

The education system in palestine



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Developing education in Palestine is a unique experience, rich and full of challenges and obstacles. First, it is unique due to the fact that it is one of the few countries where the Ministry of Education was established from scratch. Rich because of the enthusiasm and inspiration of Palestinians to learn. It is a challenge because Palestine is not yet a state and is facing a daily conflict with the Israeli occupation (UNESCO, 2002). Since the beginning of the Aqsa Intifada in 2000 and until now, the suffering of the Palestinian education increased like other vital sectors in Palestine as a result of the ongoing and repeated Israeli aggression. In particular, the aggression affects the lives of Palestinian children, their lives, future and school. Hundreds of students were killed, arrested and injured by the occupation army, which demolished many schools and some were transformed to military barracks. Not only has the Israeli occupation authorities stopped to this limit, but they established the Apartheid Wall, which increased the suffering of the educational family and prevented the access of teachers and students to school safely; thus, this forced them to travel long distances or wait for the Israelis to allow them to cross the gates that are set up on the wall (MOEHE, 2009).

Background:

As a result of the 1948 Mandate and the banishing of a lot of people from their houses, Palestinians sought for recompense in education in order to protect a satisfactory level of living (Fasheh, 1990; Hallij, 1980). As far as the Israeli Occupation inflated, Palestinians considered education as a mean to keep them away from the obliteration and the Israeli's confiscation, and the possibility of being a weapon to contend with (Tahir, 1985; Hallij, 1980).

Throughout the period between 1967 and 1994, the Israeli government was in charge for the education sector in the West Bank and Gaza. After the Palestinian Authority was established in 1994, enrolment of students into all schools reached over a million from 650, 000. However, the Ministry of Education suffered in creating methods for planning, synchronization and budgeting whilst handling the situation with the students' growth and the continual crisis of the Israeli occupation (Nicolai, 2007, p. 1).

After the Oslo I Accord in 1994, the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Education was founded. According to the West Bank report of the “Educational Sector Analysis” published in 2006, in September 2000, it was the first time when the Palestinian national curriculum was launched in the Palestinian schools and particularly in the first till the sixth grades for which this curriculum replaced the Jordanian and Egyptian curricula used since the Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza in 1967. Moreover, this curriculum created an advantage for Palestine as being the first Arabic country that teaches the English language in the first grade, as well as initiated and taught Information Technology as an obligatory material from the fifth till the twelve grade. Additionally, schools had elective subjects such as home economics, health and environment from the seventh grade till the tenth grade, and economics and management in the eleventh and twelve grades (Passia, 2008, p. 356).

The education system endured from striking damages through that period; schools and universities were closed for a long time and even some universities' closures extended to about four years, where Israelis obliged a big number of teachers to leave their jobs. Moreover, it was prohibited to

reveal anything about the Palestinian history, culture, geography and inheritance neither in class nor in the situation, for which the Jordanian textbook were in the West Bank and the Egyptian textbooks were in Gaza at that time (Nicolai, 2007, p. 1). According to the World Bank report (2006a, p. 44), a total of 266 schools and 7, 350 classrooms were built between 1995 and 2005. The MOEHE was directly accountable for the building of 118 new schools and 2, 675 educational classrooms in order to decrease the school's double shifts. According to the PCBS, 41% of classes had 30 students or less in 2004/2005 and only 18% of classes had more than 40 students (ibid: p. 51).

According to the MOEHE (2007/2008), the survey results indicated that there are 1, 182, 246 male and female students studying in kindergartens and schools including 710, 287 students in the West Bank and 471, 959 students in Gaza Strip; 592, 389 males and 589, 857 females. Moreover, there are 766, 730 students in government schools, 253, 116 students in UNRWA schools, 78, 111 students in private schools and 84, 289 children in kindergarten. There has been an obvious increase in the number of schools since the years 1994 and 2007. The total number of schools increased from 1, 469 (1, 080 governmental schools, 254 UNRWA, and 135 private) to 2, 337 schools (1, 775 governmental schools, 286 UNRWA, and 276 private) in the West Bank and Gaza during 1994/1995 and 2006/2007. The number of sections also increased during the same period. In 2007, the class sections in the Palestinian schools reached 31, 963 (34% student rate per each section), 22, 833 in Governmental schools (33. 3% students), 6, 188 in UNRWA schools (40. 9% students), and 2, 942 in private schools (24. 6% students)

(MOEHE, 2007, p. 1). Due to the harsh and hard situation that the Palestinian people have been facing until recent years, yet, the drop out rate decreased since 1993/1994 (2. 25%) until 2005/2006 (0. 9%) in Palestinian schools, and 3. 33% in governmental schools compared to 0. 1% in governmental schools in the same years sequentially (ibid: p. 2).

In 2000, while the MOEHE was attempting to endure the corrosion of the education system, the Aqsa Intifada began. This Intifada caused to increase the corrosion in the education system that the MOEHE was facing. Based on the World Bank report (2006a, p. 37), Palestinians are the most educated people in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) area with 91% adult literacy rate. According to the MOEHE, in year 2007/2008, only 1, 867 out of 2, 415 schools were operating with one shift and the remaining 548 schools were operating with two shifts, including 67 schools in the West Bank and 481 in Gaza Strip (Passia, 2008, p. 359).

Education Structure in Palestine:

The education cycle is divided into 12 phases, starting from the first grade to the twelfth grade; the pre-school education provides educational services for children from the age of four up to the age of five, which is not yet a mandatory phase in the Palestinian educational system (World Bank, 2006a, p. 6). The common education system is divided into two phases. Phase one, the basic education that is covering grades from one to ten and is divided into preparation phase from grade one to four, and empowerment phase from grade five to ten. The second phase is the secondary education, which is not obligatory, that covers grades from eleven to twelve. These grades are alienated to literature, scientific, and vocational education, which included

industrial, agricultural, commercial, hotel and home economics. In the West Bank and Gaza, there are fifteen industrial schools, as there are only three of them governmental (ibid: p. 9).

According to the World Bank Report (2006b, p. 53), in 2004/2005, the total number of students attending schools and pre-schools was about over a million, 60% in the West Bank, 70% in governmental schools, 24% in UNRWA schools, and 6% in the private sector. As for teacher's employment, governmental schools employed 66% of teachers, UNRWA 18% and the private sector 18%. However, the private sector is not investing adequate education and mostly vocational training due to the high expenditures and the slow profits anticipated from these projects. On the other hand, the private sector invests in nurseries and kindergartens (Fronk, Huntington and Chadwick, 1999).

Schools' Enrolment in Palestine:

West Bank and Gaza accomplished high enrollment rate compared to other developing countries in the MENA region. According to the MOEHE (2005), during the period of 2005/2006, there are 383, 748 students in the preparation stage; including 195, 618 male and 188, 130 female that are registered in schools in Palestine. A total of 62% of students (238, 500 students) registered in governmental schools, 29% (109, 419 students) in UNRWA schools and 9% (35, 829 students) in private schools. As for the empowerment stage, a total of 569, 873 students are registered in schools; including 296, 247 male and 283, 626 female. A total of 70% students (Among them, 398, 672 students) are in governmental schools, 25% (145, 133 students) in UNRWA schools, and 5% (26, 068 students) private schools.

Quality of Education in Palestine:

According to Kellaghan and Greaney (2001, pp. 22-23), quality is “ the term relates to the adequacy or appropriateness of objects or processes for the purposes for which they were intended. Furthermore, quality implies a scale, and often implies standards. An object can be of ‘ good’ or ‘ poor’ quality, or it can meet, or fail to meet, a standard.” There are many features of the system that would influence the education’s quality; such as the schools building condition, teachers’ status, administration staff, teacher training, and the curriculum, for which any weakness in any of these indicator will affect the other indicators. Nonetheless, the outcome is the most important part, but what really matters is not the high enrollment rate, but the fact that if the students are obtaining the suitable knowledge, understanding and skills and are not dropping out of schools.

To measure the quality of education in Palestine is not easy because of the major effect of the political situation on the education sector. Curfews, closures and all Israelis policies forced on the Palestinians affected the education sector mainly during Al-Aqsa intifada; students need to cope with all emergency situations, as well as for the teachers and schools administrators. Those aspects demoralize the educational quality. According to the MOEHE, about 43 schools were occupied and turned into Israeli military bases since the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa intifada (Nicolai, 2007, p. 2).

According to the World Bank report (2006a, p. 4), developing countries regularly reach to a serious point after the attainment of high schools’ enrolment; but had to shift their concerns to the educational quality that might have been affected by the fast extension. The report also reconfirmed

that the MOEHE has to shift their focus more on monitoring, evaluation and investing in human resources such as training teachers instead of their focus on construction and the provision of textbooks.

Current Educational Situation in Palestine:

Based on UNICEF (2010) statistics, there are 1, 141, 828 students in 2, 611 schools from the first till the twelfth grade; 1, 955 governmental schools, 325 UNRWA schools and 308 private sectors. Compared to the details demonstrated before, there is a clear change in number of students.

According to the MOEHE, in governmental schools, there are 70% attendance, 22% in UNRWA and 8% in private sectors. Since the last elections in 2006, Gaza has been under siege and the needed construction material has been prevented to enter Gaza, which caused a problem of the increasing number of students leading to increasing the double shifts in schools. Double shifts reached 82% in governmental schools, 90% in UNRWA schools which lead schools to cut off the educational hours in order to observe the large numbers of students. In addition, the Ministry added that there is a high need to build new schools in the next five years in order to absorb the increasing number of students. Thus, its recommendation was to build at least 100 UNRWA schools and 105 governmental schools.

Nonetheless, obstacles hindering the movements of students to their schools haven't got easier; they still suffer from long distances and are obliged to walk as high as 25 km to reach their schools in addition to paying a lot of money on a monthly basis (UNICEF, 2010, pp. 1-2)

Conclusion:

The problem of the education sector in Palestine is not easy; the complexity of the political situation is affecting this sector, the stages that the Palestinians went through and changing the responsible authority on the education sector since the British mandates left its finger prints on the current deterioration in the education sector. The problem of the schools crowdedness is not only due to the population growth but also due to the accumulated problems during the period 1967-1994; this freezing period in the education sector development affected deeply the quality of education in Palestine. Since the start of the MOEHE in 1994, the PA has only been trying to rebuild the education system through the expansion policy and constructing additional schools and classrooms. Yet the Israeli occupation is still hampering the education development through the closure policies.

Previously and currently, the MOEHE is still facing many problems; such as, the continuous growth rate of students' and the limited number of educational classrooms in addition to the unsuitable geographic distributions of schools site due to the Israelis imposed checkpoints, settlers road that increased throughout the second Intifada, and the segregation between Palestinian areas; as a result, students face the problem of crossing long distance to arrive at their schools. Moreover, governmental schools faced a main problem of the small sizes educational classrooms in the West Bank.