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**INSPECTOR'S ROLE IN IMPLEMENTING A REFORM: 'SCHOOL  
OF THE HOLIDAYS' CASE STUDY**

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*Abstract*

Research and articles have investigated and written about educational reforms - who are the stakeholders, what a successful reform in education is about when there are the chances of failing it and many more. Most of the reforms, as the studies show, start from top to bottom, with the policymakers of the field. In most of the European countries, the main link between policymakers and school principals are the school inspectors. This link of the chain has hardly been studied. This article is based on preliminary findings of a study examining the role of the school inspector in the implementation of reform. The research uses the mixed method and emerged, both quantitative and qualitative strategies. There are two main steps in the study: the first step - qualitative – in-depth (comprehensive) interviews with ten school principals and ten school inspectors; the second step - a questionnaire that will be transferred between 50 school principals and inspectors. The article is based on the preliminary findings of the qualitative research. The results suggest that school inspectors see themselves as representing the policy of the Ministry of Education and as mediators between the Ministry's intention at the time of the establishment of a new reform and the principals of the schools required to implement the reform. The interviews show that school principals, for their part, are assisted by the school inspector and the practices he creates for them as a central element in the study of reform and its assimilation into the school.

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**Keywords:** Educational reforms, school inspectors, reform implementation.



## 1. Introduction

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance announced, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January, that the “Holiday Schools” program, which will open kindergartens and schools for children up to the third grade, would begin in 2018 on Chanukah and Passover<sup>1</sup> holidays. This new reform in the Israeli education is, actually, an extension of 'The schools of the summer vacation' reform, which began in 2014 by the former Minister of Education, Mr. Shai Piron. Piron instituted an educational concept according to which the responsibility for education is not compulsory only during the school year, but throughout the whole year, including the summer vacation, in a circular, educational and community continuum, that he named 'Educators around the clock'. The program that extends the school year by three more weeks and shortens the summer vacation allows parents to register their children for a summer vacation program at a basic cost (Shahar, 2013). In recent years, school holidays have been a central issue in the political discourse, especially before long vacations. The claim is that Israeli children receive too many days off, compared to the rest of the world's students, and a parallel argument is that their parents days of absence from their place of work are low (Odem & Glazer, 2017). According to OECD, the Israeli students study 187 days per year, with an average of 183 within OECD countries and their parents work 1889 hours per year, compared to the average of 1763 in these countries (OECD, 2017)(*OECD Labour Force Statistics 2017*, 2018). Here, there may be one criticism of the reform, which must occur in the public sector and increase the number of parental leave days, and on the other hand, must allow quality time for parents with their children, in contrast to the perception that the education system should provide all the answers to child rearing.

It is important to note that the first announcement about “School of Holidays” program had been released in January and was to be implemented in March. Organizing it at the scale of a whole country in such a short period is no small matter. All of these aspects should be added to the position of the Teachers' Union: “We have received requests from school principals that they are required by the local authorities to perform tasks related to the 'school of the holidays'. The Teachers' Union analyzed these requests seriously and reminded you that you have no obligation to cooperate on this matter.

As you know, the Teachers' Union struggled with the parents' demand to shorten their vacations and agreed that it would take place on the condition that it would not harm teachers. The plan for expanding the “summer school” for the holidays was proposed by us and provided that the teaching staff would not be required to participate directly and indirectly in this activity. It is not the duty of any teaching employee, including school principals, to engage in this activity, and it is certain that school principals do not need to recruit personnel for the activity. The local authority is the entity that operates the activity and it is bound to do all that is required for its success. “The local authority may not impose any tasks on house managers in the school.” (Ben-David, 2018).

In this case, the necessity of school inspectors is critically expressed, mainly because school principals expressed strong opposition, not necessarily to the idea itself, but to the fact that they were called “the flag” - they were required to register the children, to write plans for vacation activities and to manage the framework. The Teachers' Union vetoed and absolved them of this responsibility. Those who were in contact with the teachers who were appointed to manage this framework, to examine and approve the

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<sup>1</sup>Chanukah and Passover- Two Jewish holidays. Chanukah is celebrated in December and the schools leave for one week. Passover holiday is celebrated at the end of March and the schoolchildren go on a two-week vacation. Author's comment.

program of activities, to maintain contact with the authorities, to make field visits and guiding the frameworks - were the school inspectors. At the same time, the authorities who were required to get into action within the program were reluctant to it, and the school inspectors were given the task of persuading and enlisting the authorities. The authorities were required to organize quickly; some were already involved in other programs that the Ministry of Education opened this year as a response to the continuation of the school day, and especially the ambiguity, led the authorities to ask for the reform to be implemented next year. Most of the pressures and political forces exerted were so strong, especially since this is an election year, and no authority wanted themselves to be seen as not providing the best solution for their voters, so 199 authorities operated the program, and 12 authorities chose not to enter this year (Eitan, 2018).

The research is trying to identify the role of the school inspector as a promoter of reforms and innovative pedagogy in the educational systems in the 21st century. The article is based on preliminary findings from the qualitative part of the study and refers mainly to the specific case of the School Holiday Reform, which was first introduced during this year (2018) in the education system.

The literature review can teach us that nowadays, countries understand that education is one of the main keys to a better future and it is the state's role to provide good education (Ehren & Visscher, 2006). The idea that the State must take attention of the treatment in schools, and what it is required to run the schools were established during the Prussian enlightenment, between 1750 – 1830. This idea has been deeply ingrained in the minds of politicians, educators and parents (Van Bruggen, 2010). Over the years, states have developed different ways of curbing what is taking place in the country's educational systems. Inspections are one way to ensure that government requirements are transformed into appropriate operations in schools. Schools act according to specific quality standards (Ehren, Altrichter, McNamara, & O'Hara, 2013). The character of the inspector has evolved in different ways in various states. Each state gave the schools' inspector various powers and labor codes that run from basic assumptions to worldviews. The purpose of the position changes from state to state and can sometimes hint at the state's perception of the inspector's work. But the central role of school supervisors as responsible for the media pipeline between policymakers and school principals who implement their policy in schools is the basis for the General Inspector's approach.

According to Hattie, reforms today are focused on popular solutions and not necessarily on the contribution to the pupil's educational life (Hattie, 2015). The state's need to provide quality public education to its citizens, the knowledge of its elected officials that the public measures them on some occasions through education systems, alongside the need of elected officials to make their mark, often constitute a platform for educational reform. The reforms are implemented in schools, but the communication channel for school principals is, as we already emphasized, the school inspectors (Nir, 2014). Can we drop them out and make direct contact with school principals? How do school inspectors make sure to pass on the concept of change that policymakers seek to contain? What happens in situations of conflict between policymakers and school principals? These questions will be examined through the 'Holiday School' reform of Israel 2018- a case study.

## 2. Problem Statement

Research and articles have investigated and written about educational reforms - who are the stakeholders, what is a successful reform in education, and when the chances of failing its and more. Most of the reforms, as indeed the studies show, start from top to bottom from policymakers in the field. In most European countries, the main link between policymakers and school principals are the school inspectors. This link in the chain has hardly been studied. This article is based on preliminary findings of a study examining the role of the school inspector in the implementation of reform

## 3. Research Questions

What are the perceptions of school principals and school inspectors their role in promoting and implementing 'School of the holidays' reform?

## 4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study it to examine the perceptions of principals and school inspectors regarding their role in promoting and implementing 'School of the holidays' reform.

## 5. Research Methods

Qualitative research using in-depth interviews with tenschool principals& 10 school inspectors. The article is based on the preliminary findings of the qualitative research.

### 5.1. Preliminary Results

The initial analysis of the interviews among school principals and school inspectors raised some themes that provide the ability to reach quantitative research with more focused questions. During the period in which the interviews were conducted, the Minister of Education determined the expansion of an already existing reform - "schools of the summer vacation" in the form of a mini-reform called the 'School of the Holidays'. This process enables a real-time educational reform 'experience', both for the principals and for the school inspectors, thus being the reason for which they were asked explicitly to be part of the reform

## 6. Findings

The themes of the interview phase of the study were grouped into four parts: Headquarters and Field, Principals' Resistance, Inspector's Role, Inspector's Collaborations. They and their illustrative quotations are arranged into a section to tell the story of the school reform.

**Headquarters and Field** – the connection between headquarters and field has a central place in all education reforms in the Israeli case, especially if we consider the use of the media by the ministers and the Director of the Ministry of Education. All respondents, without exceptions, school inspectors and principals have noted that the first time they heard about the "School of the Holidays"

reform was from the media: *“As a school inspector, I heard about “school of the holidays” reform only from the media. Nobody had told me what my role is.” (Dana, school inspector).*

School principals also experienced it in this way: *“The first exposure was through the media - Facebook – teachers' networks. At a much later stage, things were brought up to the Board of principals by the school inspector.” (Amos, school principal).*

**Principals' Resistance** - As mentioned above, the education system in Israel has undergone many reforms in recent years. School principals are required to implement these reforms in schools, except when it comes to reforms that cross their employment conditions – such as “School of the Holidays” – that takes place in their vacation. The most revealing findings provided school principals that were divided into two main groups – principals who chose to protest against the reform and school principals who accepted it. Those who opposed to reform expressed it in the interview. Also, it was reflected in their actions or, more precisely, in their lack of demonstrative activity: their refusal to help recruit teachers to work on vacation, to enrol students or involve in the pedagogic program during the vacation - *“Actually, I did not deal with it, I gave it to a teacher who was willing to accept the salary“ (Ruth, school principal).* In the group of principals who cooperated with the reform, various reasons could be found to justify their assistance in its operation *“I know that most of the principals opposed the reform and that the Teachers Union backed this step. I stayed on to run on vacation because it's my school, my students and I understand that what we do is important to parents and children.” (Michal, school principal)*

Or a school principal that saw the benefit of the parents: *“It was very difficult for my teachers. From the aspect of the parents, there is no doubt that this is significant and that is good. ... To my delight, the staff was also recruited. It was important for me to be part of what was done” (Niv, school principal).*

**Inspector's Role** – Regarding the hostile atmosphere that has developed facing the reform of the “School of the Holidays,” by the municipalities, the Teachers' Union and school principals, the school inspectors had no choice but to lead the reform. *“It was complicated to implement the reform. There was resistance. There were messages from the Teachers' Union, and there was I, standing in the middle in this example, I used my leadership skills to make it happen, and it performed”. (Tamar, school inspector).*

**Inspector's Collaborations** - *“I found myself almost alone in the battle... the good professional relations that I had formed with the local authority during my tenure were to my credit when I managed to recruit them for the task.” (Gil, school inspector).* An inspector who creates good work relations and establishes his professional position with the local authorities and its school principals throughout the year will probably be able to promote educational reforms.

## 7. Conclusion

School inspectors are “agents of the state,” responsible for implementing state mandates. The development of the school principals is their major tool for advancing local change within the school. If the state policymakers want to obtain a reform on the education system, as best as possible, they must prepare the core for it. There must be a process that commences with the policymakers, through the Ministry of Education headquarters, the districts, including the school inspectors until the school principals. The information should flow to the media only after preparing the ground for the reform, and not vice-versa, as it is happening today. It is a necessary move, even if it seems less important. In the eyes of school principals

and for the inspectors, the order of events shows how important communication is from policymaker's part, as well as it shows their lack of professionalism. Another insight that emerges from the study relates to the degree of autonomy held by functionaries. In recent years, the Israeli Ministry of Education has been leading policies or, at least, expressing a desire to increase the autonomy of school principals. The Reform of the "School of Holidays" has taught little about the power of school principals to oppose moves that are incompatible with their will. However, the resistance exists, because this is a violation of the wage agreements and the framework of their work. Meaning that school principals are not yet autonomous to decide which reforms they want to adopt and which ones they do not want. If the school reform was implemented within the framework of the director's workweek, the principals could not protest against it. At the same time, this move underscored how much the school inspector is not autonomous. As a person who experienced more autonomy as a school principal (in Israel, a school inspector could only be the person who was a school principal) and progressed in the hierarchy of positions, he/she experienced a decline in the degree of autonomy. One reason for this is directly related to the fact that the role of the school inspector was enacted in 1956. In 1996, it underwent a small and insignificant correction, and it does not precisely define the framework of the school inspector so that almost everything can enter within the context of the school inspector's work (Ministry of Education, 1956).

### 7.1. Summary

This paper focused on preliminary findings relating to educational reforms from the perspective of school principals and school inspectors. As one who is supposed to implement reforms in education, it is essential to examine how reforms "roll over" from concept to implementation. This study chose to focus on the school inspector as the person expected to implement educational reform, even if his place in this critical process is not always examined.

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