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**Kindergarten Teachers' Attitudes towards Cultivation of Social-
Emotional Competence and Social Information Processing in
Kindergarten Children**

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Long Abstract

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to add knowledge about the cultivation of cognitive-social-emotional competence in kindergarten children. It focuses on kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards the cultivation of social-emotional competence and social information processing in kindergarten children.

The study was conducted by the mixed-methods research approach. The research population consists of 65 kindergarten teachers who educate children aged 3-6 in public kindergartens of the Israeli Ministry of Education. The research instruments are an interview, an open-ended questionnaire and two close-ended questionnaires. The study has lasted two years, examining the intervention program 'Learning to live Together'. The program focuses on kindergarten teachers' role in the cultivation of social-emotional competence. It has been expanded in the cognitive dimension by the social information processing theory, under the new name 'Life in a Group'. The research question was: How does the intervention program dealing with social emotional competencies and social information processing competencies affect the knowledge and educational attitudes of the kindergarten teachers participating in the intervention program?

The research findings show that kindergarten teachers identify kindergarten children's social-emotional competences and are aware of the importance of applying these competences. Moreover, the study shows that kindergarten teachers relate to social-emotional experiences as opportunities for learning and identify children with social-emotional competences, attributing competences to them. Kindergarten teachers also develop the children's social-emotional competences in various ways. They consider it is important to provide the children's parents with tools for cultivating social-emotional competences. The research question illustrates that kindergarten teachers are aware of attitudes towards social-emotional competence and understand the concept of social information processing. Furthermore, the findings indicate that in social situations, kindergarten teachers relate to the expression and understanding of children's wishes and needs. They also relate to various characteristics of social aspects, e.g. reading the social map, solving problems, sharing, collaborating, extent of friendship relations, wish to play alone and social rejection as well as the effect of the social situation. In addition, the findings illustrate that kindergarten teachers relate to mediation in these situations and usually interpret them from the aspect of external locus of control.

The research findings show that the expanded intervention program is meaningful for the kindergarten teachers for the nurturing of an optimal climate in the kindergarten. However, the findings also underscore the importance of additional elements involved in this process, namely the kindergarten children's parents and the supervision department. The model developed by the present study can serve as a basis for a professional development program designed for educators aspiring to cultivate the social-emotional competences of children at young age.

Keywords: social-emotional competence, social information processing, kindergarten, kindergarten teachers' attitudes

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INTRODUCTION

“Mother said to me: Dany, my child is brave and wise. My child will never cry like a simpleton. I do not cry. Never. I am not a crybaby. These are just tears ... the tears ... they cry by themselves. A flower I gave to Nurit – small and pretty and blue. An apple I gave to Nurit I gave everything. Nurit ate the apple. The flower she threw in the yard. She went to play with a child – with another child. I never cry. I am brave, I am not a crybaby! But why, Mother, why do the tears cry by themselves? (Yalan-Shtekelis, 2005).

As implied by the naïve children’s song written by the children’s writer and poet Miriam Yalan-Shtekelis, life in a group entails coping with situations in which emotional-social-cognitive skills are required. These skills include the ability of emotional expression, emotional regulation, social-emotional understanding, joining and being integrated into a group. Moreover, they include the ability to see the other as well as to read the social map and the codes and norms that characterize it.

Changes in the educational perceptions, which led to the different view of children and the development of measurement and research techniques, focused and emphasized the importance of social-emotional learning for the natural, spiritual, mental development of children (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schallinger, 2011; Rosenthal, Gat, & Zur, 2009). Studies found that social-emotional prevention programs promote social competence and reduce behavioral problems (e.g. Schultz, Ambike, Stapleton, Domitrovich, Schaeffer, & Bartels, 2010). It was further illustrated that social-emotional learning supports processes of adjustment, positive attitudes towards the self and towards others, and academic success. These are expressed by prosocial behaviors and success in tests and low levels of behavioral problems, anxiety, tension, and depression (Brackett, Reyes, River, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012; Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003).

Acknowledgement of the importance of social-emotional learning is demonstrated also among parents and educators, researchers, and decision makers. Evidence can be found in the curricula of educational frameworks (Brackett et al., 2012; Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 2001) and in the formulation of procedures and standards of

social-emotional aspects in different states (Brackett et al., 2012). The first mediators of cognitive-social-emotional learning are the educators who are in charge of the educational frameworks and the children who are educated in them. Educators' attitudes towards social-emotional learning may affect the implementation, perseverance, consistency, and degree of impact of the programs on the social-emotional climate in the educational framework and on the individual development of every child in this aspect (Brackett et al., 2012; Guskey, 1988; Heo, Cheatham, Hemmeter, & Noh, 2014; Reinke, Stomont, Herman, Rohini, & Nidhi, 2011; Renjul et al., 2010).

The present study seeks to research the attitudes of the kindergarten teachers towards the cultivation of social-emotional competence and social information processing in the kindergarten.

The Kindergarten from a Historical Perspective

The first Jewish kindergarten was launched in 1898 in the Land of Israel. With the establishment of the State of Israel, the Compulsory Education Act was legislated in 1949. The Compulsory Education Act stipulates that the State is responsible for providing free compulsory education in a recognized educational institution to all the children in Israel, between the ages of three and seventeen years. Moreover, the Act stipulates that children's parents are obligated to send their children to such an institution. The principle underpinning the Compulsory Education Act is equal opportunities in education for all the children of the State, without discrimination on the background of economic situation, ethnicity, or gender. In the year 1953 the State Education Act was legislated, eliminating the method of the currents in education on an ideological and party-based background. The Act determined that the State is responsible for establishing state education. Following the legislation of this Act, two main types of education were conceived in Israel – state education and state-religious education (over the years, the Act was amended, adding inclusive state education). The Act regulates the goals of every educational current, curricula, supervision as well as the its adjustment to the needs of non-Jewish students (Weissblay, 2013).

Today, education and care during early childhood in Israel are divided between two main governmental bodies: Ministry of Welfare, in charge of daycare centers and nurseries

for children from birth to the age of three, and the Ministry of Education, in charge of preschools and kindergartens, for children aged three to six. In Israel it is customary to divide children aged three to six into separate classes according to the age group: children three years old, children four years old, and children five to six years old. Sometimes, a number of age groups are placed together (for example, children aged four to six). Hence, in this thesis, each type of setting is defined according to the literal translation of the Hebrew terms used in Israel. Children aged five to six are in the *kindergarten (compulsory)*, children aged four are in the *pre-kindergarten*, and children aged three are in the *pre-pre-kindergarten*.

The kindergarten core program includes the curriculum on the topics of preparation for reading and writing, mathematics, sciences and technology, physical education, arts, and life skills. State-religious education includes an additional core program adjusted to its worldview (<http://edu.gov.il/special/Curriculum/pre-school/Pages/kindergarten-list-of-subjects-arab.aspx>).

Kindergarten Teachers' Attitudes towards Cultivation of Social-Emotional Competence and Social Information Processing in Kindergarten Children

Many researchers and many studies emphasize the importance of social-emotional competence and social information processing to the social integration and adaptation. The educational framework in which many children are educated under the supervisory eye of the educational staff, offers many diverse social situations. These situations can evoke distress, anger, and aggression but they can also develop skills that can facilitate the children's processes of integration and adjustment (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Educational frameworks that are managed by a leading educator who is a kindergarten teacher are advantageous for the development of cognitive-social-emotional skills. This led to the development of prevention and intervention programs for this type of learning. Most of the programs are designed for kindergarten children and school children. Some are delivered by outside instructors and some by the educators in charge of the educational framework. Some programs also involve the parents in the learning process, creating a continuum between the educational framework and the home. Some of the programs are accompanied by assessment studies and some not. However, in most of these

programs and assessment studies, there is no reference to the educators who are in charge of the educational framework and to their important role in the cultivation of cognitive-social-emotional skills.

The present study discusses the 'Life in a Group' Intervention Program and includes an extension to the program provided in the framework of the research of social information processing. The program is designed for educators, and more precisely, for kindergarten teachers who educate children aged three to six. The program addresses life in the group, the social-emotional experience, and the social contacts that characterize them during children's life routine in the educational framework. The program develops a toolkit for kindergarten teachers, focusing on empathy, integration in shared games, as well as conflicts and arguments. The extension of the program copes with the understanding of the social information processing model of Crick and Dodge (1994) and its impact on the social-emotional functioning.

In addition, few research instruments that address educators' attitudes towards and beliefs related to social-emotional learning, have led to the design of a close-ended questionnaire on this topic for the purpose of the present study. For the extension of the research on the topic of social information processing within the framework of the present study, a close-ended questionnaire was designed. It applies to the kindergarten teachers with regard to the topic of social information processing.

Research Boundaries

The present study was conducted during the years 2017-2018 in the city of Petah Tiqwa located at the center of Israel. The research population consisted of kindergarten teachers who teach in the Ministry of Education kindergartens for children aged three to six. As part of their professional development as educators, the kindergarten teachers attended the intervention program 'Life in a Group' at the PISGAH center (a professional institution for the development of teaching staff in the education system in Israel) in Petah Tiqwa. Further extension on the program, dealing with the topic of social information processing, was given to the kindergarten teachers within the framework of the present study. The research instruments upon which the process is based are interviews, an open-ended questionnaire, and two close-ended questionnaires.

CHAPTER I: Theoretical Fundamentals Underpinning the Research Entitled “Kindergarten Teachers’ Attitudes towards Cultivation of Social-Emotional Competence and Social Information Processing in Kindergarten Children”

The present study explores kindergarten teachers’ attitudes towards the cultivation of social-emotional competences and social information processing in kindergarten children. The study is grounded in the idea that social-emotional competence and social information processing are important for integration and social adjustment. In the present study, the educational framework relates to the kindergarten, in which young children are educated under the supervision of an educational staff. It constitutes a ‘hothouse’ that offers numerous and diversified social opportunities for emotional-social-cognitive learning.

There are varied prevention and intervention programs designed for young children’s emotional-social-cognitive learning. Review of these programs illustrates that they are sometimes delivered by external instructors and sometimes by educators of the educational framework. Moreover, there are prevention and intervention programs that integrate work with the parents in order to form a continuation between the process transpiring in the educational framework and the children’s home. There are assessment studies of some programs but most of the studies do not relate to the educators and their important role in the cultivation of social-emotional-cognitive competences.

The present study explores the intervention program entitled ‘Life in a Group’, including an extension of the topic of social information processing. This intervention program is designed for educators, more precisely kindergarten teachers who educate children aged 3-6. The contents in which the program engages focus on social-emotional experiences and social contacts with which the children cope as part of life in the kindergarten group. The program aims to develop a toolkit for kindergarten teachers, providing tools for empathy development, integration in shared games, conflicts and quarrels. The program extension engages in the understanding of the social information processing model conceived by Crick and Dodge (1994) and the effect thereof on social-emotional functioning.

The small number of research instruments dealing with the research topic entailed the design of a close-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire investigates kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards the degree of importance attributed to social-emotional competence indices, the translation of a questionnaire examining educators' beliefs about social-emotional learning and the formulation of an open-ended questionnaire adapted to kindergarten teachers with regard to social information processing. All this was done for the purpose of extending the present study on the issue of social information processing.

The present study is grounded in three main theory. The first theory is the attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1988), the second is the learning theory and social learning theory conceived by Bandura (1977, 1988) and the third is the mediation theory (Feuerstein, 1991; Klein, 2008). The key concepts derived from these theories are social-emotional competence (Denham, 1998; Howes, 1987; Katz & McClellan, 1997), social information processing (Crick & Dodge, 1994) and mediation (Feuerstein, 1991; Klein, 2008). Consequently, the intervention program 'Life in a Group' underpins the conceptual framework of the present study and the following key terms are derived from it: kindergarten, kindergarten teachers' attitudes, social-emotional competence and social information processing.

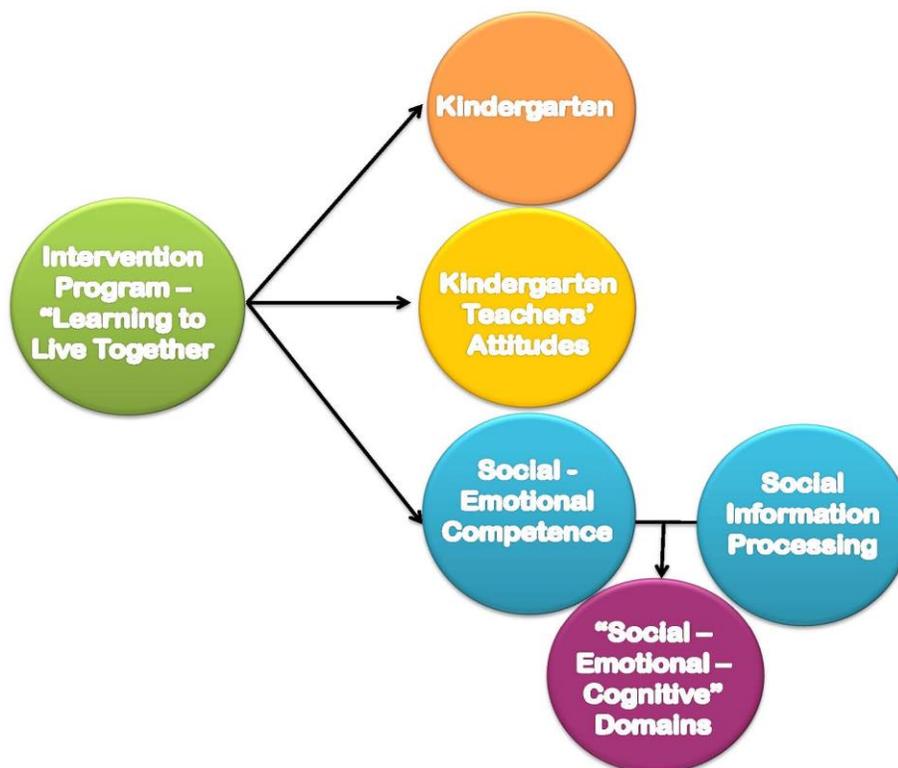


Figure 1.I: Model of the Theoretical Framework

Kindergarten – the kindergarten is a concept that was minted in 1873 in Germany by Friedrich Fröbel. The concept expanded to the entire world, including the Land of Israel, where the first kindergarten was set up in 1898. Today, the Compulsory Education Act is enforced in the State of Israel and it applies to children aged 3-17 (Snapir, Sitton, & Russo-Zimt, 2012).

Kindergarten teachers' attitudes – attitude is a theoretical concept that represents “a disposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object, person, behavior or event” (Ajzen, 2005, p. 3). Studies illustrate that educators' attitudes towards social-emotional learning might affect the social-emotional response to children in the educational framework and children's development in this aspect (Brackett et al., 2012; Guskey, 1988; Heo et al., 2014; Reinke et al., 2010).

Social-emotional competence – social-emotional competence encompasses emotional competences and social competence that are manifested by emotional, cognitive and behavioral competencies that affect and are mutually affected each other (Domitrovich et al., 2007). Social competence relates to prosocial and antisocial behaviors, demonstrated by competencies, such as conflict settlement, cooperation and friendship, ability to see others and ability to express wishes in words. Emotional competence relates to emotional expression, emotional regulation and social-emotional understanding (Denham, 1998; Howes, 1987; Katz & McClellan, 1997).

Social information processing – social information processing focuses on social cognition and is grounded in the assumption that social behavior, whether adjusted or non-adjusted, stems from a behavioral-cognitive mechanism that is activated as a response to social cues. The present study is based on the social information processing model of Crick & Dodge (1994) and it consists of six mental stages that lead to social behavior: encoding of cues, interpretation of cues, clarification of the goal, response access or construction, response decision and behavioral enactment.

To sum up, the conceptual framework model illustrates that the intervention program 'Life in a Group' attributes importance to kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards social-emotional competence and social information processing. The intervention program aims to affect kindergarten teachers' attitudes so that they can have an effect on the cultivation of children's social-emotional-cognitive competence and on the kindergarten climate that is eventually shaped by the kindergarten teachers.

CHAPTER II: Intervention Program 'Learning to Live Together'

This program (Bar, 2007; Rosenthal et al., 2009) is an instruction program intended for early childhood educators. The program was developed at the Learning Center for Early Childhood of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and was based on research and applied knowledge. The program engages in social life in the group, children's emotional-social experience while learning in the educational framework, the different social contacts between the children, the expression of empathy and concern for others, attempts to be integrated into shared games, conflicts, and arguments, and the way in which children adjust themselves to the different groups during the first years of their lives. The program was originally written for educational teams working with young children from birth to three years of age. Later on, the program was adapted the kindergarten teachers and their teaching assistants who work with children aged three to six in the kindergarten (Kindergarten in Israel is the name of the educational setting for children aged three to six, a setting that includes what may be called preschool and prekindergarten in other countries) framework. The fundamental assumption of the program is that kindergarten teachers need a professional toolkit for the cultivation of social emotional climate in the kindergarten. The toolkit can help them to see and identify social emotional situations in the kindergarten as a source of learning, know how to respond, and how to intervene in these situations. The objectives of the program are as follows:

- To make accessible theoretical and research knowledge about the development and social-emotional learning of children.
- To build practical knowledge (toolkit) based on the kindergarten teachers' training in identifying social-emotional experiences in the kindergarten as opportunities for leaning, as teachable moments, and improve the intervention skills and ways of

response to social-emotional situations in the kindergarten as well as the promotion of empathy, emotional discourse, regulation, and self-restraint.

- To make the program participants aware of the attitudes towards and beliefs about social-emotional competence. This goal is a main component of the program, and it is grounded in the assumption that all people have attitudes and beliefs accumulated from their childhood memories, their experiences as children and as adults. All these affect people's ways of response in social emotional situations.

The program attributes importance to the inculcation of knowledge and the promotion of professional abilities through the clarification of attitudes and beliefs. The objective is to change these attitudes and beliefs from implicit to explicit, process them, and create, along with the new knowledge acquired in the program, the professional attitude.

The group sessions of the program engage in three types of issues. The first is the group experience and the sense of belonging to the group, empathy and prosocial behavior. The second is joining the game, and the third is settling conflicts between the children. The group instruction is accompanied by video clips that were filmed in the kindergartens and that enable viewing authentic social-emotional events of children's social initiatives and quality interventions of the kindergarten teachers. Moreover, the program is accompanied by three instruction films, presenting different models of quality interventions different social situations, which occur in early childhood educational frameworks. The films were planned so that they summarize each chapter of the instruction program ("Children Learn Empathy", "Children Learn to Play Together", "Children Learn to Settle conflicts and Confrontations").

Parallel to these issues and as part of the experiential and workshop-type activity that characterizes the training process, the group experience of the group participants emerges. The group experience underscores social-emotional events that are formed within the group participants and the inference derived from them about group situations with which the children need to learn to cope in the educational framework. Thus, a situation is essentially created, whereby the team members themselves 'learn to live together'. The nature of the sessions, as described previously, invites the educators to cope with intuitive

attitudes towards and beliefs about children’s social-emotional behavior at its different levels.

The program includes ten group sessions under the guidance of an instructor, trained and accredited on behalf of the program management. The following table presents the syllabus of the training program ‘Life in a Group’.

Table 1.II: Syllabus of the Training Program ‘Learning to live together’

Session	Topic
1	Opening & getting acquainted group experience: group code, emotional social climate
2	Group experience: Who is the social child? What is social ability?
3	Empathy: Definition, development of empathy
4	Empathy: Continuation
5	Empathy: Toolkit for kindergarten teachers
6	Joining the game: What is required of the child in order to join the group?
7	Joining the game: Identification of strategies for joining the game and toolkit for the kindergarten teacher
8	Conflicts: The difference between conflict, aggression, and violence
9	Conflicts: Continuation and toolkit for the kindergarten teacher
10	Comprehensive and integrative summary of the in-service training course

The program was implemented over the years in different educational frameworks in Israel, and reports of the program participants’ impressions were collected. One empirical assessment research of the program was conducted in daycare centers in Israel among children aged 15-24 months and 24-36 months (Bar, 2004). The study examined the effect of the intervention on the dimensions of educators’ behaviors in different correlations (experiment group and control group and the differences between and in the group of younger toddlers and the group of older toddlers). The study also explored the effect of the educators’ attendance in the intervention program on the popular, social

measures and emotional-social competence among the children. The findings related to the differences between the intervention group educators and the control group educators showed that the intervention groups (both in the group of younger toddlers and the group of older toddlers) were more supportive of moments of the children's emotional arousal (for instance, hugging, speaking softly and calmingly in situations of emotional arousal), cultivated more the social-emotional competence (for instance, settling conflicts and joining play), and adopted fewer behaviors that undermined the acquisition of social-emotional competence (the educators' harmful behaviors towards the children compared to the control group educators. In the dimension of the reference to difficulty, which was also examined in the study, no differences were found between the intervention group and the control group. In general, the findings illustrated that compared to the control group teachers, the intervention group educators (both the teachers in the younger toddler group and the educators in the older toddler group), behaved towards the children with greater warmth, displayed more pleasure and enthusiasm, and were less critical, punishing, and threatening in their contacts with their children. Furthermore, the educators' attendance in the training program contributed to the trend of change in the expected direction of behavior of both the children and the caregivers. Nevertheless, no significant change was found and the research hypotheses that pertained to the

CHAPTER III: Research Methodology describing the Research Entitled: "Kindergarten Teachers' Attitudes towards Cultivation of Social-Emotional Competence and Social Information Processing in Kindergarten Children"

III.1 Research Aim

To explore the effect of the intervention program dealing with social-emotional competencies and social information processing competencies designed for kindergarten teachers on the attitudes of kindergarten teachers attending the intervention program.

III.2 Research Questions

Main research question:

How does the intervention program dealing with social-emotional competencies and social information processing competencies affect the attitudes of the kindergarten teachers attending the intervention program?

Secondary research questions:

1. What are the kindergarten teachers' attitudes toward cultivation of social-emotional competencies and social information processing competencies in the kindergarten?
2. What are the kindergarten teachers' attitudes toward social information processing competencies in the kindergarten?
3. Does the intervention program dealing with social-emotional competencies affect the attitudes and beliefs regarding social-emotional competencies of the kindergarten teachers attending the intervention program?

III.3 Research Hypotheses

The present study hypotheses affirm that following the attendance in the intervention program:

1. An increase will be found in the kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards their ability to develop the children's social-emotional competencies and social information processing in comparison with the kindergarten teachers in the 'control group'.
2. An optimal change will be illustrated in the kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards their ability to affect the children's social and emotional behavior.
3. An increase will be found in the kindergarten teachers' positive behaviors and cultivation of social-emotional competencies and social information processing competencies.

III.4 Research Variables

- Independent variable – the application of the intervention program which consists of cultivating kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards social information and social-emotional competencies
- Dependent variables

- The developmental stages of attitudes towards cultivation of social-emotional competence in kindergarten children
- The developmental stages of attitudes towards social information processing in the kindergarten children
- The attitudes of the kindergarten teachers on the topic of social-emotional competence and social information processing
- The kindergarten teachers' beliefs towards social emotional learning
- The ways of response of the kindergarten teachers in social situations that occur in the kindergarten

Table 1.III The Dependent variables according to research methods and research tools

Dependent variable	Method	Tool	Tool's Characteristics
The developmental stages of attitudes towards cultivation of social-emotional competence in kindergarten children	Interview	List of questions Grid of interview	original contribution
The developmental stages of attitudes towards social information processing in kindergarten children	Interview	List of questions Grid of interview	original contribution
The attitudes of the kindergarten teachers on the topic of social-emotional competence and social information processing	Survey	Open-ended questionnaire	original contribution
The kindergarten teachers' beliefs towards social emotional learning	Survey	Closed-ended questionnaire	Assessing Teachers' Beliefs About Social and Emotional Learning Marc A. Brackett ¹ , Maria R. Reyes ¹ , Susan E. Rivers ¹ , Nicole A. Elbertson ¹ , and Peter Salovey ¹ ,

The ways of response of the kindergarten teachers in social situations that occur in the kindergarten	Survey	Open-ended questionnaire	Original contribution
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III.5 Research Paradigm

The research paradigm chosen for the present study is the mixed methods approach, since the topic of study requires a depth and breadth research, validity and reliability, and generalization ability. In mixed methods research, the advantages of one approach compensate for the disadvantages of the other approach, and vice versa.

III.5.1 Mixed Methods Research

The mixed methods research combines the qualitative research paradigm and the quantitative research paradigm within the framework of one study. This integration provides new approaches to the collection and analysis of the data obtained from the two paradigms according to the research question. The research data can be built on one another or be embedded one in the other. The research design outlines a combination of elements from one paradigm with elements from another paradigm (Creswell & Clark, 2011). The goal of the mixed methods research is to learn about one paradigm from another paradigm, leading to a better understanding of the researched event (Greene, 2007).

There are opinions for and against the combination of quantitative and the qualitative approaches. Those who argue against the mixed methods approach stipulate that the theoretical basis and fundamental assumption of the two approaches are different. The combination of the approaches is also problematic and inspires deliberations regarding the limited or extensive research design, generalizability, and prediction, as opposed to a single method research. Additional arguments address the fact that the mixed methods research prolongs the duration of the research and requires multiple resources. Researchers need to be well versed in the two paradigms, and be able to deal with the complexity in the synthesis of the findings.

The proponents of the mixed methods research argue that the integration of the quantitative and qualitative methods provides a richer picture of the discussed event, as well as a deep and broad view of the field. Moreover, they maintain that there are fields that require a quantitative assessment and the addition of a qualitative component enriches the understanding. Additional arguments relate to the fact that the mixed methods research increases the depth of knowledge of the research field, enriches the corpus of knowledge, and validates the findings through the use of different approaches (Alpert; 2010; Creswell, 2009; Tuval-Mashiach, 2013). Since every approach has limitations, researchers feel that the integration of the different approaches can neutralize the disadvantages of each one of the approaches. In a mixed methods research, the different approaches can support one another and data from one approach can develop data for the other approach.

In the past two decades, the mixed methods research has become an inseparable part of the world of research. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) also maintain that the mixed methods research can be considered as a third methodological approach.

III.6 Action Research

The first action studies were conducted in the field of social psychology, and they focused on the settlement of conflicts and re-education of human society after the two world wars. Action studies were also transferred to additional areas of knowledge, including education (Zelrmair, 2016).

The initial definitions of action research in the field of education describe a research in which there is intervention by a researcher or a group of researchers. The intervention aims to improve the students' learning contents and the teachers' work conditions. Moreover, the goal of the intervention is to inculcate a new way of teaching, which the researchers explain to the educators. The educators cooperate in the process of the data collection, and the researchers have knowledge of and authority in the researched field and in the hypotheses that pertain to the research results. The researchers interpret the data, trying to see whether a change in the educators' attitudes was generated. The criticism of such action studies maintains that the researcher-respondent relationship is technical, and the research respondents are not partners to the identification of the problem that motivates the research. Critics also argue that these studies enable researchers to manipulate the

research variables or the respondents in order to affect the effectiveness of the intervention in the research (Zelrmair, 2016).

The present study is a self-action research, in which I, the researcher, focus on the kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards the topic of the children's social experience in the kindergarten, with the purpose of enhancing the intervention program. In order to assess the quality of the research and obtain professional feedback, I seek the advice of people in the academia who serve as counselors and critics (Zelrmair, 2016).

III.7 Research Stages and Tools

Table 2.III: Research Design: Mixed methods and constatative - experimental - research

Research stage	Aim	Methods	Tools	Research population	Data analysis
1.a. A constatative research (Qualitative)	To collect data regarding the attitudes of the kindergarten teachers on the topic of social emotional development and social information processing	Interviews	List of questions Interview guide - original contribution	5 kindergarten teachers	Content analysis
	To examine ways of response of the kindergarten teachers in social situations that occur in the kindergarten	Survey on the analysis of events	Open-ended questionnaire composed of 2 social situations from the kindergarten based on the topics of the intervention program	12 kindergarten teachers participating in the intervention program	Content analysis

1.b. A constatative research (Quantitative)	To examine the attitudes of the kindergarten teachers on the topic of social-emotional competence and social information processing	Survey	Closed-ended questionnaire - original contribution	34 kindergarten teachers – in-service training	Statistics
Implementing the intervention program: ‘Learning to Live Together’					
An experimental research	To collect data regarding attitudes of the kindergarten teachers on the topic of social emotional development and social information processing	Interviews	List of questions Interview guide - original contribution	5 kindergarten teachers	Content analysis
	To examine ways of response of the kindergarten teachers in social situations that occur in the kindergarten	Survey	Open-ended questionnaire	11 kindergarten teachers who participated in the intervention program	
	To examine the attitudes of the kindergarten teachers on the topic of social-emotional competence and social information processing	Survey	Closed-ended questionnaire - original contribution	25 kindergarten teachers in the experimental group and 26 kindergarten teachers in the control group	
	To examine the kindergarten teachers’ beliefs towards social emotional learning	Survey	Closed-ended questionnaire	31 kindergarten teachers in the experimental group and 27 kindergarten	

				teachers in the control group	
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Total number of kindergarten teachers participating in the research: 65

CHAPTER IV: Findings Emerging from the Various Research Tools

IV.1 Findings emerging from research question 1 and Hypothesis 1

- What are the kindergarten teachers' attitudes toward cultivation of social-emotional competencies and social information processing competencies in the kindergarten?
- An increase will be found in the kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards their ability to develop the children's social-emotional competencies in comparison with the kindergarten teachers in the 'control group'.

Table 1.IV: Themes and Related Categories

Theme	Identification of the Social and Emotional Competencies	
Category	1. Identification of the kindergarten children's social competencies	<i>"I actually identify the social competencies..."</i>
	2. Use of the kindergarten children's social competencies	<i>"... So I would actually know that the same child in the same situations really had such a role, to come and talk to her and to attempt to mediate"</i>
	3. Identification of the kindergarten children's emotional competencies	<i>"If there is such a child that I actually know is gifted with emotional intelligence..."</i>
	4. Use of the kindergarten children's emotional competencies	<i>"Like if they see somebody is crying then they immediately go to him..."</i>

IV.2 Findings emerging from Research Question 2 and Hypothesis 2

- *What are the kindergarten teachers' attitudes toward social information processing competencies in the kindergarten?*
- An optimal change will be found in the kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards their ability to influence the children's social and emotional behavior.

Table 2.IV: Themes and categories derived from the open-ended questionnaire after the intervention program

Theme	Emotional Aspects	
Category	1. Expression of emotions/wishes/needs	<i>“(he) attempted to express himself ... but they did not listen to him”. “(She) cries and yells...”</i>
	2. Understanding of emotions/wishes/needs	<i>“The child will understand that I want to play” “They did not properly interpret his facial expression and body movements” “They were not aware of his feelings” “Perhaps the boys did not identify his need and his feeling” “(she) does not understand that they want to play with her but thinks that they want to take from her”</i>
Theme	Social Aspects	
Category	1. Sharing	<i>“I would like to get the red car and play with my friends”</i>
	2. Friendship & cooperation	<i>“Difficulty in joining the game of one child as opposed to joining of the second child...”</i>
	3. Social rejection	<i>“Coping with rejection”</i>
	4. Belonging	<i>“Felt lack of belonging ... wanted to be part of the ‘group’...”</i>
	5. Place in the group of children	<i>“A dominant boy who sets the rules ... a dominant girl...”</i>
Theme	Cognitive Aspects – Intervention Skills & Ways of Response of the Kindergarten Teacher	
Category	1. Reading the social map / coding	<i>“The kindergarten teacher clarifies with the children what happened ... understanding of the social situation”</i>
	2. Kindergarten teachers as mediators of emotions between the children	<i>“And to mediate between them a conversation”</i>
	3. Problem solving	<i>“To help them reach a solution ... later, they can reach by themselves a solution accepted by everyone”</i>

IV.3 Findings emerging from Research Question 3 and Hypothesis 3

IV.3.1 Differences in Attitudes before and after in the Four Dimensions of Social Competence in the Experiment group and the control group

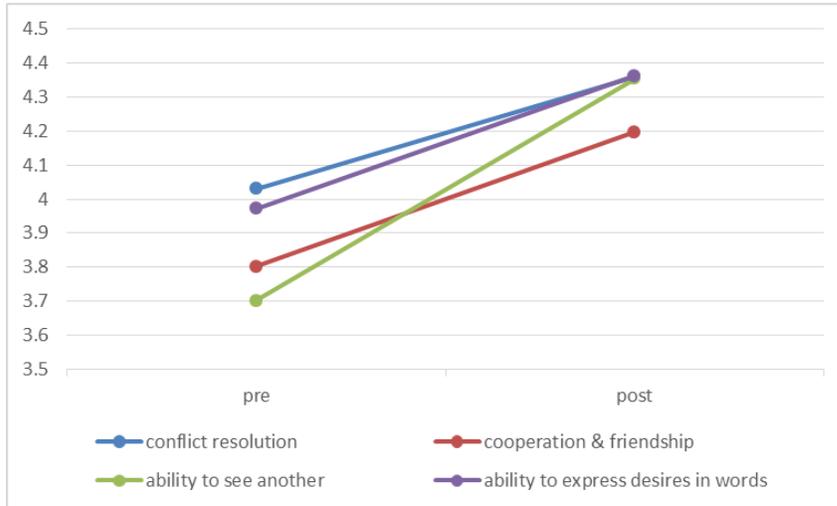


Figure 1.IV: Experimental Group

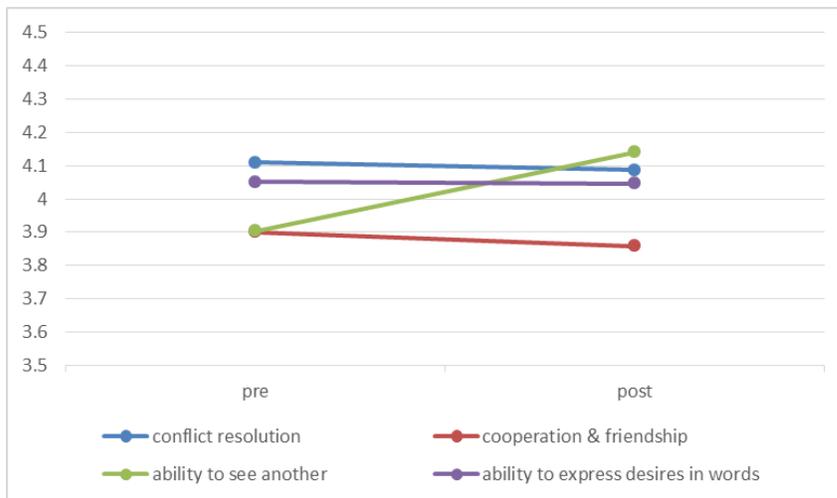


Figure 2.IV: Control group

The intervention program positively affected the attitudes of the experiment group kindergarten teachers towards the importance of developing social competence.

IV.3.2 Differences in Attitudes before and after in the Four Dimensions of Emotional Competence in the Experiment group and the Control group

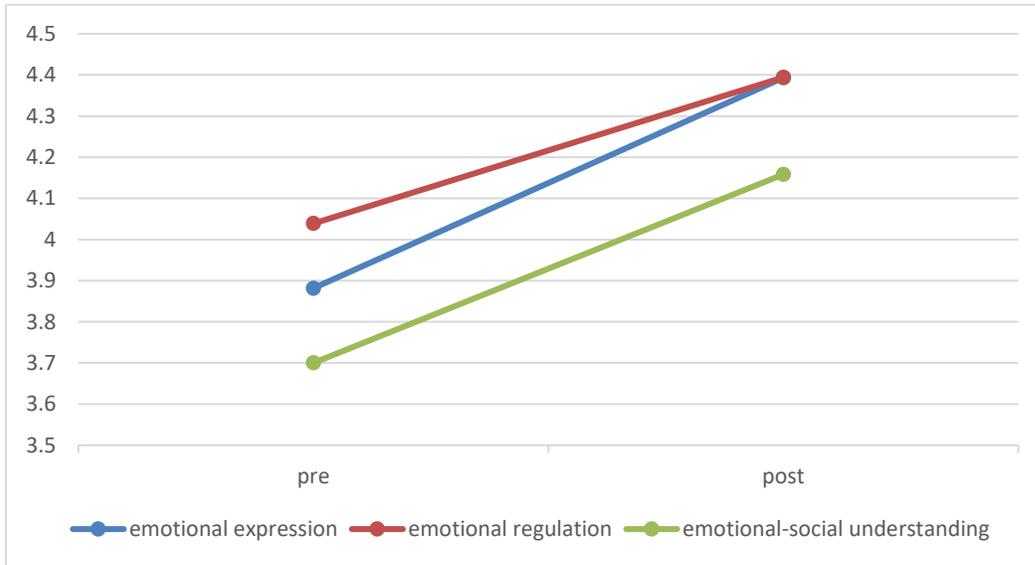


Figure 3.IV: Experiment group

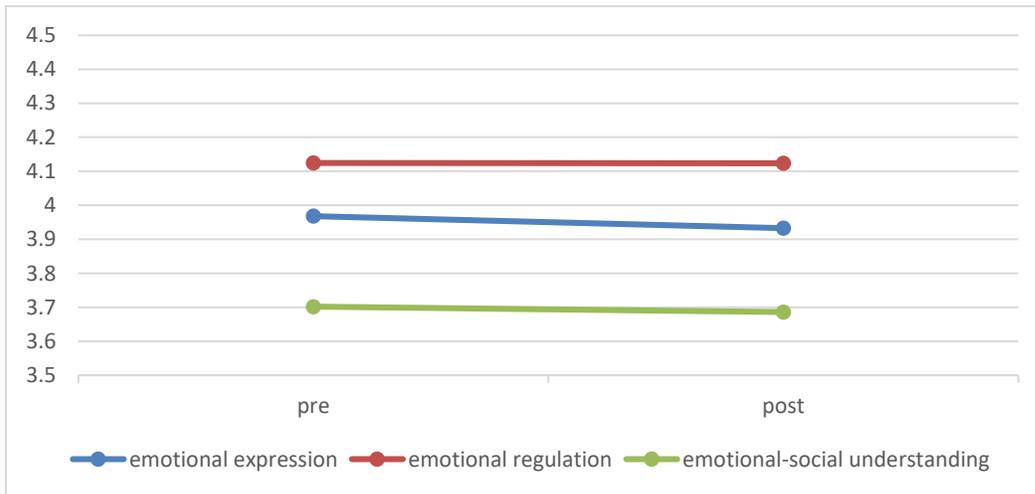


Figure 4.IV: Control Group

Table 3.IV: Means and Standard Deviations of the Research Variables for All the Participants

Variable	Index	Pre (n=65)		Post (n=51)	
		Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation

Social competencies	Conflict settlement	3.93	0.53	4.22	0.81
	Cooperation & friendship	3.71	0.67	4.03	0.88
	Ability to see the others	3.69	0.88	4.24	0.82
	Ability to express wishes in words	3.91	0.69	4.20	0.83
Emotional competencies	Emotional expression	3.80	0.89	4.16	0.96
	Emotional regulation	3.95	0.70	4.25	1.01
	Social-emotional understanding	3.54	0.88	3.92	1.20
Beliefs about social-emotional teaching	Comfort	-	-	4.04	0.84
	Commitment	-	-	3.81	0.94
	Culture	-	-	2.74	1.06

- The intervention program positively affected the attitudes of the experiment group kindergarten teachers towards the importance of developing social-emotional competence.
- In the examination of the mean values of the aspects of beliefs about social-emotional learning, the findings indicate a moderate-to-high mean for the aspects comfort and commitment and a mean lower than 3 for the aspect of support of the surrounding culture.

CHAPTER V: Conclusions and Recommendations

V.1 Conceptual Conclusions

The conceptual conclusion is an expanded model of the cultivation of social-emotional competence and social information processing among the kindergarten teachers. On the conceptual level, the research findings facilitate development of an evidence-based model that described the cultivation of social-emotional competences (SEC) and social

information processing (SIP) among the kindergarten teachers who attended the intervention program. Figure No. 1.V presents the expanded model.

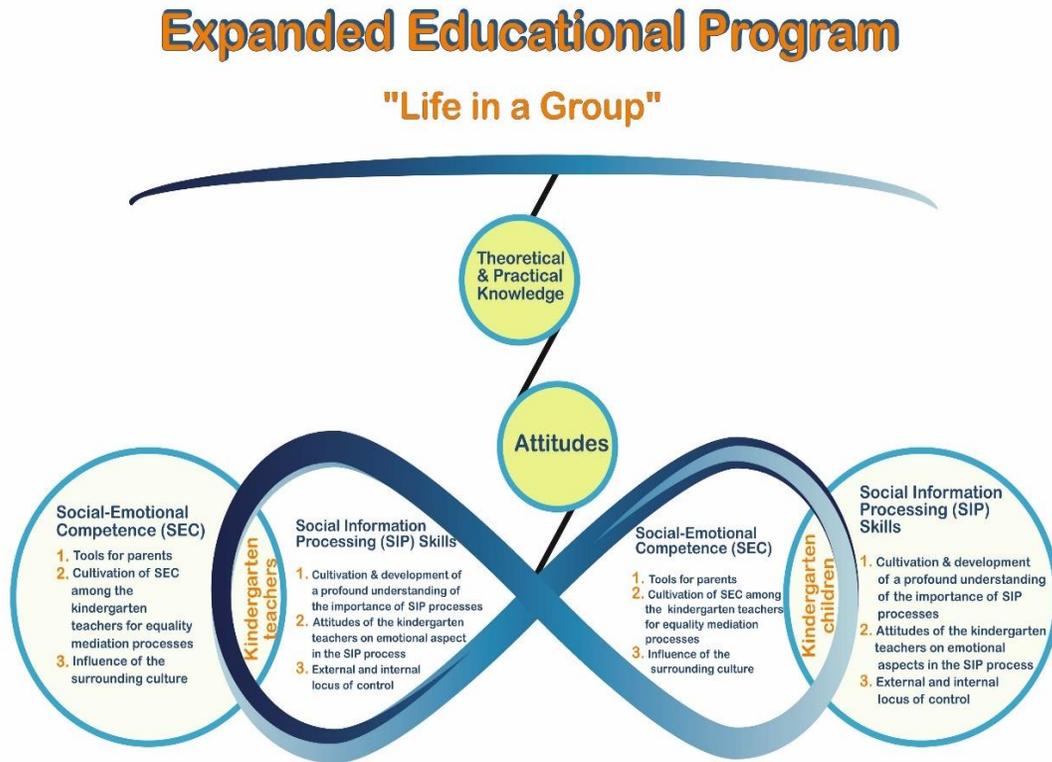


Figure 1.V: Expanded model of the Cultivation of Social-Emotional Competence and Social Information Processing – An Original Contribution

The model is holistic and integrative, since it encompasses the fields of the whole person. Combining cognitive, emotional, and social aspects. The model is also modular, since it reflects the reciprocal effect of the kindergarten children on the kindergarten teachers and vice versa. It can be adapted to diverse learning environments and to different ages in early childhood. This is a pedagogical-educational model, as it is grounded in educational theories and models of learning in early childhood. The expanded model illustrates that the practical and theoretical knowledge and the kindergarten teachers’

attitudes towards social-emotional competence and social information processing serve as a basis for professional development and promotion of learning and development processes.

The present study considers social-emotional competence and social information processing as two separate concepts that are intertwined and mutually affect one another. The model addresses the extensions of each concept separately but preserves the integration and effect of the concepts on one another.

The goals of the 'Life in a Group' Intervention Program that engages in social-emotional competence are:

- To facilitate access to theoretical and research knowledge about social-emotional learning of children,
- To build practical knowledge (toolkit) for the identification of social-emotional situations in the kindergarten and improvement of the intervention skills and ways of response.
- To develop awareness of attitudes toward and beliefs about social-emotional competence.

The data analysis and discussion of the findings indicate that the intervention program indeed achieved its goals among the research population. In addition to these findings, the data analysis and discussion of the findings showed that the kindergarten teachers attribute importance to the parents' role in the cultivation of social-emotional competence among their children, and therefore the expanded model recommends involving also the children's parents in the intervention program in order to provide them with tools for the cultivation of their children's social-emotional competence.

The expanded model further indicates that it is important to address the cultivation of social-emotional competence among kindergarten teachers as part of quality processes of mediation in social emotional situations. The cultivation of social-emotional competence among kindergarten teachers engages in the kindergarten teachers' degree of sensitivity towards different children in the social situation and their level of attention to what occurs. It also addresses the kindergarten teachers' modeling with empathy and talks about emotions and understanding the reasons for emotions.

The expanded model relates also to the culture surrounding the kindergarten teachers, or in other words, key people in roles of management and supervision. Due to the understanding of the power and impact of the surrounding culture on the kindergarten teachers' functioning and the emphases in their work, the expanded model attributes importance to the sharing of the research findings with principals and supervisors in the education system.

The expanded model also addresses the concept of social information processing. Due to the lack of studies that investigate the social information processing from the kindergarten teachers' perspective, the expanded model is based on the data analysis and the discussion of the findings obtained from the present study regarding the topic of social information processing. The model indicates that it is important to cultivate and develop kindergarten teachers' profound understanding of the importance of processes of social information processing, because of their impact on the adjustment in early childhood and in adult life. It is essential to address their attitudes towards emotional aspects in the process of social information processing. Moreover, the model presents the importance of the kindergarten teachers' role with reference to external locus of control and internal locus of control, so as to address the different viewpoints in the social situation and to provide appropriate tools for each of the children for social coping.

V.2 Practical Implications – For the Field of Action

First, the present study recommends setting up frameworks for professional development for kindergarten teachers and for parents of kindergarten children. These frameworks can increase the awareness of attributing importance to these processes and provide instruments for kindergarten teachers and the children's parents for the cultivation and development of these important skills.

Second, since the educational intervention program used visual instruments that include a workshop experience and video clips of social-emotional events that were filmed in the kindergarten, it is recommended using similar instruments also in future programs.

In the process of working with the kindergarten teachers, it is important to emphasize the topic of external locus of control and internal locus of control. When we think with external locus of control, we assume that the responsibility for what occurs is

that of others. When we think with internal locus of control, we understand that we too can impact what happens and assume responsibility for it. When kindergarten teachers settle a conflict with external locus of control, they shift the responsibility for what happened only to the children who “cause hurt”. When kindergarten teachers settle a conflict with internal locus of control, they understand that the children who “were hurt” are also responsibility they need to provide them with instruments for coping with social situations. Reference to the external and internal locus of control implies reference to the different viewpoints in a social situation and to the responsibility of sides in the situation. It is important to refer to external and internal locus of control since kindergarten teachers tend more to address external locus of control and less to address internal locus of control. It is therefore important to provide suitable tools for every child so that he or she can cope with social-emotional situations. Another point that should be emphasized to the kindergarten teachers is the importance and meaning of their emotional processes in social situations. In other words, this is their degree of sensitivity towards each one of the children in social-emotional situations and attention to what occurs, their empathy, personal awareness of the emotions, and emotional regulation ability, as part of their process of “mediation” in the social situation.

Third, the present study recommends allocating resources and incorporating the cultivation of social-emotional competence and social information processing in pre-service kindergarten teacher education in colleges and academic institutions and in the process of professional development of educators who work in the field.

V.3 Contribution to Theoretical Knowledge

The present study is an assessment research that accompanies the ‘Life in a Group’ Intervention Program. The program engaged in social-emotional competence, and was expanded to the research framework from the cognitive aspect of social information processing. The review of the prevention and intervention programs (see Chapter 2 – Description of the Pedagogical Research) indicates that not all the programs that promote social-emotional competence are accompanied by assessment studies. Hence, the present study adds to knowledge in the field of intervention programs that promote cognitive-social-emotional competence and are accompanied by assessment research.

In addition, the 'Life in a Group' Intervention Program was explored in the past among caregivers in daycare centers for children from birth until the age of three. The research population of the present study consists of kindergarten teachers of children aged three to six. Hence, it added to knowledge in this field with regard to children of kindergarten age.

The present study concluded the knowledge in the field of the cultivation and development of social-emotional competences (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000) and social information processing (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Lemerise & Arsenio, 2000). Thus, the research findings are original and innovative in this field.

V.4 Contribution to Practical Knowledge

On the level of contribution to practical knowledge, the model that was developed on the basis of the findings obtained from the present study, can serve as frameworks for kindergarten teachers' education as practical guidelines for building intervention programs in this field. Moreover, the present study reinforces the argument that kindergarten teachers feel comfortable and responsible for social-emotional learning in the kindergarten. However, the cultural environment, which includes key people in roles of management and supervision, does not support this belief.

The messages and emphases conveyed by the culture surrounding the kindergarten teachers regarding their work with the children in the context of social-emotional learning are very important. Hence, it is essential to expose key people in the roles of management and supervision to these findings.

V.5 Innovation and Originality

The small number of research instruments that address educators' attitudes towards and beliefs about the topic of social-emotional learning, led to the design of a close-ended questionnaire dealing with this topic for the purpose of the present study. Another research instrument, Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale Questionnaire (Brackett et al., 2012) was translated into Hebrew and can be used by researchers in Israel. This research instrument examines educators' beliefs about social-emotional learning according to three dimensions: comfort, commitment, and culture.

For the purpose of expanding the research of social information processing, an open-ended questionnaire dealing with this topic was tailored to the kindergarten teachers participating in the present study. The review of the literature indicated that until now, studies that have examined the process of social information processing from the kindergarten teachers' perspective have not been found. In addition, the empirical literature does not include sufficient studies of kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards emotional aspects as part of the social information processing. Consequently, this finding in the present study is innovative.

V.6 Further Research

Suggestions for future research include:

1. A research design similar to that of the present research, using observations of the kindergarten teachers' behavior.
2. A research design similar to that of the present research, using observations of the children's behavior.
3. A research that examines kindergarten teachers' viewpoint about the process of social information processing.
4. A research that examines kindergarten teachers' viewpoint about emotional and social aspects of the process of social information processing.

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