



The State, the self, and the willingness to co-exist: teachers' perceptions of the other in Israel

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KEYWORDS

Coexistence
Stereotypes
Identity
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ABSTRACT

As a result of structured separation in everyday life, Israel's Arab and Jewish youth rarely interact, which contributes to a deepening and mutual sense of distance, distrust, and racism. Teachers, as agents of social change, can lead educational processes to bridge the ideological distance between Arabs and Jews in Israel, and to create an environment of dialogue and acceptance. This study used a sample of 300 teachers (150 from the Jewish ethnic group and 150 from the Arab ethnic group) to explore their perceptions and attitudes. Findings revealed that, compared to their Jewish counterparts, Arab teachers perceive the state's attitude toward them as more negative. We found that Arab teachers' perception of citizen-state relations was higher than that of Jewish teachers; identity perception among Arab teachers was lower than Jewish teachers; and coexistence perception among Jewish teachers was higher than Arab teachers. These findings can be a base for intervention programs at national and local levels and encourage the adoption of multicultural strategies to integrate Israel's Arab population as equal citizens through social and political motivations.

El Estado, el yo y la voluntad de coexistir: percepciones de los profesores sobre el otro en Israel

PALABRAS CLAVE

Convivencia
Estereotipos
Identidad
Israel
Percepción mutua

RESUMEN

Como resultado de la separación estructurada en la vida cotidiana, los jóvenes árabes y judíos de Israel rara vez interactúan, lo que contribuye a profundizar un sentimiento mutuo de distancia, desconfianza y racismo. El profesorado, como agente del cambio social, puede liderar procesos educativos para salvar la distancia ideológica entre árabes y judíos en Israel y crear un entorno de diálogo y aceptación. En el presente estudio se utilizó una muestra de 300 miembros del profesorado (150 del grupo étnico judío y 150 del grupo étnico árabe) con el fin de explorar sus percepciones y actitudes. Los resultados revelaron que, en comparación con sus homólogos judíos, el profesorado árabe percibe la actitud del Estado hacia ellos como más negativa. Se descubrió que la percepción del profesorado árabe sobre las relaciones entre ciudadanos y Estado era superior a la del profesorado judío; la percepción de la identidad entre el profesorado árabe era inferior a la del profesorado judío; y la percepción de la coexistencia entre el profesorado judío era superior a la del profesorado árabe. Estos hallazgos pueden servir de base para programas de intervención a nivel nacional y local y fomentar la adopción de estrategias multiculturales para integrar a la población árabe de Israel como ciudadanos iguales a través de motivaciones sociales y políticas.

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With some 2 millions people, Arab citizens and permanent residents make up the largest minority group in Israel (20.9% of the Israeli population). Tensions between majority and minority, problematic in any country, are compounded in Israel by factors related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Ben-Meir, 2023).

Many events in Israel's political and social arena have shaped these tensions, but two principles of Arab inclusion guide the narrative (Israeli, 2020). First, Arabs who remained in Israel after the 1948 war were called upon to maintain peace and to share in the building of the State. In return, Arabs would be recognized as full and equal citizens with appropriate representation in Israeli institutions. Second, Arabs who stayed would benefit from the Jewish realization of self-determination in their homeland. In practice, however, no proper and acceptable balance has been formed between these two principles. From the outset, the very emphasis of Israel being a "Jewish state" effectively has made Arabs second-class citizens in their own country (Bels, 2022).

The processes of modernization and political socialization that occurred among Arab citizens of Israel (Hisherik & Gindi, 2022) strengthened Arab Israeli citizens and increased their belief in political power. The post-1967 era has been characterized by the emergence of new Arab ideologies, movements, and party organizations. The economic balance also improved, as the abolition of the military government eased employment, enabling Arab citizens to work in the Jewish sector. This led to a gradual increase in the quality of Arab life (Bels, 2022).

However, social regulation and cultural and legal inhibitions do not always allow individuals to define their identity, and as these are dynamic and constantly evolving, they are confounded and sidelined by various elements such as diverse social, educational, political, religious, economic, and contextual circumstances.

One such element is the Israeli school system, which since its inception has been segregated into several streams: Arab, Jewish, and Muslim. This issue is of particular relevance as segregation in the educational system limits the possibilities for direct contacts between Arabs and Jews, which is contrary to the recommendations in Allport's (1954) Social Contact Theory. Consequently, the majority of Jewish students do not study with Arab students and vice versa. In general, the educational context in which Arabs and Jews first come into contact with each other is in the university system when they are adults. Contact theory argues that such lack of contact during the formative years can have adverse consequences for intergroup relations (Hisherik & Gindi, 2022).

In fact, in October 2000, the Or Committee, a Israeli-government panel convened to investigate the killing of 12 Arab Israelis at the start of the second intifada, concluded that Arab citizens suffer crippling discrimination and unequal treatment. Despite this acknowledgement, however, the State's official policy toward Arabs is driven by short-term political and security considerations, such as fear of separatism. Tensions only worsened in subsequent years, evidenced by the Second Lebanon War, which broke out between Israel and Lebanon in 2006; the Akko events (2008); the Operation Cast Lead in Gaza (2008-2009); the flotilla in Gaza (2010); and the latest attacks

by Hamas that greatly deteriorated the relations between Arab and Jewish citizens.

The "other" in image and perception

The deepening rift between Jews and Arabs in Israel is of particular concern to researchers. A recent study (Israeli, 2020) found that 42% of Jews in the country were ambivalent toward Arab citizens' needs and believed that they should be treated with both respect and suspicion. The sense of suspicion was higher among religious conservatives and those on the political right. The status of Arabs in Israel is among the most divisive issues for the country's Jewish majority, with differences evident along political and religious lines (Abu-Asba, 2020). In the Israeli study (2020), three-quarters of respondents on the political left perceived Arabs as equal citizens, compared to 42% of centrists and secularists and 18% of religious conservatives and ultra-Orthodox. Respectively, about a third of the right and the religious (about 30%) and the ultra-Orthodox (45%) said they perceived Arabs as enemies. This was compared to 16% of centrists and secularists, and just 2% of those on the political left.

In this sense, Eagly and Koenig (2021) asserts that stereotypes have been recognized as important cognitive means for organizing and processing information on the world surrounding us. They also have a prominent social character, they are –usually, but not necessarily– collective perceptions, social and cultural constructs formed, inherited, and maintained within a certain community.

The emergence of stereotypes, their content, preservation, or change can be influenced by various factors, both subjective (e.g., a value system within a community) and objective (external circumstances such as political, social, cultural, etc.). For national stereotypes, geographical proximity and contact are important factors contributing to forming attitudes and stereotypical notions (Törnquist-Plewa, 2000).

An uneasy coexistence

Early experiments on abstract groups by and subsequent work in social settings (Haslam & Turner, 1992) highlight two effects. First, individuals stereotype groups by exaggerating differences with the outgroup (intergroup contrast) while dampening within group differences (overestimation of intragroup homogeneity). This is a process of social categorization based on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981), and describes how the perception of society is divided in "us versus them".

In this sense, studies such as Falah et al. (2000) and Hisherik and Paul-Binyamin (2024) find that certain social realities and political opinions have significant effects on perceptions between Arabs and Jews that promote the acquisition or maintenance of prejudices, promoting a process of social categorization that hinders coexistence. The historical context and hostile political environment in which the state of Israel was created in 1948 and the series of hostilities that followed, as well as institutional practices perceived as discriminatory, have favoured the formation of prejudice between Arabs and Jews. Among

such factors, they suggest that discrimination in the provision of municipal services and home ownership, neighbourhood conditions, extreme political opinions, identification with symbols, or not knowing the language propitiate social categorization and the formation of prejudice. However, there are other factors that have a positive impact on perceptions of the other, such as Arabs and Jews living in the same flats, as well as the willingness to integrate with each other.

Second, when an individual identifies with a group, he/she may tend to “depersonalizes”, slanting his beliefs toward the perceived group view, namely the stereotype. This group process produces a psychological state in individuals in which there is a decrease in self-evaluation (personal awareness or identity) and fear of being evaluated by others, which favours anti-normative behaviour and a decrease in prosocial behaviour (Berger & Andaur, 2022), producing a transition from individual identity to collective identity, accepting and internalising the specific norms, beliefs, and values of the group. This process of social categorization and the subsequent stereotypes derived from it have a negative effect on the coexistence of both ethnic groups (Jews and Arabs). Thus, the historical-political context, situational and personal factors, or the political and social practices discussed above, have a significant impact on the population's transition from individual to group identity. Falah et al. (2000) report that one of the most influential factors is extreme political opinions.

Additionally, there is diversity in ethnicity, language, religion, customs, traditions, and culture, as mentioned above, although human beings have differences in national beliefs, religions, languages, and cultures caused by ethnic diversity, everyone needs to coexist. Considering only the differences between them can lead to conflicts that do not benefit either party. Acceptance of cultural diversity and the uniqueness of each culture (cultural integration) or multicultural (cultural pluralism) means that the society accepts cultural differences and tries not to dominate each other. In this regard, according to some authors, to promote particularistic education that enhances the unique cultural characteristics of specific cultural groups and the preservation of their identity, and pluralistic education that cultivates intercultural tolerance and respect and promotes dialogue between groups, encourages positive coexistence and equality, which reduces potential social conflicts (see Haj Yahya, 2021; Nahhas, 2020). To this end, teachers are considered as key agents of social change responsible for educating future citizens. In addition to providing knowledge, this sector of the population is relevant in addressing issues related to social equality, the promotion of multiculturalism, tolerance, and a shared society (Hisherik & Paul-Binyamin, 2024). Therefore, teachers are key to disseminating these kinds of values and knowledge to students and thus to the future citizens who could transform society. However, the social and political context in which teachers are immersed is not innocuous for them, as they are the product of the society in which they live and of their own educational system. Therefore, it is relevant to know the perceptions of teachers as part of the population of Jewish and Arab ethnic groups and as potential agents of social change. The mul-

ticultural context of Israel, where Jews and Arabs study, adds to the importance of this issue.

Israeli Arabs relations with the state and the Jewish majority are dynamic and influenced by national policies that affect their welfare, economic situation, civil rights, and degree of integration into society. Over the years, the living standard for Arab citizens of Israel has increased, and progress has been made in education and employment –although most Arabs in Israel (65%) still work in low-paying physical trades such as construction, agriculture, and unskilled professions (Abu-Asba, 2020).

But coexistence requires more than money, work, and access to education. Samooha (2012) defines coexistence between Jews and Arabs in Israel as a voluntary recognition of equal rights and a shared loyalty to the state. Moreover, to Samooha (2012), peaceful coexistence requires that Jews and Arabs accept the right of the other to a state without conditions, adhere to democratic procedures (non-violence), and accept fiduciary duties to the state, among other measures.

When coexistence leads to conflict, it is largely due to shifting attitudes influenced by policy changes (Samooha, 2022a). In other words, because the government is a major player in Arab-Jewish relations, its policies toward the Arab population and the Palestinians influence the attitudes of Arab and Jewish citizens toward each other, and toward the state.

According to the Achord Institute's Ideal Graduate Model (2021), ensuring a sense of connection and belonging to the collective Israeli group, coupled with a deep sense of belonging to their own group, can provide the foundation for a meaningful Arab-Jewish partnership in Israeli society.

View of self, view of the other

Ethnic and religious conflict is a form of conflict supposedly generated on the basis of real or imagined “difference” rooted in ethnic and religious identities. It is “supposedly” because of the need to avoid the essentialism that characterizes discourses on identity politics, especially the independent power assigned to these identities in shaping political consciousness. Sometimes religious identity becomes part of an ethnic group's identity or vice versa and presents a volatile social mixture coupled with the power of the ethnic group's myth of common descent (Jah et al., 2023).

As a socio-political concept, identity has both an individualistic and a collective meaning: it is a “process located in the core of the individual and yet in the core of his community culture, a process which established, in fact, the identity of these two identities. In other words, it can simply be defined as a person's sense of belonging to a group if it influences his political behavior” (Werf et al., 2020).

In identity, conflicts, especially ethnic and religious ones, are the hardest to settle because they are embedded in beliefs, tradition, and culture. It becomes worst when it drives political activities. Further, identity is a personified embodiment of characteristics of what some person or group represents and belongs to. The identity is laden with values, interest, and needs that direct the pursuit of these factors (Jah et al., 2023).

For Arabs in Israel, identity is complicated by several factors. On the one hand, Arab Israelis have an emotional connection to an Arab nation that has failed to meet expectations, both domestic and foreign (some in Arab countries even consider Arabs in Israel to be traitors). On the other hand, to paraphrase Samooha (٢٠٢٢), Arab citizens of Israel have supported the state and feel loyal to it. Many Arabs even cooperated in political, intelligence, and security capabilities, contributing to the establishment of the Israeli government in Arab areas.

Rozner et al. (2022) assert that, based on survey data, many Jews in Israel (about 70%) feel connected to other Jews, and most (64%) recognize a common future for “all Jews” in the country. A small majority feel a special closeness to “all Israelis,” and a larger majority believe there is a common future for “all Israelis” (58%). Respondents also emphasize that policies encouraging residential separation between Arabs and Jews are damaging to the country and reinforce stereotypes, as well as structural discrimination.

Arab Israelis, meanwhile, often view themselves more as Palestinians belonging to a greater Arab nation than as citizens of a Jewish-majority state. Many Arab Israelis also see themselves as members of the Muslim religious community. This multiplicity of parallel identities generates significant tensions and manifests in several ways. For instance, it fuels Jewish attitudes toward Arabs, which can range from reserved to hostile. It also makes it difficult for Arab Israelis to feel that Israel is their country (Rotem, 2019).

Hermann (2017) examined the identities of the Jewish majority and the Arab minority in Israel, focusing primarily on language, a key component of identity. In her research, she asked respondents whether they spoke the language of the “other,” that is, whether Jews spoke Arabic or Arabs spoke Hebrew. In majority-minority relations, those in minority typically have a greater need to be fluent in the language of the majority. In line with this linguistic understanding, Hermann found that the percentage of Arabs who speak Hebrew was much higher than the percentage of Jews who speak Arabic.

In December 2021, in a survey of Arab-Jewish relations, Samooha (2022b) found that most Arabs in Israel define themselves through a Palestinian lens: 36.3% defined themselves as Palestinians living in Israel and 30.3% said they were Palestinian, making no mention of their Israeli citizenship. Only 33.1% defined themselves as Israeli Arabs.

In the same survey, most Arab Israelis (68.3%) blamed Israel for the conflict between Palestinians and the Israeli state; they viewed Jewish rejection of the two-state solution as a primary driver of conflict.

Yet, even if Israel were to fulfill this requirement, the state itself will remain a Jewish and Zionist state under the control of a Jewish majority, which will in turn continue to conflict with Arab identity formation (Samooha, 2022b). Thus, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is often referred to as a territorial conflict, but it is also a conflict over identity preservation (Ersoy-Ceylan, 2023).

Based on this background, the aim of the study is to investigate Arab and Jewish perceptions of the other, identify commonalities, and coexistence perceptions in a sample of Arab and Jewish teachers.

Derived from this aim, the following research questions were formulated: (R1) Will Arab teachers be more likely than Jewish teachers to perceive their relationship with the other negatively?; (R2) Will Arab teachers perceive themselves as less Israeli than Jewish teachers?; and (R3) Given the historical and social context, will Arab teachers report a stronger desire for coexistence than Jewish teachers?

Method

In order to achieve the aforementioned goal, a quantitative study was designed with a descriptive, cross-sectional, and correlational design using a survey methodology.

Participants

The research sample included 300 teachers, 150 from the Jewish ethnic group and 150 from the Arab ethnic group in the Israeli education system. A convenience sampling method was used to recruit participants.

Specifically, 60% of the Arab teachers were male, compared to 40.7% of the Jewish teachers. Among the Arab teachers, 32% taught in elementary schools, 32.7% in junior schools, and 35.3% in high schools. In contrast, 33.3% of the Jewish teachers were from elementary schools, 33.3% were from junior schools, and 33.3% from high schools.

In terms of educational attainment, 57.3% of the Arab teachers had a bachelor's degree, 38.7% had a master's degree, and 4% had a doctorate. Among the Jewish teachers, 40% had a bachelor's degree, 44% had a master's degree, and 16% had earned a doctorate.

Regarding the religiosity level among teachers, 42% of Arab teachers reported being secular religious, 40.7% traditional religious, and 17.3% secular. A 10% percent of the Jewish teachers self-reported as secular religious, 58% traditional religious, and 32% secular.

The average age of Arab teachers was 34.35 years ($SD = 8.48$). Their average years of teaching experience was 12.13 years ($SD = 7.25$) and the average number of teachers in their school was 34.25 teachers ($SD = 6.06$). Among Jewish teachers, the average age was 34.24 ($SD = 5.12$), the average years of experience was 7.15 years ($SD = 5.17$), and the average number of teachers in their school was 38.48 teachers ($SD = 11.47$).

Variables and instruments

This is a quantitative study, and several validated questionnaires were used.

Sociodemographic Questionnaire: This questionnaire aimed to collect the sample's sociodemographic characters, including gender, age, educational level, school type, teachers' number, principal's gender, years of experience, religiosity, nationality, and political tendency.

Teachers' Mutual Perception Questionnaire (Herman, 2017): This scale included 11 items, with participants scoring items from 1 = *Strongly do not agree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*, such as: “In

recent years, the attitude of the Arab citizens of Israel toward the state of Israel is more positive compared to their attitude toward it in the past". The Cronbach's alpha of the scale in this study was 0.86. Mutual perception refers to the way in which Arab and Jewish citizens perceive each other, do they perceive the other as a full partner in Israeli society, do Jews, as a majority group in Israel, perceive the Arabs as having equal rights and full partnership politically, socially, and economically.

Coexistence Willingness Questionnaire (Kupermintz et al., 2007): This scale included six items. Participants scored each item from 1 = *Strongly do not agree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*, such as "Willingness to live in neighborhood". The Cronbach's alpha was 0.76. Coexistence perception examines the concept of coexistence among Jewish and Arab citizens. This term refers to the extent to which Arabs and Jews are willing to be neighbors, to live and work in a common space, to meet and study together, and the possibility of living in common settlements.

Identity Questionnaire (Kupermintz et al., 2007): This scale included six items, with participants scoring each item from 1 = *Strongly do not agree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*, such as "It is possible for an Israeli Arab citizen who feels part of the Palestinian people to also be a loyal citizen to the state of Israel". Cronbach's alpha of this scale was 0.73. Identity perception refers to how all Jews and Arabs perceive their personal and national identity. This concept refers to the extent to which Arabs and Jews perceive themselves as part of Israeli society, and to what extent the residents perceive themselves as Israelis and how they define their identity.

Procedure

Participants were recruited using a telephone survey. The survey was conducted during February and March 2023 over 35 days. Before starting the questionnaires, the aim of the study and the ethical and confidentiality guarantees were explained. The socio-demographic questionnaire was applied and then the questionnaires were presented to the teachers. Also, the research was carried out in accordance with the ethical research rules. Therefore, the full informed consent of the teachers to participate in the study was obtained and the participants were guaranteed complete anonymity so that they were not required to provide any details that lead to their identity. Also, the participants were guaranteed their right to stop their participation at any stage of the study. Participants' responses were entered into a database for further analysis.

Data analysis

Considering that the distribution of the sample does not follow parameters of normality and homogeneity of variances using Levene's statistic as to perform independent samples t-tests, non-parametric tests using U Mann-Whitney test were performed to test the differences in the scores obtained in the mutual perception, willingness to live together, and identity questionnaire between Jewish and Arab participants. Comparisons were carried out both for total scores and for individual

items of each scale. In order to carry out these non-parametric statistical tests, ranges and standardised Z-scores were taken into account to calculate the effect size in each case.

Results

Since the sample distribution does not follow normality and homogeneity of variances parameters, non-parametric tests were performed to compare the groups.

To answer R1, a non-parametric U Mann Whitney test was conducted, which did not reveal significant differences between Arab teachers'-Arab citizens' relationship perception ($M = 159.9$, $n = 150$) and Jews teachers' school's perception ($M = 141.07$, $n = 150$), $U = 9836$, $W = 21161$, $Z = -1.9$, $p = .06$.

For a deeper analysis, another Mann Whitney U test was conducted to identify differences in Arabs citizens-state relations components scores between Arab and Jews teachers. The result of this test is presented in Table 1. As can be learned from this table, significant differences were found between Arab and Jewish teachers in the index of relations between Jews and Arabs compared to the situation with the establishment of the state, in the relations between the Arab residents and the state, in social and political relations about the state, in the integration of Arab residents in decision-making in the country, in national and military service, the equal attitude of the state towards the Arab residents, in the democratization index towards the Arab residents, and in the index of denial of the right to vote and in the index of equal allocation of budgets. On the other hand, no differences were found between Arab and Jewish teachers in the index of the attitudes of the Arab residents towards Israel and in the index of decision-making at the level of the government's policy on Jews only.

Another Mann Whitney U test for conducted to test R2. The results revealed that Jews teachers' coexistence attitudes score was significantly higher ($M = 190.06$, $n = 150$) compared to the Arab teachers' coexistence attitudes ($M = 110.4$, $n = 150$), $U = 5231$, $W = 16556$, $Z = -8.1$, $p < .001$ with a moderate effect size $r = .66$.

In the same way, it was carried out a Mann Whitney U test to check differences in coexistence attitudes components scores between Arab and Jews teachers. The results revealed significantly higher willingness of Jew teachers compared to Arab to meet with the other, study together, host him, be roommates, be friends, and share social media together. According to these findings, it can be argued that Jews teachers are characterized by a distinctly higher willingness than Arab teachers for coexistence (Table 2).

A Mann Whitney U test was conducted to examine R3 and revealed that Jews teachers' identity perception score was significantly higher ($M = 201.38$, $n = 150$) compared to the Arab teachers' identity perception ($M = 99.62$, $n = 150$), $U = 3618$, $W = 14943$, $Z = -10.2$, $p < .001$ with a strong effect size $r = .83$.

A second U Mann Whitney test conducted to test differences in identity component scores between Arab and Jewish teachers. The result of this U Mann Whitney test is presented in Table 3, and it indicates significant differences between Jewish

Table 1*Arabs citizens-state relations components differences between Arab and Jewish teachers (N = 300)*

Arabs citizens-state relations components		M.Rank	U	Z	p
In recent years, the attitude of the Arab citizens of Israel towards the state of Israel is more positive compared to their attitude towards it in the past	Arabs	147.3	10771	-0.7	.513
	Jews	153.7			
To this day, relations between Jewish citizens and Arab citizens are more positive than in the early years of the state	Arabs	180.6	6730	-6.2	< .001
	Jews	120.4			
Arabs have stronger connection to Israel than before	Arabs	169.4	8423	-3.9	< .001
	Jews	131.7			
Arabs have strong social and political relations with the state of Israel	Arabs	177.6	7184	-5.6	< .001
	Jews	123.4			
The state required to involve Arab professionals in decision-making in public bodies	Arabs	184.2	6201	-0.7	< .001
	Jews	116.8			
Every citizen, Jewish or Arab, who is of the appropriate age and exempt from military service would be required by law to do civilian service	Arabs	117.2	6250	-.69	< .001
	Jews	183.8			
The Israeli authorities over the years treated the Arab citizens of the country in an equitable and fair manner	Arabs	133.3	8676	-3.5	< .001
	Jews	167.7			
The regime in Israel is democratic even for the Arab citizens	Arabs	120.6	6679	-6.3	< .001
	Jews	181			
The right to vote in the elections should be taken away from those who do not agree to declare that Israel is the nation state of the Jewish people	Arabs	106.6	4667	-9.6	< .001
	Jews	194.4			
The state of Israel should give equal budgets to Jewish and Arab communities	Arabs	217.4	1221	-13.8	< .001
	Jews	83.6			
Decisions that are fateful to the country regarding the system of government and the structure of the economy and society must be made by a Jewish majority	Arabs	148.3	10917	-.47	.640
	Jews	152.72			

Table 2*Coexistence components differences between Arab and Jewish teachers (N = 300)*

Coexistence attitudes components		M.Rank	U	Z	p
Meeting together	Arabs	119.9	6652	-6.3	< .001
	Jews	181.2			
Study together	Arabs	111.6	5415	-8	< .001
	Jews	189.4			
Host at my house	Arabs	104.2	4308	-9.5	< .001
	Jews	196.8			
Live in the neighborhood	Arabs	112.4	5531	-7.9	< .001
	Jews	188.6			
To be a friend	Arabs	111.5	5394	-8.1	< .001
	Jews	189.5			
Share social media	Arabs	111.4	5386	-8.1	< .001
	Jews	189.6			

Table 3*Identity components differences between Arab and Jewish teachers (N = 300)*

Identity Perception		M.Rank	U	Z	p
I feel myself a part of Israeli society	Arabs	117	6226	-7.2	< .001
	Jews	184			
The relations between the Jewish citizens of Israel and the Arab citizens of Israel today are good	Arabs	102	3966	-10.6	< .001
	Jews	199			
It is possible for an Israeli Arabs citizen who feels part of the Palestinian people to also be a loyal citizen to Israel state	Arabs	208.2	2596	-12.2	< .001
	Jews	92.8			
To preserve their identity, it is best for Jews and Arabs in Israel to live apart from each other.	Arabs	99.4	3583	-11.1	< .001
	Jews	201.6			
I feel Israeli	Arabs	89.3	2064	-13.6	< .001
	Jews	211.7			
I identify with the symbols (flag & anthem) of the country, or the symbols of the country represent me.	Arabs	104	4267	-10.1	< .001
	Jews	197.1			

and Arab teachers in terms of the sense of belonging to Israeli society, perception of the relationship between Jews and Arabs, preserving national identity, sense of Israeliness, and in terms of the hints and symbols of the state, with higher mean values for Jewish teachers. In the case of loyalty to the state on the part of Israeli Arabs who feel part of the Palestinian people, there are statistically significant differences, but it is the Arab teachers who obtain higher values.

Discussion

The main purpose of the study was to examine mutual perception, identity perception, and coexistence perception between Arab and Jewish teachers in Israel. The findings presented in this study may be relevant to understanding the relationships currently established between the Arab and Jewish populations in the current context of inequality and conflict in the state of Israel. The study therefore provides an approach and description of psychological, providing data that could be useful to carry out interventions at national and local level that favor equality and integration and reduce stereotypes.

In addressing R1, the findings did not reveal significant differences between Arab and Jewish teachers in terms of the total relation scores between them. However, Arab teachers believe that Arab residents of Israel are treated better than past generations, that Arab residents have a stronger connection to Israel than before, that Arab residents have strong social and political ties with the state, that the state should integrate Israeli Arabs into decision-making processes, and that the state of Israel should give equal budgets to Jewish and Arab communities. Jewish teachers, meanwhile, feel strongly that Israeli citizens, whether Arab or Jew, should do national or military service, that the state has treated Arab residents unfairly, that the government is democratic, and that the right to vote should be denied to those who oppose the Jewish nature of the state. Both groups had positive perceptions of Arab Israelis' attitude toward the state, and both groups disagreed that only Jewish

Israelis should be making national policy decisions. These findings are supported by past studies, such as Rodin (2019), which showed that Jews and Arabs hold negative perceptions of each other, but Jews perceive Arabs more negatively and less modern than themselves. In addition, it was also showed that Jews perceive Arabs as enemies who endanger Israel's existence, while Arabs hold fewer extreme positions against Jews in Israel. Still, the trend of mutual negative perception is clearly observed. Such findings can be explained by the radicalization of both sides. Attacks on Israel from the West Bank and Gaza have crystallized a negative view of Arabs in general, including Israeli Arab citizens (Rodin, 2019). Rodin's study (2019) showed that Arabs believe that Jews do not accept them as citizens with equal rights and express high levels of lack of trust in Arab citizens. Also, Arabs believe that Jews hate them and try not to come make contacts or interactions with the Arab citizens. Niwa et al. (2016) also revealed that Jews also hold negative stereotypes against Arabs such that they believe that Arabs hate Jews and do not accept the Israel state existence as a Jewish state. Jews also believe that Arabs do not believe in Jews and express low levels of trust for them. The deterioration in relations was reflected, among other things, in bills of a restrictive nature, such as the preference of military former members of the armed forces in employment, admission of settlers to small localities in the periphery after an examination by an admissions committee, charging those seeking citizenship with a declaration of allegiance to a Jewish state, and the enactment of the Nationality Law (Israel - The nation state of the Jewish people) in July 2018.

In examining R2, we found perceptions of coexistence to be significantly higher for Jewish teachers than Arab teachers, suggesting a greater willingness from Jewish teachers to interact and coexist. These results are supported by several studies such as Falah et al. (2000), which report data indicating that a large part of the Jewish population accepts the fact that Arabs in Israel are a given reality to be accommodated. Hisherik and Paul-Binyamin (2024) argue that there are tentative advances

towards inclusivity, with a willingness on the part of Jews to accept Arab citizenship and collaborate in various spheres. Examples include the integration of Arab teachers into Jewish schools and vice versa, along with efforts to bring Arabs into the job market and support freedom of expression. Rozner et al. (2022) asked Jewish and Arab respondents to define the phrases “common future” and “closeness” and found that most Jews and Arabs in Israel agree that most shared spaces, such as hospitals or supermarkets, should be shared by all citizens. Rozner et al. (2022) state that, according to survey data on the Jewish population, a majority believe that there is a common future for “all Israelis” (58%), however, participants cite residential separation policies as detrimental to coexistence.

In addressing R3, we found that Jewish teachers feel a stronger sense of belonging to Israeli society, believe that relations between Jews and Arabs are sufficient, and value cultural separation as a means to preserve national and personal identity. Respondents also expressed doubt that Israeli Arabs can be both Palestinian and loyal to Israel. In contrast, Arab teachers felt less Israeli, viewed Israel’s symbols as irrelevant, opposed the idea that national and personal identities were mutually exclusive, and believed that an Israeli Arab who identifies as Palestinian can also be a loyal citizen to Israel. These findings are also consistent with past studies examining perception of Arab national identity in Israel, such as Rotem (2019), which showed that Jewish citizens of Israel are not only citizens of the state but are also part of a larger group that is not contained within Israel’s territorial borders (the Jewish diaspora).

Arabs of Israel share their Israeli citizenship with a Jewish population but see themselves, to a greater or lesser degree, as part of the Palestinian people and the Arab nation (Rotem, 2019) rather than of Israel. Many also see themselves as part of the Muslim religious community. This multiplicity of parallel identities generates great tension between Arabs and Jews in Israel, which ranges from reticence to hostility (Samooha, 2022a).

In the 2018 Israeli Democracy Index, nearly half of all Arab Israeli respondents (49%) identified themselves as Arab rather than Palestinian (25%), Israeli (18%), or religious (8%) (Aryan, 2018). This finding can be explained by the discrimination and exclusion of Arab citizens in Israel, as they do not receive their collective rights and the state does not treat them as citizens with equal rights. Therefore, they emphasize their Palestinian identity and neglect their identity as Israeli Arab citizens.

Among Jews, secularism is strongly linked with an “Israeli” self-definition, although the two do not necessarily overlap. Those who define themselves as “traditional” are divided between Israeli and Jewish as their primary identities. In contrast to Arab Israelis, Jews view the state as “their” country and receive full rights and budgets. Thus, it stands to reason that they are more loyal to the state than Arab citizens.

Considering the findings on perception of the other, identity and coexistence, these could be positively promoted through the implementation of more egalitarian social policies (e.g., non-restrictive policies regarding access to certain jobs and places of residence based on nationality or segregation of educational contexts), the creation of cooperative relationship, and the estab-

ishment of common goals between Arabs and Jews. These strategies attend to and could be based on Social Contact Theory (Allport, 1954), thus encouraging the use of common spaces and shared activities that promote experiences between members of different groups that are positive rather than hostile or unpleasant. Furthermore, as future lines of research, this information could be expanded by exploring more deeply other factors at the psychological and social level that could be protective factors that could be introduced into educational, political, and religious discourses or conflict, generating factors and bases, such as the influence of conditioning factors and schemes based on cognitive and socio-cultural practices and schemes of religious or political origin. In this way, more effective interventions could be designed and implemented. These interventions should be applied first to teachers as a whole, since as agents of social change and trainers of students who will be future citizens, they should have as positive perceptions as possible and believe in a possible coexistence and a fair multicultural society. Based on the findings of this study, interventions should aim to promote coexistence and identity with the Israeli state among Arab teachers.

Limitations and implications

Throughout the long, troubled history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Ben-Meir, 2023), Arab and Jewish citizens of Israel have developed negative mutual perceptions of the other. Unfortunately, the Israel state, while aware of this trend, does little to moderate these perceptions, and even exacerbates them through practices of continued exclusion and discrimination. Against this background, Arab citizens of Israel tend to sharpen their Palestinian identity at the expense of their Israeli roots. Both Arabs and Jews hold negative attitudes toward coexistence, although Jew citizens are more moderate on this measure.

From these findings and conclusions, several future research directions can be derived. For instance, researchers should consider examining attitudes, stereotypes, and coexistence of Jews and Arabs along generational lines. Another line of inquiry: the role of Arab and Jewish media in shaping national identities, stereotypes, attitudes, and coexistence perceptions. Finally, a study of the role Arab and Jewish education systems play in shaping and reinforcing these perceptions would be beneficial for targeting mitigations.

These findings can serve as a foundation for intervention programs at both a national and local level. At the national level, the Israeli state can adopt a multicultural approach that integrates the country’s Arab population as equal citizens and provides them with funding to support social and political development. The government can use these findings to lead an advertising campaign aimed at challenging stereotypes and barriers between the two populations.

To deconstruct cultural and stereotypical barriers at the local level, authorities could conduct regular meetings between Arabs and Jews in neighboring settlements, and host various cultural events. Authorities can lead integration programs between Arabs and Jews so that people feel united in their status as Israelis.

In the Israeli education system, meanwhile, intervention programs are needed to create shared learning environments and educational meetings between Arabs and Jews. For instance, cultural camps could be held to promote awareness and dialogue. Such intervention plans, which are based on Cultural Intelligence Theory (Goh, 2012) and in Social Contact Theory (Allport, 1954), can serve as a framework for promoting intercultural competence in citizenship education, including dialogue, patience, tolerance, and acceptance, which could also lead to more prosocial behaviour (Berger & Andaur, 2022). Teachers face the opportunity –and the challenge– to lead and teach with cultural intelligence and promote the concept of coexistence.

Some research limitations can be indicated. The first is related to the questionnaire. Because the survey relied on self-reported answers, it is susceptible to bias and distortion, which could compromise the reliability of results. Moreover, the results may depend to a largely extent on the measures used in the research. The second limitation pertains to the sample selection method, which generalized the results to male and female teachers from Arab and Jewish communities. The third limitation is that no hypothesis was made prior to data collection.

As a future line of research, it is proposed to replicate the study with other measuring instruments to test the reliability of the results. Furthermore, it is recommended to select samples that represent the study population, such as random probability samples, which would give equal and known probability assumptions to each member of the study group. Finally, future research should build on these preliminary results to construct theoretical models that allow for clear and robust predictions.

Conclusions

The results revealed that there are no significant differences in the total perception of relations between Arab citizens and the state between Arab and Jewish teachers, the perception of identity is significantly lower for Arab teachers, and the perception of coexistence is significantly higher for Jewish teachers. This research provides data on psychological variables that help to understand the relationship between the Arab and Jewish populations in the current social context. It therefore establishes an approach and description of the psychological factors on the perception of the other, identity, and coexistence in these populations, which can be useful for carrying out effective interventions that favor equality and integration and reduce stereotypes. In this sense, it is important to know the current state of the question among teachers since, in addition to being a part of Israel's population, they are important agents of social change in the training of future citizens and the promotion of a shared and egalitarian society.

Author contributions

Conceptualization: M.A., A.R., M.A.M., M.M.
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Validation: M.A., A.R., M.A.M., M.M.
Formal analysis: M.A., M.A.M.

Investigation: M.A.
Resources: M.A.
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Visualization: M.A.M.
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Writing – review & editing: M.A., A.R., M.A.M., M.M.

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Declaration of interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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El Estado, el yo y la voluntad de coexistir: percepciones
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