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# Israeli Students' Evaluations Regarding Leadership Education in Post-Primary Schools

**Shenhav Perets [1,2,*], Nitza Davidovitch [1] and Eyal Lewin [2]**

[1] Department of Education, Ariel University, Ariel 40700, Israel; d.nitza@ariel.ac.il
[2] Department of Middle East Studies and Political Science, Ariel University, Ariel 40700, Israel; lewin1212@gmail.com
* Correspondence: pshenhav@gmail.com

**Abstract:** This article examines the way students attending middle and high schools in Israel evaluate leadership education in their schools and the extent to which it contributes to their leader self-efficacy. Based on 376 questionnaires completed by teenage girls ($n$ = 243) and boys ($n$ = 133) who attend middle and high school in the public education system in Israel, it focuses on their perceptions regarding their school as their main leadership development establishment. Using a Likert scale to measure attitudes and perceptions of youth leadership, the questionnaire was used to investigate the following topics: the school's efforts to impart leadership and encourage leadership and leadership ability, their self-perceptions of leadership ability, and the impact of the school staff on their leadership development. Students expressed discontent with the school's ability to impart and motivate leadership, and family members and youth organizations are perceived as more influential. Students in middle schools participate more in leadership programs but evaluate the school's contribution to leadership development less favorably than high school students. Although girls and boys are participating in leadership programs at a similar rate, girls' leader self-efficacy is relatively low. Implementing leadership education has some deficiencies that require policymakers to make necessary adjustments regarding age and gender.

**Keywords:** Israeli students; leadership development; teenage girls; post-primary school; leadership programs; leader self-efficacy

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## 1. Introduction

Youth leadership is the ability to lead others toward the accomplishment of a common goal, but it is also the result of a combination of traits and abilities, including tenacity, organizational skills, concentration, tolerance, decisiveness, self-discipline, charisma, time management, self-confidence, social skills, the ability to articulate one's vision to others, and sensitivity [1]. School, and specifically post-primary school, has a significant role in developing youth leadership through many aspects of formal and non-formal education. Numerous studies have found clear correlations between adolescence and leadership, strongly suggesting that leadership practiced throughout school activities predicts success in later years [2,3]. Although based on empirical research, this should come as no surprise to scholars of education, since as early as Aristotle, the notion that people learn their first lessons through mimicry in childhood was already common [4]. The younger the person is, the fewer negative experiences he or she accumulates, and the easier it will be for him or her to modify social behavior [5]. Hence, discovering leadership at an early age is bound to carry over into maturity, making today's youth tomorrow's leadership [6].

Since leadership education is so important, youth leadership development programs have been set up all over the globe. In the US, universities partner with governmental bodies and NGOs to support building opportunities of leadership training for youngsters. These programs are constructed for American youth, as well as young participants from

emerging economies in other parts of the world. For example, the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative was set up by President Barack Obama in 2013 and funded by the American Government and public universities [7]. Such leadership development programs exist also in the UK, for instance, the Queen's Young Leaders, where, between 2014 and 2018, hundreds of youngsters from the 54 commonwealth countries participated in a program mentored by the University of Cambridge and financially supported by the Crown [7]. Global youth leadership training programs also take place in the East, for example, a program conducted by the United Cities and Local Governments organization, in Xi'an, China [8]. Another youth leadership training program is conducted by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Foundation in Ethiopia [9]. However, despite the worldwide distribution of so many programs of youth leadership, very little attention has been given by scholars and practitioners to some important questions: To what extent do these programs achieve their goals? Can we follow some of the impacts that various training projects have on the adolescents participating in them? In the quest for answers to these matters, we conducted a quantitative study in Israeli schools to comprehend how post-primary education influences teenagers' leadership skills and perceptions.

In Youth Leadership: A Guide to Understanding Leadership Development in Adolescents [10], Josephine Van Linden and Carl Fertman described a three-stage model: (1) self-awareness of one's leadership potential, mostly with adults helping adolescents to be aware of that potential; (2) interaction: involvement in activities that encourage leadership abilities and skills; and (3) mastery: dominating leadership skills and influencing others through techniques learned. A precise set of strategies and actions, including leadership knowledge, leadership attitude, communication skills, and stress management abilities, is necessary at each level. The social cognitive theory (SCT) has been used increasingly in recent years to examine how leaders evolve [11,12]. The SCT frame combines an innovative viewpoint for comprehending teenage leaders' self-efficacy with an interpretation of the procedures employed in leadership development programs, creating a connection to a much wider range of leadership development literature.

People with high efficacy are more resourceful and flexible, which increases their likelihood of managing their environment more skillfully and profitably, according to Wood and Bandura [13]. People will likely function as leaders for as long as they feel they can, as the outcomes people plan for mostly depend on their confidence in how effectively they can perform in specific scenarios [14]. Leadership self-efficacy, leader self-awareness, and leader identity, according to Day et al. [15], are essential components in the process of creating leadership. To put it another way, people who see themselves as leaders and maintain a high level of efficacy to act in that capacity when necessary [16] are more likely to show enhanced effectiveness as leaders than those who have low levels of self-awareness, a flimsy sense of who they are as a leader, and low levels of leadership self-efficacy [17]. As a direct result of the leader development process, it is, therefore, pertinent and crucial to concentrate on the development of leader self-assessment [18].

Self-efficacy among adolescents and its development throughout their years of youth have been examined recently elsewhere [19–21]. However, the focus of this paper is specifically on the school system and educational leadership programs within the school, as experienced by the teenagers themselves.

Both of these theoretical principles, the three-stage model [10] as well as the SCT [11,12], guided us in our inquiries. The three-stage model was at the core of our analysis of what the educational process included and an examination of whether it contained the emergence of self-awareness, interaction, and activity. The SCT led us to construct a questionnaire where self-efficacy was a major factor about which we inquired.

## 2. Literature Review

### *2.1. School and Leadership*

While teaching leadership skills is crucial at any age, it has a particularly positive impact on students in middle and high school. Leadership is strengthened in a much deeper

sense thanks to the aspects of critical thinking, civic perception, and democratic principles that post-primary education offers. Leadership development may happen at school in a variety of ways [22–24]. Students develop their leadership skills and traits throughout many years in the educational system in addition to receiving official instruction. Through the assimilation of ideas, attitudes, and expectations that prepare the students for their future, school plays a significant part in inspiring and offering leadership experiences [25]. Adolescents' participation in challenging roles has long been seen as a key developmental aspect. Various research works, especially those undertaken in US schools, have shown that having duties helped young people develop strategic thinking [26–29]. Studies also showed how youth's active participation in developmental processes was boosted by program leaders they could trust [30–32].

There are three basic ways for a youngster to acquire self-efficacy: social modeling, goal setting, and self-evaluation. Modeling is a process in which one fosters various patterns of thoughts or actions that were displayed in his or her close social environment—by peers or by the school staff. Goal setting refers to the personal achievements one decides to accomplish. Self-evaluation is the way one judges his or her performance in comparison with one's goals and relates also to the social environment's reactions to one's specific actions [33]. These findings highlight the importance of school training programs. They very strongly support the assertion that the educational environment and the way school programs are implemented form crucial factors in the development of self-efficacy and, then, of leadership.

Consequently, the development of young people's character is greatly aided by school in general and homeroom teachers in particular [34]. It offers instruction in justice, teamwork, respect, responsibility, hope, tenacity, and loyalty. In order to help teenage boys and girls reach their leadership potential, Fertman and Van Linden outline the precise skills that should be taught in schools. According to them, these are the formative years for future leaders, and school is the best setting for them to acquire the values that all people share and that will guide their decisions in the future. Mentorship and role models are crucial for post-primary school students, whose path in life is still unknown. The development of youth leadership depends on the support of mature leaders. It is especially necessary that adults teach leadership effectively and are a model for leadership themselves [10]. The influence of school professionals, such as school counsellors, teachers, and principals, can counter gender-related messages that impact leadership development and professional aspirations [35]. Mentoring and role modeling in the school context may also help female students in developing the knowledge and skills required for leadership and might assist in helping them develop an understanding of gender barriers in relation to leadership roles [36].

The majority of individuals' first interaction with a formal organization is at school, and, as they mature, children begin to recognize its significance in their lives [37]. School is a location where children develop their sense of intellectual competence, enabling them to take part in large-scale social activities [38], and it may be the earliest social institution that has an impact on individuals' organizational behavior [24]. Giving children important leadership positions at school is one of the ways that the fundamentals of leadership are taught. It has been demonstrated that the practice of playing roles helps young people develop strategic thinking and responsibility [26]. Schools increase students' enthusiasm to participate in challenging tasks, a crucial aspect of their growth, by giving them role models, such as instructors, administrators, guests, and exceptional students [39].

According to some studies [21,24,40], school leadership programs benefit teenagers' self-esteem, confidence, self-efficacy, knowledge of their leadership potential, and social interaction. School plays a crucial role in developing moral character and laying the groundwork for young people to become leaders [41–45], and it also has a significant impact on how young women view and understand leadership while giving them the chance to learn about it [26,35].

However, it should be clarified that this study deals with the way middle and high school students perceive the leadership development processes carried out by the school. Its purpose is not to check whether leadership has indeed developed over the years. For this, a longitudinal study would certainly have been appropriate. Since we are not following the changes that apply to those children, we are conducting a cross-sectional study. This research method draws its data from samples representing different age groups. It compares the behavior of children of different ages and deduces from this the changes that occur with increasing age.

### 2.2. Gender and Leadership during Adolescence

Adolescence appears to be the time when teens need to engage in leadership-developing experiences as part of a process of building their character and preparing them for leadership positions as adults in a challenging, uncertain, and changing world [32]. At this age, they start to develop their identities, particularly their leadership identities [46,47].

Although any teenager can become a leader, given the right educational conditions, experiences, and awareness of his or her ability to be one [10], there is a significant difference between boys and girls in this context. In middle school, girls frequently exhibit lower self-esteem than males, and this difference widens in high school [48]. Adolescent girls also appear to be more worried than boys their age, avoid taking chances, compete less, and question gender stereotypes less frequently [49]. After monitoring two gender-segregated leadership summer camps, Trumpy and Elliott [50] found that many programs meant to break down gender barriers unintentionally reinforce gendered preconceptions and expectations for both sexes. In order to encourage adolescent girls to feel they can and should exercise leadership, the environment should positively highlight women leaders. Because society does not view females as prospective leaders, they are unlikely to regard themselves as such [51,52]. According to Shapiro and colleagues [35], socialized gender norms are present by middle school and have an influence on the job ambitions of teenage girls. Studies on leadership show that girls are more exposed than boys to socialization processes that help them understand they are less suitable for leadership roles, they receive fewer messages about their leadership potential from their environment, and they are less likely to be perceived as leaders by others [53,54]. Therefore, during the past thirty years, evaluating teenage girls' educational circumstances as a basis for their empowerment and as a means of motivating them to become leading women has become a key topic in youth leadership studies.

Leadership development experiences are significantly influenced by gender. Boys and girls go through diverse developmental stages, identity formation processes, and obstacles that have an impact on their self-efficacy and confidence in their leadership skills. The process of absorbing the identity of a leader and converting a conviction in one's ability to lead into a drive to lead presents a variety of difficulties and impediments for women [38]. On the other hand, boys appear to be more affected by the impacts of leader self-efficacy on motivation to lead [55]. Men's and women's conduct is influenced by socio-structural as well as psychological elements; thus, we chose an integrative approach to better understand this behavior and the mechanisms that cause it [56]. We considered the distinctiveness of teenage females' emotional and behavioral states when investigating the process of leadership development among them.

### 2.3. Developing Leadership through the Education System in Israel

Post-primary schools in Israel are divided into two main categories: The first is middle school (7th to 9th grade), starting from the age of 12. Teachers at this level have more specific areas of expertise, and the teaching is more subject-oriented than at the elementary education level. The second is high school (10th to 12th grade), starting from the age of 15. The subjects of study at this level are more specific and teachers are more highly qualified than at the middle school level.

Students in Israel usually learn about leadership and gain experience in it simultaneously through a variety of sources. While some leadership development programs explicitly indicate that their goal is to build leadership, others achieve this goal more covertly by placing an emphasis on traits, like accountability, social duty, project leadership, and personal empowerment. The Ministry of Education's Society and Youth Administration oversees programs for young guides for volunteer students who show an interest in planning field excursions and holiday camps for children around the nation as early as the eighth grade. Additionally, this division is in charge of student councils at the national, city, and school levels. Every high school student is expected to take part in the three-year "Personal Development and Social Involvement" program, launched in 2014. Its goal is to promote teens' ability to realize their potential for independence, resiliency, self-worth, and sensitivity to others' needs.

Furthermore, every school's principal and staff have the option to incorporate a variety of leadership programs into the curriculum, including young mediator groups, empowerment groups, and initiative programs. Some invite professors and leadership experts from outside programs to address students. Additionally, leadership is explicitly taught in a variety of disciplines. For instance, conversations about historical or political people from any point in time are part of civics and history studies. Some literary teachings focus on a character who exhibits a leadership quality. Great biblical leaders and their methods of governance and decision making are frequently discussed in Bible classes. In Israel, every class at post-primary institutions is required to take part in "educational lessons" at least twice a week. These courses emphasize morals, practical life skills, communication, and casual socialization. Some of these classes are designed to develop students' potential as leaders.

It seems, though, that Israeli teens' leadership development takes place mostly outside of the classroom through extracurricular activities or informal education. In a study of national student council members, the majority of participants stated that involvement in council activities improved their communication, self-confidence, leadership, and independent abilities [57]. Through their actions, individuals gained confidence in their abilities to act and achieve as well as a sense of empowerment. They spoke about developing organizing and planning skills, time management skills, goal setting, and accepting accountability for their actions. Decision making, speaking in front of an audience, collaboration, meeting management, bargaining, complicated perception, compromise, patience, and tolerance are skills that these students have studied and exercised. They assert that none of these abilities could have been taught in a classroom.

Almost none of the leadership development initiatives and programs currently in use in post-primary schools were found to take gender disparities into account. Teachers, principals, and mentors are all given the same guidelines by the Ministry of Education about how to develop leadership qualities in both boys and girls.

## 3. Research Questions

All students participating in this research belong to the post-primary education system in Israel, which is divided into two levels of school: middle and high. To evaluate students' attitudes regarding leadership education in their schools by gender, level of education, and district, and to determine the impact post-primary education has on teenagers' development as leaders and leader self-efficacy, the following research questions were constructed:

Q1. What is the degree of participation of post-primary students in leadership programs at school?
Q2. To what extent is leadership imparted in school according to the youth's perception?
Q3. To what extent does school encourage students to take the initiative to lead?
Q4. To what extent does the teenager perceive himself/herself as having the self-efficacy to lead?
Q5. In what ways are school staff perceived to be a factor that has a major influence on leadership development?

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. Research Participants

This study analyzes responses to a questionnaire on students' attitudes about leadership education in their schools in order to determine the impact post-primary education has on teenagers' development as leaders and leader self-efficacy in Israel. It contrasts the views expressed by boys and girls attending middle and high school while placing a strong emphasis on self-efficacy as a crucial component of the leadership development process. Thus, as seen in Table 1, 376 middle and high school students from various schools in Israel, of whom 243 were girls and 133 were boys (64.6% and 35.4%, respectively), participated in this study. The vast majority attend state education schools (94.7%). More than half of the schools are located in Tel Aviv and the Central District (59%), approximately a quarter in Haifa and the Northern District (25.3%), 13.8% in the Southern District, and 1.9% in the Jerusalem District and surrounding area. About a third of the students participated in a school leadership program at the time of the research or the year before (31.9%). Noteworthily, when designing this research, we did not know whether different districts in Israel showed any differences in the findings. We raised the issue in our questionnaire because while the districts in Israel operate under the Ministry of Education, each of them is run separately and independently by its own administrator.

**Table 1.** Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample.

| Variable | Value | Prevalence | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Boys | 133 | 35.4 |
| | Girls | 243 | 64.6 |
| Grade | 7th | 28 | 7.3 |
| | 8th | 44 | 11.7 |
| | 9th | 157 | 41.8 |
| | 10th | 74 | 19.7 |
| | 11th | 19 | 5.1 |
| | 12th | 54 | 14.4 |
| Type of education | State school | 356 | 94.7 |
| | State religious school | 19 | 5.0 |
| | Boarding school | 1 | 0.3 |
| District | Tel-Aviv and Central District | 222 | 59.0 |
| | Haifa and Northern District | 95 | 25.3 |
| | Southern District | 52 | 13.8 |
| | Jerusalem District | 7 | 1.9 |
| Leadership program Participation | Yes | 120 | 31.9 |
| | No | 256 | 68.1 |

### 4.2. Research Tools

A self-report questionnaire for students, distributed through social media networks, was used for this study. Approval from the ethics committee of Ariel University was granted (AU-SOC-ND-20230221) with respect to participants' confidentiality. The theme of the study, its importance, and the sociological and social implications were clarified to the participants in advance. The questionnaire consisted of two parts:

- A demographic questionnaire in which the students were asked to indicate some personal information, such as their gender, class level, type of education institution (secular or religious), and place of residence. In addition, they were asked to specify if they are currently participating or if they participated last year in a school leadership program and, if so, to declare which out of a category of nine programs they attended.

- A questionnaire about the attitudes and perceptions of youth on the topic of leadership. This questionnaire contained 20 statements that the students rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire focused on the following topics: the school's efforts to impart leadership as content and value (items 3, 4, 5, 8, 9), the school's efforts to encourage leadership and leadership ability (items 1, 2, 6, 16, 19), the students' perception of their leadership ability (items 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20), and the impact of the school staff on leadership development (7, 11). It should be noted that item 11 had a different format. It presented the following question: "Which of the following factors do you think has the greatest impact on developing young leadership?" Participants were allowed to mark more than one answer from the following options: parents and family, membership in youth movements or organizations, school staff, the media, school leadership programs, or "other".
- Medium to high alpha Cronbach reliability coefficients were obtained for topics that were measured using four or more items: imparting leadership in the school ($\alpha = 0.70$), encouraging leadership ability ($\alpha = 0.74$), and perception of leadership ability ($\alpha = 0.82$).

This questionnaire was formed using Rehm and Selznick's youth leader self-efficacy survey [19], created as an original instrument to measure this variable. The researchers based their measures on the conceptual mapping made by previous leader self-efficacy scales [58,59] and constructed a scale that benefits quantitative researchers focusing specifically on youth since it aims to capture the key components of the leader self-efficacy concept. The Rhem and Selznick youth leader self-efficacy (LSE) scale consists of five items that were found to be the optimal factors to measure LSE (the number of the item in our survey is written in parenthesis): "I believe I have the ability to become a leader" (item 17), "I know how to be a leader" (item 12), "I see myself as a leader" (item 20), I know how I can make my world a better place" (item 14), and "I can help others work hard on a task" (item 15). This five-item scale had a high level of internal consistency at pre-test, as measured with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.818, with confidence intervals of 0.749 and 0.872. Using the youth leader self-efficacy basic component scale of Rhem and Selznick, combined with items that addressed the students' attitudes toward their school's efforts to impart leadership through lessons and activities, created a multi-layered understanding of the subject.

### *4.3. Statistical Analyses*

The processing and analysis of the data were conducted using SPSS software, version 26. The continuous research variables were described using means, standard deviations, and ranges. The categorical variables were described using frequencies and percentages. Internal reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Chi-square tests for independence were conducted to test relationships between categorical variables. To examine the differences in continuous variables by gender and level of education, *t*-tests for independent samples were conducted. To test differences in continuous variables based on district, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted. The criterion for determining statistical significance was $p < 0.05$.

## 5. Findings

Several aspects related to leadership development in schools and perceptions of students' self-leadership were examined in the current study:

- The extent of students' participation in school leadership programs.
- The way school is perceived as a place where leadership is imparted.
- School as an institution that encourages students to take the initiative and lead.
- Leadership self-efficacy among students.
- The importance of school and its personnel as key elements in the growth of leader self-efficacy.

### 5.1. The Extent of Students' Participation in School Leadership Programs

In order to examine the students' degree of participation in leadership programs at school, a prevalence analysis was conducted, segmented by gender, school category (middle/high school), and district, using chi-square tests to evaluate the significance of these differences. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 2. The percentages of participation in the leadership program were not significantly different based on gender $p = 0.918$, $\chi^2_{(1)} = 0.01$, school $p = 0.375$, $\chi^2_{(1)} = 0.79$, or district $p = 0.551$, $\chi^2_{(2)} = 1.19$.

**Table 2.** Distribution of participation in a leadership program and testing the significance of differences by gender, school, and district.

| Are You Participating This Year, or Did You Participate Last Year, in a School Leadership Program? | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | No | | Yes | | *p*.Value |
| | | % | *n* | % | *n* | |
| Gender | Boys | 68.40% | 91 | 31.60% | 42 | 0.918 |
| | Girls | 67.90% | 165 | 32.10% | 78 | |
| School | Middle school | 59.40% | 152 | 64.20% | 77 | 0.375 |
| | High school | 40.60% | 104 | 35.80% | 43 | |
| District | Northern | 25.00% | 64 | 25.80% | 31 | 0.551 |
| | Central | 60.20% | 154 | 56.70% | 68 | |
| | Southern | 12.50% | 32 | 16.70% | 20 | |
| | Jerusalem | 2.30% | 6 | 0.80% | 1 | |

It is apparent that in terms of gender, boys and girls are participating in leadership programs at a similar rate (31.6% vs. 32.1%). It is also evident that middle school is where most teenagers participate in leadership programs rather than high schools (64.2% vs. 35.8). Students who answered "yes" to the question "Are you participating this year, or did you participate last year, in a school leadership program?" were also asked to state the name of the program they attended. According to the data collected, the distribution was as follows: 39.3% of the students stated that they are part of the student council at their school, 26.4% stated that they are participating in a program called "Mashatzim" (guiding trips and camping activities for children), 14.3% replied that they are participating in "young entrepreneurs" programs, 10.7% stated that they are participating in a "Madatzim" (young guides) program, 3.6% are attending the "young ambassadors" program, and the remaining 5.7% stated various other small programs initiated by their school.

### 5.2. The Way School Is Perceived as a Place Where Leadership Is Imparted

The school's efforts to impart leadership as content and value according to the students' perception are presented in Table 3.

It can be inferred from Table 3 that students in the study population agreed to a medium-high degree with the statement that leadership-related content is delivered as part of various school activities. In addition, the students agreed to a medium-high degree with the statement that the school is one of the most influential places with regard to the development of leadership skills. The participants agreed only to a medium degree with the statement that their school has a major influence on the development of leadership and that most of the teachers at their school have leadership skills. However, the degree of agreement among students with the statement "There are more than two subjects at my school in which content dealing with leadership is delivered" was low-medium.

**Table 3.** The school's efforts to impart leadership as content and value according to the students' perception.

| | Mean | SD | Range |
|---|---|---|---|
| "At my school, content dealing with leadership is delivered as part of various activities" | 3.55 | 1.14 | 1–5 |
| "School is one of the most influential places on the development of leadership skills" | 3.3 | 1.28 | 1–5 |
| "My school has a great influence on the development of leadership among students" | 2.97 | 1.13 | 1–5 |
| "Most of the teachers in my school have leadership skills" | 2.91 | 1.12 | 1–5 |
| "There are more than two subjects at my school in which content dealing with leadership is delivered" | 2.58 | 1.26 | 1–5 |

To test for differences in the extent to which leadership is imparted by gender and level of education, *t*-tests were performed for independent samples (Tables 4 and 5), and a one-way ANOVA was performed to test for differences by district (Table 6).

**Table 4.** Students' perceptions regarding the promotion of leadership as content and value by gender.

| | Girls ($n$ = 243) | | Boys ($n$ = 133) | | $p$.Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | |
| "At my school, content dealing with leadership is delivered as part of various activities" | 3.63 | 1.16 | 3.42 | 1.11 | 0.098 |
| "School is one of the most influential places on the development of leadership skills" | 3.32 | 1.28 | 3.28 | 1.29 | 0.78 |
| "My school has a great influence on the development of leadership among students" | 2.98 | 1.14 | 2.96 | 1.11 | 0.889 |
| "Most of the teachers in my school have leadership skills" | 2.91 | 1.12 | 2.9 | 1.11 | 0.925 |
| "There are more than two subjects at my school in which content dealing with leadership is delivered" | 2.56 | 1.26 | 2.62 | 1.27 | 0.676 |

**Table 5.** Students' perceptions regarding the promotion of leadership as content and value by level of education.

| | Middle School ($n$ = 229) | | High School ($n$ = 147) | | $p$.Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | |
| "At my school, content dealing with leadership is delivered as part of various activities" | 3.69 | 1.11 | 3.35 | 1.17 | 0.005 |
| "School is one of the most influential places on the development of leadership skills" | 3.12 | 1.26 | 3.59 | 1.26 | <0.001 |
| "My school has a great influence on the development of leadership among students" | 2.91 | 1.11 | 3.07 | 1.16 | 0.194 |
| "Most of the teachers in my school have leadership skills" | 2.92 | 1.16 | 2.9 | 1.06 | 0.872 |
| "There are more than two subjects at my school in which content dealing with leadership is delivered" | 2.69 | 1.28 | 2.41 | 1.22 | 0.034 |

**Table 6.** Students' perceptions regarding the promotion of leadership as content and value by district.

| | Tel Aviv and Central District ($n$ = 222) | | Haifa and Northern District ($n$ = 95) | | Southern District ($n$ = 52) | | $p$.Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | |
| "At my school, content dealing with leadership is delivered as part of various activities" | 3.55 | 1.17 | 3.51 | 1.04 | 3.54 | 1.2 | 0.941 |
| "School is one of the most influential places on the development of leadership skills" | 3.15 [a] | 1.29 | 3.58 [b] | 1.23 | 3.40 [ab] | 1.26 | 0.018 |
| "My school has a great influence on the development of leadership among students" | 2.87 | 1.14 | 3.09 | 1.14 | 3.12 | 1.04 | 0.152 |
| "Most of the teachers in my school have leadership skills" | 2.89 | 1.15 | 3.03 | 1.13 | 2.71 | 0.96 | 0.247 |
| "There are more than two subjects at my school in which content dealing with leadership is delivered" | 2.63 | 1.33 | 2.64 | 1.16 | 2.19 | 1.05 | 0.066 |

Note: Means marked with letters were found to be significantly different following the Tukey Test in the post hoc analysis of the results.

It is apparent from Table 4 that the perceptions of boys and girls regarding the promotion of leadership at school as content and value did not differ significantly.

According to Table 5, high school students were less likely than their counterparts to agree that leadership-related information is taught in their schools as a result of a variety of extracurricular activities or in more than two different subjects. However, compared to middle school children, high school students stated that school was one of the most important environments for the development of leadership skills. There were no appreciable variations in how the leadership skills of male and female schoolteachers were perceived based on students' education level.

With the exception of the fact that teenagers from the Northern District and Haifa agreed with the statement that presents school as one of the most influential places for the development of leadership ability to a significantly higher degree than teenagers from the Central District and Tel Aviv, Table 6 shows that the degree to which leadership as a content and as a value is promoted in school did not differ significantly by district. Since respondents from the Jerusalem district constitute only 1.9% of the sample population, this district was not included in the data analysis.

### *5.3. School as an Institution That Encourages Students to Take Initiative and Lead*

Table 7 shows the means and standard deviations of the students' responses to statements about the school's efforts to encourage leadership and leadership among students.

**Table 7.** The school's efforts to encourage leadership among students.

| | Mean | SD | Range |
|---|---|---|---|
| "My school encourages student initiatives in various fields" | 3.48 | 1.01 | 1–5 |
| "There are several groups working in the field of leadership in my school" | 3.45 | 1.1 | 1–5 |
| "My school motivates the students for leadership" | 2.94 | 1.17 | 1–5 |
| "I feel I have the ability to lead projects and changes in school" | 2.73 | 1.31 | 1–5 |
| "I feel able to influence school decisions" | 2.61 | 1.35 | 1–5 |

It can be inferred from Table 7 that the students agreed to a medium-high degree that their school encourages student initiatives in various fields and that there are several

groups operating in the field of leadership. They agreed to a moderate degree that their school motivates students to engage in leadership activities. However, the students felt to a low-medium degree that they have the ability to lead processes and changes in the school and influence the school's decisions regarding procedures and rules.

To test differences in the students' perceptions of their school's efforts to encourage leadership and leadership among students by gender and level of education, *t*-tests were performed for independent samples (Tables 8 and 9), and a one-way ANOVA was performed to test for differences by district (Table 10).

**Table 8.** Students' perceptions of the school's efforts to encourage leadership by gender.

| | Girls ($n$ = 243) | | Boys ($n$ = 133) | | $p$.Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | |
| "My school encourages student initiatives in various fields" | 3.53 | 0.99 | 3.4 | 1.04 | 0.239 |
| "There are several groups working in the field of leadership in my school" | 3.47 | 1.1 | 3.41 | 1.1 | 0.64 |
| "My school motivates the students for leadership" | 2.98 | 1.15 | 2.86 | 1.19 | 0.332 |
| "I feel I have the ability to lead projects and changes in school" | 2.76 | 1.28 | 2.68 | 1.36 | 0.585 |
| "I feel able to influence school decisions" | 2.64 | 1.35 | 2.56 | 1.35 | 0.576 |

**Table 9.** Students' perceptions of the school's efforts to encourage leadership by level of education.

| | Middle School ($n$ = 229) | | High School ($n$ = 147) | | $p$.Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | |
| "My school encourages student initiatives in various fields" | 3.57 | 0.97 | 3.34 | 1.05 | 0.029 |
| "There are several groups working in the field of leadership in my school" | 3.63 | 1.02 | 3.16 | 1.15 | <0.001 |
| "My school motivates the students for leadership" | 3 | 1.2 | 2.84 | 1.12 | 0.218 |
| "I feel I have the ability to lead projects and changes in school" | 2.79 | 1.37 | 2.65 | 1.2 | 0.337 |
| "I feel able to influence school decisions" | 2.72 | 1.39 | 2.44 | 1.26 | 0.049 |

**Table 10.** Students' perceptions of the school's efforts to encourage leadership by district.

| | Tel Aviv and Central District ($n$ = 222) | | Haifa and Northern District ($n$ = 95) | | Southern District ($n$ = 52) | | $p$.Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | |
| "My school encourages student initiatives in various fields" | 3.49 | 1 | 3.31 | 1.05 | 3.71 | 0.96 | 0.062 |
| "There are several groups working in the field of leadership in my school" | 3.52 | 1.08 | 3.26 | 1.13 | 3.44 | 1.15 | 0.159 |
| "My school motivates the students for leadership" | 2.96 | 1.19 | 2.86 | 1.15 | 2.85 | 1.07 | 0.688 |
| "I feel I have the ability to lead projects and changes in school" | 2.61 | 1.31 | 2.78 | 1.29 | 3.02 | 1.23 | 0.101 |
| "I feel able to influence school decisions" | 2.58 | 1.34 | 2.64 | 1.35 | 2.6 | 1.39 | 0.924 |

Table 8 shows that the perceptions of boys and girls regarding their school's efforts to encourage leadership and leadership skills among students did not differ significantly.

As shown in Table 9, middle school students agreed more strongly than high school students that in their schools, student initiatives are supported in a variety of fields, that a number of groups are working in the area of leadership in the school, and that they feel more empowered to affect educational decisions. However, neither the assessments of the

school's attempts to inspire students for leadership nor the perceptions of the capacity to lead processes and changes in the classroom showed any discernible differences based on the students' educational level.

No significant differences were found in students' perceptions of their school's efforts to encourage the ability to lead by district.

Finally, a chi-square analysis was conducted for the statement "In the last year, someone from the school staff (educator, professional teacher, coordinator, manager, counselor) told me, or made me understand, that I have leadership abilities" in order to check for differences by gender and level of education. This analysis showed that 46.6% of the boys and 49.8% of the girls stated that a person from the school staff made them realize that they have leadership capabilities without significant differences ($p = 0.556$). The comparison by level of education was not significant ($p = 0.453$): 50.2% of middle school students and 46.3% of high school students indicated that a person from the school staff made them realize that they had leadership capabilities.

### 5.4. Leadership Self-Efficacy among Students

Table 11 shows the averages and standard deviations of students' perceptions of their own leadership ability.

**Table 11.** Perceptions of leader self-efficacy among students.

| | Mean | SD | Range |
|---|---|---|---|
| "I can make others feel good about what they are doing" | 4.14 | 0.9 | 1–5 |
| "When I am faced with a task/decision I think carefully and decide what is important to do" | 4.02 | 0.92 | 1–5 |
| "In a group, I can identify who will be more suitable for the various tasks ahead of us" | 3.99 | 0.92 | 1–5 |
| "I can help others work hard on the task" | 3.91 | 0.95 | 1–5 |
| "I believe I have the ability to be a leader" | 3.8 | 1.13 | 1–5 |
| "I know how I can make my world a better place" | 3.64 | 1.1 | 1–5 |
| "I know how to become a leader" | 3.42 | 1.14 | 1–5 |
| "I see myself as a leader in school or outside of it" | 3.15 | 1.26 | 1–5 |

According to Table 11, the majority of students said they could make others feel good about what they were doing, carefully consider what is important when faced with a task or decision, and determine which members of the group are best suited for each assignment. Most students also felt that they could motivate others to work hard on an assignment, believed they had the capacity to lead, understood how to improve their community, and knew how to do it. Students' perceptions of themselves as leaders both within and outside school were generally congruent.

To test differences in the students' perceptions of their leadership ability by gender and level of education, *t*-tests were conducted for independent samples (Tables 12 and 13) and via a one-way ANOVA (Table 14).

It was found that girls gave higher ratings to their ability to make others feel good about what they were doing than boys. In addition, girls were more in agreement than boys that they carefully consider what is important when faced with a task or decision. Boys, on the other hand, had a greater level of confidence in their leadership abilities than girls. The other items showed no discernible gender differences.

No significant differences were found in perceptions of leadership ability among students based on level of education.

No significant differences were found in perceptions of leadership ability among students based on school district.

**Table 12.** Perceptions of leadership ability among students by gender.

| | Girls ($n$ = 243) | | Boys ($n$ = 133) | | $p$.Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | |
| "I can make others feel good about what they are doing" | 4.26 | 0.83 | 3.92 | 0.99 | <0.001 |
| "When I am faced with a task/decision I think carefully and decide what is important to do" | 4.1 | 0.88 | 3.87 | 0.99 | 0.023 |
| "In a group, I can identify who will be more suitable for the various tasks ahead of us" | 4 | 0.9 | 3.98 | 0.95 | 0.912 |
| "I can help others work hard on the task" | 3.97 | 0.92 | 3.8 | 1 | 0.104 |
| "I believe I have the ability to be a leader" | 3.77 | 1.16 | 3.86 | 1.08 | 0.452 |
| "I know how I can make my world a better place" | 3.64 | 1.1 | 3.63 | 1.09 | 0.93 |
| "I know how to become a leader" | 3.33 | 1.17 | 3.6 | 1.05 | 0.024 |
| "I see myself as a leader in school or outside of it" | 3.1 | 1.26 | 3.25 | 1.25 | 0.285 |

**Table 13.** Perceptions of leadership ability among students by level of education.

| | Middle School ($n$ = 229) | | High School ($n$ = 147) | | $p$.Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | |
| "I can make others feel good about what they are doing" | 4.17 | 0.9 | 4.1 | 0.91 | 0.475 |
| "When I am faced with a task/decision I think carefully and decide what is important to do" | 3.96 | 0.97 | 4.12 | 0.83 | 0.102 |
| "In a group, I can identify who will be more suitable for the various tasks ahead of us" | 4.03 | 0.94 | 3.93 | 0.88 | 0.258 |
| "I can help others work hard on the task" | 3.93 | 0.97 | 3.88 | 0.91 | 0.571 |
| "I believe I have the ability to be a leader" | 3.79 | 1.16 | 3.8 | 1.08 | 0.947 |
| "I know how I can make my world a better place" | 3.68 | 1.12 | 3.57 | 1.06 | 0.344 |
| "I know how to become a leader" | 3.44 | 1.13 | 3.39 | 1.15 | 0.7 |
| "I see myself as a leader in school or outside of it" | 3.17 | 1.29 | 3.13 | 1.21 | 0.758 |

**Table 14.** Perceptions of leadership ability among students by district.

| | Tel Aviv and Central District ($n$ = 222) | | Haifa and Northern District ($n$ = 95) | | Southern District ($n$ = 52) | | $p$.Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | |
| "I can make others feel good about what they are doing" | 4.1 | 0.91 | 4.17 | 0.92 | 4.21 | 0.87 | 0.656 |
| "When I am faced with a task/decision I think carefully and decide what is important to do" | 3.95 | 0.96 | 4.03 | 0.91 | 4.21 | 0.8 | 0.193 |
| "In a group, I can identify who will be more suitable for the various tasks ahead of us" | 3.99 | 0.91 | 3.93 | 0.99 | 4.04 | 0.84 | 0.762 |
| "I can help others work hard on the task" | 3.9 | 0.97 | 3.84 | 0.92 | 4.02 | 0.94 | 0.558 |
| "I believe I have the ability to be a leader" | 3.79 | 1.18 | 3.76 | 1.06 | 3.81 | 1.1 | 0.963 |
| "I know how I can make my world a better place" | 3.59 | 1.15 | 3.75 | 0.92 | 3.58 | 1.21 | 0.476 |
| "I know how to become a leader" | 3.34 | 1.15 | 3.62 | 1.09 | 3.33 | 1.13 | 0.115 |
| "I see myself as a leader in school or outside of it" | 3.09 | 1.28 | 3.22 | 1.27 | 3.17 | 1.17 | 0.659 |

### 5.5. Assessing the Importance of the School and Its Personnel as Key Elements in the Growth of Leader Self-Efficacy

We examined to what extent the students perceive school as having an impact on leadership development. In order to assess the importance of school and its personnel in improving leader self-efficacy, as perceived by students, we need to evaluate the combination between three main elements in the questionnaire. The first is the results presented earlier in Tables 3–6 by the second and third statement ("School is one of the most influential places on the development of leadership skills" and "My school has a great influence on the development of leadership among students"). The teenagers agreed only to a medium extent that school is one of the most influential places for the development of leadership ability (mean = 3.30) and that the school they attend has a great influence on the development of students' leadership (mean = 2.97). High school students perceived that school is one of the most influential places for the development of leadership ability (mean = 3.59) to a significantly greater extent ($p < 0.001$) compared to middle school students (mean = 3.12). Moreover, school students in the Northern and Haifa Districts perceived that school is one of the most influential places affecting the development of leadership capabilities (mean = 3.58) to a greater extent compared to students in the Central and Tel Aviv Districts (mean = 3.15; $p = 0.016$). However, no differences were found between students in the Southern (mean = 3.40) and the other two districts ($p > 0.05$). Furthermore, no differences were found by gender in the perception of the school as having an impact on leadership development.

The second element is the examination of the factors to which the students attributed the greatest influence on young leadership development. Parents and the family in general were the most significant, being mentioned by about 65% of the cohort. Membership in youth movements and youth centers came in second (about 54%), and the third most important factor was school staff (about 30%). Other factors mentioned by the students were the media (29%), leadership programs at school (17.6%), friends (2.1%), and "alone" (1.3%).

Chi-square tests that were conducted to check whether the perception of the most influential factor on leadership development, differing by gender, education level, or district, revealed that girls attributed a significantly higher ($p < 0.05$) influence than boys to the media (32.9% vs. 21.8%), school staff (34.2% vs. 22.6%), and leadership programs conducted at or on behalf of the school (21.0% vs. 11.3%). Also, high school students attributed more influence than middle school students to membership of youth movements (63.3% vs. 48.5%, $p = 0.005$). Finally, the youth from the Northern District and Haifa attributed greater influence to the media than those from the Southern District (36.8% vs. 15.4%, $p < 0.05$).

The third element relates to the analysis of the responses to the statement "I think it is possible to know how to lead". In a *t*-test for independent samples, no significant differences were found ($p = 0.872$) in the degree of agreement with the item "I think it is possible to learn how to lead" between boys (mean 3.74, SD 1.17) and girls (mean 3.72, SD 1.15). Further *t*-tests were conducted to test the relationship between the youth's belief that it is possible to learn how to lead and the perception of the school staff and the school leadership program as the most influential factors on leadership development. It was found that teenagers who mentioned the school staff as the most influential factor on leadership development agreed to a significantly greater degree ($p < 0.05$) that it is possible to learn how to lead (mean 3.95, SD 1.07) than teenagers who did not mention the school staff as the most influential factor (mean 3.64, SD 1.18). Similarly, teenagers who mentioned the school leadership program as the most influential factor on leadership development agreed to a significantly greater degree ($p < 0.05$) that it is possible to learn how to lead (mean 4.02, SD 1.00) than teenagers who did not mention the program as the most influential factor (mean 3.67, SD 1.18).

These three elements combined indicate that school is less likely to be perceived as the institution that has the largest impact on leadership development. Other influences, such as parents and youth organizations, appear to be more significant. Interestingly, high school

students demonstrated a rather conflicting trend. While expressing highly positive opinions on school's influence on leadership development, they attributed greater influence to youth organizations when asked about the subject later on in the questionnaire. Apparently, the question that required them to choose an option among several variables that affect youth leadership made them rethink the centrality of the school on this matter. Considering the high degree of high school students' participation in youth movements compared to middle school students, this is not a surprising finding. Furthermore, according to these findings, girls attributed school leadership programs and school staff to a greater extent than boys and, hence, agreed to a much greater degree that leadership can be taught. This finding is rather encouraging, since it indicates a positive effect on girls should extensive efforts to combine leadership education with the school's curriculum take place.

## 6. Discussion

To conclude, this research sought to investigate the way teenage boys and girls perceive their school as a key element in developing their ability to guide, lead, and affect others, as well as to understand whether they are aware of their own leading potential. The study presented here provides an overview of the state of leadership education in Israel, as perceived by teenage boys and girls from the 7th to 12th grades. It seeks to determine the extent to which the education system in Israel serves the purpose of developing students' leadership skills and leader self-efficacy, which is one of its primary goals. Our understanding of post-primary leadership education has expanded due to the examination of the data from the 376 questionnaire responses in a number of ways.

### *6.1. New Findings from This Research*

First, the results indicate that students' general participation in leadership programs is relatively low (31.9%) and that girls' rate of participation is almost the same as the boys' rate. Middle schools stand out as the primary setting for involvement in these programs when we specifically look at the types of schools with the highest participation rates. These results are consistent with prior research regarding this subject [35,40,46,60], but they do not necessarily imply that girls are as likely as boys to exercise leadership. A recent study in Israel found that although the girls in these programs appear to believe they can be leaders, they are largely unaware of the range of leadership behaviors and emphasize taking charge of a group and giving instructions to their teammates as forms of leadership [61].

Second, since the purpose of this study is to evaluate how students perceive the school's efforts to impart leadership skills, they were asked to evaluate these efforts. Regardless of gender, students expressed their discontent with their school's ability to motivate them to lead, with teachers acting as role models and leading figures, with students' participation in forming school regulations, and with lessons, activities, and programs dealing with leadership. Two items stand out above all others in their low level of evaluation: the fact that leadership is rarely mentioned during formal lessons and the fact that students believe they have no power to affect educational decisions. A sense of self-worth is essential for building confidence among teenagers and could contribute to their leader self-efficacy [24,62]. Students attending middle school, however, expressed a more positive point of view regarding school leadership activities, an approach we can attribute to the fact that the program participation rate in middle schools is higher than in high schools. Nevertheless, high school students, to a much greater extent, declared school to be an influential place for youth leadership development.

Third, some surprising evaluations regarding leader self-efficacy were found in this research. As much as the students agreed to a medium-low degree that school has an impact on young people's leadership ability, they agreed to a high degree with statements declaring their self-belief in having leading skills and being able to be leaders later on in life. One has to wonder why students value their leading ability to such a high degree. A possible explanation might be the students' misunderstanding of the leadership concept. Since, according to their evaluation, leadership is hardly considered part of the curriculum

in their school and only about a third of the research population has ever participated in a leadership program, it is not farfetched to suspect that they know very little about the concept of leadership. Another possible explanation for this assumption lies in another finding. In response to a multiple-answer question where they were allowed to choose more than one option, 65% of students stated that they consider their parents and family members to be the most influential figures in their leadership development, a factor that has been found to have a major impact on youth [63–65]. Furthermore, 54% of the participants mentioned youth movements and organizations to be the most effective factor contributing to young leadership development, which is supported extensively by the literature [66–68]. Even the media was pointed out as an influential factor by 29% of this study population, mostly by girls, while only 30% mentioned school, and just 17% cited school staff. Thus, attributing students' high self-belief in their efficacy to lead is probably not a result of school efforts but more likely a result of other significant factors in their environment. Examining the responses more carefully revealed another interesting finding. Students who pointed out school staff and leadership programs as significant factors in contributing to young people's leadership development (though, as mentioned, they were not many) also agreed to a very high degree that leadership can be taught. Most of them were girls. This may indicate a certain amount of trust in the education system and its potential to initiate change and actually impact students' capabilities [30].

Statements concerning leader self-efficacy led boys to give higher estimations of themselves than girls when asked if they know how to become leaders and if they consider themselves to be leaders in and outside school. Girls, on the other hand, thought more highly of themselves than boys when it came to leadership qualities, including deliberating thoroughly before making a choice, choosing the proper individuals for a job, assisting others in achieving their objectives, and elevating others' self-esteem. A possible explanation may be rooted in adolescent girls' tendency to have low self-esteem in contrast to adolescent boys [30,69]. Boys' self-esteem can be affected by contradictory societal messages—on the one hand, to appear strong and, on the other, to be emotionally expressive. Therefore, in this study, boys may have found it necessary to transmit socially accepted answers about their perceived leadership ability. Girls, on the other hand, admitted having leading traits but lacked the confidence to actually declare that they are currently leaders or can become leaders in the future [53,54].

### 6.2. Study Limitations

Several reservations for this study are noteworthy. The results were based on an online survey design where girls responded much more than boys (possibly indicating greater interest in the subject). Also, non-responders, regardless of their gender, age, or district, may have differed from those who responded. Yet, since each of the samples separately is large enough and this research builds on other qualitative works published recently [61], it provides important quantitative data for obtaining more comprehensive observations of the leadership development processes in Israeli schools.

Generally speaking, the data gathering for this research was conducted at one point in time and referred to the specific Israeli case study. It was designed for a specific age group and concentrated solely on adolescents. In this sense, although presenting important new findings, the results might be somewhat narrowed in terms of time and place.

### 6.3. Future Research Avenues

To overcome some of the inherent limitations of case study research, future projects should adopt a comparative approach, expanding studies to a larger spectrum of ages, sampling more case studies from different cultures, and, if possible, implementing longitudinal studies to follow repetitions over time and to analyze them.

Additionally, as suggested by Haber-Curran and Sulpizio [70], we must broaden our focus toward leadership development education that provides a space for each individual to have the potential to practice leadership based upon various aspects of their social identities.

### *6.4. Practical Implications*

The Ministry of Education in Israel attributes great importance to leadership development and, therefore, initiates leadership programs directed at all students, regardless of gender. However, this research uncovered some weak spots regarding the implementation of these programs, and various insinuations are important for policymakers and school administrators in the Israeli case study's system as well as in other places around the world.

Self-efficacy and self-esteem both have an impact on how girls view themselves. Leadership self-efficacy, leader self-awareness, and leader identity, according to Day et al. [15], are essential components in the process of creating leadership. Studies have shown that primarily female students were found to benefit from leadership training programs [41,50]. Unfortunately, our study indicates a profound problem where post-primary schools in Israel are concerned. Teenage girls take part in leadership training programs at a similar rate to boys but do not consider themselves as leaders now or in the future [71,72]. They do not view the educational figures in their lives as motivating role models, they receive very little support and affirmation from teachers that they have what it takes to be one, and they lack these critical elements for developing and enhancing their leader self-efficacy [14,73]. We, therefore, humbly suggest that decision makers within the educational establishment consider the differences between middle and high school students, especially between boys and girls.

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