



# PROMOTING RESILIENCE AND PEACE AMONG YOUTH



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REICHMAN DELEGATION

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## **I. Strategic Outline**

Education has long been regarded as a cornerstone of resilience and social cohesion, yet in Israel, the system itself reflects deep societal divisions. Though globally recognized for academic innovation, Israel's education system remains sharply segregated. Most Jewish, Arab, and Druze students attend separate school systems, each shaped by distinct historical narratives and collective memories. These divisions limit meaningful encounters between groups, reinforcing mistrust and allowing stereotypes and fear to take root (Abed, 1996; Agbaria, 2015).

Teachers are increasingly burdened by the emotional toll of today's charged political climate. Many say they feel burned out and unsupported, especially when classroom discussions become heated or when students bring in emotionally charged content from social media (Kessel, S., & Dong, E., 2023). The pressure on teachers to not only educate but also emotionally support students is rising; nevertheless, the support they receive from governmental institutions is minimal and static.

When young people are constantly exposed to fear-inducing content and inherited narratives of mistrust, it impacts not only how they view 'the other' - but also how they experience themselves (Popat & Tarrant, 2022). Therefore, peace education is important for encouraging dialogue or coexistence as well as; it's also about helping students ask: How do I calm myself down when the world feels like too much? Building trust in oneself, to manage stress, and stay grounded, is just as critical as building trust across communities. Without this inner resilience, hope becomes much harder to hold onto.

Recent public opinion data shows a troubling decline in belief in the possibility of peaceful coexistence, in the context of the current conflict since October 7th. As of 2024, only 26% of Israelis think a two-state solution is achievable—down nine points from the previous year, and 24 points since 2013. The sharpest drop came from Jewish Israelis, with just 19% expressing hope, compared to 32% in 2023. In contrast, Arab Israelis have become slightly more optimistic (Silver, L. & Smerkovich, M. 2024). This shift reflects rising polarization and disillusionment, especially among the political center, concerning development threatening future peace, highlighting the need for early educational interventions that build emotional resilience, media literacy, and openness to coexistence among youth.

As belief in the viability of a political solution erodes, particularly within the Jewish Israeli majority, the importance of non-political pathways to peace, such as education, dialogue, and psychological preparedness, becomes even more urgent. Schools have the unique potential to shape attitudes before they calcify, to offer students tools for managing conflict and complexity, and to cultivate a generation capable of envisioning shared futures even amid political deadlock. These findings underscore the need for a national peace and resilience education framework embedded within Israel's stratified education system, tailored to the emotional and cognitive needs of students living in an increasingly polarized society.

To address this, this paper concludes with recommendations on creating a national peace education framework. This would include structured training for teachers, sector-specific curricula tailored to the unique needs of each community sector, and practical tools for evaluating the program's effectiveness. A compelling model for what this can look like in practice is found in Armenia's peace education initiatives. Since the early 2000s, Armenia has integrated peace and conflict resolution education into its school system, with training for teachers and curriculum development focused on conflict resolution, emotional regulation, and resilience (Batton, 2019). The NGO Women for Development, in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Science, has played a leading role in institutionalizing these programs, which include practical guides and pedagogical tools tailored to schools across the country. Armenian schools prioritize creating a culture of peace and equipping students with interpersonal and emotional skills necessary for managing conflict peacefully. By embedding these values systemically, Armenia demonstrates that when emotional resilience becomes a national educational priority, the benefits ripple far beyond the classroom (Batton, 2019). Similarly, this proposal is aimed at policymakers, educators, and civil society organizations committed to helping youth in Israel feel emotionally safe, grounded, and empowered to imagine and shape a more hopeful future.

## **II. Executive Summary**

This policy paper tackles a growing challenge in Israel's education system: the lack of peace education in a country where students are shaped by conflict, division, and emotionally charged online content.

**Peace education** is commonly defined as a process or set of educational policies, pedagogies, and practices designed to equip learners with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and

values required to prevent conflict and violence, resolve disputes peacefully, and cultivate the conditions for lasting peace at both personal and societal levels (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2024). Academic literature emphasizes that peace education not only addresses the avoidance of conflict but also seeks to transform the mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors that contribute to violence. It promotes a culture of nonviolence, justice, and cooperation (the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2024). Young people mostly grow up within educational bubbles: Jewish, Arab, or Druze, without formal, consistent, meaningful interaction with one another. This deepens misunderstandings and mistrust, especially during national crises (Blass, 2023). At the same time, teachers are under increasing pressure to manage emotionally tense classrooms, often without the appropriate training or tools.

To address this, the paper recommends building a national peace education framework that supports students and educators across all sectors. The proposal includes teacher training, sector-specific content, and regular feedback and monitoring. The aim is to help young people build resilience, empathy, and critical thinking in a way that's grounded in their daily experiences. Such a program could play a key role in strengthening Israel's social fabric, the youth's psychological resilience and openness to peace, as well as hopefully support Israel's long-term democratic health.

### **III. Challenge**

Young people in Israel are growing up in a reality shaped by political instability, fear, and deep societal divisions. Many develop strong opinions or anxieties about individuals from other communities—not necessarily due to lack of contact, but because of what they are exposed to online, hear at home, or absorb from dominant national narratives. Emotionally charged content, especially when repeated on social media, can amplify feelings of anxiety, anger, and disconnection (Robinson, et.al, 2025).

Within the education system, each school sector tends to emphasize its own community's historical and cultural perspective, often leaving little room for shared narratives or open dialogue. As a result, students grow up with a narrow understanding of what is considered “normal,” and lack the tools to critically examine their own beliefs or engage constructively with difference. At the same time, teachers are expected to facilitate complex conversations, respond to emotional needs, and create safe and inclusive environments—often without

adequate training or institutional support (Bekerman, 2016). Unsurprisingly, many educators report feeling overwhelmed and unequipped.

This dual gap—between student needs and available tools, and between teacher responsibilities and institutional support—underscores the urgency of addressing identity, conflict, and emotion in the classroom through intentional, well-supported educational strategies.

#### **IV. Literature Review**

This review outlines the key foundations for our study on youth resilience in Israel. We begin by defining psychological resilience and its importance for young people in complex environments. We then explore how media shapes resilience, and finally, we examine the role of education in strengthening emotional and social coping skills.

##### **Psychological Resilience: Definition, Understanding the Need & Key Indicators**

Psychological resilience refers to an individual's ability to adapt, grow, and maintain emotional balance when faced with challenges. According to Quirin et al. (2015), resilience involves integrating emotionally intense experiences into one's internal framework to enable proactive and constructive responses. Key components include emotional regulation, cognitive reappraisal (rethinking how one interprets a situation), and openness to diverse perspectives. Psychological resilience may be observed when young people maintain hope and engage in cross-community activities despite living in environments marked by conflict or division. This can be often assessed through a scale of resilience such as the Connor Davidson Scale (Connor & Davidson, 2003), or through qualitative interviews examining coping strategies and emotional responses. These qualities support not only personal well-being but also social understanding and constructive engagement.

Adolescence is a particularly critical period for resilience development, as young people experience heightened emotional reactivity while forming their social identities and coping skills. (APA, 2003). Building resilience during this stage can support long-term emotional health, strengthen problem-solving abilities, and encourage positive engagement with diverse social groups.

## **Psychological resilience in the Middle East**

Research in regions characterized by social and political complexity- such as the Middle East, shows that resilience is critical for helping young people navigate uncertainty and build bridges across diverse communities. (International Alert, 2016). Adolescents in these environments often face unique challenges, including exposure to conflict, identity tensions, and societal polarization. Educational and community-based programs aimed at enhancing emotional stability, fostering self-awareness, and promoting empathy have demonstrated positive outcomes. Initiatives which emphasize emotional regulation, intergroup dialogue, and critical reflection all help youth develop coping skills and strategies which maintain psychological resilience despite external stressors. (International Alert, 2016).

## **Media's Role in Shaping Resilience**

The influence of media exposure on resilience is especially pronounced in youth populations. Studies suggest that repeated exposure to emotionally charged media content can impact young people's emotional responses, empathy, and worldview. (APA, 2003; Bier et al., 2021). However, resilience can be strengthened when youth are equipped with the skills to critically process what they encounter and to manage their emotional responses effectively. (Ungar et al., 2017).

Research by The American Psychological Association highlighted that repeated exposure to violent media content can normalize aggression, increase fear responses, and reinforce stereotypes about out-groups (The American Psychological Association, 2003). Similarly, an additional study found that adolescents exposed to biased or emotionally charged narratives were more likely to exhibit polarized thinking and reduced openness to diverse perspectives, particularly when lacking media literacy skills. (Bier et al., 2021).

These media effects directly influence youth coping mechanisms and emotional regulation. Adolescents who encounter frequent negative or conflict-related media without critical reflection are more prone to emotional desensitization, heightened anxiety, and decreased empathy towards others. (Shapiro, J. 2024). Programs which strengthen media literacy and encourage emotional regulation skills have been shown to buffer these effects, supporting more adaptive coping strategies and a greater capacity for empathy across social divides. (CoPeace, 2022). This is where education plays a key role in intervention and support.

## **Media: A Central Factor in Youth Experience**

Young people today are immersed in both traditional and digital media environments, each with distinct characteristics. Traditional media (newspapers, TV, radio) often reflect the perspective of specific political or social groups and cater to segmented audiences. In contrast, digital and social media, shaped by algorithms, deliver highly personalized content, reinforcing particular viewpoints and limiting exposure to diverse perspectives. (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016). These patterns of consumption influence how youth perceive ethnic, religious, and national groups, often reinforcing stereotypes and divisions. Several studies note the role of the media in spreading emotionally charged narratives or misleading information. Such content can deepen social divides and misrepresent vulnerable communities. (Keener, 2021; IFIT, 2021). Adolescents are particularly vulnerable due to their developmental stage and reliance on online platforms for news and identity information. Bitto Urbanova et al. (2023) found that adolescents exposed to digital media without critical awareness are more likely to internalize fear, mistrust, or rigid thinking. Building psychological resilience, therefore, requires equipping youth with the ability to recognize, question, and process biased or manipulative media.

Research supports the effectiveness of structured media literacy programs in addressing these challenges. For example, Celik, Yildirim, and Aksoy found that high school students who received media literacy education significantly improved in their critical thinking, emotional regulation, and reduced susceptibility to media-driven stereotypes (Celik, Yildirim, and Aksoy, 2019). Likewise, IFIT documented the way media literacy initiatives in divided societies helped youth develop reflective processing skills and reduced the emotional intensity with which they engaged with polarizing narratives. These findings suggest that critical media education can play a key role in shaping how the students respond cognitively and emotionally to complex media environments (IFIT, 2021).

Internationally, a study by Bitto Urbanova et al. in Slovakia explored adolescents' perceptions of digital risks and found that media literacy programs helped students better manage emotional overwhelm and develop a more balanced sense of online self-image (Bitto Urbanova et al., 2023).

Beyond media, educational institutions more broadly serve as key platforms for strengthening resilience and promoting coexistence. Programs such as "Hand in Hand: Center for Jewish-Arab Education In Israel" demonstrate how integrated schools can foster coexistence by providing bilingual education and promoting mutual respect among Jewish and Arab students. (Bekerman, Z. 2016). Likewise, the "Children Teaching Children"

program by Givat Haviva connects Arab and Jewish students through shared civic education and dialogue, helping reduce prejudice and build emotional resilience through structured school-based encounters. (Givat Haviva, n.d.).

However, the structure of Israel's divided educational system presents both opportunities and challenges. While some schools emphasize shared narratives and intergroup understanding, others might maintain more exclusive frameworks which reinforce their group identity. Studies of Israeli textbooks show some progress in promoting peace and diversity, particularly in the portrayal of universal human rights and acknowledgment of different cultural groups. (Teff-Seker, Y. 2018). However, gaps remain. Therefore, while educational reforms have moved towards inclusivity, more consistent efforts are needed to fully leverage schooling as a platform for coexistence and resilience.

Complementing formal education, informal peace initiatives such as Project Harmony offer immersive experiences where Jewish and Arab children engage in collaborative arts, theater, and music to promote empathy and emotional connection. (Keener, R. 2021). Furthermore, NGO-led initiatives such as Kids4Peace use storytelling, joint seminars, and conflict resolution workshops to encourage personal sharing and dismantle stereotypes. (Kids4Peace Jerusalem, n.d.). These intergroup initiatives provide youth with emotionally challenging yet supportive environments where they can process identity-related tensions and build the skills needed for peaceful coexistence.

Media literacy education has also proven effective in developing resilience. Media literacy education affected high school students' critical thinking, emotional well-being, and resistance to media manipulation. They found that students who participated in these programs demonstrated significant improvements in identifying biased information, evaluating sources critically, and expressing independent thought (Celik et al, 2019). These cognitive gains were further linked to emotional well-being and reduced susceptibility to manipulative content. Additionally, the Institute for Integrated Transitions (IFIT, 2021) highlighted how media literacy initiatives enabled students to develop reflective processing skills and reduced the emotional intensity with which they engaged with polarizing narratives. Together, these findings reinforce the role of media education as a meaningful tool for shaping students' cognitive and emotional resilience.

## **V. Context & Analysis**

Different educational sectors in Israel expose students to vastly different realities both socially and pedagogically. Jewish schools often emphasize narratives of security and collective trauma, shaping students' identities around national resilience. While some programs promote civic engagement, there is limited space for sustained intergroup dialogue. In contrast, Arab schools frequently experience systemic marginalization: their histories and identities are often excluded from national curricula, which contributes to feelings of alienation and civic detachment. The Druze sector occupies a particularly complex position—marked by high rates of military service and civic commitment, yet often accompanied by social exclusion and lack of cultural representation in the classroom. (Abed, 1996; Berkman, 2016; Nisan, 2010). Each sector presents distinct challenges and opportunities. Tailored programs that foster dialogue, validate cultural identity, and promote emotional resilience can help bridge these divides and build a more cohesive educational landscape.

Each educational sector in Israel brings its own unique challenges and opportunities. In the Jewish sector, much of the focus is on security and collective memory. While there are programs that encourage civic engagement, they lack space for meaningful intergroup dialogue. The Arab sector is frequently left out of national discussions, and although some schools take part in bilingual or dialogue-based programs, these efforts are still limited in reach. The Druze sector finds itself in a complex position- loyal to the state, yet often feeling excluded. Programs that help students in this sector explore and embrace that complexity could create much-needed space for connection and understanding. (Abed, 1996; Berkman, 2016; Nisan, 2010).

Classroom dynamics have become increasingly unpredictable and emotionally charged. Teachers often enter discussions unsure of how students will react, as sensitive topics can quickly escalate. Conversations that touch on conflict, identity, or current events frequently become difficult to manage, with students drawing from polarized media narratives and emotional tensions running high. In this environment, many students struggle to express their feelings constructively, while others remain silent, unsure of how to process complex emotions or navigate group dynamics. (Kaye Academic College of Education, 2024).

Platforms like TikTok and Instagram flood students with a nonstop stream of emotionally charged content. Without the tools to think critically about what they're seeing, many students tend to accept the most dramatic or fear-based messages at face value. Over time, this kind of exposure can reduce emotional flexibility and reinforce rigid "us vs. them" thinking (Schmitt, 1932). Over the past year in Israel, social media has only intensified these divides, deepening group identities and fueling polarization, especially during times of conflict (Silver, L. & Smerkovich, M. 2024).

In places like Armenia, peace education integrated into the school curriculum focuses on conflict resolution, emotional regulation, and resilience, helping students build skills to manage differences peacefully and foster mutual understanding. These programs involve activities such as role plays, peer education, and community engagement to support ongoing peacebuilding efforts (Batton, 2019).

Israel offers multiple notable civil society models that exemplify effective approaches to integrated and dialogue-based education. The Hand in Hand network brings Jewish and Arab students together in bilingual schools. Givat Haviva runs programs where teens from different backgrounds work on civic projects and have honest conversations about identity and society. Kids4Peace brings together youth from different faiths to build empathy and connection through dialogue. (Hand in Hand; Givat Haviva; Kids4Peace). These are a small number of initiatives that show us that when students are given the right tools and a supportive environment, meaningful relationships can grow.

## **VI. Conceptual Framework: Psychological Resilience in the Context of Media and Conflict**

This study is anchored in a multidimensional understanding of psychological resilience as it applies to youth navigating media-saturated, conflict-prone environments. Drawing from neuropsychological, cognitive-behavioral, and social-constructivist theories, with a focus on **three key indicators of emotional resilience: emotional regulation, cognitive reappraisal, and openness to diverse perspectives**, we view resilience not as a fixed trait, but as a dynamic capacity—developed through interaction, reflection, and structured support. To guide our analysis, we focus on three key indicators of emotional resilience: emotional regulation, cognitive reappraisal, and openness to diverse perspectives.

At the same time, it's important to recognize that not all students have equal access to the tools and environments that support these skills. Media literacy—one of the most important foundations for resilience in today's digital world—is still not fully integrated into Israel's education system. While there is a nationwide Digital Media and Information Literacy curriculum, its implementation is uneven. Arab and ultra-Orthodox sectors, in particular, face significant gaps in digital access, teacher training, and media education.

According to OECD data, Israel ranks among the lowest in technology-based problem-solving skills, making it harder for students in these groups to critically engage with media or regulate their emotional responses to what they see online (Lessenski, 2023). This **digital divide**, combined with the existing separation between school systems, makes it even more difficult to build resilience consistently and equitably.

### **Emotional Regulation**

Emotional regulation refers to the ability to monitor, modulate, and respond adaptively to emotional stimuli, particularly under stress. In contexts where media exposure frequently includes violent, biased, or emotionally charged content, emotional regulation serves as the first line of psychological defense (Masten, 2014). The capacity to recognize affective responses, delay impulsive reactions, and maintain equilibrium to resilience (Masten, 2014). This regulation is closely linked to neurocognitive functions involving the prefrontal cortex and amygdala, and is shaped over time through environmental cues, educational interventions, and modeled behavior. A failure to develop this capacity leaves individuals more vulnerable to emotional flooding, reactivity, and polarization (Quirin et al., 2015).

### **Cognitive Reappraisal**

Cognitive reappraisal is a higher-order psychological process involving the reinterpretation of emotionally salient stimuli in ways that alter their impact (Quirin et al., 2015). Rooted in theories of cognitive-emotional regulation (Gross, 2015) and supported by resilience research (Masten, 2014a), this process allows individuals to reframe threatening or distressing information in more constructive terms. It plays a crucial role in how youth process media narratives—enabling them to resist oversimplified dichotomies and challenge deterministic or victimizing interpretations of conflict (Hobbs, 2010). Reappraisal fosters

cognitive flexibility, reduces emotional volatility, and enhances meaning-making capacities that are essential in environments where identity and trauma are continually politicized (Gross, 2015).

Recent resilience research offers a compelling framework for educational intervention. Psychological resilience is defined as the ability to integrate negative experiences into a functional internal system—reframing distress through predictive control and cognitive flexibility (Quirin et al., 2015). This process is mediated by emotional regulation, openness to difference, and reflective thought.

### **Openness to Diverse Perspectives**

This dimension of resilience extends beyond individual coping mechanisms to include interpersonal and epistemic flexibility. Defined as the willingness and ability to engage with perspectives that differ from one's own, this openness is integral to peaceful coexistence in divided societies. It is underpinned by social-cognitive theory and developmental psychology, which posit that exposure to difference, when coupled with emotional safety and critical reflection, cultivates empathy and reduces in-group/out-group bias. In media-rich environments, openness functions as a filter that challenges monolithic narratives and supports the recognition of plural truths, thus enhancing social cohesion (Juncos, 2018).

## **VII. Case Study: Israel's Education System in a Time of Conflict**

This case study examines how the structure, content, and context of Israel's education system influence its capacity to foster psychological resilience, critical thinking, and coexistence among youth. Drawing from academic research, government data, and civil society reports, this section analyzes how different educational sectors, Secular Jewish, Religious Jewish, Arab, Druze, and Haredi, respond to contemporary challenges, including conflict-related media exposure, emotional polarization, and structural inequalities.

One of the most urgent goals of Israeli education today is to “instill in students values of solidarity, tolerance, critical thinking, and identification with the fundamental values of the State of Israel” (Blass, 2022).

Sectoral differences in curriculum, pedagogy, and resource allocation play a major role. Druze schools have significantly improved in Bagrut (matriculation) outcomes, while

Arab schools continue to face structural disadvantages. Haredi schools often exclude core state subjects, focusing instead on religious studies. This division creates inequities not only in academic achievement but in civic orientation, narrative exposure, and emotional development (Blass, 2022).

Applied to the Israeli context, resilience-building becomes a public good. Since October 7, 2023, over 38,000 students have been displaced, and more than 300,000 students have parents serving in the reserves. (Blass, 2025) These disruptions have heightened anxiety, interrupted classroom routines, and strained already fragile support systems (Blass, 2025). In this environment, cognitive reappraisal and emotional regulation are not optional—they are survival tools. Schools that embed these principles into everyday learning have the potential to protect students' mental health and foster long-term social cohesion.

However, such efforts face obstacles. Absenteeism among teachers and budget disparities. In the past two years, the rate of teacher absences has doubled compared to the previous eight years, which has caused a large gap in the education system (Blass, 2025). With regards to budget, while the overall education budget has grown, coalition-based allocations and political priorities have complicated equitable distribution. Special education has received increased attention, but gaps remain—particularly in Arab and lower-income sectors (Blass, 2025). The emotional burden placed on teachers, combined with rising polarization, undermines both instructional effectiveness and classroom trust.

This case study highlights the need to reshape the Israeli education reform not only through academic benchmarks but through the lens of peacebuilding and emotional resilience. If schools are to be more than sites of cognitive development, they must be reimaged as platforms for social reconstruction.

Programs that teach emotional regulation, media literacy, and intergroup understanding are not peripheral—they are essential. The insights presented here reinforce this paper's proposed recommendation to offer a broader systems-level view of resilience-building in youth as a national priority.

## **VIII. Data Collection**

To better understand how media exposure and educational environments influence psychological resilience and intergroup attitudes among Israeli adolescents, this study

employed a **mixed-methods design**. This approach allowed us to triangulate findings, using both statistical patterns and in-depth personal insights to capture the nuances of resilience development across diverse communities.

Central to both the design and interpretation of our data are **three key indicators of psychological resilience**: emotional regulation, cognitive reappraisal, and openness to diverse perspectives. These indicators not only shaped our conceptual framework but also served as anchors for constructing our survey indices and coding qualitative themes. By rooting our analysis in these interconnected dimensions, we were able to interpret both numerical trends and narrative insights with greater clarity and coherence.

### **Quantitative Data**

The data analysis explores the relationships between media exposure, psychological resilience, and openness to coexistence among diverse youth populations in Israel. Using quantitative methods, including the creation of composite indices and statistical testing, we examined how participants' identities and media behaviors correlate with key psychological and social outcomes. All analyses were conducted using JMP statistical software. Given the modest sample size ( $N = 60$ ), emphasis was placed on internal reliability and effect sizes to assess the robustness of observed trends. The following section presents the construction of indices, descriptive statistics, and the results of correlation and ANOVA tests conducted to evaluate our research hypotheses.

Indices were created using survey questions that are directly tied to specific testing parameters; these parameters are important to respond to our research. All indices have a Cronbach's alpha above .6, indicating a sufficient internal reliability across the data set. The respondent's answer to our survey question was recoded as a nominal variable between 1-6 with 6 corresponding with the answer "all of the time" and a score of 1 corresponding with a reported answer of "never". Our testing parameters for each index can be seen below as well as the cronbach alpha for each variable in the data set.

<b>MEDIA INFLUENCE AND SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS INDEX (<math>\alpha</math> .61)</b>
How often do you use social networks ( $\alpha$ .588)

<b>MEDIA INFLUENCE AND SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS INDEX (<math>\alpha</math> .61)</b>
I often watch or read news on television, the internet, or social media ( $\alpha$ .51)
I see posts or videos about conflicts, politics, or social issues ( $\alpha$ .58)
I look for more than one source before forming an opinion about something I see online ( $\alpha$ .66)
I participate in online discussions or debates related to the conflict ( $\alpha$ .56)
I feel expected to share or respond to content related to the conflict ( $\alpha$ .56)

<b>RESILIENCE INDEX (<math>\alpha</math> .65)</b>
I avoid checking the news or social media when I know something bad has happened ( $\alpha$ .55)
I feel tense or stressed after watching the news about violence ( $\alpha$ .44)
I try to distract myself after watching stressful or exciting content ( $\alpha$ .47)
I talk to someone when I feel overwhelmed by the media ( $\alpha$ .61)
My reactions to difficult/stressful content vary depending on the source it comes from ( $\alpha$ .79)

<b>COEXISTENCE INDEX (<math>\alpha</math> .74)</b>
Students from different communities (Arabs, Druze, Haradi, Secular) ( $\alpha$ .71)
I have close friends from different communities ( $\alpha$ .62)
I participated in school activities with students from different communities ( $\alpha$ .68)
Education helps people understand each other better ( $\alpha$ .76)

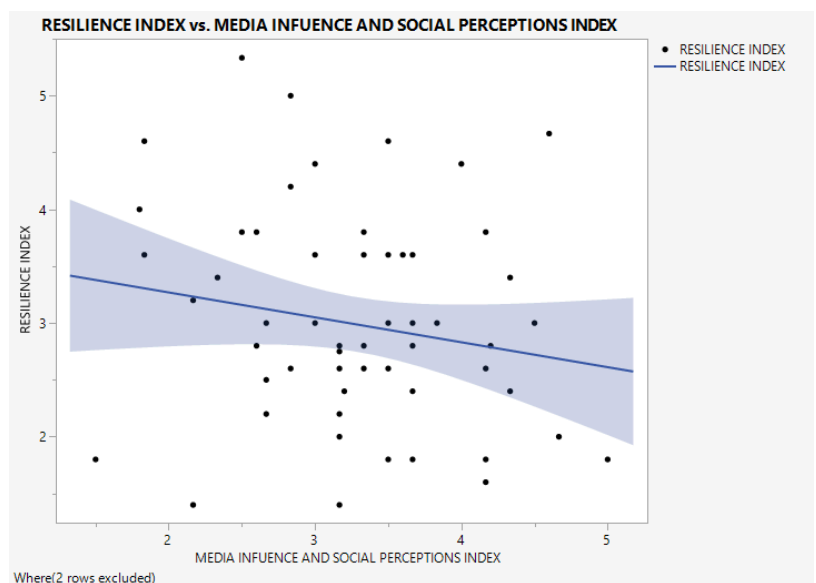
COEXISTENCE INDEX ( $\alpha$ .74)
I learned about cultures different from my own ( $\alpha$ .70)

Additionally, the respondents were split into three groups based on their identification in three major groups in Israeli society: Religious Jews, Nonreligious Jews, and Arabs. This division was chosen based on the differences in the education system between these three groups. The breakdown of the respondents is as follows -

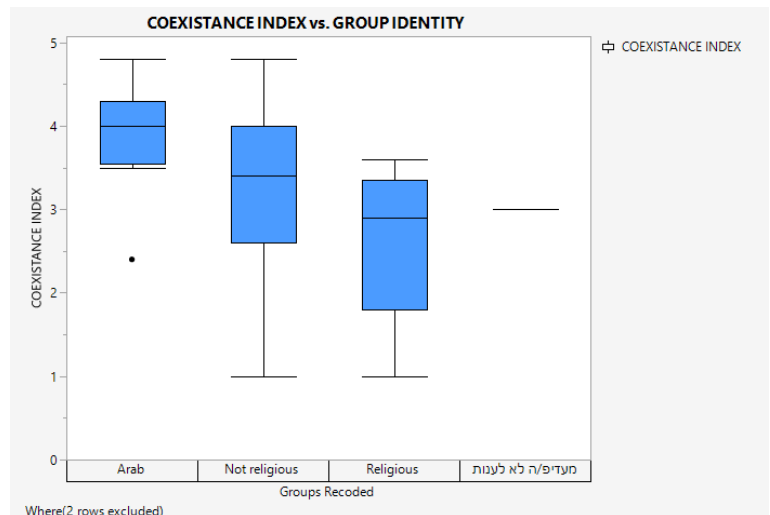
Religious Jews	13
Non-Religious Jews	33
Arab	13
Prefer not to say	1

To test how the level of media exposure impacts the level of psychological resilience, a Pearson's correlation test was run between the RESILIENCE INDEX and the MEDIA EXPOSURE INDEX. While we can not refute the null hypothesis with a degree of certainty of 95%, the P value of 0.17 is low considering our small sample size and the difficulty we had with reaching specific population groups. 60 respondents were examined (N=60) according to the research hypothesis, and a negative relationship was found between the level of media exposure and the level of psychological resilience. However, this effect size was small (-0.18).

The more active an individual is on social media, the lower their level of psychological resilience. The average level of psychological resilience in this sample is 2.99 (SD=0.93), and the average level of media use is 3.29 (SD=0.75). The following graph is a regression model illustrating our results.



Our data was more significant when testing the resilience level and coexistence by group. To test whether differences in openness to coexistence differ between groups that differ in their group identity, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted (N=53). According to the findings, a significant effect was obtained:  $F(3,49)=4.34$ ,  $p<0.01$ , the effect size is large ( $\eta^2 = .21$ ).



Tukey's post hoc analysis indicated that the **only statistically significant difference** was between **Religious Jews** ( $M = 2.53$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ,  $N = 12$ ) and **Arabs** ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ,  $N = 9$ ), with Arabs showing significantly greater openness to coexistence. Although **Nonreligious Jews** ( $M = 3.36$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ,  $N = 31$ ) also had higher mean scores than Religious Jews, the difference was not statistically significant.

### Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative findings underscore the need for integrated media education into youth-oriented educational programs, particularly in conflict-affected and socially diverse areas like Israel. The negative correlation between media exposure and psychological resilience, while modest, suggests that frequent and unfiltered engagement with conflict-related media may be emotionally taxing for adolescents. This is especially relevant in an environment where political content, misinformation, and polarized narratives dominate online platforms.

Moreover, the significant differences in openness to coexistence between identity groups point to the role of social context and educational experience in shaping intergroup attitudes. Arab youth, who reported the highest levels of both coexistence and resilience, may

benefit from more inclusive curricula or community-based encounters that foster empathy and shared identity. In contrast, lower scores among Religious Jewish youth highlight a potential gap in intergroup exposure and media coping strategies.

## **Qualitative Data**

To complement the quantitative survey data, this study conducted in-depth interviews with four experienced educators and NGO's working in distinct yet complementary educational settings: one serves as an educational director for a coexistence-focused youth initiative in Jerusalem, while the others are teachers working in the formal education system, including in a "last chance" high school for at-risk students.

These interviews were structured to explore how educators perceive and respond to the emotional, cognitive, and intergroup challenges facing adolescents in a conflict-prone and media-saturated environment. Thematic analysis of these interviews was guided by the study's conceptual framework, centered on emotional regulation, cognitive reappraisal, and openness to diverse perspectives, while also addressing the cross-cutting influence of media narratives.

All educators consistently emphasized that emotional regulation is foundational to learning and dialogue. Students today are not only exposed to trauma within their social contexts but are also continuously flooded by emotionally charged media content. This creates what one educator described as "a classroom unraveling under the weight of opinions they don't fully understand." In such environments, emotional regulation must be actively modeled and supported. Rather than attempting to immediately resolve conflict or distress, both interviewees emphasized the value of containing emotional responses and fostering a sense of safety. As one noted, "We don't jump in with solutions. We let it echo first. We try to hold space. Sometimes that's all we can do." Emotional regulation is thus framed as a relational process—one that is inseparable from the broader educational climate and the emotional availability of the adults in the room.

The development of cognitive reappraisal—the ability to reframe emotionally triggering narratives—was described as both essential and deeply challenging. In settings where adolescents are regularly exposed to binary or inflammatory portrayals of conflict, reappraisal serves as a necessary corrective to reactive thinking. Educators reported using structured exercises and reflective dialogue to help students unpack assumptions and explore

alternative interpretations. However, they also noted that students struggle to access this skill without prior emotional grounding. Reappraisal does not emerge spontaneously; it is cultivated through consistent, scaffolded opportunities to pause, question, and reconsider. Educators saw value in helping students explore how identity, culture, and media shape their initial perceptions and emotional responses to the world around them.

Openness to diverse perspectives emerged as the most aspirational component of resilience. While students often arrive with an interest in dialogue or coexistence, both educators stressed that this openness cannot be presumed. It must be developed through deliberate exposure, facilitation, and mutual vulnerability. One educator remarked: “They know how to respond, how to argue, how to disagree—but not how to sit with something uncomfortable and hear it.” Perspective-taking is not merely an intellectual exercise but an emotional and ethical practice that requires safety, modeling, and repetition. A particularly telling reflection from the youth program director encapsulated the ethos of their work: “Our first goal is to help students realize that the people they’re meeting are just human beings—they like movies, they like food, they like to eat pizza. And that’s where we begin.” This simple but powerful observation illustrates that openness begins not with abstract discussions about peace, but with shared humanity.

Finally, both interviews underscored the pervasive impact of media narratives on student identity and interaction. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube serve as the primary conduits through which students encounter and interpret political and social realities. Educators noted that students frequently echo language, imagery, and emotional framings lifted directly from social media—often without context or critical analysis. Media was described as an emotional accelerant, shaping students’ attitudes before classroom dialogue even begins. While informal strategies such as source comparison and media framing analysis are employed, educators repeatedly emphasized the lack of systemic support, curricular structure, and training in media literacy. As one teacher put it, “The algorithm is stronger than me.” Despite their best efforts, educators feel increasingly outpaced by the speed and emotional intensity of the media content shaping students’ worldviews.

Collectively, these qualitative findings reinforce the premise that psychological resilience—particularly in divided, digital societies—is a skill set that must be taught, practiced, and supported at both individual and institutional levels. Emotional regulation,

cognitive flexibility, and openness to difference are not innate capacities but developmental outcomes of intentional, relational pedagogy. The educators interviewed demonstrated profound commitment, but their insights also point to clear systemic gaps: the absence of formal emotional education, limited resources for media literacy, and insufficient support for the emotional labor that resilience-building requires. These findings provide essential grounding for the policy and programmatic recommendations offered in the subsequent section.

## **IX. Limitations**

This research was conducted under significant contextual constraints that impacted both the scope and timing of data collection. One of the main challenges of this research is the ongoing war in the area and the broader regional instability, including the Iranian missile strike on Israel in April 2024. These events introduced acute emotional and logistical challenges for both researchers and participants, particularly in school settings where trauma, security alerts, and heightened political tensions disrupted normal operations.

In addition, the academic calendar in Israel posed structural limitations. A concentration of religious and national holidays during the data collection period significantly reduced the number of available school days and limited access to students and educators across all sectors. These disruptions particularly affected efforts to expand the qualitative interview base and distribute surveys more broadly across underrepresented educational sectors such as Druze and ultra-Orthodox schools.

Another key challenge was the difficulty obtaining parental permission for minors to participate, which hindered engagement with younger populations.

Finally, the war-induced emotional climate—marked by fear, grief, and national polarization—may have influenced participants' willingness to engage in open dialogue, especially on sensitive topics related to coexistence, identity, and media influence. These limitations underscore the urgent relevance of the research but also highlight the need for cautious interpretation of findings, particularly in terms of generalizability and timing.

Future phases of this study would benefit from expanded access, post-crisis stabilization, and broader sectoral inclusion.

## **X. Policy Recommendation**

### **Curriculum Reform: Building Peace and Resilience from Grades 5-12**

In response to the growing need for psychological resilience, media literacy, and intergroup understanding in Israel's education system, we propose the creation of a comprehensive, peace and resilience education framework that spans through the major educational sectors—Jewish Secular, Jewish Religious, Arab, Druze, and Haredi. This framework should introduce a structured curriculum from grades 5 through 12 that integrates emotional regulation, cognitive reappraisal, and coexistence education as core competencies. Curriculum modules would include emotional self-regulation and trauma coping skills, critical media literacy and misinformation awareness, civic dialogue and conflict transformation, and identity exploration grounded in shared societal values.

The materials should be culturally adapted to reflect the linguistic, religious, and social realities of each educational stream, including versions in both Arabic and Hebrew, and pedagogy tailored to sectoral needs and sensitivities identified in the data collection phase. For instance, our findings indicate that students in the Haredi sector often lack structured platforms for emotional expression and intergroup engagement, necessitating tools that emphasize emotional vocabulary and regulation within a framework that aligns with religious norms. Given that early childhood is a critical period for shaping emotional regulation and cognitive development, the implementation of these interventions should begin as early as possible. Research underscores that emotion regulation skills developed in early childhood significantly contribute to later academic and social success (Graziano et al., 2007), reinforcing the importance of integrating these tools from the foundational years onward.

### **Teacher Training and Emotional Support Systems**

In parallel, we recommend the establishment of a teacher training course focused on building educator capacity in trauma-informed teaching, conflict-sensitive classroom facilitation, and youth emotional development. This would include a foundational 20-hour training for homeroom teachers, alongside specialized professional development tracks for educators in civics, digital studies, and social sciences. Teachers would gain practical tools for navigating emotionally charged conversations, recognizing signs of distress, and fostering safe, inclusive classroom environments. Given the emotional toll currently placed on

educators, this training should be complemented by sustained support systems, such as regional educational resilience counselors, confidential mental health resources for teachers, and institutional mechanisms to reduce burnout, including peer groups, coaching, and sabbatical opportunities.

### **Media Literacy as a Core Civic Competency**

A core element of this framework should be the institutionalization of media literacy as a civic competency within the national curriculum. Given the documented link between unfiltered media exposure and reduced psychological resilience, media education should be embedded in existing subjects like civics and language arts. Students must be equipped to deconstruct bias, identify propaganda, understand algorithmic influence, and engage critically with digital platforms. The Ministry of Education should also collaborate with its partners to develop accessible media literacy toolkits and promote healthy online behaviors among youth.

### **Regional Media and Dialogue Labs**

To foster real-world application and cross-sector dialogue, we recommend the development of regional Media and Dialogue Labs. These would serve as intergroup extracurricular hubs where Jewish, Arab, and Druze students collaboratively produce digital content such as podcasts, short films, or civic campaigns focused on shared social issues. Facilitated by trained educators and supported by municipal and nonprofit partnerships, these labs would create sustained, meaningful encounters that challenge stereotypes and humanize “the other.” Annual national showcases of student work could highlight civic creativity and provide recognition for young peacebuilders.

### **Integrating Emotional Literacy into Educational Standards**

Furthermore, emotional literacy should be formally incorporated into the national education standards, with measurable competencies assessed alongside academic subjects. These competencies would include students’ ability to name and manage emotions, demonstrate empathy, and engage in respectful disagreement. Assessments could include reflective writing, group discussions, and self-report scales administered by trained staff. Emotional literacy should be taught explicitly in early grades and reinforced throughout adolescence with age-appropriate content (Graziano et al., 2007).

## **Monitoring and Evaluation for Accountability and Impact**

To ensure the framework remains responsive and effective, a practical and scalable monitoring process should accompany its implementation. Schools participating in the program could use simple pre-and post-program surveys to assess changes in students' emotional regulation, openness to others, and overall resilience. These tools should be designed to be age-appropriate and easy to administer by trained school staff.

In addition, small-scale teacher feedback forms and selected classroom observations conducted periodically rather than continuously—can help identify challenges and areas for improvement without placing excessive burden on schools. Partnerships with local academic institutions or NGOs can help support this process, guiding in the design of low-cost, evidence-informed tools that reflect the diverse needs of each sector.

## **Scaling Civil Society Peace Education Models**

Lastly, the Ministry should expand support for successful civil society initiatives already working in this space. Programs like Hand in Hand, Givat Haviva, and Kids4Peace provide strong blueprints for intergroup learning, and much can be drawn from their methodologies when intervening in the public system. By providing matching grants, logistical backing, and curriculum adoption pathways, these models can be scaled across schools and regions, especially in the geographic and social periphery.

Together, these recommendations offer a realistic and research-backed approach to improving Israel's education system. They aim not just to strengthen academic outcomes, but to give students the emotional tools, social understanding, and media skills they need to cope with today's challenges. In a time shaped by conflict and constant media exposure, helping young people feel safe, think critically, and connect with others isn't a luxury — it's essential.

## **XI. Conclusion**

This research highlights how psychological resilience measured through emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, and openness to difference can be intentionally cultivated through structured, culturally responsive educational practices. Resilience is not only a buffer against stress and polarization; it is also a key driver of empathy, critical thinking, and constructive civic engagement. When students develop the tools to regulate their emotions,

reinterpret complex media narratives, and engage with diverse perspectives, they are better prepared to contribute to a more stable, inclusive society.

Despite the challenges imposed by ongoing conflict, resource disparities, and educational fragmentation, our findings, along with the successes of local initiatives, demonstrate the clear potential of a national peace education framework. Moving forward, investing in emotional literacy and cross-sector collaboration is not just a policy choice; it is a social necessity. The goal is not simply to help youth endure conflict, but to empower them to actively reshape the social fabric around them. Long-term healing and coexistence will not emerge from isolation or fear, but from education that prioritizes empathy, equity, and resilience as national values.

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