Has the Educational Field Been Left Behind? Entrepreneurship Policy in Education - The Israeli Case

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The promotion of entrepreneurship policy as a mechanism to stimulate growth, and generate employment and competitiveness in global markets has become a central theme in the economic strategies of governments around the world. Though the entrepreneurial discourse has emerged also as a global phenomenon in the education sector in recent decades, the issue of government policy to promote entrepreneurship in education has not attracted much attention from scholars. This study’s main objective is to examine and characterize the governmental discourse regarding the promotion of entrepreneurship policy in the education system in Israel. Through in-depth interviews with major governmental policy makers involved in the creation and formulation of educational policy in Israel over more than a decade, the study reveals, analyzes and characterizes the governmental discourse of entrepreneurship policy in education in Israel, its formation and development, and its perception by the governmental policy makers, in regards to the promotion of entrepreneurship in the education system. This study deepens the knowledge in the evolving field of entrepreneurship policy in the field of education and provides a thorough understanding of the various aspects of entrepreneurship policy in education, thus contributes an important input into the fieldwork of educational policy.

Keywords – entrepreneurship policy, policy-makers, government.
1. Introduction

It has been recognized for years that entrepreneurship plays a significant role in the economic development of organizations and countries (Cuervo, Ribeiro, and Roig, 2007; Drucker, 1985; Foster 1986; Morris and Saxton, 1996; Morris and Lewis, 1991; Peters, 1987). Therefore, promoting entrepreneurship as a mechanism to stimulate growth and to generate higher employment and competition in global markets has turned to a central strategy of governments worldwide, and they began to develop policies that promote and institutionalize entrepreneurship in their countries (Audretsch and Beckmann, 2007; Minniti, 2008). It can be argued that this growing interest in entrepreneurship policy is a necessary response to dramatic changes in the industrial and economic markets-the transition from “managed economy” to “entrepreneurial economy” (Audretsch and Thurik, 2000), where the most significant factors affecting productivity are knowledge production and innovation facilitation. This type of economy requires a different industrial structure as well as different economic values, the first of which is entrepreneurship (Audretsch and Thurik, 2000; Parker, 2001).

Although the discourse about entrepreneurship as a global phenomenon appeared in the field of education in recent decades, due to the significant changes occurring around the world and affecting the education systems around the world, the issue of a governmental policy for promoting entrepreneurship in education did not attract the attention of many researchers and little is known about the means, rationales and perceptions regarding entrepreneurship policy in national education systems.

While policy research often focuses on principles, texts, and practices, and does not give much of attention to the significant role of actors in the policy process (Ball, 2015), this study places these actors in the center. Thus, through in-depth interviews with central governmental policy-makers, involved in the creation and formulation of the education policy in Israel for more than a decade, this study reveals, analyzes, and characterizes the governmental discourse regarding entrepreneurship policy in the Israeli education system, its creation and the way governmental policy-makers perceive the role of the government regarding the promotion of entrepreneurship in the education system. In addition, the study provides new insights regarding the components of the
entrepreneurship policy in education, the characteristics of such policy, its manifestation and the structuring of entrepreneurship as a field of policy in education.

In this context, the study provides a thorough understanding of the various aspects of entrepreneurship policy in education, thus contributes an important input into the fieldwork of educational policy.
2. Theoretical background

2.1 Entrepreneurship conceptual framework

There is nothing new about the interest taken in entrepreneurship. Much has been written on the correlation between entrepreneurship and economic growth as well as the importance of entrepreneurship to competition capacity in the age of globalization and neoliberalism (Cuervo, Ribeiro, and Roig, 2007; Drucker, 1985; Foster 1986; Morris and Saxton, 1996; Morris and Lewis, 1991; Peters, 1987) and it has been recognized for years that entrepreneurship plays a main role in the economic development of organizations and countries. In this context, the importance of entrepreneurship—which grows further as neoliberal concepts are spread—stems from its variety of appearances, expressed by the identification, assessment and exploitation of business opportunities, establishment of new organizations or improvement of existing organizations. And indeed, in recent years the interest in entrepreneurship has significantly grown (Audretsch and Thurik, 2000; Stevenson and Lundstrom, 2007). This growth occurred within the policy-making discourse as well as in business sector (Minniti, 2008).

Entrepreneurship is a multidimensional phenomenon that crosses a multitude of disciplinary boundaries. Moreover, studies that fall under the category of entrepreneurship aim to achieve different goals. They ask different questions, revolve around different analysis units, methodologies, and theoretical perspectives. Thus, for example, the discussion about entrepreneurship may involve various aspects such as the entrepreneurial entity (a new producing entity that is different from current producing entities); the way entrepreneurs function; entrepreneurial behavior (behavior characteristics of entrepreneurs). Additional studies analyze the variables that explain the appearance of entrepreneurship; the actual enterprise; the entrepreneurial “spirit” or the results of entrepreneurship (Cuervo et al., 2007; Lundstrom and Stevenson, 2005).

The above explain why entrepreneurship is described in the literature in different ways (Cuervo et al., 2007) as well as the versatility of existing definitions in the literature for the terms “entrepreneurship” and “entrepreneur” (Ahmad and Seymour, 2008; Levin, 2006; Low and MacMillan, 1988). Anderson and Starnawska (2008) also discuss the reason for the difficulties in defining these terms. They argue that since
entrepreneurship and the entrepreneur’s activities are related to irrationality and anomaly, this phenomenon can occur in an unexpected place and by unexpected means, and cannot be placed on a rational scale. These irrational and anomalous appearances are, according to them, in contradiction to the goal of reaching a uniform definition.

2.2 Entrepreneurship policy—definitions, characteristics and challenges

The literature offers different perspectives on the phenomenon of entrepreneurship policy. Audretsch and Beckmann (2007) claim that entrepreneurship policy is the means to directly affect the level of entrepreneurship in a certain state or region, and that it can include different levels of institutions and analyses. These levels may range from individuals to organizations to industries to sectors. According to them, each of these levels is an important goal for policy. Similarly, Hart (2003) argues that entrepreneurship covers many fields of policy, and includes activities at different levels of governability, from regional or local policy to national economic development. According to Hart, the purpose of entrepreneurship policy is to promote an optimal level of entrepreneurial activity (establishment of new businesses and expansion of existing businesses) in a certain society.

Stevenson and Lundstrom (2005; 2007) also tried to face the challenge of characterizing entrepreneurship policy. According to the researchers, when establishing entrepreneurship policy governments should refer to three dimensions: motivation, opportunity, and skills. Motivation refers to the social value entrepreneurship has, i.e. to be accessible and feasible and to be perceived as desired and applicable. Skills refer to the entrepreneurial skills acquired by the education system, training programs, relevant employment experience or social and professional networks. Opportunity is the environment that supports entrepreneurship—including the accessibility to knowledge, advise, capital, networking, business ideas, and resources. In addition, opportunity includes the regulatory environment, since governments can produce the right conditions for opportunities via regulation, such as regulation that reduces or cancels barriers to entrepreneurship (i.e. barriers that prevent new businesses from accessing the market) or such that reduces penalty for bankruptcy and the stigma that comes with business failure. The interactions between these dimensions affect the level of entrepreneurship
(Stevenson and Lundstrom, 2005). Thus, for example, low levels of motivation, opportunity and skills will lead to reduced establishment of new businesses, lower chances for business success, weak entrepreneurial culture, limited support of entrepreneurship, and vice versa.

In any case, current evidence shows that in order for an entrepreneurship policy to be used as an efficient strategy for countries that wish to improve their economic capacity and to generate employment, the application of the policy has to be comprehensive (OECD, 1998). Furthermore, since the field of entrepreneurship is wide and embraces a myriad of institutions, agencies and groups, the claim is that an entrepreneurial economy necessitates a consolidated and thorough policy approach that includes all sectors of society and not just the business sector (Audretsch, Grilo, and Thurik, 2007). According to this argument, since an entrepreneurial economy produces a new direction for public policy, which not only spans through most societal institutions, but also barely leaves any aspect of the economy unchanged, instead of focusing on adding aspects of entrepreneurial policy to the “toolbox” of public policy, the debate should focus on changing the role of public policy in an “entrepreneurial” economy (Audretsch, Grilo, and Thurik, 2007).

2.3 Entrepreneurship in the education sector

As mentioned, traditionally, entrepreneurship was associated with the private sector and business organizations working to gain profit, and raised only marginal attention in the public education system (Borasi and Finnigan, 2010). Moreover, in light of current schools’ obligation to comply with institutional regulations and norms, which hardly leave any room for entrepreneurship, the schools are often perceived as avoiders of educational change (Levin, 2006).

The phenomenon of entrepreneurship first became tied with education due to the significant changes that occurred in the world which affected the education system. Today, schools are required to handle new and complex challenges that the education system was not prepared for (Hess, 2007). Education systems around the world are required to operate and function in a constantly changing environment, characterized by high level of uncertainty. They must adapt to many changes, including technological,
economic, political, and social. The fast rate of transformations and the lack of or limited capacity to predict these changes increases the uncertainty that characterizes the schools’ activity (Eyal and Inbar, 2003). In addition, the trends of decentralization and privatization, which accelerated in recent years due to the expansion of the neoliberal ideology, forced schools to operate in quasi-competitive markets with special emphasis on greater accountability, achievements, and performance.

Due to these processes, the schools, on the one hand, gain more power and autonomy in everything regarding management and planning within the school; while on the other hand, they pressured by the demands to improve achievements and meet governmental standards increases. Alongside these changes, in the past several decades, education was perceived as a critical factor in assuring national economic prosperity and competitive growth within the context of globalization.

In current reality, there is a growing demand for entrepreneurship in the public education system (Levin, 2006). However, together with this demand there are voices that criticize it and are suspicious of it (Gibton, 2010). Such criticism is towards the negative social influences of neoliberalism in general and the entrance of economic-management discourse to the education field in particular (Yemini, 2012). According to Gibton (2010), on one side of the spectrum of criticism towards the penetration of neoliberal discourse into education are researchers who consider neoliberalism as an ideology close to fascism. While on the other side of the spectrum are researchers, central of which is Ball, who refer to the neoliberal perspective and penetration into education in a more complicated way: they are suspicious of it, while also claiming that the state failed in realizing the vision of public education (Ball, 2007).

The precise meaning of the term “entrepreneurship in education,” which developed in recent years, is unclear, and the term is used to describe a wide variety of goals and actions. Some researchers use the term “entrepreneurship in education” to describe strategies aimed at improving education (Hess, 2007; Levin, 2006). Others connect entrepreneurship in education to certain behaviors and roles of individuals in the education sector. Teske and Williamson (2006), for example, defined educational entrepreneurs as individuals who change the way education is provided from its very foundation. These individuals include businessmen who utilize opportunities in the
education market; public leaders who seek to change the education system, and various entities that manage and lead non-profit operations. Entrepreneurship can be related to after-school activities as well as activities within the organization (the educational institution), which leads to innovation and change (Man, 2010). Entrepreneurship in education within the schools (intrapreneurship) is often related to the management methods of the school principals and the innovative activities the schools seek (Man, 2010). These innovative activities can be related to the school practices, pedagogy, learning strategies, creating arrangements and cooperation for problem-solving, etc. (Yemini, Addi-Raccah, and Katarivas, 2014). In this context, it is important to note that in light of the inner tensions that reflect on the inevitable conservative nature of the school on the one hand, and the need for entrepreneurial actions required to satisfy the needs and preferences of their clients on the other hand, some researchers claim that only a fundamental reform of the education system can reinvent the school as an entrepreneurial organization (Eyal, 2008).

2.4 Governmental policy to promote entrepreneurship in the education system

As mentioned above, the promotion of entrepreneurship policy as a mechanism to stimulate growth, and generate employment and competitiveness in global markets has become a central theme in the economic strategies of governments around the world. Although the entrepreneurial discourse, as a global phenomenon, penetrated this field in recent decades (Levin, 2006), the subject of governmental policy to promote entrepreneurship in education did not attract much attention of researchers. One of the most common claims against the education system is that it has an inherent objection to change. According to Levin (2006), the main issue that limits public schools’ capacity to become innovative and lead changes is the heavy regulation they must comply with. Smith and Peterson (2006) try to address the challenge of characterizing an entrepreneurial school system. This system, they claim, is composed of six characteristics: a meritocratic culture; responsiveness to change (regarding the needs of the students, the parents, and the community); non-centralized; “client”-oriented (in this context, the “clients” include the students, their parents, the community and business
sector, among others); product-driven; and, constantly working to improve the learning process.

In his study from 2008, Eyal emphasizes the inner tension that characterizes the term “school entrepreneurship.” This tension is expressed, according to Eyal, by the schools’ avoidance of change, and by their growing need for entrepreneurial activity, in order to comply with the needs and preferences of their clients. This tension led many researchers to claim that only a fundamental reform of the education system can reinvent the school as an entrepreneurial organization (Eyal, 2008). Another relevant study by Eyal (2007) examined the connection between governmental sponsorship and entrepreneurial strategies in the public education system. The study found that schools that enjoyed high governmental funding often adopt a “calculated entrepreneurship strategy”, characterized by moderate levels of proactivity and innovation; while schools receiving less governmental support presented a more radical entrepreneurship strategy, which is characterized by a high level of proactivity and innovation. The study shows that governmental funding in the education system works similarly to its effect on business systems. Many governmental resources limit the school’s freedom to seek innovative enterprises. However, while there is a linear correlation between the level of governmental support and the radical entrepreneurship in the business sector, in the public education system the correlation is non-linear. Thus, schools with a moderate level of support presented more radical entrepreneurship strategies compared to schools with low or high level of governmental funding.

The relation between entrepreneurship growth in education and policy can also manifest in a clear support of the state in the establishment of “entrepreneurial” education organizations. One example is the academy schools in England. The academies are hybrid schools aimed to serve as the terrain where entrepreneurship can blossom; they combine private-school properties, such as independent management and autonomy, alongside public support, e.g. dependence on governmental funding. The policy discourse from which the academies rose reflects commitment to combine principles, values and private sector work methods with those of the public sector, in order to turn the traditional public sector to a more innovative and entrepreneurial one (Woods, Woods, and Gunter, 2007). In accordance with the determined policy, academies can be
established by commercial sponsors or voluntary groups as new partnerships with the central regime and local educational partners (Woods, Woods, and Gunter, 2007). Such schools are independent of the local authority and cannot operate directly for profit goals (Higham, 2014). The decision to allow this type of schools is part of the policy dictated by the government at the time, which attributed great importance to developing new forms of civil society’s involvement in education in order to solve continuous social challenges. Accordingly, the government acted to remove the obstacles preventing establishment of schools by non-governmental entities and to break the state’s monopoly in this context (Higham, 2014).

It is important to note that there is a growing body of studies that criticizes the Academies programme at a policy level (Glatter 2009; Purcell, 2011). Thus, the issue academies raises serious questions about the role of the state, its responsibility over the education system and the way power is exercised in this context (Woods, Woods and Gunter, 2007), and while supporters of academy schools believe that academies can make a difference to pupils’ educational outcomes, the critics claim that they are just a path aimed to privatize the state education system (Machin and Vernoit, 2010).

The above discussion regarding the different attitudes towards entrepreneurship and policy to promote entrepreneurship in the education system attest to the lack of a clear or agreed upon understanding of how the entrepreneurial education system should be designed and the challenges in this field of research.
3. Methodology

The subject of governmental policy for promoting entrepreneurship in education did not attract much attention from researchers and very little is known about the means, rationales and attitudes towards entrepreneurship policy in national education systems. The purpose of this study is to reveal, analyze and characterize the governmental discourse regarding entrepreneurship in education policy in Israel; the context in which this discourse occurs; the expressions and aspects of the policy as perceived by the governmental policy makers; and, to examine the way policy makers perceive the role of the government in promoting entrepreneurship in the education system. The study will focus on Israel as a single nation, but its consequences are multifaceted and may promote research and governmental discussions in many other states around the world.

The study not only describes the policy as depicted by the policy makers’ discourse, but takes another step forward, trying to answer why the governmental discourse and the policy properties and expressions, as they are expressed in the governmental discussion, are as they are. For this end, we have selected a qualitative research methodology, using the “grounded theory” methodology (Glaser and Strauss, 2009; Corbin and Strauss, 1990), which enabled us to create the policy makers’ “intellectual maps” regarding the term “entrepreneurship in education” and “entrepreneurship policy in education”; it also aided us in analyzing the structure of the terms, their context and their content (Gibton, 2015).

3.1 Data collection

The study is based on open-focused interviews conducted with five senior policy-makers in the Israeli Ministry of Education (Director Generals of the Ministry of Education\(^1\)) who, altogether, maintained the position for over a decade\(^2\). As Gibton (2015) states,

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1 The Director General of Ministry of Education works side by side with the Minister of Education and is appointed by the Minister. The Director General is the highest authority in the Ministry of Education (after the Minister of Education).

2 In order to ensure the anonymity of the five interviewed director generals, any detail that might reveal their identity was omitted.
interviews with senior policy-makers are a unique opportunity to expose the environment, circumstances, context, and policy. It allows an innovative research perspective on the issue of governmental entrepreneurship policy and a fascinating and rare glimpse at the heart of where policy decisions are made regarding education. The fact that, for this research, we interviewed policy-makers who led the education system in the political arena for, altogether, more than a decade, adds a historical perspective on the subject and provides a deeper understanding of the development of the discourse regarding entrepreneurship policy in education throughout a significant duration.

Establishing the study on interviews with policy-makers holds many challenges. According to Gibton (2015), senior policy-makers are often educated, knowledgeable, and self-confident. While these characteristics make them excellent candidates for interviews, it also makes them very much aware of the possible effect their answers during the interview may have on different audiences. Therefore, they are more cautious and calculated. This understanding, naturally, compels the researchers to go to greater than usual lengths in order to create an atmosphere of trust and openness with the interviewee. Another challenge in interviewing senior policy-makers, refers to the fact that policy-makers are busy people and as such, the time they have for an interview is usually limited. These issues demand that the researchers perform thorough preparation before the interview and conduct it in the most professional, efficient, and precise manner. Therefore, we conducted before each of the interviews a preliminary process of preparation.

The preparation process included research on the structure of the organization the policy makers have managed (Ministry of Education), its goals, important changes that the organization underwent along the years (such as replacements of Ministers of Education) and the organization’s general achievements during the relevant periods. Furthermore, before performing each interview, we conducted an extensive online research about the interviewee, his or her period of duration and activity during that period, the interviewee’s biography, education, experience, and perceptions. This preliminary step is critical in order to achieve the best results from the unique opportunity to interview that person (Gibton, 2015).
The interviews were conducted between December 2014 and February 2015. The location of the meeting was determined by the interviewee. Most meetings were held at cafés and one was conducted at the interviewee’s office. After receiving the interviewee’s permission, the interviews were recorded and then transcribed. At the first stage of each interview, in what Gibton refers to as “the Authentic Stage,” the interviewer asked an open question intended to reveal the interviewee’s attitude towards the term “entrepreneurship in education” and what is a governmental policy in this context. In this stage, the interviewee could express his perspective, experience and thoughts with minimal interference from us. This open question brought out a detailed answer from the interviewee about the issue standing at the heart of this study, and raised options for further investigation and elaboration. This stage of the interview continued as long as the interviewee had anything to say, and covered many topics of the interview. After the Authentic Stage, we presented the interviewee with more questions, including questions arising from the perception the interviewee expressed during the first stage. In addition, if we found it appropriate and necessary, we confronted the interviewees with different types of information, such as scientific literature, media reports about their period of duration, the Ministry’s activity during that time, and other perceptions expressed during the research. At this point we also obtained biographic-professional information about the interviewees.

3.2 Data analysis

The data analysis process of a qualitative study depends on continuous interaction between the data collection and data analysis. Thus, information is not studied according to predefined themes or categories, but rather through a process that develops during the study and through it, from the data collected in the study itself. In this way, processes of data collection and analysis are conducted simultaneously and are affected by each other and affecting one another, with the categories being formulated as a result of these processes (Guest, Namey, and Mitchell, 2012). We based our analysis on a “grounded theory.” This method is known as a systematic, comparative and inductive approach, aimed to produce a theory. The definition of the method as inductive stems from the transition one must do from the detailed description to a more abstract, conceptual level.
The “constant comparative analysis” is the main analysis strategy of the “grounded theory” and focuses on location, naming and characterizing repetitions that arise from the data (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). According to the constant comparative analysis, every interview was analyzed compared to the previous interviews. The purpose of the analysis was to identify main issues that repeatedly appeared throughout the interviews. At the heart of this method is a coding process, which includes three types of sub-processes conducted in different steps of the analysis process (Babchuk, 1997).

The initial analysis phase involved the identification and categorization of the issues encountered in the raw data—a process known as “open coding” (Schatzman and Strauss 1973). In the second stage, through a process called “axial coding,” we re-examined the categories identified through open coding to determine relationships between them (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). The next step is the process where categories linked to the core category of the study eventually turn to the basis of the grounded-based theory (Babchuk, 1997). After the data that arose from each interview was analyzed separately, a process of analysis and comparison between data was performed and a complete picture regarding the subject of the study was received. The main themes that arose from the analysis of the interviews with the five executive policy-makers will be presented and discussed herein.
4. Findings and discussion

In this section we present the main findings that arose from the analysis of interviews with policy-makers and discuss them. The findings are based on the statements of the interviewed policy-makers, in an attempt to present the different and shared perspectives they have about the studied issue. The research hypothesis of this study is that the issue of entrepreneurship, which takes a growing role in the educational discourse, is “borrowed” from the business sector (where the concept first developed). A new generation of studies regarding “policy borrowing” revolves around policy transfer between sectors. Waldow, for example, studied in 2007 the policy transfer between business and educational sectors in Sweden and opened a new and fascinating research approach, revolving around gravely important questions such as: when a policy transfers to the educational sector from another sector, how is it translated, interpreted and adapted to the educational sector? How does the interpretation applied on a transferred policy reflect an “educational logic,” and how does the educational sector handle contradictions and mismatches caused when the transferred policy does not satisfactorily comply with the educational logic? (Steiner-Khamsi, and Waldow, 2012). The answers to these questions, which we will try to find in this study, naturally provide important clues to understanding the uniqueness of the education sector.

4.1 What is entrepreneurship in education?

As mentioned above, despite the growing interest in entrepreneurship in education in recent years, there is still no consensus in the literature as to its precise meaning. Therefore, we decided to open our interviews asking each of our interviewees to describe their perceptions of what is entrepreneurship in education. It seems that the lack of agreement regarding the definition of the term “entrepreneurship in education” is not unique to researchers and theorists, but is shared by the policy-makers of the education sector as well. Nevertheless, despite the existence of a certain variance in perceptions presented by the interviewed policy-makers (which we will be discuss below), they also shared a common opinion. This common issue is the policy-makers’ reference of
entrepreneurship in education in associative terms—of feelings, emotions and other obscure metaphors, which all share the positive connotation they bear.

This is how, for example, Director General 3 presented her opinion of what is entrepreneurship in education: ‘entrepreneurship in education is everything that isn’t routine, that isn’t the central spine of the core program… it puts in adrenalin…’. And later she said ‘it’s the spirit, the soul you breathe into the education system’. Director General 4 said, in this context, that, ‘Entrepreneurship is part of living… no regulatory policy, even the finest and best one, would be able to lead a system to a great place if the system leaves no room or time to a teacher’s autonomy, to do what relates to his passion and his love … I tried very much to promote entrepreneurship and called it to get connected to passion; to the things you love… I believe entrepreneurship comes from a passionate place’. Director General 5 used similar terms to explain what is, in her opinion, entrepreneurship in education: ‘entrepreneurship in education is that spark in your eyes’. And later she said: ‘I think it (entrepreneurship) also brought back to all of us the passion of touching education’.

This obscure and emotional discourse is different from the literature discussion about entrepreneurship in education, which emphasizes aspects of innovation and proactivity, or refers to entrepreneurship as strategies to improve education (Hess, 2007; Levin, 2006), but despite these differences, it seems that the preference of an individual’s empowerment over obedience and collectivism is a main paradigm that is rooted deep within the discourse of the policy makers, as well as in the literature in the field of entrepreneurship in education.

Another important issue arises from this context related to the difference between the discourse about entrepreneurship in the business sector and the discourse about entrepreneurship in the education sector. Thus, despite the fact that the term entrepreneurship in the business sector has various definitions in the literature, it seems that they all combine objective and measurable parameters. Common definitions in this context view entrepreneurship as the foundation of new organizations (e.g. Drucker, 1985). Other definitions refer to entrepreneurship as the ability to utilize resources in an innovative way, to create new products of services (Shumpeter, 1934). In 1973, Kirzner (1973) related entrepreneurship with the ability to correctly foresee the flaws and future
imbalances in the market. More definitions present entrepreneurship as a process that occurs in the context of an organization with certain behavioral characteristics (Zhara, 1993). One of the common definitions in this context is that of Miller (1983), according to which, entrepreneurship is the tendency towards innovation, proactivity and risk-taking. Another central approach to the definition of entrepreneurship was suggested by Shane and Venkataraman (2000), who defined the field of entrepreneurship as an empirical examination of how, by whom, and by what is affecting on the discovery, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities for creating goods and services in the future.

When observing the suggested definitions of entrepreneurship in the education sector with relation to the above definitions of entrepreneurship in the business sector, it seems that when the discourse about entrepreneurship (which originally stems from the business sector) penetrates the education sector, it becomes an “emotional” discourse, something obscure and intuitive which focuses on abstract metaphors such as “passion”, “spark in the eyes”, “energy”, etc. In this manner it creates an absence of practical, pragmatic, defined, or result-oriented discussion.

4.2 The existence, appearances and meanings of a governmental policy to promote entrepreneurship in education

As a rule, public policy can be defined as an action (or lack thereof) of the government regarding any particular issue, which has an effect on the general population (Mahroum, 2013). These issues can be related to natural resources, technology, human resources, infrastructure, and social problems. More specifically, a policy can be defined as an act (or inaction) that has a defined purpose, applied by a player or a group of players in the process of handling a problem or a particular issue (Mahroum, 2013). A policy as a normative discourse may be backed by a governmental enforcement mechanism, and it can also develop spontaneously, outside the agencies officially and legally responsible for making policies. In both cases, the policy can be organized and documented or it can be sustained in a non-written fashion, through practice, where it presents a model of ideal behavior in a patterned sphere that tries to design the behavior (Levinson, Sutton, and Winstead, 2009). In the context of educational policy, Baker and LeTendre (2005) note
that the process of its consolidation is “perforated”, i.e. its openness to external influence varies.

As mentioned above, the issue of governmental policy in promoting entrepreneurship in education has not attracted much attention of researchers to date. Thus, very little is known about the means, motives, and application of such policies in the public education system. Since in Israel this subject was hardly ever studied, when we approach this study, we had a great many questions to answer, including questions about the attitudes of the policy makers towards the very existence of a governmental policy to promote entrepreneurship, the appearance of such policy, its expression, and the way they perceive the role of the central regime in this context. In these aspects, the interviews exposed various and complex attitudes among the policy makers.

4.2.1 The role of government in promoting entrepreneurship—bottom-up vs. top-down

From the interviews, it appears that the policy makers agree that promoting entrepreneurship in the contemporary education system is important. This can be demonstrated by the answer of Director General 3 to why, in his opinion, entrepreneurship in education is needed: ‘The public education, its prestige and value are reduced in the public’s view. There are more and more private schools, anthroposophy schools, democratic school… all because parents are tired of the public system… and it was clear to me that this system has to be attractive and versatile…”.

Nevertheless, regarding the government’s role in promoting entrepreneurship in the education system, there are differences in the points of views expressed by the interviewed policy makers. These differences mainly revolve around the relationship between two attitudes: one is that entrepreneurship should grow from the bottom, and the other is that the central government should take a main role in promoting entrepreneurship in the education system. One of the most interesting issues in this context revolved around the significant role attributed by the policy makers to entities external to the education system in everything related to promoting entrepreneurship within the education system. Director General 1 mentioned the limitation of a governmental policy in everything related to its influence on the entire system: ‘Any bottom-up change, initiative, their odds of surviving in the system are much greater [than
Despite this position, when Director General 1 described the activity of a non-governmental organization (NGO) he considered as the embodiment of entrepreneurship in education, he seemed to be aware of the fact that the NGO could not have succeeded in a vacuum, i.e. without the support of the Ministry of Education, and in fact he explained that when the Ministry stopped its support of the NGO, its activity significantly reduced and it ceased to exist. Director General 2 presented entrepreneurship as a concept based on the understanding that there are “forces” external to the Ministry of Education that may affect the system: ‘Entrepreneurship [is]… a concept that provides tools, and trust in the fact that there are many forces that can affect the children’s education, which are not just the Ministry [of Education]’. Director General 4 exhibited, on the one hand, a perception according to which entrepreneurship grows from the bottom: ‘I usually thought, felt and acted to realize that entrepreneurship grows from the bottom...’. On the other hand, later in the interview she emphasizes the need for a governmental policy that will promote entrepreneurship in education: ‘We are talking about a value that enables anyone in the system—a teacher, a student, a position holder—to understand that entrepreneurship is part of their excellence. I think it has to be one of the next things to happen in the system, otherwise we will not be able to adapt ourselves to the needs of the new world’.

The words of Director General 5 also exposed a complex relationship between the role of the government and that of “the field” in this aspect: ‘There is a debate whether, when you lead a change in the system, you should lead it from top-down or bottom-up, and the truth is probably somewhere in the middle. No change in the world will happen if you won’t bring it from both the top and the bottom. The bottom—that’s the entrepreneurship. The bottom is enabling the education system, the schools, the educational personnel, the students, the teachers, the parents—to do it in their own way’.

Later, she adds: ‘...It’s the role of the system to allow the people within it... to create a certain mandate of policy that always gazes towards the future, Not to be responsive. To be able to say, Okay, this is the twenty-first century. In twenty years, it will look different from now. Let’s start developing thoughts and ideas of how, and bring them into the system... or the system will build its innovation from the bottom, but even
from the top—the headquarters cannot be chasing its own tail, so you need both… my role is to produce the infrastructure that will allow them to do it’.

This perception aligns with the research approach presented, among others, by Fullen (1994), according to which, in complex societies the use of “top-down” strategies, on their own, cause disputes or superficial application. However, combined strategies which utilize the central regime’s power (to provide directional perspective, incentives, networking, and retrospective supervision) together with the local capacity (to learn, create, respond to, and “nourish” those general directions) have higher chance to succeed. It is interesting that, in the interviews, the Director Generals chose to emphasize the role of entities external to the education system in promoting entrepreneurship, and the collaborations the state established in this context with such external entities. In fact, it seems that one of the most significant forces at the “bottom” to promote entrepreneurship in education are the external entities such as NGOs and business sector related organizations.

Director General 1, for example, said in this context that ‘Entrepreneurship is not related to a general system… and I’ll get right to the practical point: there is one association in Israel, just one, that deals with entrepreneurship, with teachers’ entrepreneurship. I fell in love with it… the administrative board of the NGO included people of the Ministry of Education, so it also had an official seal effect…’. And later he said: ‘It’s very hard for a person, an entrepreneur to act in the education system… even if he has the best idea… who can come up with them through? Organizations’. Director General 2 said similar things: ‘[During my period] there was a lot of room for entrepreneurship outside the Ministry of Education, from entities coming up with ideas’. Director General 5 even mentioned the main role played by external entities in implementing entrepreneurship in the system and the cooperation these entities maintain with the Ministry of Education: ‘We established entrepreneurship hubs with external organizations…’.

Together with her previous remarks, it seems that during the period of duration of Director General 5, there was a reference (even if lacking and random) to the dimensions of entrepreneurship policy in the business sector as suggested by Stevenson and Lundstrom (2005, 2007) (and which were detailed above). Thus, her words encompass
the perception that entrepreneurship is accessible, applicable, and desired (the “motivation” dimension) and can be “acquired” through the education system and professional networks (the “skills” dimension). Director General 5 even emphasizes the entrepreneurship-supportive environment that the Ministry of Education created during her duration and the accessibility of knowledge, networking, and ideas (the dimension of “opportunities”). Thus, for example, she mentioned in this context that ‘the role of the headquarters is to produce shelf products’ for people who ‘face difficulty with entrepreneurial issues’.

Another aspect relevant to the “opportunities” dimension of Stevenson and Lundstrom is the regulatory environment. In this aspect, anything regarding the involvement of external entities in promoting entrepreneurship in the education system, was enabled by the regulatory environment during the service of the interviewed policy makers. It seems that when it comes to promoting entrepreneurship in education, the external entities that operate within the education system greatly shape both the field and the governmental policy. In this context, we can observe the process of generating a policy to promote entrepreneurship from a social-cultural point of view, which understands policy as a deep political process of cultural product as designed and shaped by versatile social players (Levinson, Sutton, and Winstead, 2009).

4.2.2 Entrepreneurship policy—fragmented, marginal and peripheral

Despite the positive aura that the term “entrepreneurship in education” (which we examined above) carries, the interviews with the policy makers revealed that through the years, the subject of entrepreneurship was not part of the governmental agenda and in fact the existing policy in this regard is broken and a marginal part of the education system. Director General 4, for example, mentioned in the interview that: ‘[Entrepreneurship policy was not] a mainstream policy, like the improving achievements program we’ve

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3 In December 2010, the Ministry of Education published a Director General Circular was published under the title “Procedures for Approving External Programs (Third Sector and Business Community Entities), intending to organize the process of approving educational programs in educational institutions. The circular was not immediately canceled after its publication and was not applied in practice (Israeli State Comptroller, 2011), and only recently did the issue of combining external entities in the education system resurfaced at the Ministry of Education’s agenda, as expressed in the Director General Circular which results and consequences “in the field” are yet unknown.
been talking about… I don’t feel that, in the thirty five years I’ve been in the system, that entrepreneurship per se was ever one of the leading priorities… when you look at the system from above, you see a lot of islands of entrepreneurship, some are bigger, some are smaller, but you cannot pinpoint a strong color and tie all these islands together into a coherent image of policy’. In addition she said: ‘Entrepreneurship is not a leading value… it’s not a term that leads a policy like “excellence”’.” Director General 3 also said that ‘Entrepreneurship as an agenda, of course not [was not one of the subjects in the Ministry of Education’s agenda during her period of duration]’.

The reason this issue was absent from the governmental agenda was explained by Director General 4 as follows: ‘During recent years, at the end of the day, it [entrepreneurship] was not the leading aim. Because what really bothered the State of Israel was that it was lagging behind in everything related to achievements. In recent years they realized that if the State of Israel would not change its position from way back at the end of the line and start to boost itself up a couple of steps at a time… and this is exactly the things that started to happen. And when they do happen, you really can make more time for [entrepreneurship]’.

These things show that, unlike the discourse about entrepreneurship in the business sector, which reflects a clear understanding of the relation between entrepreneurship and economic growth (Cuervo, Ribeiro, and Roig, 2007; Drucker, 1985; Foster, 1986; Morris and Lewis, 1991; Morris and Saxton, 1996; Peters, 1987), according to the discourse of the educational policy makers there is no connection between entrepreneurship and improving academic achievements, and in fact the discourse about entrepreneurship among education policy makers remains disconnected from the discourse about achievements (which is the dominant discourse among policy makers along the years). This finding is particularly interesting when noticing the close connection between achievements in international tests and economy.

As exhibited by the interview with Director General 1: ‘At a State’s level you’re preoccupied with a million other things that are more important (than entrepreneurship). parents’ choice, should there be tests or not, should there be matriculation exams or not, will we succeed in the international tests or not? These questions are very important… if
you ask me, I never thought [that there is a connection between entrepreneurship and success in international tests]’.

Unlike the other interviewed Director Generals, Director General 5 mentioned that entrepreneurship was part of the strategic plan of the Ministry during her duration, but she likewise neglected to emphasize the connection between promoting entrepreneurship and improving academic achievements: ‘Even opening the registration zones and promoting school uniqueness’. What is this uniqueness? Again, it’s to create, to initiate, to paint yourselves, define who you are, make yourselves stand out, uniquely’.

These perceptions reveal that the issue of promoting entrepreneurship in education was not perceived by policy makers as a coherent policy “which stands alone”, but rather as a broken and fragmented one, tied to or embodied in other types of policies. Director General 2 said, in relation to this, that: ‘[Entrepreneurship was not part of the agenda] not as a subject. It was ad hoc. When we wanted to encourage reading, we used various initiatives to promote reading among first-graders. When we wanted to promote… not as a stand-alone value’. Director General 4 connects entrepreneurship with the terms “autonomy” and “twenty-first century skills”: ‘Today there is a growing understanding that teachers and principals need autonomy in their school… There is a lot of talk going on today that the school does not really train the mature adolescent with the tools they will need for the twenty-first century. And I do make the connection between the two’.

Another interesting finding arising from the interviews regarding the way policy makers perceive policies to promote entrepreneurship in education, is that the entrepreneurial policy is “peripheral” in that it is associated with the periphery of the education system. Eyal and Inbar’s findings from their study in 2003, show that periphery schools are more entrepreneurial than center-located schools, since the geo-social location in the periphery can be used as a mechanism for partial bypass of the considerations undertaken by the central system, which enables school activism as expressed in the school principal’s independent initiatives. The interviews with the policy makers showed that, in their opinion, entrepreneurship exists in the periphery of the system, though they did not refer to it (at least directly) in a geo-social locational context. Director General 4, for example, sees entrepreneurship as something reserved to ‘those who can afford it’: ‘Entrepreneurship is a luxury, something that’s nice to have, it
belongs to places that can afford it “we have reached a crisis point, let’s reinvent ourselves” or “we’re so good, let’s be an entrepreneur branch, let’s belong to experimental schools which, is an international league”. But, again, an international league is not everyone’s league, and it counts on that. That’s also part of the prestige that comes with it.

Even Director General 2 connects entrepreneurship with the periphery of the population (in this case she relates it to weakened populations): ‘The Ministry has its regular hours, its standards, its supervision, but there is also the great expertise gained from the universities—Bar Ilan, the Hebrew University, the Research Institute for Innovation in Education. At Bar Ilan they gave it a different name… that’s the specialty of working with children from a low socio-economic background, or as they called it “disadvantaged’’. Director General 4 said, ‘It (entrepreneurship) stayed within specific schools and a few more that came to learn from them’.

4.2.3 The difficulty of declaring an official entrepreneurship policy in education —the concern from public criticism

Another theme arising from the interviews refers to the difficulty in expressing an explicit statement of an entrepreneurship policy in the education system. The main difficulty in this context revolves around the criticism of the public discourse regarding the penetration of a neoliberal discourse (wherein the issue of promoting entrepreneurship is one of its ‘foundation stones’) in general and adding an economic-management discourse and activities in particular to the education sector (Yemini, 2012).

One relevant criticism in this context claims that the penetration of a neoliberal-economic discourse to education will lead to the State’s retreat from its commitments to education, will damage the quality of education and increase the inequality between the strata of the population. This finding is particularly interesting in light of the positive aura (which we reviewed earlier) that comes with the term “entrepreneurship.” It seems that despite this positive aura, it is difficult to express the issue of entrepreneurship (and all the aspects that come with it) in a stated fashion, within a governmental policy, due to the concern of public criticism.
Director General 2 referred to it and said, ‘If you ask me about what happened in my time, it [entrepreneurship] was not done explicitly, it was… part of the tune. There is a great difficulty for a government to declare promotion [of entrepreneurship], the slanderers will soon consider this as the government’s escape from responsibility... It’s very difficult to tell the difference between entrepreneurship that is really educational and one that has some hidden agenda…’. Director General 1 said similar things: ‘The perception… they did not use trademarks, we said that commercial entities—and what an attack I was under, and I said I would allow, I think we should allow commercial entities to enter and fund all sorts of enterprises in the school… boy-oh-boy, what the press did to me. And you had to start justifying myself…The word entrepreneurship did not come up… there’s a very strong lobby of Israeli groups about this issue’.
5. Conclusion

The increasing interest in entrepreneurship is not unique to the business sector, and in this age, when schools must face new and complex challenges, the preoccupation in and discourse about entrepreneurship have become more common in education systems around the world. Despite the commonness of the discourse about entrepreneurship in education in the last decades, the issue of a governmental policy to promote entrepreneurship in education did not attract much attention from researchers and very little is known about the means, rationales, and attitudes towards this policy in national education systems. This study, focusing on Israel that is considered a “start-up nation”, aimed to deal with the lack of research in this field.

Through open-focus interviews with senior governmental policy makers in the field of education in Israel for more than a decade, this study examined, characterized and analyzed the governmental discourse about entrepreneurship policy in education during those years, and it provides several significant insights in this context. The first insight refers to the way policy makers perceive the term “entrepreneurship in education”. The interviews exposed a common denominator among the interviewed policy makers regarding their attitude towards the issue of entrepreneurship in education, which was through associative terms of feelings, emotions, and other obscure metaphors, all bearing a positive context. All of them put the individual in the center of the discussion. Regarding definitions common with entrepreneurship in the business sector, it seemed that when the discourse about entrepreneurship (which originally stems from the business world) penetrates the education sector, it becomes an emotional discourse, something vague and intuitive which centralizes abstract images like “passion,” “spark in the eyes”, “energy”, etc. and does not refer, i.e. creating a lack thereof of a practical, pragmatic, defined and result-oriented discourse.

The second insight arising from the analysis of the findings refers to the perceptions of the policy makers regarding the role of the government in promoting entrepreneurship in the education system. Despite an agreement about the importance of the promotion of entrepreneurship in education, the interviews exposed differences between the perceptions of the interviewed policy makers. These differences were mostly
concerned with the connection between two attitudes. One was that entrepreneurship has to grow from the “bottom”, and the other was that the central regime should take a main role in promoting entrepreneurship in the education system. One of the more interesting points in this context refers to the significant role that the policy makers attributed to entities, external of the education system in everything regarding promotion of entrepreneurship in the education system, and the importance they see in those entities when it comes to shaping the educational field and the governmental policy.

The third insight refers to the place entrepreneurship should take in the education system. It seems that, despite the positive aura the term “entrepreneurship in education” has, the issue of promoting entrepreneurship in education is not realized within a coherent, “stand-alone” policy, but remains fragmented, tied and depicted in other types of policies, existing in the periphery of the education system. One of the possible explanations to this is that, unlike in the discourse about entrepreneurship in the business sector, which reflects clear understanding of the connection between entrepreneurship and economic growth, the discourse of the education policy makers shows that, in their opinion, there is no correlation between entrepreneurship and academic achievements. And so, the discourse about entrepreneurship among education policy makers remains disconnected from the discourse about competition and performance (which is the dominant discourse among policy makers along the years).

Another possible explanation leads us directly to the fourth insight, which rules the entire study and refers to the basic difficulty in expressing an explicit statement about entrepreneurship policy in the education system. Common public criticism regarding the penetration of a neoliberal discourse in general, and adding economic-management discourse and activity to the education sector in particular, results in criticism that the policy makers seem unable to ignore.

The preoccupation with entrepreneurship in the education field calls for multiple and complex challenges. While in the business sector, the connection between entrepreneurship and the products that it should yield (i.e. economic profit) is almost obvious, when one tries to confront the issue in the education sector, the matter becomes complicated and raises a series of fundamental questions, answers for which can be very multifaceted. Thus, for example, one may ask why should entrepreneurship in education
be promoted at all. Allegedly, borrowing from the business sector, the answer is clear—in order to improve performance. But what “performance” or “profit” do we mean when we talk about education? Another question that must be faced is whether entrepreneurship is a value which stands on its own, or is it merely a means to a purpose? These complex questions, which stand at the basis of the studied subject and concerned with the role of the education system, naturally make it harder to investigate the field and, of course, to create a coherent policy in the matter.

This study provides a unique glimpse into the mindset where decisions that shape the entire Israeli education system are made, and provides new insights regarding the component of entrepreneurship policy in education in Israel, as well as the characteristics of such policy, its expressions and the construction of entrepreneurship as a field of policy in the education sector. The study intensifies the knowledge we have in the growing field of entrepreneurship policies in education. In this context, the study provides a deep understanding of the various aspects of an entrepreneurship policy in education as expressed in the discourse of education policy makers, and thus delivers a great contribution to the theoretical framework regarding education policy.
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