

Israel's Education Policy Toward the Arab Education System from a Historical Perspective from 1948 to 2022

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Abstract

The article examines the educational policy of the Israeli governments towards the Arab education system and the implications of this policy on the status and achievements of that system. Based on a theoretical background describing the relations between Israel as a Jewish state and the indigenous Arab minority, the study focuses on four main historical eras: 1) that of the Military Administration period (1948-1966); 2) the “melting pot” period (1967-1999); 3) After “Al-Aqsa Events” 2000 through 2017; and 4) Between the years 2018 (Nationality Law) and 2022. Drawing on the analytical framework designed by Lauen & Tyson (2009). The findings of the study demonstrate the existence of understandable patterns of inequality on the basis of ethnicity and possible relationship between national ethnic affiliation in Israel and education policymaking for the education system of Arab minority. The article offers insights, conclusions, and recommendations for the future.

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Background to the Study

Israeli society is a divided society, on an ethnic, national, religious and political background. The deepest rift is between Jews and Arabs (Smuha, 2001). The balance of power between the two groups is unequal and the declaration of the State of Israel as a Jewish state has made the Arabs an ethnic national minority that is not equal to the Jewish majority group (Yaar & Shavit, 2001). Most recently, in July 2018, the Nationality Law was approved in the Knesset, which anchors Jewish national values of the State of Israel. Arabs in Israel are subject to institutional discrimination as a group and as individuals in various areas of life, such as income inequality (Khattab, Miaari, & Stier, 2016), under-representation in management positions in government institutions. Education is a significant milestone in the life of any human society, education for a national ethnic minority like the Arab—minority in Israel allows it to improve its human capital and realize its human potential.

The Arab educational system in Israel operates under conditions of inequality in terms of resources and infrastructure (Abu-Asbah, 2013; Balas, 2017), inspection and control of pedagogical contents taught in schools, and the choice of the teachers that the educational system employs (Al-Haj, 1995; Ehrlich & Gindi, 2017; Haddad Haj Yahya & Rudnicki, 2018; Jabareen & Agbaria, 2014). In addition, the state has withheld official recognition of the historical narrative and the cultural attributes of the Arab minority (Abu-Asbah, 2013; Haddad Haj Yahya & Rudnicki, 2018; Jabareen & Agbaria, 2014). Furthermore, it has excluded Arab educational leaders from circles in which educational decisions and policies are made. Thus, principals and teachers from the Arab educational system in Israel are unable to discuss issues related to the Palestinian national narrative and are instructed to keep this narrative out of the educational activities in their schools (Arar & Ibrahim, 2016).

Method

This article draws on the qualitative (phenomenological) offered by Lauen & Tyson (2009) to understand the changes and developments in education policy that the Israeli governments have led towards the Arab education system during four main periods of time: 1) that of the Military Administration period (1948-1966); 2) the “melting pot” period (1967-1999); 3) After “Al-Aqsa Events” 2000 through 2017; and 4) Between the years 2018 (Nationality Law) and 2022.

Findings

Furthermore, this article provides insight into the status of the Arab education system, highlighting the developments that have occurred over the years while also addressing the challenges it faces in Israel. The article delves into the consequences of government policies concerning the Arab education system and their implications for its objectives, curriculum, resources, and outcomes.

Conclusion

This study looked into main and basic areas of change in the education policy adopted toward the Arab educational system in Israel from 1948 to 2022. Although favorable developments and major and basic focal points of change were described, the Arab educational system has remained under full state control for decades and its situation has not improved. This policy

reflects hostility, discrimination, skepticism, and suspicion toward the Arab minority in Israel—a policy that has restricted the minority's role in making its own education policy.

The above discussion and the various studies and documents written on the education policies of Israeli governments over the years indicate a basic assumption that, over the years, the government and state institutions have not had a cohesive and declared educational policy toward Arabs in Israel. Contrary to this view, the article showed that even if there was no cohesive educational policy formulated in an orderly manner, from a historical perspective one can identify an educational policy different from that of the educational policy towards the Jews. This historical perspective makes it possible to identify several practical, clear and consistent policies that the various establishment bodies have adopted towards the Arab education system, and which are reflected in the various documents and studies written mainly by Arab researchers and which state that the State of Israel had ambitions for the re-socialization of the Arab citizens, in order to weaken their Palestinian identity and strengthen their Israeli identity. This is most significantly evident in the contents of the curricula. Its goals and emphases do not reflect the national-cultural identity of the Arab minority and do not adequately express its unique needs and characteristics. In addition, the education system for Arabs in Israel is indeed conducted in the Arabic language, but as mentioned, it has never been treated as an independent system or as having legitimacy in participating in the design of the public education system in Israel. Arabs in Israel do not have control over their education both structurally and administratively and in terms of content, and they do not hold key positions among the decision-makers in public education in Israel. Therefore, similar to other indigenous minorities in the world, they strive for control and independence in their education system and for expression of their unique characteristics in the various curricula.

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