

## Intercultural Competence among Jewish and Arab Students Studying Together in an Academic Institution in Israel

**Authors :** Orly Redlich

**Abstract :** Since the establishment of the state of Israel, and as a result of various events that led to it, Jewish citizens and Arab citizens of the state have been in constant conflict, which finds its expression in most levels of life. Therefore, the attitude of one group member to the other group members is mostly tense, loaded, and saturated with mutual suspicion. Within this reality, in many higher education institutions in Israel, Jews and Arabs meet with each other intensively and for several years. For some students, this is their first opportunity for a meaningful cross-cultural encounter. These intercultural encounters, which allow positive interactions between members of different cultural groups, may contribute to the formation of "intercultural competence" which means long-term change in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior towards "the other culture". The current study examined the concept of the "other" among Jewish and Arab students studying together and their "intercultural competence". The study also examined whether there is a difference in the perception of the "other" between students studying in different academic programs, and between students taking academic courses on multiculturalism. This quantitative study was conducted among 274 Arab and Jewish students studying together, for bachelors or master's degree, in various academic programs at the Israel Academic College of Ramat-Gan. The background data of the participants are varied, in terms of religion, origin, religiosity, employment status, living area, and marital status. The main hypothesis is that academic, social, and intercultural encounters between Jewish and Arab students, who attend college together, will be a significant factor in building "intercultural competence". Additionally, the existence of "intercultural competence" has been linked to demographic characteristics of the students, as well as the nature of intercultural encounters between Jews and Arabs in a higher education institution. The dependent variables were measured by a self-report questionnaire, using the components of "intercultural competence" among students, which are: 1. Cognitive knowledge of the "others", 2. Feelings towards the "others", 3. Change in attitudes towards the "others", and 4. Change in behavior towards the "others". The findings indicate a higher "intercultural competence" among Arab students than Jews; it was also found higher level of "intercultural competence" among Educational Counseling students than the other respondents. The importance of this research lies in finding the means to develop "intercultural competence" among Jewish and Arab students, which may reduce prejudice and stereotypes towards the other culture and may even prevent occurrences of alienation and violence in cross-cultural encounters in Israel.

**Keywords :** cross-cultural learning, intercultural competence, Jewish and Arab students, multiculturalism

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