



VALUES AND IDEOLOGY OF A CULTURE AS REFLECTED IN ITS KINDERGARTEN SINGING

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ABSTRACT

Singing is part of a nation's culture and reflects its values and ideology. Singing also constitutes a tool for instilling educational, social, and cultural messages. The purpose of this study is to compare the repertoire of songs sung nowadays in kindergartens in two geographical areas in Israel: the center of the country and the northern periphery. This is a comparative research. The population included kindergarten teachers, from both geographical areas. The research tools used were a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview.

Research findings show that there is a significant difference between the repertoire of songs selected by teachers working in kindergartens in the two different geographical areas. Significant differences were also found in the centrality of the various factors the kindergarten teachers consider as part of the purpose of singing. Kindergarten teachers in the northern periphery feel greater commitment to Ministry of Education's recommendations regarding songs in the kindergarten compared to kindergarten teachers in the center of the country.

If the Ministry of Education aims to lead to the creation of a core repertoire of commonly recommended songs for kindergartens in the country, it should formulate explicit guidelines for teachers and offer comprehensive training courses on this issue. Additionally, colleges of education should foster the awareness and judgment of teachers in making their musical choices, taking into consideration the existing tension between singing for imparting heritage and culture versus the natural need for renewal and change.

Keywords: Comparative Research, Ideology, Kindergarten, Kindergarten Teachers, Periphery, Song Repertoire

Introduction

Singing is part of a nation's culture and reflects its values and ideology. In Israel, singing has a central role in society, and some even call Israelis "the nation of song" (Shoked, 1993). Singing is a social activity that preserves a collective memory through a tradition of canonical and other musical works, which are part of the nation's cultural heritage. Music in general, and singing in particular, reflect processes in the formation of society and groups within it, and contribute to their cohesion and identity formation (Isaacson, 2014).

Singing also constitutes a tool for instilling educational, social, and cultural messages and values, and is an expression of the society's state of mind (Nakar, 2009). The centrality of singing in Israeli society is also expressed in the education system. In a study examining the development of songs in Israeli kindergartens between 1930 and 2010, Kahanovitz (2010) referred to the shifts that occurred in children's singing in kindergartens as reflecting changing ideologies in local culture. As a case study, her research focused on the repertoire of Hanukkah songs in kindergartens. She found that the characteristics of change that occurred in society over the years were reflected in current Hanukkah songs. Kahanovitz argues that in the past children's songs in the country reflected values and were written by real poets and composers, but today the main motivation for creating songs for young children is mostly financial.

In kindergarten, singing is an integral part of everyday activity,

and is the most common musical activity there (Sharpe et al., 2005). A study conducted in Israel found that kindergartens in Israel have no shared repertoire of songs and no defined criteria for their selection (Glushenkof and Shachar, 2004). It was also found that kindergarten teachers in Israel tend to flock after new songs, especially holiday songs (Kahanovitz, 2010). This argument is also supported by Ben-Zeev (2009), who claims that the songs in the preschool education system in Israel today constitute an economic industry where private contractors provide the music teachers and kindergarten teachers with new discs with shallow musical arrangements (mostly playbacks).

A study that examined what songs are sung in kindergartens led by students' mentor kindergarten teachers in the north of Israel (Geiger, 2013) found that in contrast to the above studies, in these kindergartens there is a shared repertoire of songs, and most of the songs are decades old.

The gap between the findings of the above studies, arguing that there is no shared repertoire of songs in Israeli kindergartens, and the findings of this latest study, led the researcher to conduct a comparative study examining a wider picture of the issue and comparing the situation in the country's center and northern periphery

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to discover what is the repertoire of songs currently sung in Israeli kindergartens in the gatherings led by kindergarten teachers in central Israel and in the northern periphery, and to examine whether there is a common

denominator between the repertoire of songs sung in kindergartens in these two different geographical regions.

This is a comparative research. The study's results illuminate the issue of the repertoire of songs in kindergartens in present-day Israel, in the center and in the northern periphery. The study population includes 87 kindergarten teachers in compulsory and pre-compulsory kindergartens, in secular and religious state kindergartens in the center and northern periphery of Israel.

The research tools included a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher and underwent reliability and validity tests. The questionnaire has three parts: Part A- where the kindergarten teachers listed the songs they sing with the children every day and at holidays, Part B- in which the kindergarten teachers described their positions regarding a few open questions about singing in kindergarten

Part C- in which the kindergarten teachers provided personal details about themselves and about the kindergartens where they work.

The questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS statistical software. The songs were coded and divided into content worlds: by subjects and chronology. The songs were divided chronologically into three groups: *new* songs (from the past decade), *current* songs (10-40 years old), and *veteran* songs (over 40 years old). Later, significant differences between the kindergarten teachers' age groups were examined, and differences between the geographical regions, in the context of the different study variables, in order to identify any statistically significant variance. The significant differences were examined using two statistical derivation tests: a t-test for two independent samples, and a One-Way Anova (analysis of variance) test.

The open questions and interviews underwent content analysis while systematically testing the qualitative data in order to identify patterns and categories. The data analysis method was carried out systematically and overtly, with careful transparency throughout the process stages. In order to protect the privacy of the kindergarten teachers participating in the study, their complete anonymity was maintained during the various stages of the study.

Findings

The study's findings show that most of the songs sung in kindergartens nowadays are in the categories: educational and general contents, nature and the seasons, and the daily routine. The main considerations for selecting the repertoire are: quality text, the song represents an important value, the melody is suitable for children's singing, and the song is a classic children's song. According to most of the study's participants, it is of great importance to preserve a core of canonical songs in kindergartens. However, more than half the study's participants noted that in their opinion it is equally important to introduce new songs to the kindergarten.

A difference was found between the song repertoire chosen by kindergarten teachers from the center and that of those from the northern periphery. In the north, *veteran* songs (over 40 years old) are more frequent compared with in the center (about 57%

compared with 40%, respectively), while *new* songs (from the past decade) were significantly more frequently mentioned by kindergarten teachers from the center (about 25% compared with about 8%, respectively).

Significant differences were also found in noting the centrality of the various factors the kindergarten teachers consider as part of the purpose of singing in kindergarten according to the geographical region where the kindergarten was located. The rate of kindergarten teachers from the center who noted the factor of the *children's enjoyment* as one of the most important was much higher compared with the rate of kindergarten teachers from the north who noted this factor. On the other hand, the rate of kindergarten teachers from the center who noted the factor of *connection to the Jewish tradition* as one of the most important was much lower compared with the rate of kindergarten teachers from the north who noted this factor.

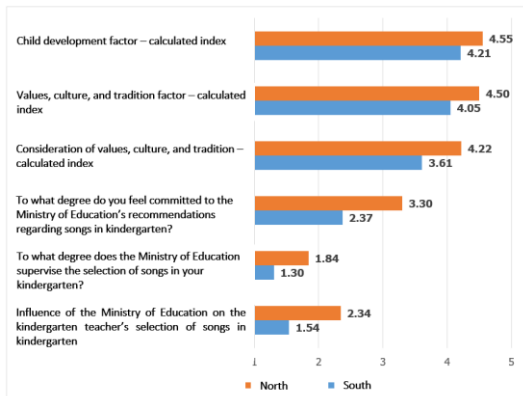
Gaps were found in the kindergarten teachers' evaluation of the main sources from which new songs reach the kindergarten, based on the kindergarten's geographical location. Thus, the rate of kindergarten teachers from the center who noted *Ministry of Education training seminars in which they participated* as one of the central sources for new songs was much lower (10%) compared with the rate of kindergarten teachers from the north who noted this source (about 34%). On the other hand, the rate of kindergarten teachers from the center who noted *sharing with colleague kindergarten teachers* as one of the main sources was much higher (about 77%) compared with the rate of kindergarten teachers from the north who mentioned this source (about 57%).

Significant differences were found between the kindergarten teachers in the different geographical regions regarding their evaluation of the following parameters (Figure 1):

- Child development factor (purposes of singing in kindergarten)
- Forms values, culture, and tradition (purposes of singing in kindergarten)
- Consideration of values, culture, and tradition (when choosing the songs)
- Degree of commitment to Ministry of Education recommendations regarding songs in kindergarten
- Degree of Ministry of Education supervision of song selection in kindergarten
- Ministry of Education influence on the kindergarten teacher's song selection

In all of these parameters, kindergarten teachers from the north gave significantly higher ratings compared with kindergarten teachers from the center.

Figure 1. Comparison of study findings by geographical regions (significant differences only)



As shown above, kindergarten teachers in the northern periphery feel greater commitment to the Ministry of Education's recommendations regarding songs in the kindergarten compared to kindergarten teachers in the center. Significant differences were also found in the kindergarten teachers' estimation of the degree of Ministry of Education's supervision and its influence over their selections.

Regarding the songs sung at kindergartens at holidays, the findings show that cultural classic songs have a significant place in Israeli kindergartens today. Most of the songs sung at holidays are *veteran* (over 40 years old) and *current* songs (10-40 years old), rather than *new* songs from the past decade. The younger kindergarten teachers tend to sing with the children fewer *veteran* songs compared with the older teachers. The study found that the decision whether to hold the holiday party with or without the parents' participation had an impact on the kindergarten teacher's choice of the song repertoire for the party, as noted by a kindergarten teacher in her interview: "Look, it makes a big difference if the party is with parents or without them. When we need to make a show we know how to do it, but if the party is without parents, we don't have to 'go crazy' with the whole production, new songs, lighting, we can be a lot more faithful to ourselves!" Another kindergarten teacher noted the importance of singing a repertoire of songs familiar to the parents at kindergarten parties, as part of the inter-generational connection: "I want to come to a party of my children and grandchildren where I know the songs, not as though I was in a night club". In this context of holiday songs in the kindergarten, no significant gaps were found between the kindergartens located in the center and in the north periphery.

Discussion and Conclusions

About 75% of the kindergarten teachers in the study have an academic degree (bachelors or masters). In terms of their age, about one third of the kindergarten teachers in this study are aged 35 and younger (the *younger* group), about a third were aged 36-45 (the *intermediate* group), and about a third were aged 46 and over (the *older* group). The mean age of the kindergarten teachers participating in the study was 42 years, with the age range being 23-66. The average work experience of the kindergarten teachers in this study was 14 years, with the range being 1-34 years of experience.

Significant differences exist between the songs sung in the center and those sung in the northern periphery. This finding supports the conclusion of Glushenkof and Shachar (2004), who found that kindergartens in Israel lack a shared repertoire of songs. In the northern periphery, *veteran* songs are more common than in the center, while *new* songs (written in the last decade) were more frequently mentioned by kindergarten teachers in the center compared to those in the north. In terms of song contents, *action and exercise* songs were more popular in kindergartens in the center compared with those in the north.

Regarding songs sung at holidays in the kindergartens, in contrast to the findings of previous studies (Ben-Zeev, 2009; Kahanovitz, 2010), this study found no significant gaps between kindergartens located in the different geographical regions. Despite the kindergarten teachers' interest in a current repertoire of songs for the kindergartens, a significant place is still reserved for the cultural classic *veteran* songs at holidays. The gap between the findings of this study and those of previous studies can be explained in two ways:

1. The decision whether to hold the holiday party with or without the participation of parents had an impact on the kindergarten teachers' choice of songs for the party.
2. The younger kindergarten teachers are likely to include fewer *veteran* songs in holiday parties compared with the older kindergarten teachers.

The differences between the songs sung in kindergartens in the center of Israel and those sung in the northern periphery are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Differences between songs sung in kindergartens in the center and those sung in the periphery

	Center of the country	Northern Periphery
Chronological age of the songs in the repertoire	Veteran songs are less frequent %39.62	Veteran songs are more frequent %57.01
	New songs significantly more frequently mentioned %25.16	New songs only mentioned %7.79
Purposes of singing in kindergarten	About 32% mentioned the children's enjoyment as the most important purpose	About 19% mentioned the children's enjoyment as the most important purpose
	About 1% noted connection to the Jewish tradition as one of the most important purposes	About 11% noted connection to the Jewish tradition as one of the most important purposes
Main sources of new songs for the kindergarten	%10 noted Ministry of Education training seminars	%34 noted Ministry of Education training seminars
	Sharing by colleague kindergarten teachers is a central source of new songs	Sharing by colleague kindergarten teachers is a marginal source of new songs

As mentioned, singing is a tool for conveying messages about educational, social, and cultural values, and is an expression of the society's ideals and values (Nakar, 2009). In this study, regarding the factor of *values, culture, and tradition* as a consideration for choosing songs for the kindergarten, teachers in the northern region rated it significantly higher than the kindergarten teachers in the center of the country.

In contrast to what is described in the research literature regarding singing in Israeli kindergartens in recent years, classical cultural songs, or canonical songs, still have a significant place in Israeli kindergartens at present.

As stated above, the study population included 87 preschool teachers, working in the center of the country and in the north periphery. They are all Jewish teachers and teach in State kindergartens. The northern periphery kindergarten teachers live in the Galilee and Golan Heights regions. Most of them are senior and not young. Some live and work in a kibbutz, some in a moshav (types of cooperative agricultural communities) and some in a town. The population is heterogeneous in terms of its religious background: secular, traditional, and religious. The kibbutz kindergarten teachers often include in their work Israeli songs that are cultural classics. The religious kindergartens frequently sing prayers, cantor songs, and blessings. The study's findings show that most of the kindergarten teachers from the northern periphery are more conservative in their musical choices and are captive in past traditions.

The research population in central Israel is composed mainly of secular kindergarten teachers, most of whom teach in urban kindergartens. They are heterogeneous in terms of age and work experience, with some being veterans in the profession while others are quite new. Most of them regularly participate in training seminars about music for preschool children. According to the study's findings, kindergarten teachers from the center were more liberal in their musical choices.

Isaacson (2014) argues that teaching songs is a social activity that preserves a collective memory through a tradition of canonical and other musical works that are part of the nation's cultural heritage. Music in general, and singing in particular, reflect processes in shaping the society and groups within it, and contribute to their cohesion and identity formation. The findings in this study may indicate that the collective memory and cultural heritage of the populations in these two different regions of the country are not identical.

If the Ministry of Education aims to lead a move of creating a shared core recommended repertoire of songs for kindergartens in Israel, it is worth providing the kindergarten teachers with explicit instructions, offering extensive training on this issue, and even exposing preschool education students at the teacher training colleges to recommendations concerning the recommended repertoire of songs for kindergartens. Additionally, colleges of education should foster the awareness and judgment of kindergarten teachers in making their musical choices, taking into consideration the existing tension between singing in kindergarten for imparting heritage and culture while

maintaining the connection between the generations, versus the natural need for renewal and change.

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