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**THE PERCEPTION OF SUBJECT COORDINATORS'
DIFFICULTIES IN THE SUBJECT COORDINATOR'S ROLE**

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Abstract

In each organization, there is a director responsible for the organization's functioning. The organization manager should have the ability to lead the organization's employees. A school is an organization whose main purpose is to lead and guide the school population towards achieving its central aim. The school principal is unable to perform all existing administrative functions in the school, therefore, there is a need for an aiding body that will assume some of the management functions and assist the school principal (and the system). The role created in the school to help the school principal is the role of the subject coordinator. Subject coordinators constitute a link between the various school elements, such as management, teachers, students and parents. The activity of subject coordinators is carried out primarily within the school environment. There are several factors that may impair the ability of subject coordinators to function optimally, such as lack of financial resources, human resources and training. With the aim of mapping the possible causes of difficulties in the functioning of the subject coordinator, interviews were conducted with 10 subject coordinators of various subjects from two secondary schools in the Israeli education system. The interviews revealed some of the difficulties experienced during the performance of their role.

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1. Introduction

Every organization has a manager responsible for the organization's functioning. The manager of the organization should have the ability to lead the organization's employees. In order to perform this task in the best possible manner, it is recommended that the organization's manager possess leadership characteristics. The literature provides several definitions of the concept of leader. There is no single answer to what a leader is and what distinguishes between a leader and a non-leader (Kolan, 2017). Sharma (2007) argues that leadership is not the ability of the leader or the manager to coerce the actions of others. In Sharma's opinion, in order to reach the goal set by the organization, it must be reached without any need for coercion (ibid). The Hebrew Even-Shoshan dictionary definition of a leader is the ability of a person or group of people to head the organization, to lead to a common goal (Even-Shoshan, 1997).

The school serves as an organization. The school's main goal is to lead and guide its students to learning. It follows that the central role of the school principal is to lead the entire school population to its central destination (Hopkins, 2001). The leadership is expressed both educationally and pedagogically. The goal is to improve the scholastic abilities of all students in the school. However, the school principal has other roles, such as designing the future of the school with their vision, leading the teaching staff, and managing the connections between the community and the school. The principal who serves as the leader of the school organization should be able to see the entire school framework with its variety of functions. They must know how to make connections between the various bodies, and all this in order to bring all students in the school towards success (AvneyRosha, 2008).

Looking at the functioning of high schools in Israel it is evident that the school principal is unable to perform all the tasks and manage the school framework alone. The school framework, which consists of students, administrative staff, supervisory board, and the community, presents short-term and long-term challenges that cannot be managed by a single individual, as talented as they may be. There is a need for an aiding body that will assume some of the management functions and assist the school principal (Popper & Lipshitz, 2000).

The role created in the school to help the school principal is the role of the subject coordinator. The subject coordinators constitute a link between the various school elements, such as management, teachers, students and parents. The activity of subject coordinators is carried out primarily in the school environment. The subject coordinators perform many functions throughout the day, for example, regular monitoring of students' grades, handling students with special needs, and meetings with parents, students, or both. When a problem emerges, the report is made to the principal; this helps reduce workload. Therefore, it is evident that the role of subject coordinators includes the pedagogical area and the organizational area within the same subject for which they are responsible (Popper & Lipshitz, 2000).

One of the roles of subject coordinators in high schools in Israel is creating the link between the school administration and the teaching staff. Subject coordinators are responsible for leading the various teams under their responsibility towards the goal set by the Ministry of Education, the school principal, the teaching staff, or both. By virtue of their managerial role, the subject coordinators should have leadership abilities. In practice, not all subject coordinators function as 'managers' (Bodoan & Pregman, 2003).

There are several factors that may impair the ability of subject coordinators to function optimally; one of them is training. The training of subject coordinators does not meet the requirements of their role. Many subject coordinators do not distinguish between the performance of a task and the management of the task. Subject coordinators are required to make many decisions throughout their duties; they often face dilemmas that the solution of which requires tools they do not possess. In such situations, subject coordinators can be seen working from their familiar and safe place, which leads to the subject coordinator focusing on execution rather than managing the situation (Amit, Popper, Gal, Miskal-Sinai, & Lissak, 2006).

Another factor is resources. Resource cutbacks can create a problematic and sometimes impossible situation for performing tasks by the school's subject coordinator. The cutbacks in the various resources require the subject coordinator to deal with the task rather than managing it. When there are cuts in resources such as manpower or budget cuts, the goals usually remain the same. There is still a need to fulfill the goals and achieve them in the best possible way despite the limitations. Often, the desire to increase efficiency and thus create cutbacks leads to achieving the opposite goal than desired. In most cases, cutbacks harm the mid-level managers because they have to pass the instructions along to their subordinates (Altman, Rosenstein, & Pressburger, 2004).

With the aim of trying to map the possible causes of difficulties in the functioning of the subject coordinator, interviews were conducted with subject coordinators in the Israeli education system. Ten coordinators of various subjects were interviewed from two high schools. The interviewees' profile is presented in Table 1.

Table 01. Profile of the interviewed subject coordinators

No.	Years of experience as subject coordinator	Age	Position	Number of subordinates – extent of responsibility	Education	Teaching subject
1.	7	54	Mathematics coordinator	11	M.A.	Mathematics
2.	3	36	Science coordinator	6	B.A.	Science, Mathematics
3.	2	39	Mathematics coordinator	7	B.A.	Mathematics
4.	7	47	English coordinator	3	M.A.	English
5.	12	52	Linguistic coordinator	8	M.A.	Linguistics
6.	8	63	Mathematics coordinator	4	B.A.	Mathematics
7.	8	60	Learning development coordinator	4	M.A.	Literature, Linguistics
8.	8	47	Literature and community involvement coordinator	8	B.A.	Literature
9.	3	42	Civics coordinator	8	M.A.	Civics
10.	15	50	Science coordinator	9	PhD.	Science

All the subject coordinators included in the sample are women, even though the percentage of men in the school staff is 26%. There was no attempt to understand the reason for this in the interviews. The subject coordinators were asked questions on various subjects. Some of the questions dealt with the reasons for being selected for the role, the functions they had to perform, the difficulties that arose in their role, and the creation of conflicts between the coordinators and the teachers and between the coordinators and the management. Below are some of the data obtained from the interviews.

2. Main Body

Question 1: Who selected you for the role of subject coordinator?

Eight out of 10 respondents said that the school principal asked them because there was no one to fill the role. Two respondents said they wanted the role.

Question 2: If you did not want the role, why did you take it on yourself?

With the exception of the two who wanted the role, the answers from the remaining 8 respondents were varied. For example:

- *"I was pressured"*
- *"I had no choice"*
- *"No one else wanted to do it and there was no one to take on the coordination"*
- *"This was done by default"*

From the responses to questions 1 and 2 it can be seen that over 70% of the teachers did not want to accept the position of coordinator. Despite the fact that this role brings with it a promotion in rank, the teachers are not interested in accepting and performing it.

Question 3: What roles should a subject coordinator perform?

The following are some of the statements made during the interviews. The statements were attributed to their function, here listed in brackets.

- *"I always see the best interests of the student and therefore I do not do extreme things. I try as much as possible to be here for the students"* (sensitivity to students).
- *"Mirroring all the time"* (guidance).
- *"Not too place blame but to stimulate, to help"* (motivating the team).
- *"To guide, to give didactic advice, provide materials, give advice on holding a classroom"* (guidance).
- *"Humanity, professionalism, in my opinion they must be at the top of professionalism"* (skills).
- *"You have to keep your finger on the pulse at all times and be a sympathetic ear, to sit with the teachers"* (guidance).
- *"I am responsible for the ongoing functioning of the teachers in the team, their conduct. I have to pass on information that comes from the supervision"* (teachers' ongoing functioning).
- *"Of course, a year prior, I present a program with my needs for that year"* (long-term planning).
- *"I am always in direct contact with my teachers"* (sensitivity to staff).
- *"I examine the curriculum and monitor it"* (supervision and monitoring).
- *"I need to know the state of the students. If the supervisor wants me to show her where every child is at, or what they are doing"* (supervision and monitoring).

- “Advises teachers if there are disciplinary problems, and accompanies her because she is a new teacher” (guidance).

This question allowed to see that the subject coordinator has a variety of roles to perform. There was no uniformity among the subject coordinators in terms of the functions that the subject coordinator has to perform. Each interviewee emphasized the part of the role from the direction that was important to her. Sometimes the importance of the role was given in accordance with the event that the subject coordinator underwent prior to the interview. The statements were classified into different categories in order to try to understand the role of the subject coordinator. The two main roles that emerged in the interviews were guidance and supervision. The subject coordinators said they spent a lot of time instructing and guiding the team members; part of the guidance was of new teachers who joined the staff. These teachers needed guidance in building lesson plans, and solving problems that arose in the classroom that they did not know how address, and help with long-term lesson planning. The second main function was supervision and monitoring. The subject coordinators said that they supervise and monitor teachers’ learning while monitoring the implementation of the curriculum, and examine the implementation of ongoing assessments for students in order to prevent problems that may arise in the future on the manner in which the certificate is graded.

Another question the subject coordinators were asked was how did they know what they should do in their role. The answer was unequivocal: “*I learned throughout working.*” All of them said they did not find an organized and structured document about the role of the subject coordinator. All the knowledge they had coming into the role was from the time when they themselves had a subject coordinator. Some of them said that they acted as their subject coordinator did that seemed good to them. Some responded that they did everything the professional did not do for them. For some, the subject coordinator did not constitute a significant figure in their ongoing functioning as teachers in the school. Some of the coordinators said that at a time when they were only subject teachers, they were not always present at the staff meetings. The reason for not attending the meetings was that at the time they were teaching or were on a vacation day. One could understand from these statements that the subject coordinators felt they had been thrown into the role without proper preparation and direction. Some said that it was very difficult to feel ‘alone’ and try to do the job without ‘operating instructions’ for the role of subject coordinator.

From the interviews, some difficulties emerged with which the subject coordinator had to manage during their work. The difficulties can be divided into several categories: financial resources, coping with lack of support from principals, supervisors or both in the Ministry of Education, motivating the staff, and a lack of recognition of the importance of the role of the subject coordinator.

The main difficulty encountered by all the interviewees was that relating to financial resources. All interviewees argued that one of the main problems in their role was their inability to meet with the staff. The reason for this is that there is no regular meeting in the system where the entire team meets and raises various topics for discussion. When asked why there was no fixed hour in the system, most of them answered that the school framework was unable to find time for the staff meetings. The subject coordinators described a situation in which they could only meet with some of the staff. Some even said they did not have meetings with some of the teachers they were responsible for. Some said that because

they do not have organized staff meetings with all the teachers, it makes it difficult for them to create a variety of activities in the different subjects.

A recurring difficulty was the lack of joint meetings of the subject coordinators. They said there were regular meetings for class coordinators, homeroom teachers, and vice principals, but the coordinators do not have a regular meeting. There is no forum in which personal or professional problems arising from the performance of the role can be discussed.

An additional difficulty raised by the subject coordinators was that the class coordinators and homeroom teachers have a professional factor who meets with them once a month. There are no professional bodies such as educational counsellors, vice principal, or psychologist who meets with the subject coordinators. The subject coordinators said that sometimes they encounter problems that they are not authorized to solve and it is important for them to consult regularly with a professional. In addition, the high workload of working with many diverse factors raises personal difficulties, and they feel that they need 'something that will help them to vent', preferably with a professional.

3. Methodology

In order to obtain information about the difficulties in the job of subject coordinators, in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 different professional coordinators. In-depth, semi-open interviews were conducted with the aim of obtaining as much information as possible about the different roles they must perform. During the interview, professional subject coordinators were asked additional questions whose purpose was to understand deeply the opinion of the various professional coordinators. At the end of the interviews, the information was collected and seven main themes were issued

4. Conclusion

The role of the subject coordinator is a managerial one. Teachers who are interested in accepting the role are often influenced by the characteristics of the role (Pounder & Merrill, 2001). The role enables the teacher who performs it professional advancement and promotion, salary increase, and the possibility of influencing and improving the school's educational framework. The interviews revealed that despite the professional advancement, teachers do not usually volunteer for the role.

From the interviews it can be concluded that the role of the subject coordinator is varied and linked to all the factors present in the school. The subject coordinator constitutes a link between the different factors that exist in the education system. The subject coordinator must provide solutions to problems that arise from students, teachers and parents. They must also report to the school principal and to the supervisor from the Ministry of Education.

The role of the subject coordinator is carried out according to the personal understanding of each subject coordinator, thus, the solutions provided to problems are the result of the coordinator's understanding of the problem. There is no official document describing the role, even in general terms. Every subject coordinator performs the role according to what they feel is necessary, even in the absence of appropriate training.

During the interviews, many difficulties arose regarding the performance of the role. The difficulties could be divided into two categories: difficulties relating to financial resources and difficulties

relating to personal resources. Most subject coordinators raised a major problem in lack of time to perform the various tasks. The shortage in time resources prevents the subject coordinators from conducting regular scheduled staff meetings, and prevents the possibility of proper initiation to new teachers. In relation to personal resources, the subject coordinators felt that they were not sufficiently appreciated by the educational system. In addition, the subject coordinators did not feel that they were fulfilling a managerial role.

It can be hypothesized that if the role of subject coordinator will be recognized as a managerial position, the role's importance will also be recognized, and more resources will be allocated to enable optimal performance of the role. This could lead to more teachers wanting to fulfill the role, to increasing the quality of subject coordinators, and their level of performance.

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