

Introduction

This monograph traces the education system among the Palestinian Arabs in Israel since the establishment of the state, with a brief background on the pre-state period. It seeks to examine the complex relationship between education and social change among an indigenous “involuntary” minority living in an ethnonational state, which, despite its pluralistic structure and formal democracy, lacks multicultural ideology. The monograph discusses historical changes along with educational policies, formal programs, and local initiatives for empowerment originating in the Arab community. Using a comparative approach, the study juxtaposes the Arab and Hebrew education systems from early childhood through higher education in terms of administration, resources, curriculum content, and returns. The monograph offers a detailed analysis of the impact of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the goals and content of Arab and Hebrew education, with special focus on the narratives and official knowledge conveyed to Jewish and Arab students through the history curriculum. Changes in education are analyzed together with contextual, demographic, economic, and sociopolitical changes at the local, national, and regional levels.

This monograph represents the only comprehensive and current social science account of contemporary Palestinian Arab education in Israel to date. Moreover, it is the only detailed analysis of Arab education that is based on longitudinal research, thus providing an important opportunity to examine trends in formal policy, school content, educational attainment, and outcomes and other important issues, with the added perspective afforded by the passage of time. No less significant, it simultaneously addresses formal policies of control versus efforts for self-empowerment initiated by the indigenous Palestinian community. In this context, the monograph represents the first systematic examination of an authentic model for social

change and educational empowerment initiated by the Palestinian Arabs in Israel through a civil society organization. Throughout this monograph I use the terms Palestinian Arabs in Israel, Palestinian Arabs, the Palestinian/Arab minority, Arabs, and Arab population interchangeably.

Methodology

The analysis incorporates a broad variety of qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a thorough examination of the education system. The qualitative methods include the use of pertinent documents from the State Archives, in addition to specific reports obtained from the Ministry of Education and the minutes of the Follow-Up Committee on Arab Education in Israel. Until recently, a large portion of the documents obtained from the State Archives were classified as “secret” or “top secret.” They provide an outstanding opportunity to examine the foundations of the official policy toward the Arab population in general, and toward the education system in particular, during the first decade of statehood, a policy that was crucial in determining the structure and goals of Arab education.

The qualitative research also entailed a content analysis of the history curricula in the Arab and Hebrew schools over a period of 70 years, from 1950 through 2020, as well as analysis of pertinent reports in Israeli newspapers and periodicals published in Arabic, Hebrew, and English. The Hebrew publications included *Al-Hamishmar*, *Davar*, *Haaretz*, *Leket*, *Lemerchav*, *Maariv*, and *Yisrael Hayoum*. The Arabic publications were *Al-Gadid*, *Al-Hadaf*, *Al-Ittihad*, *Al-Mujtama'*, *Kul el-Arab*, *Al-Sinnarah*, and *Fasl el-Makal*. The analysis also included the English-language newspaper *The Jerusalem Post*.

In addition, the qualitative methods included conducting three focus groups: a focus group of 14 Arab students from different faculties at the University of Haifa (November 2019) and two focus groups of Arab teachers (January 2020), one that included 10 Arab elementary school teachers and another that included 12 Arab teachers from secondary and middle schools.

The focus group technique was used as a *supplementary* data source and a follow-up data collection method to further explore the meaning of the survey data and obtain a sense of recent trends. Focus groups offer several advantages. They provide an opportunity to observe a large number of interactions on a topic within a limited period of time. Moreover, they facilitate the exploration of controversial issues and complex and sensitive

subjects. Focus group discussions enable group members to react and build on the responses of other group members. In addition, the results of focus groups are easy to understand and interpret since the researchers can ask respondents to elaborate and further explain their statements. (For reviews on the focus group technique, see Morgan 1998; Litosseliti 2003; Tadjewski 2016.)

By nature, focus groups do not constitute representative samples and have several other limitations (for limitations of focus groups, see Litosseliti 2003, 21). Nevertheless, we sought to select groups that represented a wide spectrum of experiences and attitudes. In addition, we made sure that the participants selected were affiliated with the main categories of the studied groups.

The focus groups were moderated by professional moderators, who were informed of the study's aims, content, and the main principles to be sought in the group discussion (for the skills required of moderators, see Litosseliti 2003, 42). Every effort was made to maintain a comfortable, flexible, and open atmosphere during the discussions and to enable all participants to contribute. The research team ensured participants that their identities would remain anonymous. Consequently, the names used in the text are pseudonyms, unless otherwise indicated.

The questions formulated for the focus groups were unstructured open-ended questions according to specific topics. The analysis of the discussions was based on strictly qualitative methods that entailed examination of direct quotations from the discussions and relevant statements from the one-to-one interview data. In the analysis, these statements were used as illustrative quotations without losing sight of the specific context within which the material was generated (e.g., Wilkinson 1998, 196).

The qualitative research also entailed systematic observations conducted at a number of elementary, middle, and secondary Arab schools in the Galilee (northern Israel) and the Little Triangle region (central Israel) during the months of January and February 2020. These school visits also provided opportunities to conduct a number of unstructured interviews with teachers, principals, and superintendents. Yet in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent school closures, efforts to continue this systematic observation through 2021 were very difficult and in many cases impossible.

The quantitative methods entailed two major surveys. The first survey, conducted in November 1993, was the first representative nationwide survey of Arab teachers in Israel. Based on a representative sample of 852 teachers,

the survey examined the status, attitudes, and orientation of Arab teachers in Israel. The sample was selected in three stages. First, 26 localities were randomly selected to represent the different categories of Arab localities: (a) geographical area (Galilee-north, Triangle-center, Negev–Naqab-south); (b) religion (Muslim, Christian, Druze, mixed communities); and (c) size, as determined by municipal status (town, local authority, regional authority, none). Second, a sample of schools was selected from each chosen locality according to a predetermined quota based on population data regarding school level, type, and affiliation. Third, a random sample of teachers was selected from the schools included in the sample in accordance with the predetermined quota based on school size. The research tool was a multiple-choice questionnaire that was distributed to the participants, who filled it out individually and anonymously.

The second survey focused on problems and adjustment patterns among Arab and Jewish students. It was conducted in May 2001 among a representative sample of Arab and Jewish students at the University of Haifa, which was chosen because it has the largest concentration of Arab students among Israeli universities. Moreover, the Arab students at the University of Haifa constitute a cross-section of Arab students in Israel in terms of religious affiliation, residential locality, gender, and other pertinent characteristics. The sample of Jewish students was aimed at placing the findings within a comparative perspective.

This survey used three-step sampling: (1) selecting the main faculties in which Arab students enroll—humanities, social sciences, healthcare, natural sciences, education, and law; (2) randomly selecting one department from each faculty; (3) selecting one compulsory course for each year of undergraduate studies and one course from the first year of graduate studies. A total of 410 Jewish and 193 Arab students were interviewed. Arab students were overrepresented in the sample (32 percent in the sample compared to 18 percent of the student body) to ensure that the different subgroups among the Arab students were represented and to have enough cases for statistical analysis.

In addition, the quantitative analysis examined available pertinent statistics and reports from the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics over the course of more than 70 years, from 1949 through 2022. These include all the annual Statistical Abstracts of Israel and special press reports up to 2022. National Institute for Testing and Evaluation (NITE) reports for the period 1991–2020 were used to analyze the Psychometric Entrance Test (PET), which is required for admission to Israeli universities and academic

colleges. In addition, the analysis utilized relevant data about local school tests (Meitzav) provided by RAMA—the National Authority for Measurement and Evaluation under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, together with data from international tests, including the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (2006–2018) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) (1999–2019).

Chapter Descriptions

The monograph contains seven chapters and a conclusion, as follows:

Chapter 1 stipulates a general theoretical framework on education, multiculturalism, and social change among minorities in contemporary societies. The framework is based upon an eclectic approach that combines elements from a number of theoretical perspectives, among them critical multicultural education, Freirean critical-transformative pedagogy, and Gramscian theory of cultural hegemony. Based on these elements, I propose a critical model of *empowering multicultural education*.

Chapter 2 provides background on the status and characteristics of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel and discusses their identity formation. I begin by outlining theories pertaining to multicultural democracy and the rights of indigenous groups and national minorities. I then summarize developments among the Palestinian Arabs in the wake of their transition from a majority into an “involuntary minority” after Israel was established. Next, I discuss the main factors that affected their social, economic, and political development as well as their complex status as a “double periphery” simultaneously situated at the margins both of Israeli society and of the Palestinian national movement. I conclude with a detailed analysis of the major barriers to multicultural democracy in Israel, especially Israel’s ethnonational character, the securitization of state-minority relations, and the blurring of majority-minority boundaries.

Chapters 3 to 6 cover the educational system for the Arabs since the establishment of the state of Israel, from elementary school through higher education.

Chapter 3 traces the main developments in formal education for the Palestinian Arabs in Israel since the establishment of the state, including a brief summary covering the pre-state period. First, I provide some background about the administrative structure of Arab education and describe the policy considerations that have led to this structure. Next, I point out

the main trends in the expansion of education among the Palestinian Arab minority, as reflected in the increase in the number of Arab students and the growing educational attainment of Arab female students, from early childhood through the end of high school. The second part of this chapter focuses on qualitative changes and inequalities vis-à-vis Hebrew education. After outlining a brief theoretical framework, I examine the achievements of Arab students compared to those of their Jewish counterparts based on scores on local Israeli tests (Meitzav and Bagrut) and a series of international tests (PISA and TIMSS). I also examine trends that reflect educational inequalities between Jews and Arabs as well as inequalities within each group based on gender and socioeconomic background, and I discuss the factors contributing to these inequalities. I conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational gaps between Arab and Jewish schools.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the goals and content of Arab education compared to Hebrew education. It discusses how the majority manipulates the education system as a mechanism of control and cultural hegemony. More specifically, the chapter examines how rival histories and competing narratives are taught in the shadow of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. After proposing a theoretical framework, I give some background on the goals of Arab and Hebrew education that were introduced when Israel was established and discuss how these goals have changed over time. The major part of this chapter constitutes a content analysis of the history curriculum over 70 years, from the establishment of the state until the present. The critical multicultural perspective used to examine the findings sheds light on the limits of the education system and the repercussions of the lack of multicultural ideology on the possibility of enhancing diversity and mutual acceptance of rival narratives in a deeply divided society.

Chapter 5 examines the status and attitudes of Arab teachers in Israel. After a brief theoretical discussion, I outline the foundations of the policy of control and the culture of silence imposed upon Arab teachers immediately after the state was established. I then focus on the findings of a nationwide survey that examined the characteristics of Arab teachers and their attitudes toward cardinal issues within the school system and in society at large. A special section is devoted to burnout among Arab teachers and the impact of individual, institutional, and societal factors on burnout rates. Recent local and global trends are discussed, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the status and conduct of Arab teachers.

Chapter 6 examines higher education among the Palestinian Arabs in Israel. In this chapter, I trace the main trends in the expansion of tertiary education among the Arab population from the establishment of the state until the present period and compare these trends to the Jewish population. First, I outline the factors that have made education in general, and higher education in particular, top priorities for the Arabs. Along with the impressive expansion of higher education among the Arabs in Israel, I discuss factors that have retarded their educational attainment. More specifically, I discuss the role of the PET as a gatekeeper that has negatively affected not only Arabs' access to higher education but also their chances of being admitted to prestigious areas of study. Next, I outline the main adaptation problems of Arab students during their academic studies, with special emphasis on cultural adaptation and its implications for identity and political socialization. I conclude this chapter with a detailed discussion of employment opportunities for Arab college and university graduates and the relationship between educational expansion and socioeconomic mobility.

Chapter 7 focuses on empowerment through local initiatives among the Palestinian Arabs in Israel. I begin with a brief theoretical introduction to empowerment in general, and among indigenous minorities in particular, and then discuss the role of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). After that, I briefly summarize the obstacles to the development of civil society organizations among the Palestinian Arabs in Israel.

The major part of this chapter is devoted to an analysis of the unique experience of INSANN, which was established in 1991 as the first nationwide Palestinian NGO in Israel in the field of education and culture. I provide a detailed analysis of INSANN's strategy of empowerment and social change, as reflected in its various community projects and initiatives. I conclude by discussing the significance of civil society organizations among minorities and the lessons to be learned from this specific experience.

In the conclusion of this monograph, I summarize and further consider the central theoretical questions raised throughout. In particular, I discuss the policy implications of the major findings of this comprehensive study. I examine the significance of these implications in understanding the role of education among indigenous minorities and disadvantaged groups in deeply divided societies in the context of social change, multiculturalism, ethnic stratification, cultural hegemony, and strategies for self-empowerment.