

## **A Global Pandemic in a Multicultural Society: Comparison between Jewish and Arab Teachers' Metaphors of Teaching**

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**ABSTRACT:** The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the education system around the world. This article examines the perceptions of teachers who are members of the Jewish majority and the Arab minority in Israel, particularly on their e-learning role during the pandemic. Based on analysis of metaphors chosen by 20 Jewish and 14 Arab teachers, results of the study indicate two themes: (1) a collectivist perception prevalent among the Arab teachers and (2) an individualistic perception prevalent among the Jewish teachers. Recommendations to the education system are based on the cultural differences and inequalities between these groups.

**KEYWORDS:** Teachers, COVID-19, role perception, metaphors

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The outbreak of COVID-19 disrupted most circles surrounding people's lives around the world. As a result, humanity and its social institutions have faced great challenges and difficulties that have changed the daily routine, probably forever (Samhita & Varma, 2020). In Israel, three COVID-19 lockdowns were announced by the government and highly impacted the population. The first lockdown started on March 14, 2020 and was cancelled on April 30, 2020; the second lockdown began on September 25, 2020 and was terminated on October 17, 2020; the third lockdown started on December 27, 2020 and was ended in mid-March 2021 (Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020; Ministry of Interior, 2020).

The Israeli governmental restrictions due to the pandemic comprised traffic restrictions (the citizens were only allowed to drive for crucial needs), and educational institutions were closed due to enforced social isolation that did not allow conventional learning at schools. The emergency restrictions were enforced by policemen, soldiers, and inspectors who fined citizens who violated the restrictions and even arrested or detained them.

The Israeli education system was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent prohibitions. Like numerous education systems around the world, the local education system had to close all schools in the first half of 2020 in order to prevent the spread of the disease. Thus, traditional learning at schools was replaced by online distance learning. Consequently, the social and educational order in the country was disrupted. The teachers suddenly had to reformulate their work, including their teaching methods and their strategies of coping with the resultant difficulties (Daniel, 2020). In order to address the dramatically new situation, the teachers had to rapidly update their knowledge, technological skills, practices, and comprehension of the emergent challenges (Smith et al., 2021; Zhao, 2020).

The current research deals the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on Israeli teachers who are members of two distinctly different cultures: Jewish and Arab. It contextualizes the COVID-19 effects on the structure of education in Israel, considering its two separate Jewish and Arab education systems. After this contextualization, the authors present the qualitative research method deployed in analyzing the Israeli teachers' metaphorizing of their feelings and the consequent educational challenges they faced due to the dramatic move from traditional educational to distance learning.

In the finding section, the authors present two main themes indicated by their data analysis: (1) collectively focused metaphors and (2) self-focused metaphors. They then decode the meanings of their findings, particularly the emergent distinction between the socially different Jewish and Arab groups and further discuss the differences between the Jewish group, which emphasizes the centrality of the individual, and the Arab group that centers on a more collectivist approach.

The unique contribution of this research is demonstrated in two areas. First, this research provides a comparative perspective on teachers of different cultural backgrounds and how they perceive their role as teachers and educators during the COVID-19 period. Secondly, this research genuinely elaborates a qualitative methodology that conceptualizes metaphors of experiences and feelings of Jewish and Arab teachers. Hence, this research illuminates the multicultural dimension of teachers dealing with the COVID-19 crisis while comparing Jewish educators, who are members of the majority Israeli culture, and Arab educators, who belong to a minority culture with its own characteristics.

### **Multiculturalism and Conflict in Israel**

Israeli society, like many societies in the world, is multicultural and comprises numerous sectors and communities; nevertheless, it does not deploy an inclusive multicultural policy in its educational institutions (Paul Binyamin & Haj-Yehia, 2019; Shafir & Peled, 2002). Notably, Israel's population is estimated at 74.1% Jews, 21.0% Arabs, and 4.9% others (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

The interactions between the different groups in Israeli society—Jews and Arabs, religious and secular people, liberals, and conservatives—are typically hostile and involve mutual negation (Smootha, 2017, 2019). The deepest divide in Israeli society, however, is the divide between the Jewish majority and the Arab-Palestinian minority that comprises about 20% of the Israeli population. The Arab society in Israel considers itself to be part of the Palestinian people who are in conflict with the State of Israel (Smootha, 2019). Arab citizens in Israel suffer from exclusion and discrimination in diverse aspects of daily life, including employment, *per capita* income, social mobility, and education (Jamal, 2018).

### **Two Separate Education Systems: Between Individualism and Collectivism, Tradition and Modernity**

The separation between the social groups in diverse fields of life, particularly the education system, generates a lack of basic recognition that stimulates a sense of alienation, bigotry, mutual fear, and even racist and violent expressions. These phenomena create a substantial psychological barrier for Arabs who wish to fully and comfortably belong in Israeli society (Prashker, 2008). The Israeli education system has been designed with these contours, and we will discuss later the implications of this reality on the education system.

Although the different sectors are inseparable parts of Israeli society, they maintain separate education systems in separate residential areas. These distinct systems operate from kindergarten through elementary and secondary schools to teacher training colleges that train the future generations of teachers in each and every sector (Paul Binyamin & Haj-Yehia, 2019). In this situation, most of the students in Israel, from kindergarteners to twelfth graders, do not meet students or teachers from the other sectors through their learning years.

The gaps in resources and infrastructures (for example, access to the Internet) are evident in high dropout rates and low academic achievements for Arab students (Arar & Haj-Yehia, 2010). The curriculum in the Arab education system does not address the Arab society's unique characteristics and its pedagogical contents do not reflect the Arab culture, history, or literature (Haj-Yehia & Lev Tov, 2018). This separation also comprises significant differences in the organizational, instructional, and educational culture of the two systems of education, including teacher status and social position, parent-teacher relationships, principal status and characteristics of successful management, family position in the education process, and various pedagogical and didactic models as detailed below.

A critical examination of the Jewish and Arab education systems in Israel is interrelated with a broader inquiry of intercultural dynamics in contemporary multicultural societies. Oplatka and Arar (2016), in their examination of promoting social justice in traditional and modern societies, discuss the apparent centrality of the collective in traditional societies, in contrast to the apparently individualistic nature of modern societies. In a traditional society, the individual primarily obeys the people in charge and their activities are directed

at the collective's benefit. In contrast, a modern society focuses on self-orientation and personal choices, while every person is predominantly encouraged to express their selfhood.

Research on the interrelations between teachers and parents in Jewish and Arab societies in Israel suggests that Arab teachers cooperate less with their students' parents and feel less threatened by the parents than their Jewish counterparts (Addi-Racah & Grinshtain, 2016). Arab teachers are perceived as a source of authority and knowledge and enjoy more prestige and honor than the Jewish teachers. Awad et al. (2010) contend that cultural traits explain the differences in definitions of a good teacher, suggesting that students with modern cultural characteristics, in contrast to those with traditional cultural characteristics, primarily appreciate a teacher who develops cognitive competence among their students and is able to move from an individual level to the collective level of their class. Other research (Markic et al., 2016) focuses on standpoints of Jewish and Arab chemistry teachers and reveals that Arab teachers, as members of a traditional society, particularly focus on memorization as a learning method. In other words, they consider themselves as a source of knowledge and expect their students to memorize the knowledge they share. Jewish teachers operate according to individualistic principles such as independent learning and problem-based learning, whereas their Arab counterparts, in focusing on collective memorization, maintain a collectivist paradigm.

To summarize, we suggest that the Israeli education system, in its separating between Arabs and Jews, intensifies the differences between teacher characteristics, teaching methods, and contested self-perceptions of the teachers' educational role. The boundaries between the two societies are not closed or blocked, and mutual influences diffuse into one another. Notwithstanding, the 21<sup>st</sup> century Israeli education system still comprises two highly distinct cultures: One is typically based on collectivist values and the other relies on individualistic values.

Thus, our research question is whether the global COVID-19 pandemic that affected many systems, including the education system, differentially affected the Jewish and Arab education systems. Alternatively, did social distancing, distance learning, and teachers' difficulties in adjusting to digital pedagogical models lead to *similar* responses in the Jewish and Arab education systems in Israel?

## Methodology

In this study, we wanted to explore the teaching perceptions of Jewish and Arab teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, we used a qualitative research method that assists to reveal the meanings given by teachers to their own experiences, perceptions, and considerations (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The sample of 34 teachers included 20 Jews and 14 Arabs who taught in elementary schools (20 persons) and secondary schools (14 persons); 27 interviewees were women and seven interviewees were men. They all lived in central Israel and officially agreed to be interviewed. Their schools

participated in a Professional Development Schools (PDS) project (Ikpeze et al., 2012) where schools collaborated with the college where the authors of this article work. It is important to note that the authors of this research are secular Jewish women who support multiculturalism and critical thinking about social, educational, and political controversies in Israel. Notably, they are well-experienced in culturally sensitive fieldwork with Arab colleagues and students. During this research, ethical rules were maintained by protecting the teachers' anonymity and omitting identifying details about the interviewees' schools. We kept the interviewees' anonymity by giving pseudonyms.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Hebrew in winter 2020. Each interview lasted about an hour and the quotes we used in the article were translated into English. The aim of the interviews was to learn about the experiences and feelings of the teachers regarding the shift from the traditional teaching routine to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. For this purpose, we asked the teachers to choose an image or a metaphor that reflected their feelings and experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and explain that image or metaphor. We did not provide samples of metaphors to the teachers in order to avoid any bias in their answers.

A metaphor, in research, is a means that represents one aspect of experience in terms of another dimension, and it might relate to diverse contents and discourses. Steger (2007) notes that metaphors can provide researchers an exposure of people's insights, values, beliefs, and presuppositions that usually are not directly expressed (due to fear of criticism, shame, or unawareness regarding a feeling) (Aita et al., 2003). A metaphor analysis can help us to better understand emotional contexts and more complicated situations (Steger, 2007).

The accumulated data has been thematically analyzed (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) using Narralyzer software to examine texts and qualitative data (Shkedi, 2005). Results of analysis indicate two self-perceptions of the teachers: one focused on the individual while the other focused on a collective framework. Significantly, individual or self-oriented metaphors were common among the Jewish teachers whereas collective metaphors were shared by most of the Arab teachers.

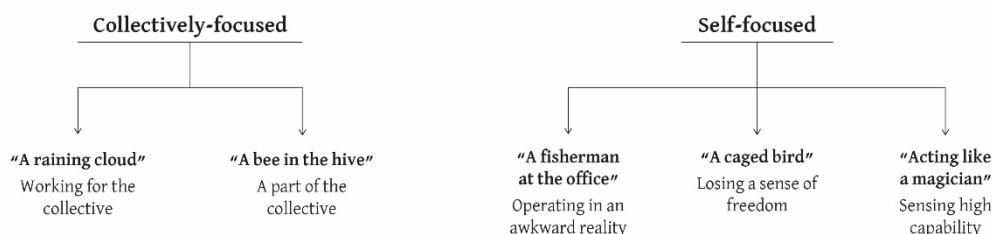
## Findings

To reiterate, the teachers were asked by the authors to use metaphors in order to describe their feeling during the COVID-19 pandemic. After they uttered a metaphor, they were asked to explicate their choice. An analysis of the metaphors indicates two main themes: (1) A collectively-focused approach that regards the teacher as a tool of servicing the collective while emphasizing the teacher's traditional role as responsible for teaching and students' learning; and (2) a self-focused approach that primarily related the teachers' personal experiences during the COVID-19 crisis. The collectivist attitude was manifested by most Arab teachers (11 out of 14) and just one Jewish teacher. In contrast, the individual attitude was expressed by most Jewish teachers (19

out 20) and only a few Arab teachers (3 out of 14). Figure 1 shows a thematic analysis of the teachers' metaphors reflected by the interviews.

## Figure 1

### *Thematic Analysis of Teachers' Metaphors*



## Collectively-Focused Approach

The collectively-focused approach emphasizes the teachers' focus on their responsibility towards e-learning, students, and society. It mainly deals with the teachers' role and is less occupied with their personal needs and experiences. Thus, the metaphors relate to teachers' significant role in shifting from daily routine to a new routine during the COVID-19 pandemic. The metaphors that demonstrate a collectivist perception are divided into two subcategories: (1) teachers' self-perception as professionals whose role is to advance the collective and (2) teachers' self-perception as professionals who are a part of the collective. The collectively-focused approach is demonstrated by metaphors deployed by 11 Arab teachers and 1 Jewish teacher.

### ***"A Cloud Yearning to Rain on Children": Teacher's Self-perception as a Professional Whose Role Is to Advance the Collective***

Most of the teachers who demonstrated a collective approach to teaching primarily perceived themselves as dominant figures in the learning process who advanced their clients (i.e., the students), whereas the students were typically described in these teachers' metaphors as passive subjects. This approach characterizes traditional teaching in which the teacher is predominantly a source of knowledge who "mediates" the learning materials to their students or "receivers."

Amana (An Arab woman teacher) chose to use images of clouds and earth to demonstrate her active and significant role as a person-in-charge, in strong contrast to the students' passive position. She explained,

It's like a cloud who yearns to rain while the children are like the earth. The children are like a thirsty earth that needs to be fertile in order to allow vegetation to germinate. Without the raining clouds it is difficult for the earth to germinate [...].



Amana referred to the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent online learning challenge through a metaphor that centers on the teacher as a source of knowledge. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this image intensified and she felt like a cloud raining information and knowledge while she perceived her students as a thirsty land that needed to be quenched.

Other metaphors used by teachers who belonged to this subcategory manifested an approach that focused on the teacher's role in interacting with students and protecting them. For example, one of the teachers (An Arab male teacher) saw himself "as an umbrella that protects and saves my students from this distancing." He compared difficult online teaching with rewarding face-to-face meetings, explaining, "it has been easier for me to know and sense their experiences, feelings, and problems, as well as their pains and happiness."

Another kind of imagery was manifested by Hamudi (An Arab male teacher) who metaphorized himself as a truck packed with goods that delivers the commodity to the clients:

I am the truck while the commodity is the learning material that I distribute to my clients, the students. I said "a truck" rather than a small car because I meant to emphasize that I've been loaded with tons of material, with frequent changes, difficulties, and challenges. I wish to deal with everything and then distribute [everything] to my students. I must reach every student and give him his own commodity. [...] I think that distance learning increases the gaps.

This imagery indicates that the teacher perceived himself as responsible for his students and as an authority and a source of knowledge that should be transferred to its destination. The teacher was aware of his limits and he criticized the broadening gaps during this difficult time.

Edna, a woman teacher, is the only Jewish teacher that chose a metaphor directed at the collective. Her discourse dealt with difficulties that prevented her from ultimately servicing her students:

I feel like I'm in a time channel or in some bubble that is detached from the world. [...] The world as a global village doesn't exist anymore. This is my feeling of going back in time. [...] At first, I sensed confusion, a great deal of uncertainty, like, how can we work in this way? How can we care for the children, both academically and emotionally? I'm a teacher who prepares students for the state's final exams. It's a very big responsibility.

The other subcategory manifests a collectively-focused approach that focuses on the teacher as part of the collective.

### ***"Like a Bee in a Hive": The Teacher's Self-perception as Part of the Collective***

A few teachers among those who deployed collectively focused metaphors perceived themselves as individuals who primarily act within a broad social community. Amir (An Arab male teacher) considered himself part of a broad community by using the metaphor of "a bee in the hive." He said,

Today, after the COVID-19 period, I feel like a bee in a hive that must cooperate with the other bees in order to maintain liveliness during learning processes. We cannot exist without working together. [...] We need cooperation between all teachers, students, parents, and the powers in school. We worked around the clock in order to ultimately include our students in the e-learning, teaching, and evaluation circles. [...] [We tried to provide] as many ways as possible to meet [our students'] emotional and social needs beyond learning.

Like a bee that acts in a hive together with its counterparts (accumulating food, postpartum caring, securing and maintaining the hive), Amir portrayed his role by repetitively using the concept of cooperation. He considered his main role during the COVID-19 pandemic as promoting e-learning and collaboration between all parties: teachers, students, and parents.

In the same spirit, Jihad (An Arab male teacher) admitted:

During this COVID-19 period I feel like I'm in a football game, in which every player plays in his turn, doing his particular job in a way that would enable his group to move forward and succeed. [...] Each and every player gives [as much as he can] and supports his teammates in order to fulfill their group goal. Hence, my colleagues and I worked as much as we can in taking care of our students and protecting them.

According to Jihad, every teacher had a particular role in fulfilling the group assignment. His perception demonstrated a systemic vision in which the single teacher is not an individual in their own right but rather a part of an organization that takes care of the students while acting-out the teachers' authoritative and protective roles.

The metaphors used by most of the Arab teachers coincide with the characteristics of a traditional society that glorifies the collective and praises teamwork that benefits the whole society. The teacher's roles, in regard to their relationship with students, are embedded in authoritative imagery in which the teacher shares their good qualities with the students, physically and emotionally defends them, and addresses their academic needs. In other words, according to the collectivist perspective, the teacher is primarily a source of knowledge and authority.

### **Self-focused Approach**

The 22 metaphors that express the self-focused approach deal with the teachers' discussions of themselves and the difficulties they faced during the pandemic. This personal aspect is demonstrated by most of the Jewish teachers (19 out of 20) and a very few Arab teachers (3 out of 14). An analysis of these metaphors indicates teachers' introspection during the shift from traditional teaching to online teaching during the COVID-19 era affected these teachers whose discourse did not center on their students but on themselves.

As shown below, the teachers' intuitive selection of metaphors left no room for students. An analysis of the findings reveals the following subcategories: (1) "A fisherman in the office"—dealing with a peculiar reality or



a different world; (2) "Like a bird in its cage"—losing a sense of freedom; and (3) "Magical forces"—a sense of high competence in solving emergent difficulties. A detailed explication of selected metaphors in each of these subcategories is shared below.

### **"A Fisherman in the Office": Operating in a Peculiar Reality**

Four Jewish teachers, in imagining their feelings about the shift from daily routine to the COVID-19 pandemic, chose metaphors that depicted a different, strange, and unfamiliar world with conductive rules and regulations that were rather unknown and unclear, like the traits of the VOCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) world (Hadar et al., 2020). They felt that they had no means of dealing with such a realm.

David (A Jewish male teacher) imagined himself as an animal in a habitat that did not allow for its existence, saying he felt "like a fisherman in an office whose natural place is at the sea. Likewise, the COVID-19 pandemic posits the teacher in a rather unnatural position at her/his home rather than working at school." Galya (A Jewish woman teacher) described her feelings by using the terms "formless" and "snowfall," partly alluding to the very beginning of the Bible: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was formless, and void" (Genesis 1, 1). Formlessness connotes disorder and a sense of chaos.

Shahar (A Jewish woman teacher) considered herself a person in a new, different world, inspired by Dorothy from Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*. Dorothy got caught in a Kansas tornado that hit the farm where she lived with her uncle, aunt, and dog. She flew through the air and landed in the imaginary land of Oz. Shahar said,

As a teacher, I feel like Dorothy landing in Oz... She has to learn about a new world where there are many people that she doesn't know who warn her about most awful things that might happen. They tell Dorothy that there's a solution but only God knows what this could be. The truth, however, is that Dorothy is in a better situation than me because she has a yellow brick road to go on. For me, the new situation means reinventing everything, collecting the yellow bricks.

Shahar's statement reflected her feeling that she was in an unfamiliar, unknown territory with strange people who advised her but she was not sure if she could trust them. This interviewee went even further with this metaphor and claimed that, in comparison with Dorothy, the latter's position was better. The yellow brick road marked Dorothy's path while Shahar had to pave her own way.

The images selected by the teachers were taken from diverse worlds: contemporary realm (a fisherman in an office), nature (chaos and snowfall), fictional world (*The Wizard of Oz*), and sports (marathon), but they all expressed a virtual reality in a different, non-routine world that was typically vague, complex, and uncertain with rapid changes. The teachers felt they did not have enough means to understand how to deal with this new world and they were not at ease with it.

The following metaphors used by three Arab teachers, unlike their peers who focused on a collectivist perspective, deal with their personal feelings and, particularly, a sense of loneliness. The metaphor selected by Jamal (An Arab male teacher, in describing his feeling during the COVID-19 era identifies a sense of abandonment. Jamal significantly felt like a land that had been abandoned, neglected, and left alone to deal with e-learning. "As a teacher, I feel like an *abandoned earth*," he said and accused both the state, the Ministry of Education, and the students' parents, as well as himself, for the knowledge that he lacked:

Nobody cares for the teacher. He breaks his head over what to do with the students. The parents are not cooperative. The state told us to teach via Zoom but no one guided us in operating it. We're a deserted land. Neither the citizens nor the state or the Ministry of Education care for this land. I felt totally neglected.

A sense of loneliness was also reflected by a metaphor used by Suraya (an Arab woman teacher) who focused on her personal situation:

Nowadays, I'm subjected to rather unpleasant feelings. At a certain moment, I felt like a punching bag beaten by everyone. During the lockdown period, we experienced uncertainty. We didn't know what to do – should I teach or not? Are we going to be fully or partly paid? The parents claimed that we're just passing time and they spied on us for most of the time. The media contended that we're not doing enough and they urged the parents and the students to demand their return to in-class school routine despite the fear of being infected with COVID-19 [...] No one consulted us. Nobody cared for our mental wellbeing. After all, we're also human beings. A significant part of the teachers was financially or medically harmed by the pandemic [...] Nobody took it into consideration [...] The fears dramatically affected me. I am frozen.

The image of "a punching bag" is something that anyone can beat and use to carelessly vent verbal or physical anger. Suraya (An Arab woman teacher) felt that the teachers passively stood at the center of a boxing ring and were beaten from all sides, by fearful students and parents, while experiencing their own fears. All these feelings reduced the teachers' sense of mental wellbeing, damaging them financially and physically.

### ***"Like a Bird in Its Cage": Losing a Sense of Freedom***

Six Jewish teachers used various metaphors that expressed loss of a sense of freedom. Yardena (A Jewish woman teacher) said, "I feel like I face a transparent wall; thus, I can see what's going on outside but I'm trapped inside and cannot do anything about it. I see the problems and the difficulties, but I can't help." Miriam (A Jewish woman teacher) described a similar feeling:

I feel like a delicate filter that does not allow all materials to be effectively filtered. This period is accompanied by a lot of worrying and caring for family, parents. Children have to deal with different social and educational difficulties. [...] Distance learning was like thunder on a clear

day. I didn't really know how to deal with the students, how to meet their needs. [...] Fear and anxiety about the unknown became more significant.

As their stories reveal, these teachers insisted that, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, they felt like malfunctioning objects.

Several teachers, however, selected metaphors of caged birds in improper habitats or, alternatively, birds which were physically disabled after their wings were clipped and they could no longer fly up to the sky. Aviva (a Jewish woman teacher) said: "I'm like a bird in a dovecote who knows that, physically, it is capable of flying but is not allowed to and, anyway, it has nowhere to fly." In the same spirit, Eden (A Jewish woman teacher) felt like a caged bird. She explained,

I selected this metaphor because I felt that part of my liberty has been taken away. I lost the ability to do whatever I want. They enforced a certain kind of teaching that didn't fit me, I was less attached to it. I felt like a bird in a cage that merely yearns to spread its wings and fly away.

These teachers felt that their liberty had been stolen. In the next section, we will examine the metaphors deployed by teachers who expressed various ways of dealing with the complicated situation.

### ***"Like a Magician Who Has to Pull out a Rabbit from Her Empty Hat": A Sense of High Competence***

Four teachers selected metaphors that highlighted the roles they played in order to shift from the traditional daily routine to distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This role playing was particularly demonstrated by two Jewish women teachers. Odelya said,

As a teacher, I feel like a magician who has to pull out a rabbit from her seemingly empty hat. I needed a new magic every time in order to deal with this reality [...] I dealt with many difficult situations in teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, whether they involved emotional or technological challenges. I had to pull a "magic" [trick] out of my hat every time in order to deal with complicated situations. As a magician, I can play a different character each time. I can play the role of a teacher or a psychologist or an educational consultant. I mostly played the role of a parent of my student. This magic, however, quickly went away [...] I used my creative abilities. I created a lot of new learning materials, including PowerPoint representations [...] Although I already had plenty of learning materials, I had to be creative and look for new, diverse materials while adjusting myself to distance learning in a new, changing reality.

Odelya focused on the changing needs that stimulated her to be a different character each time: a teacher, a psychologist, a mother, and a technologist. In the same spirit, Meytal confessed,

On one hand, I deal [with this situation] on my own and I practically survive this new reality. On the other hand, I manage to provide myself "the food and drink" I need, which means that I successfully deal with the technological tools and the required changes for operating distance learning by Zoom. This shift left me with harsh feelings! I wondered how I should teach so many subject materials through distance learning. I had a lot more question marks. [...] I feel that the new challenges taught me many things, both technologically and as a more sensitive and aware teacher. My sense of capability, in technological terms, has increased, as well as my sense of capability in acquiring learning materials by distance learning. I feel that I did manage to teach via distance learning. Regarding classroom management, I managed to deal with the students and their parents and to ultimately challenge this route of teachers-students-parents relationship [...] I feel like I've really developed myself pedagogically. The situation in which we found ourselves is distance learning that requires an open mind, creativity in mediating, and acquiring the learning materials. I've developed a lot of PowerPoints and numerous technological tools to transform my lessons into interactive classes. I wanted my students to look forward to my next class, despite the tight schedule and the significant lack of direct contact.

The citations of teachers in this subcategory indicated high self-esteem and sense of capability to change and adjust to the new situation and its various challenges, whether the teacher considered themselves as a magician or a stray cat. Other metaphors that were not discussed in the paper due to words limits included seeing oneself as "Mr. Flexible," a plasticine-like children's toy that can be kneaded and redesigned, and "a tree with branches and a thick trunk" that symbolized a sense of resilience and competence. In the next part, we will summarize the findings and discuss their meaning in light of the reviewed scholarship.

## Discussion

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has changed education systems around the world. In only a year, many changes were accelerated, particularly a dramatic shift from school-based learning to distance learning (Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020). Teachers have changed their teaching methods; updated their knowledge, skills, and practices; and adopted innovative pedagogical models (Smith et al., 2021; Zhao, 2020). In this study, however, we examined teachers' negotiations of the challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic and used metaphors as a substantial research tool that enabled us to explore the teachers' perceptions of their educational role during this period. In particular, a comparison between Jewish and Arab teachers enabled us to examine whether the differences between the Jewish majority's and the Arab minority's education systems in Israel were evident in the metaphors used.

An analysis of the metaphors clearly identifies a distinction between Arab and Jewish teachers' perceptions of their role and their ways of coping with the

COVID-19 reality. Similar to the traditional characteristics and the collectivist agenda of the Arab society, the Arab teachers' metaphors reflected the ways in which they perceived their roles as teachers. They regarded themselves as subjects who primarily served the collective's goals. They considered themselves as constituents of a large organization, like they were a footballer in a team or a bee in a hive. Everybody works for everyone. The ways they treated their students, as the metaphors indicated, also coincided with traditional perceptions of the teacher's role as an authority and a source of knowledge who mediates information and life-experience. The Arab teachers were mostly concerned with the need to transfer the learning materials to their students by a big truck or, alternatively, as a massive cloud that blissfully rained on their pupils.

In contrast, the metaphors uttered by Jewish teachers, who acted in a society with modernist and postmodernist characteristics, reflected their feelings as individual subjects. They expressed a sense of frustration about acting in a rather vague, awkward, and constrained world. These teachers were mostly concerned about themselves. They were more occupied with their own feelings and difficulties and were less concerned about the challenges faced by their students.

Arab teachers in the study centered on the e-learning process and their commitment to their students and the society, whereas Jewish teachers centered on their own anxieties. Even when the Jewish teachers focused on teaching-learning processes, they were still self-focused on their "magic-like" competence. In other words, the Jewish teachers admitted their difficulties yet they were able to demonstrate a sense of pride about successfully overcoming the obstacles. Notably, the Israeli education system separates Arabs and Jews and is characterized by two distinct cultures with concomitant modern and traditional traits and collectivist values. This study identifies two distinctly different trends in teachers' perceptions of their role during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in distance teaching.

The globally spread pandemic affected education systems around the world, causing teachers worldwide to negotiate similar problems like the shift to distance learning that evoked different feelings among teachers who belong to different cultures. In particular, teachers from a more traditional society dealt with the challenges differently than teachers who are members of a modern society. Teachers with more collectivist orientations emphasized the importance of society and their social responsibility within it; in contrast, teachers in a more modern society were more occupied with themselves and primarily negotiated their own feelings.

The differences in Jewish and Arab teachers' perceptions do not merely derive from cultural differences but also relate to the existent inequality in Israeli society and significant gaps in allocating materials and available resources (Arar & Haj-Yehia 2010; Harboun, et al., 2013). Distance learning required students' families to purchase computers and reliable Internet, as well as relied on parents to provide a great deal of school support. These requirements often could not be met by Arab students and their families. In addition, the assistance provided by the Ministry of Education via nationwide virtual lessons was developed only in Hebrew; thus, many Arab students could not use these

various platforms (Abu Rabi'a & Dahan, 2021). Considering this unequal realm and the lack of material resources, it is not surprising that Arab teachers deployed metaphors that reflected their primal responsibility to meet their students' material and emotional needs while they were less concerned with their own emotional state. The gaps that we mentioned above have escalated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

These material conditions limit the Arab teachers' actions, as we learned from Harboun et al. (2013) and from the findings of the study: While Jewish teachers have the opportunity to engage in both their own and their students' wellbeing, "caged" Arab teachers only provide knowledge by their "singing," if we use Maya Angelou's metaphor in the poem "caged bird" (Angelou, 1983, p. 9). These findings stimulate a discussion of the responsibility of the education system to provide differential solutions to teachers from different cultures in a society that is characterized by conspicuous socioeconomic gaps and inequalities. As we indicate in the second part of our discussion, technological, pedagogical, emotional, and material problems of the different societal sectors all should be addressed by the education system.

Teachers who express themselves individualistically should be encouraged to deal with their feelings while spreading their wings and breaking out of their emotional cages. Likewise, teachers who are more collectivist should be encouraged to self-explore their personal needs and to learn how to procure the emotional help that they need, no less than their students. Notwithstanding, it is important to note that the collectivist teachers, who often teach students without material resources like computers and Internet supply, should be materially supported by the state's systems. Crucially, these teachers should not have to be responsible for everything.

## Conclusion

Although the COVID-19 pandemic is a phenomenon that is still crossing every border and damaging numerous societies around the world, its negative impact on education is differential. The COVID-19 pandemic involves particular difficulties and challenges in regions where populations struggle with significant inequalities and lack of resources. The teachers' responses identified in this study are culturally dependent. We clearly recognize a linkage between cultural characteristics and teachers' perceptions of their educational role. Cultural diversity affects feelings, behaviors, and self-perceptions. Thus, the state's apparatuses, including wellbeing and education systems, should consider the cultural particularities within different populations alongside its attempt to address society's needs. In addressing the teachers' needs, it is important to consider each social group's values and behavioral norms. Alongside the assistance to all teachers and students in the country, the state should provide individual emotional support that is particularly sensitive to the needs of teachers and students who are members of traditional minority groups. As indicated in this research, teachers who belong to these groups seldom focus on their own distress and personal emotional difficulties. Thus, this research might have significant implications on teachers training. The training institutions



should be aware of the differences between "individualist" majorities and "collectivist" minorities, and they should address this particularity in their curriculum. The COVID-19 era proves that supporting teachers, in the existent situation, is not enough. Rather, it is essential to guide the teachers, during their training, in negotiating blurred, unexpected realities.

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