

## New Immigrant Teachers - Social Assimilation Among School Staff

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**Abstract**—The present study explored the extent of support provided by the school staff and management to mathematics teachers who immigrated to Israel from various countries. The attitudes of these teachers towards mathematics education in Israel were examined. The immigrant teachers' statements illustrate a sense of belonging and full integration in Israel. However, these findings should be considered with great reservation in light of the cultural background whereby the teachers had been educated and trained for the teaching profession.

**Keywords:** *New immigrant teacher; acclimatisation of mathematics teachers.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

This During the years of its existence, the State of Israel has absorbed immigration waves from various countries. At the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century more than a million immigrants came to the country, most of them from the former Soviet Union (and fewer also from Ethiopia), among them a large number of teachers with extensive academic education and full teaching training.

A study investigating the acclimatisation of the immigrant teachers specified the characteristics of this teacher population [1]. The present study examined mathematics teachers, based on these characteristics. It focused on the extent of social and professional support provided to elementary or junior high school teachers by the school management and their colleagues. This was grounded in the assumption that immigrant teachers' success in educational practice in general and mathematics in particular depends first and foremost on their social absorption and support of the integrating frameworks.

### II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Studies conducted in the past [2], [3], [4], examining immigrant teachers' characterisation, presented the following findings:

**A. Personal data** – immigrant teachers usually have a higher academic education as well as previous teaching experience.

**B. Pedagogical approaches** – these teachers' educational perception is strict; they frequently use frontal teaching while maintaining discipline. The level of demands from the learners is extremely high, demonstrating preferential attitude towards excelling pupils.

**C. Social relationships** – the environment whereby the immigrant teachers grew up and were educated strongly affected the relationships with their Israeli colleagues. Most of them arrived from undemocratic regimes. Hence, they display an attitude of suspicion towards the institution representatives and their superiors, such as the principal, mathematics coordinator and other school officials. Moreover, they find it difficult to adjust to the free framework of social relations prevalent in Israel; teacher-pupil relationship; interrelations with colleagues on the staff; teacher- principal relations, etc. Furthermore, the impact of their previous education is manifested by adhering to previous patterns of mathematics teaching and avoiding adoption of innovations. The cultural gap and previous habits do not facilitate immigrant teachers' adjustment to teaching methods common in Israel.

**D. Difficulties** – immigrant teachers have language difficulties, not only with regard to professional terms but also in speaking fluently, writing on the board without spelling mistakes, being acquainted with the diversified curricula and so on.

Consequently, colleagues' support for the immigrant teachers' professional promotion and reinforcement of their sense of belonging is extremely important [5], [6], [7]. Immigrant teachers are used to frontal teaching yet find it difficult to express themselves in the new language. As a result, they experience distress and need the support of Israeli teachers while adapting themselves to a new type of class culture.

It is likely to assume that the language of mathematics – as an international language – would facilitate immigrant teachers' adjustment, in comparison with teachers of other subjects.

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Nevertheless, not being versed in the local language and not knowing the school culture constitute a difficulty by itself.

As Remennick [3] indicates in her study: out of 36 teachers of science-oriented subjects, only 20 managed to survive in the system. Her analysis of the interviews shows that, even in a society committed to professional integration of immigrants, cultural barriers to successful work performance are rather significant. Beyond skills of mastering the language and the curriculum, immigrant teachers have to adjust to the new school culture.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Research questions

1) *What are the attitudes of immigrant teachers towards mathematics education in Israel?*

2) *To what extent were the immigrant teachers socially integrated at school?*

#### B. Research design

The research population consisted of 42 immigrant mathematics teachers who are actually teaching in the education system.

The teachers responded to a 5-rank Likert scale attitude questionnaire, which quantitatively examined attitudes towards two issues: attitudes towards mathematics education in Israel and teachers' relationships with their superiors and the school staff. After checking the attitudes, four teachers were monitored for two years and they were interviewed twice during the academic year.

### IV. FINDINGS

Analysis of the teachers' attitudes towards mathematics education in Israel shows extreme opinions in four items. 82% of the teachers believe that mathematics teaching in Israel is different from the method they have known before. Moreover, the same number of teachers (82%) maintain that in their origin country they were more respected by their pupils.

One of the previous teaching patterns, attributed also to frontal teaching, is maintaining silence and discipline during lessons. 77% of the teachers concurred with this assertion. Indeed, immigrant teachers consider this approach as an important prerequisite for conducting mathematics lessons in an orderly manner. Conversely, immigrant teachers do not believe that exams in Israel are less difficult from the ones given abroad, namely they have no complaints about the mathematical level required from learners.

Analysis of the teachers' opinion about their relationships with colleagues and the head teacher indicates that they are fully integrated among the staff and are involved in everything which transpires at school. The new immigrant teachers do not feel rejected by Israeli teachers. The principal is interested in what occurs in their class (77% pointed out the head teacher's interest in their practice). They are partners to the decisions made by the mathematics team (88%) and are invited to all the events at school.

However, immigrant teachers do not usually observe their colleagues' lessons. What is meant to familiarise immigrant teachers with the pedagogical approaches of Israeli teachers is not implemented in practice.

Nevertheless, one should consider several attitudes about which the teachers did not concur. For example:

- *"I feel free to speak up during staff meetings"* – 35% are still not expressing themselves freely during colleague encounters.
- *"The head of mathematics department at my school helps immigrant teachers"* – 40% of the teachers think that the mathematics coordinator does support immigrant teachers whereas more than 40% do not think so.
- *"Immigrant teachers usually face disciplinary problems in their class"* – 35% of the teachers admit that immigrant teachers do in fact experience disciplinary problems vis-à-vis 53% who do not advocate this attitude.

### V. DISCUSSION

The research findings of the present study illustrate that new immigrant mathematics teachers mention social acclimatisation and a sense of being involved in what is going on at school. However, these statements should be taken "with a grain of salt" in light of their previous cultural and social background. The fact that these teachers were raised and educated in a society whereby no difficulties are declared aloud and negative events are not reported raises some doubts regarding the conclusive attitudes. The social status of immigrant teachers is not so ideal as is depicted by the findings of the present study.

Moreover, teachers' attitudes towards mathematics education in Israel show that, to date, the immigrant teachers have not abandoned previous patterns and approaches. Discipline and practice are still fundamental principles which they find hard to forsake.

Failure to provide full support to immigrant teachers, e.g. invitation to observe colleagues' lessons, prevents these teachers from embracing Israeli teachers' work patterns. Furthermore, not in all schools the mathematics coordinator accompany immigrant teachers. Thus, immigrant teachers are not offered a most important professional help. In spite of the positive picture portrayed by the immigrant teachers' responses, the way to their full social and professional acclimatisation is still long.

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*Hachinuch Ve-Svivo*, 24, 2002, pp. 25-33. [Hebrew]

#### APPENDIX

Below are findings of the assertions about which teachers expressed an extreme attitude

Assertion / attitude 42 =N	Agree / strongly agree	Agree / strongly agree	Disagree / Strongly disagree
1. In order to teach mathematics must there must be silence in class	(77%)	-	(23%)
2. Mathematics exams in Israel are much easier than in my origin country	(12%)	(12%)	(76%)
3. Pupils abroad respect their teachers more than Israeli pupils	(82%)	-	(18%)
4. Mathematics teaching in Israel is different from the teaching I knew in my origin country	(82%)	-	(18%)
5. During recess I mainly speak with the new immigrant teachers	-	(6%)	(94%)
6. The mathematics coordinator is interested in what is going on in my class	(77%)	(12%)	(12%)
7. Israeli teachers do not like immigrant teachers	-	(23%)	(77%)
8. I take part in all the social events at school	(88%)	-	(12%)
9. My colleagues involve me in all the decision-making processes	(88%)	-	(12%)
10. Mathematics teachers at school invite me to observe their lessons	(23%)	-	(77%)