
من اجل أن تبقى المؤسسات العربية قائمة، من اجل أن تبقى القدس عربية فلسطينية إسلامية مسيحية

"اشتر زمنا في القدس"

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A Fact Sheet on Education in Jerusalem

Introduction

For the last 55 years, Jerusalemites have struggled through their educational institutions to preserve and strengthen their Palestinian national identity. They withstood, and for that, they endured great difficulties and accepted the minimum available resources. This includes having their children in buildings that were not qualified in the first place to be schools, or having them in residential buildings, both of which are with narrow spaces, and without playgrounds, or specialized educational facilities.

Despite this steadfastness, the prevailing scene today is one of anxiety that dominates all those interested in preserving the identity of the educational process in Jerusalem, with the main issue of concern being the Israeli occupation's plan to replace the Palestinian curriculum in all Jerusalem schools with the Israeli curriculum.

Replacing the Palestinian curriculum with an Israeli curriculum raises serious concerns that are not limited to the possibility of losing the Palestinian identity and preparing the students of Jerusalem to be suitable to work in the institutions of the occupation (while having to do so to maintain a livelihood), thus serving its goals without awareness. Moreover, these risks also include the loss of the quality of education at the lower grades, and accordingly, the failure to achieve the expected result at the higher grades.

Distribution of students in Jerusalem during the school year 2021/2022

According to the Directorate of Education/ General Awqaf in Jerusalem , the number of Palestinian students in Jerusalem in the 2021/2022 school year reached 98,426 students, of whom 45,426 are enrolled in schools affiliated with the Palestinian administration (studying a Palestinian curriculum). These students are distributed among private schools (33,817 students), General Endowments (Awqaf) schools (10,637), and UNRWA schools (972), and all of which study the authentic Palestinian curriculum.

The 53,000 remaining students attend the municipality and the Israeli Ministry of Education schools, in addition to contracted schools affiliated with the occupation administration. Among these students, around 13,000 study the occupation curriculum -Israeli Matriculation Exams (Bagrut), while the rest are required by the Israeli occupation administration to study a curriculum that is a distorted version of the original Palestinian curriculum. This version is devoid of all the contents and symbols of the Palestinian national identity that form the backbone of the general structure of the Palestinian curriculum.

Students' enrollment in the Bagrut: Reasons and Facts about Quality of Education

It should be noted that close to 13% of Palestinian students in Jerusalem study the Bagrut curriculum. This is most likely due to the fact that parents of children that show low achievement in the Palestinian track transfer them to the Bagrut track, which offers more extensive specializations, and some parents believe that this Bagrut track is easier for students who cannot raise their academic achievement in the Palestinian track. Moreover, there are students who enroll in the Bagrut track because they want to specialize in technology, or because their parents think that the Bagrut system will provide them with better opportunities to join the labor market. Some parents believe that the Bagrut curriculum is stronger compared to the Palestinian curriculum, and gives students more space to think, while other parents believe that their children have better chances of achieving better grades in the Bagrut, compared to Tawjihi, due to the greater chances of cheating in the Bagrut exam.

However, it is important to understand the real situation of the Bagrut, and this is reflected in the results of achievement among Palestinian students within Israel. These results indicate that students in the Arab Bagrut exam achieve poorly, compared to students who take the Hebrew Bagrut exam. The results of the 2018 PISA test indicated **a gap between Arab and Jewish students (up to four**

educational years in science and mathematics, and up to five years in languages) in favor of Jewish students.

It should be noted that the Arab students who enroll in the Bagrut have fewer chances, compared to the Jewish students, of succeeding in the exam and having opportunities of access to universities. According to a studyⁱ by researcher Samira Elayan entitled “Education, Education and Scientific Research” and published in the year 2020¹, there has been an increase in the percentage of successful students in the Bagrut among Arabs and Jews over the years, however, the differences between them are still large. Close to 64% of Jewish students applying to the Bagrut program succeeded in the year 2000, compared to 45% of Arab applicants. These percentages improved in 2017, however, the differences continue where 80% of Jewish applicants succeeded, compared to only 64% of Arab applicants who succeeded.

Another studyⁱⁱ by the Arab Center for Applied Studies (Mada al-Carmel), entitled "Neoliberalism in the Arab Education System in Israel" and issued in 2021², indicated that both Arab and Jewish students in Israel fall in the lowest educational attainment scale in the subjects of science, mathematics and mother language. Despite the attempts to amend the courses, based on the results of PISA 2015, Israel's attempts were unsuccessful. The results showed a decline in students' achievement in 2018 compared to 2015. The study referred to the results of the OECD 2016 report, which confirms **the existence of large gaps between Jewish and Arab citizens in advanced technological skills, where 33% of Arab adults lack basic knowledge in computer skills, compared to 9% of Jewish adults.**

It is worth noting that the quality of education and the available educational courses are linked to budgets. According to Dr. Youssef Jabarin, a former Knesset member, there is a **gap between the amounts allocated to a Jewish student compared to an Arab student reaches 18,000 shekels in favor of the Jewish student.** This means that the gap in the budget between a Jewish school accommodating 600 students and a similar Arab school accommodating 600 students amounts to 11 million shekels annually in favor of the Jewish school.

As for Jerusalem, the attempts to encourage students to study the Bagrut curriculum by all means are due to the Israel's need for relatively cheap labor to serve its society and its goals. In Jerusalem, with the population growth and immigration behavior

¹ <https://www.palestine-studies.org/sites/default/files/bookspdf/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9%20%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%20%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%AB%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A.pdf>

² <https://mada-research.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/NL-AgbariaJaraisy-Education.pdf>

continuing as the trend today, the demographics of Jerusalem within a few years are expected to be as follows: 45% of the population are Palestinians, 45% are religious Jews that work in limited jobs, and 10% are secular Jews. **Since the bulk of the labor force will be mainly consisted of Palestinians, Israel will therefore strengthen its efforts to direct the goals of education to serve its economic and colonial goals. They will promoting education that is based on individualism, prioritizing the interest of the individual over the group, erasing the Palestinian narrative, and instilling a sense of inferiority among the Palestinians.**

The most important dangers resulting from teaching the Israeli curriculum can thus be summarized as follows:

1- The Palestinian students will be stripped of their identity and will not be taught about their history and their narrative, while they will be taught the Zionist narrative. For example, there is no use of the word Palestinian or Palestine in the Israeli curriculum, while there is only a reference to the Arab identity of the Palestinians, and the curriculum depicts them as a minority whose homeland is in Arab countries and with no roots in Palestine. This is in addition to embedding a feeling of inferiority.

2- Leading students to a poor quality of education. As mentioned previously on education within Israel, there is a gap of 4 years in science and mathematics and five years in mother language between Arab and Jewish students in favor of Jewish students.

3- Turning the Palestinians into cheap labor that serve the institutions and economy of the occupation.

The Dangers Facing Palestinian Schools Teaching Palestinian Curriculum

The real danger has been Israel working in the past years to provide educational services in the city of Jerusalem by purchasing these services from Palestinian private schools. Consequently, private schools began to rely on the official institutions of the occupying state (Israel) for their budgets. During the early years, these official institutions did not oppose those schools teaching the Palestinian curriculum, however, more recently they began to impose restrictions on these private schools in an effort to close them. Indeed, it has stopped purchasing educational services from a number of these schools, and the schools are now unable to cover their costs in full. Recently, the authorities began threatening schools with complete closure if they teach the original Palestinian curriculum. On the other hand, the institutions of the **occupying state** (with a police mentality) have imposed extraordinary control over Palestinian schools from which they purchase services. This includes preventing these schools from showing any patriotic manifestations, such as raising the Palestinian flag, or teaching students traditional and patriotic songs. All these measures add to the occupation institutions attempts with distorting

the Palestinian curriculum where they removed everything related to the Palestinian narrative and symbols from the curriculum. These occupation institutions in recent years also started to require that any new school should teach the Israeli curriculum.

While the occupying power is obligated to provide new school buildings under the pressure of court decisions, it will most likely alienate private schools, and will stop paying for their services, which means that many of these schools may be closed due to their inability to cover their costs. When this happens, and if Israel controls education in Jerusalem, it will control the content, concepts, and quality, and we will witness the deterioration in the quality of education in schools in the coming few years.

Challenges before us as Palestinians to preserve the identity of our children in Jerusalem

First: The Challenges of Maintaining the Palestinian Curriculum Education

The challenges might differ from one group to another within the Palestinian society as follows:

- 1- The challenge of parents of students and school principals controlled by the occupation municipality (55% of students): They need to preserve the Palestinian curriculum, and this requires parents to collectively demand that their children are taught the Palestinian curriculum.
- 2- The challenge of private schools, especially those that receive fees from the occupation municipality (34% of students): This lies in maintaining their independence, and enabling them, over time, to cover their costs without subsidies from the occupation municipality, in addition to developing their buildings and programs to enable them to maintain the numbers of their students and continue teaching the Palestinian curriculum. This requires substantial support to support their operating and development costs.
- 3- The challenge of the Public Endowment schools and UNRWA schools (11% of students): This requires developing their buildings and programs and providing additional free of charge schools in the city.

Second: The challenge of providing additional classrooms

The spaces available in schools within the Palestinian umbrella are ideally sufficient to serve 31,500 students, but in fact, they serve 45,500 students. The schools suffer from periodic maintenance and renovation needs, as many of them are located in old buildings.

The occupation takes advantage of the lack of sufficient classrooms on the Palestinian side, and imposes the Bagrut curriculum on every new school it builds. Accordingly, the needs include:

1- Adding 560 classrooms to accommodate 14,000 students. This represents the difference between what the existing schools are now accommodating, and what they are ideally supposed to accommodate.

2- Annually Adding 80 classrooms to accommodate the annual increase in the number of students amounting to 2,000 students.

ⁱ <https://www.palestine-studies.org/sites/default/files/bookspdf/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9%20%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%20%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%AB%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://mada-research.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/NL-AgbariaJaraisy-Education.pdf>