Sense Of Self-Efficacy And Coping With Challenges Faced By Arab Preservice Teachers In Practical Work In Special Education In Jewish Schools

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Abstract:

Background: In recent years, the Ministry of Education has decided to integrate Arab preservice teachers into Jewish schools due to a shortage of Jewish teachers and the recognition of many Arab teachers who are unemployed. This initiative has led to a flourishing of Arab preservice teachers who, upon completing their practical training, integrate as teachers in Jewish society. Therefore, today, an increasing number of preservice teachers from the Arab community are pursuing careers in Jewish society upon completing their studies. However, this step has presented challenges for Arab preservice teachers who must navigate a new educational culture.
The research aims to examine the self-efficacy of Arab preservice teachers regarding their integration into special education classrooms in Jewish schools. Concurrently, the study seeks to explore how academic student teachers successfully cope with challenges encountered while teaching their frontal classes in Jewish classrooms.
Materials and Methods: The study employed a qualitative narrative research method. The study included semi-structured interviews with eight student preservice teachers in special education, which will be analyzed to extract central themes.
Results: The findings of the research may contribute to a better understanding of the challenges faced by these preservice teachers, their coping strategies, and their self-efficacy. This understanding can assist in improving their adaptation and integration into multicultural settings.
Conclusion: The qualitative findings from the research reveal four main themes: Self-efficacy, Coping, Identity, Belonging and social Proximity including Language. One of the main conclusions was the identity and family support plays a central role, with participants emphasizing their commitment to preserving their Arab identity while working in Jewish schools.
Key Word: coping, self-efficacy, preservice teachers, multicultural education.

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I.   Introduction

In Israel, the Ministry of Education maintains two separate educational systems: one for the Arab society and one for the Jewish society. These societies first encounter each other in the academic classroom (Halabi & Faour, 2021).

In 2012, the Ministry of Education decided to change its approach by placing Arab teachers in Jewish schools, acknowledging a shortage of Jewish teachers while many Arab teachers remained unemployed (Halabi & Faour, 2012). This initiative represented a significant change for Arab teachers both economically and culturally, presenting numerous challenges as they navigated cultural differences (Pergman, 2014).

Vygotsky's model includes several fundamental principles for social development, providing insight into how student teachers in multicultural societies can integrate and thrive within the educational system. As they cope with a new and multicultural environment, the significant influence of the social context around them is evident (Vygotsky and Cole, 1978).

Preservice teachers training is a central process in the field of education. The training of teachers involves a wide variety of processes and activities aimed at acquiring the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for teaching (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007).

Students are required to have self-efficacy as one of the most crucial skills during their studies. The term "self-efficacy" refers to an individual's ability to construct their understanding and personal gain to bring improvement, development, and goal achievement. When students possess self-efficacy, they can overcome obstacles and progress in their academic and professional paths (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1994, 1997).

To successfully navigate the initial period of their careers, novice preservice teachers must address various challenges that may arise when working with students, particularly in emotional and behavioral aspects. The ability to withstand pressure and find effective and practical ways to manage demanding situations are central components of professional self-efficacy (Kuronja, Čagran & Krajnc, 2019).

Coping is a process that occurs within individuals and between them and their environment, aimed at overcoming challenges, realities, distress, and difficulties encountered in various areas of life. This process includes emotional, physical, and cognitive components. Coping encompasses understanding individual differences in people's abilities to deal with challenges, understanding distress, and finding effective ways to alleviate and improve coping processes (Folkman, 1984).

In the context of teacher training, coping is a complex process of experience, learning, and development for young teachers. Modern education is advancing rapidly, making the role of the teacher central and critically important. Teacher training is carried out in different and evolving stages, according to the individual learning process and the development of the teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2008).

The current research will examine the self-efficacy of novice preservice teachers from the Arab community regarding their integration into special education classrooms in Jewish schools. Concurrently, the study investigated how these student teachers manage the challenges that arise during frontal teaching

in special education classrooms within Jewish schools. The research will focus on the academic background of these preservice teachers, the knowledge and practical skills they bring to the field, as well as the unique challenges they encounter. This study is conducted against the backdrop of the significant increase in the integration of Arab teachers into Jewish schools. The intersection of Arab culture and tradition within special education poses numerous and complex challenges. This research will focus on understanding the values and processes that Arab preservice teachers undergo.

II.   Material And Methods

Study Design: The novelty of this research lies in examining the integration of preservice teachers from the Arab community into educational frameworks within the Jewish community. The research will assess the self-efficacy and coping strategies of these preservice teachers in their practical work within special education in Jewish schools. Additionally, the study will explore the cultural and educational challenges that these preservice teachers face during their practical work. Through interviews, potential solutions to various challenges will be identified.

Study Location: This study is conducted in colleges specializing in special education located in northern Israel.

Study Duration: January 2024 to July 2024.

Participants: This study involved eight Arab student teachers who were an integral part of the research. The group comprised Arab students enrolled in teacher training colleges, specializing in special education, and conducting their practical work in Jewish schools. Additionally, previous studies and publications describing the self-efficacy and coping strategies of preservice teachers in multicultural experiences were utilized to deepen and enrich the understanding of the findings**.**

Research Tools and Data Collection: The research incorporated two tools:
1. Demographic Questionnaire: This collected personal information about the Arab preservice teachers gaining experience in Jewish schools.
2. Interviews: Semi-structured interviews served as a solid foundation for the research.

The semi-structured interviews included questions on various topics, such as the academic background and training areas of the student teachers, their reasons for choosing to gain experience in Jewish schools, and questions about their interactions and coping instruments with mentor teachers, students, and school administrators.

Examples of interview questions:
• "What are the main challenges you face in integrating into the Jewish school, and how do you cope with them?"
• "What are the advantages and opportunities that come with your integration into the Jewish school?"
Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, and all interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Procedure methodology
Phase 1: Pilot Study, Initially, a pilot study was conducted to test the suitability of the questionnaire for the target population. Each participant was then provided with an explanation of the research and its objectives. If the participants agreed to be interviewed, a meeting was scheduled at their convenience, during which they signed a consent form.

Phase 2: Demographic Questionnaire, the preservice teachers completed a demographic questionnaire that included questions about their employment status and the importance they attribute to the research topic.

Phase 3: Individual Interviews, Personal interviews were conducted with each preservice teacher separately to gain deeper insights into the educational processes in the schools. The research was carried out in Hebrew, with the option to use their mother tongue, Arabic, if preferred. Following the interview, participants were asked additional questions for clarification or further elaboration. The interviews were recorded using Zoom or a mobile phone.

Phase 4: Data Analysis, the collected data were analyzed to identify central themes that formed the core of this research. Thematic analysis was employed, involving the following steps:

1. Initial Reading: A preliminary reading of the interviews to familiarize with the content.
2. Identifying Initial Themes: Identifying and defining initial themes.
3. Merging Similar Themes: Merging similar themes and organizing them hierarchically.
4. Reliability Check: Verifying the reliability and accuracy of the themes by repeating the identification process with several research supporters.
5. Organizing Findings: Organizing the findings and drawing conclusions based on the collected data to derive research insights.

III.   Result

Sample

The interviewees in this study were selected using a "snowball" sampling method. They come from a diverse demographic background. Most of them reside in villages (6 out of 8), while 2 live in cities. Their ages range from 23 to 52. The primary language spoken at home is Arabic, but all of them are also proficient in Hebrew.

Table no 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Student Teachers

Pseudonym	Age (year)
Mouna	27
Alin	27
Hanin	24
Mira	23
Rana	30
Sima	52
Rimah	24
Abeer	25

Qualitative Findings
Main Themes

In this section, the key points of each theme for all interviewee groups will be presented. At the end of each theme, similarities will be summarized. The identified themes are: Self-Validation, Coping, Identity, and Belonging and social Proximity including Language. Each theme is based on responses given during the interviews.

1) Self-Validation

The interviewed students describe a sense of pride in being Arab students gaining experience in a Jewish school. For example, Alin stated: "Sometimes I say to myself, 'Good job, I succeeded. I am wearing a head veil - Hijab, an Arab, for Arab parents.'" Similarly, Sima shared: "I prove that I can do it. at first I started working as a teaching assistant at the school, afterward I was chosen by the principal and the administration to work as a full time as a teacherso I started this way. That was how I proved to myself that I can do it". Rana added: "My effort, my work, and giving everything I can for the students and proving to myself that I can succeed that was the contribution for me. On the other hand I had to struggle in order to cope with many who looked at meand said, 'Oh, what is this Arab girl doing here with a Hijab?' that was hard at first, but I managed to cope with it."

From the above, the students take pride in being Arabs gaining experience in a Jewish school. They describe that despite the challenges, they feel significant and believe they have found their place.

2) Coping

The students describe their coping strategies for dealing with the challenges of being Arab working in Jewish schools during the interviews.

Mira described her initial fear about integrating into the teaching staff: "My only fear was whether I would be able to fit in, so I decided to give it a try. I didn't know what the staff would think. It wasn't like a summer camp; there were many people and teachers, and I wasn't sure how I would fit in or if I would succeed. I'm sociable myself and can integrate. So, I managed to cope. Mira added: 'The way I dealt with it was by ignoring, and if someone didn't want me around, I wouldn't be.'"

In contrast, Rana had a different approach to coping. She constantly reminded herself that she came for the teach the students, not to make friends: "Every morning I reminded myself that I was here for the children, not for the staff. That's what I thought, and that's what helped me."

Abeer described her coping as easier because she had previously studied in a Jewish school: "One of the things that made my integration easier was the fact that I had studied in such a school myself. In high school, I attended a Jewish school, so I was somewhat familiar with the atmosphere, which helped improve my integration into the current school".

Mouna occasionally initiated brief conversations with the staff to maintain a good relationship: "I think maintaining a connection with the staff is important. I try to start brief conversations to keep a positive and good relationship while I'm there. I asked how they are doing and showed interest in them. I'm not shy about introducing myself to those I don't work with."

As can be seen, the students found different ways to cope, to feel part of the team, whether through small hallway conversations, reflecting on their previous experiences in Jewish schools as students, or explaining their own culture.

3) Identity and belonging and social proximity.
The students described their desire to learn about new and different cultures, which did not hinder their sense of belonging or identity.

Alin shared: "Firstly, it's easier to work there because of the conditions; it's easier to integrate and there's always more demand for teachers here and therefore more opportunities to find work. Additionally, since we live in a multicultural country, meeting new people and learning about their holidays helps me grow by getting to know people who are different from me."

Mira said that she didn't try to hide her identity, that was even clearly noticeable through the food she broughr. She explained that she is open to explanations: "Usually, I try not to hide it. For example, I always bring Arabic food, and they ask—what's grape leaves or maklouba? I explain and try not to conceal anything."

Sima felt she needed to bridge the cultural gap: "I show others the Arab side, to demonstrate that not all Arabs are the same. I've shown them everything—the extreme, the moderate, and the traditional. I hope to make a difference in the discourse."

Rimah explained that even her parents prefer she works in a Jewish school: "My parents and family are very proud that I started working this year. They believe it's better for me to work in a Jewish setting rather than an Arab one."

Abeer emphasized the need to respect oneself to gain respect from others: "I never felt the need to hide who I am or where I come from. On the contrary, I enter the school every day with pride in my identity and attire. I believe that to gain respect from others, you first need to respect yourself and who you are. If you're embarrassed about who you are, it can lead to unpleasant situations with others".

Mouna reflected: "Certainly, I feel that this is a challenge, but it should be something normal and accepted by everyone. We live in one country, and I would be happy if the situation were such that I could teach in Jewish schools and Jewish teachers would also teach my children in an Arab school in the future. I'm optimistic that such a step could show students that studying in a school with a mixed teaching staff is possible and that coexistence and mutual respect can work".

The students did not feel the need to change their identity. On the contrary, some of them noted that if they respect themselves, others will respect them. The desire to teach in Jewish schools is significant and some indicated that they would only teach in Jewish schools. They felt a sense of belonging and didn't have issues with their identity. They talked about coexistence and multiculturalism factors that allowed them to feel included.

When asked about the support they receive from their **close environment**, most of the students reported that they receive full support at home.

Hanin sayed: "The environment is very supportive. My mother is happy that I am integrated here in a Jewish school and supports me because there is work there."

Rana described: "From my family's perspective, especially my husband, I can tell you that at the beginning, it was hard for him to accept it, because there are Arab schools, and he wondered why I was going there instead of finding work in my area or in an Arab school. But once I was accepted here and he saw that everything was okay and that I was doing well, he relaxed."

Sima shared that this was a realization of a dream for her: "when a friend discouraged me by saying 'You dream of being accepted as a teacher.' I answered then that I was fulfilling a dream. And now that I got accepted

and started working, I can say, that if you receive respectful treatment, why wouldn't you be accepted? I was offered the position. My family is very proud that I am teaching in a Jewish school; it's not something that is taken for granted."

Mouna described that since finding work in Arab schools is more challenging, her family is actually pleased that she is working in a Jewish school: "My family encourages me because, for some reason, there is a perception that the situation in Jewish schools is better compared to the Arab community. I am trying to show them that every society has its problems and difficulties."

From the above, it is clear that the students receive support from home. Initially, there was concern about working in a different culture and language, but in the end, the full support of their families. An important aspect the interviewees described is the difficulty in finding work in Arab schools, while there is a shortage in Jewish schools.

Regarding difficulties, the students raised several issues during the interviews: linguistic, cultural, and educational.

IV. Linguistic Challenges

The students reported difficulties related to language, particularly because Hebrew is not their mother tongue.

For example, Alin explained: "But you speak a somewhat formal language and they speak more fluently. I would ask questions or speak in a way that was not entirely clear... it's not my native language". Similarly, Hanin mentioned: "In terms of language, I was often corrected, for instance, with 'two' or 'a pair.' But what's nice is that they correct and understand".

Cultural Challenges: Another significant challenge was the lack of knowledge about Jewish culture and customs. Hanin described her difficulty with explaining Memorial Day: "When it was Memorial Day, for example, I had to teach about it and explain it. It was hard because I didn't know what it was about or how to explain Memorial Day. I didn't have much information on this topic—my knowledge of Israeli culture is limited". Maria also noted the lack of understanding of Jewish customs and holidays: "I know about their holidays but don't understand the reasons behind them. Now I experience it, like Passover, Holocaust Remembrance, Memorial Dayand why they celebrate Passover for example. I started learning about the Matzah and various symbols of Passover that I didn't really know, like the five cups of wine. So I began asking questions".

Mira further shared: "We had a memorial ceremony where we were supposed to wear white. I'm in a Jewish institution, and I respect everything that is said and requested, and I also participate because I want to give them the feeling that I belong to them, not just that I'm here to work. So, I wore white, stood at the ceremony, and there was the siren. It was time to say 'Hatikvah,' and I didn't know how to say it. I felt embarrassed, because I live here and don't know 'Hatikvah.' Everyone started looking at the Arab teachers, and I felt it standing in line, they looked at me, and I had to pretend with my lips that I knew it, but I didn't know it. No one ever taught us at school".

It is evident that some of the difficulties stem from language barriers. The students indicated that Hebrew is not their first language, but the more significant challenge they discussed is cultural. They were unfamiliar with Jewish holidays and traditions, which created a cultural barrier when they began teaching in Jewish schools.

V. Discussion

The aim of the study was to examine the processes and challenges faced by Arab student teachers during their practical training in Jewish schools, as well as their coping strategies. The research delves into the multi-dimensional experiences of these student teachers, highlighting the educational and cultural obstacles they encounter. Additionally, it seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the student teachers navigate the complexities of integration into a new educational environment, the methods they use to adapt their teaching practices and the support systems that contribute to their professional growth. Through this examination, the study aims to shed light on the struggles and successes of student teachers in their training process.

Challenges and opportunities in multicultural education According to the findings of this study, mentorship programs and collaborations between colleges and schools play a crucial role in promoting multiculturalism and effectively integrating teaching students from the Arab community into Jewish schools. This aligns with the study by Najjar and colleagues (2020), which presents a complex picture of human diversity in Israeli teacher education colleges. Which highlighted the potential of this diversity to foster cross-cultural understanding and enrich the academic environment. Additionally, Abu-Rabia-Queder's (2019) research reveals that Arab female students integrating into Jewish schools face significant challenges, including cultural and linguistic gaps that may lead to feelings of alienation and social isolation. These challenges are further compounded by dealing with prejudice and social barriers. The students are required to adapt to the Jewish culture and language while simultaneously striving to preserve their Arab cultural identity. Managing these multiple

identities presents an ongoing challenge, illustrating the tension between integrating into Jewish society and maintaining their personal heritage.

Self-efficacy and identity One of the central themes that emerged is self-efficacy. As Arab students navigated various challenges during their practical training in Jewish schools, the feeling of needing to prove themselves stems from the necessity to demonstrate their professional and academic capabilities within an educational system that is not part of their own culture. Research indicates that the sense of self-efficacy can enhance motivation among minority groups, but it may also lead to mental burnout and prolonged stress (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1994, 1997). Bandura (1977, 1997) conceptualizes self-efficacy as an individual's perception of their competence about a specific task or behavior. Bandura (1982) posits that self-efficacy significantly influences emotional responses and behavior, particularly in reactions to stress and in unfamiliar situations. He characterizes the concept as the mediating process between knowledge and action. Individuals who harbor doubts about their capabilities are likely to invest less effort and abandon tasks more readily when confronted with challenges. Such individuals may experience heightened anxiety in situations they perceive as beyond their coping abilities.

Self-efficacy is fundamentally defined as an individual's belief in their capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments. Bandura (1994) delineates four primary sources that contribute to the development of self-efficacy:

1. Mastery Experiences: Bandura argues that individuals who exclusively experience success may develop unrealistic expectations for rapid results and become easily discouraged when faced with setbacks. The cultivation of robust self-efficacy necessitates experiences in exerting effort to overcome obstacles. Upon recognizing their ability to surmount challenges, individuals are more likely to persevere and emerge with enhanced resilience.

2. Vicarious Experiences: Observing others successfully perform tasks can significantly influence an individual's self-efficacy beliefs. When individuals witness peers or role models overcome obstacles through sustained effort, it can bolster their own belief in their capacity to master comparable activities. This is particularly impactful when the observed individual is perceived as similar to oneself.

3. Verbal Persuasion: Social persuasion in the form of verbal encouragement from others can strengthen an individual's belief in their capabilities. When people are persuaded verbally that they possess the capabilities to master given tasks, they are more likely to mobilize greater effort and sustain it, particularly in the face of difficulties. However, Bandura cautions that unrealistic boosts in efficacy through verbal persuasion are quickly disconfirmed by disappointing results of one's efforts.

4. Physiological and Affective States: An individual's physiological and emotional states influence their self-efficacy judgments. High arousal, such as anxiety or stress, can debilitate performance, whereas positive mood states can enhance perceived self-efficacy. People are more inclined to expect success when they are not beset by aversive arousal. Bandura emphasizes that it is not the sheer intensity of emotional and physical reactions that is important but rather how they are perceived and interpreted.

These four sources of self-efficacy do not operate in isolation but rather in a dynamic interplay. The integration of information from these diverse sources shapes an individual's self-efficacy beliefs, which in turn influence their cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection processes. Understanding these sources provides valuable insights into the development and enhancement of self-efficacy across various domains of human functioning.

In the case of Arab female students, the need to prove themselves in two domains – both as future teachers and as representatives of their culture – increases emotional pressure and places them in a unique position of dual challenge.

The role of family support The family plays a central role in shaping an individual's identity and sense of belonging. Personal and social identity are largely formed through family interactions and the values passed on within the family. The family provides the individual with an initial sense of belonging, security and love, which are essential for a healthy personal development. Through processes of socialization, emotional support, and the instilling of social values, the family influences every aspect of an individual's life and shapes their future (Adar-Bunis, 2007). This aligns with findings from the current research, where students stated that their families encouraged their involvement in Jewish society. When the family acts as a source of emotional support, it provides its members with tools to cope with life's challenges, helps reduce daily stress and promotes personal well-being and emotional wholeness.

Linguistic and cultural barriers The study found that students from the Arab community face language challenges that sometimes hinder their daily communication within the school. This finding aligns with other research, which has pointed out difficulties in everyday communication, due to language barriers, especially in academic and formal contexts. Many teachers express concerns about their Hebrew proficiency and the impact of these language skills on their effectiveness as mentors. Furthermore, there is a significant tension between maintaining the Arabic language and culture; and focusing on the Hebrew-speaking educational frameworks (Mar'i & Buchweitz, 2023; Obeidat, 2005; Schumann, 2013).

VI.   Conclusion

Based on the feedback from the participants, it is recommended to enhance practical experience for students. This could involve providing more opportunities for hands-on experience in Jewish schools during their training period.

In addition, the participants recognized the important role of family support in coping with challenges. It is advisable to develop specialized courses focused on Jewish culture. This would help students and trainees better understand the cultural context of the schools where they will be placed, allowing them to be better prepared for their roles.

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