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School principals' agency as reflected by extracurricular activities in the Israeli education system

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This study examines the nature and extent of extracurricular activities in the Palestinian Arab, Jewish Religious and Jewish Secular educational sectors (Israeli education system also includes the Ultra-Orthodox sector with its own management, monitoring and governance apparatus.) in Israel, in order to characterise the contextual variables that may affect school principals' agency. We explored 2009 Program for International Student Assessment results regarding the nature and intensity of extracurricular activities implemented in schools. We used school's questionnaires to conceptualise the relations between schools' contextual variables and extracurricular activities. Descriptive statistics and Poisson regression analyses were applied for data analysis.

Keywords: schools; entrepreneurship; extracurricular activities

A correlation was found between the level and the scope of extracurricular activities and the educational sector, e.g. Palestinian Arabs schools, Jewish Religious and Jewish Secular schools had differing intensities of extracurricular activities and each of the sectors demonstrated different types of activities. Controlling for schools' characteristics resulted in different patterns of activities, with Palestinian Arab schools offering less arts'-related and more academic activities. Jewish Religious and Jewish Secular schools were found similar in their academic activities, while Jewish Religious schools had significantly less arts activities. Schools' autonomy was found to be an important variable in predicting schools' extracurricular activities.

As extracurricular activities can be viewed as schools' autonomous choice, school principals' agency was found to play important role in the scope of choices made under such agency, thus fostering diversity among schools within the given accountable environment. We show that agency can rise above external pressures the lead to change and entrepreneurship inside local schools.

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Introduction

In many countries including the UK, USA and Israel, schools are exposed to increasing external pressures for high achievements and performance along with demands to align according to governmental standards and top-down policies (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Gibton, 2011). At the same time, current decentralisation processes may result in school principals and teachers gaining more power and autonomy *de facto* regarding internal processes and decision-making in school, affording formulation of bottom-up policies (Goldring & Schuermann, 2009; Nir, 2009). These two prominent trends expose school staff to complex pressures that affect their actions and practices. In some cases, teachers and school principals enjoy a high degree of discretion as long as they advance and improve students' achievements (as is the practice in charter schools in USA, e.g.). This enables school staff to take advantage of opportunities for autonomy to promote new initiatives and lead changes in their schools and communities. Namely, teachers and particularly school principals may take a proactive role to advance initiatives that reflect their own interests and respond to the particular schools' needs and social context in which they are embedded. The degree of school staff agency largely depends on the school's context, so that the scope and intensity of initiatives staff undertake can vary from school to school (Clarke & Wildy, 2004; Foster, 1989). Most schools are expected to comply with formal norms and accountability requirements, but the informal initiatives they undertake may differ.

Hence, this study focused on informal school initiatives as reflected in extracurricular activities (hereafter, EXCUR activities). More precisely, we sought to explore and predict schools' diversity in EXCUR activities in various contexts, according to the different education sectors in the Israeli system – namely, the Palestinian Arab, Jewish Secular and Jewish Religious sectors.

We focused on EXCUR activities for two reasons: first, these activities are not related directly to the formal curriculum and course of learning; hence, the type of EXCUR activities and their intensity depend to a large extent on schools' preferences and resources, which may lead to diversity between schools. Second, educational policy-makers and social researchers often view EXCUR activities as superfluous or even contradictory to the academic mission of schools. Thus, examining this issue may reflect school staff and particularly principals' agency to act beyond expectations in social and cultural spheres compared to academic areas.

Theoretical framework

The institutional perspective traditionally regards schools as being influenced by strong institutional pressures (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer,

Scott, & Deal, 1992; Scott, 1995) and compelled to conform to practices and norms imposed by the formal central authorities (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Ogawa, Sandholtz, Martinez-Flores, & Scribner, 2003; Scott, 1995). However, in order to increase schools' efficiency and outcomes by responding to particular local needs, educational systems across various countries adopted decentralisation policies (Nir, 2009). These policies, which shifted the level of decision-making authority from the central government to local educational authorities and gradually to individual schools, severely challenged schools' institutional environments. Under decentralisation policies in western countries, schools which gained more influence over their own decision-making were expected to gain power and autonomy (Nir, 2009), afford more diversity in school governance (Gibton, 2011; Goldring & Schuermann, 2009) and increase their dependency on their local environment (Addi-Raccah, 2006). As Moos and Moller (2003, p. 357) have argued, schools function in a hyper complex society in which they have to act as

... self directed organizations that must manage their own affairs within the frames provided by authorities and they must be accountable to those same authorities ...

The way in which management and the 'production of output' is exercised is up to each individual organisation, thus leading to school diversification and to the formulation of different types of school governance. In other words, schools become more diverse, and different schools face the same challenges in differing ways (OECD, 2010a). There is no doubt that these conditions are reshaping the role of principals and teachers and expose them to new and challenging requirements.

Goldring and Schuermann (2009) summarised the multiple roles that school principals must face in this epoch: responding to accountability requires that principals increase their visibility and responsibility, focusing on instructional improvement for advancing pupils' achievements; plan, allocate resources and make decisions based on data and research; function within a market-oriented and competitive environment; and finally, integrate and engage the school with its external environment. They have opportunities to influence policy, allocate resources and mobilise (McLaughlin & Brown, 2000; Whitaker, 2003), and must respond to calls for innovation, critical thinking, adaptability and creativity – vital skills in the twenty-first century. Indeed, school principals currently are expected to initiate various activities. The literature indicates that the ability to exercise individual agency is contextually bound (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009; Hardy & Maguire, 2008; Veciana & Urbano, 2008). In their comprehensive review, Pacheco, York, Dean, and Sarasvathy (2010) referred to external pressures (e.g. demands for accountability, competition between schools or political

pressures) that may force changes that are aligned with top-down policies and the ability to gain power, social support and legitimacy by adherence to socially appropriate practices. According to Pacheco et al. (2010), powerful agents (such as school principals) who possess resources, knowledge or strategic social network positions are able to better use their political power to shape institutions in their favour and shape the institutional environment in either direction. Battilana et al. (2009) also indicated that agency is dependent on the degree of opportunity available. With respect to schools, studies in Israel showed some relations between agency and initiative-taking, and various resources such as government funding, geographic location or school's socio-economic level (Eyal, 2007; Eyal & Inbar, 2003; Gali, 2005). For example, in schools that undergo decentralisation and are granted their own management capacities, principals were found to initiate more extensive and broader relations with external agencies (Addi-Raccah, 2006). In this context, is decentralisation granted to school allowing the school principals to exploit their autonomy for taking new initiatives?

Therefore, we can assume that the opportunities that school principals exploit are largely influenced by each school's respective conditions. This study tested this notion in regard to the provision of diverse EXCUR activities at schools.

Extracurricular activities in schools

Schools have traditionally been seen as social organisations with multidimensional environments, which offer a wide range of activities that affect pupils' lives. Various studies exist regarding pupils' engagement both within and beyond school, as well as organised or self-directed, periodical or sporadic, religious, political and other activities (e.g. Guest & Schneider, 2003). For the sake of this study, we define EXCUR activities as pupils' non-curricular engagement, organised and managed by the school and occurring on school grounds. Researchers investigating extracurricular activities have frequently studied the relationships between participation in these activities and the social outcomes, academic achievements and educational attainment of adolescents (Ludden, 2011; Swanson, 2002). EXCUR activities are believed to offer pupils a means to express and explore their identity, generate social and human capital, and offer non-academic challenges. Adolescents form their identity by developing skills, discovering preferences and associating themselves with others. For years, a significant amount of research was devoted to understanding the impact of participation in EXCUR activities on pupils' lives. Feldman and Matjasko (2005) and Shulruf, Tumen, and Tolley (2008) presented a comprehensive review of research, which found a generally positive influence on pupils' educational, cultural and social outcomes. For example, they found that EXCUR activities are associated with (1) higher academic performance and attainment; (2) reduced rates of dropout; (3)

lower rates of substance use; (4) less sexual activity among girls; (5) better psychological adjustment, including higher self-esteem, less worry regarding the future and reduced feelings of social isolation, and (6) reduced rates of delinquent behaviour, including criminal arrests and antisocial behaviour.

While studies show that extracurricular activities impact pupils and school environment, and although these activities are regarded as an integral part of a school's responsibility to provide a balanced education that supports the formal curriculum (Shulruf et al., 2008), school principals' decisions regarding the choice and implementation of these activities have not previously been studied.

Indeed, little is known about the choice made in schools on the nature, scope, frequency and amount of EXCUR activities offered, on the trade-offs that might exist between different types of activities, on the involvement of external agencies in development and implementation of such activities and on various variables that play a role in this choice. School principals may decide whether to engage with EXCUR activities or invest their resources in other activities or tasks such as reducing school size (OECD, 2010a). In fact, school principals hold a significant role in introducing and implementing EXCUR activities in school, particularly at the secondary level (Kmetz & Willower, 1982; Martin & Willower, 1981; Pounder & Merrill, 2001) where EXCUR activities serve as a framework enabling adolescents to seek reward and appreciation from one another rather than from adults (Boocock & Coleman, 1969). Based on fieldwork from 20 schools, Rudd, Aiston, Davies, Rickinson, and Dartnall (2002) reported that principals stressed the importance of giving students a wide range of learning experiences and the need for flexibility in the curriculum. Flexibility and variety were manifested not just in the formal curriculum offered, but also in the number of EXCUR activities available and in the provision of additional subjects, such as an extra language, music, drama, art or physical education.

Differences exist also in the variety of and participation in EXCUR activities in regions with diverse SES backgrounds or cultural differences. In addition, these activities may fluctuate significantly, depending on school resources (Hoy & Miskel, 2001). Given severe budget constraints, a highly heterogenic population and diverse school types, principals might perceive EXCUR activities as a means for new initiatives, for establishing relations with external agencies, and even for creating school uniqueness by branding and marketing.

Furthermore, while the academic curriculum currently remains under tight governmental regulation, EXCUR activities provide a marketing tool for school principals and may also represent their individual vision and spirit (Dryfoos, 1999). As Martin and Willower (1981, p. 84) note,

principals perceived the extra-curricular activity program as a unifying force within the school and a method for interacting with pupils in an informal fashion. They viewed their time investment as a show of support for the efforts of all concerned and as a positive advertisement for the school.

Therefore, we should examine EXCUR activities within the school context in which they are offered. In the next section, we focus on the Israeli setting for examining EXCUR activities at schools in different educational sectors.

The Israeli education system

Israel is an immigrant-absorbing democracy with a Jewish majority. Twenty percent of Israeli citizens are Palestinian Arabs, a distinctive ethnic and religious minority. Furthermore, the Israeli Jewish majority is far from being homogenous in origin (comprised of immigrants from Europe, North Africa and America) and religious worldview (secular, traditional, modern Orthodox or ultra-Orthodox), with significant differences between residents of the country's centre and periphery. This social heterogeneity is reflected in the structure of the educational system.

The Israeli educational system was established as a cartelised and almost entirely public. Following the Education Act (1953), schools are affiliated with four different sectors. It includes three distinct public sectors, free of charge and fully supervised by the state: the Jewish secular schools, the Jewish religious and Palestinian Arabs schools. In addition, there are the ultra-Orthodox and semi-private schools that are partially supervised by the state. In 2012 1169,711 students studied in Israeli schools with 668,692 students (57%) in the Jewish Secular sector, 212,379 students (18%) in the Jewish Religious sector and 430,518 students (36%) in Palestinian Arab sector.¹ The rest of the students (226,694) study in Ultra-Orthodox Jewish and other semi-private schools.²

All students are required to complete 13 years of compulsory schooling that includes: one year of kindergarten and 12 years of primary (grades 1–6), lower secondary (grades 7–9) and senior secondary (grades 10–12) schooling (Resh & Benavot, 2009). Most of the primary and lower secondary schools are owned and run by the state. As for senior secondary schools, nearly half (47%) of these schools are operated by non-for-profit organisations, while the other half are run by local authorities (38%) or the state (15%). De-facto a great number of pupils from the high to low range of the socio-economic scale completing secondary school and about two-third of the pupils are finishing high school with a matriculation certificate. The matriculation certificate is awarded by the Ministry of Education to secondary school pupils who succeed in achieving passing grades in a required minimum set of standardised examinations. The results of the matriculation exams have a great implication for the individual's future as it affords them

to continue to higher education. Thus, for receiving the matriculation certificates, schools, although not owed by the state, have to provide to the students a common curriculum core defined by the Ministry of Education. Beyond these requirements, schools may have some flexibility in their curriculum, depending on their sector affiliation, school characteristics and principals initiatives, as briefly presented below.

The Palestinian Arab sector

Since the establishment of the Israeli state, the Arab education system has remained at the margins of the mainstream Israeli Jewish education system, subject to continuous government control processes. The Arab education system suffers from discrimination in the allocation of resources, including physical infrastructure and classrooms, teaching hours and enrichment hours (Arar, 2012). The Palestinians, who prior to 1948 constituted the majority of the country's population, attended a separate education system run by the British mandate government. This ethnic separation continued to exist after 1948, primarily because the remaining Arab localities within the Israeli territory were placed under military administration, which lasted until 1966. The abolition of military administration did not eliminate this division in education: with a few exceptions, through the present day, almost all Arab students are taught by Arab teachers, both male and female, at separate schools where the main language of instruction is Arabic and part of the syllabus is specific to Arabs. Officially, the Arab schools fall under the state education sector, but in practice they are administered by a separate department at the Education Ministry. However, unlike the Jewish public religious and ultra-Orthodox sectors, which are run by representatives of these sectors, the Arab education department does not enjoy independent Arab administration; for most of its history, it has been headed by Jews (Dahan & Yona, 2006).

Due to an ongoing complex political situation in Israel, the Palestinian Arabs are politically marginalised, subject to constant (though changing) suspicion regarding their loyalty to the State. The overwhelming majority resides in distinct geographical localities (villages or towns) or in segregated neighbourhoods in 'ethnically mixed cities' such as Haifa or Tel Aviv-Jaffa (Gonen, 1996). These factors, among others, contribute to a tighter state control over school principals' selection and general control of Arab schools by the dominant Jewish majority (Al-Haj, 1991). The Arab sector also experiences considerable discrimination in resource allocation and provides different individual and cultural services or programmes than Jewish schools (e.g. Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011). A comprehensive report by Human Rights Watch (Coursen-Neff, 2001) claims that schools for Palestinian Arab children offer fewer facilities and educational opportunities than those offered to other Israeli children. For example, Palestinian Arab children

attend schools with larger classes and fewer teachers than do those in the Jewish school system. Schools in the Arab educational sector also have fewer libraries, computers, science laboratories and even recreation space (Tatar & Horenczyk, 2003). Compared to Jewish schools, Arab schools also offer its students a limited number of school subjects and less differentiated curriculum (Ayalon, 2002), which is academically oriented. Among the academic subjects, sciences are highly valued due to their contribution to the progress and modernisation of society. This can be seen in the increasing rate of students who take higher level courses in sciences. History and literature also have a relatively high status because of their cultural and social significance as part of the process of democratisation and politicisation of the educational system. Since the 1970s, this sector has emphasised the teaching of Arabic and Arab culture, Islam and Christianity, which have great importance in transmitting the cultural capital in Arab society. Although a significant improvement in the educational level of the Israeli Palestinian Arab population has been recorded in the last 50 years, Arab education still lags far behind the Jewish sectors in terms of resource allocation and schools' autonomy. In line with this situation, school principals in this sector are less autonomous and more dependent on the governmental financial and other resources (Resh & Benavot, 2009).

Jewish Secular and religious sectors

Jewish Secular and Jewish Religious schools have several similarities. Like Palestinian Arab schools, both types are primarily publically financed. Jewish Secular and Jewish Religious schools coexist in most cities, towns and rural areas in Israel and serve students of diverse socio-economic levels. On average, the socio-economic characteristics of public religious school students are somewhat lower than those of public secular school students (Dahan & Yona, 2006; Schwarzwald, 1990). Both school types share similar curricula in most subjects, with religious schools placing greater emphasis on Jewish and religious subjects (Ayalon & Yogev 1997; Dahan & Yona 2006). Hence, as the Jewish Secular sector emphasises progress and technological development, there is a tendency to attribute great importance to science subjects and the value of humanities and social sciences. In contrast, the Jewish religious schools put special emphasis on Jewish studies, which are the basis of religious education and the means of transmitting the religious culture and heritage. Therefore, subjects such as Bible and the Oral Law occupy a central place in the curriculum in addition to other school subject as science, history and language. The combination of Jewish studies with secular subjects in the curriculum of the Jewish Religious sector reflects its ethos based on the worldview of '*torah im derech erez*'. This means that the educational system teaches the Jewish subjects in order to prepare its students for a religious lifestyle, and the

secular subjects in order to prepare them for the demands of the labour market (Ayalon & Yogev, 1996).

The Jewish religious schools, attended by about 13% of the Jewish population, are characterised by a religious-Zionist commitment and a traditional and conservative ideology (Schwarzswald, 1990). Formally, as public education, neither school type exercises selection policies on the basis of parents' socio-economic status or student's previous achievement. Yet, Jewish religious schools are selective in one important aspect: the observance of religious codes in the student's home. The Jewish religious schools expect parents to provide a religious environment at home that harmonises with the schools. Moreover, Jewish religious schools can legally refuse to accept or expel students whose behaviour does not conform to the school's religious norms. This selection mechanism results in about 75% of the students at the state Jewish Religious schools being from religiously observant families; most of the remainder are from less observant families (also known as 'traditional' families), and a tiny minority from secular ones (Leslau & Rich 2001; Schwarzswald 1990).

At the state Jewish secular schools, most students are from secular families and the rest are from the less observant religious families (Schwarzswald, 1990). One expression of the religiosity of the Jewish religious schools is their gender segregation. While almost all secular schools are coeducational, religious schools separate girls and boys, either in same-sex classes within coeducational schools or at same-sex schools (Yablon, 2009). Another aspect that should be noted here is a relatively higher degree of pedagogic autonomy traditionally granted to the Jewish religious sector compared to the more centralised Jewish Secular sector. Svirsky and Dagan-Buzaglo (2009) addressed the diversity in curriculum among the sectors and identified a high degree of diversity in Jewish Religious schools that may possibly affect the schools' outcomes.

In Israel, major changes in the educational system have taken place since the mid-1980s, transforming it from a state-controlled, overly bureaucratic and almost fully state-financed system into a decentralised system partly controlled by local authorities and increasingly (although still rather moderately) privately financed (Dahan & Yona, 2006). To note here, the decentralisation reforms were originally intended into Jewish schools and the reforms were almost entirely omitted from the Arab schools (Dovrat, 2005). The decentralisation of the Israeli education system should, therefore, be seen as part of a larger trend of the weakening of Israel's central educational administration in recent years. While schools in Israel are still state affiliated, nowadays they enjoy a greater degree of autonomy and parental involvement and control than in the past (Gaziel, 1994; Inbar & Chushen, 1997).

Currently, schools can design part of their curriculum policy (e.g. type of courses and advance courses offered at schools) and other informal and

EXCUR activities. These activities may be initiated by teachers and/or special coordinators, but all must be approved by the school principal. The formal definition of the principal's role in Israel, as published in the circular of the Director General of the Ministry of Education, indicates that the principal is responsible for initiating and organising – with the assistance of school staff – all social and educational EXCUR activities at the school.³ However, schools may take advantage of such liberties to differing extents. Moreover, in this context, Arab schools are the less decentralised as policies such as school structural reform and integration or self- management have not been thoroughly implemented due to historical above-mentioned reasons.

Based on the above literature, we expected that:

- (1) Educational sectors (Jewish Secular, Jewish Religious and Palestinian Arab) would differ in the amount and type of EXCUR activities offered at schools.
- (2) Some of differences between the educational sectors could be attributed to school principals' autonomy at school. This hypothesis is based on differences in school principals' agency to execute specific educational agendas.

Data

The present study is based on PISA 2009 data collected during March 2009, in Israel. A representative sample of students and schools were selected to include a total of 5761 pupils aged 15 (born in 1993) from 176 schools (40 students from each school). The response rate for this study was 95% of the schools and 89% of the students selected for the sample.⁴ School principals answered a questionnaire aimed to examine various topics related to organisational and pedagogical aspects of their schools (RAMA, 2010). The study included Palestinian Arab, Jewish Secular and Jewish Religious schools that comprise the total Israeli sample.⁵

The research variables

EXCUR activities

This variable was computed as a count variable regarding the number of EXCUR activities offered at schools as reported by school principals. The internal reliability of this scale that was computed by Cronbach's α is .79.⁶ The activities included: (1) band, orchestra or choir; (2) school play or school musical; (3) school yearbook, newspaper or magazine; (4) volunteering or service activities; (5) book club; (6) debating club or debating activities; (7) school club or school competition for foreign language,

mathematics or science; (8) academic club; (9) art club or art activities; (10) sporting team or sporting activities; (11) lectures and/ or seminars; (12) collaboration with local libraries; and (13) collaboration with local newspapers. This variable ranged from 0 to 13. High values indicate that the school offers many EXCUR activities.

Based on factor analysis (see Appendix 1) and theoretical considerations (see above theoretical framework), these activities were divided into two types: academically oriented EXCUR activities (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$) and Arts-oriented EXCUR activities (Cronbach's $\alpha = .65$). All other activities did not composite a clear factor.

School principal autonomy

School principal autonomy was computed by asking school principals to mark whether 'principals', 'teachers', 'school governing board', 'regional or local education authority' or 'national education authority' are responsible for the following tasks: (1) selecting teachers for hire; (2) dismissing teachers; (3) establishing teachers' starting salaries; (4) determining teachers' salaries increases; (5) formulating the school budget; (6) deciding on budget allocations within the school; (7) establishing student disciplinary policies; (8) establishing student assessment policies; (9) approving students for admission to the school; (10) choosing which textbooks are used; (11) determining course content; and (12) deciding which courses are offered. We then computed the percentage of tasks that are a primary responsibility of the school principal or teachers out of the total tasks. Next, due to right-tail skewed distribution, we defined three levels of school autonomy variable (low, medium and high), according quartiles. The medium autonomy (two middle squaretails) represents collaborative governance where school principals decide on schools' processes together with the two formal external agencies – LEAs (local educational authorities) and the Ministry of Education. Low autonomy (lower quartiles) represents dependency and high influence of the external agencies, whereas high autonomy (higher quartiles) reflects that school principals have an extended mandate to shape and design their own school policy.

Educational sector

(1) Arab schools; (2) Jewish Secular schools; (3) Jewish Religious schools. Based on the values of this variable, we computed two dummy variables: Arab schools and Jewish Religious schools each in comparison to Jewish Secular schools.

Control variables

In order to examine the net effect of school governance on EXCUR activities, we controlled for variables that are related to EXCUR activities at school.

School size

Based on the number of students at school. A natural log transformation was computed, due the skewed distribution of this variable.

School SES composition

This variable was computed based on students' *PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS)*. The SES variable was derived from the following three indexes: highest occupational status of parents, highest educational level of parents in years of education according to ISCED and home economic and cultural possessions. For each school, an average of the students' ESCS index was computed as an aggregate at the school level (for more details regarding each component, see OECD, 2010b).

The two variables – school size and students SES composition in school – are an indirect estimation of school resources. Large schools and schools serving affluent students have more ability to mobilise resources and offer more EXCUR activities (see also Guest and Schneider, 2003).

School mean score in mathematics test

This measure was calculated based on students' achievements in a mathematics test administrated by PISA. This variable was computed as an aggregate at the school level. We control for this variable as empirical evidence exists for a correlation between academic achievements and EXCUR activities (OECD, 2010b).

School's competitive environment

Each school had to report 0 if no schools compete for its students or 1 if one or more schools compete for its students. This variable reflects the extent to which the school is situated in a competitive and uncertain environment that may demand schools to take a proactive initiation in order to be attractive and unique in their environment, thus affecting EXCUR activities.

School structure

0. Three (10th to 12th) or four years (9th to 12th) high school 1. Six years of secondary school (from 7th to 12th grade). We control for this variable

as six-year secondary schools tend to be more diversified in its students' social composition and needs, which may affect the type of EXCUR activities offered at school.

Method

To test the research hypothesis, we conducted several descriptive statistics: frequencies, t-test and analysis of variance. We also conducted a negative binomial regression analysis. This type of analysis is employed for modelling a count variable that has positive integer values (1, 2, 3 and so on) and when the count variable is over-dispersed; that is, when the conditional variance exceeds the conditional mean. Negative binomial regression is modelled on the log of the outcome variable. This variable is predicted with a linear combination of the predictors as follow:

$$\text{Log (\# of counts)} = B_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \dots + \beta_n x_n$$

where B s are the regression coefficients and the x s are the predictors. The coefficients have an *additive* effect in the log (y) scale and the exponentiated coefficients have a *multiplicative* effect in the y scale. In order to test for the assumption that the conditional variance is not equal to the conditional mean, we ran the regression model and established that indeed, in an estimate of the dispersion coefficient, this value was not constrained to zero as the parameters' 95% confidence interval did not included zero.⁷ In addition, to assess the fit of the model, we provided the goodness-of-fit chi-squared test. The statistical models may fit data well if the goodness-of-fit chi-squared test is not statistically significant. For conducting all statistical analyses, we use weighted data at the school level, as estimated by the OECD.

Results

The data analysis is presented in two parts: first, we describe the research variables in comparing between the three educational steams. In the next part, we present the multivariate analysis in which EXCUR activities were examined.

Descriptive analysis

Table 1 presents the percentages of schools that offer different EXCUR activities in the Jewish Secular, Jewish Religious and Palestinian Arab educational sectors.

Table 1 clearly indicates that schools offer EXCUR activities in various areas. Most activities are related to the school's formal activities such as

Table 1. The descriptive statistic of the EXCUR activities: A comparison between Jewish Secular, Jewish Religious and Palestinian Arab Schools.

	Jewish Secular	Jewish Religious	Palestinian Arab schools	Total
<i>Arts activities</i>				
1. Band or choir	50.4	40.1	18.2	38.4*
2. School play	44.3	37.8	37.3	40.6
3. Art activities	52.7	54.6	19.1	43.3*
<i>Literacy activities</i>				
4. Book club	19.4	29.8	9.9	19.2*
5. Local libraries	21.1	29.0	25.1	24.3
6. School newspaper	11.9	9.9	15.5	12.5
7. Debating club	13.0	16.4	5.0	11.6*
<i>Academic activities</i>				
8. School competition	47.3	33.6	37.6	41.0*
9. Academic club	53.3	67.6	40.6	53.2*
10. Lectures and seminars	67.2	93.9	48.5	68.5*
<i>Other activities</i>				
11. Year book	62.1	40.1	61.7	56.0*
12. Volunteering	88.1	97.3	38.5	75.7*
13. Sport teams	70.1	61.5	65.7	66.6

* $p < .05$.

school yearbooks and sport teams – which are common in Israeli schools – and volunteer activities, which comprise part of the schools' routine activities at the 10th grade. Prominently, schools offer academic-oriented activities that mainly target high achievers, such as science courses and engagement with higher education institutions. Less frequent were activities related with art or culture and even more rare – with literacy. Table 1 also shows that Jewish Secular and Jewish Religious schools offered more EXCUR activities in 8 out of the 13 areas, as compared to Palestinian Arab schools that offered more activities in only one out of 13 areas. Palestinian Arab schools performed more yearbook production activities than Jewish Religious schools, while in few other activities such as school plays, library visits and newspapers, no significant differences between these two were found. Apparently, Jewish Religious schools are more active in book clubs, lectures and seminars, in comparison to both other sectors.

From Table 2, as already indicated above, we learn that Jewish (both Religious and Secular) schools offer a significantly higher total number of total EXCUR, academic and Arts-oriented EXCUR activities compared to Palestinian Arab schools. Although (Please check the edits made in the sentence “Although...Arab sectors”, and correct if necessary) higher diversity was found in EXCUR activities in Palestinian Arab schools (Coefficient of

Table 2. Research variables by educational sectors.

	Jewish Secular	Jewish Secular	Jewish Religious	Palestinian Arab schools	Total
<i>EXCUR activities</i>					
Total amount of EXCUR activities	<i>M</i>	6.01	6.11	4.21	5.51*
	<i>SD</i>	3.32	1.77	3.35	3.13
Amount of academic EXCU	<i>M</i>	1.67	1.95	1.26	1.62*
	<i>SD</i>	1.29	.76	1.24	1.19
Amount of arts EXCUR	<i>M</i>	1.47	1.32	.74	1.22*
	<i>SD</i>	1.15	1.13	.89	1.12
<i>Schools' characteristic</i>					
School size (ln)	<i>M</i>	6.16	5.85	6.36	6.14*
	<i>SD</i>	.88	.57	.36	.72
School SES mean (standard scores)	<i>M</i>	.04	-.03	-.51	-.14*
	<i>SD</i>	.36	.51	.43	.49
School mean in math achievement age 15	<i>M</i>	450.89	468.79	367.76	431.08*
	<i>SD</i>	55.03	56.63	44.64	66.93
Secondary school	%	47.3	83.3	18.3	48.2*
Competitive school environment	%	79.1	93.2	82.2	83.8
School autonomy	<i>M</i>	.47	.46	.36	.44*
	<i>SD</i>	.21	.20	.12	.19

* $p < .05$.

Variance, $CV = .79$), as compared to the Jewish Secular and especially Jewish Religious sector ($CV = .55$ and $.28$, respectively), Jewish Religious schools were found to be most active in academic EXCUR, both compared to Jewish Secular and Palestinian Arab sectors ($M = 1.95$ of three activities compared to 1.67 and 1.26 , respectively). The Jewish Secular sector was found to offer most in Arts EXCUR activities ($M = 1.47$, out of three activities). Further, Jewish schools were found to be composed of students from a more affluent background (high SES) and have on average a high level of math achievements compared to Palestinian Arab schools. Most of the Jewish schools are also six-year secondary schools, from grades 7th to 12th. Arab schools are mainly four years schools, from 9th to 12th, indicating that the Arab sector underwent less educational reforms or changes since one of the major Israeli reforms included passage from four years to six years high schools. In all educational sectors, the majority of schools are located within a competitive environment; that is, students may select to learn at other schools of the same sector. However, Palestinian Arab schools are smaller and receive fewer resources from the government or LEA. Moreover, Palestinian Arab school principals reported to have less

autonomy than did their peers in the other educational sectors. Table 3 further examines the autonomy variable within the sectors.

Table 3 demonstrates the distribution of schools' autonomy within each of the educational sectors. It apparent that most of the Palestinian Arab schools (76.3%) suffer from low levels of autonomy, while more than a third of the Jewish Religious schools (38.4) enjoy high levels of autonomy. About 39.1% of schools in the Secular Jewish sector and 33.7% of Religious Jewish schools enjoy an intermediate level of autonomy, meaning they act in a collaborative environment where decisions are made jointly with LEAs and the Ministry of Education. Table 4 demonstrates the extent to which the above-presented variables affect schools' EXCUR activities.

Table 4 presents the results of three models of negative binominal regression analysis aimed to explain total, academic and arts EXCUR activities intensity. The first analysis includes only educational sectors. The second analysis examines sectors' effect after controlling for school characteristics. In the third analysis, school principals' autonomy was added in order to examine its impact on differences between sectors. This may enables us to learn about the school principals' initiations in the different sectors.

In regard to the differences between sectors in EXCUR activities (column 1 for each type of EXCUR activities), as already indicated above (see Table 2), it was found that Jewish Secular schools offer more EXCUR activities than Jewish Religious and Palestinian Arab sectors. In academic EXCUR activities, Jewish Religious schools lead, while in Arts EXCUR activities no significant differences were found between the two types of Jewish schools and significantly fewer activities were traced in Palestinian Arab schools. School variables were added in column 2 in Table 4. It was found that regarding all types of EXCUR (i.e. total – academic and Arts), variables reflecting school resources, namely school size, school SES mean and secondary schools, are positively related with more EXCUR activities. Thus, schools that are large and enroll many and affluent students receive from the Ministry of Education and from parents more resources that may be directed for EXCUR activities. It was also found that schools with a high mean of academic achievements favour the cultivation of academic EXCUR, as an additional framework for sustaining their high achievements.

Table 3. Distribution of school autonomy by educational sector.

	Jewish Secular	Jewish Religious	Palestinian Arab	Total
Low autonomy	32.0	32.0	67.3	41.4
Medium Autonomy	39.1	39.1	20.3	32.3
High Autonomy	28.8	28.8	12.4	26.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	465	465	300	1020

Note: $\chi^2 = 127.69$; $df = 4$; $p = .000$.

Table 4. Results of Poisson Regression analyses for EXCUR activities.

	Total EXCUR			Academic EXCUR			Arts EXCUR		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Intercept	1.461*	-1.387*	-1.471	.512*	-2.163*	-2.149*	.402*	-.725*	-.935*
Palestinian Arab	-.654*	-.186*	-.108	-.323*	.132	.206*	-.622*	-.214*	-.179*
Jewish Religious	-.214	-.136*	-.141*	.183	.190*	.188*	-.035	-.079	-.067
School size		.318*	.290*		.290*	.233*		.136*	.194*
School SES mean		.392*	.376*		.367*	.365*		.491*	.409*
School mean in math achievement		.001*	.002		.001*	.002		.001	.001
Secondary school		.264*	.256*		.335*	.332*		.334*	.288*
Competitive environment		-.041	.0529		.014	.083		-.004	.038
Low autonomy			-.109			.000			-.371*
Medium Autonomy			.196*			.279*			-.087
Goodness of fit	1180.75	1024.11	999.72	831.51	743.60	722.81	885.92	864.38	847.73
Chi square	947	941	939	947	942	939	947	942	940
df									

* $p < .05$.

From Table 4, we can also learn that while controlling for school variables, the differences in EXCUR activities between sectors declined (see along columns 2). However, this trend was mostly prominent for the differences between Jewish Secular and Palestinian Arab schools with a decline of 71% in the effect of Palestinian Arab schools for total EXCUR. The sector effect turned to be insignificant in the case of academic EXCUR and a decline of 65% resulted in the case of arts EXCUR. It appears then that resources (although indirectly measured) indeed explain the advantage of Jewish schools in EXCUR activities. Having resources enables school principals to implement more EXCUR activities, at least with relation to academic EXCUR activities (Hoy & Miskel, 2001). Where there are resources – as in the case of the Jewish schools – schools' initiatives in term of EXCUR activities are greater; where the resources are scarce and limited – as in the case of Palestinian Arab schools – less EXCUR activities are offered.

Columns 3 in each type of EXCUR further addresses the differences in EXCUR activities among the sectors, as attributed to school principal autonomy and agency.

First, we address to the effect of level of autonomy on EXCUR activities. We found that school principals, who reported having an interim level autonomy (i.e. they work in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the LEA), also reported having more EXCUR activities at school – particularly, academically oriented EXCUR activities. As for arts EXCUR, schools with a low level of autonomy – where school principals appear to be influenced by formal external agencies such as the Ministry of education and LEA – tend to offer less arts EXCUR activities. We may assume that these kinds of activities receive less of their support from external agencies that pose on schools high pressures for academic attainments.

The findings indicated that in accounting for school principals' autonomy, it seems that there were almost no changes in the extent of activities offered in Jewish Religious schools. As for the difference between Palestinian Arab and Jewish Secular schools in total EXCUR, the change is insignificant (from $-.186$ to $-.108$). That is, as Jewish school principals have more autonomy at school, this enables them to bring and incorporate in school many EXCUR activities. While addressing different types of EXCUR activities, we found different trends. Given the collaboration between schools and the formal external agencies (intermediary autonomy), this seems to afford Palestinian Arab schools the ability to perform more academic EXCUR activities than Jewish Secular schools. Due the academic nature of such activities, which are associated with achievements and learning, school principals may gain assistances from their collaborative counterparts in order to advance and enhance such activities. Yet, these schools remain comparatively low in the level of arts EXCUR activities. The findings showed that principals of Palestinian Arab schools, who tend to have less autonomy, also engage in fewer arts EXCUR. Hence, the findings

partially support the second hypothesis that school principals' autonomy explains part of the differences in intensity and type of EXCUR activities revealed between sectors. However, this is correct only for the difference between Jewish Secular schools and Palestinian Arab schools.

Summary and discussion

This study aimed to investigate school principals' agency through the lens of EXCUR activities in three sectors of the Israeli education system. We compared the scope and intensity of EXCUR activities in Jewish Secular, Jewish Religious and Palestinian Arab sectors while controlling schools' variables, i.e. size, SES, achievements, competition and the autonomy level as perceived by school principals. While focusing on school principals' autonomy, we were able to investigate the potential for agency as reflected in EXCUR activities. Referring to our first research hypothesis, we found that schools in the various sectors differ in the amount and scope of EXCUR activities. We focused on academic and Arts EXCUR activities to differentiate pursuit of academic excellence from other activities that may not involve direct academic accountability.

Given the current pressure for academic success and the discourse regarding excellence and high achievements at schools, academically oriented activities are associated with stronger institutional status than arts activities. Thus, in all sectors, schools offer academic-oriented activities. However, schools in Palestinian Arab as well as in Jewish Religious sectors offer less arts-oriented activities than schools in the Jewish Secular sector.

These findings may suggest that given the limited resources of the Palestinian Arab sector, when schools have opportunities for taking initiatives, they first invest in activities, i.e. academic EXCUR activities that are congruent with their accountability pressures – with the policy of improving students' achievements. However, due to lack of financial resources and probably appropriate human resources in diverse fields (such as arts) (Benavot & Resh, 2003), very low diversity between schools in the Palestinian Arab sector exists regarding cultural activities. Ultimately, these schools comply with the formal demands of the central educational authority, while also offering more unique (academically oriented) activities that make schools more attractive in the community and less exposed to arising critiques that schools are being narrow and focused mainly on testing. Furthermore, by cultivating academic EXCUR activities, school principals may gain easier legitimisation and support for introducing EXCUR activities to school. They lead a change that may be absorbed into the normative school routine without any prominent reorganisation or resentment. Thus, principals of Palestinian Arab schools are likely to find it easier to get internal approval for academic-oriented activities than they would for developing new ventures in the cultural sphere.⁸ Moreover, this is not inconceivably a

political issue as well. By offering academically oriented EXCUR activities, schools may gain legitimisation from their environment and authorities to continue to maintain the institutional norms prevailing in the educational system. Hence, these schools may also work to compensate students that are less socially advantaged to get more enrichment in academic subjects.

Compared to the Arab-Palestinian schools, in the Jewish Secular sector, which has more external resources and support, school principals and teachers may offer more options beyond the scope of academic orientations. In these schools, agency is more dominant, as schools introduce activities that are not only congruent with academic pressures, but rather the offer arts activities that may moderate and balance academic pressures and also turn school into an attractive setting to diverse population of students, by introducing to pupils additional engagements detached from direct association with the academic sphere. Notably, Jewish Religious schools may avoid offering arts activities on religious grounds and instead invest more in academic or religious activities (the latter are also may be tested academically in religious subjects). Hence, Jewish Religious schools possess similar resources to the Jewish Secular sector, but concentrate on rather different activities, thus revealing the extent of schools' agency and choice within a given level of resources.

Introducing arts activities while the dominant policy is directed toward achievements, particularly in science and technology (Ayalon & Yogev, 1997), can inspire new approaches regarding the mission of schooling, including that which views schools as spaces for re flourishing liberal art and humanistic areas. This conversion of schools' roles, however, requires that such a change be supported and legitimised by other actors beyond the school leadership (Wooten & Hoffman, 2008). Affluent parents, who are also considered to be high in their cultural capital (Lareau, 2006), may indeed be among these actors as revealed in Jewish Secular schools with a composition of students from a high SES background. Religious sector is generally religion-related, and thus may contribute to explaining the differences between schools.

However, huge differences between sectors in the amount of EXCUR activities almost disappeared in academic activities while controlling schools' contextual variables. This is of particular importance for Palestinian-Arab schools, which actually produce similar EXCUR offerings but suffer from lack of resources and structural discrimination (Arar, 2012). However, beyond the issue of resources, educational policy which influence the extend of school principal space to make decisions and take actions in divers school issues was found to have a significant role in regard to EXCUR offered at schools. Less constrains by formal authorities was associated with more EXCUR activities. Here, the study showed that less constrains and control over school principals is a matter of political and subordination position. Within the Palestinian Arab schools, it was found that school principals have a limited spheres for agencies, their

decision-making are being formulated by or with the collaboration of the formal authorities.

Apparently, control over educators has an impact on opportunities provided in school. It is not only an issue of limited resources, but in addition to the scarce resources, school leaders are constrained and controlled on political ground. In this regard, we may view the Palestinian Arab school principals being under siege. In sum, our findings indicate that school resources, although being important are only one of the factors that influence school principals' agency. Similar trends were found in regard to achievements. As (Please check the edits made in the sentence "As...country's' GD", and correct if necessary) reported in PISA report (OECD, 2010a), only a fraction (6%) of achievement gaps is found to be attributed to country's' GDP. Further, while international comparisons focus on countries as units of analysis, our work show string inter-sector variability that goes beyond financial constrains. That national and local policy-making and, in particular, the perceived autonomy level may affect school principals' aspirations for agency, and in turn the whole schools' performance. In other words, comparative research should take into account school variation within each country when trying to resolve the educational debate over schools' activities and performance.

The present study has some limitation that should be taken into account. First, it examined school EXCUR activities that were listed by principals. Potentially, more diverse activities that may in fact be offered at the schools might not have been examined in this study. Yet, if this is the case, it can be assumed that more diversity between schools would be expected, thus reinforcing our main arguments. Furthermore, the present study is based on a quantitative data-set. We could benefit from mixed research methods in order to better understand school principals' initiative to offer different EXCUR activities.

Notes

1. <http://cms.education.gov.il/EducationCMS/Units/Owl/Hebrew/UvdotNetunim/netunim/>
2. We excluded the Ultra-Orthodox sector from our analysis since most of these schools do not participate in Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).
3. http://cms.education.gov.il/EducationCMS/Units/Sherut/Takanon/Perek7/Menahel/Hagdara/hagdara_al_yesodi.htm. Last viewed Sept 16, 2012.
4. Many studies that used PISA data addressed cross-countries issues. However, due to the heterogeneous structure of the Israel school system and the diversification of schools within each educational sector, viewing Israel as a whole unit would hide the complex and dynamic internal process that occurs in the country.
5. The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law (Cited from PISA 2009 Results: Executive Summary; <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/34/60/46619703.pdf> retrieved December 4, 2011; p. 2).

6. Cronbach's α is a coefficient of internal consistency, which measures the extent to which individuals are consistent in their reply to a series of items. It is commonly used as an estimate of the reliability of a scale. This coefficient ranges from 0 not reliable to 1 highly reliable. Based on a rule of thumb, reliability of .65 or higher is consider to be acceptable.
7. See UCLA, academic Technologic service, SPSS Data Analysis Examples; Negative Binomial Regression, http://www.ats.ucla.edu/stat/spss/dae/neg_binom.htm, retrieved on January 1, 2012.
8. There may also be cultural considerations that determined EXCUR activity preferences, such as a preference of for academic over Artistic activities. However, school principals' documented ability to change the norms prevailing within their educational sector can potentially make them agents of change and institutional entrepreneurs. This phenomenon is less common in Palestinian Arab education, probably due additional constrains as mentioned above.

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Appendix 1. Pattern loadings on four factors

Results of a factor analysis based on oblique rotation, which assumes that the factors are permitted to be correlated with one another. We found four factors in which the Eigenvalue was higher than 1.

Pattern matrix				
	Factor			
	1	2	3	4
Band orchestra or choir	.099	-.087	.711	-.044
School play or school musical	-.159	.176	.464	.048
School yearbook, newspaper or magazine	.075	.864	.037	.000
Volunteering or service activities	.236	.048	.297	.243
Book club	-.152	.133	.091	.536
Debating club or debating activities	.043	-.089	-.009	.317
School club or school competition in foreign language, math or science	.727	.170	.176	-.120
Collaboration with academic institutions	.498	-.105	-.022	.382
Art activities or enrichment programs	.159	-.028	.645	.056
Sporting team or sporting activities	.189	.183	.045	.407
Lectures or Seminars (e.g. guest speakers such as writers or journalists)	.469	-.067	.279	.421
Collaboration with local libraries	-.087	-.116	.133	.475
Collaboration with local newspapers	.114	.136	-.075	.371
Eigenvalues	3.90	1.33	1.18	1.14
% of variance	30.05	10.27	9.11	8.79