The objective

To analyze the educational policy reporting specialized schools in Israel, within the accepted theoretical framework that emphasizes the trade-off between equity and freedom of choice, with reference to these questions: whether and to what extent, if any, is there a tension between de jure policy and de facto policy with respect to specialized schools in Israel?

Research questions:

1. To what extent, if any, does educational policy in the context of Israel's specialized schools promote equity?
2. To what extent, if any, do educational policy in this context promote choice?
3. Which policy “actors” are dominant, and what are their “voices” in the dynamics of policy formulation?
4. In what way, if any, do these voices merge (dis)harmoniously with education policy in the context of specialized schools in Israel?

Methodology

If we decide to make use of a critical focus methodology from the field of qualitative research, for the purpose, a research paradigm based on the critical hermeneutics methodology approach.

The method of analysis chosen is two-stage thematic content analysis, which consists mainly of a search for identification of recurrent themes and patterns in a whole array of data. The first stage is involved in thematic analysis of policy documents and transcriptions of semi-structured in-depth interviews with senior officials in the Ministry of Education, selected from a sample of experts. In the second stage, the results of the thematic analysis were mapped and analyzed according to the Value-Critical Policy Analysis model proposed by Schmitz (2006) and first formulated by Martin Rein (as quoted by Schmitz, 2006).

Methodological work model - Investigation of the phenomenon

The findings and conclusions

35 findings led to conclusions which are presented here in:

1. The reasons for the establishment of specialized schools as well as the characterization of the “bottom up” phenomenon indicate the decline of the central government’s power in parallel with the rise of the power of additional actors’ (local authority + parents) whose entry has influenced the policy sphere and turned it into reactive rather than a proactive policy.
2. The value of choice and parental autonomy outweigh the value of equity, and even contradicted the equity value.
3. Their establishment followed the trend for many years, enabling other “actors” in the policy arena to establish different operating norms that were not always in line with the regulations and permits of official education policy. This is in contrast to their being “acquired” of pedagogical changes, innovation, and diversity.

Summary of results of analysis of the phenomenon and its development

From the investigation, it can also be recognized that the de facto policy that has shaped the phenomenon is that these schools are a part of the quasi-market orientation, which stem from the growing influence of the neoliberal worldview, that may hinder equity or equality of opportunity in children from weak populations, a phenomenon also identified in rich countries.

In the establishment of a practice that enables private money to enter the system without additional collection through donations, indicate that this has contributed to the development of specialized schools from 1985-2019. This is done through the analysis of education policy issues in this context where there is an underlying conflict between the values of equity versus choice.

In addition, the permit received from the Ministry of Education regarding the establishment of a practice that enables private money to enter the system without additional collection through donations, indicate that this has contributed to the establishment of specialized schools from 1985-2019. This is done through the analysis of education policy issues in this context where there is an underlying conflict between the values of equity versus choice.

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The different groups of actors: The local authority and parents who occupied power from the success of the phenomenon, and who were exclusive with regard to the supplementary budgets, and could establish additional exception collection norms, due to the lack of enforcement and a policy turning a “blind eye.” In addition, the permit received from the Ministry of Education regarding the additional collection through donations, indicate that this has contributed to the establishment of a practice that enables private money to enter the system without any control.

Introduction

Although Israel aspires for equity, its students’ academic achievement distribution is characterized by large gaps compared with other OECD countries (OECD, 2019). Moreover, there is an incremental trend of inequity. This large achievement gap is further challenged by the growing number of specialized schools in Israel, which characterized by hybrid financing (public and private), selective admission processes and supra-regional registrations (Klein, 2011; Corcoran & Baker-Smith, 2015). This trend is a part of the quasi-market-oriented orientation, which stems from the growing influence of the neoliberal worldview, that may hinder equity or equality of opportunity, yet, might reinforce choice. This study researches the key aspects of the establishment and development of specialized schools from 1985-2019. This is done through the analysis of education policy issues in this context where there is an underlying conflict between the values of equity versus choice.


Summary and debate

From the investigation, it can also be recognized that the de facto policy that has shaped the phenomenon is that these schools are a particularly successful educational model, but it has also been found that they also give a distinct advantage to the established strata. In light of this, the question arises: how and in what way is it desirable to narrow this gap? According to Ben-David-Hadar (Ben-David-Hadar, 2018), as long as neoliberal assumptions demand cuts in central budgets and giving local actors more independence in policy formulation, as revealed in this study, the evident implications of a “learning society” will not be achieved. Thus, the main assumption of policy makers is:

1. By the redistribution of wealth, with the source being monies raised from taxes, while limiting sources of supplementary budget through a system of donations.
2. By affirmative allocation for talented individuals from disadvantaged population.

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