

Education Resilience Under the Occupation- Case of Palestine

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Received 20 August 2023, Revised 21 Sep 2023, Accepted 20 October 2023,
Published 1 May 2024

Abstract

The education system of Palestine has complex history being controlled by different countries such as British, Jordan, Egyptian and Israeli government. In 1967 the Israeli government took control of the education system of Palestine, controlling the entire educational experience of Palestinian students, including, construction, and maintenance of schools, curriculum development and employment of teachers. After the Oslo agreement in 1993, the education system of Palestine was taken over by Palestinian authorities but due to Israeli occupation Palestinian would not be able to construct school buildings without Israeli building permits, Palestinian authorities did not have the right to build or renovate schools and by stopping the students and teachers at checkpoints and walls, Israeli authorities denied education to Palestinian students and teachers.

The oppression by Israeli government is the violation of the United Nations human rights conventions. With few opting for the teaching profession, diminished quality of the teaching education program, with unable to implement a better strategic education plan & others are few challenges faced by the Palestinian educational system. Despite these challenges due to Israeli occupation, Palestinian education system has demonstrated tremendous determination, vision, transformation, and positivity. In this paper the author reviews the challenges and achievements of the Palestinian education journey despite the fierce Israeli occupation.

Keywords: Palestine, Palestinian education system, Palestinian teachers

1. History of Palestinian Education System

During the last hundred years major socio-political changes have taken place in Palestine.(1917-2017) which have impacted social, political and economic conditions of Palestine(Michaels 2017; NasirTucktuck, Baker & Love 2017).These changes contributed to giving structure to the educational practices. Education is pivotal in bringing about a positive change in life, education improve the skills, knowledge; augment the intelligence, helps in preparing to become more responsible citizen of the civilized society. (H. Ramahi, 2017). The education system of Palestine was initially controlled by Ottoman Empire, Great Britain, Egypt, and Israel until 1993.Under the British (1917-1947) the government public schools of Palestine was controlled by government and the private schools were controlled by religious organizations. Public schools were controlled by United Kingdom for the

Palestinian students and Jewish students were controlled by autonomous system. There was conflict in both the systems. Palestinian education system had inadequate financial support and was not allowed to design their curriculum. In 1967 Egyptian curriculum was followed in the schools of Gaza Strip while Jordanian curriculum was followed by the schools located in the East Jerusalem and west bank. Israeli ran the government schools, Palestinian refugees were provided primary education from grade 1-9 by UNRWA, local and foreign religious organizations ran private schools which provided education at all level. Oslo Agreement between the Palestinian Liberation Organization and Israel led to the Palestinians to control their own education system.

2. Current Education System of Palestine

Palestinian decision-makers have been under constant pressure over a century, due to which education in Palestine has been highly inconsistent. The National Authority of Palestine took responsibility for the Palestinian education system in Gaza strip and West bank which was established as a result of the Oslo Agreement between Palestinian Liberation Authority and Israel. In 1994 Palestinian Higher Education Ministry was established. Major challenges were faced by the Palestinian Higher Education Ministry. The Ministry developed the curriculum for the Palestinian students, established training institute for the teachers, and constructed multiple schools.

3. Preschool Education

The private sector and NGO's run the preschool education. Ministry of Higher Education monitor the pre-school education, grants the licence to operate and ensure that the facilities provided by the schools must meet the standard requirement. Teachers with degrees in early childhood education, is the prerequisite qualification for the teachers to teach in preschool, also standard curriculum and small teacher-children is required. (Dickman et al, 2009). Children entering basic education are strengthened by preschool learning. Importance of preschool education and the rational effect of the preschool learning at the later stage of life are supported by all the education theories. One year preschool education is mandatory in Palestine. A kindergarten administrator is present in every district who is responsible for supporting and monitoring the kindergarten of the area.

Palestinian education system can be divided into the following:

- ✓ Primary Education from 1st to 4th standard
- ✓ Middle Education from 5th to 10th standard
- ✓ Secondary Education is the final 2 years of education at the secondary school level; thereafter students sit for an entrance examination Tawjihi for admission in colleges and universities in Palestine.

According to Palestine Central Board of Statistics the drop rates have increased to 1.3% for the year 2006-07, highest for the last 5 years. At the secondary level the male drop rate increased to 3% exceeding the last year.

Table (1) Example of the Palestine Central Board of Statistics the drop rates by Years

	Drop Out Rates	2002/2003	2003/2004	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007
Basic	Male	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.8	1.3
	Female	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.5
	Both Sexes	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.9
Secondary	Male	2.6	2.3	2.5	2.3	3.0
	Female	4.8	3.6	3.7	2.9	3.8
	Both Sexes	3.7	3.0	3.1	2.6	3.4

Source: <https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/default.aspx>

4. TVET

Vocational Education under which the industrial schools are established to skill the students in different trades. Vocational education is supervised by Technical & Vocational Education and Training. National Qualification Framework (NQF) & Palestinian National Qualification System regulate the uniformity of qualifications at all levels. Technical and Vocational Education is not an integrated system and various bodies such as ministry of education, ministry of labour, private institutions and NGO's provide the technical and vocational education. As a result the training is ineffective and has led to duplication. (Kouhail, 2004). The curriculum is old, the equipments are obsolete, with no or minimal training of trainers. Very few students enroll for the vocational training, especially among female students (MAS, 2010; Gill et al, 2000). The salary drawn by vocational training graduates is low as compared to university graduates. (MAS, 2010).

5. Higher Education

Higher education in Palestine does not promote development as it should be doing. Higher education sector in Palestine aims to improve quality, increase capacity and create a knowledge based economy. Due to establishment of Council of Higher Education, National Commission for Accreditation and Quality, University Student Fund, Council for Scientific Research, Higher Education Law, considerable improvement in higher sector education has taken place. (Abu Al-Hummous, 2006; Baalousha et. al, 2009; & Darwish, 2009). Lack of qualified staff, lack of support for research, lack of sufficient infrastructure are major problems with higher education. (Baalousha et. al, 2009; & Darwish, 2009). Limited access to electronic database and poor resources are major issues with libraries. (Baalousha et. al, 2009; & Robinson, 2010).

Tertiary Education is the post secondary education which includes colleges offering 2 years diploma & universities offering 4 years of undergraduate programs. There are 9 universities in West Bank and 4 universities in Gaza. Apart from that 12 technical, 14 community colleges and one arts & music institute is there in Palestine. (<https://moe.edu.ps/>).

The higher education sector is supervised by ministry of higher education while Quality assurance of higher education is regulated by Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission. The Higher Education Ministry of Palestine has proposed a strategic plan for education 2008-2012 in connection with higher education to make higher education demand oriented from supply oriented to make higher education more compatible with labor market. Palestine European Academic Co-operation in Education is the Inter-University co-operation programs which is supported by the European partners, UNESCO and UNDP and is supervised by Ministry of Education and Higher Education. At present Palestine European Academic Co-operation in Education is the exchange program of 23 Palestinian and European Universities and there is constant exchange of volunteer academicians from North America, Europe, to Gaza and West Bank.

6. NGO's

NGO'S protected common identity and history and strengthened the values and structure of the Palestinian society. (Abdullah, 2004). NGO's have been helping the poor, vulnerables and marginalized group while carrying out developmental activities in health, education, microfinance and job creation. (Abdel Shafi, 2004; Abdullah, S. et al, 2005; Abusrour, 2009). The role of NGO's has influenced the government economic and labour policies (Abdel Shafi, 2004). Lack of coordination and competition among NGO's themselves or with the government is seen as one issues faced by NGO's.

7. Curriculum

Curriculum and teaching go hand in hand assisting the students to develop the required problem solving and learning skills. Not only the teaching style has to be reinvented but the curriculum also needs to be reinvented where students' problem solving skills are enhanced. According to (Katz, 1985) focus on learning help students to learn the concepts for long time, whereas spoon feeding education has short term impact on learning the concepts. Israel placed strict control over teaching of subjects related to history, geography, civics, literature which were related to Palestine. Anything which referred to the armed struggle, Zionist or Arab National Movement was completely banned. (Assaf, 2004). According to Arab Knowledge Report (2009) there is a disparity in the knowledge and skills when compared with the completed level of education.

The curriculum lacks at developing the ability to analyze the information. As compared to authoritarian ways the children can learn more effectively by creative ways. (Torrence and Goff 2009). According to (Fattash 2010) teachers do not have specific training of different aspect of teaching such as teaching writing skills, he further stated that due to lack of necessary resources and equipments teachers could not teach properly. Curriculum has not been revised and it does not enhance the creative and analytical skills of the students, instead it relies more on memorization and rote learning (Bitar and Assali 2008). According to Ministry of Education and Higher Education curriculum is based on Palestinian national values, Islamic religion and national heritage. It also lay emphasis on teaching third language in addition to Arabic and English. The pedagogy is based on practical approach and critical thinking (Brown, 2001:23)

Table (2) New Palestinian Curriculum

Phase	Target Grade	Planned Introduction	Actual Introduction
Phase 1	Grades 1 and 6	2000	2000
Phase 2	Grades 2 and 7	2001	2001
Phase 3	Grades 3,8 and 10	2002	2002 Grades 3 and 8 2004 Grade 10
Phase 4	Grades 4,9 and 11	2003	2003 Grades 4 and 9 2005 Grade 11
Phase 5	Grades 5 and 12	2004	2004 Grades 5 and 10 2006 Grade 12

Source: MOEHE and UNESCO, 2005:18

8. Budget Allocation on Education

Staff salary accounts for 90% of the budget & operational cost are 85% of the budget. (Nicolai 2007). The government would have to raise the educational budget or else the educational reforms would stagnate.

9. Impact of Israeli Occupation on Palestinian Education

The occupation of Gaza by Israel has brought a series of restrictions, the military has imposed about 1,000 orders from tree planting to education (Graham Brown, 1984). The education system was under control of Israeli Military Governor during the first twelve years of occupation (ICJ, 1980). Initially the education system was similar to what was developed by Jordanian and Egyptian rule. Israeli military had full control relating to teachers and curriculum in government schools. Only minimal funding was provided, and that mainly went to cover teacher salaries. There was constant decline in the standards of schools, libraries, laboratories and teaching standards. No teaching training support and no new schools were constructed (Brown, 2003).

Education system was fully politicized with teachers having different political view were transferred to some other place, while reducing the staff numbers everywhere (ICJ, 1980: 93). Israeli education

system has been highly centralized education system, with very little information about teachers, the textbooks mentioning anything about Palestine was highly censored with limited support to the teachers training program.(Assaf,1997). Israel has imposed restrictions on the movement of the Palestinian population which affect the daily life of the Palestinians as a result they cannot travel freely which prevent them from reaching to their workplace, school, colleges, universities and their daily activities. Special permits from Israeli authorities is required by the Palestinians to cross the check points. (Joint Written statement submitted by Al-Haq, the Palestinian centre for Human Rights (PCHR) and the Federation of International Human Rights Ittijah (Organizations based union of Arab community), non-governmental organizations in special consult, 2006). Curfews imposed by Israel affects the Palestinian education by losing school days. Attack on school and colleges by Israeli government have resulted in killing & injuring of teachers and students, the construction of wall has resulted in limited access to the students and teachers in the wall adjacent areas. The impact of such barriers has resulted in poor teaching quality and consequently increasing the unemployment rate.

The Israeli attacks have financial implications as well on the education system due to loss of school buildings, loss of furniture, equipments etc, besides imposition of high taxes and fines by the Israeli authorities also makes it difficult for the Palestinian school to run. (Ministry of Education & Higher Education).Building or expanding the schools is very difficult because of prior Israeli construction permit. Due to overcrowded classrooms, residential apartments have been leased by ministry of education, majority of them do not meet the standard requirement which makes difficult for both students and teachers to use the school premises. (Ministry of Education & Higher Education).According to the official website (Republika) based on official UN data more than 1.3 million Palestinian children in the occupied territory have experienced violence and demolition of schools by Israel. (Rizky Jaramaya Red and Esthi Maharani,2022).

Israel has been violating the educational rights of Palestinians, which creates obstacles in getting access to education, especially for the Palestinian women as the Palestinian Society is a Patriarchal society,inspite of these obstacles the percentage of educated women in Palestine is one of the highest in the world. Incidence of clashes between security forces and students on the way to school, stopping of students and teachers at the checkpoints do affect the education system.(Antara News,2019) .In order to avoid the heat Palestinian students must study in tents without chairs and tables.(Niken Purnamasari,2017).

Detention of Palestinian students by Israeli forces have also been reported, to create illiteracy and unemployment among Palestinians.(Tempo.co,2022).Palestinians who accepted Jewish refugees from the European genocide are now being deprived of all their rights by the Israel. Teachers have to interrupt teaching on regular basis because the students are unable to concentrate on teaching and want to talk about the Israeli oppression. (Save the Children, 2023:24).According to the UN report, 2005, the presence of military violate s the human rights on education system. Israeli Palestinian conflict is one such bad example. (Munoz Villalobos, 2004:23).The oppression by Israel would affect the psychology of the younger Palestinian generation and can lead to depression and stress disorders.UNICEF has contributed a lot in this field by acting as a mediator, facilitator and initiator. (Ririn Suhasni Rahayu, 2022:7-11). Palestinian people had no idea on what curriculum and subjects should be taught in schools. They have no idea on the number of days the schools should have in an year and the timings of the school. (Ministry of Education 1998).

According to the education ministry of Palestine 88% of the schools in Gaza Strip run two shift of teaching per day due to the curfew imposed by Israel. Consequently the professional development of teachers has been reduced due to workload. (Ministry of Education).Damaging the educational buildings is a violation of Fourth Geneva Convention, 1949,Article 26 of Universal Declaration of

Human Rights, 1948 and Article 13 of International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Israel being a member of both of Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is required to maintain them. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on 11th November 2023 around 3,117 students and 183 members of educational staff were killed and around 4,613 students and 403 teachers were killed in Gaza. According to the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR), the education has been hampered in all the educational institutions affecting 88,000 students. Around 300 school buildings which is about 61 percent of the total buildings in Gaza have been damaged. Around 555 students from Gaza have been denied for scholarship abroad due to the war like situation. According to the Ministry of Education, 625,000 school students have been denied education for the academic year 2023-2024 due to closure of schools. (Middle East Studies Association).

10. Challenges Facing the Palestinian Education System

The biggest challenge faced by the Palestinian education system is lack of enthusiasm and interest in becoming a teacher. The students with lower marks in Injaz examination (an entrance examination for university education) opt for teaching profession. (Nicolai, 2007). The teaching standard for Master of Education program is well below the international standard. As a result the teachers who become the principal of the schools are not suited for the job which further deteriorates the quality of teachers. Updating and revising the text books is expensive and due to financial constraints the curriculum is obsolete. Palestinian education system still emphasis on traditional learning ways such as rote learning and memorization. Instead of performance based evaluation, traditional paper and pencil test are more prevalent in the Palestinian education system. Instead of education reforms funded by USAID, UNESCO and World Bank the need of the hour is to develop indigenous education plan by Palestine as the agencies such as World Bank and others rely on international educators who lack necessary knowledge about Palestinian education.

The education initiatives funded by international agencies require equipment and resources such as books and computers which due to Israeli control are not easily accessible in the Palestinian market. To implement these educational initiatives Ministry of Education and educational institutions must strengthen their relationship. To strengthen such relationship experienced educators who are familiar with the local teaching pedagogy must be inducted to further enhance the educational reforms of international agencies. Due to Israeli occupation the movement of educators and their participation in meetings, conferences and workshop is restricted. Education reforms initiated by international agencies would be strengthened by the participation of parents in the education of child. Teacher to pupil ratio is high and according to Ministry of Higher Education it is 1:33 in government schools and 1:38 in UNRWA schools, as compared to the other countries where it stands at 1:20 in general. High teacher pupil ratio causes gap in understanding more complex study material.

According to Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS) report 2006 Palestinian Education System there is no formal licence as well as any specific qualification is required to enter the teaching profession. The same report states that for entering into the teaching profession very low Injaz score is required. In service teachers training has been a rare phenomenon under Israeli administration. (Assaf, 1997:53). The government teachers were prevented by the Israeli authorities from attending academic courses offered by Palestinian universities and colleges. (Khaldi and Wahbeh, 2000).

The in service training has been scattered and has been given by various agencies such as Ministry of Education and Higher Education, NGOs etc. (MOEHE and UNESCO, 2005). Later on Ministry of Education and Higher Education offered more decentralized training, where funds were allocated to the schools, and the topic of the training was decided by the teachers and the principals. (Kvalbein

and Smith,2003). Under the Israeli administration the employment conditions were not clearly defined which resulted in frustration and job dissatisfaction among teachers.(Assaf,1997:53).Because of low salaries the teachers looked for other jobs which was stopped when Israel passed a decree in 1983.(Graham-Brown,1984).With teachers taking other jobs the teaching is sacrificed as teachers are unable to go for in service training and they have little time to prepare for classroom teaching.(Van Dyke and Randall,2002). Under the Palestinian Authority the salaries of teachers have been increased. Palestinian primary schools have high enrollment rates, according to Ministry of Education and Higher Education there is only 2 percent drop out rate at the primary level which gradually increases with higher grades. The drop outs are mainly due to less interest in studies, disability both physical and psychological, difficulty in commuting to schools and early marriages.(Kadumi and Abu Zeid,2003).

11. Recommendations

Making students aware about the importance and the role the teachers play in nurturing a better society. Encouraging students to take up the teaching profession by giving scholarship to the students pursuing masters program in education. Raising the salary of the teachers, developing them professionally and also encourage teachers to participate in workshops, conferences, seminars to enhance their skills. The traditional rote learning and memorization should be replaced by teaching techniques which are more innovative and interactive.

The support and cooperation from the education ministry is required to coordinate with the experienced educators and international experts to design a standard curriculum which should emphasize on the latest teaching techniques which are innovative and interactive. Making adequate finances available to make Palestinian higher education institutions competitive with international standards. Establishing quality research program for Palestinian higher education institutions. It is strongly recommended that community involvement is important in developing the strategic plan for education.

12. Conclusion

Brief description about Palestinian education system is given under this article. From the brief history to the existing education system as a result of Oslo agreement has been discussed. The impact on Palestinian education due to Israeli occupation and the strategic education plan of Palestine has also been discussed. Importance of greater coordination between the Ministry and NGO's has been discussed.

For the educational reforms the completion of the strategic plan is a positive step. Improving teaching and designing a better curriculum has also been discussed. In the end the current issues faced by Palestinian education system were discussed and recommendation and suggestions to overcome the issues were given.

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