



Crossing Cultural Boundaries in Teacher Education: Bedouin College Students' Experiences in Jewish Schools in Israel

Inna Smirnov-Okanin, Regina Benchetrit · Kaye Academic College of Education, Beer-Sheva, Israel

ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study, based on semi-structured interviews with pre-service Bedouin teachers, examines how they navigate professional identity, cultural awareness, and belonging during practical training in Jewish schools in Israel. Initial apprehension transformed into pedagogical growth and confidence through supportive interactions; yet linguistic challenges and uneven cultural exchange persisted, with Hebrew proficiency emerging as central to belonging. The study underscores the need for structured intercultural preparation and targeted linguistic support in teacher education programs.

Research Questions

How do Bedouin trainee teachers **experience intercultural encounters** in Jewish school settings?

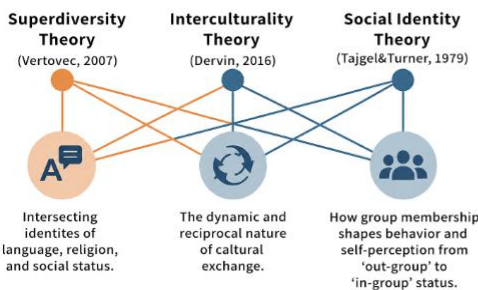
How do these encounters **shape their cultural awareness**?

Background & Rationale

- 8 pre-service Bedouin teachers; year-long practicum in Jewish elementary schools, Southern Israel.
- Bedouins are educationally marginalised within Israel's Arab minority — facing language gaps, stereotyping, and institutional bias in majority schools.
- The study addresses a gap regarding **pre-service Bedouin teachers** in majority-dominated educational settings.

Theoretical Framework

Three theoretical lenses inform this study:



Methodology

DESIGN

Qualitative case study — constructivist-phenomenological approach.

PARTICIPANTS

8 pre-service Bedouin English teachers (7F, 1M); purposive sampling.

DATA COLLECTION

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews in English (40–60 min).

DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

KEY FINDINGS

1 FROM FEAR TO BELONGING

Began with fear and anticipated discrimination. A warm welcome turned anxiety into belonging (**out-group** → **in-group**).

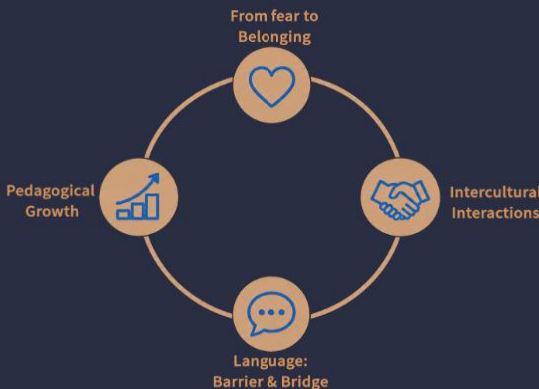
"I was scared initially... but all my fears disappeared as soon as I stepped into the school."

2 INTERCULTURAL INTERACTIONS

Interactions marked by student curiosity about Bedouin culture, and teachers' exposure to Jewish practices.

Cultural exchange was often **one-sided**: Bedouin teachers shared their culture, but reciprocal learning from the majority was lacking.

"I was helping them know my culture, but it felt one-sided."



3 LANGUAGE: BARRIER & BRIDGE

Limited Hebrew proficiency was the most significant barrier, hindering communication and teaching effectiveness.

Daily interaction led to substantial improvement. Language became a **key to belonging** — targeted support is needed.

"My Hebrew improved a lot, thanks to daily interactions with the students who were patient and helpful."

4 PEDAGOGICAL GROWTH

Professional identity took precedence over cultural identity. Participants acquired diverse teaching methods and classroom management skills.

Bedouin identity did not limit professional growth.

"My mentor teacher had teaching methods that we didn't use in Bedouin schools. Seeing these methods inspired me."

Key Insights

- Professional identity overshadowed cultural identity — Hebrew and pedagogy, not culture, dominated participants' narratives.
- Initial fears rooted in minority status were gradually replaced by professional confidence through daily practice.
- The training context foregrounded **professional identity development** and **Hebrew language proficiency** over explicit cultural identity discussions.
- Effective communication and pedagogical competence emerged as the key determinants of success and belonging.

Practical Implications for Teacher Training

- Structured Intercultural Competence Training:** Mandatory modules to address stereotypes, biases, and cultural misunderstandings.
- Targeted Linguistic Support:** Ongoing tutoring and language assistance in Hebrew proficiency.
- Reciprocal Cultural Learning:** Curricular and extracurricular initiatives (e.g., joint projects) to foster mutual understanding between Bedouin and Jewish students/staff.

Future Research

- Follow participants from training into in-service teaching (longitudinal)
- Capture the other side — Jewish pupils, staff and mentor teachers
- Larger, more varied samples across colleges; more male trainees
- Test targeted Hebrew support and reciprocal exchange projects
- Compare with other minority pre-service teachers in majority schools

CONCLUSION

The study revealed a journey of growth where effective communication (Hebrew proficiency) and pedagogical competence emerged as key determinants of success and belonging in the majority setting.

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.

Based on the published chapter: Smirnov-Okanin, I., Benchetrit, R. (2026). Exploring the Experiences of Pre-service Bedouin Teachers in Jewish Schools in Israel: A Case Study. In: Wanke, M., Pogorzelska, M. (eds) Intercultural Encounters in Complex Societies. Culture in Policy Making: The Symbolic Universes of Social Action. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-17707-0_7