**Language and Conflict in East Jerusalem: Perspectives of Arab Teachers on Learning Hebrew**

# Abstract

The education system in East Jerusalem is divided between schools supervised by the Israeli ministry of education and those supervised by the Palestinian ministry of education. The Israeli ministry of education requires East Jerusalemite educators who teach, or attempt to teach, in the public schools supervised by the Israelis to learn Hebrew at an Israeli higher education institute by enrolling in basic courses of Hebrew language and expression. The purpose of this research is to examine the perceptions and attitudes of these East Jerusalem teachers toward the acquisition of Hebrew as a second language and communicating in it with the Jewish society.

Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the participants, all of them Arab teachers from East Jerusalem who studied Hebrew at an Israeli college, were required to complete a an open-question structured questionnaire regarding the multiple facets of the command and practice of Hebrew.

The major findings obtained is that East Jerusalem teachers are willing to learn Hebrew for everyday communication but that they are driven by mostly instrumental-utilitarian considerations. The research concludes that communicating in Hebrew is accompanied by a sense of jeopardizing their national identity as Palestinian citizens under Israeli rule and that national identification is certainly an obstacle to second language acquisition.

Particularly, the research sheds light on Hebrew acquisition amongst Arab teachers in the context of the precarious status of East Jerusalem and of the convoluted design of the education system in the shadow of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Generally, it informs about the impact of national language policy on educators teaching in L2.

# Introduction

The study differs from other research on the acquisition of Hebrew by the general Arab population in the State of Israel (e.g. Mar’i and Buchweitz, 2021) by taking into account the unique civilian status of Arab Jerusalemites and the fact that the educational system in East Jerusalem is governed by two rivalry nations competing for control, namely the Israeli and the Palestinian educational authorities.

The background for the study is the Arab residents of East Jerusalem and the education system in East Jerusalem. The Arab residents are a unique minority group within the larger Arab minority in Israel. East Jerusalemites are not fully-fledged citizens: they hold a permanent Israeli resident status distinguishing them from other Arab populations in Israel. They can vote in local elections, they are entitled to all the social and health benefits enjoyed by Israeli residents and are permitted to work in Israel. They may also apply for Israeli citizenship in accordance with the Citizenship Law provided they meet certain conditions, including proving basic knowledge of Hebrew. The education system in East Jerusalem is divided between institutions under the supervision of the Israeli Ministry of Education and those under the supervision of the Palestinian Ministry of Education. The Israeli Ministry of Education requires teachers in the public school system to complete Hebrew studies at an Israeli academic institution. The Arab population of East Jerusalem is characterized by two competing drives – the desire to integrate into the Israeli economy and feelings of hostility and a lack of belonging. In the context of this study, these two drives are crucial, and are very clearly reflected in the results of our survey concerning attitudes in relation to the acquisition of the Hebrew language on the part of the East Jerusalemite teachers interviewed (Koren and Abrahami, 2017)

The relevance of the study is that it provides data as to how national languages are perceived by minorities in a state of conflict with the hegemonic culture. e by a non-identifying minority.

Based societal theories on second language acquisition, according to which the level of social integration determines the level of success in commanding the language (e.g. Schumann, 2012), the focus of the study on teachers’ attitudes is crucial. It informs about the impact of national language policy on educators teaching in L2. Furthermore, pedagogues have significant experience and are knowledgeable of the complex nature of language policy and practice (Levy-Gazenfrantz and Shapira-Lischinsky, 2017: 232), thus analyzing their perceptions can contribute to policy planning.

## Literature Review

Public life in Jerusalem is conducted mainly in Hebrew. Public services, government institutions, employment, health, higher education, and recreation are mostly accessible to Hebrew speakers only. As a result, the level of Hebrew among the adult population of East Jerusalem is low; East Jerusalem residents acknowledge that Hebrew proficiency is an essential asset, but the level remains rudimentary all the same (Alayan, 2019). Since the teaching of Hebrew in Schools is scarce, mainly due to lack of professional Hebrew teachers willing to teach in East Jerusalem, educators report that only 17% of their students are capable of conducting a conversation in Hebrew at a high or excellent level (Ratner et. al., 2019). East Jerusalem residents’ use of the Hebrew language is limited to necessary communication with governmental and administrative services. Job market integration and full access to social rights is impeded by low levels of Hebrew fluency (Bassul, 2016). It is common for people with degrees, work experience, and talent to work as waiters or cleaners only because their Hebrew is not good enough (Jaber, 2020). Despite the low command of the language, motivation among residents to learn Hebrew is high (Hasson, 2015; Stern, 2015).

Among the Arab population of East Jerusalem, 31% understand Hebrew at a good or very good level, 39% at a medium to low level, and 30% don’t understand Hebrew at all, while 37% reported speaking Hebrew at their place of work and 64% attested to having difficulties filling out forms or writing official letters in Hebrew (Lehrs, 2012). Nevertheless, 83% expressed that they would like their children to learn to use Hebrew proficiently (Lehrs, 2012).

Arab youths in Jerusalem have a better level of Hebrew than the adults due to more frequent contact with Hebrew speakers in their daily lives, and are more likely to have learned it in expedited courses at private institutions and Hebrew *ulpanim* (dedicated Hebrew language schools) (Ha’aretz, 2013). In recent years, dozens of *ulpanim* have opened in Palestinian neighborhoods and the number of attendees in Jerusalem has grown significantly (Ha’aretz, 22.02.2016: 6). However, the high cost of Hebrew courses is a limiting factor.

Elements in the Government and City Hall have identified the demand and the Government’s program for empowering East Jerusalem includes a large budget for encouraging the learning of Hebrew. In May 2018, Government Resolution Number 3790 was passed with the aim of reducing socioeconomic disparities and boosting economic development in East Jerusalem. A large part of the budget for the resolution has been allotted to Hebrew instruction (Lavi et al., 2018). It should be noted that, while Hebrew fluency is common mainly among young men, women and older adults find it hard to communicate in Hebrew, let alone read or write the language (Ronen, 2018). The decisive factor of electing to acquire the Hebrew language and to study the Israeli curriculum is obtaining the Israeli matriculation certificate, recognized by Israeli institutes of higher education (Alayan, 2017).

The Ministry of Education and the Education Board (*Manhi*) for the Arab sector in Jerusalem Municipality are responsible for educational infrastructure in East Jerusalem. This infrastructure is based on three tracks, each representing a different type of school with different targets in terms of Hebrew language acquisition (Alayan, 2021). The first track concerns schools recognized by the Ministry of Education and under the supervision of the Jerusalem Municipality that teach the Israeli curriculum. These schools are in the minority. They prepare students for the Israeli matriculation exam and have Hebrew lessons four to five days a week starting in the third grade. Most of the teachers, administrators, and supervisors at these schools are Israeli Arabs. In contrast to the Palestinian curriculum, this program prepares students to access the Israeli higher education system and job market.

The foreign track consists of recognized but unofficial institutions – schools that teach the Palestinian curriculum and operate outside of the Ministry of Education’s supervision. These schools teach only part of the Israeli curriculum and are mostly operated by Arab non-profits under the supervision of the Palestinian Authority. At the end of their studies, students take the *tawjihi* – the Jordanian-Palestinian matriculation exam – as is the norm in the West Bank and the Gaza strip (Yair and Alayan, 2009). Over the last decade, the number of student at these schools has increased by a factor of almost fourteen. Importantly, for 92% of those studying in Palestinian-curriculum schools, the volume of Hebrew language instruction is low (State Comptroller, 2019).

The third track consists of private schools run by churches, *waqf* (Muslim charity organizations), and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and funded by a variety of external bodies. These provide education to approximately 20,000 students, which accounts for about a quarter of all Palestinian students. Such schools teach very little Hebrew; only two of them teach the Hebrew curriculum in preparation for the Israeli matriculation exam; the rest prepare students for the *tawjihi* (Alayan, 2021).

The majority of students in East Jerusalem study the curriculum mandated by the Palestinian Authority. The main reason for this is related to the political conflict and the fear that students will acquire knowledge that might distort their Palestinian identity and perception of the political reality. Social-cultural factors also influence willingness to learn a second language when it is perceived as a threat to the learners’ identity, while motivation and positive perceptions toward the second language highly contribute to its acquisition (Ushida, 2005). The cultural and political distance between minority groups and the target-language speaking population influences language learning: the greater the cultural divide between the two groups, the lower the success rate for effective language acquisition (Bechor, 1992). Individuals living under a foreign regime will wish to preserve their mother tongue because it is an important locus of their identity (Taylor, 1994; Obeidat, 2005). The prevalence of these factors in the context of Hebrew language acquisition among the Arabs of East Jerusalem is obvious but the matter is complicated by the economic advantages of learning Hebrew (Lavi, Hadad, Elran, 2018). As Schumann contents, learners hailing from socially and psychologically distanced groups will struggle harder to acquire the second language, and will employ specific strategies and techniques to shorten the socio-psychological expanse (Schumann, 2013).

From the point of view of the decision-makers in the Ministry of Education and the Jerusalem Municipality, on the other hand, studying the Palestinian curriculum constitutes a violation of Israeli sovereignty (Ronen, 2020). Nevertheless, there is a percentage of the population that studies the Israeli curriculum, despite receiving threats from political elements in the community (Ronen, 2018). According to a survey conducted by the Jerusalem Municipality in 2017, 48% of parents of students in East Jerusalem would prefer for their children to study the Israeli curriculum. However, the Israeli curriculum is considered a political threat. Following the survey, a Muslim ruling was issued stating that “the Israeli curriculum must not be taught in East Jerusalem” (Yelon, 2017).

Masry-Harzallah et al. (2011: 92) point out that students in East Jerusalem learn Hebrew as a third language, after Arabic and English, sometimes even as a fourth language, after French or German. It is not surprising then that the overall proficiency in Hebrew in East Jerusalem is at a level that does not allow East-Jerusalemites to work in the Western part of the city or even hold a basic conversation (Spolsky and Shohamy, 1999). The problem in the field of Hebrew language instruction, however, is the shortage of quality teachers (State Comptroller, 2018), as well as the lack of textbooks suitable for this particular population. Many Hebrew teachers in East Jerusalem schools have not been trained for Hebrew language instruction and do not practice it as their profession. The few Hebrew acquisition textbooks that are available were designed for Jewish immigrants and contain overt political messages that are hard to swallow for Palestinian students.

East Jerusalemite high school graduates tend to pursue further studies at the Al-Quds University, universities in the West Bank, or academic institutions in other Arab countries because they find it difficult to get accepted into Israeli universities, even with an Israeli matriculation certificate. Following their studies they still find it hard to integrate into the Israeli job market because this often requires further credentials officially recognized in Israel. Therefore, many graduates invest significant financial resources and spend a year or more learning Hebrew and completing their *bagrut* requirements at the Hebrew University preparatory program or other similar privately-run programs in East Jerusalem in order to get into Israeli academic institutions (Hasson, 2015).

Despite the reservations of the Palestinian educational authorities discussed above, a number of studies have demonstrated that Arabic speakers in Israel attribute great importance to proficiency in Hebrew because of its many social and economic advantages (Abu-Asbah et al., 2011; Amara and Mar’I, 2002; Atily, 2004: 342; Ministry of Education, 2015). Ilaiyan and Abu Hussain’s (2012) study examining the attitudes of Arab students in East Jerusalem toward Hebrew found positive perceptions both toward the study of Hebrew as a second language, and in terms of the students’ willingness to communicate in this language outside of the classroom. Some of the parents also supported their children’s Hebrew language studies, mainly in light of the instrumental-pragmatic advantages the language could give their children in the future (Ilaiyan, 2012).

## Methodology

The present study is based on the qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative-interpretative research is an analytical rather than statistical process. The analysis performed by the researchers is partially intuitive and its goal is to obtain insights that may lead to a wider understanding of the studied phenomena (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). This type of research encourages creativity within the analytical process, while recognizing its limitations. The analysis is inherently limited by the context in which it is performed. The choice to focus on the interpretative approach (Spector-Mersel, 2011) stems from our focus on elements that are politically and socially charged and which include a narrative aspect.

The study was conducted among 29 teachers, all residents of East Jerusalem, who were recruited using the convenience sampling method, having participated in a “Hebrew language and expression” course at one of the Arab colleges in Israel’s central region. The participants teach various subjects at East Jerusalem schools, from primary school up to high school. Among these teachers 4% (1 teacher) was employed by the Israeli Ministry of Education, 23% (4 teachers) were employed by the Jerusalem Municipality, 14% (3 teachers) were employed by the Palestinian Authority; and 59% (11 teachers) were employed by private institutions. Their teaching experience ranged between 4 and 25 years. The overwhelming majority of respondents were women (91%). The average age of the participants was 31.78 (SD = 5.86).

The participants’ proficiency in Hebrew was very basic, consisting of letter recognition and familiarity with a few words. They found it difficult to construct a simple sentence or conduct a short conversation in Hebrew. The contexts in which they had previously learned Hebrew were public education institutions – schools under the supervision of the Jerusalem Municipality and the Israeli Ministry of Education, where there are but few hours dedicated to Hebrew learning and the instruction is done at the most basic level; private centers/institutes in East Jerusalem, at the “first steps toward Hebrew acquisition” level; academic courses as part of the general electives curriculum at Palestinian universities and colleges; and via informal channels, as a result of work or contact with Jews in West Jerusalem.

The study used an open-ended question survey developed especially for the purposes of this study. The survey was composed in Arabic by Ab’d El-Rahman Mar’i and distributed at the end of the 2018–2019 school year (summer of 2019) after the teachers had completed their Hebrew course. Participants were asked to answer 10 open-ended questions (see Appendix) that encompassed key aspects of the teachers’ willingness to acquire the Hebrew language and revealed their perceptions and the factors that influenced their studies.

The questionnaire was developed based on a previous questionnaire developed for a research conducted by the Israeli National Authority (RAMA) in May 2018 following government resolution on “reducing socio-economic gaps and economical development in East Jerusalem”; it stressed as one of its main four declarative goals the promotion of Hebrew teaching. The research included an attitude survey, distributed among educators and principles in order to garner and map their needs (Ratner et. al., 2019: 20-27). The current questionnaire was also developed based on the accumulated experience of the authors in Hebrew language and literature teaching and in in-depth consultation with two qualitative research experts, in order to ensure the validity of the responses. The data was transcribed by the authors and inspected for reliable transcription by a qualitative research expert and a quantitative research expert. The coding of the data and the extraction of valid and reliable themes were determined in conjunction with the qualitative and quantitative experts .

The Arabic-language survey questionnaire was distributed to graduates of the “Hebrew Language and Expression” course with permission and authorization of the college’s academic administration. The essence of the research, its goals, and the commitment to protect their privacy and anonymity, as well as their right to opt out of the questionnaire at any point, was explained. The respondents were given a full class session (1.5 hours) to fill in the survey, which is sufficient time for experienced teachers. There was no word limit, everyone was encouraged to write down their thoughts freely. The participants were allowed to opt-out without providing an explanation. Out of the 33 distributed questionnaires, 29 were filled out. Our analysis of the answers produced four themes that served us in the data processing stage: the contexts in which Hebrew language acquisition occurred (Q1, Q2, Q6); the involvement of the Israeli Ministry of Education in the Hebrew instruction process (Q3, Q8); the benefit of learning Hebrew based on instrumental considerations (Q4, Q5); the political and identity aspects of Hebrew acquisition (Q7, Q9, Q10).

# Results

### Hebrew acquisition contexts

Only half of the teachers in the study had studied Hebrew before enrolling at the college. When asked about the role of language centers/institutes in Hebrew acquisition (Q6), a common answer was that their contribution was minimal: “Most of the centers/institutes are for commercial and economic goals”; “What matters is the money, not the teaching”; “They don’t focus on the teaching and stay at the basic level of learning the alphabet.” A significant portion of the instruction remained on the theoretical level. As one respondent put it: “I can read a text in Hebrew, but I cannot conduct a short conversation.” A few mentioned that they are exposed to and acquire Hebrew through work and contact with Jews, and therefore there is no need for these centers/institutes. They either learn Hebrew at the *ulpans* for immigrants in West Jerusalem in order to get accepted into academic institutions, or volunteer for civil-national service where they learn Hebrew at an *ulpan* established specifically to help young people in East Jerusalem integrate into academic and professional arenas (Piotrkowski, 2013).

A few participants referred to the positive contribution of the institutes: “They teach very well and it depends on the degree of willingness and motivation of the learner to invest in acquiring the language”; “The instruction is very high level and they help the applicants get into Israeli colleges and universities and work in the Israeli job market”; “There are a few reputable institutes in the city that have Jewish teachers.” They also mentioned that, even though the centers are good, they are expensive, and it would be fitting for the State to provide free Hebrew courses.

When it came to participants who had not studied Hebrew previously (Q1), common statements among their answers included: “I went to a private school where there were no Hebrew lessons”; “I haven’t got the time to learn Hebrew at a private institute”; “My parents don’t care about learning the language.” One teacher remarked that she “does not like learning Hebrew.”

### The involvement of the Israeli Ministry of Education in Hebrew instruction

The Ministry of Education bears the responsibility for Hebrew instruction in schools. Among the survey answers, prominent reasons given for why the Ministry is interested in teaching the language (Q3) included: “To strengthen Hebrew education and weaken the status of the Arabic language in the city”; “To create contact between the two peoples”; “To give Hebrew the status of exclusive official language in institutions run by the Ministry of Education and make it a given”; “To prepare learners for integration in the Israeli job market.” It was also a common understanding among learners that Hebrew is a basic condition for obtaining a job in public service.

A significant portion of the respondents maintained that, on the face of it, the Ministry claims to be interested in Hebrew acquisition, but in practice, it does not do much toward this aim since there are not enough regimented hours or qualified Hebrew teachers. In their explanations for why this may be the case, the following reasons stood out: “So that the residents of East Jerusalem don’t know their social rights”; “To deepen the discrimination between Jews and Arabs in the city”; “So that the Jerusalem Arabs can’t face the enemy”; “To implement the policy of marginalizing Arab schools.”

Concerning the professional level of Hebrew teachers in East Jerusalem schools and their nationality (Q8), only a few said they were happy with the teachers. The overwhelming majority were unequivocally dissatisfied in this regard. Among their answers, there were widespread claims that East Jerusalem teachers “are not proficient in Hebrew,” “can hardly read or write,” and “spend most of their time teaching the alphabet.” On the other hand, Arab Israeli teachers, most of whom are students at academic institutions in Jerusalem were seen as “having proficiency in Hebrew, but lacking pedagogical knowledge” or “having a hard time controlling the students and teaching the course material.” The following statements also caught our attention: “The passing grade in Hebrew is 50”; “The tests focus on knowledge of the alphabet and a few vocabulary words”; “They pass everyone so they don’t have a fail on their grade card.” Likewise, the majority of participants who had studied Hebrew at school claimed that the lesson content was repetitive, mostly focused on the alphabet, and that it did not help them learn the language.

### The instrumental benefits of learning Hebrew

Most respondents maintained that Hebrew use had been imposed on residents of East Jerusalem (Q4) following the seizure of control by the Israeli authorities and the transfer of municipal services under the responsibility of the Jerusalem Municipality, and in light of their dependence on the Israeli economy. Participants emphasized the importance of Hebrew in day-to-day life, for example: “Knowing Hebrew gives me more opportunities to work in government facilities in Israel as well as private institutions”; “Knowing Hebrew makes it easier for Arabs in East Jerusalem to know their rights and obligations”; “Hebrew gives me the ability to fill out forms”; “Hebrew helps me manage my personal affairs, read letters, talk to Hebrew-speaking officials, etc.”; “Knowing Hebrew helps me get service at the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Health, Social Security, etc.”; “Hebrew helps me communicate with Jews in the public sphere.” A few outlying participants presented different reasons for learning Hebrew: “According to Islam you must learn the language of your enemy”; “Knowing Hebrew arms me with tools that make it possible for me to deal with the enemy and understand him.” One teacher claimed that “under the current conditions, they can’t force their curriculum on us. The Israelis want to integrate East Jerusalem into Israeli society, but discrimination in terms of services prevents this from happening.”

The fragile security situation in East Jerusalem, the Israeli West Bank barrier, and the checkpoints contribute to the feeling of constant fear and affect the residents’ self-confidence (Q5). A large part of respondents gave serious weight to the link between the language and the security situation, as evidenced by the following examples: “Knowing Hebrew boosts your confidence when you’re at a checkpoint or you see soldiers walking around the Old City alleys”; “Proficiency in Hebrew gives me the strength and the courage to defend myself, so I won’t find myself mute, embarrassed, and tense when facing a Jew”; “Knowing Hebrew breaks down the barrier of fear toward the other”; “The checkpoint is a big problem for young people, so I am studying Hebrew because of the security situation in order to communicate with the military or the border police at checkpoints”; “Knowing Hebrew gives me inner confidence for when I go to the Jewish neighborhood to take care of personal matters.” Only a few respondents saw the matter in a different light: “Fear and confidence are psychological matters, but it’s important to learn the language”; “We live in Jerusalem together, the fear is created by security incidents”; “The kids are scared of the soldiers anyway.”

### Political and identity aspects of Hebrew acquisition

We wished to examine the influence language had on the learners’ sense of identity, both directly and indirectly. First we honed in on the participants’ perceptions by having them compare themselves to Palestinian Arabs in the West Bank (Q7). Most respondents stated that there is a fundamental difference in the perception of Hebrew between the two groups, for example: “In the West Bank they disregard the language due to their nationalist outlook, because they are under the occupation, and we, the Jerusalemites, are less so”; “Some of the young people in East Jerusalem are proficient in Hebrew and proud of it, whereas in the West Bank being proficient in Hebrew is seen as collaborationism and giving up your Palestinian nationality”; “In East Jerusalem Hebrew is a necessary part of reality, and in the West Bank it’s considered the language of the enemy that is unrequired”; “In East Jerusalem people know more Hebrew than the West Bank due to the economic and political reality”; “In East Jerusalem knowing Hebrew is necessary to know your social rights, while in the West Bank, Hebrew helps them get work in Israel.” A small minority of teachers claimed there was no difference between the two populations. One teacher emphasized that “the two groups are equally interested in learning Hebrew so they can know the enemy from up close.”

The participants were also asked to assess how being offered full Israeli citizenship, like the Israeli Arabs, might affect their attitude toward the Hebrew language (Q9). The majority of respondents answered that they were willing to learn Hebrew regardless of citizenship, for reasons including: “Knowing the enemy’s language”; “We are under occupation and want to know what the enemy thinks of us”; “To broaden my education;” “To communicate with the other, like people do in English”; “It’s an important local language and you can’t communicate with the Jews without it.” A few participants disclosed willingness to learn Hebrew for the sake of citizenship, citing the following reasons: “It makes it easier for me to integrate into life in the State of Israel”; “I am willing to invest in learning the language and make contact with the Jews, which contributes to proficiency”; “It’s an opportunity to be proficient in the language and to meet Jews.” On the other hand, about a quarter of the participants noted that they would refuse Israeli citizenship at any rate for the following reasons: “I am unwilling to give up my Palestinian identity”; “Hebrew is the language of occupation, and acquiring it is for the sake of resistance”; “If I had citizenship it would have a negative effect on me.”

The participants were also asked to state their opinion about whether learning Hebrew impairs their national identity (Q10). Most participants determined that it did not weaken or impair their Palestinian identity, as evidenced by the following examples: “Hebrew is the colonial language designated for conducting the lives of citizens and distancing them from the Palestinian people”; “We are under exploitation and oppression because of the Israeli occupation and the language is part of that system”; “Better proficiency in Hebrew is not an indication of giving up Palestinian nationality”; “Proficiency in Hebrew was designed to hurt the city of Al-Quds and weaken the Arabic language from the start, and I am aware of it.” Only a few teachers determined that it could harm their identity, as evidenced in the following examples: “Knowing Hebrew at a higher level may bolster Israelization”; “It might affect young people more, in that they’ll worry about their own personal welfare and will drift away from the Palestinian people.”

# Discussion

Based on the respondents’ answers, it is possible to assert that an improvement in the level of instruction would boost the motivation for Hebrew acquisition among students. It is worth noting that the Ministry of Education and the Jerusalem Municipality allot students in Palestinian school programs a partial budget, whereas those studying in Israeli school programs are allotted a prioritized budget, as well as a development budget designed to encourage them to switch to the Israeli programs (Ronen, 2018). As a result, East Jerusalem students studying the Palestinian curriculum are particularly challenged by the language barrier.[[1]](#endnote-2)

Instrumental considerations bear a weight in acquiring the language of the Other, especially for a minority (Ben-David, 2017; Dubiner, 2012). The majority of study participants agreed that Hebrew is important for getting by in a space where it is the dominant language. They are motivated to learn Hebrew for pragmatic goals, such as communicating with authorities, obtaining government services, integrating into the Israeli job market, and studying at academic institutions in Israel.

However, whether driven by instrumental or integrative motivation, language acquisition has social impacts: it is the first step toward integration in a society and its culture (Gardner, 1980; Macintyre et al, 2003). One of the teachers noted that Hebrew is a social motivator, i.e., a cultural bridge toward better familiarity with Jewish culture, and emphasized that learning a new language and exposure to the culture of the other expand the learner’s personal knowledge. Others, however, refrained from addressing the cultural aspect due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which prevents the learners from accepting the Other and assimilating into their culture (Bechor, 1992). Some of the teachers saw Hebrew acquisition as a religious duty, since Islam obliges worshippers to know the language of those with whom they come into contact.[[2]](#endnote-3)

In terms of the link between language and national identity, a significant percentage of participants said that, while Hebrew serves them in communicating with Jews, they still consider it the language of the enemy, forced upon them by the occupation. The teachers in East Jerusalem therefore prefer not to go too far in their Hebrew studies since proficiency in Hebrew is viewed as damaging to their Palestinian nationalist stance and a step toward Israeli citizenship. The complex political reality around them – their ambiguous political status, the split between Palestinian and Israeli institutions in the education system, discrimination against citizens of East Jerusalem – all these strengthen their Palestinian identity. They see themselves as part of West Bank Palestinian society and are committed to the Palestinian nationalist ambition (Yair and Alayan, 2009). Hebrew is perceived by them as part of the occupation. The nationalist issue, the Israeli control over East Jerusalem, and the hostile power relations between the parties do not allow for a real building of trust, closeness, or connection. Therefore, they are not interested in reaching a situation similar to that of Israeli Arabs, who have undergone a process of Israelization, which included increased Hebrew learning and the adoption of Israeli culture (Amara and Mar’I, 2002; Mar’I, 2013).

# Conclusion

One of the study’s most important findings is that, while there is an inclination among Arabs in East Jerusalem to learn Hebrew, it stems from instrumental considerations, for practical communication purposes. On the other hand, there is a nationalist resistance in this community to normalization of relations with Israel, thus, even though there is no opposition to learning the Hebrew language, identification with the Palestinian nationalist cause certainly serves as an obstacle to its acquisition. These are currents that run contrary to each other. The study likewise shows that knowledge of Hebrew facilitates unmediated communication with institutions and individuals in Israel that could eventually lead to a change of attitude toward Hebrew speakers as a whole.

The limitations of the article are its status as a preliminary study, and the limited number of participants. 29 respondents do not constitute a representative sample. Hence, conducting follow-up studies using systematic sampling of all the Palestinian teachers in East Jerusalem is recommended. Such a broad-sample study would confirm the representation of the true values of the population and allows conclusions to be drawn from additional factors. The study paves the way to an ensuing research, which will focus on the influence of national language policy on educators who teach a second language and on those engaged in teaching languages other than their mother tongue.

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# Appendix: Survey Questions

Question 1: Why have you not studied Hebrew until now? (If you have please skip to the next question).

Question 2: Have you studied Hebrew before? In what context and at what level?

Question 3: In your opinion, is the Israeli Ministry of Education interested in teaching the Arabs in East Jerusalem Hebrew? And why?

Question 4: What do you think about the following statement: “Hebrew has been imposed on the Arabs in East Jerusalem as a means of handling routine practical matters.”

Question 5: Do you agree with the claim that teaching Hebrew to children in East Jerusalem bolsters their confidence and makes them less afraid when they see Jews or encounter them?

Question 6: There are private Hebrew language schools in East Jerusalem. Do these institutions contribute to Hebrew language acquisition and fluency?

Question 7: In your opinion, are there differences in perceptions and attitudes toward the Hebrew language among Arabs in East Jerusalem and Arabs in the West Bank? Why?

Question 8: Are you happy with the level of Hebrew teachers at the schools in East Jerusalem? What is these teacher’s nationality? Who funds them?

Question 9: If you were given full citizenship, like the Israeli Arabs, would you change your mind about the Hebrew language? Why?

Question 10: How has Hebrew acquisition affected your national identity?

1. According to the 2018 government program “Reducing social gaps and economic development in East Jerusalem”, more than 43% of the Israeli government budgeting allotted to education in East Jerusalem (approximately 193 milion NIS out of 445 million NIS) are contingent upon students switching to study the Israeli curriculum (Ir Amim, 2020). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. There is a well-known saying in Arabic—“He who learns the language of the others will be saved from woe”—and Arabic tradition even tells of Zayd ibn Thabit, the prophet Muhammad’s personal scribe, who was ordered to learn Hebrew in order to communicate with the Jews and managed to learn it in three month [↑](#endnote-ref-3)