



De-Palestinization of Education in Jerusalem: Education challenges pose threat to Palestinian national identity

The Civic Council for Education in Jerusalem

With a new right-wing Israeli government, schools in East Jerusalem (EJ) have seen an increase in attempts to Israelize their curriculum. 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 EJ. The Minister of Education stated plainly the motives behind this new plan: “I want to aid the process of Israelization.”¹



As the occupying power, Israel has no jurisdiction to change the education system in the occupied territory. However, since the 1967 illegal Israeli annexation of occupied EJ, Palestinians have been subjected to discriminatory Israeli law. **Bennett’s plans for “Israelization” therefore entail an intensification of de-Palestinization, which includes intersecting curricular, economic, political, and military interventions to strip Palestinian youth in East Jerusalem of their rights to education, identity, and self-determination.**

Historical Background

- In 1948 **Jerusalem was divided** into West Jerusalem under Israeli rule and East Jerusalem with the West Bank under Jordanian rule. The Jordanian education system was then implemented in EJ schools.²
- After the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem in 1967, Israel’s MoE and the Jerusalem Municipality **imposed the Israeli education curriculum on Palestinian schools** in EJ, provoking the immediate reaction of Palestinian students, teachers, and parents, who went on strike in order to preserve the old Jordanian curriculum and refused to enroll their children in schools financed by the Jerusalem Municipality and Israeli MoE.³
- In July 1969 the Israeli government tried again to strengthen its control over EJ schools, passing Law 564 on school supervision that **enabled Israel to fully oversee Palestinian schools in the city**, including private schools.⁴ This law also called for the implementation of the Israeli curriculum in EJ Palestinian schools, which attempted to delegitimize and suppress the Palestinian narrative and identity.
- Palestinian education stakeholders including school administrators, teachers, and the education department in EJ rejected the law, refusing to cooperate with the Israeli MoE. In retaliation, **Israel ordered for the closure of the Palestinian education department in EJ.**⁵ The Palestinian general strike continued until 1971, with very few students attending the Palestinian schools.

¹ Kashti, Or, and Nir Hasson. "Israel's Education Ministry to pay East Jerusalem schools to 'Israelize' curriculum." Haaretz.com. January 28, 2016. <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.700219>.

² Nuseibeh, Rawan Asali. *Political Conflict and Exclusion in Jerusalem: The Provision of Education and Social Services*. Vol. 19. Routledge, 2015.

³ Civic Coalition for Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem. "Briefing note regarding De-Palestinization of education in occupied East Jerusalem." February 2014. http://www.civicoalition-jerusalem.org/uploads/9/3/6/8/93682182/briefing_note_regarding_de-palestinization_of_education_in_occupied_east_jerusalem.pdf.

⁴ Civic Coalition for Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem. "Education under occupation: The case of Jerusalem." http://www.civicoalition-jerusalem.org/uploads/9/3/6/8/93682182/education_under_occupation-_the_case_of_jerusalem.pdf.

⁵ Al-Ashab, Itedal. *Education in Jerusalem*. 2013.

- In 1974 the Jerusalem Municipality agreed to teach both the Jordanian and the Israeli curriculum, although Palestinian educational institutions continued rejecting the Israeli curriculum.⁶
- By 1980 all of the Palestinian schools in the city were teaching the Jordanian syllabus, although the **Israeli authorities continued to review textbooks**.⁷
- Following the 1994 Oslo Accords, a **Palestinian curriculum was developed under international supervision** to replace the Jordanian curriculum; in 2000, Palestinian schools in EJ began using the curriculum.⁸

De-Palestinization through Curriculum

The Israeli MoE and Municipality of Jerusalem engage in the censorship of Palestinian curriculum and the coerced imposition of Israeli curriculum in EJ schools. In 2011 the Jerusalem Municipality censored the Palestinian curriculum by instructing schools in EJ to **only purchase textbooks prepared by the Jerusalem Municipality and the Israeli MoE**.⁹ Doing so obligated these schools to impose a syllabus of the Palestinian Curriculum that conveys a **distorted perspective of historical events in favor of the occupying State**, including the removal of the following¹⁰:

- Any recognition of the Palestinian national identity, the Nakba, the Occupation, expansion of illegal settlements, resistance efforts, or the Palestinian refugee right of return;
- The Palestinian Education Ministry logo (replaced with the Jerusalem Municipality logo);
- A portion in the first-grade book where children draw and color the Palestinian flag;
- Lessons about significant cities in Palestinian history, such as Akka (Acre); and
- Mentions of Jerusalem as Palestine’s capital, instead naming Jerusalem as the united capital of Israel.

Educators or schools face sanctions if they violate Israeli law by publicly commemorating the Nakba.¹¹

Israeli initiatives have also **pressured Palestinian students into taking the Israeli Bagrut high school exam** rather than the Palestinian Tawjihi exam. In 2012, for example, the Israeli MoE began a campaign to expand Palestinian inclusion in Israeli universities.¹² Since **Israeli universities do not recognize the Tawjihi** and only accept a limited number of Palestinian students entering with it (even though the exam is widely recognized elsewhere)¹³, more Palestinian students have had to take the Bagrut in order to be eligible for admission. Palestinian students are also **pressured into pursuing secondary schools that use the Israeli curriculum because it aligns to the Bagrut**.¹⁴ Data in the years following the campaign show that more Palestinian students are taking the Bagrut each year:

Year	Palestinian students in Jerusalem taking the Israeli Bagrut high school exam ¹⁵
2013	1,392
2014	1,554

⁶ CCPRJ, “Briefing note.”

⁷ Cheshin, Amir, Bill Hutman, and Avi Melamed. *Separate and unequal: The Inside Story of Israeli Rule in East Jerusalem*. Harvard University Press, 2009.

⁸ CCPRJ, “Briefing note.”

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Kairos Palestine. *Easter alert statement*. April 2014, as cited in

http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/ISR/INT_CCPR_CSS_ISR_18169_E.pdf.

¹¹ CCPRJ, “Briefing note.”

¹² Neshet, Talila. “Israel to launch campaign to attract more Arab students to universities.” Haaretz.com. October 21, 2012. <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israel-to-launch-campaign-to-attract-more-arab-students-to-universities.premium-1.471184>; Lubell, Maayan, and Suheir Sheikh. “Carrot, Not Stick: Israel Pushes Its Curriculum in Palestinian Schools.” U.S. News & World Report. June 29, 2017. Accessed July 31, 2017. <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2017-06-29/carrot-not-stick-israel-pushes-its-curriculum-in-palestinian-schools>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Shuttleworth, Kate. “For Arabs in Israel, Curriculum Choice Is Politically Charged.” The New York Times. January 19, 2014.

https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/20/world/middleeast/for-arabs-in-israel-curriculum-choice-is-politically-charged.html?_r=0.

¹⁵ Hasson, Nir. “More Arab students in East Jerusalem seeking Israeli matriculation certificate.” Haaretz. May 11, 2015. <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.654209>.

Once admitted to an Israeli university under the initiative, Palestinian students are required to attend special orientation programs aimed at changing the mentality, culture, and identity of the Palestinian student.¹⁶ Through these processes, the shift towards Bagrut entails the delegitimizing of Palestinian curriculum.

For the 2013-2014 year, the Jerusalem Municipality and the Israeli MoE introduced a plan to **pressure EJ schools to adopt the Israeli curriculum**.¹⁷ A study of the Israeli curriculum's Arabic-language books¹⁸ revealed that:

- **The Israeli curriculum does not recognize the Palestinians as a people**; it identified the Palestinians as "others," "minorities," "Muslims," "Christians," or "Druse," as in stating that Jews and non-Jews live in the Galilee with no use of the words "Arab" or "Palestinian." Similarly, contents of the textbooks ignore Palestinian geographic names and instead use transliterated Hebrew names of geographic sites.
- In addition to the use of transliterated Hebrew instead of the appropriate Arabic terms, **the books contain thousands of factual mistakes**, including at least 7,532 mistakes in math books for 8-15-year-olds, 3,939 mistakes in three geography and history books, and hundreds of mistakes in Arabic language studies books.
- **The curriculum stresses the importance of Israeli citizenship and loyalty to Israel** as a democratic state established by its declaration of independence. The books highlight discrimination against Jews in Europe but do not mention discrimination against Arabs.
- The history and geography books **rely on the dominant Zionist narrative**, including stating that Jews came and built the country in 1948 without mention of the Nakba or historical events in Palestine prior to that date. The books rely on the Torah to illustrate Jewish history, with Jewish people considered the owners of the land and everyone else referred to as temporary "passengers." The books ignore the presence of the Arab-Palestinian people in Israel and stress the Promised Land of the Jewish people.

In spite of pressures by the Israeli MoE to use this curriculum, most public schools in EJ continued to teach the censored Palestinian curriculum, with few schools deciding to change.¹⁹

In January 2016 media reports revealed that the Israeli MoE plans to pressure schools in EJ to abandon the Palestinian curriculum through **economic coercion, offering extra funding to schools that agree to switch to the Israeli curriculum**.²⁰ The Israeli Minister of Education, Naftali Bennett, stated 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**."²¹ Further details reported in August 2016 showed that the Minister of Jerusalem Affairs and Heritage Ze'ev Elkin decided that the **conditional funding would include transfers of budgets for renovation to Palestinian schools in EJ** totaling NIS 20 million (US \$5.28 million dollars).²² In addition to going beyond the authority or scope of the MoE, this plan would **violate laws prohibiting unequal allocations and discrimination** between institutions dependent upon government ministries.²³

¹⁶ Hijazi, Yahya. *Education in Jerusalem : Between an organized entity and a conflict over identity*. 2016.

¹⁷ CCPRJ, "Briefing note."

¹⁸ Khoury, Jack. "Israel's textbooks in Arabic are full of mistakes, study finds." Haaretz. May 08, 2011. <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/israel-s-textbooks-in-arabic-are-full-of-mistakes-study-finds-1.360617>.

¹⁹ CCPRJ, "Briefing note."

²⁰ Kashti and Hasson, "Israel's Education Ministry."

²¹ Ibid.

²² Adalah sent a letter to the Minister of Jerusalem Affairs and Heritage and the Attorney General demanding that they revoke this decision; see Adalah.

"Conditioning budgets for repairing East Jerusalem schools on adoption of Israeli curriculum is illegal." August 17, 2016.

<https://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/8888>.

²³ CCPRJ, from statements about education in Jerusalem.

De-Palestinization through Disinvestment

While Israeli curriculum policies contribute heavily to de-Palestinization, Palestinian youth in EJ also experience de-Palestinization through disinvestment, disenfranchisement, militarization, and criminalization. **Palestinian students in EJ receives less than half of the budget allocated to Israeli students in West Jerusalem**; the budget allocated to schools using the Palestinian curriculum is 60% of that allocated to those using the Jewish Israeli one, and settlement schools receive 170% compared to the budget allocated to Palestinian schools.²⁴ The Israeli disinvestment in EJ schools has contributed to a **great shortage of educational equipment**, including sports equipment, recreational space, computer labs, science labs, and school supplies.²⁵

Schools in EJ rarely have the funding or permission from Israeli authorities to maintain, improve, or expand upon their existing infrastructure. With an estimated **shortage of 2,200 classrooms in EJ**²⁶, existing classrooms are overcrowded and have become challenging learning environments for both teachers and students. An estimated **8,000 to 9,000 students do not have a seat** or are not eligible for a seat in the schools in EJ²⁷. Many of the current school buildings are substandard for a proper educational environment, with some **EJ schools located within former residential buildings that are unsuitable** to accommodate for a large number of students.²⁸ Given the extreme planning and building restrictions that Israeli authorities place on building in EJ, many schools have added necessary facilities without the building permits and have subsequently been ordered **demolition orders on spaces such as laboratories, classrooms, and recreational grounds**.²⁹ Palestinian youth continue to learn in these schools while knowing that they are subject to bulldozing at any time.

The Israeli Municipality, moreover, has removed most of the established and often historical Arabic names of streets and places in East Jerusalem and given them new names in Hebrew.^{30 31} Likewise, Israeli laws in Jerusalem require that Arab businesses to have the majority of their signs in Hebrew.³² Meanwhile, the streets of entire neighborhoods in East Jerusalem still remain unnamed and without investment in proper signage in Arabic.³³ Palestinian youth in EJ must travel to school in the context of these linguistic attacks, which target the Palestinian Arab character of East Jerusalem and contribute to de-Palestinization.

It is under these conditions that the Israeli MoE has proposed to give EJ schools educational funding conditional upon the adoption of the Israeli curriculum³⁴; **schools that choose to continue to use the Palestinian curriculum will suffer even further from disinvestment**, forcing an even greater de-Palestinization of EJ schools.

²⁴ Hasson, Nir. "Arab students in Jerusalem get less than half the funding of Jewish counterparts." Haaretz. August 23, 2016. <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.738104>.

²⁵ CCPRJ, "Education under occupation."

²⁶ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Occupied Palestinian Territory. "East Jerusalem: Key humanitarian concerns." August 18, 2014. <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/east-jerusalem-key-humanitarian-concerns-august-2014>.

²⁷ Sokolower, Jody. "Education under occupation: East Jerusalem." Rethinking Schools. Spring 2016. <https://www.rethinkingschools.org/articles/education-under-occupation-east-jerusalem-an-interview-with-zakaria-odeh>.

²⁸ Association for Civil Rights in Israel. "Failed Grade: East Jerusalem's Failing Educational System." August 2012. <http://www.acri.org.il/en/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/EJeducation2012en.pdf>.

²⁹ CCPRJ, "Education under occupation."

³⁰ Civic Coalition for Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem, Coalition for Jerusalem, and Society of St. Yves. "'De-Palestinization' and Forcible Transfer of Palestinians: A situation of systematic breaches of State obligations under the ICCPR." 2014. Joint NGO report to the UN Human Rights Committee.

³¹ "30 East Jerusalem streets given Hebrew names, enraging Arab residents." Times of Israel. September 21, 2015. <http://www.timesofisrael.com/hebrew-street-names-okayed-for-east-jerusalem-enraging-arab-residents/>

³² Lidman, Melanie. "Law requires E. J'lem businesses to have signs in Hebrew." December 17, 2010. Jerusalem Post. <http://www.jpost.com/National-News/Law-requires-e-jlem-businesses-to-have-signs-in-Hebrew>

³³ Association for Civil Rights in Israel. "East Jerusalem 2015: Facts and Figures." May 2015. <http://www.acri.org.il/en/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/EJ-Facts-and-Figures-2015.pdf>.

³⁴ Kashti and Hasson, "Israel's Education Ministry."

De-Palestinization through Disenfranchisement

Decisions around curriculum and budgeting in the majority of schools in EJ are made by the Israeli MoE and Jerusalem Municipality without the support or authority of Palestinian families and communities. Palestinian students are spread across five school systems within EJ, distributed as follows³⁵:

Type of school system	% of Palestinian students enrolled
Jerusalem Municipality and Ministry of Education	42.8
Private	31.4
Sub-contracting schools (subsidized by the MoE)	10
Al-Waqf	13.8
UNRWA	2

Without Palestinians' access to decision-making power over education for the majority of Palestinian youth in EJ, **these disparate systems lack a cohesive strategy** to build high-quality education for students and instead often have **contradictory or conflicting goals**.³⁶ Adequate data cannot be collected or compiled across the five systems, making short- or long-term educational planning extremely difficult.³⁷ These factors, compounded with inequitable funding, result in **greatly varied levels of quality of students' educational experiences across schools in EJ**.³⁸

De-Palestinization through Militarization and Criminalization

As Palestinian youth face de-Palestinization through curriculum policies in increasingly underfunded and undemocratic schools, they also endure ongoing militarization caused by the Israeli military occupation of EJ. **Students are forced to cross checkpoints on a daily basis** in order to attend school, resulting in frequent delays, tardiness, and absences.³⁹ More than a quarter of people in EJ live in neighborhoods that are physically segregated from the rest of the city because of constructed walls.⁴⁰ The wall has had a devastating effect on Palestinian access to employment, contributing to **86.6% of Palestinian children in EJ living below the poverty line**.⁴¹ EJ schools struggle to recruit and retain qualified teachers, who are disincentivized from teaching in EJ because they are also required to navigate checkpoints, closures, and the wall to reach their schools.⁴² As some schools in EJ have tried to offer pay increases to counter this challenge, most of the EJ schools under Israeli MoE authority cannot afford the incentives and therefore experiencing a **widening gap of teacher salaries and teacher qualifications**.⁴³ The shortage is even greater for the subjects of math, English, and science.⁴⁴

Violence against Palestinian youth in EJ by Israeli forces increased after recent passage of legal changes targeting Palestinian children. Palestinian youth are subjected to frequent arrest, while their families are made to pay hefty fines in the midst of worsening economic conditions.⁴⁵ In 2010, for example, an estimated **1,200 minors were detained from Jerusalem; of these, only 230 were charged** and either released on bail, placed under house arrest,

³⁵ Palestinian Ministry of Education. "Jerusalem Municipality Annual Book 2014-2015."

³⁶ Civic Coalition for Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem. "The right to education campaign: Education in Jerusalem." 2008. www.civiccoalition-jerusalem.org/uploads/9/3/6/8/93682182/the_right_to_education_campaign.pdf.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Hever, Shir. *Education in East Jerusalem: Report on the educational system in East Jerusalem*. Alternative Information Center, 2007.

⁴⁰ Association for Civil Rights in Israel. "East Jerusalem 2015: Facts and Figures."

⁴¹ Hasson, Nir. "Four out of five East Jerusalemites live in poverty, a sharp rise over past years." Haaretz. June 22, 2016. <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.726357>.

⁴² Sokolower, "Education under occupation."

⁴³ CCPRJ, "The right to education campaign."

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Addameer. "Arrests of Children in Jerusalem: Detention, Education, Financial Strains and Social Burdens." June 06, 2017. <http://www.addameer.org/publications/arrests-children-jerusalem-detention-education-financial-strains-and-social-burdens>.

or made to do community service.⁴⁶ **Children detained in EJ under the Israeli civic law system have experienced blindfolding, physical violence, verbal abuse, threats, and strip searches.**⁴⁷ In 2015, 38.5% of arrested EJ youth were taken at night, 87.7% were restrained during their arrest, and 89.2% did not have a family member or lawyer present.⁴⁸ Around 75 Palestinian children are currently incarcerated in Israeli prisons and detention centers, with cases of detained youth experiencing **a loss of school time from 3 months to 1 year and some not returning to school ever** after their detention.⁴⁹ In addition to losing instructional time, Palestinian youth in EJ who experience arrest and detainment are subject to **disorientation, loss of control of self-determination, low self-esteem, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which “adversely affect any future pursuit of education** and are considered a major cause of former Palestinian child prisoners’ reluctance to return to school.”⁵⁰

Effects of De-Palestinization on Students in East Jerusalem

The De-Palestinization of education in EJ through curriculum, disinvestment, disenfranchisement, and militarization all contribute greatly to a **skyrocketing rate of school dropout among Palestinian youth in EJ**. An estimated 36% of East Jerusalemites fail to complete high school, with many defaulting into the child labor workforce.⁵¹ 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.⁵²

Israel’s control of Palestinian education in EJ remains a great threat as it is intentionally designed to “Israelize”⁵³ and therefore de-Palestinize EJ youth. Each Israeli educational policy seeks to delegitimize the current Palestinian narrative and implement a narrative that suits the desires of the Israeli government. **Israeli control over Palestinian education denies Palestinians the right to self-determination, as it attempts to strip future Palestinian generations of their history, their culture, and their right to exist.**

CCPRJ Call for International Support

CCPRJ calls upon the international community to give a protective response and to exercise its third-state responsibility for human rights violations through diplomatic interventions to:

- 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 textbooks** in all Israeli-operated public schools;
- **Provide unconditional permits and funds** for maintenance and improvement of educational facilities; and
- **Hold Israel accountable** for violating not only the right to education under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, but also the right to cultural identity and the right to receive information for Palestinian youth in East Jerusalem.

⁴⁶ Addameer. "East Jerusalem Prisoners." July 2017. <http://www.addameer.org/content/east-jerusalem-prisoners>.

⁴⁷ Defense for Children International Palestine. "Annual Report 2016."

⁴⁸ Defense for Children Palestine. "No Way to Treat a Child: Palestinian children in the Israeli military detention system." April 14, 2016. http://www.dci-palestine.org/palestinian_children_in_the_israeli_military_detention_system.

⁴⁹ Addameer, "Arrests of Children."

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Maimon, Oshrat. "Falling between the cracks: Student dropout and the shortage of classrooms in East Jerusalem." Ir Amim. August 2015. <http://www.ir-amim.org.il/en/node/1410>.

⁵² Eitan, Uri, Aviv Tatarsky, Oshrat Maimon, Ronit Sela, Nisreen Alyan, and Keren Tzafir. "Annual Status Report: The Failing East Jerusalem Education System." August 2013. <http://www.acri.org.il/en/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/EJ-edu-report-2013.pdf>.

⁵³ Kashti and Hasson, "Israel’s Education Ministry."