

## **Beyond the Boundaries of Sharing: Parents' Perceptions on Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in School<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

The study examined parents' perceptions of their partnership with the school, focusing on social-emotional (SEL) aspects. An anonymous online questionnaire was distributed to 588 parents of children in grades 1 to 12; 82% were parents of children in elementary school and 18% of children in junior high school. The participants represented the Israeli population in terms of gender and demographics. The research aimed to identify the areas of activity that parents perceive as important and to understand the influence of demographic and social variables on parental socio-emotional perceptions towards the school. The study's findings show differences between genders and between speakers of different languages that affect their perception of the parents' committee roles, particularly in social and emotional skills (SEL), such as self-management, decision-making and social awareness. The research highlights significant gender differences in areas related to parental roles and behaviors. Mothers were found to be more directly involved in daily school activities, which contributed to increased social awareness in educational contexts. Additionally, parents whose mother tongue is Arabic view the parent committee roles as more important compared to parents whose mother tongue is Hebrew. However, no significant differences were found in socio-emotional perceptions based on demographic variables such as place of residence, participation in

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the parents' council, education, field of occupation or the perception of the roles of the parents' council. The activity perceived as the most important by the parents is direct and continuous contact with the school administration. The study emphasizes the need to encourage parents to take a more active role in the educational process to improve the learning and emotional well-being of the students.

**Keywords:** parental involvement, social-emotional learning (SEL), parent-teacher cooperation, ethnicity

## **Introduction**

In recent decades, partnership between parents and the education system has become a central topic in educational research, reflecting the growing importance of parental involvement in their children's learning and development processes. Studies indicate that collaborative relationships between parents and educational staff, including school counselors, significantly affect students' sense of self-worth, their involvement and the improvement of their overall well-being and academic achievements (Epstein, 2018; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Korem, 2022).

Parental involvement benefits both students and the educational staff. This contribution is reflected in, among other things, improved communication between parents and the school following personal meetings with parents; however, it also deepens the educational staff's understanding of the family background and the parents' views on issues such as homework (Cohen et al., 2024; Mahoney et al., 2018). However, there is considerable variance in how

parents perceive their role in the educational partnership, which leads to differences in their level of involvement in the education system.

The current study aims to increase understanding of the ways in which a more effective and meaningful partnership can be fostered between parents and educational institutions, based on recognition that effective collaboration between the two can lead to improvements not only in students' academic achievements, but also in their resilience and in their personal and social development. The findings can suggest new directions for improving educational policy and encouraging parents to become more active partners in the learning process.

## **Literature Review**

### **Social-Emotional Learning**

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is a multidimensional approach that emphasizes the development of essential skills for managing emotions, setting and achieving goals, cultivating empathy, maintaining positive relationships and making responsible decisions. The current study highlights the role of SEL in designing a supportive learning environment, as it promotes students' self-awareness and resilience, which are the foundation for academic and personal growth (Taylor et al., 2017). Studies in recent years emphasize that SEL deals not only with emotional intelligence, but also involves cognitive and behavioral skills related to academic success and mental health (Mahoney et al., 2018). For example, including SEL in the curriculum has been shown to improve classroom behavior, reduce stress and create a learning atmosphere where students feel valued and understood, and it ultimately supports their long-term

success (Weissberg et al., 2015). Additionally, SEL skills foster a culture of empathy and acceptance, preparing students to navigate social dynamics within diverse communities and collaborate in a global world (Jones & Kahn, 2017).

### **Parental Partnership in the Education System**

Parental opinion was first recognized in the Australian Education Act of 1872, which stipulated that each school would have a parent advisory council with citizen representation. However, this recognition was mainly formal, and was not accompanied by any real influence on decision-making. Significant inclusion of parents in decision-making processes in schools only began in the early 1980s (Knight, 2020). In subsequent decades, this trend increased significantly, and it appears that parental involvement is increasing, not only at the organizational level but also in pedagogical and social areas (Hornby et al., 2018). Studies that focus on parental involvement in the social-emotional field (SEL) emphasize that it strengthens the students' sense of belonging to the learning environment, improves their abilities and advances them to higher academic achievements (Epstein, 2018; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). To date, parental partnership has been studied in many contexts; however, references to it in school pedagogy are rare (Haisraeli & Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2023). Management of pedagogical change has also been extensively studied, but mainly by considering the school as an organization that functions separately from the community context and not as an integral part of it (Azorín, 2020). Various theoretical approaches relate to the role of parents in the education system, one of which is the ongoing partnership model (Epstein, 2018), which

sees parents as active partners in their children's learning process. This model points to the importance of parental involvement throughout the learning process, not only at home, but also at school, as part of close collaboration with teachers and the educational staff. The partnership model of parents with the school (Epstein, 2018) describes a dynamic system of relationships between parents, teachers and the school, which focuses on collaborative action for the benefit of students' success. Epstein proposes a model of six types of parental involvement, which form the basis for an effective partnership that strengthens the community's sense of ownership of the school: (1) Parent-school interaction – supporting and nurturing children through understanding the child's needs and creating a supportive learning environment; (2) Communication – improving the two-way dialogue between the school and home, with the goal of promoting the child's success; (3) Voluntary involvement – including parents in school activities, taking into account their availability; (4) Learning at home – guiding parents on ways to encourage learning at home, such as developing reading and writing skills; (5) Decision-making – involving parents in policy-making and improvement initiatives; (6) Collaboration with the community – utilizing community resources for the benefit of the school and the community, such as collaborations with libraries or local organizations. Each of these types of involvement provides a framework for developing programs and activities that aim to encourage parental involvement, improve the school climate and enhance the sense of belonging of both parents and students. This model emphasizes the importance of creating open and clear channels of communication between the school and parents, and the need to develop programs that promote active involvement and are tailored to the unique needs

of the school community. Parental involvement contributes not only to the academic success of students, but also to developing their sense of commitment and overall well-being (Epstein, 2018). On the other hand, another approach offers a more traditional perception of the role of parents and sees them as external observers whose role is to support the educational process from the home only (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005).

Parental partnership in the education system plays a key role in promoting both academic and social achievements. Including parents in the educational process is essential for creating a holistic and healthy learning environment (Korem, 2024). When parents are involved in the learning process, they not only contribute to their children's academic success, but also provide a supportive environment for healthy emotional development and the development of vital social skills (Berkowitz et al., 2017). A meta-analysis (Jeynes, 2012) examined the effectiveness of various parental involvement programs in urban settings. The study showed that effective parental involvement can have significant positive effects on students apart from academic achievement, which can be reflected in improving students' self-confidence, strengthening their sense of self-efficacy and reducing feelings of alienation at school. These findings indicate that when parents are actively involved in their children's education, they support academic performance and also improve students' overall sense of well-being and strengthen their connection to the school environment. Another study (Wilder, 2014) showed that the connection between parental involvement and academic achievement was consistent across different demographic groups.

Including social-emotional skills is a process that transcends cultural and demographic differences. Social-emotional education has been found to promote positive outcomes among students of all socioeconomic and gender backgrounds (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). Studies (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Park & Holloway, 2013) indicate that demographic variables such as place of residence, education or occupation do not significantly affect parental involvement in school activities, including participation in parents' committees. The findings indicate that social-emotional perceptions related to involvement in the school are relatively uniform across different demographic groups. In Israel, both Arab and Jewish parents generally had positive attitudes toward the implementation of SEL, regardless of their socioeconomic status or educational background (Benish-Weisman et al., 2019).

The perception of the importance of education and parental involvement transcends demographic boundaries. This was reinforced by Goodall and Montgomery (2014), who found that the school's approach to parental involvement in the school is more critical than the parents' sociodemographic characteristics.

### **The Importance of SEL in Schools**

Schools are crucial environments in the development of social and emotional skills. Effective SEL programs are those that are well-planned and integrated into everyday interactions and practices within schools (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Korem, 2022). Research shows that including SEL as part of the curriculum (instead of delivering it in fragmented, irregular sessions) can improve its effectiveness (Gedikoglu, 2021). In addition, a holistic view of the entire school is recommended, in which SEL values are adopted throughout the

curriculum and students have opportunities to apply these skills in various situations. One of the challenges in implementing SEL programs among parents is the terminology used, which can sometimes be vague and discouraging for them. To address this challenge, educators are encouraged to use simple language and focus on specific skills rather than broad terms. Parental involvement in SEL activities and opportunities to experience the benefits of SEL firsthand can also foster trust and cooperation among parents (Tyner, 2021).

SEL is defined as the process through which people acquire and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve goals, demonstrate empathy, maintain relationships and make responsible decisions (CASEL, n.d.; Durlak et al., 2011). SEL is an integral part of education and human development, and it promotes educational equity and excellence through authentic partnerships between school, family, and community (Miller et al., 2021). It has been shown to lead to positive outcomes, including improved academic performance and reduced stress and anxiety among students (CASEL, n.d.; Durlak et al., 2011). In conclusion, this partnership between parents and schools is a crucial dimension in everything related to handling social-emotional problems (Korem, 2024).

### **The Role of Parent-School Partnerships in Social-Emotional Learning**

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is increasingly recognized as an essential component of education, which aims to equip students with the skills necessary to manage emotions, establish relationships and make responsible decisions (Korem, 2024). The success of SEL programs depends significantly on

partnerships between parents and schools, as parental involvement can influence the creation of a supportive environment that contributes to children's emotional and social growth (Tyner, 2021).

The role of parent-school partnerships in social-emotional learning (SEL) is essential in creating environments that support children's comprehensive development. These partnerships leverage the strengths of schools and families (Korem, 2022). When educators and parents work collaboratively, they provide consistent reinforcement of SEL abilities, such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making both at school and at home. Compatibility between the school's methods of operation and the parents' approaches is essential in order to create a supportive environment. Students feel safe in such an environment and it helps them deal with conflicts, loneliness, and social pressure. When the social-emotional field is addressed, concentration, self-management and a sense of efficacy, which are essential conditions for long-term academic success, also improve (Greenberg et al., 2003; Durlak, et al., 2011; Durlak et al., 2024; Epstein, 2018).

Effective school-family partnerships, including active parent councils, are critical to student success, while placing responsibility on schools to develop appropriate approaches to parental involvement (Epstein, 2018). Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) identified gender differences in parental involvement, where mothers are usually involved in daily activities and fathers are more involved in processes of decision-making or specific events.

Recent studies (Anikiej-Wiczenbach et al., 2024; Schmidt et al., 2023) confirm this division and indicate that despite social changes, mothers have higher

levels of social awareness. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) point out that meaningful parental involvement requires active participation in decision-making processes, a model that explains the different levels of involvement between gender and linguistic groups.

Fathers' involvement in their children's education has increased in recent years, which may reduce the gap in social awareness between mothers and fathers (Cabrera et al., 2018). A meta-analytic study of parental involvement and achievement in East Asian countries (Kim, 2020) suggests examining gender differences in the broader context of social structures and cultural norms. The study emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive environment in parent councils that will encourage equal participation of mothers and fathers and suggests specific strategies for schools to promote gender-balanced involvement in educational decision-making. This comprehensive review (Kim, 2020) shows that although gender differences in parental involvement in school exist, the gap is gradually narrowing.

In social-emotional learning, effective parent-school partnerships transcend passive involvement such as merely receiving updates; they necessitate active involvement in which parents are seen as co-educators in their children's learning journey. This involvement can take various forms, such as participating in SEL workshops, volunteering in classrooms or participating in decision-making processes related to SEL curricula. Such involvement not only reinforces the skills learned at school, but also empowers parents to model them at home, ensuring a smooth transition of learning between school and the home environment (Barnard, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Moreover, successful partnerships are characterized by open, two-way communication, in

which schools seek to understand parents' perspectives and incorporate their insights into SEL strategies (Sylaj & Sylaj, 2020). This approach builds trust and respects the diverse backgrounds and strengths that families bring to the educational landscape. By prioritizing positive staff-family relations and involving families in meaningful ways, schools can create a supportive climate that values the contributions of all stakeholders (Christenson & Havsny, 2004; Patrikakou et al., 2005).

In practice, effective SEL partnerships often include shared leadership structures in which parents, educators and community members collaborate to define goals and make decisions that benefit students' social and emotional development. This collaborative approach helps to dismantle traditional power hierarchies within schools, while fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment for all participants (Zins & Elias, 2006).

### **The Role of Parents in Areas of SEL**

Parents' perceptions about their involvement in school activities play a central role in the effectiveness of SEL programs. Some parents widely support teaching SEL-related skills while others express doubts about the idea that schools are the appropriate place for it. They prefer that the school focuses on studies and parents focus on SEL. This emphasizes the need for schools to communicate to parents the importance and benefits of SEL, while ensuring their support and involvement (Tyner, 2021).

Parents who are knowledgeable about SEL principles, even if they are passively involved, contribute significantly to their children's emotional development. This passive involvement often includes understanding the

importance of emotional regulation, empathy and relationship-building skills, which can be reinforced at home through daily interactions and modeling appropriate behaviors. When parents are aware of the contribution of SEL, they are better equipped to support their children's emotional needs, leading to improved self-regulation and social competence in children (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Active parental involvement in SEL extends beyond the home and into classroom, school, or community settings and can take various forms, such as school-led learning about SEL, helping educators to include SEL methods in the curriculum or assisting in classrooms by supporting SEL activities. This not only reinforces the skills learned at school but also creates a consistent and supportive environment that bridges the gap between home and school and is linked to improved student outcomes, including increased academic achievement and improved social behavior. Moreover, parents who actively engage in SEL initiatives often become advocates for these programs, fostering a community-wide commitment to advancing the social and emotional well-being of all children (Weissberg et al., 2015).

Studies on the social awareness of mothers compared to fathers reveal diverse insights into parental roles and behaviors. In most cases, mothers demonstrate higher levels of social awareness and responsiveness, which are largely influenced by the norms and social expectations towards them. For example, mothers are generally perceived as the primary caregivers, which may lead to increased sensitivity and attention to the social and emotional needs of their children (Schmidt et al., 2023). This view is consistent with findings that mothers tend to be more involved in nurturing roles, while fathers often adopt a protective or play-directing role (Anikiej-Wiczenbach et al., 2024; Pakaluk &

Price, 2020). Furthermore, mothers' parenting practices are typically shaped by social pressures to conform to maternal ideals, which emphasize attentiveness and emotional availability to their children (Schmidt et al., 2023). However, it is essential to recognize that these differences are not just biologically determined, but are also a product of cultural and social structures. As gender roles continue to evolve, distinctions between gendered behaviors may become less pronounced, with fathers increasingly participating in caregiving roles traditionally associated with mothers (Cabrera et al., 2018; Van Holland De Graaf, 2018). It follows that while mothers may currently demonstrate a broader social awareness in their parenting, ongoing changes in social norms may lead to more balanced parental roles in the future.

Studies (Kaufman et al., 2012; Schwartz, 2013; Sharabi et al., 2019; Sharabi et al., 2021) show that there are differences between Jews and Arabs in Israel in social perceptions and skills. The differences in the nature and extent of involvement may stem from the deep cultural differences between the two societies, with Jewish society tending towards individualism and Arab society characterized by a collectivist approach (Schwartz, 2013). Jewish society tends to encourage personal independence, individuality and autonomy, whereas conservative Arab society is strict about rigid hierarchical structures and provides less opportunity for personal autonomy. Thus, Arab parents tend to show more respect and trust towards the education system, principals and teachers than Jewish parents. This characteristic is reflected in their lower levels of involvement in school activities, compared to the higher involvement of Jewish parents (Sharabi et al., 2021).

## **The Research Question**

How do parents perceive the cooperation of the parents' committee with the school?

## **Research Hypotheses**

- 1) Differences will be found among parents in their perceptions regarding the importance of the areas of parents' committee activity.
- 2) Hebrew-speaking parents will attach greater importance than Arabic-speaking parents to parental participation in self-management and decision-making.
- 3) Differences will be found in the perception of the inclusion of social-emotional skills in school based on demographic or social criteria, such as place of residence, education, field of occupation and activity in the parents' committee.
- 4) Mothers will attach greater importance to communicating with the school on social and emotional issues compared to fathers.

## **The Research Method**

The current research was designed as a quantitative study whose purpose is to examine the relationships between variables through structured data collection and statistical analysis. The main research tool is a structured questionnaire, consisting of 41 closed questions and two open questions, which were designed to provide in-depth insights into the phenomena being studied. The questionnaire was online and anonymous and was distributed to parents of children in grades 1–12.

## **The Research Population**

The recommended method for research in a multicultural population, according to Creswell & Creswell (2017), is simple random sampling, and this was chosen to ensure maximum representativeness of the diverse research population. Using random sampling enables higher external validity and reduces the risk of statistical bias. The advantage of sampling is that the results of the study can be generalized to the general population more accurately (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The participants were 588 parents of children in the education system (grades 1–12). Of all the parents, 82% reported children attending elementary school and 18% reported children attending secondary school. Parents with children in both were asked to comment on the cooperation with the school of only one of their children, according to their choice. The respondents represent the Israeli population in terms of gender and demographics: gender balanced – (49% men, 51% women), 78% Jews, 15% Muslims, 4% Druze, 3% Christians. The average age of the participants was 40 years (the age range was 29 to 59) and 60% of the participants have an academic degree. The occupation of 19% of the respondents is education, and 67% of the parents are active in one of the parent representation frameworks (class, school, local or national committee).

## **The Research Tool**

The main research tool is based on a closed questionnaire consisting of items rated on Likert-type rating scales, designed to measure attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The questionnaire consisted of 41 statements with four options for each statement, and the respondents rated

their answers on a four-point scale: from 1 – not at all important to 4 – very important. In addition, two open questions were included in the questionnaire in order to expand the understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The first part consisted of demographic questions to document the participants' characteristics, such as age, occupation, education, religion, mother tongue and degree of involvement in parents' committees. In the second part, the questions focused on building an equal relationship between the educational staff and the student's parents according to the family-school partnership model (Epstein, 2018), and according to the SEL model of CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) Resource Center, which also presents the core skills of social-emotional abilities (SEL) in adults. For the purpose of division into categories, factor analysis was conducted, however, the reliability of the factors was low. Therefore, content analysis was conducted among judges and five categories were found. The reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach's alpha, which was found to be appropriate for estimating parents' perceptions of their partnership with the school, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Questionnaire Structure and Subject Reliability**

<b>SEL area</b>	<b>SEL dimensions and their indicators</b>	<b>Number of items</b>	<b>Reliability</b>
Social involvement	Communication, collaborative work, solving conflicts	15	.894
Social awareness	Respect for others, adopting the other person's perspective	8	.818
Self-perception	Recognition of strengths, self-confidence, self-efficacy	3	.691
Self-management	Setting goals, motivation, organizational skills	11	.901
Decision-making	Analyzing situations, identifying problems, problem-solving	4	.896

The data was analyzed using SPSS software. The results were classified according to different categories of parental involvement, and the connections between the degree of parental involvement and parents' perceptions of the development of social-emotional learning in their children were examined.

### **Ethics**

The questionnaire received the approval of the ethics committee of a large college in central Israel. It was distributed through a company that specializes in online questionnaires. The researcher received a code number for the respondents without any identification capability. Thus, the promise to respondents that their answers would remain confidential and anonymous was

maintained. This is important and helps encourage honest and unbiased feedback.

## Findings

### How Do Parents Perceive the Cooperation of the Parents' Committee with the School?

To understand parents' perceptions regarding cooperation of the parents' committee with the school, the participants were presented with statements examining the degree of importance they attach to various areas of the committee's activities and to their voluntary involvement in the educational institution. Participants were asked to rate the degree of importance from 1 (not at all important) to 4 (very important). The data indicates a clear order of priorities regarding the parents' roles. The direct ongoing connection with the school management was rated as very important by 95% of the respondents ( $M = 3.53$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ), while relatively low importance was attributed to areas such as involving parents who do not participate in school events (78%,  $M = 3.14$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ) and volunteer assistance (76%, mean 3.05), with higher standard deviations indicating differences in perceptions.

In the field of volunteering, the topics of coping with social pressure (93%, mean 3.48, standard deviation 0.67), and social-emotional learning (87%, mean 3.29, standard deviation 0.75), also rank highly.

Active volunteering requires direct involvement and receives a lower rating, indicating a preference for strategic content and less for focused actions, although it is worth noting that active involvement also receives high marks from

most parents – assistance in preventing violence (85%, mean 3.26, standard deviation 0.79), and patrols by parents during recess (69%, mean 2.88, standard deviation 0.87) – an activity aimed at encouraging positive behavior and strengthening the sense of security among students.

**Table 2: Distribution of Percentages, Means and Standard Deviations:**

**Parental Perceptions**

<b>Area of parent committee activity</b>	<b>Percentage who rank it as important or very important</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Direct ongoing connection with the management	95%	3.53	0.63
Involving non-participatory parents	78%	3.14	0.81
Assistance in volunteering to improve skills	76%	3.05	0.86
<b>Social-emotional topics</b>			
Coping with social pressure	93	3.48	0.67
Social-emotional learning (SEL)	87	3.29	0.75
Assistance in preventing violence	85	3.26	0.79
Practicing reading/math/science with parents	76	3.01	0.80
Reading stories	74	2.98	0.82
Patrols to encourage good behavior	69	2.88	0.87

In order to expand understanding of the phenomenon related to parental volunteering, an open question was asked: "I am willing to volunteer in the following areas." Most parents emphasized their responsibility to intervene in issues such as school violence, for example: "Violence needs to be condemned and parents have an important role in this"; "Today's youth are very violent and we need to talk about these things a lot." Other parents indicated that they were willing to help with educational and social activities, such as "trips"; "giving age-appropriate lectures"; "helping students who are having difficulty"; "social activities to improve social status and social behavior"; "protecting the environment, preventing vandalism." In the field of education, there were many suggestions: "I can prepare digital activities on several subjects such as math, language, and science that the children will also enjoy and learn in an innovative way"; "lessons on Torah and tradition; "democracy and citizenship studies." Other parents were also willing to help through initiatives, skills, and knowledge: "I am ready to volunteer and help in any area I can: standing in front of a camera, interviewing, conveying messages, and more"; and parents were even willing to volunteer "in things that other parents are not willing to do."

The wide variety of the parents' suggestions reflects their commitment to influencing the school environment in educational, social and academic areas, while using their unique skills, initiatives and support to promote the well-being of students and the educational community.

It is worth emphasizing that only a few (3%) indicated that they were not interested in volunteering at all. The reasons given for this were lack of ability: "I have nothing to offer. I'm a single parent with no life to give," lack of free time: "I would like to, but I don't have the time. Everything is very important, it's just

that parents are also busy with work and family life and they do not always have availability to volunteer," or their refusal is a matter of principle: "I don't think parents should interfere in what happens inside the school."

### **Hypothesis 1:**

#### **Differences Will Be Found Among Parents in Their Perceptions Regarding the Importance of the Areas of Parents' Committee Activity**

The findings regarding the first hypothesis consist of two main aspects:

##### **a. The parents' perception of the types of activities at school**

To examine this aspect, a repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted, accompanied by a Bonferroni-type test to correct for multiple measurements. The analysis results showed significant differences in parents' perceptions of the importance of the types of activities ( $F(2.528) = 96.99, p < .001$ ). The differences indicate a clear order of priorities in their perceptions:

1. Maintaining continuous contact with the school management was rated as most important.
2. Bringing parents together ranked second.
3. Volunteer assistance was seen as the least important area of the three.

##### **b. How parents' perceptions of social-emotional issues corresponded to their mother tongue**

In order to examine differences in parents' perceptions of social-emotional issues according to mother tongue (Hebrew or Arabic), an

independent samples *t*-test was conducted. The test results showed significant differences in relation to the mother tongue ( $t(557) = 2.76, p < .01$ ); parents whose mother tongue was Arabic attributed greater importance to social-emotional issues in the context of parental activities, compared to parents whose mother tongue was Hebrew.

These findings emphasize the differences between different groups of parents in their perception of the roles of the parents' committee and the cultural and social significance they attribute to various activities.

### **Hypothesis 2:**

#### **Hebrew-Speaking Parents Will Attach Greater Importance Than Arabic-Speaking Parents to Parental Participation in Self-Management and Decision-Making**

The findings show that parents whose mother tongue is Hebrew attach greater importance to parental participation in decision-making and self-management at school, compared to parents whose mother tongue is Arabic. These differences were examined using a *t*-test for independent samples, and were found to be significant. ( $t(556) = 1.78, p < .05$ ) From the data, it can be seen that Hebrew-speaking parents tend to see collaboration in school decision-making as a significant component of the educational process. In contrast, Arabic-speaking parents may emphasize other aspects of cooperation with the school. This data emphasizes the need to adapt approaches to collaboration with parents, taking into account cultural and linguistic differences, in order to create a collaboration process tailored to the different needs of parent communities.

### **Hypothesis 3:**

#### **Differences Will Be Found in the Perception of the Inclusion of Social-Emotional Skills at School Based on Demographic or Social Criteria, Such as Place of Residence, Education, Occupation and Activity in the Parents' Committee**

This hypothesis was refuted. The findings, based on an independent samples *t*-test, show that no significant differences were found between the demographic variables (place of residence, education and field of occupation) or the social variables for activity in the parents' committee. These findings indicate that social-emotional perception is not significantly affected by these demographic or social characteristics, and that perception in this area is relatively uniform among the groups examined.

### **Hypothesis 4:**

#### **Mothers Will Attach Greater Importance to Communicating with the School on Social and Emotional Issues Compared to Fathers**

The findings indicate significant gender differences in the perception of the importance of social-emotional communication (SEL) with the school. Mothers rated the importance of communication at an average of 3.31 out of 4, compared to fathers who rated it at an average of 3.19.

The result is reflected in a statistically significant *t*-test value ( $t(571) = 2.57, p < .01$ ), which emphasizes that mothers tend to attribute a higher value to communication with the school than fathers.

## **Discussion**

The research question was: How do parents perceive the cooperation of the parents' committee with the school? The findings indicate that parents attach great importance to cooperation with the school, and especially to continuous and direct contact with the management. These data add to the research literature that emphasizes the role of parents as key partners in the school community (Epstein, 2018). This involvement is seen not only as a tool for strengthening the school's functioning as part of the community, but also as a means of promoting students' academic achievements and emotional well-being (Mapp & Henderson, 2023).

The findings indicate a clear preference for activity that promotes continuous and direct contact with the school management, which was found to be of the highest importance (95%). This choice reflects the parents' desire to be partners to the management strategies and to building school policy, as noted by Epstein (2018), and emphasizes the importance of dialogue between parents and management in creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

It was found that a high percentage of parents (89%) attach great importance to activities related to developing social and emotional skills (SEL) and responding to social pressures, as evidence of the growing awareness of students' social-emotional challenges. These findings are consistent with the research literature, which emphasizes the critical role of parents in partnering with teachers to develop effective SEL programs (Weissberg et al., 2015).

The findings highlight the influence of cultural values on parents' priorities. Parents' preference for direct contact with the management may stem from a

sense of collective responsibility, which suits communities where parents perceive themselves as complementary to the education system (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). In addition, parental volunteerism in violence prevention and emotional areas indicates their desire to be directly involved in issues that affect their children's lives at school.

Parental partnership in school is perceived by most parents as a combination of socio-cultural dimensions and organizational structures, and can form the basis for a significant educational partnership. This partnership contributes to strengthening social capital and improves learning processes while addressing the emotional, social and educational needs of students and the entire community.

### **Hypothesis 1:**

#### **Differences Will Be Found Among Parents in Their Perceptions Regarding the Importance of the Areas of Parents' Committee Activity**

The study's findings emphasize significant differences in parents' perceptions of the roles of the parents' committee and the importance of social-emotional areas, while distinguishing between the types of activities at school, and between parent groups, according to mother tongue. The differences found in social-emotional perceptions between Arabic-speaking and Hebrew-speaking parents are consistent with previous findings (Anikiej-Wiczenbach et al., 2024), which showed that different cultural groups attribute different weight to social and emotional aspects. Collectivist cultures, such as Arab society, tend to place a stronger emphasis on social issues, cooperation and community, which may

explain the much greater importance attributed to these issues by Arabic-speaking parents (Cabrera et al., 2018).

These findings raise questions about how schools can adapt parent committee activities to a variety of cultural values and perceptions. For example, it may be worthwhile to emphasize areas of activity that promote broad social participation among parent groups from a variety of cultures, while at the same time strengthening the recognition of the value of areas such as volunteering even among groups that tend to attribute less importance to them (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

Moreover, the findings indicate the need to recognize the influence of gender roles and society on parental involvement. As gender and social roles change and evolve, we may see a convergence between different groups of parents in their perceptions of the importance of the roles of the parents' committee, and this warrants continued examination of these trends in the future (Kim, 2020).

The findings emphasize the importance of adapting educational models to the diverse needs of parent communities, while maintaining flexibility and cultural sensitivity. Recent studies reinforce these findings, indicating that successful partnerships encourage high emotional involvement on the part of parents, especially in issues of social-emotional coping (Schmidt et al., 2023). Such partnerships strengthen social capital in the school community and enable parents to serve as positive mediators between students and the educational staff. Moreover, studies indicate that parental involvement contributes to the development of social awareness in students and reduces incidents of violence (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

## **Hypothesis 2:**

### **Hebrew-Speaking Parents Will Attach Greater Importance Than Arabic-Speaking Parents to Parental Participation in Self-Management and Decision-Making**

The findings indicate that Hebrew-speaking parents attach greater importance than Arabic-speaking parents to parental participation in self-management and decision-making. This difference emphasizes the influence of cultural contexts on patterns of parental involvement. The research literature shows that cultural preferences and social expectations play a central role in shaping parental perceptions. Research by Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) shows that parents from different cultural backgrounds may attach different weight to their roles of involvement in school, depending on the values and roles expected of them.

In communities that emphasize collectivist values, such as Arab society in Israel, parents tend to rely more on the school's authority in decision-making, and perceive their involvement as supportive but less managerial. Studies indicate that in communities that emphasize individualistic values, such as secular society, parents perceive their involvement in school not only as a right but also as a moral obligation, and therefore strive to be active partners in decision-making processes (Cabrera et al., 2018; Van Holland De Graaf, 2018). Moreover, in these communities there is a tendency for greater equality between parents and schools in decision-making processes. In contrast, among Arabic-speaking parents, there is little emphasis on participation in decision-making. This may stem from the collectivist cultural structure of Arab society in Israel, which emphasizes hierarchy and authority. In collectivist cultures, parents tend to rely on school authority in decision-making, while their

role is seen as supportive rather than managerial (Anikiej-Wiczenbach et al., 2024). Additional studies (Schmidt et al., 2023; Van Holland De Graaf, 2018) also emphasize that collectivist communities strengthen the values of partnership and mutual support over independent decision-making.

These differences may also be influenced by cultural and systemic barriers (Schmidt et al., 2023) or may even determine that ethnic minority experiences lead to a sense of insecurity in participating in decision-making processes. Another study, consistent with the current one, found that Arabic-speaking parents may experience a sense of less influence over school policy (Pakaluk & Price, 2020).

The findings illustrate the need to develop school policies that promote multicultural partnerships that include the diversity of voices in the parent community. To reduce the gaps, schools are recommended to encourage active involvement of all parent groups in decision-making processes, while adapting to their cultural contexts. This will help create a united and collaborative parent community, which strengthens the role of parents as essential partners in school processes.

### **Hypothesis 3:**

**Differences Will Be Found in the Perception of the Inclusion of Social-Emotional Skills at School Based on Demographic or Social Criteria, Such as Place of Residence, Education, Occupation and Activity in the Parents' Committee**

Both Arab and Jewish parents generally have positive attitudes toward implementing social-emotional learning (SEL) in schools, regardless of

socioeconomic status or educational background (Benish-Weisman et al., 2019). The findings do not indicate significant differences in perceptions of SEL between demographic groups, based on variables such as place of residence, level of education, occupation, or involvement in the parents' committee. These findings are consistent with research verifying the uniformity of SEL perceptions among diverse demographic groups in Israel, supporting its broad acceptance across cultural and social contexts.

In contrast to the findings in this research, other studies found differences between different demographic groups (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Park & Holloway, 2013). These differences may be influenced by socioeconomic factors. For example, while general perceptions of SEL were similar across socioeconomic groups, parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds reported more barriers to active engagement in SEL programs due to lack of time and resources (Kaplan Toren, & Seginer, 2015). Therefore, the discrepancy between studies may be due to cultural variations. It is possible that specific emphasis on certain social-emotional skills differs between Arab and Jewish communities. For example, Arab parents may place greater importance on respect, honoring authority and collective harmony, while Jewish parents may place greater emphasize on personal expression and assertiveness (Shoshani & Slone, 2017).

The findings showed no significant differences in the perception of the inclusion of social-emotional skills between parents who are active in a parents' committee and those who are not. This finding is supported by research indicating that formal involvement (such as participation in a parents'

committee) does not necessarily influence views regarding social-emotional education (Berkowitz et al., 2017).

#### **Hypothesis 4:**

#### **Mothers Will Attach Greater Importance to Communicating with the School on Social and Emotional Issues Compared to Fathers**

The findings indicating gender differences in the perception of the importance of communication between parents and schools are consistent with the research literature. A study by Cabrera et al. (2018) shows that mothers tend to show greater involvement in social-emotional issues due to traditional gender roles associated with nurturing and promoting the well-being of children. The study emphasized that mothers' involvement in school communication is influenced by social expectations for female roles in supporting and educating children.

Further research emphasizes the tendency of fathers to perceive their role in practical or economic aspects rather than in social-emotional ones. This may explain the difference in the perception of the importance of communication with schools. These findings greatly illuminate the need to establish models of equitable parental involvement, while recognizing the complexity of gender contexts and their impact on and treatment of parenting roles (Anikiej-Wiczenbach et al., 2024).

Schools can promote multidimensional approaches to parental involvement, enabling fathers and mothers to use their strengths in the educational system. For example, Pakaluk & Price (2020) proposed developing communication programs tailored to gender needs, with an emphasis on understanding gender

differences and their impact on the parents' experience. The program included initiatives that encourage fathers to participate more actively in the social-emotional aspects of their child's education, addressing stereotypes or underlying biases regarding parents' roles in education on the one hand, and maintaining the traditional involvement of mothers on the other.

### **Limitations of the Research**

One of the study's limitations is that it was based on only one questionnaire, without adding clarifying questions or expanding items according to findings that emerged during the collection process. This may limit the depth of understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Using an additional questionnaire or enhancing the existing questionnaire could provide more detailed data on the relationships between the variables examined.

Also, the response options scale (1-4) is limited and therefore insensitive to the variety of options on the scale from "not at all important" to "very important." In further research, expanding the respondents' choice options is recommended.

### **Further Research**

The current findings emphasize the need to consolidate a holistic partnership between parents and the school, which transcends administrative aspects and focuses on developing an ongoing social-emotional policy. This partnership is especially necessary in times of uncertainty, such as national crises or challenging periods such as the coronavirus pandemic and war situations. Further studies could explore ways in which parents could be more effectively

involved in dealing with crises and enhance their contribution as partners in creative solutions.

The gender and cultural gaps that emerged in the study highlight the influence of social and cultural structures on parents' involvement and their perceptions of SEL. Including these aspects in future research will allow for a broader understanding of their impact on communication patterns between parents and the school. For example, it is important to examine the differences between Hebrew and Arabic speakers and their impact on creating meaningful connections, especially in situations of cultural or social tension. Understanding the impact of cultural affinity on educational partnerships can help promote culturally appropriate strategies to strengthen partnerships.

In addition, expanding the research tool through enhanced questionnaires that include additional items may contribute to collecting more in-depth and diverse data, which will allow for an in-depth investigation of the connections between parental perceptions and SEL implementation while focusing on different and broader populations. This approach may shed new light on the significant role of parents in the education system and identify ways to improve their involvement in decision-making processes and school activities.

These aspects can serve as a basis for developing effective and culturally sensitive partnership models, which will not only contribute to future research, but also offer practical solutions to improve dialogue and connections between the school and the community, in a way that will support the personal and social growth of students and the community as a whole.

### **Practical Contribution**

The findings indicate the need to develop a comprehensive educational policy that promotes social-emotional skills while adapting to cultural values and the characteristics of the local community. Supervisors, principals, and teachers can use the questionnaire in this study or parts of it to learn more about the perceptions of the school's community of parents and their unique needs.

Schools can adopt collaborative models that include parents in decision-making processes, while improving communication, expanding areas of volunteering and making culturally and linguistically appropriate partnerships accessible.

Practical implications can be expressed in the following areas:

- 1) Creating mechanisms for sharing decisions in the school with cultural and linguistic adjustments. In order to increase the volume of parental decisions in the school, it is important to establish dedicated forums such as parent-teacher committees, which should be structured in a way that ensures equitable representation of diverse groups in the community. In addition, surveys and assessment tools can be developed that enable parents to share their opinions, needs and suggestions regarding school policies and programs. Care should be taken to adapt these mechanisms to the cultural and linguistic background of the community, for example through translating materials, organizing meetings for parents and making information accessible. To improve the sense of partnership and involvement, parents can also be included in planning special programs or educational activities, such as maritime culture or social projects, thus emphasizing their contribution as an integral part of the school.

- 2) Empowering parents from minority groups through practical tools that will increase their sense of efficacy. Schools can work to do so by developing dedicated educational programs offering information and tools that blend with the everyday challenges in their children's lives. These programs can include workshops for parents on topics such as effective communication skills, social-emotional education and coping with stressful situations. Parents can also be provided with training on the education system, their rights and ways to collaborate with the educational staff. In addition, creating community support groups for parents will allow them to share experiences, learn and increase their sense of personal and community efficacy.
- 3) Promoting a multicultural approach to dialogue and collaboration. Adopting a multicultural approach requires the education system to recognize the diversity of values, customs, and languages of the different communities as an integral part of the ongoing conduct of the school. Implementing this principle can include establishing multicultural committees that include parents and educational staff, which will work to formulate educational programs relevant to the local population and promote culturally appropriate initiatives. In addition, integrating the cultural heritage of communities into learning and school activities, such as celebrating traditional holidays, organizing community events and incorporating cultural content into the curriculum, contributes to deepening the sense of belonging and strengthens the connection between the school and the community. An appropriate response to linguistic diversity among parents may be expressed in making information, documents, and meetings

available in the family's native language, including through translation services. Moreover, the existence of informal meetings between parents and teachers, such as "parent-teacher cafe" initiatives, may contribute to deepening personal acquaintance, building mutual trust and promoting an open, respectful, and attentive dialogue to the cultural and social needs of all members of the school community.

- 4) Training school staff in cultural sensitivity and leading participatory policies. Educational staff will receive training to help them understand and respect the cultural diversity and values of the communities of parents at the school. This should include workshops on cultural sensitivity, development of intercultural communication skills and learning ways to create a collaborative and inclusive space. Apart from this, it is necessary to provide staff with practical tools to lead collaborative processes, such as facilitating meetings with parents, planning community projects and managing conflicts in a constructive and respectful manner.

It is important to emphasize the collective aspect of training, including building a clear collaborative policy, formulating procedures for embedding values of inclusion and equality and developing leadership capabilities among the educational staff, so that they can manage an effective partnership with parents. These initiatives will strengthen the relationship between the school and parents, encourage mutual trust and contribute to creating a supportive and empowering educational environment, while promoting values of inclusion and equality.

Adopting these steps is expected to strengthen the sense of belonging of the parents and the community, reduce barriers and create diverse educational communities based on the values of inclusion and equality.

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