

Organizational Behavior in Special Education Schools within the Arab Society in Israel: Challenges, Opportunities, and New Insights

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Abstract: *Special education schools in Israel's Arab society operate within a complex matrix of cultural, social, and structural dynamics. This article explores the intricacies of organizational behavior within these institutions, emphasizing leadership practices, internal communication, staff dynamics, stigma, and innovation. New sections explore gendered organizational roles, the impact of religious-cultural norms, and digital adaptation in schools. The article concludes with recommendations for culturally informed organizational development to enhance educational equity.*

Keywords: organizational behavior, special education, Arab society, educational leadership, cultural inclusion

1. Introduction

The study of organizational behavior in special education schools in the Arab society of Israel reveals a distinct interplay between cultural values, leadership patterns, community expectations, and systemic limitations. With increasing awareness of inclusion, diversity, and equity in education, it becomes vital to understand how internal organizational patterns affect educational outcomes for children with special needs.

Cultural Influences on Organizational Behavior

Organizational structures in Arab special education schools are often shaped by community values, language practices, and traditional views on disability.

- **Collectivist Norms vs. Individualized Approaches** – A collective cultural orientation can sometimes limit personalized learning pathways.
- **Cultural Stigma** – Attitudes toward disability **continue to be shaped by traditional beliefs**, influencing how schools position themselves within their communities
- **Language as a Dual Medium** – Schools function between Arabic and Hebrew, which creates a unique bureaucratic and communicative challenge.

Leadership and Power Relations

School leaders operate within hierarchies that are both formal (administrative) and informal (social and religious).

- **Authoritative vs. Participatory Leadership** – Many schools function under rigid leadership patterns, though a shift toward participatory models is emerging.
- **Community Engagement** – Leaders often function as cultural mediators between governmental expectations and local needs.

Gender Roles and Organizational Dynamics

In many Arab schools, gender continues to play a crucial role in defining leadership, teaching assignments, and authority:

- **Feminization of Care Roles** – Most special education teachers are women, often reinforcing care-giving stereotypes.
- **Male-Dominated Leadership** – Senior management positions are frequently held by men, despite the pedagogical work being performed mostly by women.
- **Tensions in Gendered Expectations** – Female staff may face social scrutiny, particularly when working in mixed-gender or non-traditional frameworks.

Religion, Identity, and Organizational Culture

Religious identity in Arab schools is not just a private matter—it shapes school ethos, staff cohesion, and parent-school relationships.

- **Faith-Based Practices** – Religious holidays, values, and customs influence scheduling, pedagogy, and interactions.
- **Navigating Differences** – Schools that serve both Muslim and Christian communities must balance diverse religious sensibilities.
- **Religious Leadership and Influence** – Local religious figures sometimes shape parental attitudes toward special education, which indirectly affects school legitimacy and behavior.

Innovation and Organizational Learning

Special education schools are slowly integrating modern models of education and behavior management:

- **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)** models are being introduced with culturally tailored modifications.
- **Inter-school Collaboration** – Partnerships with mainstream schools help in promoting inclusivity.
- **Reflective Practice** – Emerging "learning communities" among staff provide ongoing professional growth through peer dialogue and reflective methods.

The Role of Technology in Organizational Behavior

Digital transformation in Arab special education schools is uneven but increasing:

- **Technological Lag** – Many schools lack adequate infrastructure, but external programs are beginning to bridge the gap.
- **Digital Platforms for Staff Collaboration** – WhatsApp, Google Workspace, and other tools are increasingly used to coordinate teaching and therapy.
- **Resistance to Change** – Some educators express hesitation due to lack of training or cultural discomfort with surveillance and documentation.

Staff Well-Being and Burnout

The psychological well-being of staff in special education is a growing concern:

- **High Emotional Load** – Teachers and therapists often shoulder the emotional responsibilities of both students and parents
- **Burnout in Isolated Settings** – Many schools operate in small towns or villages, which increases professional isolation.
- **Need for Supervision** – A lack of consistent emotional or clinical supervision contributes to early burnout and staff turnover.

Organizational Identity and Professional Voice

Arab educators in special education often face a dual identity:

- **Marginality within Marginality** – Educators belong to a national minority and serve children with disabilities—both marginalized groups.
- **Seeking Professional Legitimacy** – Many educators feel underrepresented in national discourse on education.
- **Building Voice from Within** – Some schools are nurturing professional writing, research, and advocacy as a way to build identity.

2. Recommendations

- 1) **Culturally Responsive Training Programs** – Design professional development with sensitivity to language, gender, and religious contexts.
- 2) **Empowerment Through Leadership Pipelines** – Encourage leadership development among women and younger staff.
- 3) **Community-Based Mental Health Support** – Introduce culturally acceptable models of emotional support and peer mentoring.
- 4) **Flexible Organizational Frameworks** – Allow each school to adapt structures based on its unique cultural, geographic, and community needs.
- 5) **Digital Inclusion Strategies** – Build technological capacity through targeted investment and culturally adapted tools.

The Absent Media Representation of Arab Special Education Schools

Despite their crucial role in marginalized communities, Arab special education schools in Israel receive minimal coverage in both Arabic and Hebrew media. This invisibility contributes to public misunderstanding and reinforces marginalization.

- **Silenced Voices:** Mainstream media often neglect stories of success, innovation, or resilience emerging from these

schools, choosing instead to focus on crises or avoid the subject altogether.

- **Impact on Funding and Perception:** Lack of representation can lead to reduced funding, minimal community engagement, and a continued perception that special education is a secondary or "lesser" educational path.
- **Toward a Proactive Media Strategy:** Schools should partner with local journalists, NGOs, and parent groups to document and share positive stories, promote awareness campaigns, and assert their institutional identity within the public sphere. A media-savvy school is a politically empowered one.

Competition and Tensions Between Special Education and Inclusion Policies

Recent policy shifts in Israel emphasize inclusive education, encouraging the integration of students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. While progressive in intention, this shift raises complex issues for Arab special education schools.

- **Policy vs. Practice:** Inclusion often lacks sufficient resources, trained staff, or cultural sensitivity, placing unrealistic demands on mainstream schools and potentially neglecting students' individual needs.
- **Threat to Specialized Institutions:** The rise of inclusion may unintentionally delegitimize the existence and funding of specialized schools, framing them as outdated or exclusionary.
- **Who Decides?:** The question of where a child should learn—mainstream or specialized settings—is often decided by state bodies, sometimes overriding the nuanced understanding held by families and educators. Balancing expert opinion with parental voice is essential for ethical educational placement.

School–Family Relations and the Burden of Social Stigma

In many Arab communities, disability is still viewed through lenses of shame, divine punishment, or failure, creating psychological and social barriers for families.

- **Parental Denial and Withdrawal:** Some parents hesitate to acknowledge their child's disability, delaying diagnosis or resisting school recommendations. This complicates collaboration and may hinder the child's educational and emotional development.
- **School Strategies for Trust-Building:** Successful schools invest in long-term relationships with families, conduct culturally sensitive home visits, and include community leaders or religious figures to reduce stigma.
- **From Judgment to Partnership:** A paradigm shift is needed—from viewing parents as "resistant" to understanding their fears within a broader socio-cultural context. Building empathy within staff training is key to transforming school–family dynamics.

Structural Inequities and Budget Allocation

Rationale: To highlight how systemic disparities in government funding affect organizational function.

Resource Disparities and Institutional Capacity

Arab special education schools often receive less funding per student compared to their Jewish counterparts, impacting infrastructure, staff recruitment, and specialized services. Budget constraints limit the ability to implement new pedagogical models or acquire assistive technologies. These inequities reinforce dependency on external donations or sporadic NGO support, which complicates long-term planning and sustainability.

Intersectionality in Staff Experiences

Rationale: To analyze how identity markers (gender, ethnicity, age) shape workplace experiences and authority within schools.

Intersecting Identities and Workplace Equity

Teachers and administrators navigate multiple identity layers—being Arab, often female, and working in special education—all of which shape how they are perceived by colleagues, students, and the broader community. Younger staff may experience generational tension or limited upward mobility, particularly when challenging patriarchal norms within leadership structures.

Crisis Management and Organizational Resilience

Rationale: Especially post-COVID-19 or in light of regional tensions, this section can address adaptive strategies.

Crisis Management and Organizational Flexibility

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed both fragility and resilience within Arab special education schools. While digital adaptation was uneven, many schools displayed creative responses, such as home-based learning packets, WhatsApp-based therapy, and community mobilization. These responses underline the potential of culturally embedded crisis strategies over imported models.

Student Voice and Participatory Practices

Rationale: This fills a gap regarding how student perspectives are integrated into organizational behavior.

Listening to Students: Agency in Special Education

Organizational behavior traditionally centers adults, but meaningful student participation is increasingly recognized as vital. In a few pioneering schools, adapted student councils and feedback loops are being piloted, giving children with disabilities a platform to express needs and contribute to school culture.

Advocacy and Policy Engagement

Rationale: To propose a more active political role for special education institutions.

From Compliance to Advocacy: Organizational Activism

As marginalized institutions, Arab special education schools are often reactive rather than proactive in policy engagement. A shift toward advocacy—through teacher unions, academic collaborations, and parent coalitions—can amplify their voice

in educational reform discussions, influencing laws, budgets, and national discourse.

3. Discussion and Recommendations

The findings of this paper reveal the multifaceted nature of organizational behavior in special education schools within the Arab society in Israel. These institutions operate under intersecting pressures: cultural traditions, systemic inequality, policy ambiguity, and limited access to professional development. Such conditions impact leadership dynamics, staff cohesion, and the overall school climate, often undermining innovation and long-term planning.

One of the most prominent challenges is the tension between state-imposed administrative frameworks and local cultural norms. Principals and staff are frequently **struggle to balance state compliance with cultural responsiveness**. Moreover, budgetary inequities restrict the capacity of Arab special education schools to invest in infrastructure, technology, and staff training. These disparities deepen existing gaps between Arab and Jewish educational institutions.

The paper also highlights how gender dynamics influence organizational roles and hierarchies. Female educators, who make up the majority of the workforce in Arab special education schools, often encounter both institutional barriers and community expectations that limit their professional advancement.

A notable yet underdeveloped component is the voice of the students themselves. While these students are at the heart of special education efforts, they are rarely engaged in shaping their own learning environment. The potential for participatory models of school governance, even in adapted forms, remains largely untapped.

In light of these findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1) **Culturally Responsive Leadership Training:** Develop and implement leadership programs tailored to the unique sociocultural realities of Arab schools. These should include modules on intercultural competence, conflict resolution, and inclusive governance.
- 2) **Equitable Resource Allocation:** Advocate for funding formulas that account for structural disadvantages and provide targeted support to Arab special education schools. This includes funding for assistive technologies, therapy services, and staff development.
- 3) **Strengthening Female Leadership:** Promote mentorship and leadership pathways for women in education, particularly in management and policy-making roles. Address institutional biases through affirmative policies and capacity-building.
- 4) **Student Participation Frameworks:** Introduce accessible models of student participation such as adapted student councils or peer-support programs. These initiatives should empower students with disabilities to express their needs and shape their school culture.

- 5) **Community–School Partnerships:** Establish stronger ties between schools and local communities through advisory boards, parent networks, and culturally relevant outreach programs. Such partnerships can enhance trust and improve educational outcomes.
- 6) **Policy Advocacy and Representation:** Encourage schools and educators to take active roles in educational policy debates. Creating coalitions of Arab educators, researchers, and parents can amplify marginalized voices in national decision-making forums.

By implementing these recommendations, Arab special education schools can move from reactive adaptation toward proactive organizational development rooted in equity, agency, and cultural integrity.

4. Conclusion

Organizational behavior in Arab special education schools in Israel cannot be understood in isolation from the broader cultural, political, economic, and religious contexts in which these institutions operate.

These schools **function not only as educational institutions but also as key social pillars** in communities grappling with compounded marginalization—both as a national minority and within the disability sphere. This article has demonstrated that the challenges faced by these schools are not merely administrative or pedagogical but rather structural and deeply sociocultural. From gender dynamics and family-school relations to state policy and stigma resistance, these factors shape the everyday organizational life of special education settings.

Despite systemic underrepresentation and limited resources, Arab special education schools show remarkable potential for innovation, resilience, and redefinition of leadership, partnership, and professional identity. Their existence should not be viewed as a transitional step toward full inclusion, but rather as institutions worthy of recognition and investment as part of a diversified and equitable educational landscape.

By addressing sensitive and underexplored issues—such as media invisibility, the tensions around inclusion policies, and the weight of social stigma—this article highlights the urgent need for deep, multidimensional organizational reform that is culturally grounded and community-driven.

In conclusion, the future of Arab special education schools in Israel must not be shaped solely by centralized policy decisions in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, but also by the lived experiences of teachers, parents, and students in classrooms and villages. Only an organizational model rooted in these realities can truly deliver just, human-centered, and transformative education.

Future reform must also prioritize equitable resource allocation, structural recognition of intersecting staff identities, and active inclusion of student voices in decision-making. Arab special education schools should not merely adapt to state expectations, but actively shape national policy through culturally grounded advocacy and knowledge production.

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