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Cross Border Teachers: The Case of Ultra-Orthodox Teachers in the State Education System

ABSTRACT: The concept of “cross-border teachers” has been extensively explored as a method to cultivate cultural competence among educators working in diverse cultural settings, often teaching in cultures different from their own. It has also been examined in the context of the sense of belonging and otherness experienced by teachers working in schools with cultural characteristics distinct from their own. The multiculturalism of Israeli society means teachers come from different parts of society. While the challenges of Arab educators have been examined, little is known about ultra-orthodox teachers in the Israeli education field. The current study concentrates on ultra-Orthodox teachers as a case study for those who instruct in schools outside their community. These educators grapple with identity gaps within the schools they teach, where the cultural character differs significantly from their own. The research is grounded in interviews with approximately 30 ultra-orthodox teachers engaged in non-ultra-orthodox schools. These teachers delineate the challenges arising from the dissonance between their identity and that of the schools where they work. The analysis explores various gaps between the teachers and the populations they encounter. The findings reveal that identity gaps manifest in three spheres – personal, organizational, and social. The teachers have developed coping strategies, influenced by the religious boundaries between them and the school environments. These strategies range from attempting conflict resolution to demonstrating flexibility when confronted with challenges. The study sheds light on how cross-border teachers navigate the education system, emphasizing the importance of diversity and multiculturalism among teaching staff in mitigating conflicts within the teaching profession.

KEY WORDS: Cross border teachers, ultra-orthodox teachers, state education system, identity gaps.

Introduction

The education system in the State of Israel is considered public and consists of four sectors: the secular Hebrew sector, the religious Hebrew sector, the ultra-Orthodox Hebrew sector, and the general Arabic sector (Zarad, 2019). Additionally, there are 6 bilingual schools where Hebrew and Arabic are the languages of instruction (Viniger, 2018). Demographically, the structure of the education system indicates that 43% is in the state-secular sector, 14% in the religious sector, 19% in the ultra-Orthodox sector, and 24% in the Arab sector (Blas, 2021). An analysis of the teaching staff reveals that 23% belong to the Arab sector, while 77% belong to the Hebrew sector. Half of the Hebrew sector teachers work in the secular sector. 80% of the teaching staff are women, but this percentage is lower in the Arab sector. The age range varies between 30-49 in the Hebrew sector, while in the Arab sector, the teachers tend to be younger (Zarad, 2019). Very few Arab teachers teach in Hebrew schools and vice versa, with few Jewish teachers teaching in schools in the Arab sector. However, there is a motivation in Hebrew schools to integrate Arab teachers into the education system. This integration is accompanied by challenges (Shoshany, 2020) arising from the meeting of different identities (Gindi & Erlich, 2018; 2019; 2021), study contents that may not always correspond to the attitudes of the Arab public in Israel, as well as the need for proper preparation of the education system to effectively absorb and diversify the teaching staff by including teachers from the Arab sector (Hirshak et al., 2010).

When it comes to Jewish and Arab teachers, there is a cross-over between the different education systems. The transition between education systems requires both the system and the teachers to be flexible in behavior and thinking, eliminating alienation from the other and non-stereotypical thinking, etc. (Hishrak et al., 2010). While in the ultra-orthodox education systems, teachers typically share an identity that aligns with their respective educational systems, in the state education sector, teachers come from various segments of Israeli society, including both Arab and religious teachers (Blas, 2014), similar to what is occurring in religious communities worldwide, for example, in the Amish community in the United States (Yang, 2022). However, while there is motivation to facilitate the entrance of Arab educators into Hebrew education, the integration of ultra-orthodox teachers into the state sector education system is a relatively new phenomenon.

The State Education Law of 1953 facilitated the establishment of the Jewish education system in Israel, allowing for tailored responses to diverse

populations. This legislation recognizes three primary educational streams: the state-secular stream, catering to the entire population; the state-religious stream, addressing the religious community; and the ultra-orthodox stream, specifically tailored for the ultra-Orthodox population. The education system for ultra-orthodox communities is characterized by gender segregation, influencing educational approaches for boys and girls. The ultra-Orthodox education system enjoys a degree of autonomy in shaping its content and selecting teaching staff. Autonomy levels are aligned with the allocated education budgets for these institutions (Horowitz, 2012; Weissbly & Weinengar, 2015; Zernowitski & Feldman, 2018). Female graduates from ultra-Orthodox education often pursue careers as teachers and undergo professional training in teaching and education (Regev, 2017).

While many ultra-orthodox education graduates integrate into their system, reflecting their lifestyle and worldview (Chassida & Klapholz, 2021; Reiman, 2017), two parallel processes have emerged over time. First, due to a lack of employment opportunities within the ultra-orthodox sector for those with teacher training, graduates seek positions elsewhere (Friedman, 1991). Second, there's a challenge for those seeking job security and higher salaries compared to the ultra-orthodox educational field (Goldfarb, 2013). This has led ultra-orthodox teaching training graduates to integrate into education systems outside their community, ensuring job security and adherence to legally acceptable wage conditions through the Education Ministry.

The integration of ultra-orthodox teachers into education systems with differing worldviews raises questions about conflicting identities and the implications for their daily lives. This study aims to explore the experiences of those teachers integrating into state education systems, examining the challenges they face regarding identity gaps in their work. The objective is to inform future efforts in optimizing teaching staff composition, considering individuals from diverse backgrounds as cross-border educators.

Cross-border teachers

Many schools throughout the world in general, and in Israel in particular, have been integrating teachers from minority groups into schools serving the general population. These teachers become part of a system whose culture differs in character from their own. The differences between a school's identity and the identity of the teachers who work there raise questions about otherness, belonging, and the implications for employees' work experiences. Cross-border teachers (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013) in Israel's

education system are those who identify as having a religious affiliation that differs from that of the school where they teach, or who come from an ethnic background that is different from the one predominantly represented within the school's staff (Erlich & Gindi, 2020; Bart & Ben-Uliel, 2021). These teachers face personal challenges throughout their tenure, as they contend with tensions and contradictions stemming from the gap between their identity and that of the school. They invest significant effort into developing and utilizing coping strategies to help them bridge these gaps.

Recruiting employees to identify with the values of an organization is an important objective in organizations and contributes a great deal to the organization's effectiveness (Bahat & Levyatan, 2016; Gioia et al., 2013). Organizational identity reflects the degree to which an individual identifies with the organization that employs them and doesn't wish to leave. Teachers with professional and organizational identities tend to be involved in their work and active participants who attribute a lot of importance to effective performance, which can decrease patterns of burnout (Maor & Hemi, 2021). An aspect that is important for employee commitment and involvement in their work concerns the individual's identity with something significant for them. As a result, an employee who is committed to their organization believes in the organization's objectives and values, willingly accept instructions from their superiors, and invests considerable effort in doing their job (Oplatka, 2015). Since organizations are a meeting space for identities, the various identity circles sometimes create tensions and conflict between groups in society and individuals in that same society. These identities can include gender, nationality, religion, profession, etc. (Katz, 2014, 2016). These tensions stem from the desire to live and conduct oneself in a familiar, known space, opposite the departure towards what is unknown and different. The tensions are expressed in ways that vary from self-isolation and withdrawal to openness and assimilation (Ben Asher, 2019). Personal identity is highly visible when one's surroundings include people who are not included in that identity. For example, married people and singles, adults and youth, and Haredis and non-Haredis. The "other" in this sense is not singular and not necessarily homogenous, but a symbolic representation that the individual cultivates during their personal cultural journey and throughout their life (Katz, 2014, 2016). In order to avoid conflict, humans have a basic tendency to create homogenous teams of people who share similar characteristics. While this tendency can prevent friction and encourage calm, it also reinforces a "group-think" dynamic and reduces the various perspectives regarding challenges facing the organization from within and from without. On the other hand,

the leading mechanisms for improving varied performance in organizations are paradoxically connected to the tension that arises when there is a large degree of diversity among team members (Oplatka, 2015). The idea that conflict is unavoidable and should be harnessed as a force of creativity and positivity, and sometimes is a catalyst for positive change at work, offers a perceptual change regarding conflict and a shift from immediate reluctance and the desire to stay in one's comfort zone to a place of deriving maximum benefit both from respectable and respectful management of the conflict and from the ability to stop conflicts from growing and spreading out of control (Northouse, 2012).

In educational work, there are a variety of topics around which various conflicts might emerge. These conflicts could harm the workers' productivity and the effectiveness of work teams (Oplatka, 2015). Schools have unique organizational characteristics like a loose organizational structure, a great deal of autonomy granted to teachers in their work, and an organizational culture characterized by amorphousness and conflicting goals. Accordingly, the way conflicts between school personnel are dealt with is different than how conflicts between workers are dealt with in other organizations (Dorhaim, 2017).

For ultra-orthodox women employed outside their community, or in positions that require them to make decisions impacting ultra-orthodox society, identity gaps have been found to create tension between their sense of professional integrity and adherence to the norms and values of the ultra-orthodox community. The resulting conflict of interest in these women creates conflict defined as cognitive dissonance. This dissonance intensifies the paradox between their education, status, and commitment. Those who learn new occupations acquire skills and qualifications that prepare them for significant, key roles in new employment sectors, but these new occupations could threaten ultra-Orthodox social order because they are connected to values that are not in line with their ideology (Layosh, 2016). Specifically, in the education system, when organizational identity is examined from the perspective of employee wellbeing, it is found that among ultra-Orthodox teachers in a state-religious education system school, for example, there is a lower sense of well-being, stemming from the ideological, religious, and social gaps between their personal identity and that of their place of work (Bart & Ben-Uliel, 2021). In analyzing an individual's attitude toward identity gaps, invites particularistic Jewish discourse alongside liberal universalistic discourse, essential educational issues arise regarding the educational process. In this framework, four approaches for an individual to cope with this complexity have been mapped and analyzed. Cohen (2015) mapped these approaches based on the assumption that there is a constant tension between the main

identity circles in Israeli society, and the individual copes and manages their life given this tension.

The first approach is called the “contradiction approach”. According to this approach, the tension between identity circles is not something that can be resolved, and each person has one identity that is the most important to them and is decisively superior ideologically. In this approach, the individual’s experience involves polarization, alienation, and rejection. The second approach is called the “conflict approach.” In this approach, the individual has a hard time deciding, and is often uninterested in doing so. A person following this kind of approach experiences ongoing conflict that has no possible or desirable resolution and the resulting difficulty is a negative challenge. According to the third approach, the “dialectic approach,” the individual is uninterested in deciding between the various identity circles; they experience the challenge as a positive element in their lives, something that makes them grow. The tension between identities is not perceived as a threat but rather as an opening for learning, specifically from the complexity. Finally, there’s the “congruence approach,” according to which the individual tries to achieve congruence and complementarity between their various identities through any means possible and strives to experience this gap as a defining experience in their life. This approach includes the desire to blur tensions or ignore them due to the desire to resolve conflicts, i.e., it is not that there is no conflict but rather the individual wants to emphasize what unifies them. Although these approaches describe coping mechanisms within the Israeli educational discourse, they shed light on individuals’ strategies given identity gaps in their lives and especially at their workplaces.

Study Method

The analysis of how ultra-Orthodox teachers in non-ultra-Orthodox schools address gaps in organizational identity was conducted using a qualitative paradigm aimed at exploring the subjective experiences of these teachers. Qualitative research offers a means to interpret human behavior within social contexts, delving into processes that validate findings, particularly those tracking attitudes and perceptions deeply entrenched within broader social dynamics (Tzabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2016). Specifically, this study aimed to uncover the lived reality of how teachers navigate identity-related challenges in their daily roles, emphasizing the interpretations they ascribe to their work and providing a platform for study participants to articulate their worldview.

To facilitate this exploration, a semi-structured and in-depth interview format was employed, fostering a conversational dynamic between the researcher and participant. Participants were encouraged to freely express their perspectives, allowing for a deeper understanding of their worldview (Shkedi, 2003). This approach was chosen for its capacity to illuminate the worldviews of ultra-Orthodox teachers working within non- ultra-Orthodox educational settings. The interviews were guided by pre-prepared questions outlining key topics, yet remained flexible to adapt to the flow of conversation. Participants were also given the opportunity to introduce new topics or refine existing ones as per their preferences, with encouragement from the researchers. Through these interviews, a comprehensive overview of the strategies employed by ultra-Orthodox teachers to navigate organizational identity gaps was outlined.

Study Sample

For the purpose of this study, the researchers contacted 30 ultra-Orthodox teachers teaching in schools outside their community. The study sample was identified based on the researchers' personal acquaintance with the teachers. Given the fact that people from the ultra-Orthodox sector tend to shy away from surveys and cooperating with studies, personal acquaintance was necessary for cooperation on this issue. The study sample included women who are married with children, and who themselves attend schools within the ultra-Orthodox education system. Most of them have worked in education for a significant number of years, particularly in others education systems. Most of them stated that they chose to work outside the community because of the better work conditions offered, including job security and full compensation according to the Education Ministry.

Analyzing the Interviews

The analysis of findings involved a systematic coding process, wherein data from interviews were categorized with specific codes that recurred throughout, thereby facilitating the identification of emerging ideas (Tzabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2016; Glaser & Strauss, 2017). This coding process unfolded across three stages aimed at identifying trends, patterns, and formulations systematically. Firstly, interviews were initially segmented by topic. Subsequently, a more granular coding process was undertaken for each topic or category, with distinct categories being distilled from each. Finally, an examination of the interplay between different topics and categories was conducted in response

to the research question. Categories deemed non-essential were filtered out, enabling the extraction of central themes pivotal to conveying the essence of the study. Through this coding process, central themes emerged delineating the strategies employed by ultra-orthodox teachers in schools outside their communities to navigate their identity gaps across three dimensions: personal, organizational, and social.

Findings

The ultra-orthodox teachers in this study teach schools in the state education. In describing their experiences and the meaning they infuse into their daily work from a perspective of personal and organizational identity, we identified some clear characteristics in their teaching experience in three circles: personal identity gaps, organizational identity gaps, and social identity gaps.

Personal Identity Gaps

For ultra-Orthodox teachers, instructing in schools outside their community presents a profound challenge to their identity, often resulting in a dichotomy between reinforcing their identity and embracing adaptability by adopting behaviors incongruent with ultra-Orthodox norms. As a minority within the broader school environment, comprising both staff and students, negotiating their identity spans a spectrum of assimilation. While some teachers find that teaching in diverse settings bolsters their identity and distinguishes them more prominently, others grapple with a complex struggle, occasionally necessitating adaptations that challenge their core identity. This tension underscores the apprehension within the ultra-Orthodox community regarding female graduates teaching outside their insular environment. Participants echoed these sentiments when discussing their families' attitudes toward their workplace. It's evident that the gravest concerns arise when considering employment in secular institutions. One participant, Hadar, said: My father is really alarmed. He wants me to quit. My in-laws were critical... in my parents' home I don't speak about the school". In contrast, Chaya recounted a more supportive stance from her family: "My family encouraged me to work in an organized, established place. Some view this as a decline in religious level, but there are also some...who appreciate me and say that I'm the right person for the job because I am representing my community with respect".

The perception of a challenged identity resonates among all interviewees, with some viewing it as an inevitable aspect of their professional journey, while others acknowledge its tangible impact on their daily practice. The

pronounced sense of “otherness” creates for part of them a notable barrier, hindering teachers from fully integrating into their surroundings. But the others are more susceptible to shifts in their identity.

I'll put it like this: In Egypt, be an Egyptian. Adapt yourself to the society around you wherever you are... smartphones, a lot of openness to things I hadn't known about till now, openness about life and concepts that I hadn't known: different songs, different cultures, slang, rules, and customs (Yael).

Naama added, “A smartphone with WhatsApp, available internet, constantly speaking with men who have no restrictions about the duration of a conversation with me and sometimes even about the topic of conversation.” The ultra-Orthodox lifestyle is put to the test, mainly due to the teachers’ access to technology, internet, and smartphones which were mentioned in almost every interview, but not only. It is also a matter of exposure to other values, as Michal explains:

The texts about Independence Day, Memorial Day, and Holocaust Memorial Day led me to an understanding and appreciation, and to identify with the bereaved families, Holocaust survivors, and IDF soldiers, something that wasn't obvious to me in the past. I was raised in a home where IDF soldiers and everything they implied were not valued, and suddenly I feel more connected.

These challenges face ultra-orthodox society from various places, but exposure to them while justifying the necessity of a livelihood makes it more significant for the female graduates of ultra-orthodox education who teach in an educational framework that is different from the one they were taught in.

Conversely, some teachers perceive a distinct boundary between themselves and the diverse identities they encounter. They believe that this identity gap is insurmountable, thereby placing greater importance on their personal identity than they would within their community: “I feel a sense of mission...and a need to be careful with my words, what to mention and what not to” (Sarah). Rivka, also claims she is part of the team but also maintains her distance. “The diversity of the teachers makes me feel like everyone has their role and I have mine, and that’s fine...There were times that I wasn’t updated about things because I don’t have WhatsApp and it creates a gap between me and them...I am not interested in changing that.” Hadar also expressed her serious concerns. “From the moment I was hired, I was in a sort of denial. I suppressed it for the entire summer break...it’s like jumping right into the deep end, and it wasn’t simple for me.”

Organizational Identity Gaps

The findings from the interviews highlight a disparity not only in the teachers' identities but also in their organizational identities, as a school's vision and educational approach typically align with its affiliated educational stream. In Israel, the educational streams are primarily distinguished by levels of religiosity. The participants interviewed for this study all belong to the most stringent religious stream. Their responses revealed discrepancies between the foundational principles of education they were raised with and the expectations placed on them as teachers in these alternative streams. Teaching in an educational environment different from their own poses challenges for their roles as educators, and this challenge persists regardless of the specific workplace. For example, state education places significant emphasis on national values and the sanctity of the land, which starkly contrasts with the values taught in the ultra-orthodox stream. The participants perceived this not only as an introduction to unfamiliar values but also as a challenge to navigate within the organizational context of the school.

The Independence Day celebrations and the very idea that the State of Israel is the 'beginning of our redemption.' In my perspective, we are still in exile, with all that implies. I sometimes find myself needing to explain my position to a colleague who comes from another background... In general, my worldview is very different (Hadassah).

This point was also raised regarding coping with the organizational identity and not only the personal one, as described by Nechama:

For me... and as a person, I don't feel like I'm contradicting myself. I have what I believe in, and when I sing HaTikvah (the national anthem), I know that it's a type of code. I'll sing but not at the top of my lungs, because I am supposed to serve as a role model for the students. If I am working here, I should be respectful of it. This is the way of the school, and I am supposed to correspond with it.

Rivka describes how she needs to bridge the gap between her identity and the school's organizational identity. "As an ultra-Orthodox teacher, I guide the class. I had to walk through the streets of Jerusalem with a huge Israeli flag in my hand waving it all around and singing *HaTikvah*."

The calendar of the state education system is very different from that of the ultra-orthodox stream, and the fact that Independence Day and Memorial Day serve as expressions of redemption was mentioned a lot in the interviews,

as it perpetuates the gap as an inseparable part of their work. Yael described a great deal of effort involved:

To adapt yourself at all times, my opinions, my views, my ideologies to their lifestyle. For example, to be enthusiastic and happy on Independence Day and Jerusalem Day. To stand at attention during the Memorial Day siren. To reference love for the land of Israel in teaching. I feel a bit less enthusiasm about this and more about the holidays and the preparations for them. Because in state education, Independence Day is the Holy of Holies.

Dina further elaborated:

Sometimes I feel insecure about teaching things and conducting ceremonies related to... I deal with receiving study material about topics that are not taught in ultra-orthodox schools, and sometimes they are in opposition with my worldview.

Alongside the value-based gap that ultra-Orthodox teachers face, they also describe a world of a different kind that was unfamiliar to them. Students attend from across a wide religious-secular spectrum, and some do not receive religious education at home. Daniella spoke about this “There are gaps in the degree of importance of basic values...frustration when facing low levels of religiosity, parents who are not stable in their spiritual opinions, and sometimes criticism for the ideology I was taught.”

Ultra-Orthodox teachers encounter challenges primarily concerning values associated with the State of Israel and occasionally with aspects pertaining to the religious sphere. Additionally, they cite differences in language and terminology, personal and relationship statuses that are not present in Ultra-Orthodox society, and interactions with students and colleagues that diverge from their upbringing within the education system. “I studied in an ultra-orthodox school, and the school where I teach has no gender separation. Boys and girls are together” (Batya). Hadar added:

The school is secular, the (male) principal is married to a man, this is something I'm unfamiliar with. The students in the class sometimes have sexual preferences that I am unfamiliar with. It is a big challenge for me... this exposure is not simple...students even come up to me and ask me how I can work here.

Some of the teachers that were interviewed mentioned unfamiliar language and interactions with students that were different than what they saw in their sector. “The educational language there is strange. Sometimes

vulgar. Even kids in first grade...I'm paying a price...it's challenging...it's a big effort all the time, every time" (Sarah). Sarah elaborated on the difficulty she has communicating with parents. "I don't have WhatsApp, I'm not available because I have a simple phone [a phone with no internet capabilities]. It makes it difficult to communicate...I can tell it bothers some of the parents."

Social Identity Gaps

The study participants' descriptions of their experiences paint a consistent picture regarding how they perceive the identity gap within their workplaces. From the perspective of ultra-Orthodox teachers, it appears that teaching in any stream outside of their own community yields a similar sense of "otherness," regardless of the specific stream they teach in. In essence, their perception of this "otherness" remains consistent, even when comparing experiences of teaching in vastly different streams. While some participants highlighted the identity gaps they encountered in their work, others did not perceive identity as a significant factor in their professional lives. The social aspect of these identity gaps is articulated as follows: "Teaching in this environment is complex. Within the team, I am seen as different, and this cannot be overlooked. While I am generally respected, there are instances where I feel excluded, partly due to my basic phone." The issue of the phone arose frequently in discussions. Rivka remarked, "I don't have WhatsApp, I don't have YouTube, I don't have any of it. This makes things very challenging for me, as a lot of communication and events happen through these platforms, even among staff members."

Similar sentiments were echoed by other teachers who also face fundamental differences with the ultra-Orthodox stream. In their experiences, issues such as the use of smartphones serve as social barriers, alongside other factors such as dietary restrictions or differing days of learning compared to what is accepted in their community sector. Chaya describes this dynamic:

Since I only have a simple phone, I don't get all the messages on time... As for dietary observance, I can't eat at any of the parties. And as for the school schedule, there is no flexibility regarding holidays. For example, the day after the three pilgrimage holidays fell out on Saturday so Sunday was considered a regular day of school. The day after another holiday is considered a regular school day. It's hard for me physically and spiritually.

Batya claims:

I'm working with a completely different public. There is hardly any ideological or spiritual connection. Sometimes where there are incidents at the parliament

or tense days against the background of Independence Day... I'd rather be in an ultra-Orthodox school.

In addition to the gap stemming from a different lifestyle, there is a similar sentiment regarding external conduct and patterns of clothing associated with ultra-orthodox identity. For example, Dina says: "I see differences in hair coverings, clothing. I wear sleeves till my elbows and stockings." Tzipora adds, "Differences with the staff are evident mainly in external appearance and dress."

However, some participants assert that identity does not significantly influence their professional lives and does not accentuate any social differences between teachers and students. This phenomenon is particularly prominent among those teaching in secular schools, perhaps because the disparities are so pronounced, and their identity is perceived as markedly distinct from the outset, thus posing less of an obstacle.

It took me some time to get used to it. The team is secular but very respectful. I am part of the team... That has taught me how to respect all people as they are. Actually, the diversity of the teachers made me feel that each person has their place and their role, and I have mine, and everything is fine (Rivka).

Michal elaborates, claiming that working in the secular sector suited her, and created especially interesting work for her rather than the burnout she may have felt had she taught in a place where she had grown up and was educated:

It suited me just right. I think I have the right approach. I have a lot to learn... and it really interests me and makes me want to continue here. Besides, it doesn't bother anyone that I'm an ultra-Orthodox woman. I was nervous but everyone is great with me, and the staff is cohesive and accepting."

It appears that the ultra-Orthodox teachers' distinct identity compared to that of their workplaces can be understood on a spectrum of feelings of "otherness" and belonging, a sentiment shared by all study participants. However, there is a stronger sense of belonging for teachers in state-religious schools, as they operate within a religious framework, which mitigates their sense of "otherness." "I don't feel different among the staff. Our school prioritizes equality and does not show favoritism based on religious affiliation or style," says Tzila. Dina adds, "Our school endeavors to treat all societal minorities—Ethiopians, ultra-Orthodox—equally. There is equal discourse in the teachers' lounge.» It is essential to note that while ultra-Orthodox teachers

have been employed in state-religious schools for some time, their integration into secular schools is a relatively recent development and not yet widespread. This may explain why these teachers sometimes have differing experiences; they may be the only ultra-Orthodox teachers in a school, and in some cases, the only ones in their family teaching in the secular stream.

Discussion

This study investigated identity gaps in the field of education for ultra-Orthodox teachers working in the state education sector. In a society characterized by diverse shades of religiosity and nationality, teachers from various backgrounds, origins, and religious affiliations play an essential role in the Israeli education system. While the education system is segregated by nationality and religious affiliation, with parents selecting education for their children based on compatibility of values and educational approaches, it is crucial not to overlook the challenges teachers face in navigating unfamiliar territory as they carry out their valuable educational work.

It must be acknowledged that not every teacher can bridge cultural and value gaps, but those who choose to do so, are exposed to an unfamiliar world and must strive to perform optimally. This reality can sometimes impact the nature of the teacher's work, their mental well-being, and their social integration within the school as an organization. Research has indicated that organizational identity gaps can have adverse effects on employees, including ultra-Orthodox teachers specifically. Therefore, it is imperative to address these challenges and provide support for teachers navigating unfamiliar educational environments (Oplatka, 2015; Erlich & Gindi, 2020; Katz, 2014 and 2016; Kaplan, 2021; Bart & Ben-Uliel, 2021).

These challenges are particularly prevalent in the Israeli education system within the context of teachers from the Arab sector. Among these challenges, it has been observed that Arab teachers often find themselves compelled to suppress their national identity and pride. Additionally, they may encounter reluctance stemming from the militaristic discourse that characterizes Israeli society (Saada & Gros, 2019; Gindi & Erlich, 2019). Some Arab teachers also face difficulties in implementing curricula that do not always align with their original values and may exclude certain groups from their content (Shoshani, 2020).

However, there is limited understanding of the challenges these teachers encounter as they strive to bridge the gaps and mitigate conflicts that may arise due to disparities between their personal identity and the organizational identity of their schools.

From its inception, the 1953 law that established education streams in Israel recognized the ideological and value-based distinctions between these streams. It granted the ultra-Orthodox community the autonomy to adhere to its values rather than being directly accountable to the Ministry of Education. However, the primary focus of the law pertains to a school's student body and the curriculum taught therein, rather than the sectoral affiliation of its staff.

Nevertheless, the increasing presence of ultra-Orthodox teachers in schools outside their community over the years underscores the existence of identity gaps for teachers as employees within an organization. It highlights the challenges faced by "cross-border teachers" in effectively managing their educational responsibilities despite cultural and organizational differences. These challenges manifest in three key areas: personal, organizational, and social, with variations depending on the individual teacher and their workplace.

It appears that the diverse feelings and coping mechanisms observed among teachers stem from the significance of the boundaries between personal identity and the school's identity, as manifested in its vision, worldview, and organizational identity. Teachers in state-religious schools tend to exhibit a softer sense of grappling with challenges compared to those in the secular sector. However, daily navigation of identity gaps has enabled these teachers to develop strategies for bridging these gaps, ensuring that their educational work remains unaffected.

Essentially, the world of "cross-border teachers" (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013) is situated between their personal identity derived from their societal position, religion, or cultural background, and the identity of the school where they teach, alongside the identities of fellow teachers and students. For ultra-Orthodox teachers, navigating these borders at work requires coping strategies that vary depending on the educational stream in which they teach. The greater the distance between their religious affiliation and that of the school, the more pronounced the school's identity and vision will appear as "other," making it more challenging to bridge these gaps. Consequently, they are more likely to adopt a dialectic approach (Cohen, 2015), experiencing the gap as an opportunity for personal and professional growth. Conversely, in schools closer to the teacher's level of religiosity, an adaptive approach is taken, aiming to blur and overlook gaps to resolve conflicts within their identity.

The experiences of these teachers can serve as a case study to examine the phenomenon of cross-border teachers. On one hand, there is a tendency to recruit employees, particularly teachers, who align with the values of the school to mitigate conflicts that could jeopardize organizational effectiveness

and success (Gioia et al., 2013; Bahat & Levyatan, 2016). Conversely, a diverse teaching staff, including cross-border teachers, can enhance organizational performance, albeit paradoxically due to the tension arising from a high degree of diversity within the team (Oplatka, 2015).

The findings suggest that ultra-Orthodox teachers learn to navigate between the needs of the school and their own worldviews without compromising their role as educators. Identifying and acknowledging these conflicts allows them to adopt flexible or stringent approaches, demonstrating respect for their workplaces and a commitment to professional development. Despite the personal challenges encountered by cross-border teachers in bridging gaps, their coping strategies enable them to broaden their horizons and engage with diverse groups, which is essential for their educational endeavors. Future consideration should be given to how cross-border teachers are perceived by staff and management at the schools where they teach.

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