

# **EMPIRICAL RESEARCH OF RITUALS AS REFLECTING THE ISRAELI CULTURE IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

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**Abstract:** The research field in this article is state elementary schools in Israel. This field reflects only a part of the field of education but is suited for the examination of the existence of rituals that reflect the culture and influence the attitude towards authority and in this context the teacher's status. This is the assumption based on the sparse research conducted until now, according to which rituals are held even if unconsciously they reflect the culture and influence the attitude towards authority. The following two rituals were defined for this research study.

**Key words:** Morning meeting ritual, welcoming ritual in school, community, communication, educational institution, reflection.

## **1. Morning meeting ritual and the welcoming ritual in school as reflecting of the Israeli culture**

*Morning meeting ritual.* This addresses the meeting of the population of the parents and the students with the educational staff in the school every morning. This is a meeting between the family and the educational institution at the start of every day, and it occurs in the entry to the school, from the entry gate to the entry to the classes. The occurrence of the morning ritual can be expressed in different spaces in the school, such as, for example, the entry space in the school courtyard, or the entrance of the school, and in all open spaces outside of the classrooms. The ritual occurs in the time between the opening of the school gates beginning from 7:30 in the morning until the ringing of the entry to the classes at 8:00 in the morning. The ritual includes all the contacts and interactions

possible between all those who come to the school, including teachers and students, teachers and parents, and students and students.

*The welcoming ritual in the school.* This addresses the meeting between the school and the community of visitors who comes to it. This is a meeting of guest and host, when the host is the official institution. The ritual occurs in the entry space before the school secretary office and in the entire secretary office, and it can exist for all hours of the day and also on vacation days when the school secretary office operates regularly. In this ritual there is a meeting with the visitors in the school. This is a meeting between boundaries, between what belongs to the organization and what does not belong to the organization. It presents the coping with visitors who are the outside population of the school. This is an organization and its manners of entry. The welcome is that of the visitors from the outside and the one who receives them is the representation of the school – the secretary or the secretary office. The secretary office is for this issue like the living room of a house, where the guests go and where they are expected to host them until the figure they have come to meet is available.

## **2. Research Population**

To examine the characteristics of the rituals, the similar and the different components in the elementary schools in Israel, two stages will be implemented. The first stage has the objective of examining the similarity and the difference in the rituals, and the second stage has the objective of examining the degree of the teachers' awareness of its existence and degree of influence on the attitude to their status – the teacher's status. This stage will also include the examination among the population of parents who are partners in the holding of these rituals in the school and has influence on the attitude towards the teacher's status. In the first stage, a representative sample of one hundred (100) state elementary schools will be chosen. The focus on the elementary stage and the state sector meets the need

to focus on an identical age environment and to reduce intervening variables that derive from the different stages and sectors. The method of sampling of the schools will be undertaken with sampling of clusters proportional to their size (Beyt-Marom, Gordoni, & Zemach, 2009). The cities throughout Israel will be defined as clusters, and from the clusters cities will be randomly sampled from the north of the country, the center, and the south. From them schools will be randomly sampled relative to the size of the city in the method of the random number. In the second stage and on the basis of the data of the survey questionnaire, ten schools will be examined that will be found at the edges of the measures of similarity or difference of the general pattern of the rituals and in them observations and interviews will be held, as detailed in the continuation.

### **3. Research methodology, research instruments, and research questions**

The instruments that I will use for the collection of the data are a combination of quantitative instruments and qualitative instruments, when the quantitative instruments (survey questionnaire) will allow the examination of similarity and change and the qualitative instruments (interviews and observations) will reflect the respondents' viewpoint (Shkedi, 2003).

*Research Questionnaire.* A telephone questionnaire will be conducted with the relevant representatives of the schools (principal, vice-principal, secretary, etc.), so as to follow up after the characteristics of the rituals and the manner of their conduct. The questionnaire will include a number of parts:

- Demographic part. Number of students, staff, socioeconomic background (cultivation index), registration regions, etc.
- Characteristics of the rituals: frequency, duration, timing, number of participants, number of meetings, average length of the ritual.
- Management of the rituals.

In addition, in the schools chosen for in-depth research interviews and observations will be conducted.

*Interviews.* In every school, interviews will be conducted with the principal, a parent, and a teacher, so as to focus on their interpretation and perceptions of the rituals in the schools. A total of ten teachers, ten parents, and ten principals will be interviewed. The interview will include questions such as the following.

- In your opinion, why are the rituals held as they are held in the school?
- Are there guidelines regarding the holding of these rituals?
- If so, who gives these guidelines? If not, do they need guidelines or do they know what to do?
- How do they know what to do?
- To what extent are they satisfied with these rituals and with how they are held?
- What would they change and why?

*Observation.* Thirty (30) observations will be held on the two rituals, fifteen (15) on the welcoming ritual and fifteen (15) on the morning meeting ritual, so as to complete and to validate the findings from the other instrument.

### **Analysis of the Data**

The analysis of the data will be performed according to the research questions and according to the definition of the units of analysis in the interviews and observations, with the goal of characterizing the structure of the rituals, identifying the focuses of similarity and difference, and explaining the influence of these rituals on the teacher's status.

### **Reliability and Validity**

The combination of quantitative methods and qualitative methods, painstaking processes of sampling, validated questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews will enable the strengthening of the validity and reliability provided by

triangulation – multiplicity of sources, representativeness, variety of tools, and variety of viewpoints.

The performance of the research is conditional upon the achievement of the ethical approvals required from the Chief Scientist of the Ministry of Education.

### **Research Contribution**

This work may shed light on the hypothesis that culture is related to the actions and organizational practices held in organization similarly, as well as extend the definition of the routines and their organizational roles as recruiters of legitimacy from the near and broad environment. In addition, the research study has an applied contribution that is expressed in the better understanding of the routines with their advantages and disadvantages for the different audiences.

### **Research Questions**

1. How are the rituals of meeting and welcoming held in the state elementary schools in Israel?
2. What are the characteristics of similarity and difference of these rituals?
3. How are these rituals perceived and explained by the teachers and the parents?

### **Applied Contribution**

This work may illuminate the awareness of educators of the cultural reproduction in the framework of their everyday work and the cultural influence on their status in society.

The applied contribution is relevant to the programs of training and professional development of teachers and principals, especially in light of the leading reforms in the Ministry of Education – the New Horizon and Courage to Change Reforms. In the framework of these reforms, the teacher's professionalism today presents a demand for multidimensionality: a teacher is required to be in charge of the scholastic, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral

parts. The multiplicity of these roles does not allow and is contradictory to professionalism. In recent years, the loss of teacher authority and the greater burnout among the practitioners of the teaching profession have been increasingly noted. Therefore, every change that may be examined and implemented in the field of the teaching profession must take into consideration the values of the culture and not be at the expense of these values. The increase of effectiveness in this field should be done from within the framework of the values of the culture and not outside of it.

There is a contradiction, whether real or imagined, between the professionalism of the teachers and the culture that supposedly harms their authority. Thus, the following question is asked. Can teachers be professional in the culture that from the beginning places them in a problematic and low place in all that pertains to the attitude towards authority – and how? This can be a great challenge. Perhaps the teachers need to change? If so, they can change, by changing their behavior and creating a cultural space where the attitude towards authority is strengthened.

The contribution of this research study is, therefore, in the coping of the educators with the question of whether to change or not from the place of the knowledge and awareness of the culture, in its characteristics, for better and for worse.

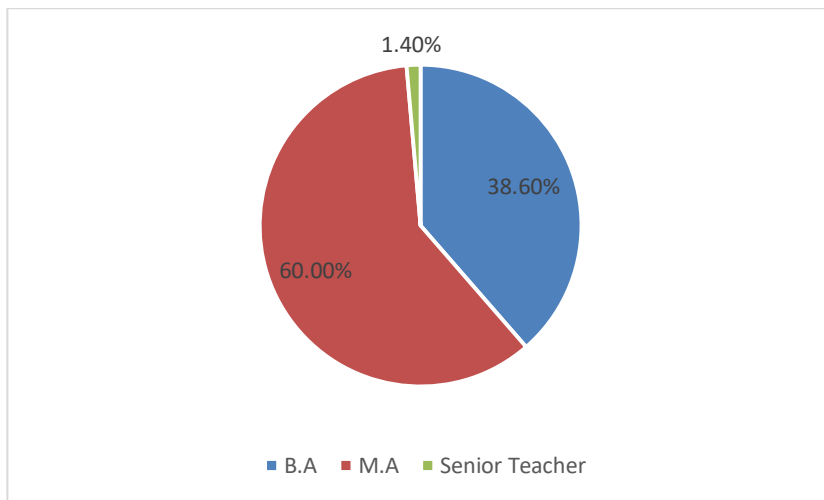
#### **4. Data analysis and interpretation of results**

##### ***Demographic details of research population***

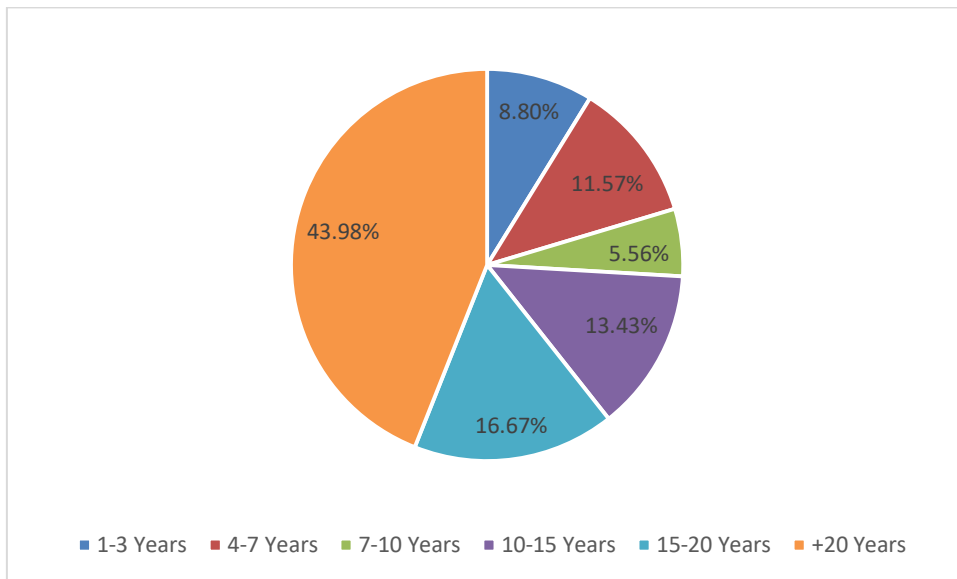
216 Teachers were sampled from 27 schools located around the country, 95.8% of which were women (N=207) and 4.2% were men (4.2%). 38.6% of the research population held a Bachelor's degree (N=60), 60% held a Master's degree (N=129) and an additional 1.4% were certified as senior teachers (N=3). Teachers' seniority varied from one year to over 20 years, with 8.8% having less than 3

years of experience in the profession (N=19), 11.6% working 4-7 years as teachers (N=25), 5.6% having 7-10 years of experience (N=12), 13.4% with 10-15 of previous working years (N=29), 16.7% with 15-20 years of experience (N=36) and 44% of the sampled population working over 20 years as school teachers (N=95).

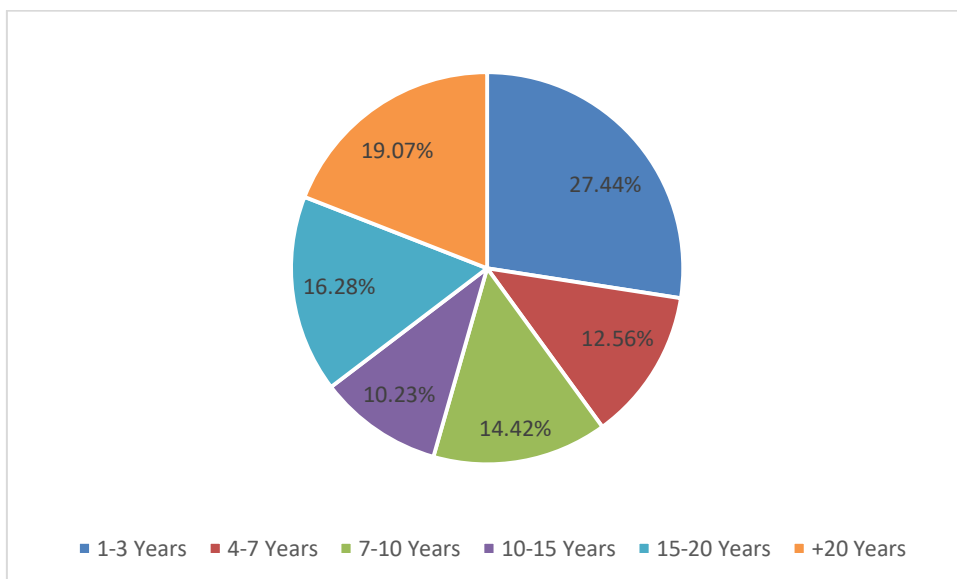
When asked about their seniority at their current workplace, 27.3% responded that they were occupied for 1-3 years at the same school (N=59), 12.5% had been working for the same school for 4-7 years (N=27), 14.4% for 7-10 years (N=31), 10.2% for 10-15 year (N=22), 16.2% spent 15-20 years at their current workplace (N=35) and an additional 19% were hired more than 20 years prior to responding to the survey (N=41). Figures 1,2 and 3 visualize information regarding the research population's formal education status and seniority.



**Figure 1. Teachers Formal Education**



**Figure 2. Years of Experience**



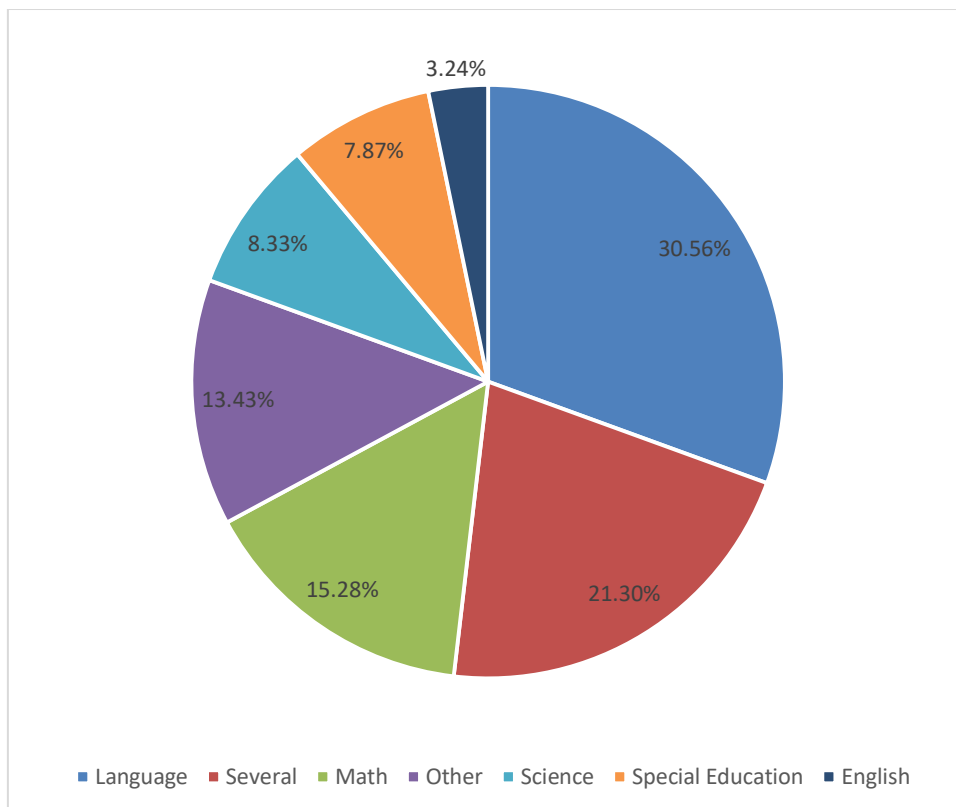
**Figure 3. Years of Experience at Current School**

Data regarding the participants main field of teaching and additional responsibilities at school was collected as well. 30.6% of the responders were

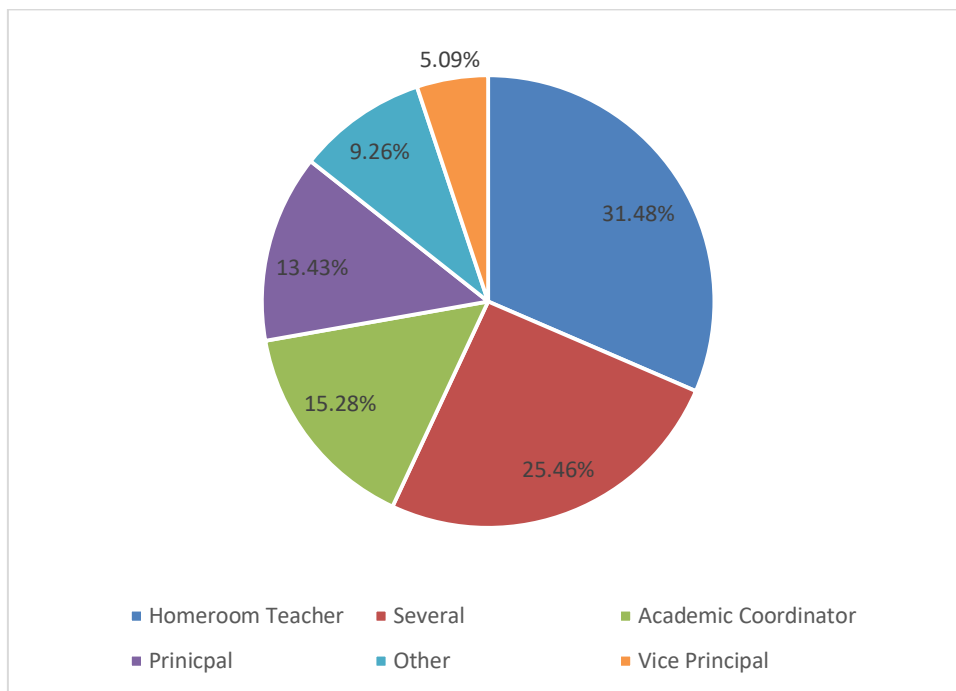


teaching language (N=66), 15.5% were math teachers (N=33), 18.3% were science teachers (N=18), 7.9% were special education teachers (N=17) and 3.2% were mainly teaching English (n=7). An additional 21.3% were teaching a mixture of several of the above (N=46) and the remaining 13.4% had a different main topic as their main field of work (N=29).

31.5% of the research population held a homeroom teacher position at the time of the response (N=68), 15.3% were coordinators of an academic topic in their school (N=33), 13.4% served as school principals (N=29), 5.1% were vice principals (N=11) and 9.2% had an additional responsibility other than the ones listed (N=20). The remaining 25.5% of the sample held more than one additional responsibility at once (N=55). Figures 4 and 5 visualize the distribution of teaching topics and additional responsibilities of the research population.



**Figure 4. Teaching Topics of the Sampled Teachers**



**Figure 5. Additional Responsibilities of the Sampled Teachers**

### ***Research Instruments***

*Morning Meeting Ritual Questionnaire*- Responders were asked to rate 21 statements regarding the morning meeting ritual on two scales- personal agreement (from 1- "Strongly Disagree" to 5- "Strongly Agree") and validity (from 1- "Very False" to 5- "Very True"). The agreement scale reflects responders agreement to each statement, while the validity scale sheds light on how much each of the statements is actually happening in real life. An additional 9 statements regarding personal feelings about the ritual were also rated on the same 5 level agreement scale.

5 Factors were calculated for each subject. Factors 1-4 were calculated twice- once for the agreement scale and once for the validity scale, while the fifth factor was only calculated for the agreement scale:

1. Ritual's contribution to communication with teachers (8 statements)-

Agreement scale internal reliability  $\alpha=.818$ , validity scale internal reliability  $\alpha=.882$

2. Ritual's contribution to students (2 statements) -

Agreement scale internal reliability  $\alpha=.791$ , validity scale internal reliability  $\alpha=.856$

3. Ritual's contribution to teacher's professionalism (5 statements) -

Agreement scale internal reliability  $\alpha=.769$ , validity scale internal reliability  $\alpha=.842$

4. Ritual's routine (5 statements) -

Agreement scale internal reliability  $\alpha=.501$ , validity scale internal reliability  $\alpha=.695$

5. Ritual's importance (calculated only for the agreement scale, 9 statements) -

Agreement scale internal reliability  $\alpha=.932$

***Results***

Table 1 summarizes the agreement scale results for each statement across the entire sample population. Table 2 showcases an equivalent analysis done for the validity scale. For convenience reasons the statements are listed by factors and not by their original presentation order within the questionnaire.

**Table 1. Agreement Scale Results for Statements and Factors.**  
*Calculated Factors are Underlined and in Italics*

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
<i>Ritual's contribution to communication with teachers</i>	<u>3.025</u>	<u>0.724</u>
The morning meeting ritual improves communication between the teachers and the parents' community.	3.653	1.089
The morning meeting ritual is important for parents' familiarity with the school staff	3.505	1.133
The morning meeting ritual is important for parents' involvement in their children's education.	3.278	1.102
The morning meeting ritual is important for parents' involvement	3.194	1.087
The morning meeting ritual aim is for parents and teachers to share information	2.819	1.177
The morning meeting ritual aim is for meant for parents to enhance their familiarity with the school	3.102	1.141
The morning meeting ritual mainly takes place between teachers and parents	2.380	1.023
The morning meeting ritual mainly takes place amongst parents and themselves	2.273	0.976
<i>Ritual's contribution to students</i>	<u>3.076</u>	<u>1.031</u>
The morning meeting ritual improves students academically	2.764	1.093

The morning meeting ritual improves students socially	3.389	1.172
<i>Ritual's contribution to teachers' professionalism</i>	<u>3.164</u>	<u>0.840</u>
The morning meeting ritual assists problem solving	3.185	1.210
Having a morning meeting ritual implies the school's strength	3.412	1.217
The morning meeting ritual showcases teachers' professionalism	3.241	1.257
The morning meeting ritual is an opportunity to unveil the school's activities	3.602	1.120
The topics discussed during the morning meeting ritual mostly revolve around problems	2.380	1.000
<i>Ritual's routine</i>	<u>2.866</u>	<u>0.726</u>
The topics discussed during the morning meeting ritual mostly revolve around compliments and positive feedback	3.102	1.169
The morning meeting ritual takes place every day	3.074	1.317
The morning meeting ritual takes place 2-3 times a week	2.894	1.277
The morning meeting ritual ends at the bell	2.995	1.342
The morning meeting ritual continues after the bell	2.264	1.173
<i>Ritual's importance</i>	<u>3.606</u>	<u>0.882</u>
The morning meeting ritual has a unique contribution to the school's positive image	3.495	1.149

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The morning meeting ritual enhances the teaching profession's prestige	3.106	1.251
The morning meeting ritual improves the teachers' status	3.171	1.210
The morning meeting ritual is a "must"	3.176	1.256
The morning meeting ritual has no importance (reversed statement)	4.319	0.854
Parents will support the morning meeting ritual because it improves their place within the school	3.069	1.021
I suggest cancelling the morning meeting ritual because it has negative implications on teachers' professionalism (reversed statement)	4.269	0.936
I suggest cancelling the morning meeting ritual because it has negative implications on teachers' image (reversed statement)	4.287	0.950
The morning meeting ritual has importance in many fields.	3.565	1.160

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**Table 2. Validity Scale Results for Statements and Factors. Calculated  
Factors are Underlined and in Italics**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
<i>Ritual's contribution to communication with teachers</i>	<u>2.732</u>	<u>0.806</u>
The morning meeting ritual improves communication between the teachers and the parents' community.	3.315	1.175
The morning meeting ritual is important for parents' familiarity with the school staff	3.056	1.144
The morning meeting ritual is important for parents' involvement in their children's education.	2.949	1.150
The morning meeting ritual is important for parents' involvement	2.843	1.101
The morning meeting ritual aim is for parents and teachers to share information	2.569	1.041
The morning meeting ritual aim is for meant for parents to enhance their familiarity with the school	2.694	1.108
The morning meeting ritual mainly takes place between teachers and parents	2.287	1.026
The morning meeting ritual mainly takes place amongst parents and themselves	2.144	0.956
<i>Ritual's contribution to students</i>	<u>2.81</u>	<u>1.079</u>
The morning meeting ritual improves students academically	2.546	1.060
The morning meeting ritual improves students socially	3.074	1.240

<i>Ritual's contribution to teachers' professionalism</i>	<u>2.856</u>	<u>0.925</u>
The morning meeting ritual assists problem solving	2.815	1.182
Having a morning meeting ritual implies the school's strength	3.069	1.250
The morning meeting ritual showcases teachers' professionalism	2.949	1.251
The morning meeting ritual is an opportunity to unveil the school's activities	3.181	1.235
The topics discussed during the morning meeting ritual mostly revolve around problems	2.264	0.960
<i>Ritual's routine</i>	<u>2.654</u>	<u>0.855</u>
The topics discussed during the morning meeting ritual mostly revolve around compliments and positive feedback	2.833	1.205
The morning meeting ritual takes place every day	2.847	1.377
The morning meeting ritual takes place 2-3 times a week	2.653	1.303
The morning meeting ritual ends at the bell	2.708	1.334
The morning meeting ritual continues after the bell	2.227	1.133

Most notably, every single "negative" statement regarding the morning meeting ritual (labeled as "reversed statements" in table 1) was rated higher than 4 on average, meaning responders were highly **in favor** of the described rituals (ratings for those labels were reversed during the analysis so they will follow the



general direction of the questionnaire, in which high scores reflect a positive attitude towards the ritual).

Also noteworthy is the fact that the research population sees the ritual as one that should be more valuable socially (average rating 3.389) than academically (average rating 2.764). the same pattern was apparent in the validity scale results, with an average rating of 3.074 for the social value of the ritual, in comparison to an average rating of 2.546 for the academic value of the ritual.

### ***Questionnaire Results by Teachers' Education***

The five factors calculated from the questionnaire were compared across different levels of teachers' education using a MANOVA procedure. The analysis yielded an insignificant difference between the groups [ $F(18,408)=0.495$ ,  $p=.960$ ]. None of the individual dependent factors were found to be significant by itself. Note that one of the groups of this analysis consisted of only 3 subjects, which may bias the results. Table 3 summarizes the results of the described analysis, Figure 6 provides a visualization of it.

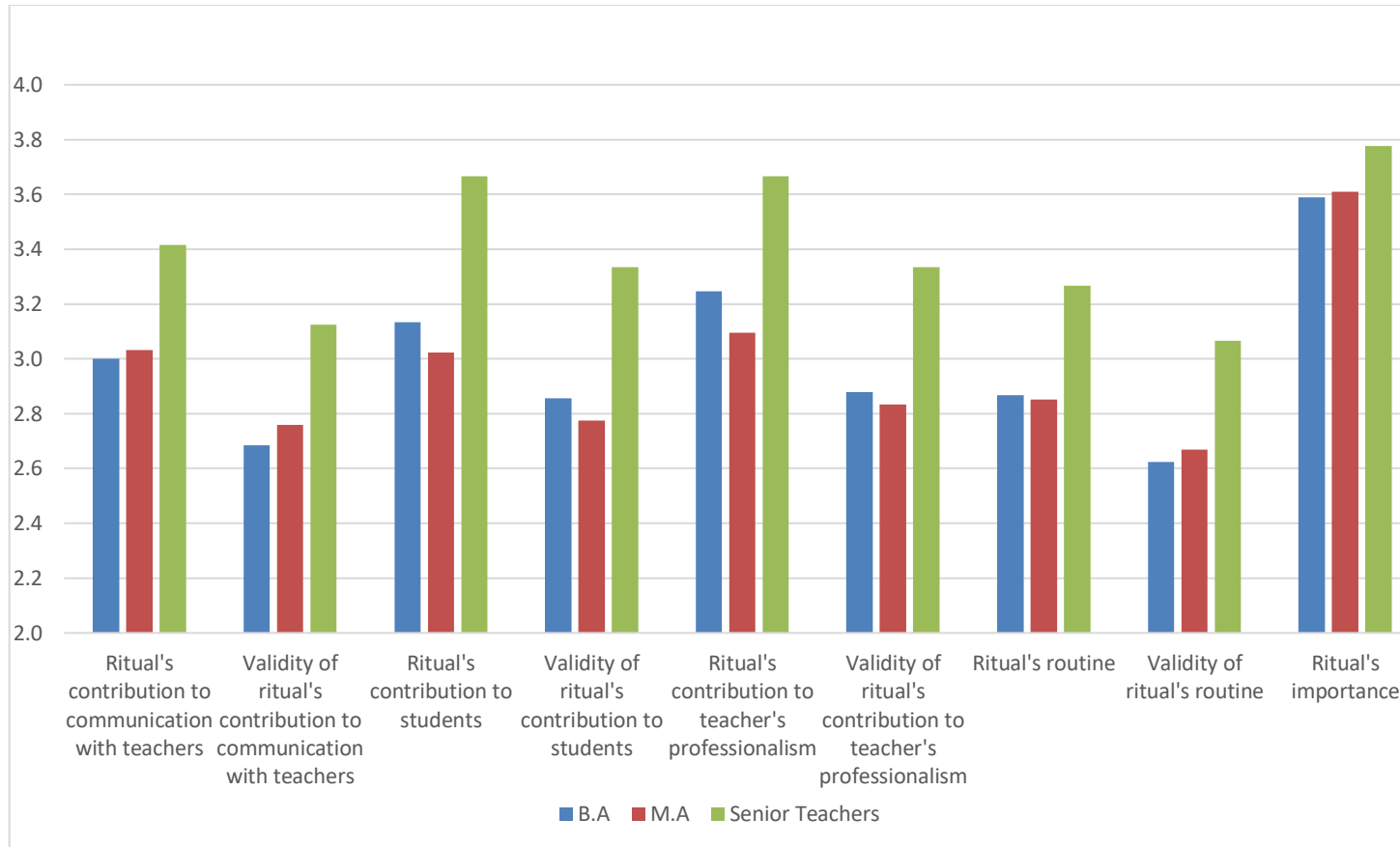
***Table 3. Questionnaire Results by Teachers' Education***

Factor	B.A (n=83)		M.A (n=129)		Senior Teachers (n=3)		F(2,212)	p value	$\eta^2$
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
	Ritual's contribution to communication with teachers	3.000	0.789	3.031	0.686	3.417			
Validity of ritual's contribution to communication with teachers	2.684	0.800	2.760	0.809	3.125	1.000	0.577	.562	0.004
Ritual's contribution to students	3.133	1.166	3.023	0.946	3.667	0.577	0.781	.459	0.002

Validity of ritual's contribution to students	2.855	1.095	2.775	1.082	3.333	0.289	0.489	.614	0.005
Ritual's contribution to teacher's professionalism	3.246	0.871	3.096	0.825	3.667	0.306	1.352	.261	0.003
Validity of ritual's contribution to teacher's professionalism	2.880	0.966	2.834	0.910	3.333	0.115	0.459	.633	0.005
Ritual's routine	2.867	0.795	2.851	0.688	3.267	0.306	0.479	.620	0.005
Validity of ritual's routine	2.624	0.874	2.668	0.854	3.067	0.115	0.414	.661	0.006
Ritual's importance	3.589	1.011	3.611	0.807	3.778	0.111	0.073	.930	0.009

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**Figure 6. Questionnaire Results by Teachers' Education**



### *Questionnaire Results by Teachers' Gender*

The five factors calculated from the questionnaire were compared across genders using a MANOVA procedure. The analysis yielded an insignificant difference between the groups [ $F(9,206)=1.604, p =.116$ ]. None of the individual dependent factors were found to be significant by itself as well. Note that one of the groups of this analysis consisted of only 9 subjects, which may bias the results. Table 4 summarizes the results of the described analysis, Figure 7 provides a visualization of it.

*Table 4. Questionnaire Results by Teachers' Gender*

Factor	Men (n=9)		Women (n=207)		F(1,214)	p value	$\eta^2$
	M	SD	M	SD			
Ritual's contribution to communication with teachers	3.000	0.488	3.027	0.734	0.012	.915	0.005
Validity of ritual's contribution to communication with teachers	2.833	0.679	2.728	0.812	0.148	.701	0.004
Ritual's contribution to students	3.000	0.661	3.080	1.045	0.051	.821	0.004
Validity of ritual's contribution to students	2.722	0.712	2.814	1.093	0.062	.803	0.004
Ritual's contribution to teacher's professionalism	3.356	0.706	3.156	0.846	0.488	.486	0.002
Validity of ritual's contribution to teacher's professionalism	2.844	0.698	2.856	0.935	0.001	.971	0.005
Ritual's routine	2.911	0.762	2.864	0.727	0.036	.849	0.005
Validity of ritual's routine	2.889	0.843	2.643	0.856	0.710	.400	0.001
Ritual's importance	4.086	0.571	3.586	0.889	2.801	.096	0.008

## **5. Conclusions**

The findings of this study show that parental involvement in their children's education is a product of the interrelationship between individual barriers and school barriers. Hence, it is necessary to improve teachers' practices as well as identify parental obstacles to involvement in their children's education. However, it may be more effective to focus on improving teacher practices rather than on parental variables because schools have more resources than parents in terms of educated teachers, established in-service programs, and funding for programs. Improving school practices to encourage active parental participation may be less of a challenge than improving the demographic status of low-socioeconomic status and single parents would be (Pryor, 2001). Muijs et al. (2004) stated that achieving parental involvement is one of the most difficult areas of school improvement in economically disadvantaged areas. One of the reasons for the difficulty may be related to the lack of pre- and in-service education (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002) for teachers on ways to initiate and practice parental involvement in the classroom. As a result, many teachers have reported a lack of relevant knowledge and have experienced uncertainty regarding ways to encourage parent involvement (Dauber & Epstein, 1993).

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