

With the recent Israeli government schools in East Jerusalem (EJ) have seen an increase in attempts to control the education system. Recently, the Israeli Ministry of Education (MoE), headed by former extreme right wing Knesset member Naftali Bennett, approved a plan to provide financial support only to schools that teach Israeli curriculum in occupied East Jerusalem. The plan by the new Minister of Education will include more training for teachers and extra hours of teaching, supervision, music, and art. The Minister of Education stated plainly the motives behind this new plan, "I want to aid the process of Israelization".ⁱ



As a consequence of the illegal Israeli annexation of occupied EJ, Palestinians are subject to Israeli law. EJ children are entitled to free public education from the age of 5 to 18, in accordance with the Israeli 1949 Compulsory Education Law. However, since the occupation in 1967 one of the major problems concerning education has been Israel's continued intent to de-Palestinize the schools in EJ, by trying to change the Palestinian curriculum and by introducing the Israeli curriculum in the schools.

Historical Background

With almost 50 years of Israeli occupation and annexation of EJ, Palestinian schools in the city have had to cope with severe and increasing hardships. In 1967, Israel's MoE and the Israeli Municipality of Jerusalem (Jerusalem Municipality) tried to impose their own curriculum on Palestinian schools. Following resistance by the students, teachers and families, the Israeli authorities adopted a heavily censored version of the Jordanian curriculum in 1980. The Palestinian education system in Jerusalem is operated by five separate authorities: the Islamic Waqf, the Israeli MoE, the Jerusalem Municipality, the private sector (including churches, monasteries, Islamic charitable societies, and individuals) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Coordination among these authorities is minimal to non-existent, resulting in major discrepancies in the quality of education children receive.

Palestinian Curriculum

In 1994, after signing the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian Authority began to develop a Palestinian curriculum with international supervision, and in accordance with the Oslo Accords, in order to replace the Jordanian curriculum. In 2000, the Palestinian schools in EJ started to use it.ⁱⁱ

Discrimination

The educational sector is negatively impacted by institutionalized discrimination and substandard infrastructure: in spite of several high court decisions there is still a shortage of 1000 classrooms, a substandard quality of existing facilities, and severe access restrictions for teachers and students.ⁱⁱⁱ According to the Israeli Compulsory Education Law of 1949, children between the ages of 5 and 18 are entitled to free public education. A total of 106,907 Palestinian students are divided into five categories of school management.^{iv}

2016 education figures^v

Type of school system	% of Palestinian students enrolled
Jerusalem Municipality and Ministry of Education	43.80
Private	32.91
Sub-contracting schools	7.30
Al-Waqf	14.23
UNWRA	1.76

Lack of educational cohesion, mounting discriminatory processes, and an oppressive surrounding environment all contribute greatly to a skyrocketing rate of school dropout amongst Palestinian youth in EJ. An estimated 36% of East Jerusalemites fail to complete high school, with many defaulting into the child labour workforce.^{vi} The Jerusalem Municipality does little to deter this trend from growing, as 30% of EJ schools lack any dropout prevention program whatsoever and another 40% have only minimal services related to such prevention.^{vii} A Palestinian student in EJ receives less than half of the budget allocated to an Israeli student.^{viii}

Education Control

De-Palestinization of the Palestinian curriculum produced by the Israeli Ministry of Education

In 2011, the Jerusalem Municipality started censoring the Palestinian curriculum by instructing schools in EJ to only purchase textbooks prepared by the Jerusalem Municipality and the Israeli MoE. Doing so obligated these schools to impose a syllabus of the Palestinian Curriculum that conveys a biased perspective of historical events in favour of the occupying State.

The syllabus presents a distorted view on Palestine. It omits any recognition of the Palestinian national identity, the Nakba, the Occupation, expansion of illegal settlements, resistance efforts, or Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian state.^{ix} The syllabus names Jerusalem as the united capital of Israel. It likewise entails the removal of the following:^x

- The Palestinian Education Ministry logo (replaced with the Jerusalem Municipality logo);
- A portion in the first-grade book requiring children to draw/colour the Palestinian flag;
- Passages about the Palestinian refugee right of return;
- Lessons about significant cities in Palestinian history, such as Akka (Acre);

Imposing the Israeli curriculum on EJ schools: a threat to the Palestinian national identity

For the 2013-2014 year, the Jerusalem Municipality and the Israeli MoE introduced a plan to encourage EJ schools to adopt the Israeli curriculum. Not only is this another attempt to de-Palestinize EJ schools, a study of the Israeli Arabic-language books also revealed that:

- The Israeli curriculum does not recognize the Palestinians as a people; it identified the Palestinians as others, minorities, Muslims, Christians or Druse;
- Contents of the textbooks undermine Palestinian students' cultural and national identities, for example by using transliterated Hebrew names of geographic sites, or by stating that Jews and non-Jews live in the Galilee, without mentioning the word "Arab" or "Palestinian";
- In history books the Torah is used to illustrate Jewish history. Jewish people are considered the owners of the land and everyone else is referred to as temporary 'passengers'. It is stated that the Jews came and built the country in 1948 and there is no mentioning of what happened before that date. The books ignore the presence of the Arab-Palestinian people in Israel and stress the Promised Land of the Jewish people. Furthermore the books lack any analytical approach, as opposed to the books used for the Jewish curriculum;
- In geography books all history about the Nakba is hidden. The curriculum stresses the importance of Israeli citizenship and loyalty to the area. The books state Israel is a democratic state because this is what is written in the Israeli declaration of independence. The books also highlight discrimination against Jews in Europe but there is no mention of discrimination against Arabs. The books are translated from Hebrew and as a result have an extremely Zionist narrative;
- In math books for 8-15-year-olds there are at least 7,532 mistakes; in three geography and history books there are 3,939 mistakes. Hundreds of mistakes were also found in textbooks for the study of the Arabic language, including mistakes in syntax and grammar, and the use of transliterated Hebrew instead of the appropriate Arabic terms;^{xi}

A third tool in the process of Israelization of the education system is a campaign aimed at undermining the quality of the Palestinian curriculum.^{xii} It should encourage students to do the Israeli Bagrut high school exam, instead of the Palestinian one, because this last one is not admissible for Israeli universities (although widely recognized elsewhere). Additionally Palestinian students are invited to special orientation programs for Israeli universities. Activities during the orientation are aimed at changing the mentality, culture, and identity of the Palestinian student.^{xiii}

Year	Palestinian students in Jerusalem taking the Israeli Bagrut high school exam ^{xiv}
2013	1,392
2014	1,554
2015	1,934

Extra funding for, conditioning funding on adopting the Israeli curriculum

In January 2016, the media revealed that the MoE are planning to put pressure on schools in EJ to switch from the Palestinian curriculum to the Israeli one. Extra funding would be made available to schools that decided to make the switch. The Minister of Education has been quoted as stating that he wants “to provide a strong tailwind to any school that chooses the Israeli curriculum. My policy is clear: I want to aid the process of Israelization.”^{xv} Currently most public schools in EJ teach the Palestinian curriculum. Some schools offer students a choice between the two curriculums. The Israeli matriculation exam has become more popular because universities in Israel do not admit students who have passed the Palestinian matriculation exam.^{xvi}

In August 2016, the media reported that the Minister of Jerusalem Affairs and Heritage Ze'ev Elkin decided to condition transfers of budgets for renovation to Palestinian schools in EJ (some NIS 20 million (US \$5.28 million dollars)) on the adoption of an Israeli-authored school curriculum. Conditioning the transfer of educational budgets in this manner is illegal, as the law prohibits unequal [budget] allocations and discrimination between institutions dependent upon government ministries; government and municipal budgets must be allocated equally and according to clear and written criterion. As only Palestinian schools will be harmed by this decision, it also constitutes discrimination on the basis of nationality. Further the ministry has no authority to condition budget transfers on changes in educational content.^{xvii}

It should be noted that the budget allocated schools using the Palestinian curriculum is 60% of that allocated to those using the Jewish Israeli one. Settlement schools receive 170% compared to the Palestinian schools.^{xviii}

As the occupying power, Israel has no jurisdiction to change the education system in the occupied territory. Yet it maintains its policy of discrimination by its decisions to increase the funding or condition funding for schools on adopting the Israeli curriculum.

The Civic Council for Education in Jerusalem calls upon the international community to give a protective response and to exercise its third-state responsibility for human rights violations by:

- Diplomatic interventions which ensure that relevant Israeli authorities will abstain from all further efforts to impose its own curriculum and censored text books on East Jerusalem schools, reinstate the original Palestinian curriculum and text books in all Israeli-operated public schools, and provide unconditional permits and funds for maintenance and improvement of educational facilities;
- Concluding that Israel is violating not only the right to education under IHL and IHRL, but also the right to cultural identity and the right to receive information.

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- ⁱ O. Kashti and N. Hasson, Israel's Education Ministry to Pay East Jerusalem Schools to 'Israelize' Curriculum, Haaretz, 29 January 2016, available at: <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.700219>.
- ⁱⁱ J. Sokolower, Education under Occupation: East Jerusalem, an interview with Zakaria Odeh, Alternet, 13 April 2016, available at: <http://www.alternet.org/education/education-under-occupation-east-jerusalem>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ ACRI, East Jerusalem 2015: Facts and Figures, 12 May 2015, available at: <http://www.acri.org.il/en/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/EJ-Facts-and-Figures-2015.pdf>; ACRI, HCJ: Authorities Have 5 Years to Provide Public Education in East Jerusalem, available at: <http://www.acri.org.il/en/2011/02/06/high-court-ruling-authorities-have-5-years-to-provide-free-public-education-in-east-jerusalem/>.
- ^{iv} Ibid.
- ^v Education Department Jerusalem, Presentation Education Numbers 2016.
- ^{vi} O. Maimon and others, Falling between the Cracks: Student Dropout and the Shortage of Classrooms in East Jerusalem, Ir Amim, August 2015, p. 5, available at: <http://www.ir-amim.org.il/en/node/1410>.
- ^{vii} E. Uri and others, Annual Status Report: The Failing East Jerusalem Education System, Ir Amim and The Association for Civil Rights in Israel, 2013, p. 11.
- ^{viii} N. Hasson, Arab Students in Jerusalem Get Less Than Half the Funding of Jewish Counterparts, Haaretz, 23 August 2016, available at: <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.738104>.
- ^{ix} Civic Coalition for Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem, Palestinian Schools in East Jerusalem Forced to Use Israeli-Censored Textbooks, 5 April 2012, available at: <http://www.civiccoalition-jerusalem.org/press-releases/palestinian-schools-east-jerusalem-forced-use-israeli-censored-textbooks-0>.
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- ^{xi} J. Khoury, Israel's Textbooks in Arabic Are Full of Mistakes, Study Finds, Haaretz, 9 May 2011, available at: <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/israel-s-textbooks-in-arabic-are-full-of-mistakes-study-finds-1.360617>.
- ^{xii} K. Shuttleworth, For Arabs in Israel, Curriculum Choice Is Politically Charged, New York Times, 19 January 2014, available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/20/world/middleeast/for-arabs-in-israel-curriculum-choice-is-politically-charged.html?_r=0.
- ^{xiii} T. Neshet, Israel to Launch Campaign to Attract More Arab Students to Universities, Haaretz, 21 October 2012, available at: <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israel-to-launch-campaign-to-attract-more-arab-students-to-universities.premium-1.471184>; ACRI, Interview with Attorney Nisreen Alyan.
- ^{xiv} N. Hasson, More Arab Students in East Jerusalem Seeking Israeli Matriculation Certificate, Haaretz, 30 April 2015, available at: <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.654209>.
- ^{xv} Supra note 1.
- ^{xvi} Ibid.
- ^{xvii} Adalah sent a letter to the Minister of Jerusalem Affairs and Heritage and the Attorney General demanding that they revoke this decision, See Adalah Press Release, "Conditioning budgets for repairing East Jerusalem schools on adoption of Israeli curriculum is illegal," 17 August 2016, available at: <http://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/8888>.
- ^{xviii} N. Hasson, Arab Students in Jerusalem Get Less Than Half the Funding of Jewish Counterparts, Haaretz, 23 August 2016, available at: <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.738104>.