems of autistic children in the Arab sector; raising awareness of AIDS and how to work with people having AIDS.

4. Favorable Urban Environment Projects: studying the relations between representatives of different religions in the city; organizing women clubs in the districts; establishing a travel agency in Nazareth; supporting events that popularize Arab-Palestinian folklore; a heritage week to preserve the memory of abandoned villages; organizing the club to help children in the unrecognized villages; a school club to encourage reading.

These various activities and projects are designed and implemented by the students themselves, which demonstrates their social activity and their willingness to self-expression, shows their ability to find and identify the needs and problems of society and local community offering solutions to improve the environment and the life of the local community through interactions with teachers and other adults.

Galilee High School established Student Leadership Center to coordinate project activities. Its aims are to develop leadership skills among students, increase personal responsibility for what happens in school and community, promote volunteer initiatives among students, develop their group work abilities, increase students' confidence in expressing opinions and participating in community life. Currently, Student Leadership Center is actively involved in all school events; it surveys the needs of students and the level of their satisfaction with school activities, organizes meetings with community representatives and social events at school.

To identify the impact of an innovative civil education program on the development of social activity and civic engagement of the program participants, we conducted a survey among 175 students. The group of respondents included 101 girls (57.7%) and 74 boys (42.3%) of the age group from 15 to 18 years old. The prevailing number of female respondents reflects the gender imbalance among the student body in this school. The survey was conducted before and after the participation of the respondents in the pilot civics program.

The questionnaire consisted of four parts. Part A included personal questions (about age, gender, specialization at school, the level of education and employment of the respondents' parents, the socio-economic status of the family). Part B consisted of fifty statements to evaluate the following aspects:

leadership, volunteering and participation in the life of the local community, choice of a future profession, effective use of leisure, a sense of involvement and belonging to society, compliance with rules and laws, democracy values. The response scale is a five-level Likert scale with level 1 showing disagreement with the statement and level 5 showing full agreement with the statement. Levels 2, 3, and 4 are intermediate. Each participant was asked to agree or disagree with each of the statements by choosing the appropriate level of the scale. The score reliability coefficient is shown in Table 01.

Table 1. The Score Reliability Coefficient

Aspects	Statement No	Cronbach's alpha
Leadership	1-11	0.840
Volunteering and participation in the life of the local community	12-20	0.808
Choice of a future profession	21-28	0.744
Effective use of leisure	29-34	0.834
A sense of involvement and belonging to society	35, 38, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 48, 49, 50 36, 37, 39	0.839
Compliance with rules and laws	36, 37, 39	0.633
Democracy values	47	

Part C of the questionnaire contained five questions to identify the influence factors, due to which a student acquired a certain characteristic from the part B parameters. The factors of influence were school, home and family, a social club, friends, and a political or social movement. Part D included six basic concepts: citizenship, social partnership, social activity, volunteering and contribution to the development of society, civil society, rules and laws. The respondents were asked to rate the level of their knowledge and understanding they had about each of the concepts before and after participating in the educational program. The five levels Likert scale was used. The general level of knowledge was compiled by calculating the average of the participants' responses on six items; each respondent received a value in the knowledge variable, the value ranged from 1 to 5, where the highest level was estimated at 5 points.

The results presented in Table 2 indicate significant differences in the perceptions of each aspect of civil education among students before joining the program and after completing the program. A significant difference was found in the perception of leadership before and after the program (t = -3.391, p <0.01), which shows an increase and improvement in the leadership dimension among students due to their participation in the program. There was also a significant difference in perceptions of volunteering and community participation before and after the program (t = -5.524, p <0.001). The average perception of volunteering after the program was 3.77 versus 3.33, thus indicating an increase and improvement in the perception of volunteering among students due to their participation in the program.
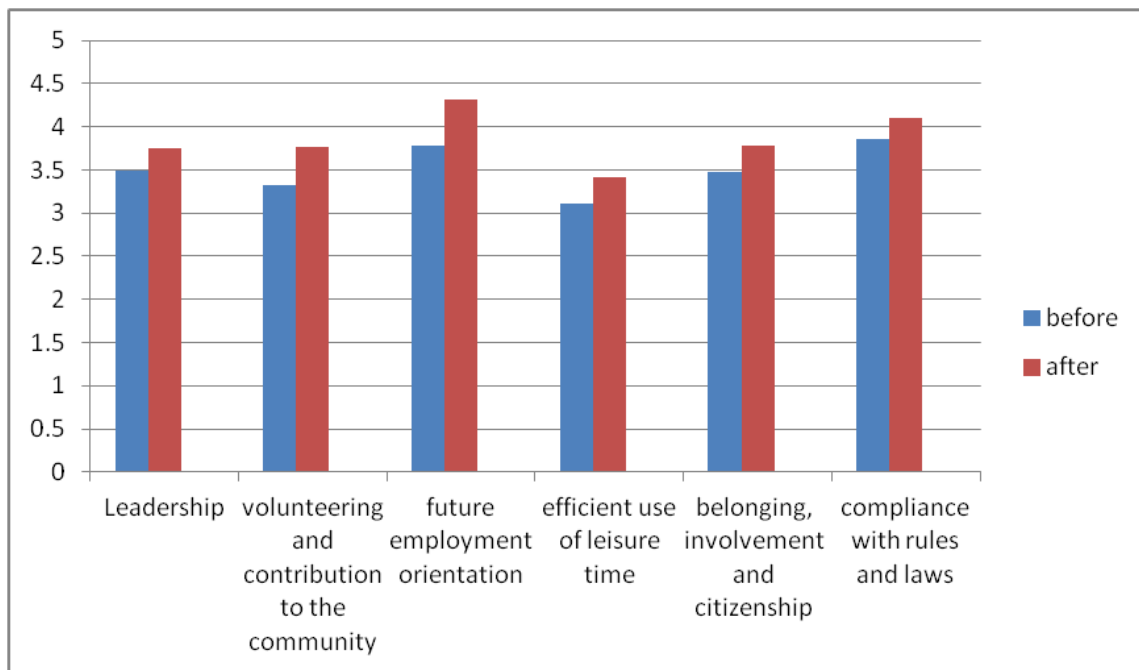
Table 2. Differences in the perceptions of each aspect of civil education among students before joining the program and after completing the program

Aspect	Period in Regards to Program Participation	Number of Respondents	Average (1-5)	Standard Deviation	t
Leadership	Before	175	3.49	0.71	-3.391**
	After	175	3.75	0.68	

Volunteering and participation in the life of the local community	Before	175	3.33	0.79	-5.524***
	After	175	3.77	0.69	
Choice of a future profession	Before	175	3.78	0.90	-6.471***
	After	175	4.31	0.60	
Effective use of leisure	Before	175	3.11	0.59	-4.198***
	After	175	3.41	0.73	
A sense of involvement and belonging to society	Before	175	3.48	0.75	-4.239***
	After	175	3.78	0.55	
Compliance with rules and laws	Before	175	3.86	0.88	-2.801**
	After	175	4.10	0.74	
Democracy values	Before	175	3.53	1.15	-3.881***
	After	174	3.95	0.89	

Note: **$p<0.01$, ***$p<0.001$

Deviations for each aspect of civil education before students' joining the program and after completing it are shown below in Figure 01.

Figure 1. Deviations for each aspect of civil education before students' joining the program and after completing it

Table 03 shows the survey results regarding the factors of influence on students' attitudes towards leadership.

Table 3. Factors influencing students' attitudes towards leadership

Factor of Influence	Period	
	before	after
School	33	26
	55.9%	44.1%
Home and Family	70	73
	49.0%	51.0%
Social Club	2	9
	18.2%	81.8%
Friends	19	31
	38.0%	62.0%
Political or Social Movement	11	22
	33.3%	66.7%
No changes notice	22	9
	71.0%	29.0%
More than one factor of influence	17	3
	85.0%	15.0%
$\chi^2 = 27.144, p < 0.001$		

Analysis of the results indicates a significant difference in the attribution of the leadership function to different factors of influence before and after students' participation in the program: $\chi 2 = 27.144$, $p<0.001$. Before the program, students named school, home and family as influencing factors, but after participating in the program, they began to include political or social movement, friends and membership in a social club as influencing factors. Similar changes have been reported for other concepts. In particular, there was a significant difference in attribution of the volunteering function before and after the program: $\chi 2 = 22.532$, $p <0.001$.

Evidently, the program showed students the factors of influence through which they can express and develop the characteristics and scope of their social activity.

7. Conclusion

The implementation of a pilot educational program at the Galilee High School demonstrates the diversity of teaching methods and shows the possible scope of interaction of all people interested in the development of civil society both on a local and global level. Inherent for the pilot program opportunities for the practical application of acquired knowledge, values, and attitudes foster the civic engagement of students inside and outside of school. The research results show significant differences in the perceptions of each aspect of civil education among students before joining the program and after completing the program. The program implementation brought a significant increase and improvement in the leadership dimension among participating students. Prior to the implementation of the program, the prevailing opinion was that social activity is possible only at school, participation in the program allowed high school students to start socially important activities outside school. The program influenced their acquisition of the characteristics and views of a socially active person with a certain civic position. Israeli educators and civil society representatives understand that civil education in the heterogeneous society of

Israel must be organized as an incessant dialogue, when the participants of education process and its beneficiaries comprehend each other's intentions and learn to accept and share values of various society groups.

Acknowledgments

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