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The Effect of the Druze Education Reform in Israel and Druze Students’ Achievements in Higher Education

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Abstract

This study investigates the educational achievements of the Druze community in Israel. It examines the role of the sectorial separation of Druze education, gathering insights from school principals, supervisors, and students about this structure. Through interviews with educational stakeholders, the research analyses the preparation processes for Druze students' academic pursuits and evaluates the impact of this educational segregation on their success in matriculation exams and higher education integration. The findings indicate that the historical educational separation has positively influenced Druze students' outcomes, with the Druze educational model yielding significantly better results than other Israeli school systems. Key to this success is strategic resource investment, innovative teaching methods, and a strong emphasis on academic excellence. This model presents a viable pathway for enhancing educational achievements among other minority groups both in Israel and globally.

Keywords: achievements, Druze society, exams, higher education, matriculation

Introduction

Ever since the State of Israel was established (1948), Druze education was part of the Arab school system. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a new outlook emerged among the Druze community, and many were concerned that the young generation would assimilate into Israeli society and leave the Druze faith and heritage, among other things due to the neglect of their roots (Ha’israeli, 2022). Therefore, a demand was made for a renewed emphasis on ethnic consciousness. To realize

this goal, the leaders of the Druze community demanded that Druze education be separated from Arab education, forming

a special study program for the Druze (Falah, 2000; Ha’israeli, 2022). The Israeli Ministry of Education and Culture was the first government ministry to implement the government’s decision, separating Druze education from the Arab department of education and culture and establishing a unit for Druze education and culture, in charge of the pedagogic-ethical aspects of education and development of curricula with special contents for Druze schools (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020). The independence of Druze education was manifested both in the establishment of this unit and in accentuating Druze uniqueness by building new curricula, writing textbooks, and adding unique contents for Druze schools (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020; Falah, 2000; Harb et al., 2022).

Within five years the unit established an independent education system with regard to pedagogy and curriculum, physical buildings, tools and study aides in the various educational and cultural domains (Abbas, 2004). The Druze school system assumed responsibility for producing graduates who could become integrated in Israeli society, love the homeland and feel a sense of belonging, be loyal to the state and a partner in its construction and defense, while remaining connected to Druze society. These aspirations are anchored in the overall goals of the Druze school system as of 1976 (Abbas, 2007; Ha’israeli, 2022; Peled, 1976). It can be seen that the Druze school system focuses both on shaping the identity of Druze youth, with the purpose of nurturing a connection to their heritage, and on cultivating loyalty to the State of Israel (Abbas, 2004; Ha’israeli, 2022).

The current study addresses the process of separating the Druze school system from Arab education and the effect of this separation on the changing eligibility rates for a matriculation certificate and number of academic students from the Druze community. This examination will be carried out from different perspectives: On one hand, that of the students – 11th-12th grade students at Druze schools and undergraduate Druze academic students, and on the other, that of the staff – Supervisors, school principals, and Druze trainee principals.

Literature Review

Autonomy in Education – The Druze in Israel

In 1957, the Israeli government recognized the Druze community as separate and independent and in 1962 the government approved the Druze Religious Courts Law. This recognition paved the way for separation and for emphasizing the uniqueness of the community among other local minorities (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020; Dana, 1998). Since establishment of the state (1948), the education system awarded educational autonomy to sectors that differed fundamentally from the Jewish secular sector, and first and foremost – Arab society. The right to influence educational contents is entwined with the right to preserve one’s group identity (Ha’israeli, 2022). To preserve the unique features of their cultural identity, unique groups within society need recognition that will grant them an impact on the contents their children are taught (Rabin, 2002). This is a group right and not an individual right. Hence, the purpose is to generate an educational and cultural climate capable of preserving the cultural freedom of the minority group to choose its identities (Ha’israeli, 2022) and determine the values that guide its life and the education of the next generations (Rabin, 2002; Harb et al., 2022).

When examining to what degree a cultural minority indeed enjoys educational autonomy, it is necessary to distinguish between a demand for liberty and autonomy that imply lack of intervention by the state and a demand that the state recognize the minority’s cultural-national uniqueness, encourage it, help it, and support it. The demand for educational self-management is an example of the demand that the state encourage and help preserve the minority’s cultural uniqueness. In this context, Gavizon and Balfour (2005) argue that even if Arab society has a relative autonomy within the state school system, a large part of the educational decisions concerning the curriculum are reached by the “Jewish majority.” Therefore, most of the autonomy of the Arab school system concerns the separation of schools, allowing children in the Arab minority to study in their own language (Ha’israeli, 2022).

The full control of the Jewish school system over the Arab school system to some degree compromises the ability of Arab society to determine its own educational aims and deprives it of their right to shape and direct the school system according to its collective interests (Savirski et al., 2020). At the same time, the high involvement of decision makers from the Jewish school system thwarts any significant involvement of Arab educators in the decision-making process – both regarding the allocation of public resources to the schools and regarding educational contents intended for Arab students (Ha’israeli, 2022; Saban, 2002; Savirski et al., 2020). Moreover, the separation of the Druze school system from the Arab school system illustrates the structure of Israel’s high school system, which maintains separate systems for the Arab, Druze, Haredi (ultra-orthodox), national religious, and secular Jews. The investigation into the effects of a separate school system on Druze students in higher education may, therefore, highlight issues related to sector-based education in multi-cultural societies and its effects on achievements in higher education.

The Circumstances that Paved the Way for Establishing The Unit For Druze Education

First it is necessary to understand the background to the reform. The issue of how much cultural freedom a minority should receive to choose its identities and determine the values underlying its life and its education of the next generations involves a fundamental debate. This is true regarding the ethno-national Arab-Palestinian indigenous minority in Israel and its right to enjoy educational self-management, i.e., educational autonomy (Rabin, 2002; Savirski et al., 2020). Relating specifically to the basic right of a national-indigenous minority to influence educational contents, Al-Haj (1996) notes that this is associated mainly with the debate on the right of the Arab sector, as a minority, to maintain educational autonomy. The issue touches upon the extent to which the Israel’s Arab sector as a minority enjoys the right to influence the nature of its education (Ha’israeli, 2022).

Arab education in Israel is mostly managed by Jewish officials and decision makers. The authority of Arab municipalities and of Arab school principals is merely technical, while material decisions are reached in the Ministry of Education (Al-Haj, 1996; Savirski et al., 2020). The fact that Arabs have no impact on Hebrew-Jewish education is a given, but it is astonishing that they have only an infinitesimal part in managing their own educational matters. With regard to the curriculum, Jews control the Arab school system (Savirski et al., 2020). For many years, it was primarily Jews who occupied the committees that formulated the curricula and educational aims of Arab schools (Al-Haj, 1996; Savirski et al., 2020).

Some claim, mainly in Arab-Muslim society, that the comprehensive control of the Hebrew school system over the Arab school system prevents Arab society from any possibility of determining its own educational aims, deprives it of its right to shape and directs the school system according to its collective interests (Savirski et al., 2020). In addition, they contend that it thwarts any significant involvement of Arab-Palestinian educators in the decision-making process, both regarding the allocation of public resources to the schools and regarding educational contents intended for Arab students (Saban, 2002). This pervasive control likely extends into higher education as well, where the ability of Arab institutions and educators to influence academic policies and curricula could be similarly constrained.

Teaching in Arabic has remained the primary feature of the separate school system. However, the language utilized for teaching does not attest to the contents studied. For purposes of comparison, the considerable investment in teaching Hebrew in Jewish schools, regarding both motivation and study hours, derives from a worldview that perceives language as a primary component of the revival of Hebrew nationalism, reinforcing the national identity, and strengthening the national self-image, while teaching Arabic in Arab schools has been reduced to merely imparting language skills (Peled, 2006).

With regard to the Arab school system, it has been suggested more than once in the past that cultural and educational autonomy be granted through one of two courses. The first course is that of cultural autonomy, pertaining mainly to culture, education, religion, language, and media. Cultural autonomy is individually-based, applied to people who belong to a certain minority irrespective of their place of residence; thus, it is distinguished from territorial autonomy that applies to a certain territory and all those who live there (Samooha, 1999).

Since Arab citizens of Israel are territorially spread over different regions of the country (mainly in the Galilee, the Triangle, the Negev, and towns in the coastal plain), the relevant discourse for the Arab-Palestinian minority is one of non-territorial cultural autonomy (Klein, 1987; Amer & Davidovitch, 2020). This means cultural statutory autonomy (by law) and involves establishing an autonomous council elected by members of the minority. The other option is that of a more limited autonomy for the Arab-Palestinian minority, restricted to education, with no autonomous Arab council. Hence, it is evident that Arab-Muslim society is making all efforts to distinguish itself from the Israeli-Jewish school system (Ha’israeli, 2022). This option of segregation and culture was awarded to the Druze school system as early as 1976, and this cultural autonomy seems to have benefited the Druze community, as manifested in its achievements.

The Decision to Establish a Separate School System for the Druze

With the establishment of Israel, the Druze sector was identified by Israeli society with the Arab sector and one conspicuous result of this was the inclusion of Druze students within the Arab state school system. In the late 1970s, however, Druze leaders took action to separate from the Arab school system, forming a separate system, the Druze Unit of Education, that allowed them to add to the curriculum unique contents for their community, such as Druze heritage (State Archives, January 1, 1984 – June 30, 1985, p. 335). This decision to establish a separate school system for the Druze community was the product of the Shechterman Committee in the early 1970s that determined:

The committee contends that the State of Israel has not done enough to instill an Israeli-Druze consciousness, and only little educational and informational efforts have been made among Druze youth to promote an Israeli-Druze consciousness. This has caused damage to the state and to its image. The fact that mandatory enlistment applies to the entire Druze community should have urged the State of Israel to encourage intellectuals to develop the foundations of Israeli-Druze consciousness as an ideological theoretical basis, providing Druze youth with a logical explanation and mental and theoretical background for their full identification with the state and readiness to fight for it while simultaneously maintaining their uniqueness as Druze (Shechterman Committee Report, 1975, p. 2721). Furthermore, higher education institutions have a crucial role to play in this regard. They are uniquely positioned to deepen this consciousness through tailored academic programs and research initiatives that explore and reinforce Druze heritage and its integration within Israeli society. Notably this decision did not take into consideration the effects that such separation would have on Druze students’ integration and achievements in higher education.

Establishment of The Unit for Druze and Circassian Education and Culture

To maintain treatment of the Druze sector, the Unit for Druze and Circassian Education and Culture was formed – an independent unit within the pedagogic secretariat that was in charge of the administrative and pedagogic aspects related to this school system and its unique needs (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020). The unit took care of a range of issues: Old schools were renovated and expanded and new ones founded; new study programs in the universities were developed to promote preservation of the heritage; new textbooks were written; the teaching force was enhanced and the proportion of certified teachers grew (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020). The separation of Druze education also affected the field of teacher training, and several teacher training colleges that catered to Druze students opened. In contrast, the teacher training programs in universities remained open to students from all sectors.

The new school system set itself a goal to generate among Druze students an Israeli-Druze consciousness and identity aimed at their identification with the state and its symbols, by emphasizing common elements between the Druze and the Jews and distancing the students from their Arab identity (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020). To implement this policy and achieve these goals, Arab teachers were replaced by Druze teachers, the existing study programs were converted into new ones, and a new subject called “Druze heritage” was introduced, aimed in practice at forming a new pro-Jewish and pro-Israeli Druze identity (State Archives, January 1, 1984 – June 30, 1985, p. 19).

The case of Druze society in Israel has attracted, on one hand, praise voiced by the Jewish population and establishing a Druze attitude and loyalty to the state, and on the other, suppressed claims by Druze representatives citing discriminatory treatment of the Druze by the authorities, incompatible with their loyalty to the state. This argument also reflects events within the school system in Druze towns. Special textbooks were written for learning the unique aspects and contents of the Druze heritage, hundreds of Druze teachers were trained, professional development programs were held for the teachers, many classrooms, sports halls, and libraries were built, vocational and technological education was increased, and steps were taken to increase the number of Druze in institutions of higher education, which was very low. This unit also dealt with education in the small Circassian community (State Archives, January 1, 1984 – June 30, 1985).

In 1990 the Druze and Circassian schools were integrated in the Haifa and northern districts, and the Unit for Education continued as the headquarters of the ministry’s pedagogic secretariat in the Haifa District. The unit outlines policy, plans pedagogic actions, and takes care of all issues concerning education and culture in Druze and Circassian towns, while coordinating and collaborating with the ministry’s various units in the main offices and districts as well as with the local municipalities and educational institutions (State Archives, January 1, 1984 – June 30, 1985).

In 1991 an advisory committee was appointed on behalf of the government, to examine changes in the educational policy for Druze society. The committee’s recommendations were intended to bring Druze education to the same level as the major educational stream. The committee indicated the need to grant Druze education the necessary resources for its advancement by adding technology, laboratories, and computers, as well as improving the physical conditions for learning and teaching. Another suggestion was to eliminate the position of the person in charge of Druze education in the Ministry of Education and place responsibility for the Druze school system with the district to which they belong (State Archives, January 1, 1984 – June 30, 1985). In 1984, following two government resolutions on closing the gaps between the resources allocated to Druze towns and to Jewish development towns, the Ministry of Education introduced a five-year plan to reduce educational and budgetary disparities and close the gap between the level of education in the Druze sector and that customary in the school system at large (State Archives, January 1, 1984 – June 30, 1985).

Since this separation, a constant rise is evident in the level of education in the Druze sector, manifested in the number of students and the eligibility rate for a matriculation certificate, both among the boys and mainly among the girls, which has been gradually growing over the years (Barakat, 2022; Halabi, 2017). The data speaks for themselves and show that the rate of those eligible for a matriculation certificate in the Druze sector is at present, in 2022, among the highest in the country – naturally higher than the Arab sector and the Bedouin sector – reaching about 89% (Ministry of Education website, no date).

The study examines the process that led to the separation of the Druze schools from the Arab education system, while presenting the new curricula introduced in the Druze schools in 1976 instead of those used at that time in the Arab schools. The study presents the mechanism established to implement all of this and we saw how the state used the Druze school system to strengthen the application of the mandatory military service law to the Druze in 1956, with the aim of promoting Druze education and creating a separation that would result in this (Harb et al., 2022). It is possible to prioritize the Druze over the rest of the Arab population. The study examined the circumstances and reasons that led to the separation of Druze education and presented the goals of establishing the Druze education unit, its methods of operation and how the state's goals correspond to the interests of the Druze, and in particular of the Druze students (Halabi, 2017).

The achievements of Druze society with regard to education in general and to the rate of those eligible for a matriculation certificate and the number of students in institutions of higher education in particular are extremely exceptional and impressive, especially the results of the matriculation exams (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020). The question is, What resources helped Druze students overcome the financial and budgetary constraints and achieve such high rates of eligibility for a matriculation certificate as a way of entering academia? Is the change in recent years a result of the separation of the Druze school system from the Arab system or of the sociocultural transformation within Druze society?

Following the literature review, the current study’s point of departure is that eligibility for a matriculation certificate opens the door to academia and from there to high quality employment. Those who do not manage to pass the matriculation obstacle will not be able to enter academia because their school system did not train them for this, and as a result they will subsequently find it very hard to do well in life. The skills that the school system imparts to its graduates are those that will determine the chances of studying in institutions of higher education. Education is the basis for the equal opportunities to which every child in Israel is entitled. Hence proper, efficient, and effective preparation affects success in the matriculation exams and reaching academia. The better the preparation in high school, the greater the ability of students to acquire an academic education. In our opinion, efficient preparation might have a positive effect on students’ sense of readiness and self-efficacy and on the integration of Druze high school students in academia, which does not offer special programs to Druze students, as well as their achievements. In addition to the separation of the Druze school system from the Arab school system, other factors that might affect the integration of Druze students in academic studies can also be indicated, such as cultural and social changes in Druze society in recent decades. Effective teacher training programs tailored for Druze educators, principal leadership training that focuses on the unique challenges of Druze schools, and the development of culturally sensitive educational standards and assessments are essential. These measures can ensure that the educational environment is conducive to meeting the specific needs of Druze students, thereby enhancing their academic success and integration into higher education

The current study examines whether the separation of Druze education affected the achievements of Druze students in higher education. What do Druze school principals, supervisors, and trainee principals think about the results of the separation? And particularly – can the case of education in Israel’s Druze sector serve as a model for success among other minorities in Israel and elsewhere?

**Methodology**

**Research Questions** The study examines the results of separating the Druze school system from the Arab Division of Education in the Ministry of Education from the perspective of nine (8 males and 1 female) Druze high school principals, supervisors, and trainee principals from the universities. Interviews were conducted with nine school principals, supervisors, and trainee principals. They were asked about the process of preparation for academia among Druze students and their views on the effect of education in the Druze sector on students’ achievements, both in the matriculation exams and when joining academic studies. We will examine the following research questions:

1. Did the separation of the school system (the removal of the Druze school system from the Arab Division of Education in the Ministry of Education) affect the achievements of Druze students in the matriculation exams, and to what degree? This question will be tested by exploring the matriculation results in Druze high schools from 1976 to 2020.

2. What factors caused Druze students to achieve high rates of eligibility as perceived by the principals, supervisors, and trainee principals? This question will be tested by in-depth interviews with the research participants.

3. What is the view of Druze principals, supervisors, and trainee principals regarding the results of the separation, in light of the impressive rise in the rates of eligibility for a matriculation certificate and consequently the sharp rise in the number of Druze students in academia? This question will be tested through in-depth interviews with the research participants.

4. Do methods of preparation for higher education implemented in Druze high schools affect the attitudes and perceptions of 11th and 12th graders regarding readiness for academia, and to what extent? This question will be tested through the perception of students (high school and undergraduate students, by means of self-report questionnaires).

**Research Tools** The data were collected by means of two customary qualitative research tools: Interviews and documents (Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 1990), where the triangulation of the two tools contributes to the internal validity of the findings (Yin, 1994). The researcher used a semi-structured open-ended interview with all the educators, since this method makes it possible to present materials and questions that were not anticipated in advance and to form a social procedure that centers on words (Ellen, 1984).

As stated, in the current study we used a flexible and powerful tool, the interview, that makes it possible to reflect the voice of the interviewees and understand the meaning they give to the subject studied (Rabionet, 2011). The interviewees were interviewed with a semi-structured interview (Qu & Dumay, 2011) to ensure that all the topics and questions relevant for the study would be expressed in the interview and that answers would be given to the questions posed by the study, granting meaning, analyses, and interpretations to the quantitative data collected in the quantitative part. Semi-structured in-depth interviews give interviewees the freedom to describe their thoughts and to emphasize the topics they perceive as important while allowing the researcher to respond, providing thorough attention and a sound focus on parts that require clarification or more detail in order to receive as full a picture as possible of the fundamental topic studied (Horton et al., 2004). The semi-structured in-depth interviews began with an identical statement that clearly defined the research topic and focused the interview on it, while noting that the interview is voluntary and that the researcher is obligated to maintain the confidentiality of the interviewee’s information and identity.

**Data Analysis** Every interview took 90 minutes in average. All the nine interviews were recorded and transcribed word for word. Data analysis in this study was carried out with a thematic analysis (Crowe et al., 2015) that allows identifying and analyzing themes in a qualitative database, such that it is possible to interpret different aspects of the subject studied (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In thematic analysis, an attempt is made to detect within the data explicit and implicit themes (Joffe & Yardley, 2004), with the aim of describing and understanding what people feel and think and how they behave in the context underlying the research topic (Guest et al., 2011).

The data were analyzed based on the six stages proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) for thematic analysis, while adapting them to the needs of the current study. The following are the data analysis stages in the current study:

1. Holistic reading of the initial interviews to detect the main ideas reflected in them.

2. Initial units of meaning that arose from the interviews were noted. The units of meaning reflected the major and most prominent themes that arose from the interviews (Ayalon & Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2010). This stage took a long time because it was carried out concurrently with continued conducting of the interviews. Each of the interviews was read in full and then encoded by initial units of meaning, at this stage without giving them titles or deciding on a certain order.

3. Gathering the units of meaning and dividing them into themes. The large amount of material required repeated examination of the many units of meaning that arose from the interviews, while dividing them into themes and examining the relations between them to reach a coherent structure that tells the story that arises from the interviews. This stage included initial mapping of the themes.

4. The structure formed was examined, while rereading all the units of meaning placed in each of the mapped parts. The purpose of the reading was to closely examine each of the themes as independent elements and as components of the full story. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest analyzing each theme separately in order to identify the “story” it tells and at the same time understanding how this story is integrated in the general “story” that the researcher wishes to tell by presenting the findings. This reading revealed a certain repetition and overlapping between different parts of the analysis map and a need to reduce and generate a more sparing and precise structure. Some of the themes found to be sparse were joined with others, while other themes were split into more precise and distinct ones.

5. The themes were given titles. At this stage, eight main themes were generated.

6. Writing the qualitative part of the findings chapter. The writing process required reexamination, in the wish to remain as close as possible to the interviewees’ words. The writing involved weaving the results of the analysis with quotes from the texts, in order to provide the reader with a coherent and convincing story that encompasses the topic investigated (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

In the interview the following questions were presented to all the school principals, supervisors, and trainee principals:

1. What is your opinion on the level of Druze education relative to other sectors? Are you satisfied?

2. How is the Druze study program unique? In what way is it different? And in what way is it similar?

3. What do you think about the matriculation results in Druze high schools?

4. What factors caused Druze students to achieve high rates of eligibility?

5. What are the results of the separation in light of the impressive rise in the rate of eligibility for a matriculation certificate and consequently the sharp rise in the number of Druze academic students?

6. In your opinion, is the increase a result of the separation from the Arab education division in 1977?

7. Are students followed after graduating from high school?

8. In your opinion, does the school constitute an academic advocate for its students? How are students prepared for academia?

Results

Analysis of the interviews conducted with nine principals, supervisors, and trainee principals in the Druze sector generated eight main themes. According to the interviewees, these themes are interconnected and tell the full rich story of the development of Druze high school and academic education through their eyes. We shall present the main themes that arose as well as select quotes from the interviews that illustrate these themes. Each theme shall be presented concisely, followed by quotes and explanations on how these quotes illustrate the theme. Finally, each theme will be summarized in light of the quotes from the interviews.

Overall Satisfaction with Druze Students’ Achievements, with an Emphasis on Matriculation Data

The testimonies of the interviewees (mentioned by their initials) indicate general agreement that the Druze education is on the rise and there is overall satisfaction with student achievements. For example, H. who was interviewed claims, “In recent years there is a considerable improvement in the level of education and in the achievements of Druze schools, of course both in absolute terms and compared to other sectors, particularly the Arab sector.” A. emphasizes and adds, “The level of Druze education compared to other sectors is satisfactory and they lead in many areas, particularly in the rate of those eligible [for a matriculation certificate].” He continues:

I am very satisfied with the situation because of the positive trend of the system. The high eligibility rates show that all students take the matriculation exam, no child is left behind, and all students earn a matriculation certificate that ensures entrance to academic studies and future employment.

V. thinks and argues:

The current state is satisfactory. The considerable changes in society led to a change in education as well… The situation is constantly improving from an achievement orientation, but do the data indeed reflect the situation in academia and in institutions of higher education? I am speaking only about secondary education, in elementary education very good work is undoubtedly being done to instill values and education. This is happening in the preschools and the multiple informal education programs have also been beneficial. The results are very good, the Druze community is leading the pack.

Moreover, Z. believes that “Education in Druze villages is advancing, the level of Druze education tops the list of eligibility for a matriculation certificate and of achievements on the MEITZAV test.” M. put an emphasis on the resources:

The state of education in the Druze sector is good, regarding resources Druze education receives enough resources but these resources are not put to the best use, unlike the Jewish sector where there is knowledge of how to utilize the existing resources and how to obtain more. Compared to the Arab sector I think that we are not very different, but compared to the Bedouin sector the level of Druze education is higher. The matriculation results among Druze high school students are good, particularly regarding eligibility for a matriculation certificate, but the rate of students who earned high grades and averages should be stressed, as these will enable them to join academia in the fields of engineering and medicine. It is not enough to have a high rate of eligibility; more efforts should be made to improve the quality of the students’ matriculation certificates.

N. elaborates even more regarding the general society aspect:

It is precisely in Druze towns that there has been an enormous improvement in the matriculation results. We are talking about high, impressive, very high achievements relative to schools from other sectors. As I see it, the main role of the schools is precisely to prepare students for life itself and not necessarily to reach good achievements in the matriculation certificate. Hence, I see that education should contribute to building society [particularly culture] and support as much as possible the facilitation of a good and proper social life, where this approach centers on building human beings. So good matriculation results are very important but it is necessary to take into account those who did not achieve the anticipated results and see how society treats them. This inquiry is important, both for the individual and for society.

P. describes what he thinks happened and even uses the word “revolution”:

In the last decade Druze education has undergone a revolution, as it was previously at the bottom of the scale regarding achievements, after Arab education, and now we see that the level of Druze education equals Jewish education or even surpasses it on certain dimensions. The level of Druze education is leading in eligibility for a matriculation certificate and achievements in the MEITZAV test. In general, I am very satisfied, there are several issues that should be focused on, for instance the Druze placement system, giving the principal authority to choose the teachers. The matriculation results are very impressive, the eligibility rate is high, there is a considerable rising trend, but as I noted before it is necessary to place more emphasis on the quality of the matriculation, the excellence proportions, which can encourage [students to join] academia more than the eligibility rate, as sometimes the weight of the matriculation does not grant graduates the eligibility to join academia.

Additionally, I. claims we need to examine the quality, as he describes:

In my opinion, education in the Druze sector is constantly advancing, the eligibility rates for a matriculation certificate have been on the rise for a decade … the Druze sector seems to be leading in its eligibility rates, the question to be asked concerns the quality of the matriculation.

He also adds, “Very good results, the Druze sector tops all others, this is not evident in institutions of higher education.” S. also speaks about awareness which will lead to integration:

In recent years we have witnessed a considerable rise among Druze students in Israel with regard to the proportion of those registering for academic studies and advanced degrees. This rise is a direct result of higher awareness of the necessity of this for becoming integrated in Israeli society on the necessary and even average level, while realizing the right to equal opportunity in senior roles compared to the Jewish sector.

All the interviewees in the current study emphasized the considerable rise in the success of the Druze school system, with an emphasis on student achievements in the matriculation exams. Moreover, the principals stressed their satisfaction and pride at these achievements. The principals see the efforts made by Druze society to facilitate these achievements, such as the many educational programs beginning from preschool.

Desire to Continue to Excel

One of the prominent themes that arose from the interviews was the principals’ need to constantly continue detecting issues that need strengthening, make efforts, and reach improvements in these issues. This inclination of Druze principals is part of the explanation for the Druze school system’s ability to reach good achievements. This is reflected in H. words: “We are in the right direction but there are still lots of things that should be enhanced and not only academic and achievement-oriented, such as teaching values, social involvement, and certainly improving the quality of the matriculation results”. A. also thinks that “There is room for improvement in the proportion of those excelling, particularly among the boys”. V. adds:

I am satisfied but I seek to improve and advance. Education in the Druze community is undergoing big changes, the teacher staff are acquiring an education and managing to improve the state of education. The many programs are leading to significant changes as well.

Z. places his emphasize on the areas of study and says:

It is necessary to put more effort into the quality of the matriculation exams and the level of excellence. In addition, there is not much success in the psychometric exam in Druze schools. Therefore, the Druze community must put two matters at the forefront: A higher education in science and in the areas of high-tech and medicine, and economic advancement. For this purpose, it is necessary to educate to excel from a young age until higher education if this community indeed desires to become integrated in modern society.

Additionally, M. claims that we need to invest in order to gain:

I am not satisfied enough with the state of education in the Druze sector, there is a lot to improve and upgrade. In my opinion, it is necessary to put more efforts into human capital, develop it optimally and focus on it and give the professional management and supervisors the mandate to choose the best teachers. It is necessary to support the teaching staff constantly, both pedagogically and organizationally, to allow teamwork and peer learning. Students’ level in several subjects is low, for instance, the knowledge of Hebrew, which affects the rest of the subjects, particularly in high school.

P. claims that we need to increase awareness:

I think that it is necessary to make more of an effort to advance the quality of the matriculation studies and the level of excellence. In my opinion, the common goal is the possibility of joining academic studies, becoming graduates who contribute to society and who will become influential figures able to advance Druze society in particular and Israeli society in general. I think that also increasing awareness among young people and the need for an academic certificate and its meaning contribute to increasing motivation and to the wish to reach eligibility.

I. calls for a change in the school’s role: “Some things require change, such as the role of the school in preparing high school students for academia”.

The interviewees indicate a strong urge and desire to continue investing resources in development and excellence. It is clear that they do not take the success of Druze students for granted, rather as necessitating constant efforts in order to maintain the clear advantage of the Druze sector in future years as well. At the same time, the principals emphasize the need to build new programs, choose high standard teaching staff, and invest in areas that are slightly weaker, such as teaching the Hebrew language.

Similarity and Uniqueness of the Druze Study Program

The principals related how the study contents of Druze students are very similar fundamentally to those of the general sector, aside from the cultural-religious uniqueness. This point is significant, as the standards to which Druze students are held resemble those of the general population. Hence, their achievements are even more conspicuous and they receive no concessions that might explain the high achievements of Druze students. H. points at the uniqueness of the special program:

The uniqueness of the Druze study program [is] its very existence as a sectorial study program, and particularly that some topics and subjects are universal or at least common and identical to all sectors, such as math, English, science, primary language, and Hebrew language, such that as I see it the unique areas are perhaps certain chapters in history and heritage … in the other subjects there is no difference and in my opinion there is no need for any difference. The laws of mathematics and English grammar and/or the primary language and the Hebrew language will not change between sectors.

On the other hand, M. expresses a different opinion:

There is nothing unique in the Druze study program aside from building a program in the Arabic and Hebrew language, where the coordinating supervisors determine the emphases and choose special texts appropriate for Druze society. The Druze study program differs from that of the other sectors in the subjects of Arabic language, Hebrew language, and Druze heritage, but it is similar in the other subjects, particularly math, English, and science.

Some principals mentioned the cultural diversity in the Druze study program, where this diversity is supported mainly by the contents of Druze heritage, history, and language. This is reflected in A. words: “There are unique study programs in areas of heritage, history, Hebrew language, Arabic language … the student is exposed to the unique culture, values, which increases the sense of belonging to the community, to society, and to the state”. V. elaborates in detail:

There are study programs in the subjects of Druze heritage, Arabic literature, field training, and knowledge of the land, to shape the identity and enhance the civic sense of Druze adolescents. Analysis of the study programs and of the teaching methods may help construct an educational model that will assist in adapting the contents to the underlying goals of the programs. The research findings show that the study contents and their methods of instruction have a significant part in establishing the personal identity and enhancing the civic sense of local Druze adolescents. Study contents that include messages enhancing the identity and civics, side by side with educational activities adapted to the students, educational projects, teachers who impart to their students tools and skills – all these allow adolescents to shape their identity and enhance their sense of civics and belonging.

In addition, Z. states that:

The Druze study program is intended to construct a Druze identity. There is no doubt that studies of “Druze heritage” have not helped members of the community acquire a higher education or become familiar with the specifics of the faith and its foundations, which should have been taught by clerics with a higher education and knowledge of the Druze faith rather than by teachers whose training in Druze heritage was provided through courses or mail-order books.

N. thinks that “Most of the program is comprised of heritage studies. The students’ connection to the historical and spiritual tradition of the Druze community is important. The gist of this program involves constructing a Druze identity”. P. adds, “The study program in the Druze sector is characterized by uniqueness in the subject of Druze heritage, while the other subjects are more universal and parallel to any study program in the different sectors.” Furthermore, I. argues:

Druze heritage, Druze identity, history for the Druze, it seems that a process of identity constructing existed and still exists. The premise underlying my outlook is that study programs and their method of instruction can help shape identity and influence the enhancement of adolescents’ civic sense. The questions deriving from this are: Do the study programs in these subjects contribute to establishing an Israeli-Druze identity? And how is this manifested? Also, the study program in field training and knowledge of the land includes preparing youth for military service and the domain of social education.

S. points out that:

The Druze study program emphasizes the existence of the Druze as a distinct community, separate from Arab society. This is manifested, for example, in teaching Druze heritage (in light of the fact that the Druze faith is secret) in order to instill the Druze entity and identity, through texts selected from Arabic literature that are unlikely to enhance Arab identity and Arab nationality, distinguishable from those in the Arab study program, devoting a large number of hours in the curriculum to Hebrew lessons, including Bible lessons, and strengthening the status of Arabic as an official written and spoken language. These differences may train graduates for life in Israel.

In the context of the uniqueness of the Druze educational program, the principals are divided. Some emphasize elements common to the program and to educational contents imparted to students in the general population. These principals contend that it is precisely due to the similar contents that it is possible to measure the high achievements of the Druze population versus the general population.

The Contribution of the Teaching Staff as an Important Element in the Achievements of Druze Students

The principals were asked about the main reasons and factors that could explain the high achievements of Druze students. One of the major factors emphasized by the principals was the teaching staff and the high quality educational teams. H. describes in his own words the importance of the staff’s quality: “The quality of the teachers and the declining age of the teaching staff at the schools. Also, the quality of the principals selected in recent years.” A. believes, “The factors that contribute to students’ achievements are primarily follow-up by the supervisors, setting goals and aims on the student level, follow-up and consistency of the principals and teaching staff.” M. expresses his feelings regarding the staff’s contribution:

From my point of view, the achievement of high eligibility rates was facilitated by a good management team, good utilization of resources, investment in human capital in the high schools, building adapted school programs by officials within the schools, professional support in the core subjects (languages, math, and sciences) by the professional guidance and supervision system.

An elaboration gives N in his opinion:

In my opinion, the change in the teacher’s status. Absorbing many new fresh and motivated teachers with new ideas for implementation. The turnover among the teaching staff led to teaching how to compete (perhaps)? Encouraging higher education among the students. Changing the image of the graduate as one who must advance, and develop. All these are direct reasons for the increased eligibility, in my opinion.

P. gives examples of the main contributors according to his experience: “The main contributors are measurable work programs with clear goals, aims, and vision; Also, the quality of the general and subject-matter supervisors, the quality of the principals and teachers, generated the desired change.” S. put an emphasis on investment in the teaching force in schools:

The matriculation eligibility rates among Druze students are increasing, a cause for praise and pride. This increase has two main reasons in my opinion: The first is higher awareness of the significance of matriculation grades as a determining criterion for admission to universities and to certain academic disciplines and the strong wish to receive the opportunity to study valued subjects. The second is the considerable competition among those in charge of the school system, whether supervisors, school principals, teachers, or parents, which has a direct effect on the students.

The principals indicate that the investment in good teaching staff from the Druze sector is one of the most important causes of the success of Druze students. Among others, good teaching staff manages to encourage the desire for education among students, encourages excellence, and provides students with sources of support throughout their studies.

Liberal-Modern Trends as an Important Factor Affecting the Achievements of Druze Students

Another significant social change in the last decade involves a certain decline in conservative views in the sector and a rise in the level of modernist and liberal views. These processes have allowed primarily Druze women to study outside the home, acquire an education and a profession, and constitute an important source of subsistence for the household. H. describes it well when he says: “Openness and social and cultural development among the community, leading to double the number of girls in academia.” Z. indicates that gender as a part of social changes has a significant impact:

Druze women have advanced in the sphere of higher education, more than have Druze men. Nevertheless, the disparity between the sexes with regard to education might have many negative consequences for the structure of the family unit, hence the need to encourage the entire population to acquire a higher education and excellence in education and then we can contend together with the rest of the country’s inhabitants who receive high quality excellent education, so much so that they have become scientists, researchers, and lecturers at institutions of higher education as well as high-tech and industry entrepreneurs, and if all citizens do not have the same opportunity to acquire excellent education we will be unable to generate explorers, scientists, and high-tech workers irrespective of religion, nationality, race, and sex, rather the test is one of education.

Moreover, I. focus on the cultural changes and their influence:

The influential factors are sociocultural factors. The Druze community has changed considerably over the past two decades, where the sociocultural change has transformed the girls into a studying and working force. Prior to 2000 only a minority of Druze women studied, compared to the last two decades, and following the social change more and more Druze young women are acquiring a higher education. Society allows this now and even encourages it, while in the early 1990s and in the 1980s and of course earlier this was not socially acceptable …

The principals indicate that the social changes in the Druze sector aroused mainly liberal winds that encouraged many women to join the sphere of higher education and the labor force. In this way, it became socially acceptable and more and more women embarked on a course of studies, generating an overall rise in education rates in the Druze sector.

Issues of Identity as an Important Factor Underlying Druze Students’ Achievements

One of the significant aspects that arose in the interviews as explaining the desire of the Druze to excel and invest in education is the issue of identity. The principals emphasized that the unique Druze identity causes Druze society in general and the young in particular to invest in education in order to distinguish themselves from the general Arab sector. V. says it clearly:

The influencing factors are social factors, the issue of the affiliation and identification of the Arab minority in Israel arouses public attention, usually in times of crisis. Under the title “the Arab minority” a distinct place should be accorded to the Druze community that conducts itself differently than the Arab minority at least in a major aspect of Israeli society – members of the Druze community serve in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and study in a school system that is separate from the Arab school system. At the same time, their way of life is perceived as similar to that of the Arab minority. This raises at times the issue of the citizenship, identity, and identification of Druze residents of Israel whose study programs are determined by the Ministry of Education and adapted for Druze society.

V. argues, “The separation did not cause the current change, the separation was intended to separate the Druze from other Arabs.” V. isn’t satisfied with the situation. too:

I’m not happy with the attribution of the advances made to the separation. The separation of Druze education from Arab education in Israel began in 1974, there was nothing that contributed to Druze education. On the contrary, to begin with there were several very problematic points that demanded change: 1. The poor quality of teachers at Druze schools, which were mainly appointed in an unsuitable way and particularly in elementary schools, at an age that is the most important for shaping children toward junior high and high school; 2. The content of the study material was not compatible with that in Jewish schools in Israel, and particularly the emphasis on the Hebrew language; 3. The content of the books determined by the principal at the school stemmed mainly from personal motives of the school and the teachers usually had no impact, aside from agreeing with the principal on the books he chose, even if they were inappropriate for the study track; many books bought were not subjected to any supervision by educators; 4. The attitude of the Ministry of Education to Druze schools was as a last priority and the supervision was based on motives of compensations and friendship between the supervisor and the schools, the municipality, and the person in charge of Druze and Circassian education; 5. Efforts made in favor of Hebrew language as studied in academia did not exist in Druze schools at all; most of the students had a poor command of Arabic and Hebrew and spoke a mix of both, which did not help them become truly familiar with the language for purposes of studying, which is why the rate of those eligible for a matriculation certificate among the Druze was among the lowest in Israel; 6. The math textbooks were in Arabic and there was no scholastic continuity between elementary and junior high school, which made it hard for the children to do well in the most important subject in the entire curriculum; 7. There were no programs and solutions in Druze schools for integrating students in disciplines they like and want.

The general idea of the separation was that when the students would be capable of understanding the language of the local people and state this would be the general solution to the success of Druze children and if the study programs would be changed the successes would be considerable and that the main requirement is a good teacher staff and not because they are someone’s relatives or supporters of the mayor or the principal.

Additionally, N. disconnects the link between the separations and the Druze’s educational achievements:

The high eligibility rates are not a direct result of the separation. If we look for instance at Arab society, the proportional number of academics is high although they studied in a very traditional and inflexible setting and study program. In my opinion the quality of teaching, the students’ family background, are the two main elements that have a big effect on the student and his results/aspirations for the future.

Then again, some of the principals did stress the significance of separating the school system in the 1970s as creating a different trend in Druze education than in Arab education and allowing it to reach a higher level. A. adds, “The separation of Druze education from Arab education beginning from 1977 led to stressing the uniqueness and building a unique work apparatus and a strategic program for the sector, including resource distribution.” M. describes:

In my opinion the separation of the Druze sector from the other sectors had the effect that the professional guidance and supervision system in Druze education focused on Druze schools. If we had remained part of the Arab sector, for instance, Druze schools would not have received the current focus and efforts. In addition, the supervisors of Druze education knew how to obtain resources and budgets that could advance Druze education, although more can be obtained.

According to P.’s opinion, the separation is more social:

I think that the separation provided more of a focus on social life, adapting necessary contents for members of the community, and emphasized unique needs of society. The separation also provided precise mappings that made it possible to follow members of the Druze community. The focus and the setting of short- and long-term goals for the Druze school system had an impact.

In addition, I. share his thoughts:

The separation may have had an effect with regard to budgets and new contents, primarily building a Druze identity that would be loyal to Israeli society, but the change in results came not from there but rather from the sociocultural as well as the economic change.

S. elaborates further:

Before reaching academic studies, Druze education is separated in the schools from Arab education in Israel, with regard to the study program. This separation is intentional, in order to distinguish Druze society which seems itself as a society worthy of a different official attitude and entitled to services equal to those of Jews in Israel, since this community is an ally whose sons serve in the IDF. In my opinion, Israel aimed to segregate the Druze from the Arabs through education and the study program, as the Arab study program enhances the national identity of Arab Muslims and stresses the national and political conflict between Arabs and Jews. This study program does not suit young people who will be enlisting in the IDF after graduating in order to defend Israel and its political and national principles.

This indicates that some of the principals indeed see the separation from the Arab school system as a means that accelerated the development of the Druze school system in the direction of increasing students’ achievements and grades. In contrast, other principals expressed sharp reservations concerning the impact of the separation on students’ achievements and said that the separation was a way of “reeducating” the Druze population by the Israeli government rather than helping Druze students succeed.

The School as an Academic Advocates

One of the factors that might explain the continuous improvement in the achievements of Druze students is the follow-up of student achievements in higher education as well. Thus, based on the rationale that the school prepares the students for an academic future. Hence, the principals were asked how they follow the continued development of the students at the conclusion of their mandatory years of schooling and also what they think about the school’s role in preparing students for academia. All the principals stressed that the school should be an academic advocate that prepares students for academia and that resources should be invested in this. H. Illuminates this topic:

There is a process of follow-up, as there should be, on the school level, on the level of the town, and certainly on the sectorial level, because it is important for this information to be available so that we can use it to reach conclusions and insights for the future… the school is an academic advocate but still on a low level. I think that more resources should be invested in this in order to make academia more accessible to everyone. The preparation of students for academia is through academic direction of high school students, particularly 11th and 12th graders, with the help of organizations and non-profits, of course in coordination and according to the policy of the ministry. I think that the local authorities and the parents are less involved in this issue and that is a pity.

Moreover, A. illustrates:

A program for career education is operated as of early education, including preparation for academia. At present, preparation for academia is provided as part of the “Career education 3-30” program, namely from early education until after military service. Including parent guidance, training teachers for innovativeness and entrepreneurship, and more…

In addition, V. believes that “The top place of the Druze in the [national] school system isn’t sufficiently evident in institutions of higher education, the results slightly distort reality, the topic should definitely be studied in order to understand what is behind the numbers.”

M. believes that school isn’t an academic advocate:

There is no follow-up after the conclusion of 12th grade, particularly by elements related to the Ministry of Education, and as a result a large part of the young people receive no professional guidance and do not manage to become integrated in academia or in the labor force. The young men who enlist in the army receive guidance only after their discharge. Therefore, at present the schools are not academic advocates, high schoolers receive little guidance for academia and are exposed to academic disciplines only to a limited degree in fairs or seminars, and they do not receive suitable training that would allow them to become well integrated in academia.

I do not have much information about the courses taken in schools, junior high or high schools, regarding preparation for academia. High schoolers mostly make an effort to succeed on the psychometric exam and the matriculation exams but this does not constitute real preparation for academia because there is need for individual guidance for academia as regards choosing a discipline that will suit the needs of the labor market, because we see many academic graduates who are not employed for lack of advance guidance and they chose their study discipline for all kinds of reasons. In addition, the high school students do not receive enough information on the nature of teaching and learning in academia, which differs considerably from that at school, and this affects new students who change their major or drop out of academic studies.

On the other hand, N. claims that:

The attitude to academia at present is different, it is a top priority, there is professional guidance and I assume that there are designated visits, encounters with students, lecturers, and others from lots of universities and institutions of higher education in order to encourage students to register at these institutions after high school. In addition to workshops, classes, lectures, and others.

P. argues differently:

The schools are undoubtedly the gate to academia and influential agents and consulting strategists of all students. But it is notable that they are considered an important and central element in addition to the graduate, to which we can add the home and society. All these can be very influential factors in the student’s decision-making and can be a supportive and advancing factor for academic studies. On the high school level the graduates and the proportion of academics are monitored and on the level of the Druze division of education all graduates are monitored and there is even a program called 3-30 that aims to support Druze graduates from age 3 to 30 in order to raise the proportion of academics, facilitate integration in key professions, and particularly to increase the proportion of male academics as there is a disparity between boys and girls in academia.

Another aspect is being explained in I. words:

It should have been by now but it is not. The purpose of the school as perceived by the principals is at present, in my opinion, to constantly improve the rates of eligibility for a matriculation certificate without seeing the next stage. Success is not measured by the number of students but rather by the number of those eligible, and this is an important insight. Action must be taken to include this issue in the success measures of high school principals.

A wide and detailed description is given by S. who feels optimistic about the present programs:

In some Druze municipalities there are joint exposure programs of the high schools and colleges/universities in Israel, but this exposure is still insufficient and on a limited basis. As a result, many parents from the community send their children to high schools in Jewish towns. A large part of these receive an opportunity to take joint courses with the Technion, for instance, or other universities, while still in high school. Preparation is provided, first of all, by helping students find the field that suits their abilities and character for future studies while still in high school. This is done together with the multi-disciplinary staff at the school, which includes school counselors, homeroom teachers, and psychologists.

As indicated by the principals, although everyone sees the importance of preparing students for higher education at the high schools, there is at present insufficient investment of resources and development of programs in this direction.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Themes*

| **Theme** | **Details** | **Selected quote** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Overall satisfaction with the achievements of Druze students, with an emphasis on matriculation data** | All the principals interviewed for the study emphasized the considerable rise in the success of the Druze school system, with an emphasis on student achievements in the matriculation exams. Moreover, the principals stressed their satisfaction and pride at these achievements. | “The level of Druze education compared to other sectors is satisfactory and they are leading in many areas, particularly in the rate of those eligible [for a matriculation certificate]. I am very satisfied with the situation because of the positive direction of the system.” |
| **Desire to continue excelling** | The interviewees indicate a strong urge and desire to continue investing resources in development and excellence. It is clear that they do not take the success of Druze students for granted, rather as necessitating constant efforts in order to maintain the clear advantage of the Druze sector in future years as well. | “I am satisfied but I seek to improve and advance. Education in the Druze community is undergoing big changes, the teacher staff are acquiring an education and managing to improve the state of education. The many programs are leading to significant changes as well”. |
| **Similarity and uniqueness of the Druze study program** | Some emphasize precisely common elements of the program and of the educational contents imparted to students in the general population. These principals contend that it is precisely due to the similar contents that it is possible to measure the high achievements of the Druze population versus the general population. | “The study program in the Druze sector is characterized by uniqueness in the subject of Druze heritage, while the other subjects are more universal and the equivalent of any study program in the different sectors”. |
| **The contribution of the teaching staff as an important element in the achievements of Druze students** | The investment in good teaching staff from the Druze sector is one of the most important causes underlying the success of Druze students. Among others, good teaching staff manage to encourage a desire for education among students, encourage excellence, and provide students with sources of support throughout their studies. | "From my point of view, the achievement of high eligibility rates was facilitated by a good management team, good utilization of resources, investment in human capital in the high schools”. |
| **Liberal-modern trends as an important factor affecting the achievements of Druze students** | The principals stressed that the success of the Druze school system is based to a large extent on sociocultural changes that occurred in the last decade. | “A drop in the desire to join the security forces in the future led to a cognitive change among our youth, manifested in the need to acquire academic studies and a profession outside jobs in the security forces”. |
| **The connection between separating the Druze school system from the Arab Division of Education and the achievements of Druze students** | Some of the principals indeed see the separation from the Arab school system as a means that accelerated the development of the Druze school system in the direction of increasing students’ achievements and grades. In contrast, other principals expressed sharp reservations concerning the impact of the separation on students’ achievements and said that the separation was a way of “reeducating” the Druze population by the Israeli government rather than helping Druze students succeed. | In my opinion, the separation did not cause the current change, the separation was intended to separate the Druze from other Arabs”. |
| **The school as an academic advocate** | Although everyone sees the importance of preparing students for higher education in the high schools, there is at present insufficient investment of resources and development of programs in this direction. | “The top place of the Druze in the school system is not sufficiently evident in institutions of higher education, the results slightly distort reality”. |

Discussion

To gain a wider perspective on the impact of the separation of the Druze education system from the Arab education, school principals, supervisors, and trainee principals in the Druze sector were interviewed. These interviews raised several main themes. This part will list the themes and propose explanations for the presence of these views among the interviewees (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020; Harb et al., 2022).

First, the majority stressed that they are satisfied with the achievements of students in the Druze sector, with an emphasis on matriculation data. The interviewees emphasized the considerable rise in the success of the Druze school system, stressing students’ achievements in the matriculation exams. Furthermore, the principals emphasized their satisfaction and pride at these achievements. The principals see how Druze society is investing in education in a way that facilitates these achievements, for example by multiple educational programs from the preschool stage. Principals’ views emphasize the continuous and consistent education in Druze society, which begins at a very early age, necessitating efforts in many dimensions until seeing the products in high school and subsequently. Hence, principals suggest that it is necessary to plan significant educational actions on the level of contents, supervision, and educational tools in order to encourage students to excel in the lower grades as well. The majority of Druze high school graduates who pursue a higher education choose to focus on education and therefore attend teacher training colleges or education programs in universities all over Israel.

These findings are compatible with previous studies showing that the leadership of principals in schools has a significant contribution to student achievements. The principals in this study are all graduates of Israel’s higher education system and understand both the aims of the separate Druze high school system to preserve Druze culture, and the pluralistic nature of Israel’s higher education, which promotes co-existence. Therefore, they are uniquely positioned to give their students tools that are effective in integrating into and succeeding in higher education. Manz and Sims (1991) found that a leading-shaping educator manages to influence students to apply themselves to their studies and agree to give more to the school and to their peers than they are required, based on their belief in the goals. Hence, such principals will strive for change while stressing the uniqueness of each student and will convey to students the message and feeling that they trust the students’ inner motivation and thus allow them more freedom of choice and a greater range of action. Such principals manage to influence their students to apply themselves to their studies from an inner desire rather than in expectation of reward. They cause the students to recognize the value of their achievements and the achievements as positive rewards in and of themselves, as part of their personal growth and development. The students will agree to give more to the school and to their peers than they are required, based on their belief in the goals of the school. These findings were repeated in studies in the field of leadership (Pearce et al., 2013). These studies show that two components underlie the perceived image of the principal: the professional component and the personality component, which occupies a prominent part among all researchers. The professional component relates to how the formal role is practiced, while the personality component relates to a combination of personal traits that the students consider part of the professional personality of a good educator, particularly regarding the ability to treat students with an attitude of respect and humaneness, in a wide sense. Training of educators in higher education should address both components.

The interviewees also indicate that one of the strengths of the Druze school system is its religious-cultural uniqueness. It is clear that the interviewees are proud of their cultural autonomy and they enrich the study contents significantly with heritage aspects that enhance Druze students’ identity and their sense of belonging and pride in the sector. Then again, the principals emphasize that most of the professional and pedagogic contents are shared by the state school system. This is a very important point because it stresses that Druze students have the same scholastic point of origin as their Jewish, Arab, and Christian peers. This only serves to highlight the high achievements of the Druze and it seems that they receive no compensations that might explain the high achievements of Druze students.

One of the important research questions concerns the reasons for Druze students’ higher achievements in the matriculation exams compared to their Jewish peers. The current study raises several important reasons. First of all, the principals do not take the high achievements for granted. Specifically, a significant theme attested to by all principals is encouraging the desire to excel. In the principals’ opinion this desire must be shared by the principals themselves, the educational teams, and the students. The principals stressed their need to continue detecting weak points, making efforts to improve them. This inclination of principals in the sector is part of the explanation for the ability of the Druze school system to reach very good achievements. The principals emphasized the need to make an effort to urge students constantly and consistently, while not taking students’ current achievements for granted. Namely, the fundamental approach of the principals in the current study is that in order for Druze students to maintain their high achievements over time it is necessary to preserve the programs, teaching methods, and efforts of the educational teams. Indeed, the principals are very attentive and make a big effort to construct new programs, choose high quality teaching staff, and invest in areas that are slightly weaker, such as teaching Hebrew.

In addition, the principals also stressed the efforts made on behalf of the educational teams and noted the contribution of the teaching force as an important factor in the achievements of Druze students. The principals see great significance in choosing good teachers and subsequently in their further training, because these trainings contribute significantly to the achievements of Druze students. Among others, a good teaching force manages to encourage the desire for education among the students, encourages excellence, and provides students with sources of support throughout their years of studies.

Another explanation mentioned by principals in the attempt to understand the exceptional achievements of Druze students is the flourishing of liberal-modern trends. In the last decade there has been a certain decline in conservative views among the Druze sector and a rise in the level of modernist and liberal views. These processes have allowed primarily Druze women to study outside the home, acquire an education and a profession, and constitute an important source of subsistence for the household. This led to a rise in the significance of education as an important element in the mobility of Druze families and in the ability to improve their economic situation. Subsequently, this message filtered down to the students from their parents and seems to have also led to a rise in their motivation to apply themselves to their studies. The principals’ testimonies are compatible with previous studies conducted in Druze society, which showed the continued existence of cultural barriers that make it hard for women to acquire an education or work, first and foremost patriarchal patterns (Dwairy & Jagelman, 2020; Ha’israeli, 2022).

In addition to the traditional prohibitions that prevent women from studying with men, being outside the home or outside the village without a male escort, there are also other traditional social barriers: Many parents believe that studies are not essential for girls as they will marry in any case and remain at home, all the more so in the case of higher education that requires significant financial costs. Nonetheless, in recent years modernization trends are evident, the financial need for an additional salary in the household, and the Compulsory Education Law (Dwairy & Jagelman, 2020). All these have gradually changed the attitude of Druze society to educated and working women and have led to the growing significance attributed to education in Druze society.

In addition, thanks to the shaping of a unique Druze identity the principals emphasize that Druze students make an effort to reach achievements and attain an education with the aim of distinguishing themselves from the overall Arab sector. Namely, the scholastic success of the students is perceived by the principals as a means of generating a positive unique identity compared to young non-Druze Arabs. Hence, belonging to a separate Druze school system increases the motivation of Druze students and their sense of belonging to the Israeli collective.

One of the main questions in this study concerns the contribution of separating the Druze school system from the Arab Division of Education to the achievements of Druze students. The principals indicate that in contrast to the initial hypothesis of this study, a large part of the principals do not see the separation of the Druze school system from the Arab Division of Education as a major factor explaining the achievements of Druze students. These principals advocated internal explanations, citing active actions taken by leaders of the Druze sector to encourage education among young Druze. This, in place of an external explanation such as the separation of the school system, which depends primarily on the decision of the Israeli establishment. In this context, certain principals even expressed a sense of grievance at the separation, emphasizing that it served as a tool for “reeducating” the Druze population by the Israeli government, rather than being aimed at helping the success of the Druze students.

Another significant topic that arose in the study concerns the wide perspective of the principals with regard to the students’ education. Namely, the principals do not see the education of young people as “ending” in high school, rather they see one of the school’s roles as an important academic advocate. Preparation for academic studies should be manifested both in the professional-pedagogic sphere and in the social-emotional sphere. At the same time, the principals stressed that since their “mandate” is limited to high school they invest their resources (money, teaching staff, study methods) in the school and do not have the resources to invest in building preparatory programs for academia. Thus, the principals expressed a desire to develop programs that would help students acquire skills of knowledge and tools for entering academia.

Contribution of the Current Study

The current study has an important contribution to the Israeli school system in general and to the Druze school system in particular. The development and consolidation of the Druze school system as a distinct body within the Israeli Ministry of Education, which began in 1976, has yet to be studied and explored with regard to its long-term results. The study is the first to examine the issue of the separation of the Druze school system and its impact on the achievements of students in this sector. The research findings indicate that the outstanding achievements of students in the Druze school system (particularly in the high school) indeed distinguish them from their peers in the general, Arab, and ultra-Orthodox school system. Their high school achievements pave the way to greater success in the higher education system, and opens doors for them to pursue a higher education in many high-demand fields but also significantly influence their prospects in teacher training programs. The research findings emphasize that these achievements can be explained mainly in light of the significant investment of leaders of the school system, beginning with the supervisors, through the principals, and ending with the teachers and teaching teams.

The research findings indicate a disparity between the high achievements of high school students and their sense of academic preparedness for university studies. Therefore, the conclusions of the current study stress the need to develop intervention programs for the Druze sector that will improve students’ preparedness for entering academia from a scholastic and social perspective, as well as in aspects of adjustment to the academic institutions. In addition, the disparity between the achievements of high school students and those of Druze students in academia accentuates their lack of academic preparedness for higher education. Therefore, The appropriateness of the matriculation exams held at the end of high school should be examined and especially how they can really prepare for success (and maybe even predict) in academia. The conclusions of the present study emphasize the need to better adapt the contents of the matriculation exams (and the preparations for them) to the students' subsequent academic requirements.

In summary, in seems that the Druze model presents a successful educational model that invests in resources, teaching methodologies, study discipline, and encouraging students to excel. All these lead to significantly higher achievements of Druze students compared to their peers in Israel’s other school systems. Therefore, the other school systems would do well to embrace the positive features of the Druze system, including increasing supervision of the learning processes.

In addition, from a perspective of social solidarity, an outline consisting of a uniform state school system for all students in Israeli society should be considered. Such an outline would allow very wide common grounds, while making room for the social, cultural, and religious uniqueness of the different streams. The more education will provide a response for the general abilities that students must acquire in order to succeed in the employment world of the 21st century, as well as for the uniqueness of every identity component in Israeli society, the more such education will develop students with pride in their identity but also unity and collaboration.

In conclusion, the findings of the current study should serve as actionable recommendations for decision makers in the state education system, for decision makers in the Druze education system as well as for practitioners. Quality assurance of new academic programs will be examined through students’ perception; New research implications for the faculty and for the administrators seeking to constantly, will improve the quality of their programs Moreover, the study may serve as a theoretical foundation and significant background for future studies aimed at planning education in Israel in general and in the Druze community in particular.

Contribution of the Current Study

The current study is the first of its kind in that it examined the Druze education system in a thorough, in-depth and broad manner. At the same time, the study's conclusions should be treated with caution, based on the following limitations. First, due to difficulty in reaching large samples, the samples for the present study were done in the form of a convenience sample. Therefore, the samples of students, students, and principals are not representative of the entire research population. Follow-up studies should expand on these samples and examine the questions of the current study by reaching larger and more representative samples. Second, the qualitative information as reported by the managers is a result of their subjective worldview. In addition, the interpretation of qualitative information may be somewhat biased because it relies on preconceived assumptions of the researcher.

Moreover, the current study emphasizes the differentiation of the Druze education system from the Arab education system. It should be emphasized that the claim that achievements have indeed improved thanks to the separation has received support one way or the other. On the one hand, the interviewees in the current study did not mention separation as the main precipitating factor for high achievements in the Druze sector compared to the Arab education system. On the other hand, the autonomy in content and independent management of the Druze education system is indeed uniquely characteristic of the Druze education system and less so of the Arab education system. Thus, follow-up studies should continue to examine the common denominator as well as the differences between the two education systems. The more thorough and profound this characterization is, the more policy leaders will be able to take advantage of each education system and improve the other.

Finally, at the beginning of the study, the intention was to compare the achievements of the Druze education system with the achievements of the Christian population. This is because these populations are similar in size, with Christians serving as a kind of comparison group with the Druze population. At the same time, no separate data were found on the Christian population by itself, but as part of the general Arab population.

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