

Inna Smirnov-Okanin, Kaye Academic College of Education, Beer-Sheva, Israel
innasm@kaye.ac.il
Regina Benchetrit, Kaye Academic College of Education, Beer-Sheva, Israel
reginab@kaye.ac.il

STUDY FOCUS

This qualitative case study explores the intercultural experiences of eight pre-service Bedouin teachers during a year-long practical placement in Jewish elementary schools in southern Israel. Although classified within Israel's broader Arab minority, Bedouin communities are culturally distinct and educationally marginalised, and the experiences of Bedouin trainee teachers have received little scholarly attention.

Placing them in majority-Jewish schools creates a rich, real-world setting for studying intercultural encounters and their effect on cultural awareness. The central interest is not only whether the placement was successful, but how students negotiated cultural awareness, language, professional identity, and belonging within a majority school environment.

WHY THIS CONTEXT MATTERS

Bedouin students enter teacher education with rich cultural and linguistic resources, but they also face the realities of minority status, social distance, and Hebrew-dominant school settings. Their practicum therefore becomes a meaningful meeting point between college learning and the lived complexity of schools.

It is a site where collaboration, empathy, and professional growth may develop — but also where unequal cultural knowledge and hidden stereotypes may become visible.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How do pre-service Bedouin teachers **experience intercultural encounters** within Jewish school settings?

What are the perceived impacts of these encounters on their **cultural awareness and professional development**?

METHOD IN BRIEF

A qualitative case study conducted through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews in English. Data were analyzed thematically, producing four interconnected themes: *from fear to belonging*; *intercultural interactions*; *language as barrier and bridge*; and *pedagogical growth*.

Framed by Superdiversity Theory (Vertovec, 2007), Interculturality Theory (Dervin, 2016), and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

KEY MESSAGE

Contrary to expectation, professional identity overshadowed cultural identity. Hebrew proficiency and pedagogy — not cultural difference — dominated participants' narratives. The practical-training context itself foregrounds professional concerns, likely masking deeper cultural-identity dimensions that another setting might reveal.

The findings show a movement from initial apprehension to growing professional confidence. Supportive relationships with pupils, mentor teachers, and staff helped students feel accepted and capable. At the same time, the study avoids a simple celebration of intercultural contact: cultural exchange was sometimes uneven, and Bedouin students were often positioned as the ones expected to explain their culture.

WHAT STOOD OUT MOST

- **Language became central:** Hebrew proficiency affected classroom communication, management, confidence, and belonging.
- **Professional identity dominated:** Participants discussed teaching methods and classroom management more than cultural identity.
- **Belonging was built relationally:** Daily interactions with supportive pupils and staff helped reduce fear and strengthen confidence.
- **Reciprocity was limited:** Cultural learning often focused on Bedouin students explaining their culture, rather than mutual exchange.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

- Prepare minority and majority participants for intercultural practicum placements **before** the placement begins.
- Provide targeted Hebrew support connected to classroom communication and pedagogy.
- Create structured opportunities for **reciprocal cultural learning** between Bedouin and Jewish students, pupils, and staff.
- Recognise practical training as a space for both **professional development** and **culture building**.

SELECTED REFERENCES

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. Sage.
- Dervin, F. (2016). *Interculturality in education: A theoretical and methodological toolbox*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.
- Vertovec, S. (2007). Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30(6), 1024–1054.