

'I lost my identity in the halls of academia': Arab students on the use of Arabic in Israeli higher education

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Multicultural environments in academic institutions face major challenges in teaching, learning, and social integration. Although the number of Arab students attending institutions of higher education in Israel has increased, the Arabic language has little presence in the Israeli academic world. This article explores the results of teaching Arab students in their language. Can it have a positive influence on their feelings of belonging and can it enable them to integrate more successfully in academic settings? The findings indicate that teaching in Arabic alongside Hebrew in Israeli academia enhanced feelings of belonging in Arab students. They developed a sense of belonging to their institution and their integration grew. These findings can help decision-makers in multicultural academic contexts throughout the world adjust their programs to meet the needs of diverse groups in their respective student populations.

Introduction

Since the mid-1990s there has been a dramatic increase in the number of Arab students attending institutions of higher education in Israel, especially teachers colleges. Their percentage in the country's universities is still lower than the corresponding percentage in Israel's Jewish population. For example, the percentage of Jewish university students per 1,000 residents rose from 2.4% in 1957 to 31% in 1999; in contrast, the percentage of Arab university students rose from 0 in 1957 to 12% in 1999. In other words, in 1999, the percentage of Jewish university students in Israel was 5.2 times more than the corresponding figure of Arab university students. Still, there is an improvement; whereas, in 1960, there were only 350 Arab college graduates, in 1995, the number of Arab college graduates was 33,000 (Alhaj, 2001).

In 2020, the number of Arab students in Israeli institutions of higher education showed a steady increase. In 2018-19, their number crossed the 50,000 mark for the first time, and, in the 2019-20 academic year it reached 54,000, representing a 110 percent increase in the second decade of the twenty-first century (Central Bureau of Statistics 2019). In the 2009-2010 academic year, the number of Arab undergraduate students was 22,268, constituting 11 percent of all undergraduate students in Israel. A decade later, there were 43,454 Arab undergraduate students in Israel, constituting 18 percent of the country's total undergraduate population (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

Over the past decade, there has been a 183% increase in the number of Arab graduate students. Whereas, in 2009-2010, Arabs constituted only 6.5% of the total number of graduate students, by 2019-20 there were 9,252 Arab graduate students, indicating a 15% increase. During the past decade, there has been a significant increase, by 110%, in the number of Arab doctoral students. In 2019-20, there were 855 Arab doctoral students in

Israel, constituting 7% of the total doctoral population, as opposed to only 413 Arab doctoral students in 2009-10 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

Thus, the increase has had an impact on the structure of the student population in Israeli institutions of higher education, especially in teachers colleges. In some courses, the Jewish students are a minority. Sometimes, Arab lecturers teaching in multicultural classrooms are asked to teach in Hebrew, despite the fact that most students are Arabs. One often hears Arab students complaining of unfair conditions, and there have been a number of quiet protests expressing the frustration of Arab university students (“Why do we have to have this class in Hebrew when the lecturer is Arab and can teach us in Arabic?”). When the subject matter is taught in Hebrew, many Arab students find it hard to understand the learning material and frequently lose their self-confidence vis-à-vis the Jewish students in the classroom, which means they feel isolated in the classroom. No one hears their protests and only their frustrated silence expresses their feelings.

In recent years, more attention has been paid to this issue. For instance, in critical pedagogy, there are voices claiming that it is important to bring the experience of university students into the classroom, fight against their silencing, help them promote their knowledge, and contribute to their empowerment (Giroux, 1991). In the United States, for example, in the case of the speakers of Spanish and other languages, the silence of non-Anglophone students stems in part from the fact that English is the dominant language on campuses and is regarded as the standard (Leeman, 2005). Spanish is regarded as an inferior language compared to English. Thus, Hispanic students with good English have a higher status on campus. Many lecturers prefer English over Spanish, and as a result, undermine the self-confidence of Spanish-speaking students. The message conveyed in American society is that, while it is right to speak Spanish, each language has its own unique context. Whereas one can converse in Spanish in one’s neighbourhood, it is not customary in academic environments (Leeman, 2005).

While the debate over the importance of university studies in English seems to focus on a technical issue, it actually transmits a message regarding the hierarchy of languages and legitimises the dominance of English in the college campuses in America. It could be argued that classroom teaching in the “underprivileged” language makes students who speak that language feel better and enables them to more effectively deal with their tensions and anxieties, and that it can constitute an important factor for group coping. Such arguments open the door for critical thinking focusing on how individuals internalise cultural suppression and promote social change.

This study presents the attitude of Arab students in an academic college in Israel and refers to the issue of teaching in their native language, as expressed in interviews conducted with them. In my thirty years in the academic world, I always regarded language purely as a means of communication. Only recently I went through a major change and began to consider language in terms of identity and culture. In this study, I explore the extent of students’ attitudes as expressed by my own newly developed awareness. Accordingly, I ask: Does teaching in Arabic improve the overall feeling of

Arab students, enable them to integrate more effectively in the context of the College, and help them cope better with the challenge of their academic studies?

The study examines theories connected to language. The interviewees are students who attended two leadership courses that I taught. One of the courses was ethnically mixed, with both Jewish and Arab students, taught in Hebrew. The second course was only for Arab students, taught in Arabic. It is clear to me that the relationship between my student interviewees and myself had an impact on the interviews. They were aware that I was their lecturer, and it is possible that they tried to please me by giving answers intended to meet my expectations. In this context, I wish to point out that qualitative research does not pretend to be objective, and as such, results depend on the researcher's integrity, fairness, transparency, and dedication to the studies' aims (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The Palestinian Arab population in the State of Israel

In 2019, the Arab community, numbering 1,837,000 people, constituted 20 percent of Israeli's population (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Since Israel's establishment in May 1948, its Arab citizens have suffered discrimination and have not been treated as equal citizens. Israel's attitude toward its Arab members is derivative of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict and Israel's definition as a Jewish state. As a result of that definition, Palestinians have been distanced and even excluded from the country's centres of power, individually and collectively (Lustick, 1985; Ghanem, 1998). Not only does Israel exclude the Palestinians from control, but it has also prevented them from building their own social institutions and identity. Israel controls the Palestinians through economic dependency. It has confiscated lands on which Palestinians have depended for their livelihood and through the separation of ethnic groups in the non-Jewish community: Muslims, Christians, and Druze (Abu-Saad, 2004). This policy has become official by Israel's parliament, the Knesset, by the *Nation-State Law*, which has given official sanction to the exclusion of Arabs from the country's centres of power and discrimination.

This policy of division and control of the Palestinian minority has been vigorously implemented in the country's education system too. Israel has decided that Arab primary and secondary school students must attend separate schools and have a separate education system that is totally controlled by the Israeli establishment. As is the case in other spheres of life, it suffers from discrimination, as expressed in the quality of its infrastructure, in the transfer of budgets, and in the design and quality of its curricula (Mizel, 2011). In addition, control of the Arab education system is primarily expressed in its content, its educational goals, and everything connected with the construction of an Arab identity, while all available resources are invested in the construction of an Arab student who will identify with the Jewish state and its goals, be obedient, and be alienated from his/her Palestinian-Arab identity (Ghanem, 2018). The same kind of discrimination that is described above with regard to school students in the Arab education system can be seen with regard to Arab university students. The dominant language, Hebrew, and the structured conditions of Israel's college campuses, make life difficult for Arab students. As a result, there is a low percentage of Arab students relative to their percentage in Israel's population. In the

2016-2017 school year, Palestinian Arabs constituted 16 percent of the country's undergraduate population, 1.13 percent of its graduate student population, and 3.6 percent of its doctoral candidates (Lior, 2019). The situation is particularly severe with regard to senior faculty members: only 1.75 percent are Arabs (Ali & Da'as, 2019).

Arabic in Israeli academia

Until 2018, Arabic and Hebrew were Israel's official languages, a status that stemmed from historic circumstances rather than from a direct, deliberate policy. During the British Mandate in Palestine, English and Arabic were the official languages in accordance with the laws of the British crown. When Israel declared independence on May 14, 1948, the Knesset cancelled English as the country's official language and recognised Arabic and Hebrew as Israel's official languages. In the wake of the passage of the Nation-State Law in July 2018, Arabic lost its status as an official language; "Arabic has a unique status in Israel, and the law will establish the manner in which Arabic is to be used in or before governmental agencies" (Israel's Book of Laws, 2018). Even before this law, Arabic's official status had no practical significance in public life in Israel. Hebrew is the dominant language in public and social spaces, the country's official agencies, in institutions of higher education in Israel, and in the country's major media players (Saban & Amara, 2002). The marginality of Arabic in Israel is clearly expressed in the country's Jewish schools.

In Israel's Jewish schools, Arabic has been largely neglected, competing with foreign languages such as English and French that have been assigned far greater importance and have thus contributed to Arabic's further exclusion from the Jewish educational context (Saban & Amara, 2002). Moreover, many Jewish Israelis regard Arabic as an inferior language spoken by an inferior nation from which one should distance oneself, and they feel that efforts should be made to learn European languages, considered to be "superior" languages, rather than Arabic (Saban & Amara, 2002). When Israeli Jews learn Arabic, they often do so because of its importance in security and intelligence contexts. Arabic's status is gloomy by Israeli legislation, which is not translated into Arabic despite the relative ease with which one could translate texts in the present age of the Internet (Rosenhous & Goral, 2008). Arabic's status is also dismal within the overall linguistic context in Israel. The agencies in charge of road signs do not post dual-language (i.e., Hebrew and Arabic) signs on many roads in Israel, including those located in ethnically mixed (i.e., Jewish and Arab) cities, although, in a normative, egalitarian society, the default should be Hebrew and Arabic road signs. Today, more than a decade after the ruling of the Israel Supreme Court (in its capacity as the High Court of Justice), which called for dual-language signs in ethnically mixed cities, the process of setting up such signs has not yet been completed (Yitzhaki, 2011).

The status of Arabic in Israeli academia is no different. A report published in 2014 by the Van Leer Institute in collaboration with the Sikkuy Organization and the Dirasat Center focused on the obstacles in Israeli academia with which Palestinian Arab university

students cope. The report claims that Arabic is almost totally absent from Israeli academia and no attempts are made to include Arabic in Israeli's academic world, which is regarded as a Hebrew-speaking environment (Abu Ras & Maayan, 2014).

In the first major research study on the status of Arabic in Israeli academia, similar findings were presented. In that study, it was found that Arabic does not exist in Israeli academia as an academic language, and that, in most cases, the language in classrooms where Arabic is taught is Hebrew (Abu Ras & Maayan, 2014). Amara and his research partners (Amara, Donitza-Schmidt & Mar'i, 2016) believe that this situation has caused the alienation of Arab students from Israeli college campuses and even argue that Arab's status in academia should be promoted because a fair-minded attitude toward that language, like a fair-minded attitude toward those who speak it, will help Arabic speakers feel more at home in Israeli academia. If Arab students feel more at home there, they will more effectively integrate into Israel's academic world and Israeli society, as confirmed by Halabi (2016).

My students explained that language was the principal obstacle in their studies and in their integration in their study program and into the university context in general. They also complained of the lack of respect shown to their native language, making them feel as if they and their identity are not being shown sufficient respect. Ali and Da'as (2019) backed up these arguments, noting that language is one of the main stumbling blocks for Arab students in Israel, who, for the first time in their lives, are required to function within a Hebrew speaking system.

The present study seeks to investigate whether the teaching of subjects in Arabic in Israeli colleges helps Arab students feel a greater sense of belonging vis-à-vis the College, and whether it strengthens their national identity as Arab-speakers.

What is national identity? National identity is an ideological concept that cannot be easily defined. Several disciplines, such as politics, sociology, history, anthropology, and sociolinguistics use ideological foundations in their definition of this concept. The complexity involved in national identity definition stems from its formation over a long period of time. Another problem that complicates the definition is the similarity and overlap between ethnic identity and national identity, which in some cases might be similar. For example, Oakes (2001) argued that any definition of ethnicity should include certain characteristics that a given group of individuals have in common, such as religion, culture, origin, values, and sense of belonging. Similarly, Krejci and Velimsky (1981) described features that contribute to the nation's characteristics such as territory, state, language, culture, and history. If all these features exist in a community, Krejci and Velimsky (1981) argued that one must therefore add a sixth feature: national identity. In light of the above, we can see that, in some cases, there can be a similarity between the definition of ethnic identity and the definition of national identity.

Language as identity

Much has been written in the professional literature about language as a means of communication. While many research studies have focused on the acquisition of a second language, relatively little scholarly attention was given to aspects of language as identity and power. Undoubtedly, any decision to focus on language in terms of identity and power has political and social implications, as pointed out by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), who argued that language, in addition to being an instrument for communication between human beings, also expresses identity, culture, and heritage. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), most studies on language have investigated the communicative aspect, and very little has been written about language as an entity that represents identity. In their view, language is also power. When we speak, they claim, we not only want others to understand us. We also want them to believe us, to satisfy our wishes, to respect us, and to distinguish us from other human beings. He also argued that, at both the group and individual level, the value of a language corresponds to the value of those who speak it, the reason being that all languages are equal from the philological standpoint, but not from the social standpoint (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

Fairclough (2001) argued that language reflects the balance of power in a society. The strong members of a society define reality through a discourse that creates laws intended to control that reality and reinforce it within the status of society's strong members, who decide what is permitted, who belongs, and, most importantly, what is truth.

According to Chen et al. (2008), people who speak the same language are attracted to one another in their quest for security. Language therefore plays a major role in the creation of national identity, and of patterns of belief and behaviour that make social orders look natural or self-understood. In light of the findings of Chen et al. (2008), the obvious conclusion is that language is an extremely important element in the creation of the identity of a group or a nation, and in the creation of patterns of belief and behaviour that make social orders look natural or self-understood.

Scholars such as Crawford (1989) have argued that there is a close connection between language, identity, and social stratification. Thus, the status of a minority group's language has a major impact on the maintenance of inequality between a society's strong and weak groups, and, accordingly, there is a link between the minority language's social and political status and the legitimisation of the minority's group affiliation with the majority group.

The multitude of identities and languages in many countries because of immigration in the modern era has led scholars to examine the phenomenon of ethnic languages, and more attention is being paid to the teaching of ethnic languages in education systems and in academia. Although there are fewer than two hundred countries in the world, there are more than seven thousand ethnic groups and more than seven thousand ethnic languages (Cummins, 1984; Phillipso & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995; Walter, 2003).

Western democracies attempt to deal with the multiple identities and languages in the modern era. In such countries as Canada, United States, Sweden, Australia, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, laws guarantee the right of immigrants' children and those who are members of a minority group to receive an education in their native language (Cummins, 1984; Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995; Walter, 2003). Canada was the first country to develop bicultural teaching in English and French. Today, one thousand six hundred schools in Canada, a quarter of a million students, are educated in their native languages (Swain & Johnson, 1997). In January 1998, the U.S. Congress passed its first law dealing with bilingualism, helping school students with limited English (Crawford, 1989).

In recent years, America has produced more curricula for minority languages in addition to the regular curriculum and after school hours. These curricula have been developed for Spanish speakers whose numbers have grown dramatically and are America's largest ethnic minority group. The curricula refer to heritage language programs for strengthening the self-confidence, self-image, and ethnic identity of school students with limited English.

Although such programs and the trend toward the teaching of ethnic languages in the school system and academia enjoy wide support, some people believe that English should be the sole language of instruction. These people believe that local languages and languages that do not enjoy a privileged status are suitable for conversations and communication among friends and family members but not for the academic world (Fairclough, 2001).

According to Leeman (2005), this approach maintains both the total hegemony of English in academia and the dominant ideology in America, preventing the option of introducing Spanish into the public sphere. Thus, argued Leeman (2005), students, especially Spanish speakers, are given the message that it is very difficult to change America's reality and social norms. Therefore, instead of holding on to their ethnic language, they should seek to belong to the language group of those who determine those norms and define what is appropriate (Leeman, 2005). Leeman distinguished between the personal and social voice. She claimed that language is the tool used to make a voice heard, and to ensure that a voice has power, it must be heard and not just used in personal conversations.

Leeman (2005) also argued that instruction in Spanish is important for Spanish-speaking primary and secondary school students, because systematic teaching in their native tongue reinforces their identity and self-confidence, thereby making it easier for them to integrate into their school and setting, whose dominant language is English. Spanish speakers will develop a sense of pride and will be proud of their identity if their native tongue is a language of instruction in academia, especially if the introduction of Spanish as a language of instruction is carried out properly and used correctly (Martinez, 2003).

A comprehensive research study conducted in the U.S., including forty-two thousand schoolchildren who attended schools in six different districts, examined the educational

program that enables equality for immigrants' children. According to this study, the children of immigrants achieved the highest grades when they learned in their native tongue for the longest period, namely five to six years, and when both their native tongue and English were the academic languages of instruction. In another study carried out in an American high school where twenty percent of the students were Hispanic, the program of bilingual (English-Spanish) classes for the Hispanic students was successful, helping these students develop their ethnic identity while also enabling them to integrate more effectively and comfortably into university contexts. From the psychological standpoint, their self-image improved, as did their scholastic achievements (Abi-Nader, 1990). A study that focused on the integration of mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong found that language exerted a major influence and that the ability to function as a bilingual individual promotes peace of mind and increases the chances for successful integration in tertiary frameworks (Chen et al., 2008).

Research studies investigated the extent to which the social climate in educational contexts in school systems and institutions of higher learning influence the integration of students and their achievements (Tinto, 1987; Rogoff, 1990; Berndt & Keefe, 1992). Based on these studies, feelings of belonging have an impact on chances of student's success in educational contexts (Finn, 1989; Goodenow, 1993). A comprehensive study conducted by Goodenow (1993) found that social acceptance and sense of belonging can be measured on the interpersonal level, in terms of the overall attitude of the institution of higher education and its patrons. In addition, when students sense a feeling of belonging toward their educational institution, their motivation increases, as does the effort they invest in their studies and their achievements. Goodenow concluded that the influence of feeling of belonging is particularly relevant in the case of students from the periphery and from a low socioeconomic background, as well as in the case of immigrants' children.

Schuster (2012) focused on the teaching of Amharic in Israel to a group of Ethiopian schoolchildren in an after-school program at a local community centre. She found that, through learning in their native tongue, the schoolchildren were drawn closer to both their Ethiopian and Israeli identities. They felt comfortable, and were proud of their identity and culture, thus the development of their complex identity was facilitated.

The findings of these studies intertwine completely with multicultural theory arguments, the main one being that the more we enable minority groups to maintain their identity and their language, the greater their self-confidence, and nearer they will feel to the public sphere, and stronger will be their feelings of belonging with regard to the country in which they live (Kymlicka, 1995, 2007; Berry, 1998). Language and bilingual models are highly regarded by the proponents of multicultural theory because they provide an equal educational opportunity for members of minority groups (Banks, 1995). Moreover, the language and culture of schoolchildren are the most important elements in their life experiences. Thus, language and culture must be taken into consideration in any education system that aspires to be multicultural (Ovando & Combs, 2018).

The above studies intermesh with theories that focus on recognition and dignity to the *Other*, and on cultivation of the Other's self-image and sense of pride. Through such an attitude, we can help the Other achieve more, integrate in society, and enhance his/her sense of belonging. Honneth (2008), who studied this issue extensively, developed a critical theory, by which recognition of the Other is an ethical and moral act that enables individuals and groups to develop an identity, positive self-esteem, and a degree of autonomy. Furthermore, Honneth (2008) argued, many social and political struggles have been generated by failure to recognise and respect the Other. He emphasised the point that recognition of the Other must go beyond the declarative stage:

The granting of recognition [to the Other] must not be limited to words or symbolic expressions; it must be accompanied by actions that confirm that recognition ... so that new forms of recognition can emerge. From the social standpoint, legal definitions must be altered, other forms of political representation must be established, and a redistribution of material assets must be carried out (Honneth, 2008, pp. 173-174).

Honneth (2008) discussed another concept in the context of recognition: visibility. Accordingly, basic recognition means we see the Other in the social sense or signal to the Other that we see and respect him/her. The term "seeing" is not used in its simple or physiological definition because rulers express their superiority by pretending not to see their subjects, who, in that case, become worthless and transparent:

The expression [i.e., pretending not to see] serves in day-to-day language as the description of an action by which we make someone invisible or transparent: we can demonstrate our lack of respect for people who are around us by acting as if they are not really physically present (Honneth, 2008).

Israel is a good example for testing the issue of language in its multicultural context, especially in institutions of higher education. As noted above, Arab and Jewish university students in Israel do not usually meet before they arrive at the university or college campus because, until the end of their secondary school studies, they attend separate education systems. The meeting on campus is unavoidable because there are no Arab universities in Israel. Although there are a number of Arab colleges in Israel, many Arabs attend Jewish colleges.

In Israeli academia, language is one of the more significant issues for the Arab students' coping with the academic world, and it has an impact on the degree of their integration in the academic world. The College where the study was carried out is an excellent example of this issue, therefore it is an ideal site for its examination.

The College tends to be multicultural. It looks after the academic needs of its Arab students and displays a positive attitude toward some of their social needs, such as religious holidays. In contrast with other academic institutions, Arab students feel at home at the College. The College's decision to hold classroom sessions in Arabic in its programs is yet another step taken towards multiculturalism. It is the first college in Israel to do so. Education at universities and colleges benefits and empowers students from

disadvantaged groups. When the institutions have a policy of multiculturalism, the students feel more comfortable, they can integrate better into campus life, and they feel a stronger sense of belonging to their institution (Dahms, 1994). This study considers the influence this decision has on the College's Arab students, regarding their feelings and sense of belonging toward the College.

Methodology

The study's interpretive methodology is the most suited for this research as it focuses on how people experience the world. This methodology examines the participants' actions to understand their experiences, feelings, and points of view (Creswell, 2014; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995; Schwandt, 1998; Shkedi, 2003).

Open coding is one of the processes of analysing textual content. It includes labeling concepts, defining and developing categories based on their properties and dimensions. It is also used to analyse qualitative data and is part of qualitative data analysis methodologies. In the analysis phase, when going through the data, you often mark important sections and add a descriptive name or 'code' to it. This is the first step of coding, called open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Maykut & Morehouse (1994) presented three approaches to analysing qualitative data based on Strauss & Corbin (1990). This study uses the second approach to data analysis, that of the researcher who is concerned primarily with accurately describing what she or he has understood and reconstructing the data into a 'recognisable reality' for the people who have participated in the study. This approach requires selection and interpretation of the data. In more recent discussions of their research, Belenky (1992) referred to their research approach as 'interpretive-descriptive'.

Participants

The population studied consisted of 30 students aged 20-28 who attended a college in Israel in 2017-2018. The courses were on leadership. One of the courses was ethnically mixed (attended by both Jewish and Arab students), and the total number of students in that course was 27, with 6 Jews and 21 Arabs. The second course was attended exclusively by Arabs, and the total number of students there was 32. The total number of Arab students in the courses was 53. Ten students refused to be interviewed (they did not explain their refusals), and 30 students of the remaining 43 students who were available and willing to be interviewed, were selected for the study.

Procedures

The study was conducted during the students' third year at a mixed teacher training college attended by Arabs and Jews. The third year was chosen because the students are more mature at this stage and have made up their minds regarding college and the events taking place there.

Data collection

The study was based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) based on prior discussions with the Arab students. In these discussions, students referred to a variety of everyday events at the College such as the academic and administrative staff's treatment, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, politics, majority and minority relations, and multiculturalism. The major issue was the status of Arabic at the College.

During class discussion, the lecturer asked the Arab students to document their experiences anonymously and then collected the written testimonies. Only the Arab students were asked to document their experiences because they were the study's subjects. Forty Arab students recorded their experiences, but only 30 expressed interest in being interviewed. The ten students who refused claimed they already wrote their opinions and had nothing more to contribute to the study.

From the discussions and written texts (about experiences), the researcher identified various topics to which the students referred, such as discrimination, identity, majority and minority relations, and the Arabic language. Next, the researcher interviewed the participants in the researcher's office, adjacent to the classroom. The interview duration was 40 minutes, and all were conducted in Arabic, the mother tongue of both the researcher and the participants.

Data analysis

The researcher read the interviews, transcribed them as accurately as possible, and then read the transcripts again, utilising open coding (Belkin & Croft, 1992). The data was categorised, and themes were identified. The data was analysed based on Maykut and Morehouse (1994), whose approach fits the research objective. The researcher respected the participants' confidentiality and used pseudonyms. In addition, the researcher identified the class only as third years and thus respected their confidentiality. The participants were told they could opt out of the study if they wished. The researcher, an Arabic speaker well acquainted with the culture, had been the students' lecturer for several years and the relationship was open and amicable. These elements encouraged the students to speak freely.

Data analysis was based on three phases of data collection: (1) Discussions: students referred to a variety of everyday events at the College. The major issue in these discussions was the status of Arabic at the College; (2) The Arab students were asked by the lecturer to document their experiences. Forty Arab students recorded their experiences; (3) A semi-structured, in-depth interview (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was designed, based on prior discussions and written experiences.

Two themes or topics emerged from the data.

Language as a means of learning and communication

Many students mentioned Hebrew as a barrier that made learning and communication with the Hebrew speaking students more difficult.

When we learn the material in Arabic, I feel that I understand it better than if I had learned it in Hebrew. [Su'ad]

I wanted to clarify my position and I needed the help of the lecturer who translated what I said from Arabic [into Hebrew]. [Ahmed]

Language as a means of identity

When I enter the College, I see signs in Arabic, and that makes me feel good. I sense that my culture and my right to exist are being respected. [Abed]

I was amazed to see that there were both Arabic and Hebrew subtitles. Most of the time, we see films that have subtitles only in Hebrew, but this time I felt proud when I saw my language included in the text. [Riad]

Findings

The current study's findings, from both the separate Arab class and the mixed class of Arab and Jewish students, demonstrate that Arab students perceive their language more as a national identity than as a mere way to communicate. They were critical of the College's policy regarding their language and culture.

The findings relate to two principal subjects:

Language as a means of communication

This concerns the development of the ability to express oneself, an ability that enables the interviewees to use and to pursue their studies in, their mother tongue.

Language as identity and control of territory

The students spoke about their feeling of pride that stemmed from the use of Arabic in their study program, noting that the use of Arabic contributed to their self-confidence and their feelings of belonging with regard to the College, expressing their respect to the College who has recognised their native Arabic language as a language of instruction.

Language as a facilitator of communication

Su'ad, a student in the leadership class where all the students were Arabs:

When we learn the material in Arabic, I feel that I understand it better than if I had learned it in Hebrew. I have a broad communication space and I respond to events.

Yusef, who attended the same class, reinforced her remarks:

Arabic enables me to respond to what is said, not only by the lecturer but also by my classmates because I understand what they are saying. In classes [taught] in Arabic, I feel at ease. I understand most of what is said. I feel very much involved, especially when the lecturer includes in his remarks religious verses [from the Koran] and poetry. The lecturer conveys messages more effectively than in the classes that are taught in Hebrew.

Many (21) of the students attached greater importance to Arabic as an expression of identity than as a means of communication. Nura claimed: "When people are speaking in Arabic, I feel that this bothers Jews, and I am deeply offended".

Ahmed reinforced this approach:

When the lecturer asked us to choose a leader we could identify with, I chose a leader who is an Arab nationalist. The Jews [in the class] did not like my choice and thought that my selection was directed against them. I feel that I do not get legitimation for my right[s] or my culture or my language.

...

I wanted to clarify my position and I needed the help of the lecturer who translated what I said from Arabic [into Hebrew]. It was hard for them [the Jewish students in the class] to hear Arabic [being spoken].

Sarah [one of the Jewish students in that class] replied to Ahmed: "It is a good thing that there are courses [being taught] in Arabic. This is a sign that the College recognises your identity [and] your culture".

Abed emphasised the importance of language as an expression of identity: "When I enter the College, I see signs in Arabic, and that makes me feel good. I sense that my culture and my right to exist are being respected".

[With regard to language,] Riad put more emphasis on the dimension of identity than on the issue of communication:

The lecturer showed us the film *To Sir with Love*, which is in English. I was amazed to see that there were both Arabic and Hebrew subtitles. Most of the time, we see films that have subtitles only in Hebrew, but this time I felt proud when I saw my language included in the text.

Language as identity and control of territory

Yussra described the classroom as an arena where there is a struggle for control:

The Jewish students are the ones who establish what the discourse will be. They create the laws, and therefore they set the agenda. It really bothered them when we speak Arabic with one another; they prefer us to be silent.

Iman backed up this approach with regard to the group being taught in Arabic. With a smile on his face, he reported having placed a sign on the door of Room 3005: "This is

the Arabs' room". He noted: "In the classroom, we are the ones who are in control. We talk more freely than we do in classes where the language of instruction is Hebrew".

He added:

One day, a Jewish student got mixed up and entered the classroom where the language of instruction was Arabic. The moment the lecturer began to speak in Arabic, she became very anxious and left the room in panic.

Salwa said:

The Jewish students control the discourse. I have a lot to say but I do not dare to express myself. I asked the lecturer to be transferred to the second group, which is taught in Arabic, but he did not allow me to do so.

The issue of speaking in your own language becomes even more significant when you are required to express your emotions. Amir said:

Sometimes, in these courses, there are workshops in which we have to express our opinions and feelings. It is very hard for us to express our emotions in Hebrew. We feel much more comfortable expressing our feelings in our own language.

The presence of Jewish students in the classroom makes it difficult for the Arab students to express themselves not just because of the language but also because of the issues of identity and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Naama said:

When there are also Jewish students in the classroom, we cannot express ourselves freely because we do not want to hurt their feelings. When there are only Arab students in the class, we have a feeling of freedom and liberty, and we can express ourselves freely and in an authentic manner.

Azdahar added:

We are not a small group. There are many Arab students attending this College. Are we seen? Is our presence felt? Our attire is visible on campus, and our language is legitimate there. It is less legitimate in other public places. For example, when I get on the bus on my way to the College, I am afraid to speak Arabic.

Many of the students I interviewed supported Azdahar's approach, emphasising the fact that the College allows them to speak freely in their own language. Many of them repeated the same phrases: "We are seen. Our existence is recognised. We are respected".

As noted in the review of the professional literature, language is much more than a communication means. This point is clearly expressed in the students' remarks. Language also, perhaps even chiefly, symbolises identity and is perhaps one of the most important components in one's ethnic-national identity. Thus, beyond the fact that it is easier for Arab students to express themselves in their own language, as noted above in the last

student comment, the very existence of courses that are taught in Arabic at this College symbolises a great deal for its Arab students. Yosra said:

Language gives you the feeling that you exist. You are recognised, and your right to be taught in your own language is also recognised. I felt like a valued, significant person here.... The fact that we are provided with courses taught in Arabic carries the message that we are being given the right and the legitimacy to say what we want and that we are not inferior to them [the Jewish students]. This arrangement allows me to feel a sense of belonging with regard to my people but also with regard to the College.

The feeling that the College recognises and respects the Arab students makes them feel that their presence is welcome, and, as a result, they have a feeling of belonging. These feelings increase their self-confidence and their belief in themselves and in their abilities. On the other hand, within the territory of the classroom, when they participate in a class with Jewish students, taught in Hebrew, Arab students feel threatened. Huda summarised:

The course [that was taught] in Arabic gave me courage and self-confidence in my other courses. Because of the course [that was taught] in Arabic, I felt that I must make my voice heard in other courses. This empowered me and I felt that I was not inferior to other students. If the situation was reversed and Jewish students had to hear a lecture in Arabic, the same thing would happen to them.

Smahar added:

Why should we have to be taught in Hebrew? Most of the lecturers who teach me are Arabs. In addition, when we finish our studies, we will go to Arab schools, and we will teach our pupils in Arabic.

The experience was so positive and so significant for the Arab students that it led some of them to emphasise that courses taught in Arabic should be mandatory.

Discussion and conclusions

The issue of adjustment of Arab students to the Israeli academic space is complex. Israeli universities operate in Hebrew, so the language of teaching and research is Hebrew. This makes life difficult for Arab students since Hebrew is not their mother tongue. Creating a separate Arab speaking group might affect the level of study.

Moreover, a lack of multiculturalism in academia, both in Israel and in the world, can lead to excluding and undermining minority groups and affect their achievements. The treatment of minority groups depends on the academic institutions' approach to the group. Inadequate multiculturalism and respect to minorities can lead to tension, discrimination, and exclusion of the minority. It is hard to overlook the large numbers of Arab students studying in Israeli institutions. The Arab students' crisis of identity in light of the area's conflicts, and Arabic being scarce in the academic sphere, causes the students to unify around Arabic as a national and cultural identity element.

The study examined the College's openness to the participants' language. The findings show that there is some exclusion, from the students' point of view. However, when the institution treats the minority positively, they develop a stronger sense of belonging to the institution. These feelings contribute to their ease and comfort, and lead to spending more time in the academic space, compared to the public sphere that is more hostile to Arabic, as the students report. Some of the students explained that their interaction with Jews was limited to the classroom and did not extend beyond it. They claimed that many Jewish students could not tolerate hearing Arabic.

Among those who studied in mixed classes with Jewish students, the Arab students described feeling excluded and expressing themselves less than Jewish students. They explained this due to their difficulty in understanding the language in class, Hebrew, which undermined their confidence. They feared their friends and lecturers would classify them as academically weak students.

It seems many academic institutions in Israel proclaim a multicultural orientation, but do not implement it. Therefore, multiculturalism remains a declaration. Arab students protest against academic institutions that require Arab lecturers to teach Arab students in Hebrew. This situation raises questions regarding discrimination toward the group and its identity and culture, but also might create groups that have no relations with Hebrew speakers, a situation that might affect their achievements. It can be concluded that language is an extremely important element in the identity of groups and in the creation of relationships between them.

My research supports the position that there is an unequivocal connection between language and identity, as noted in the professional literature (Amara, 2017). Most interviewees spoke about language and their national identity in the same breath. When they spoke about the lessons given in Arabic that enabled easy and free self-expression, they used expressions connected to the issue of identity. Although they talked about the ease with which their words flow in their native language, they also spoke about a "family atmosphere", freedom and liberty, and about the Jewish "Other" who does not enable them to express themselves fully and freely and who sometimes even distorts the meaning of what they have said.

The findings of this research study are congruent with other research studies. They show that the course that was taught in Arabic increased the interviewees' self-confidence and enabled them to participate more actively in the classroom discussions because they felt more at ease and freer to express themselves. While the classes taught in Arabic made them feel connected to their identity and increased their pride in that identity, they did not become "stuck" in their identity and did not demonstrate any tendency toward isolation from their Jewish counterparts at the College. Quite the contrary, this arrangement enabled them to accept and respect the Jewish Other and the College as a whole in a prominent and impressive manner. This situation dovetails perfectly with the central argument of multicultural theory; when ethnic groups are recognised and given the

opportunity to express and reinforce their identity, their members feel more at home, and integrate more effectively in their surroundings and the country in which they live.

The granting of a dignified status to the Arabic language in Israeli academia also reinforces the arguments presented by Amara and his colleagues (Amara, Donitza-Schmidt & Mar'i, 2016). In their recommendations submitted to Israeli academic authorities on the subject, they claimed that respecting a language respects its speakers, promotes their feeling of belonging, and helps them integrate in society. In contrast, the course that was taught in Hebrew generated sentiments of "separatism" among the Arab students. It made them feel that their rights were infringed, it diminished their self-confidence, and made them feel that they were inferior to their Jewish colleagues. It also gave them the impression that the Jewish students had "seized control" of the classroom, discouraging them from expressing themselves freely and increasing their unwillingness to participate in classroom discussions.

The findings of the present research study are congruent with the critical arguments of the multicultural approach, as represented by Kymlicka (2010), and with the claims of critical theory as phrased by Honneth (2008), that the use of the language of the Other provides the Other with recognition and respect. Both claim that recognition of the Other at both personal and collective levels must go beyond the declarative stage and beyond folkloristic symbols and must take form of a genuine change in reality that is expressed in practical measures and genuine recognition of the rights of minority groups. The Arab students I interviewed felt that the existence of a course taught in Arabic is proof of the College's recognition of the Arab collective, its identity, and its language. For these students, a real change had taken place.

To sum up, we see that language is not just a tool for communication and that, first and foremost, it symbolises identity. In light of the large number of Arab students on college campuses in Israel, the Arab language's culture in academia constitutes a sphere of power struggles between Arabs and Jews because the real conflict between the two nations has not yet been resolved. The dialogue between the two groups regarding the use of language is still in progress. It should be noted that the change that has taken place at the College with regard to its Arab students is substantive from the symbolic and ideological standpoints. Although it seems minor, it has brought about a major and substantive change among the Arab students: the level of their self-confidence has risen, they feel more at ease at the College, and they have a sense of belonging to the College. One can predict that this will have a positive impact on their achievements. The issue of Arabic as a language of instruction at the tertiary level requires serious thinking on the part of the College with regard to the introduction of this arrangement in all its frameworks. It also requires comprehensive thinking in Israeli academia concerning the option of the application of a similar arrangement in all Israeli institutions of higher learning.

In light of these findings, we recommend addressing this issue by permitting teaching in Arabic. In addition, Arabic should be made more present in all College spaces, on signs, among administrative staff, and on the various College websites. The College should

ensure that Jewish students learn about Arab culture and Arabic not as the enemy's language or a language learned only for security reasons. Groups of Arabs and Jews should convene in the academic institute to promote coexistence, reduce tension between the groups, and enable a sense of belonging to the institution while respecting the unique aspects of the Arab minority in the academic sphere.

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