

Education in Jerusalem
and
It's Impact on the Palestinian Identity:

Towards Sustainable National Educational Policies

Prepared by:
Mr. Tahseen Yaqeen
Mr. Oday Abu Karsh
Ms. Rawan Sharqawi

2015

The Palestinian Association for Empowerment and Local Development- “REFORM”

Jerusalem- September 2015

General Framework:

as part of REFORM’s interest in ensuring the Palestinian identity of Palestinian citizens in Jerusalem (Jerusalemites), rebuilding the connections between Jerusalemites and their cultural and social surrounding, identifying the obstacles that stand against realizing this goal, reinforcing the Palestinian cultural and social heritage, enhancing participation of youth and woman in political life, especially in Jerusalem, revitalizing the collective Palestinian identity, the Palestinian Association for Empowerment and Local Development- REFORM implemented several Round-Table meetings entitled: “Education in Jerusalem and its Impact on the Palestinian Identity” with partnership with several related bodies such as **Faisal Al-Husseini Foundation, the Directorate of Education in Jerusalem, the Parental Teacher Association, the National Coalition for the Defense of Rights of Palestinians in Jerusalem, in addition to a group of educators and social activists of Jerusalem and a group of schools of Jerusalem Directorate of Education as Al-Quds School for Males, Al-Ram Secondary Boys School and AL-Eman Secondary School.**

This effort as part of a quest to investigate the actual status of education in Jerusalem and its impact on the Palestinian identity, and in an attempt to find possible solutions leading to the development of the educational system and resisting attempts of isolating Jerusalem, and enhancing mutual social understanding in it.

Mr. Tahseen Yaqeen, an educational expert and director of the follow-up and evaluation of Gender unit in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Mr. Oday Abu Karsh and Ms. Rawan Sharqawi from REFORM supervised the meeting and formulated the paper of intended policies.

The status of education in Jerusalem:

Education in Jerusalem faces a state of disintegration in general. Several educational systems are applied on students, such systems have different

references. Israel controls the governmental schools as governments (including the Israeli occupation Government) inherit each other.

Private schools and schools run by UNRWA remained as is, other schools, mainly schools run by the Jordanian endowment authority are treated differently by Israel. This state became strongly established after signing the Peace Accords between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and Israel as a supplement to the Oslo Accords, where the mutual Palestinian Jordanian understanding contributed to run these schools by the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

Therefore, the status of education in Jerusalem takes several complicated forms of dependency, the curriculum, and the infrastructure; as a result, it suffers and faces many educational problems, such as:

Limited Non-Curricula Programs:

Non-Curricula educational programs are of great importance in the process of education. Due to the limited financial resources and with the absence of an integrative education strategy and of the so many authorities running the educational process, schools in Jerusalem face the lack of non-curricula programs and supportive educational systems.

Limited Interactive Spaces among Jerusalemite Students:

Physical spaces are narrowed, thus leading to restricting and narrowing educational spaces, especially yards. This narrowness and decrease in these spaces leads to narrowness in horizons and to bullying and negative interaction among students especially in crowded classes, playgrounds, and facilities, the chance for positive interaction among students, thus, fades away.

Absence of Distinguishing Standards According to Individual Skills:

Differences in individual abilities and skills, their effects on students, identifying their entrance levels, sectors to join and engagement in their societies are very natural. However, the case in Jerusalem is very different. Such factors do not decide the future of students there, on the contrary, the type of school and their body of reference are the most decisive factors that determine their future, development, level of income rather than their

abilities and skills, which leads to the instability of social understanding and the creation of a society of various classes.

Decay of Infrastructure:

The deteriorating state of infrastructures, the poor inadequate sanitation in Al-Awqaf schools (Palestinian government schools), the decrease and the absence of appropriate yards, the limited spaces and facilities such as labs and libraries, in addition to the crowded classes which created a serious psychological effect on students and affected their ability to achieve the desired objectives, to interact and build their individual skills, all perpetuated the current social classes and deepened differences among students due to differences in financial potentials of their families.

Inability to Monitor the Drop-out Phenomenon:

Drop-out of school phenomenon is considered one of the serious problems the educational sector faces. This problem and its effects are remarkably increasing in Jerusalem. The different responsible supervising authorities there (Israeli, Palestinian, Private, Private companies, and UNRWA), the political as well as the security status, the occupation municipality's attempts to Israelize services including schools are all negative factors raising drop-out of school percentages and make it very difficult to find appropriate solutions. The ability to get actual real percentages of drop-outs becomes very restricted due to the many supervising authorities running the educational systems, as a result, the reasons behind dropping out of schools are difficult to identify and the possibility of treating it fades away.

Despite all these difficulties, studies show high rates of drop-outs. A study conducted by the Forum of Arab Thought in 2012 showed that the percentage of drop-outs from the Jerusalem schools mounted to 29%. Here we should point out to procedures to fight and stop this phenomenon with the absence of precise analysis of it, and its connections to the collective Palestinian identity. Most researchers of this aspect see drop-out of school mainly happens because of the desire of students to improve their families' income through joining the Israeli labor market.

Limited Opportunities in Vocational Education especially for Female students:

The different educational systems in Jerusalem have negatively affected the availability of vocational specializations and made such specializations available just for a specific group. Israeli students enjoy availability of majoring and specializing in different vocations. Their schools are highly and technically equipped. In contrast, the Palestinian students suffer from the lack of such facilities and chances. The Israeli authorities deliberately restricted development in Arab schools of Jerusalem and introduction of vocational education. As a result, Palestinian workers become unskillful workers in the Israeli labor market. In addition, there is no safe and secure environment of vocational education for females, which made them unwilling to join such type of education, though joining vocational education is crucial, highly benefits society and is a necessity for a comprehensive social development.

Differences in Regulations and School Vacations:

Differences in regulations and instructions regarding school holidays and school working days, and the length of these days confuse most families whose children study in schools supervised by different supervising bodies. Schools run by the Israeli municipality do not work on Israeli occasions or feasts. In addition to the differences image of admitting students of the first grade, where municipality schools differ from Al-Awqaf schools.

| Supervising Authority | Age of Admission |
|--|---|
| Schools run by the Directorate of Education | Up to Feb 7 th , year of admission 2003 |
| Private Schools | Up to April 14 th , year of admission 2003 |
| Municipality Schools and the Israeli Ministry of Education | Up to Dec 25 th , the year is directly preceding the year of admission |
| UNRWA Schools | Up to Jan 31 st , year of admission 2003 |

The Effect of Different Education Systems on the Palestinian Identity in Jerusalem:

It is possible to summarize the effect of the difference of educational systems on the Palestinian identity in Jerusalem as follows:

Israelization of Educational in Jerusalem:

Despite the importance of the variety in educational system and their positive effect, especially culturally and mentally, such an impact does not apply in the case of Jerusalem, in particular, and in Palestine in general.

This is due to the conflicting policies, in addition to the Israeli occupation and its efforts to alienate the educational systems from its Palestinian context, which directly and adversely influence relationship between the different Palestinian components, and the social harmony as well as collective norms and values.

Thus, the Israeli authorities aim to wipe out the Palestinian identity and to weaken the national feelings and identity among Palestinian youth. To achieve this goal, the occupation authorities applied the Israeli curricula which include civic education textbooks that emphasize the Israeli citizenship in the selected Palestinian schools (about 2000 students). Israeli is seeking nowadays to disseminate this experience to the rest of the Palestinian schools (the statistics is drawn from the directorate of Education in Jerusalem).

Moreover, these authorities, for so many decades, tried their best to deform and change facts in the Palestinian curriculum and delete any issues related to the national context. They also impose the Israeli educational system on schools established by them which are known as Municipal Schools, which threatens the Palestinian identity and foretells the disintegration of the Palestinian society into different classes conflicting in their national awareness.

Student's Alienation:

The ever-increasing gap among students affiliated to different contradicting educational systems, increases social alienation and deepens the absence of a collective identity.

Refraining from Participating in National Activities in Some Schools:

The multiplicity of educational systems in Jerusalem has greatly impacted national activities in many schools. As a result, these schools followed certain policies and procedures leading sometimes to canceling national activities and preventing students from celebrating them. This is clearly evident in schools run by the Israeli Municipality and Israeli Ministry of Education. The Israeli authorities prevent students from participating in activities whether physical, cultural, artistic, voluntary or folkloric, which complicates national affiliation and imposes a burden on parents to compensate for this, though they are not mostly able to do so.

Towards Sustainable and National Educational Policies:

The divided educational systems threaten the collective Palestinian identity in Jerusalem, and strengthen the Israeli efforts to Israelize the city completely, particularly, the cultural component. Participants concluded to emphasize the importance of developing a non-curricula supplementary educational programs that provide interactive spaces for Jerusalemite students and improve their engagement in activities that will enhance the collective Palestinian identity in several areas.

So, it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, specifically the Departments of Educational Activities to try their best to design such programs that ultimately activate communication among Jerusalemite students and strengthen interactive contexts among them on the one hand, as well as among them and their families. This paper focuses on several programs in an effort to realize the objectives agreed on by participants and creating policies that are able to deal with the actual status of education in Jerusalem, and the social gaps between the different components of society, in addition to strengthening the collective Palestinian identity, some of these programs are:

- Because of the eminent danger threatening Jerusalemite students, it becomes necessary to coordinate efforts with international agencies and human rights organizations in order to document Israeli violations against Palestinian schools.
- Integration with the Palestinian civil institutions acting in Jerusalem to design and produce supplementary programs that aim to bridge educational gaps in these schools.

- Involving private sector institutions and organizations in Palestine to reinforce the steadfastness of Palestinian schools and protect them from Israelization.
- Integrating with educational institutions in creating interactive tasks that are able to include parents.
- Developing a supervision center through involving experts and volunteers so as to reach schools and treat the problem of drop-outs and academic low achievements.
- Organizing regular competitions and cultural activities in Jerusalem.
 - Supporting cultural centers.
 - Coordinating with the Ministry of Culture to support theatres, arts, especially mobile ones and connect them to the educational process.
 - Establishing a Palestinian endowment to support education in Jerusalem and work on establishing a consultative council including representatives from the private sector, the local sector and the official authority to run this endowment and ensure its sustainability.
 - Developing infrastructure of schools in Jerusalem and involving the community in the educational process.
 - Transforming private schools into communal centers and clubs visited by schoolchildren and other students from other neighborhoods after school day, and in accordance with the newly-declared policy of the Ministry approved by the cabinet, which designates “Saturday” to perform such activities.
 - Encouraging investment in kindergartens since the occupation Municipality has established (4-6 kindergartens). The graduates of these kindergartens are directly moved to schools of the Israeli Ministry of Education. This clearly affects their national upbringing. So, it is of great importance to establish kindergartens affiliated with the Palestinian Ministry of Education and connect them with the Palestinian governmental schools in an effort support Palestinian national upbringing.

- Connecting the Directorate of Education in Jerusalem with its neighboring directorates such as Ramallah and Bethlehem directorates. This can be achieved through shared activities aiming at removing the Israeli closure imposed on both students and teachers of Jerusalem, and enhance the communication of Jerusalemites with their social and cultural surrounding.
- Enhancing the role of social media through encouraging production and presentation of dramas and plays by students, aiming at discussing the educational situation in Jerusalem.
- Providing citizens with brochures that raise their awareness and limit the rate of affiliating to the Bagrut system.
- Encouraging students to tour the city and other provinces too.
- Enhancing the role of student's councils away from politicization.
- Encouraging parents to educate their children through visiting historical, religious and natural places and not only restricting visits to Al-Aqsa Mosque; so as Jerusalem, the province of Jerusalem and the country as a whole, become a substantial entity.

Procedural Frames:

- Inviting the Minister of Education to form a council representing institutions and ministries related to Jerusalem; The Ministry forms a secretariat for this council in order to coordinate efforts in educational action inside Jerusalem. This council is to be run under the auspices of the Department of Jerusalem of the PLO and the National Conference of Jerusalem.
- Increasing the budgets of Jerusalem units in ministries and institutions so as to enable them to organize and implement national and educational activities about Jerusalem.
- Emphasizing national partnerships between the Directorate of Jerusalem and national institutions.
- Enhancing coordination between the Ministry of Education and government officials from other ministries and institutions.

Participants see that the Jerusalem unit in the Ministry of Education has a duty to facilitate and increase the process of coordination among all officials so as to facilitate the education process in Jerusalem.

- Conducting a field research by the Directorate of Education in Jerusalem to investigate students as well as their parent's desire to join the Israeli Bagrut system.
- Targeting students of the Israeli Ministry of Education to raise their national awareness.
- Holding a national conference under the auspices of the Prime Minister to discuss the status of education in Jerusalem and its effects on the collective Palestinian identity.
- Supporting and developing educational media and information.

Conclusion:

No doubt that Education in Palestine, in general, and education in Jerusalem, in particular, face a lot of challenges negatively affecting its quality. The greatest negative impact is related to the collective Palestinian identity which mainly resulted from the multiplicity of educational systems and the supervising authorities, which, in turn, affected the Palestinian social and cultural heritage and the social harmony, and thus proceeded towards isolating the city culturally and socially of its environment.

Therefore, it becomes necessary to work and unify efforts at both the official and the non-official levels to upgrade and improve the status of education in Jerusalem, and overcome and eliminate factors that divide the collective Palestinian identity, which directly affected relationships between the different social components, hence, it is important to start reviving the Palestinian collective identity, and defending the socio-cultural heritage as it is an integral part of the Palestinian identity.

Distribution of Students by supervising bodies in the Holy City

| Supervising Body | No. of Schools | No. of Students | % of Students | No. of Divisions |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Endowments | 38 | 12338 | 15.24 | 480 |
| Private Schools | 66 | 22438 | 27.71 | 888 |
| Municipality and Ministry | 50 | 38785 | 47.90 | 1240 |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| of Education | | | | |
| Certified (semi governmental schools) | 13 | 4714 | 5.82 | 174 |
| UNRWA | 8 | 2697 | 3.33 | 98 |
| Total | 175 | 80972 | 100 | 2880 |

(The statistical table is cited from a study prepared by the Ministry of Education in 2012)