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Durable Professionalism in Contested Spaces: Evaluating the Conversion of Teacher Readiness into Stable Professional Tenure in Politically Contested Multicultural Settings, 2022–2025

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Abstract

This study examines the systemic and political dynamics shaping the professional trajectories of Palestinian educators trained for boundary-crossing roles in Jewish state schools in Israel. While specialized programs successfully cultivated intercultural competence and pedagogical readiness, these gains were undermined by entrenched structural and ideological barriers. 12 in-depth semi-structured interviews with 12 Palestinian teachers were analyzed as well as findings from a telephone survey with 99 graduates. Findings reveal that institutional absorption failure, manifested through contractual precarity, geographic misalignment, and organizational inertia, prevented the conversion of individual readiness into stable tenure. Inclusion was found to be conditional, requiring sustained emotional labor, linguistic self-censorship, and political alignment, particularly during periods of heightened sociopolitical tension following 7 October 2023. These patterns reflect deeply rooted power asymmetries that marginalize Palestinian citizens and perpetuate tokenistic integration. This study argues that durable professional integration in contested spaces demands a paradigmatic shift: from viewing inclusion as a temporary concession to embedding stability and equity as structural principles. Such transformation requires dismantling institutional mechanisms that reproduce asymmetry and investing in long-term ecological supports, such as permanent contracts, culturally responsive leadership, and inclusion protocols. Without these systemic reforms, intercultural competence remains insufficient to overcome the political and structural forces.

Keywords: Palestinian teachers; systemic barriers; Israeli-Arab conflict; boundary-crossing teachers; sociopolitical tension



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1. Introduction: From Preparation to Professional Rupture in Boundary-Crossing Pedagogy

The mandate for teacher preparation in pluralistic societies extends beyond traditional pedagogy to the cultivation of intercultural competence (IC) (Cushner & Mahon, 2009; Cushner, 2025; Dervin & Hahl, 2015). This educational imperative acquires profound political and social urgency within deeply divided, high-intensity conflict environments, such as Israel, where the structural segregation of educational streams necessitates deliberate, high-risk policy interventions (Allport, 1954; Abo-Zaed Arar, 2025; Krakowski, 2008). The integration of minority educators, specifically Arabic-speaking teachers entering Jewish state schools, serves as a strategic mechanism to address chronic staffing shortages while fostering elements of a shared civil society (Hisherik et al., 2025; Jayusi & Bekerman, 2019).

The present inquiry provides a detailed, longitudinal qualitative analysis of the professional trajectories of graduates from the “Orientation Program for Arabic-Speaking Teaching Candidates”, which was implemented during 2022–2023, and follows their professional integration from 2022 through 2025. This initiative was established to equip Palestinian educators with the requisite linguistic, cultural, and intercultural skills for boundary-crossing roles (Gindi & Erlich Ron, 2025). However, the framing of this program often emphasizes the utility of the Palestinian teacher to the majority system, positioning them as a solution to Jewish institutional deficits (e.g., teacher shortage) rather than foregrounding their own professional agency. While prior scholarship confirms the efficacy of such specialized training in fostering individual readiness (e.g., Abo-Zaed Arar, 2025; Jayusi & Bekerman, 2019), a critical policy lacuna persists: the failure to convert this enhanced individual competence into stable, long-term professional tenure. Research consistently indicates that minority educators face disproportionately high turnover rates, often due to deficiencies in the institutional ecology of the receiving schools rather than individual teacher deficits (Achinstein et al., 2010; Yip & Ji, 2024).

We investigate the systemic and political factors that promoted and impeded the stable tenure of these educators over a three-year arc, contextualized by the dramatic shift from the routine tension of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the heightened sociopolitical volatility following the events of 7 October 2023, and the subsequent war in Gaza. The Hamas large-scale, coordinated attack that killed approximately 1,200 people in Israel and involved the kidnapping of over 240 civilians and soldiers triggered a profound national trauma and reconfigured social expectations across Israeli institutions, including schools (Shechory Bitton et al., 2026). The attack’s scale and shock, widely described as Israel’s 9/11, intensified public scrutiny of expressions of loyalty, belonging, and national solidarity, leading to an environment where deviations from dominant emotional or political norms were perceived as suspect. In this climate, teachers who were already positioned as “other” encountered heightened pressure to mute or manage their cultural and emotional expressions. This study ultimately argues that the observed professional rupture is a function of systemic absorption failure, where institutional structures and political asymmetry undermined the individual resilience and competence successfully cultivated during the training period.

2. Literature Review: Intercultural Competence, Asymmetry, and the Ecology of Retention

To understand the trajectory of Palestinian teachers in Jewish schools, it is necessary to move beyond generic theories of multicultural education and engage with the specific structural realities of the Israeli context, as well as critical theories of power and boundary crossing.

2.1. The Israeli Education System and Boundary-Crossing Teachers

The Israeli education system is not a monolithic entity, but a segregated structure composed of four distinct streams: State-general (Jewish), State-Religious (Jewish), Ultra-Orthodox (Jewish/Haredi), and Arab (State-run) (Al-Haj, 2002). While all streams are theoretically funded by the Ministry of Education, they remain administratively and culturally distinct (Abu-Saad, 2016). The Arab education system, serving Palestinian citizens of Israel, has historically suffered from chronic underfunding, overcrowding, and significant infrastructure deficits compared to the Jewish streams (Golan-Agnon, 2006).

This separate and unequal reality creates a powerful push factor for Palestinian teachers to seek employment in Jewish schools. Many seek employment in Jewish schools not necessarily out of an ideological desire for integration, but in search of professional

dignity, better resources, and organized working environments that are often absent in the under-resourced schools of their home communities (Jayusi & Bekerman, 2019).

However, crossing into the Jewish stream means entering a space where the curriculum, calendar, and national ethos are exclusively Jewish-Zionist (Ichilov, 2004). The “State-Secular” stream, while not religious, is heavily imbued with Zionist narratives, Jewish holidays, and national symbols that exclude the Palestinian narrative (Jamal, 2007). Thus, the Palestinian teacher enters not as a neutral professional, but as a representative of the “Other” within a hegemonic space designed for the majority (Jamal, 2007; Jayusi & Bekerman, 2019).

2.2. Intercultural Competence as Survival Mechanism

Intercultural Competence is a multifaceted capacity spanning cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains, enabling effective interaction across diverse cultural contexts (Deardorff, 2006). For teacher preparation, the Intercultural Teaching Competence (ITC) model provides a useful structure, categorizing skills into three levels (Dimitrov & Haque, 2016; Okken et al., 2022). The Foundational Level includes essential attitudinal prerequisites, such as openness and empathy; the Facilitation Level addresses observable behaviors, such as classroom management and effective cross-cultural communication; and the Curriculum Design Level pertains to integrating culturally relevant materials (Hisherik et al., 2025).

However, in the context of asymmetric conflict, IC is not merely a professional soft skill; it transforms into a survival mechanism. For the minority teacher, IC involves the high-stakes management of Controversial Political Issues (CPI) and the navigation of constant identity threats. (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2025; Gindi et al., 2024; Muszkat-Barkan, 2022; Ting-Toomey, 2009). The development of IC in these settings is complex, often progressing from initial knowledge gaps and mutual apprehension toward building trust through structured encounters (Hisherik et al., 2025). However, this delicate process is perpetually challenged by the entrenched perceptions of irreconcilable goals characteristic of intractable conflicts (Bar-Tal, 2011).

2.3. Boundary-Crossing and Power Asymmetry

Boundary-crossing teachers are educators whose distinct backgrounds stand out within the school context, particularly because of differences from the student body or the staff (Gindi et al., 2020). In the Israeli context, however, the boundary is not merely professional or organizational; it is a militarized, national, and linguistic border enforced by the state (Saada & Gross, 2019). The power asymmetry is such that Palestinian teachers are expected to be fluent in Hebrew and knowledgeable about Jewish culture (Zionism, holidays, Bible), whereas their Jewish colleagues rarely possess reciprocal knowledge of Arabic or Palestinian heritage (Erich Ron, 2025). This imbalance imposes a significant, unequal burden on minority teachers, demanding continuous cultural vigilance and rigorous identity negotiation, often manifesting as self-censorship, to preserve professional legitimacy within the dominant cultural institution (Gindi & Erlich Ron, 2019; Saada & Gross, 2019).

This continuous expenditure of self-regulation and emotional energy is recognized as emotional labor and is a significant factor contributing to the disproportionately high attrition observed among minority teachers, regardless of their intrinsic motivation or pedagogical skill (Karakus et al., 2024). The success of IC is therefore conditional on the system’s capacity to recognize and alleviate this asymmetrical burden, ensuring that professional tenure is not contingent upon identity reduction.

Power asymmetry is deeply rooted in Israeli society, where the Palestinian citizens are marginalized (Ghattas, 2025). Like Indigenous people in other countries, they often

confront systemic resistance, which manifests as institutional inertia, tokenism, and policies designed to uphold the status quo (Povey et al., 2024). The influence of interest convergence means that systemic changes frequently favor the interests of dominant groups, making genuine minority agency and sovereignty difficult to realize.

2.4. *The Ecology of Teacher Retention*

Long-term teacher stability is fundamentally determined by the institutional ecology of retention, the policy-amenable, school-level conditions that sustain professional commitment (Achinstein et al., 2010). For boundary-crossing educators, the core measures of this ecology include the provision of stable financial capital (e.g., permanent contracts), supportive human capital like high-quality mentoring and leadership, and robust multicultural capital, such as an organizational culture that actively values diversity and protects against prejudice (Rutherford et al., 2024). The failure to provide standard, permanent employment undermines the efficacy and morale of these educators, transforming them into temporary, flexible labor and accelerating systemic turnover (Gindi et al., 2020; Yip & Ji, 2024).

3. Materials and Methods

The current evaluation employed a qualitative, short-term longitudinal design rooted in a contextualist epistemology to explore the multifaceted experiences of graduates of a teachers' training program (Silverman et al., 2024). This approach was critical for capturing the depth, nuance, and political sensitivity inherent in the boundary-crossing teacher's professional arc. The methodology was purposefully constructed to move beyond mere measurement of training outcomes toward a structured exploration of the systemic and psychological factors that either supported or undermined the long-term conversion of individual readiness into stable professional tenure.

3.1. *The Research Context*

The present study is based on the evaluation of the 'Orientation Program for Arabic-Speaking Teaching Candidates to be Placed in Schools in the Jewish Sector' (henceforth—the Orientation Program), which operated between August 2022 and 2023 across two cohorts. The Program was established to address a dual mandate: practically, to mitigate the chronic shortage of teachers in the Jewish state education system by utilizing the oversupply of qualified Arab educators; and ideologically, to promote a shared society by reducing prejudices and stereotypes rooted in the structural segregation of the Israeli educational system (Abo-Zaed Arar, 2025; Hisherik et al., 2025).

The Program was explicitly designed to prepare Palestinian graduates for boundary-crossing roles by enhancing their linguistic command of Hebrew, deepening their knowledge of Jewish culture and heritage (e.g., holidays and memorial days), and developing the IC required for optimal integration. It functioned as a preparatory phase for the integration of the teachers into Jewish schools, thereby complementing a program named "Meshalvim u'Mishtalvim" ("Integrating and Being Integrated"), which has been operating in Israel since 2013, and provides ongoing professional support to Arab teachers during their integration into Jewish schools.

However, the Orientation Program was ultimately discontinued following the events of 7 October 2023, and the ensuing war, which placed the program in a challenging political and security context (Jayusi, 2025; Silverman et al., 2024).

3.2. *Participants and Sampling Strategy*

In October 2025, a comprehensive telephone survey was conducted with 99 graduates (from a list of 364 teachers who graduated from the program) to map their current employment status and professional trajectories. This preliminary mapping procedure was

designed to identify retention patterns. Additionally, we purposefully sampled 12 teachers for in-depth interviews from the list of 364 graduates. The 12 participants were selected primarily because they remained in the system (or had recently left), allowing for a deep investigation into the mechanisms of survival and the specific points of friction. We specifically sought diversity in subject matter (STEM vs. Humanities) and geographic location to see if these factors influenced retention.

The qualitative component focused on 12 graduates interviewed in the summer and fall of 2025. Table 1 tracks the career paths of 12 teachers who completed the Orientation Program and their employment history immediately following graduation. The graduates represent a diverse group in terms of age, ranging from 24 to 47, and cover a wide array of teaching subjects, including Mathematics, Art, Hebrew, and Sciences. The employment records reveal that while a fair number of the interviewees secured positions in Jewish schools, the trajectory for many was marked by instability and discontinuity in the years immediately following the program. Only two individuals, Fadia and Amal, show clear, consecutive employment in a single Jewish school setting right after graduation, suggesting a smooth transition. However, this stability contrasts sharply with the experiences of most others.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics.

Name	Age	Teaching Subject Area	Education	Instruction History
Rania	37	Mathematics and Computer Science	M.A.	Three different Jewish schools in three years, all middle schools.
Wurud	29	Art	M.A.	Taught in a Jewish elementary school for two years after the program, and now teaches in an Arab elementary school.
Nadin	36	Kindergarten teacher	M.A.	Two years in a Jewish school, followed by a year in an Arab elementary school, and back to a Jewish school.
Dania	38	Early childhood	B.Ed.	A third of her position is in a Jewish school and the other two-thirds in the Arab education stream.
Khawla	30	Mathematics	B.A.	Worked part-time (50%) in the first year and full time in the second year.
Amal	32	Hebrew Literature and Education	B.Ed.	Her second year of teaching in a Jewish high school.
Najakh	27	English	B.Ed.	First year teaching in a Jewish high school as a substitute teacher.
Hiba	38	Hebrew	M.A.	Taught one year in a Jewish school, followed by teaching Hebrew privately for two years, and going back to teach at a Jewish school part-time.
Lubna	24	Math and Science	B.Ed.	Teaching in a Jewish special education school for the past two years.
Latifa	44	Art	B.Ed.	Since graduating from the program, has been working in three different Jewish schools simultaneously.
Jihan	31	Sciences	B.Ed.	Did not work in the first year after graduating from the program, and has worked in a Jewish middle school for the past year.
Fadia	47	Physics	B.Ed.	Has been working in a Jewish middle school for three years straight since graduating from the program.

3.3. Procedure

The research focused on Palestinian teacher-graduates who were placed in Jewish state schools from the two cohorts of the Orientation Program (2022 and 2023), two or three years after they completed the program. The evaluation team conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with a sample of 12 teachers in the summer and fall of 2025. The participants were purposefully sampled, and the timing of the interviews ensured a longitudinal

perspective, allowing for reflection on long-term professional stability following the post-7 October 2023 massacre.

Data collection was designed to prioritize interviewee comfort and rich narrative production. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or online, allowing participants flexibility, and were conducted in either Hebrew or Arabic, based on the interviewee's preference. Interviews conducted in Arabic were led by an Arabic-speaking researcher from the evaluation team. All interview transcripts were translated into Hebrew before being subjected to thematic analysis.

The analysis was a team-based thematic analysis informed by reflexive thematic analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The analysis team operated from a contextualist framework, viewing knowledge generated as context-specific and recognizing that the researchers' interpretation was influenced by partial perspectives (Haraway, 1988). The team included researchers with expertise in qualitative methodology and a deep understanding of the study's social and educational context.

This analysis integrated both deductive and inductive approaches to ensure theoretical grounding while remaining responsive to the data. Initially, a deductive framework was operationalized using the ecology factors defined by Achinstein et al. (2010), specifically focusing on financial, human, and social capital to systematically identify structural deficits. This top-down analysis was complemented by inductive open coding, which was essential for capturing emergent phenomena in the post-October 7th context that traditional, US-centric retention literature often overlooks. Through this dual-modal process, several novel codes surfaced, including "linguistic policing" regarding the use of Arabic, "the principal as a protective barrier" against parental interference, and the "demand for political alignment." This synthesized methodology allowed for a nuanced exploration of teacher retention that accounts for both established structural factors and localized political frictions.

This team-based approach enhanced rigor by incorporating diverse perspectives in an agreement-based approach rather than seeking simple inter-rater reliability. This process involved six stages: separate reading and initial impressions, comparison across interviews focusing on agency and professional resources, condensation of codes into topic groups (Braun & Clarke, 2006), deep scrutiny of these topic groups by the team, generation of final themes, and final refinement by the entire research team. Any disagreements were resolved through focused discussion in which team members revisited the relevant excerpts and clarified their interpretations until a shared understanding was reached. The goal of the analysis was to identify recurring themes related to motivation, the application of IC skills, the influence of administrative support, and the psychological and structural costs of tenure maintenance.

3.4. Research Positionality

The present qualitative investigation was led by a Jewish Israeli researcher with extensive experience in the field of intercultural education and conflict-affected societies. This leadership perspective, rooted in the majority society, inherently risks privileging the institutional viewpoint and potentially overlooking or understating the subtle dynamics of emotional labor and identity suppression experienced by the minority educators. This limitation, often termed 'partial perspective' (Haraway, 1988), necessitates transparency and proactive measures to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings (Bourke, 2014; Holmes, 2020). To mitigate these inherent biases and enrich the interpretive process, the research was conducted by an interdisciplinary, cross-cultural team. This team included one Jewish PhD specializing in religious studies, two Arab PhDs specializing in education, one Jewish PhD in sociology, and one Jewish MA in psychology. The benefit of this diverse research ecology was multi-layered. The presence of Arab colleagues was important for

ensuring the fidelity of the data interpretation, particularly for interviews conducted and transcribed in Arabic, offering critical insight into culturally embedded meaning and the political subtext of the narratives (Dhillon & Thomas, 2019; Kerstetter, 2012). When disagreements arose between Arab and Jewish team members regarding the interpretation data, these tensions were used as analytical data. The team adopted a dialogic consensus model, where the Arab researchers’ interpretation of cultural nuances and Arabic-language interviews was prioritized in the analysis of identity and safety themes. This reflexive process highlighted that even within the research team, power asymmetries regarding who gets to define reality were present and had to be actively managed.

The collaboration between colleagues specializing in sociology, education, and psychology provided interdisciplinary depth, allowing the research team to analyze the complex themes not merely as educational or administrative problems, but as manifestations of power asymmetry (Sociology), organizational culture (Education), and psychological coping mechanisms (Psychology). The juxtaposition of Jewish and Arab perspectives, coupled with the disciplinary diversity, ensured that the final thematic findings—particularly those concerning conditional inclusion and emotional neutrality—were critically challenged and triangulated across multiple cultural and theoretical frames, ultimately strengthening the rigor and validity of the qualitative results (Foote & Gau Bartell, 2011; Kezar, 2002).

4. Findings: Readiness, Resilience, and the Institutional Failure of Stable Tenure

Data from a telephone survey of 99 graduates, conducted in October 2025, revealed that 39.4% of the graduates were working in Jewish schools at the time the interviews were held, while 60.6% were not. The survey revealed that 15 teachers had left their Jewish school posts because they were hired only on a substitute basis, covering for teachers on sabbatical or maternity leave, and were subsequently dismissed or had their hours drastically reduced when the permanent teacher returned.

The thematic analysis reveals a compelling pattern: the successful cultivation of individual IC skills among the graduates stood in stark contrast to the institutional resistance encountered in the pursuit of stable professional tenure. The central thematic structure emerging from the analysis consists of three overarching themes and their respective sub-themes, as shown in Table 2. Theme 1 focuses on the internal resources and competencies developed by the teachers; Theme 2 details the external, structural impediments that drove attrition; and Theme 3 captures the psychological and political costs of maintaining a sense of belonging in the majority-dominated institutions.

Table 2. Results of the Thematic Analysis.

Themes	1. The Cultivation of Intercultural Competence and Professional Agency	2. Systemic Absorption Failure and the Mechanisms of Attrition	3. Conditional Inclusion and the Cost of Identity Negotiation
Subthemes	1A. Professional Agency and Foundational IC.	2A. The Geographic Barrier.	3A. The Principal as a Protective Barrier.
	1B. Cultural Knowledge and Facilitation Skills.	2B. Contractual Precarity.	3B. Enforced Self-Censorship and Linguistic Policing.
			3C. The Demand for Emotional and Political Alignment.

4.1. Theme I: The Cultivation of Intercultural Competence and Professional Agency

Graduates consistently reported that the Orientation Program provided them with essential professional and cultural capital. Contrary to the deficit model often applied to minority teachers, the graduates emerged with high levels of professional agency.

4.1.1. Professional Agency and Foundational IC

While all participants reported high motivation, the realization of that agency was dependent on the school context. The motivation to join the program was deeply linked to seeking greater professional agency and stability, elements perceived as more abundant in the Jewish state system compared to the Arab sector. The program was seen as a vital channel for accessing stable employment, often contrasting sharply with the scarcity of positions and perceived bureaucratic inefficiencies in the Arab sector. Rania, for example, described her choice to join in clear occupational terms:

There, [in Jewish schools] it's more ordered, more organized... I can't have a job in the Arab sector. If you want to work at an Arab school, you need to wait in line, unless you have connections, and I am one of those who don't have connections... I'd have to wait until my children have grandchildren, then I'll be able to enter.

This search for professional legitimacy was reinforced by the perception that the Jewish sector provided greater autonomy and validation for their pedagogical capital, which is a core component of Foundational IC (Hisherik et al., 2025; Okken et al., 2022). Nadin articulated a stark contrast, highlighting the administrative support and autonomy she found in the Jewish school:

In the Jewish sector there is more order than in the Arab sector. Also, I never approached my principal and told her: 'I want something' and she told me 'no', or 'no budget'... The management... is different. I always found inclusion and support in the Jewish sector... If I bring an idea and the principal loves the idea... [for example, once] she told me: 'Nadin, I have the hours, what can we do with them?', I told her: 'Let's do this for fourth grade... we have the national assessments soon. We will work on the assessment, give them learning strategies,' she accepted it happily. In the Arab sector, that happens less.

Nadin's experience confirms that supportive leadership valued her initiative, reinforcing her sense of efficacy and self-worth. Wurud presented a similar vocational motivation, stating that the Jewish school system was where her specific subject—art—was valued: "I would prefer a Jewish school... we don't have [it]... say in my village there is no art class. So there is no work... so I chose to be in a place that is good for me... for me as an art teacher, who appreciates the art, what I do." This confluence of factors, the search for order, financial stability, professional autonomy, and validation of specialized skill, is critical as it confirms the program's initial success in providing a pathway to enhanced agency and belonging.

4.1.2. Cultural Knowledge and Facilitation Skills

A core success of the program was its contribution to the acquisition of Cultural Knowledge (Cushner, 2025), particularly regarding Jewish heritage, holidays, and social norms. Khawla reflected on how the formal training provided depth beyond mere social exposure:

I lived in [a Jewish city], I know the culture... [but still] the [Orientation] program... deepened my knowledge... even things that were new... and that's how you can connect things... understanding the reasons... what are the customs, it also adds to you more... It's true that you experience it in your life, but you don't sit and study it... learning adds a different aspect in my opinion.

This specialized instruction enhanced the teachers' ability to navigate the social and educational context, improving their Facilitation Level competence and bridging the gap between academic proficiency and the pragmatic, cultural literacy required for sustained cross-cultural interaction.

4.2. Theme II: Systemic Absorption Failure: Structural Barriers to Tenure Stability

Despite the demonstrated individual readiness and high motivation of the graduates, the overarching institutional system consistently failed to support the formation of stable professional tenure. The mechanisms driving long-term attrition were consistently structural, pointing to a profound dysfunctionality within the retention ecology, which systematically utilized, then discarded, boundary-crossing educators (Achinstein et al., 2010).

4.2.1. The Geographic Barrier

The most severe and pervasive structural barrier reported was the pronounced geographical mismatch between the teachers' residences (the majority of graduates reside in North Israel), and the positions actively promoted for placement (concentrated overwhelmingly in the Central region). In spite of having known about this in advance, this created an untenable logistical and financial burden, transforming the pursuit of tenure into an exhausting and impractical endeavor, especially for those with family responsibilities. Wurud, for instance, noted the immediate difficulty: "They sent me to places far from my sector, from the area". For many, the travel requirements rendered the position incompatible with a sustainable work-life balance, leading to resignations and a search for jobs closer to home. Lubna explained the immense logistical burden this imposed on her as a mother:

Most of the jobs that they offered me were in the center [of Israel]. . . Now I am a mother, and I have small children. . . a work in the [center] is something like, that is disconnected from reality. . . It's true that I . . . want to work and I love to work, and also like that to fulfill my ambitions. . . but still, I am a mother. . . So no, they (the program) are not the ones who found me the job. . . That's why I didn't immediately start teaching after I finished the program.

The systemic failure was further underlined by explicit pressure placed on the graduates to accept these distant placements without institutional adaptation. Najakh recalled being informed of the limited options: "They put pressure at the beginning, [they told us] there are no nearby schools, 'you will go to far away schools'... They said there are no nearby schools, [and if] you do not want to receive far away schools. . . you will leave the program. I said I will try. . . I said: 'that's it, what will happen will happen, I want to start'". This pattern confirms a fundamental disconnect between the stated political goal of integration and the administrative logistics of placement, which prioritized the needs of the central institutions over the geographical constraints of the trained cohort.

4.2.2. Contractual Precarity

A critical institutional failure that actively sabotaged the long-term professional stability of the graduates was the persistent reliance on temporary contracts and the refusal to convert posts into stable, budgeted standard hours. This instability directly attacked the financial capital component of the retention ecology (Achinstein et al., 2010). As mentioned above, 15 teachers left their Jewish school posts because they were hired only on a substitute basis, and were subsequently dismissed or had their hours drastically reduced when the permanent teacher returned. This systematic utilization of prepared Arab teachers as flexible, short-term labor rather than permanent staff demonstrated a lack of institutional commitment to their long-term tenure.

This atmosphere of contractual ambiguity was compounded by a lack of clarity regarding professional incentives, which created distrust and eroded morale. Khawla, for instance, mentioned the dispute over promised benefits:

Something came up in the [orientation] program I remember very well, which is a guarantee of employment... They promised us... and that was a very big dispute. And the matter of the in-service training was not clear either. . . if there is in-service training, there is no professional development bonus. . . You promised a bonus, then stand by your word because in the end. . . there wasn't any.

This ambiguity concerning both contract stability and professional benefits, often paired with managerial excuses regarding budget cuts, revealed that the institutional system was structurally designed to support short-term staffing gaps, not long-term career progression. The unstable nature of employment was the decisive factor forcing prepared, motivated teachers back into the Arab education system or out of the profession entirely.

4.3. Theme III: Conditional Inclusion and the Cost of Identity Negotiation

The political environment, exacerbated by the post-October 7th crisis, sharpened the boundaries of professional acceptance, revealing that inclusion was often contingent upon the suppression of the teacher's national and emotional identity.

4.3.1. The Principal as a Protective Barrier

The principal's leadership proved critical in determining the teacher's psychological safety and professional tenure. The stability and efficacy of the Arab teacher were often contingent upon the principal's willingness to act as a mediator of interethnic relations and a protective shield against institutional and communal prejudice (Achinstein et al., 2010). Hiba illustrated how a strong principal provided the necessary human and social capital:

If there is someone. . . who is not comfortable with an Arab teacher teaching him, there is a way to deal with the matter... The principal does not agree. . . If the principal is strong. . . if the principal accepts you, the whole school will accept you. . . If the principal is good, then you won. . . She listens to us, listens to all our problems.

This protective function was important to teachers, providing institutional loyalty when teachers faced antagonism. Latifa, for instance, recalled the deep personal investment of her principal, which validated her professional legitimacy: "She [the principal] told me, Latifa, I will fight for you, I won't give up on you." This commitment from the leadership creates an essential climate of trust, mitigating the generalized fear of sanctions common among minority groups in high-conflict societies.

This supportive role extended to actively managing microaggressions and challenges from other staff members to the teacher's presence. Nadin faced repeated intrusive questioning from a Jewish teacher assistant who questioned her loyalty and intentions: "One assistant used to ask me: 'Why are you here? Why don't you work in the Arab sector? Why did you come here? You come a long way... are you thinking about something?... Are you thinking about something you want to do to us?'" Nadin reported that when she shared this with the principal: "she would... set a boundary." This decisive intervention by the principal protected the teacher from interpersonal antagonism and preserved Nadin's professional efficacy by ensuring the institutional space remained manageable.

Furthermore, after the post-October 7th massacre, the principal's role became a critical defense mechanism, offering vital institutional defense against community pressure (Silverman et al., 2024). Wurud, for example, was falsely accused by a student of making a provocative political statement—speaking badly of the prime minister. Her principal immediately managed the situation, protected Wurud from parental backlash and provided decisive support:

The principal called me after the last class and told me: ‘Wurud, everything is fine. . . you can go home calm.’ . . . I told her: ‘If you want to come to school on Sunday and find all the parents standing outside the school gate, either they will beat me up, or they will break my car. . . I am not going home before this matter is dealt with.’ She said to me: ‘You are not entering the classroom, because now if you enter, they will say you entered to improve their opinion. I will send the school grade coordinator.’ The coordinator is strong. The coordinator went in and said to them: ‘I want to understand what happened. . . The children told her: ‘Not true, Wurud did not say that. Wurud said such and such.’ The coordinator reprimanded them and told them not to invent things, not to lie.

This professional, swift intervention ensured the teacher was protected from false accusations and external communal pressure, but it should be mentioned that this would not have happened if Wurud had not been attentive and vigilant to the possibility of escalation.

At the same time, not all interviewed teachers encountered principals who functioned as a source of support, protection, and professional containment. Several teachers described managerial relationships marked by distance, heightened scrutiny, and limited pedagogical or emotional accompaniment, dynamics that significantly complicated their integration and undermined their capacity to remain in the Jewish educational system over time.

Rania’s words illustrate how the same position of authority that can enable belonging and professional stability may also operate as a mechanism of control, regulation, and identity constriction. Rania, who has moved between three Jewish schools since completing the program, described a professional trajectory marked by feelings of partial visibility and non-belonging, which she attributed to inconsistent and insufficient managerial support. Reflecting on her first placement, she recalled that “the principal told me. . . [that] there wasn’t a good connection between me and the students”, despite later asking her to remain as a substitute teacher for maternity leave. In her second school, the absence of meaningful accompaniment was especially salient: “No one came to observe me, no one, no principal, no vice principal. . . and in the end they said that I don’t speak well to the children and that the parents didn’t want me to stay.” Even in her current school, the third, despite reporting close relationships with students, she continues to encounter linguistic regulation by the principal, as will be further elaborated in the next subtheme.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate how managerial commitment can provide the indispensable human capital necessary to sustain the minority teacher’s presence and psychological safety within the contested institutional ecology. Conversely, when such commitment is absent, managerial authority may exacerbate professional precarity, weaken teachers’ sense of belonging, and undermine the conditions required for their long-term retention within the Jewish educational system.

4.3.2. Enforced Self-Censorship and Linguistic Policing

This subtheme reveals how professional acceptance frequently mandated the suppression of core identity components, compromising the IC goal of identity work (Ting-Toomey, 2009). The pressure to conform was exerted not only by colleagues but often implicitly by management through linguistic constraints. Rania reported direct instructions regarding linguistic self-censorship, indicating that the use of her mother tongue was viewed as a professional transgression: “She [the principal] told me: ‘a word in Arabic slipped out, be careful, don’t do that’.”

This prohibition on using Arabic, even spontaneously, functions as a powerful symbolic boundary, signaling that the Jewish school is a strictly Hebrew-speaking space where the minority language is unwelcome. This requirement for linguistic self-monitoring imposes a heavy cognitive load. Dania elaborated on the pervasive self-regulation required to

maintain legitimacy, highlighting the asymmetric power relations: “You keep your identity and your culture, but to express and speak in my language is impossible. . . You focus on what you teach... [but] you can’t just come and start speaking with your language and start freely, no.”

This necessity for identity containment means the teachers internalized the rule that only their professional self, the subject matter expert, was welcome, while their cultural self had to be suppressed. Rania also noted managerial attempts to disrupt the formation of supportive peer networks among Arab teachers, framed as encouragement for integration, but experienced as controlling: “The principal wanted to disperse the Arab teachers: ‘All the colleagues who speak Arabic sit together there, that is not acceptable to me. . . My goal is not to separate you... but I also want you to be in contact with all the teachers, as if to disperse.’” This experience of being policed both linguistically and socially demonstrates that while the principal’s power can be protective, it can also be used to enforce assimilation, demanding that the teachers dilute their cultural identity to appear integrated.

4.3.3. The Demand for Emotional and Political Alignment

The highest psychological cost was revealed in the wartime context, where the system demanded emotional compliance with the majority narrative. Wurud recounted a highly charged dialogue with her principal following a difficult incident, which exposed the conditional nature of her belonging:

I told the principal: “If you can understand me, I am a mother. My heart aches for all mothers in the world, the side does not matter.” The principal responded by saying: “Between us. . . there is no one who is not empathetic to their people, and I understand. I cannot tell you, ‘you are an Arab, don’t be empathetic to Arabs.’ I am Jewish, I will be empathetic to Jews. . . I understand that a person is empathetic to their people, but there is no need for the students and the school to feel it” . . . And that’s exactly what happened, and that’s what is happening. . . I (Wurud) try as hard as I can not to show any empathy [for Palestinians]. . . I know that she always wants to hear from me that I am empathetic to Jews, with the situation of the Jews, and that. . . And she is very. . . happy with my answers.

This quote shows that demands go beyond professional neutrality. It is a demand for emotional assimilation. The Palestinian teacher must perform empathy for Jewish trauma while suppressing all visible grief for their own people. This emotional labor is the steep psychological tax of conditional inclusion. This exchange vividly illustrates that while the teacher’s IC fostered universal empathy, the institutional reality demanded its explicit suppression when directed toward the minority group’s experience. This political boundary effectively forced the teacher to engage in profound emotional labor, transforming the maintenance of tenure into an act of sustained identity reduction.

5. Discussion: The Durability of IC Versus the Resistance to Systemic Change

This qualitative analysis confirms a fundamental paradox: the program successfully achieved its pedagogical objectives, cultivating competent and resilient educators, yet this success was hampered by systemic and political barriers to stable tenure. The teachers who graduated from the program showed resilience in the face of the inherent difficulties of being Palestinian teachers in the Jewish education system, and despite the political tensions that followed the October 7th massacre and the Israel-Gaza war (Silverman et al., 2024; Jayusi, 2025). However, the very fact that these teachers were required to demonstrate exceptional and sustained resilience underscores a deeper structural problem: resilience became a compensatory mechanism for navigating conditions that should not have been so hostile in the first place. In this sense, their perseverance is not simply evidence of

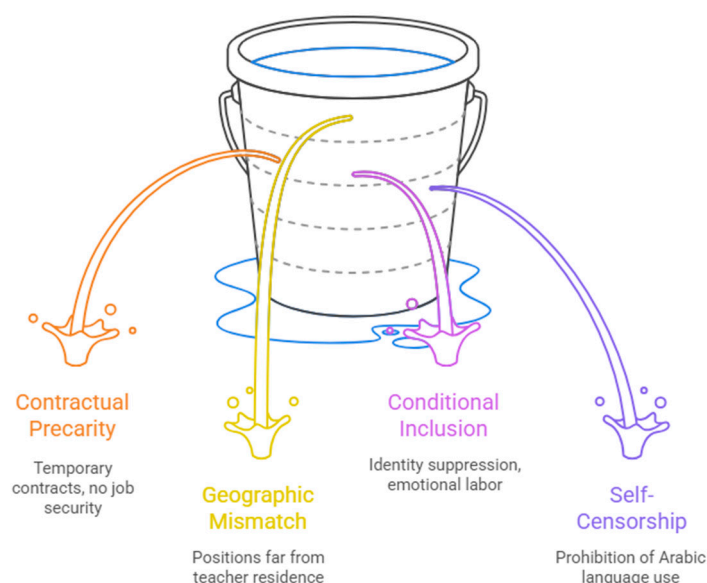
individual strength but a marker of systemic failure, an indication that the educational system relies on extraordinary personal coping rather than addressing the institutional inequities that produce such strain.

The primary finding, exemplified in the systemic absorption failure, is that the high rate of attrition (60.6% turnover from Jewish schools) is a structural issue, not a deficit in individual teacher capacity. The graduates successfully built the human capital (pedagogical skills, Hebrew proficiency) and positive psychological capital (self-efficacy, motivation) necessary for the role, as evidenced in their cultivation of agency. However, this readiness was undermined by deficits in the structural capital and financial capital of the receiving institutional ecology (Achinstein et al., 2010; Rutherford et al., 2024). The pervasive reliance on temporary contracts and the rigidity of geographic placement demonstrate a systemic failure to provide the foundational structural stability required for tenure. The institutional system utilized the minority teachers primarily as short-term labor rather than investing in them as permanent assets.

Furthermore, the qualitative data illuminates the political and emotional cost of integration exemplified by the teachers' conditional inclusion. While the training successfully enhanced the IC of the graduates, particularly at the foundational and facilitation levels (Dimitrov & Haque, 2016; Okken et al., 2022), the receiving environment placed severe conditions on their ability to enact the core IC component of identity work (Muszkat-Barkan, 2022; Ting-Toomey, 2009). As shown in Figure 1, the evidence of linguistic policing and the explicit demand for emotional and political alignment demonstrates that the system enforces an assimilatory framework, where the minority educator must continuously engage in emotional labor to secure professional legitimacy (Saada & Gross, 2019). The presence of a supportive principal offered vital social capital and protection, but even this important human buffer could not erase the inherent political asymmetry or the demand for self-censorship. This persistent extraction of emotional labor destabilizes long-term professional belonging, confirming that individual resilience, even when successfully cultivated (Cushner & Mahon, 2009; Cushner, 2025; Dervin & Hahl, 2015), is insufficient to overcome entrenched power asymmetry and systemic deficits. The silver lining may be in that despite the difficulties, teachers mostly spoke of the logistical and geographic barriers rather than the political divides. This may indicate that relatively simple accommodations and resource allocations can preserve these teachers.

The persistence demonstrated by the interviewed Palestinian educators, despite the profound systemic failures and political hostility, represents a key finding of contextual adaptive resilience (Jayusi, 2025). This resilience is defined not merely as a passive individual trait but as a dynamic, adaptive process of professional survival within escalated conflict-ridden environments (Ungar, 2011). The qualitative data revealed that teachers employed specific resilience strategies, including maintaining rigorous emotional boundaries, utilizing strategic silence to navigate confrontation and suspicion (Saada & Gross, 2019), and sustaining their function as cultural mediators between students and staff (Jayusi, 2025). Their commitment to their professional identity, even when faced with explicit loyalty tests and the threat of professional precarity (Achinstein et al., 2010), underscores how the teachers' internal human capital and positive psychological capital served as anchor points for endurance (Rutherford et al., 2024). This sustained professional courage confirms that individual agency and IC, when developed, can resist external pressures.

Teacher Attrition: Readiness vs. Stability



The Exit Sequence Flowchart: Readiness vs. Stability

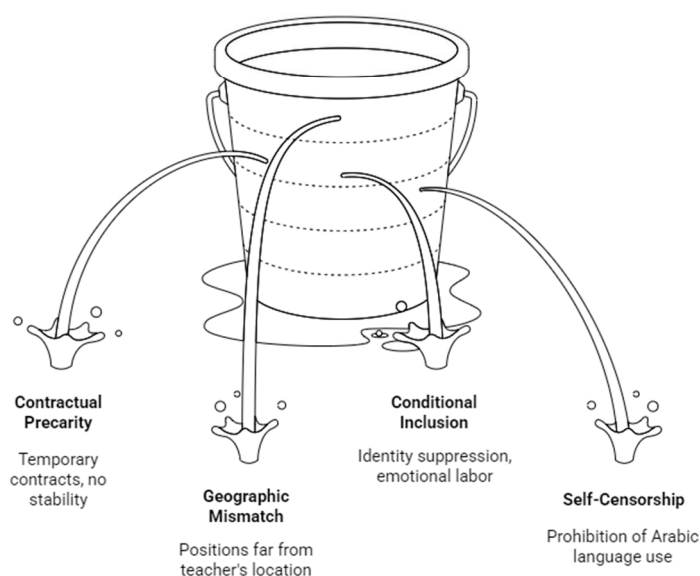


Figure 1. Teacher attrition.

Research Limitations and Future Directions

The current investigation, while providing rich longitudinal qualitative insights, is subject to specific methodological limitations that influence the generalizability of its findings. The research focused on a purposefully selected sample of program graduates who had some experience in Jewish schools. Furthermore, the study was conducted within a period of acute socio-political conflict (post-7 October 2023), which, while providing invaluable data on coping with crisis, renders the conclusions highly context-specific,

potentially affecting their long-term durability. Future research should employ complementary methodologies, including comparative studies across diverse contexts, such as other high-intensity conflict zones or societies with entrenched power asymmetry (Dhillon & Thomas, 2019; Povey et al., 2024). Longitudinal mixed-methods designs are necessary to systematically track the long-term professional persistence and well-being of the full cohort over time, helping to distinguish between temporary crisis coping mechanisms and sustainable factors of retention (Rutherford et al., 2024). It would also be interesting to examine the coping of teachers who are the only Palestinian teachers in their school compared with teachers who have more than one Palestinian colleague. Finally, it would be of value to examine multiple case studies of boundary-crossing teachers and their principals.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study demonstrates that while the specialized preparation program for Palestinian boundary-crossing teachers in Jewish schools achieved success in cultivating individual IC and readiness, this achievement was curtailed by severe systemic and political barriers. The resulting professional rupture underscores that the viability of cross-cultural teaching initiatives in politically contested environments is conditional upon the host system's political will to provide structural stability and non-assimilatory inclusion (Povey et al., 2024).

The events of October 7th stripped away the veneer of shared living, revealing the raw power dynamics beneath. For boundary-crossing to be sustainable, the Israeli education system must move beyond the deficit model of training teachers to fit the system, and engage in the structural reform of the system itself. Without this, the integration of Palestinian teachers will remain a revolving door, fueled by individual hope but stalled by institutional inertia and political erasure. While high levels of individual capital were successfully developed through preparation (Cushner, 2025; Cushner & Mahon, 2009; Dervin & Hahl, 2015; Muszkat-Barkan, 2022), the ultimate retention and integration were significantly impeded by structural and political resistance (Rutherford et al., 2024). This suggests that the successful conversion of initial individual readiness into stable, long-term tenure depends heavily on the systemic capacity and support of receiving institutions.

Furthermore, the conditional inclusion and suppression of the Palestinian identity demonstrated that belonging was provisional, requiring teachers to engage in emotional labor and identity containment, particularly during the intense political period following 7 October (Saada & Gross, 2019; Silverman et al., 2024). The willingness of the Palestinian teachers to pursue integration, despite these high personal and structural costs, confirms the strategic importance of this initiative for promoting shared societal outcomes. For boundary-crossing initiatives to serve as meaningful agents of sustained social change and professional stability, policy must shift its focus from training the minority workforce to aggressively reforming the majority-dominated structures that actively undermine their long-term tenure conversion.

The study shows the importance of training programs for boundary-crossing teachers focusing on language, culture, and identity (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2025). The demonstrated effectiveness of the program in imparting competence and resilience, combined with the teachers' willingness to teach in the Jewish educational stream despite the high political cost, underscores its strategic importance for social cohesion. Shared living requires a fundamental shift in mindset, from viewing inclusion as a temporary concession to recognizing it as a structural principle of equity. In societies where power asymmetry is deeply entrenched, the institutional inertia, tokenistic gestures, and policies designed to preserve the status quo are especially important to overcome (Ghattas, 2025; Povey et al., 2024). When employment stability becomes foundational rather than conditional, it disrupts patterns of

marginalization and compels long-term investment, signaling a genuine commitment to dismantling structural barriers (Achinstein et al., 2010; Rutherford et al., 2024).

The institutional ecology of receiving schools must be reformed to ensure genuine inclusion (Povey et al., 2024). This requires the development and mandate of specialized training for principals and educational teams in receiving schools, focusing on cultural inclusion protocols, power dynamics, and professional protocols for managing political tension in a non-assimilatory manner (Muszkat-Barkan, 2022). Teacher as well as principal training must move beyond cultural sensitivity to actively address organizational biases that enforce identity policing. A formal system of continuous professional and emotional support must also be institutionalized for all boundary-crossing teachers, extending beyond the first year. This support structure should provide sustained guidance on navigating organizational politics, identifying microaggressions, and the high emotional labor demands associated with the role.

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