Contribution of Pre-Academic Preparatory Studies to Development Empowerment among Students

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Abstract

The Pre-Academic Preparatory Program (PAPP) is a remedial framework aimed at providing students with the tools needed to pursue a higher education.

Higher education institutions in Israel tend to evaluate the success of such programs by means of quantitative criteria based on the students' grades. This study sets out from the premise that evaluations based exclusively on a student's grades fail to provide a true assessment of his or her development in the program. Accordingly, it examines the impact of the program on the students' sense of empowerment.

Data collection was conducted by means of a questionnaire compiled especially for this study, consisting of various propositions derived from the extensive literature on the issue of empowerment. The study samplecomprises 146 Arab students in Israeli, randomly selected from the pre-academic preparatory program at the Sakhnin College of Teacher Education. The findings point to a strong association between a sense ofEmpowerment and the courses offered in the program.

Key Words: assessment, pre-academic preparatory program, empowerment, change and social justice.

1. Introduction

The Pre-Academic Preparatory Program (PAPP) provides a second chance to students who, for one reason or another, failed to complete high school, in the belief that they are capable of succeeding and integrating into higher education frameworks.

In a comparative study of preparatory program students and standard university students in terms of self-esteem and motivation to learn, no significant difference was found between the two groups, indicating that thepreparatory program students are not a "lost" population, but possess self-esteem and a motivation to learn nodifferent from those of other students in the standard track. As such, they worthy of investment and to be granted greater access to academic subjects beyond the core subjects, and to be treated as equal to other students in the academic system (Zoabi, 2012).

The PAPP is a remedial framework capable, in practice, of bridging gaps that emerge in elementary and high school level, to help strengthen academic abilities and provide students with the tools that they need to pursue higher education. It is an educational institution that offers a second chance for those who did not succeed the first time around (Zoabi, 2012). The uniqueness of the PAPP lies in the fact that its students attend it for a set period, then integrate into standard studies at higher education institutions. It raises the student's expectations to do well academically at university, and gives them more confidence in their ability to obtain an academic degree.Besides countering educational disadvantages, the PAPP also has an explicit social purpose of closing social gaps and integrating those of underprivileged social and economic backgrounds to integrate into the general student population and in higher studies, by making more of them eligible to pursue a university degree (Ariely, 1997).

In addition, studies show that most of the applicants for the PAPP come from families of low socioeconomic status (Hyosh, 2000). Although the PAPP does succeed in blurring differences arising due to social status, some personal and academic differences do remain (Awad, 2009). Nonetheless, the PAPP offers a second chance for individuals from disadvantaged social groups and lower socioeconomic classes to find their way to achieving social mobility goals and to integrate as equals in higher education (Hyosh, 2000).In Israel today, there are 46 PAPP frameworks in Jewish communities, accommodating 12,252 students, 6.4% of whom are Arab students(Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012). By contrast, in the Arab sector there was not a single pre-academic preparatory framework until 2010, when the college in the Arab Israeli town of Sakhnin took upon itself to establish one.

The data shows that until 2007, only two pre-academic preparatory frameworks catered specifically to Arab students: one at Hadassah College in Jerusalem, with 22 Arab students, and another at the College of Judea & Samaria, with 29 Arab students (Visblay, 2007). These two frameworks, catering to only a handful of individuals, clearly failed to provide an adequate solution for young men and women of Arab society, which constitutes 20% of Israel's population. While a number of other preparatory frameworks accommodated a further small percentage of Arab students, these did not constitute a coherent solution for closing the gaps between the Arab educational system and its Jewish counterpart in Israel. According to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, the percentage of Arab Israelis who applied and failed to enter university in the 2010-11 academic year stood at 33.6% – over 50% more than the failure rate among Jewish students (20.1%). The failure to provide equal opportunities for young Arab adults, coupled with a lack of PAPP frameworks for the Israeli Arab population, and high threshold requirements for admission into universities and colleges in sought-after fields (in terms of matriculation grades, SATs and minimum age), means that many Arab high school graduates are effectively denied theopportunities of further education (Awad, 2009).In view of this state of affairs, in 2009 Sakhnin College established a PAPP framework. Sakhnin College is an academic institution overseen and financed by the Israeli Ministry of Education and accredited by Israel's Council for Higher Education to award a Bachelor's degree in Education (B.Ed.), a teaching certificate in a variety of programs, and a Master's degree (M.Ed) in education systems management and organization and in educational counseling.

The principal aim of the Sakhnin PAPP is to improve access to higher education to high school graduates from Arab sector in Israelby providing a second chance for capable students who wish to pursue a university degree but, for various reasons, did not complete their high school education. It quickly proved very popular, with enrollment growing from 79 students in its first year, to 220 students in 2012, 87.0% of whom were women. Following mutual recognition agreements with many academic institutions in northern Israel, 60% of the program's graduates continued their studies at higher education institutions, each year (Awad, 2009).

In light of the initiative's comparative success in such a short period, the primary aim of the present study is to evaluate the extent to which pre-academic preparatory frameworks of this kind contribute to students' internal qualities, beyond the quantitative achievements of their final grades or the percentage of PAPP students that go on to university. To this end, it examines the association between the preparatory program and its students' sense of empowerment. We posit that the degree of such a sense of empowerment is a true measure of the success of the pre-academic program.

2. Theoretical Background: Empowerment

The notion of empowerment has evolved in recent decades as a key concept in social and behavioral sciences. Ideas about empowerment at the individual, group or community level appear in the literature in knowledge fields (Roy, 2010) as diverse as education (Mabry & Snow, 2006), services management and operation (Bowen & Lawler, 1992; Spreitzer, 1995), and the treatment of ethnic minorities (Murray & Simeon, 2007), of people with special needs (Dempsey &Dunst, 2004), and of perceived dis-empowered groups such as women (Lee-Rife, 2010; Murphy-Graham, 2010).

In the late 1960s, the professional and research literature began to examine empowermentrelated ideas in the context of improving welfare and social services, especially for victims of social deprivation (Berger &Neuhaus, 1977; Lee, 2001; O'Connell, 1978; Rappaport, 1985; Shroff, 2010; Solomon 1976). Since then, the concept has gradually been extended to the point where it now has multiple meanings (Bartunek & Spreitzer, 2007; Hassanpoor, Mehrabi, Hassanpoor,& Samangooei, 2012; Roy, 2010).

In some instances, the term "empowerment" refers to a particular worldview about the desired existential condition of individuals, groups, or communities, as a goal for professional interventions (American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work, 2002). In others, it is used to describe intervention techniques and procedures ("empowering intervention") that should be used to achieve a desired end. Still other researchers see empowerment as an approach that combines both a process and a particular concept (Miley, O'Melia& Dubois, 2004). The theoretical models in the field of empowerment are based on the premise that every individual has the potential and abilities to contend constructively with the challenges in their life, but for various barriers and other factors – internal or external – that prevent them from making the most of their abilities and fulfilling their aspirations (Adams, 2003; Freire, 1985; Hassanpoor et al., 2012; Rappaport, 1987; Spreitzer, 1996).

A sense of empowerment leads people to feel they can control their own destiny and achieve personal and organizational goals (Hassanpoor et al., 2012). It figures prominently in values underlying a social policy that combines an emphasis on human needs and promotes social justice (Chapin & Cox, 2001; Hassanpoor et al., 2012), by promoting equal distribution of resources; combatting racism, sexism, age discrimination, discrimination against homosexuals, and discrimination against people with disabilities; advocating a positive approach to diversity and diversity; protecting the environment; promoting self-determination (participation to the greatest extent possible in decisions affecting one's life, both personal and political); and cultivating self and the community of fulfillment (Chapin & Cox, 2001; Hassanpoor et al., 2012; Nkhonjera, 2011; Shroff, 2010).

The purpose of empowering intervention is to bring about and support a process by which a person or a group goes from a condition of comparative helplessness or passivity, to one where they have a sense of greater control over their lives, and are better able to make decisions and influence the course of their lives (Adams, 2003; Bogler&Somech, 2004; Myers, 1991; Shroff, 2010; White, 2010; Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz &Checkoway, 1992).

Empowerment encourages people to learn how to connect with and modify their emotions, and how to manage situations so that they maintain a sense of being in control (Benjamin, 1998; Benjamin & Sullivan, 1999; Hassanpoor et al., 2012; Murphy-Graham, 2010). It can also foster the development of interpersonal skills, such as improved negotiation skills, the ability to express thoughts and feelings more clearly, and anger management in conflict situations (Benjamin & Sullivan, 1999; Murphy-Graham, 2010, Roy, 2010). Empowerment involves changes on three interrelated levels: the intrapersonal or psychological; the interpersonal; and environmental (Lee-Rife, 2010; Murphy-Graham, 2010, Roy, 2010; Sadan, 1997; Whiteside, 2009). At the intrapersonal level, empowerment encompasses knowledge acquisition, the development of skills and provision of tools necessary for personal growth and action in the social arena – be it independent action, negotiations, cooperation with others, or other actions (Hazan, 2004; Murphy-Graham, 2010; Parsons, 1988. Roy, 2010). Empowerment bolsters one's self-image (Janssens, 2010), one's ability to make decisions, and one's sense of complete freedom to take any action and achieve great things (Bogler&Somech, 2004; Hassanpoor et al., 2012).

A sense of power and capability enhances one's confidence in managing failure, and in mustering the internal motivation needed to manage one's tasks (Blanchard, Carlos & Randolph, 2003). It is also predicted to boost motivation (Hassanpoor et al., 2012; Liden, Wayne & Sparrow, 2000), and one's perceived self-efficacy (Hemric, Eury, &Shellman, 2010). According to many researchers, empowerment at the intrapersonal level entails an increased awareness of the factors that led to one's present condition (Robbins, Crino, &Fredendall, 2002; Sadan, 1997; White, 2010); the development of a self-concept as part of a greater collective and solidarity with others in a similar situation; reduced self-recrimination over past events; and a sense of personal responsibility for solving problems in the future (Friere, 1973; Gutierrez, 1990; Hassanpoor et al., 2012; Janssens, 2010; Kieffer, 1983; Morgen& Bookman, 1988; White, 2010).At the interpersonal level, empowerment enhances one's understanding for the need to build relationships with others as part of one's commitment to society (Gutierrez, Cox & Parsons, 1998; Janssens, 2010; Liden, Wayne & Sparrow, 2000; Murphy-Graham, 2010; Shroff, 2010). Cooperation with others in various social settings, such as mutual aid or voluntary organizations (Gutierrez, 1990; Janssens, 2010; Kieffer, 1983; Riessman, 1997), allows one to develop a better understanding of groups, organizations, and other social entities that govern the daily lives of individuals and groups, and an ability to contribute to their activities(Whiteside, 2009). At the environmental level, empowerment involves, among other things, a heightened awareness of the existence of variations in power, influence, or availability of various resources in an individual or community's environment, and developing an understanding of the structural processes or systemic factors that place obstacles in the individual's path (Kane, 1987; Murphy-Graham, 2010; Whiteside, 2009).

In addition, it promotes increased participation in the policymaking process, in self-help, in mutual support activities, in social and community activities, and in affiliation to activity groups at various levels (Chapin & Cox, 2001; Whiteside, 2009).Together, changes at the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels and in one's relationship to the environment should result in individuals being able both to influence the processes around their life and to promote or achieve their goals (Friere, 1973 Gutierrez, DeLois & GlenMay 1995; Kieffer, 1983; Lee-Rife, 2010; Murphy-Graham, 2010; Roy, 2010; Sadan, 1997; Solomon, 1976; Spreitzer, 1996). With this in mind, the present study sets out to examine the effect of pre-academic studies on its students' sense of empowerment.

3. Methodology

This study uses a quantitative tools methodology – an advantage in that analysis of the students' responses is easier, and the analysis method more uniform. In the present study, this took the form of a questionnaire which probed both background variables and items related to empowerment.The study population consisted of 146 students, randomly selected from the pre-university course at the Sakhnin College of Teacher Education. The sample represents approximately 71% of the study population.

3.1. The Study Population

Approximately 86.0% of the student body is women. 91.0% of students are under the age of 25, with the average age of 21.6 (standard deviation: 3.6 years). Average family size among students was about 7 persons per family. Distribution of religion among students revealed 89.0% to be Muslims, 7.5% Christians and the rest Druze. 33.6% of respondents noted they were married; the remainder were single. Approximately 18.5% of the students reported their father to be university educated (with a Bachelor's degree or higher); 13.7% reported that their mother was also a university graduate. 50.0% of students reported that their families were struggling, financially.

3.2. Research Tools: Assessing empowerment

The data collection was based on a questionnaire compiled specifically for this study, consisting of various statements derived from the extensive literature related to empowerment, as detailed below.It should be noted that we found no tool for assessing the effect of academic studies on the individual's sense of empowerment. In the absence of statements directly linking academic studies with empowerment in the international literature, we carried out a context adaptation in two steps.

In the first step, each statement was preceded by the words "During pre-academic studies at the college" to underline the study's context. The second step involved adapting the statements from empowerment theory to the field of education and teaching, to link the two worlds of content. For example, the statement "Empowerment increases the critical awareness within the individual" (Sadan, 1977) was reformulated in the questionnaire as: "my critical awareness with regard to various issues has grown." Thus, after application of both steps of the context adaptation, the final form of this statement was: "During pre-academic studies at the college, my critical awareness with regard to various issues has grown". The study questionnaire was compiled in Hebrew and translated into Arabic, the participants' native language.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part I consisted of 54 Likert-type statements linking pre-academic studies with the sense of empowerment. Participants were asked to note the extent to which they agreed with each statement on a scale of six, from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 6 ("Agree very much"), and their opinion on the effect of PAPP studies on their sense of empowerment for each statement, on a scale of six, from 1 ("No effect at all") to 6 ("Affected it a great deal").

To ensure that the statements' wording was clear and well suited to the target population, the questionnaire was first submitted to five judges of content who are knowledgeable on the subject of empowerment. It was then handed over to five judges of language to validate the translation from Hebrew to Arabic in terms of content and language. Changes were made to a number of statements in light of the comments and insights received from these judges.

The 53 statements that appeared in the questionnaire after adaptation to the PAPP context are presented below with their respective theoretical references. In line with previous studies of this sort in the professional literature, the statements were dividedinto two groups, relating to the intrapersonal and interpersonal/environmental levels, respectively.

The intrapersonal level consisted of the following 25 statements: I have undergone a change at the personal level (Cox, Kelchner& Chapin, 2002; Hazan, 2004; Parsons, 1988;Uphoff, 2003; Wallerstein, 2006); I have a greater personal awareness of my abilities and inner strengths (Hazan, 2004; Myers, 1991; Parsons, 1998); I have a stronger sense that I am capable of making decisions in various areas (Adams, 2003; Barton & Barton, 2011; Clark & Davis-Kenaley, 2011; Myers, 1991; Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz &Checkoway, 1992); I have come to know my own abilities (Hazan, 2004; Parsons, 1988); I have come to know my professional abilities (Irwin, 1996); My self-image has been enhanced (Hazan, 2004; Parsons, 1988); I have undergone a process of self-development (Hazan, 2004; Parsons, 1988); My self-esteem has grown (Clark &Krupa, 2002; Pinderhughes, 1989; Rappaport, 1985; Solomon, 1976; Zimmerman, 1990); My professional worth has increased (Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook& Irvine, 2011; Irwin, 1996); My self-confidence has grown (Niemann-Struwega&Meintjes, 2008; Olin, et al., 2010; Sadan 1997); I am more able to accept myself for what I am (Sadan, 1997); I have learned to accept my own mistakes (Sadan, 1997); I have an improved analytical ability with regard to various issues (Rappaport, 1990; Zimmerman, 1990); I have learned to come to terms with inappropriate behaviors of mine in the past (Friere, 1973; Gutierrez, 1990; Kieffer, 1983; Solomon, 1976); I have a greater sense that I am capable of solving problems in various areas (Friere, 1973; Gutierrez, 1990; Kieffer, 1983; Menon, 2001; Parsons, 1998, 1991; Solomon, 1976); I have gone from a state of (relative) lack of control to one of control in various areas (Adams, 2003; Chiang & Hsieh, 2011; Sadan, 1997). I have gone from a passive state (observer) to an active one (actively learning and doing) in class (Adams, 2003; Sadan, 1997); my critical awareness of various issues has grown (Luttrell, 1988; Morgen& Bookman, 1988; Sadan, 1997: 56); I have learned innovative educationalacademic concepts (Knight, 2010; Zhong, 2011); I have learned that the student is a full partner in the learning process (Carl, 2009; DeJong& Miller, 1995; Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Klopfenstein, 2003; Perlman, 1975; Saleebey, 1996); I have learned to prompt myself to remediate the undesirable aspects of my situation (Ben Galim, 2000; Carl, 2009; Woolfolk& Hoy, 1990); I have learned to encourage myself to deal with my personal shortcomings in various areas (Carl, 2009); I have learned to make the most of my studies and of former relationships and events when formulating my current identity (Cohen, 2000; Pinderhughes, 1989; Rappaport, 1985; Solomon, 1976; Zimmerman, 1990); My positions on various issues have changed (Hazan, 2004; Parsons, 1988).

The interpersonal/environmental level of the questionnaire consisted of the following 28 statements: I have learned the importance of the student taking part in decisions and in processes concerning him or her (Bryan & Henry, 2008; Short, 1994); I have come to understand that I can call upon the help of others to learn their needs, as they perceive them, in various areas (Hmelo-Silver, 2004); I have learned to choose the goals and work methods to suit my needs (Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Klopfenstein, 2003); I have learned how to gauge the change that has taken place within myself (Carl, 2009); I have learned that I must present myself through my strengths rather than through my weaknesses or vulnerabilities (Cohen, 2000; Darling, 1991); I have learned to focus on other people's strengths and not on their weaknesses or vulnerabilities (Cohen, 2000 Darling, 1991);

(Cohen, 2000 2000,כהן)I have learned to tell others people's about my successes ‏(למדתילספרעלהצלחותייילאחרים
I have learned to focus on other people's successes (Cohen, 2000 Darling, 1991); I have learned to develop reciprocal relationships with fellow students (Farmer, Yue& Brooks, 2008; Gutierrez, 1990; Kieffer, 1983; Lachtman, 2010; Parker, et al., 2001; Parsons, 1998; Riessman, 1997); I have learned to make contact with others to solve various problems (Farmer, Yue& Brooks, 2008; Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Kieffer, 1983; Parsons, 1998;

Robbins &Fredendall, 2002); I have acquired certain styles and communication skills that help me forge relationships with society and my surroundings (Barton & Barton, 2011; Wallerstein, 2006); I have learned to cooperate with others to bring about change in the environment (Kieffer, 1983; Parsons, 1998; Wallerstein, 2006); I have learned communication skills that give me access to educational establishments to find solutions to various problems (Kieffer, 1983); I have learned to link between environmental factors and other people's problems (Barton & Barton, 2011; Clark & Davis Kenaley, 2011); I have learned to encourage other people to deal with their personal shortcomings in various areas (Carl, 2009); I have a greater sense of personal responsibility to solve problems in the present and in the future (Friere, 1973; Gutierrez, 1990; Kieffer, 1983; Solomon, 1976); I have learned to express my faith in my abilities to resolve various problems in relation to others (Klopfenstein, 2003); I have learned that I must act to strengthen other people's faith in their own ability to propose solutions to various issues (Klopfenstein, 2003); I have developed a sense of solidarity with other students who are going through the learning process (Friere, 1973; Gutierrez, 1990; Kieffer, 1983; Solomon, 1976);

I have greater influence over others and ability to mobilize them to solve problems (Sadan, 1997);I have learned to take concrete action to change my reality (Parsons, 1998, 1991; Eylone& Bamberger, 2000); I have learned the importance of taking part in decisions and processes involving me (Lashley, 2001); I have understood that I can choose the goals and work trends to suit other people's needs (Zimmerman, et al., 1992); I have learned to invite others to take part in evaluating themselves in various areas (Fetterman, 2001); I have a greater understanding that other people have different sources of strength (Clark & Davis Kenaley, 2011); I have come to understand that other people may possess different resources (Gammonley&Luken, 2001; Kane, 1987); I have learned that some of the problems that other people have may be attributable to various structural organizational factors (Kane, 1987); I have learned to encourage others to improve their undesirable conditions (Carl, 2009); I have learned that the other person's affiliation (in terms of social class, ethnic origin, status) is related to their current situation (Clark &Davis Kenaley, 2011; Friere, 1973; GlenMay&DeLois, 1995; Kieffer, 1983; Sadan, 1997; Solomon, 1976); I have learned about the relationship between another person's environment (neighborhood, extended family, town/village) and their present condition (Friere, 1973; GlenMay&DeLois, 1995; Kieffer, 1983; Sadan, 1997; Solomon, 1976); I have learned not to blame myself for inappropriate incidents or behaviors of mine in the past whose causes I did not understand (Friere, 1973; Gutierrez, 1990; Kieffer, 1983; Solomon, 1976).

Part II of the questionnaire concerned personal background variables, such as gender, age, family size (including parents), economic status, religion, parents' education, and the number of siblings under the age of eighteen. It also included other questions concerning the impact of specific academic courses at the PAPP – e.g.., Education Fundamentals, sociology, psychology and Education & Empowerment – on the respondent's personal and professional development.

3.3. Factors Analysis and Questionnaire Reliability

The questionnaire items cover a range of personal and interpersonal/environmental empowerment issues, in two parts: a) questions on the effect on the respondent's sense of empowerment brought on by the pre-academic preparatory program, and by religious practice and faith, and b) background variables. Table 1 below summarizes the reliability of the questionnaire and indices derived from factor analysis. The reliability of the sense of empowerment component was $\alpha = 0.95$, indicating a high degree of internal consistency. In addition, a factor analysis was carried out on the 53 component items, to examine their correlation to various factors, including one hidden factor representing the sense of empowerment. In a factor analysis of the sense of empowerment component scores, six factors were found to be significant in accordance with their constituent items.

The first factor relates to 16 items (Nos. 35, 36, 38, 39, 42-53) that are "dominant" – i.e., with a load greater than 0.4. These relate to various aspects of the degree of reciprocity and relationship with others and the environment – the reciprocity index – on a scale based on the average of its constituent items. This factor explains 13.2% of the total variance of the "sense of empowerment" component, and has a value of $\alpha = 0.93$ (a high score indicating a high level of reciprocity and consideration of others and of one's environment).

The second factor comprises eight dominant items (Nos. 1, 9, 21, 22, 23, 29, 31, 34), related to detecting one's personal capabilities – the capabilities detection index – on a scale based on the average of its constituent items. This factor explains 9.3% of the total variance of the "sense of empowerment" component, and has a value of $\alpha = 0.89$ (a high score indicating a high level of detection of one's capabilities and skills).

The third factor consists of seven dominant items (Nos. 13–19) relating to various aspects of setting personal goals while taking into account environmental conditions – the goal-setting index – on a scale based on the average of its constituent items. This explains 8.1% of the total variance of the "sense of empowerment" component, and has a value of $\alpha = 0.91$ (a high score indicating an informed goal setting).

The fourth factor includes four dominant items (Nos. 27, 30, 32, 33) relating to aspects of the effect of a sense of empowerment on managing others – the personal influence index – on a scale based on the average of its constituent items. This factor explains 7.2% of the total variance of the "sense of empowerment" component and has a value of $\alpha = 0.82$ (a high score indicating a high degree of influence in managing others).

The fifth factor includes five dominant items (Nos. 2–5, and 11) related to various aspects of dealing with problems and challenges – the coping measure – on a scale based on its constituent items. This factor explains 7.2% of the total variance of the "sense of empowerment" component, and has a value of $\alpha = 0.84$ (a high score indicates a good level of dealing with problems and challenges).

The sixth factor comprises three dominant items (6, 7, 8), related to various aspects of empowerment-induced action – the action index – on a scale based on the average of its constituent items. This factor explains 5.7% of the total variance of the "sense of empowerment" component, and has a value of α = 0.74 (a high score indicating a high level of empowermentinduced action).

Finally, based on the average of the items included in the six aforementioned factors, a new index was constructed – the general sense of empowerment index. Together, the six factors explain 50.6% of the total variance of the "sense of empowerment" component, and the value of this index is α = 0.94 (a high score indicating a high sense of empowerment).

The reliability of the component Perceptions and attitudes toward religion was α = 0.88 – indicating a high degree of internal consistency. A factor analysis of the eight component items and their correlation to the six factors and to the hidden factor of perceptions and attitudes toward religion revealed one significant factor with eight items (Nos. 1 – 8) with a load above 0.5. These items describe various aspects of perceptions and attitudes surrounding personal faith in key religious tenets – such as God, messengers and prophets, holy books, angels and the day of Judgment. This religiosity/faith index has a scale based on the average of its constituent items, and explains 59.6% of the total variance of the Perceptions and attitudes toward religion component, with a high score indicating a high degree of religiosity/faith in the study sample.

Table 1: Cronbach alpha values of the indices' scores

Component \ Index	1 Reciprocity	2 Capabilities detection	3 Goal-setting	4 Personal influence	5 Coping	6 Action	7 General sense of empowerment
Sense of empowerment	0.93	0.89	0.91	0.81	0.83	0.74	0.94
Perceptions and attitudes toward religion	Religiosity/Faith (0.88)						

Perceptions and attitudes toward religion Religiosity/Faith(0.88)

3.4. Research Procedure

The questionnaires were handed out in the classrooms of the Academic College for Teacher Training in Sakhnin, toward the end of the 2012-13 academic year. Students answered the questionnaires anonymously. The questionnaires were then reviewed by the researchers.

4. Findings

Table 2 presents the averages of the level of agreement and the impact of participation in the PAPP on the respondents' sense of empowerment and their association coefficients. The findings reveal a high level of agreement in relation to all six measures of a sense of empowerment (overall average of 4.8 on a scale of 1 to 6), and a high impact of the PAPP studies on the sense of empowerment (overall average of 4.74 on a scale of 1 to 6). In addition, Table 2 shows a strong and statistically significant linear association between the level of agreement to the greater sense of empowerment and the reported impact of participation in the PAPP.

Table 2: Averages of agreement with statements (of higher sense of empowerment) and the impact of studies on the sense of empowerment, and the association coefficients between them

Index	Average agreement (Standard deviation)	Average Impact (Standard deviation)	Association coefficient*
Reciprocity	4.79(.063)	4.74(.066)	0.976
Capabilities detection	5.00(.068)	4.89(.072)	0.652
Goal-setting	4.73(.065)	4.71(.067)	0.992
Personal influence	4.78(.074)	4.59(.080)	0.650
Coping	4.88(.070)	4.82(.073)	0.957
Action	4.62(.080)	4.65(.083)	0.947
General sense of empowerment	4.80(.057)	4.74(.061)	0.941

* P-value <.0001

Of particular note are the high averages of the Capabilities Detection index in both the agreement and impact measures (5.00 and 4.89, respectively) – and in the Coping index (4.88 and 4.82, respectively).

Table 3 presents the linear association coefficients between the general sense of empowerment, and the participants' background variables. The findings show that there is a statistically significant positive linear association between the general sense of empowerment index and the parents' educational level (0.156 and 0.244, respectively). In addition, there is a notable statistically significant negative linear association between the general sense of empowerment index and the respondent's religiosity (-0.154).

Table 3: Association coefficients between background variables and general sense of empowerment

Variables	General sense of empowerment	P-value
Economic situation	-0.096	Ns
Mother's education	0.244	0.003
Father's education	0.156	0.060
Religiosity	-0.154	0.064

Table 4 presents the reported contribution of the various academic courses to the students' sense of personal and professional empowerment. It should be noted that the academic courses extend over a full year, which means that they involve two hours of study each week throughout the year. Most students reported a high contribution by the Education & Empowerment course to both their personal and professional sense of empowerment (95.8% and 95.2%, respectively). The Education Fundamentals course is also reported to have contributed a great deal to their professional sense of empowerment (90.3%), and to a moderate degree to their personal sense of empowerment as well (64.0%).

Table 4: Reported contribution of academic courses to sense of personal and professional empowerment (%)

Courses	No effect	Moderate effect	Profound/very profound effect
Personal empowerment			
Education Fundamentals	2.7	23.3	64.0
Introduction to Sociology	1.4	8.2	90.4
Introduction to Psychology	0.7	16.4	82.9
Education and Empowerment	0.7	3.5	95.8
Professional empowerment			
Education Fundamentals	2.1	7.6	90.3
Introduction to Sociology	2.7	8.2	89.1
Introduction to Psychology	0.7	8.2	91.1
Education and Empowerment	0.7	4.1	95.2

5. Discussion

The underlying premise of the present study is that evaluations of the Pre-Academic Preparatory Program (PAPP) based purely on the number of students who complete it to achieve the equivalent of a high school matriculation, or by the number of its graduates who go on to university, does not accurately reflect the internal development that its students experience. Accordingly, the present study sets out to examine the effect of the PAPP program on its students' sense of empowerment, with particular emphasis on its uniquely empowering features and other factors that may lead to mobility and social change. The findings reveal six indices that reflect the sense of empowerment induced by the pre-academic program: a reciprocity index, reflecting various aspects of the individual's degree of reciprocity and relationship with others and the environment; a capabilities detection index, describing the individual's abilities to detect their own capabilities; a goal-setting index, reflecting the quality of the individual's ability to set personal goals while taking into account environmental conditions; a personal influence index, reflecting the impact of the person's sense of empowerment on their ability to manage others; a coping index, describing different aspects of the individual's ability to deal with problems and challenges; and an action index, measuring various aspects of empowerment-inspired action.

The data from these six indices indicate an enhanced sense of empowerment and a high level of agreement by respondents that this is thanks to the pre-academic studies. Analysis of the findings reveals that the process of empowerment within the students occurred on three interrelated and mutually influenced levels: intrapersonal or psychological, interpersonal, and environmental (Lee-Rife, 2010; Murphy-Graham, 2010, Roy, 2010) Of particular note were the high scores in the capabilities detection index and in the coping index. The former is a measure of the student's internal capabilities, and in keeping with previous studies, reflects changes at the personal level (Hazan, 2004; Murphy-Graham, 2010, Roy, 2010); the development of critical thinking on various issues (Robbins et. Al., 2002, White , 2010); recognition of one's internal and cognitivescholastic capabilities (Murphy-Graham, 2010, Roy, 2010); increased self-esteem and self-confidence (Blanchard, Carlos & Randolph 2003; Janssens, 2010); greater awareness of one's responsibility for providing solutions (Adams, 2003; Hassanpoor et al., 2012; Janssens, 2010; Shroff, 2010; White, 2010); and proactive action to improve one's quality of life (Bogler & Somech, 2004; White, 2010; Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz &Shroff, 2010;). The coping index measures the respondent's ability to deal with problems and challenges through, for example, an enhanced awareness of their internal ability to deal with problems and challenges (Hassanpoor et al., 2012; Rappaport, 1987; Spreitzer, 1996); the development of abilities to associate personal resources with achievements (Whiteside, 2009); the development of a sense of being able to make decisions and solve problems (Liden, Shroff, 2010; Wayne & Sparrow, 2000); and a stronger understanding of the importance of their involvement in decisions about their future when trying to achieving personal and organizational goals (Hassanpoor et al., 2012).

In addition, the findings show a positive relationship between parents' education and a sense of empowerment. The literature shows that higher education is a powerful aid in empowering the individual (Al-Haj, 2003). Similarly, studies show that an empowered person can also empower others (Gottlieb, 2000). Thus, the positive association between the education of the students' parents and their sense of empowerment is the outcome of the students' exposure to two empowering factors: that of a supportive and encouraging family, coupled with similarly empowering PAPP studies. When the parents speak the same language as the student is exposed to in his studies, they provide a fertile and supportive medium to help him succeed in his second attempt to become eligible for higher education.

Conversely, the findings show a negative correlation between religiosity and a sense of empowerment. This may be attributed to how empowerment paves the way and supports the individual's transition from a condition of helplessness or passivity, to one where he has a sense of greater control over the events of his life, and a greater ability to make decisions and actually influence the course of his life (Shroff, 2010; white, 2010). In addition, there was no evidence of a link between the economic situation of the student's family's and his or her sense of empowerment. This finding indicates that empowerment can take place irrespective of one's economic situation, and is a universal process based on the notion that every person has potential and capabilities that they can beneficially call upon to deal with the challenges in their lives (Adams, 2003; Hassanpoor et al., 2012), and it is obstacles and various other factors – internal or external – that prevent one from making the most of one's abilities and realizing one's aspirations. Empowerment can bolster motivation (Hassanpoor et al., 2012) and notions of what one is capable of (Hemric, Eury & Shellman, 2010), as well as the perception of oneself as part of a collective and solidarity with others in a similar situation, and a sense of personal responsibility and responsibility toward others (Hassanpoor et al., 2012; Janssens, 2010, White, 2010).

Academic studies at the pre-academic program at Sakhnin College make up 25% of the total curriculum, and include Arabic language studies, Education Fundamentals, Introduction to Sociology, Introduction to Psychology, and an Education & Empowerment course specially devised for the program. The latter course sees empowerment as meaning that every person has internal strengths, which find expression or not depending on the situations that they encounter in the course of their lives. Such empowerment helps develop positive self-esteem and recognition of one's own worth and that of others.

As a result of this process, the individual acquires the ability to formulate a clear position about himself and his life and to take responsibility for his actions, views and feelings. It is a transformation based on the individual's development of capabilities at the psychological and interpersonal levels, and in their relationship with external elements in the environment where a goaloriented group or person is operating.

It should be noted that studies in this course are conducted through workshops and active collaborative (consultative) learning. Students spend a significant part in the course either in presentations in which they share personal, interpersonal or social issues, or in discussions about current affairs.

The great majority of students reported that the Education & Empowerment course had a profound effect on them both personally and professionally, while Education Fundamentals had comparatively little effect on them on a personal level. As a result, the Education Fundamentals course has been replaced by one titled Education for Values, which will expose the students to basic concepts and instruct them on the theory and practice of values-based education. It will serve as an opportunity to learn the personal values of each student and of the group as a whole by way of real-world application. It will develop awareness of the ethical dilemmas and challenges facing each student, expose students to a democratic humanist worldview, and examine the extent to which it accords with, or contradicts, the Israeli society and educational system in general and the Arab society in Israel in particular. It will focus on the effect of the students' universal and subjective values on their chosen approach to life from a variety of options, and examine how repeated application of the students' values during their studies, empowers them and increases the effectiveness of the process, by linking their internal world of values andthe outside world.

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