

NEW DATA ON
EDUCATIONAL ACCESS/ATTAINMENT OF ARAB STUDENTS IN ISRAEL
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Palestinian Arab school children comprise approximately 25% of the country's school students. In the 2007/2008 school year their number stood at 480,517 pupils.² From elementary to high school, Arab and Jewish students learn in separate schools. Systematic, institutionalized discrimination impedes the ability of Arab students at Israel's state-run schools to participate in a free society. The state education system ignores the rights, the needs, and the priorities of Arab students, and thus, denies them the opportunity to develop a positive cultural and national identity. The three primary sources of inequality are the denial of the right to determine educational goals and objectives, the discriminatory allocation of state resources to Arab schools and students, and the inadequate representation of Arab citizens in decision-making positions in the Ministry of Education (MOE).

Denial of the right to determine educational goals and objectives

The MOE retains centralized control over the form and substance of the curriculum for Arab schools. *The State Education Law (1953)*, as amended in February 2000, sets educational objectives for state schools that emphasize Jewish history and culture. Article 2 of the amended law specifies that the primary objective of education is to preserve the Jewish nature of the state by teaching its history, culture, language, etc. Article 2(11) of the law stipulates that one objective of education is to acknowledge the needs, culture and language of the Arab population in Israel. However, this article is not being implemented and this objective is not being realized. Thus students in Arab state-run schools receive very little instruction in Palestinian or Arab history, geography, literature, culture, and traditions and spend more time learning the Torah and other Jewish texts than they do on studying the Qur'an, Islamic texts or the New Testament. While Arab schools have their own curriculum, it is designed and supervised by the MOE, where almost no Arab educators or administrators have decision-making powers: Arabs account for only 6.2% of the total number of employees in the MOE.³ The vast majority of these employees work in Arab towns and villages or mixed cities providing services directly to Arab communities. Arab professionals are rarely found in decision-making positions in the upper echelons of the MOE. By contrast, state religious schools established only for religious Jewish students maintain autonomous control over their curricula.

Discriminatory allocation of state resources to Arab schools and students

The MOE severely underfunds Arab schools in Israel. Israel does not regularly release official data detailing how much it spends in total on each Palestinian and Jewish student, and there are no separate lines in the state budget for Arab education.⁴ However, state statistics published in 2004 reveal that for

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² Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), Statistical Abstract of Israel 2008, No. 59, Table 8.13.

³ The Civil Service Commission, "Suitable Representation for the Arab Minority, including the Druze and Circassians in the Civil Service," 2006 (Hebrew).

⁴ The state budget for education is structured in such a way as to prevent analysis of exactly how much funding Arab education receives. The budget is broken down into 20 general articles, of which only one includes a breakdown of spending on Arab and Jewish education, namely the Pedagogy Administration, the executive arm of the Ministry of Education (MOE). The Pedagogy Administration allocated 4% of its budget to Arab education in 2006 and 3% in 2007. In addition, in line with the State Budget for 2006, drawn up by the MOE, just 1.5% of the state funds allocated to NGOs working in the field of education were allocated to NGOs providing educational services to Arab children and students. Source: The State Budget, 2006 and 2007 (Hebrew).

the academic year 2000-2001 public investment in Arab schools equaled an average of NIS 534 per Arab student, compared to NIS 1,779 per Jewish student or three times more.⁵ This under-funding is manifested in many areas, including the poor infrastructure and facilities characteristic of Arab schools. Furthermore, from primary to secondary school levels, classes are more crowded in Arab schools than in Jewish schools, with an average class size of 26 pupils per class in Jewish schools compared with 30 pupils in Arab schools.⁶ In terms of long-term investment in the education, only four teacher training institutes operate in the Arab education system, compared to 55 in the Hebrew education system.⁷ One of the results of this under-investment is that Arab students training to become teachers account for only 10% of the total.⁸

Early childhood education

Educational disadvantage for Arab children in Israel begins from the earliest stages of the educational process. While *The Compulsory Education Law (1949)*, as amended in 1984, lowered the age of compulsory education from five to three years old, today, state funding for kindergarten education for three and four-year-old Arab children is minimal. Few state-funded preschools operate in Arab towns or villages in Israel, as compared with Jewish communities. As a result, in 2006/7 about 32% of Arab 2-5 year-olds were *not* enrolled in kindergartens, compared to just 15.6% of Jewish children of the same age group.⁹

Primary and Secondary School Education

Due to the state's underfunding of Arab schools, Jewish children excel in school to a greater degree than Arab children from early on in their education. Thus by grade 5, at the end of primary school education, Jewish children gain an average score of around 79% in the Hebrew examination, whereas Arab children scored on average 61% in the examination of Arabic, their native tongue.¹⁰

Arab citizens consistently attend school for fewer years than Jewish children, and in recent years the gap between the two groups has not closed: from 2003 to 2006, Arab children aged 15 and over received an average of 11.1 years of schooling. During the same period, Jewish children received an average of 12.7 years of schooling, i.e. *over one and a half additional years*.¹¹ Consequently there is a higher rate of dropping-out rates among Arab citizens of Israel: the national average rate at which pupils dropped out of the education system in 2006-2008 was 7.2% among Arab pupils in grades 9-12, almost double the figure among Jews (3.7%); a similar pattern of dropping-out applies at grades 9-11: 8.7% among Arab compared to 4.4% among Jewish pupils.¹² The drop-out rate is particularly alarming among the Arab Bedouin in the Naqab, at a rate as high as 70% overall.¹³

⁵ Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), "New Survey – Investment in Education 2000/1," 3 August 2004 (Hebrew).

⁶ CBS, Statistical Abstract of Israel 2008, No. 59, Table 8.9.

⁷ CBS, Statistical Abstract of Israel 2008, No. 59, Table 8.44.

⁸ The proposed state budget for education, 2008.

⁹ CBS, Statistical Abstract of Israel 2008, No. 59, Table 8.6.

¹⁰ The website of the Ministry of Education, press release dated 6 February 2008, "Good results in examinations in mathematics, English and science in Haifa" (Hebrew). According to the press release, Jewish children in the Haifa District scored an average of 79% in Hebrew language examinations, a score quoted as being similar to the national average, while Arab children in the Haifa District scored an average of 62% in Arabic language examinations, quoted as slightly higher than the national score for Arab children of 61%.

¹¹ CBS, Statistical Abstract of Israel 2008, No. 59, Table 8.3.

¹² CBS, Statistical Abstract of Israel 2008, No. 59, Table 8.24.

¹³ Hannan el-Sana and Ajaj Asif, "The Arab Bedouin Population in the Naqab: Economics and employment," The Naqab Institute for Peace and Development Strategies, 2007.

Case Study: First high school in the “unrecognized” Bedouin villages in the Naqab

No high schools currently exist in any of the Arab Bedouin unrecognized villages in the Naqab. The region of Abu-Tulul – El-Shihabi is home to approximately 12,000 Arab Bedouin citizens, and contains seven unrecognized villages. Around 750 female and male students are of high school age; however, only approximately 170 attend high school. The nearest high school is located 12-15 kilometers away; no public transport is provided for the students and many parents will not allow their daughters to travel unaccompanied outside the vicinity of this area. The remainder – around 77% of the total – drop out of the system permanently as a direct consequence of the lack of a local high school. In 2005, Adalah filed a petition to the Supreme Court of Israel on behalf of 35 Arab Bedouin girls and six local NGOs to demand that an accessible high school be built in Abu-Tulul – El-Shihabi.¹⁴ In January 2007, the Supreme Court approved a settlement between the MOE and Adalah, according to which the MOE would establish a high school in Abu-Tulul – El-Shihabi, the first in any unrecognized village, and begin to operate it from 1 September 2009. Despite this agreement, however, as of June 2009, the MOE has yet to begin work on the school.

Higher Education

Arab students are dramatically under-represented in Israel’s institutes of higher education: in 2006/7, 9.1% of Jews in Israel aged 20-29 were students at universities, compared to 3.8% of Arabs.¹⁵ A major obstacle to the admission of Arab students into universities is their relatively poor performance on matriculation exams (the *Baghrut*). Furthermore, the gap between Arab and Jewish students widens further when it comes to meeting the requirements for entering university, as the following table illustrates.

Pupils in Grade 12 with Matriculation Certificates who Met University Entrance Requirements in 2006¹⁶

	Jewish	Arab
Entitled to a matriculation certificate	54.9%	46.3%
Met university entrance requirements	48.3%	34.4%

In fact, Arab students account for just 11.2% of all first degree students. This proportion has an inverse relationship to educational level: At the level of second degree, Arabs account for 6.1% of all students, and by third degree level, the percentage of Arab students falls to an average of 3.5% of all students.¹⁷ The following table shows the falling percentages of Arab students at first, second and third degree level in four key subjects.

¹⁴ H.C. 2848/05, *Fatimah Abu Sabila (Ali) et al., v. The Ministry of Education, et al.* (decision issued 23 January 2007).

¹⁵ CBS, Statistical Abstract of Israel 2008, No. 59, Table 8.47.

¹⁶ CBS, Statistical Abstract of Israel 2008, No. 59, Table 8.25.

¹⁷ CBS, Statistical Abstract of Israel 2008, No. 59, Table 8.52.

University Students by Degree, Field of Study, and Population Group¹⁸

Degree	Engineering and architecture		Sciences and mathematics		Medicine		Law	
	Jews	Arabs	Jews	Arabs	Jews	Arabs	Jews	Arabs
First degree	90.0%	6.0%	85.3%	9.5%	79.3%	19.7%	92.4%	6.7%
Second degree	91.6%	3.1%	92.9%	3.3%	86.6%	12.3%	94.8%	4.7%
Third degree	91.7%	2.5%	95.1%	2.1%	93.1%	4.1%	96.9%	3.1%

Arab citizens of Israel in academia

Arab academics are sorely represented in the faculties of Israel's institutions of higher education, and are consequently marginalized in the production of knowledge in society. Arab academics in general are under-represented in Israel's colleges and universities: in 2007, Arabs, men and women, accounted for as few as 1.2% of all academics employed by Israeli universities and colleges in tenure track positions, and received on average salaries worth 50% less than their Jewish counterparts.¹⁹

Illiteracy rates

The average rate of illiteracy in Israel, at 4.6%, is considered relatively low.²⁰ In the UN's Human Development Report 2007/2008,²¹ Israel was ranked 23rd among 177 countries in which the level of literacy was measured. However, a closer analysis of illiteracy in Israel according to gender and ethnicity indicates that certain population groups have higher percentages of illiteracy than the national average. The group with a particularly high level of illiteracy is Arab women. In 2008, 13.4% of Arab women were considered illiterate, compared to 3.4% of Jewish women, 5.5% of Arab men and only 1.9% of Jewish men.²²

Measures to raise educational standards

The MOE's policies actually act to entrench the gaps between Palestinian and Jewish school children, as special programs to assist academically weak children or enrich the gifted are disproportionately awarded to Jewish schools. For example, the government has provided towns and villages classified as National Priority Area "A" with a host of lucrative educational benefits over many years. However, only *four* small Arab villages of a total of 535 communities were originally selected to receive these benefits, despite the disparities in educational attainment levels and the quality of facilities between Jewish and Arab schools. Thus, for example, Migdal HaEmek and Natserat Illit – two Jewish towns in the north of Israel – received National Priority Area "A" educational benefits, while eleven neighboring Arab towns and villages are excluded.²³

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Adel Manna, *Kitab al-Mustaqbali al Arabi fe Israel*, 2nd Annual Book of Van Leer, 2007 (Arabic).

²⁰ CBS, Statistical Abstract of Israel 2004, No. 55, Table 8.3.

²¹ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2007/2008, Fighting Climate Change: Human solidarity in a divided world*.

Available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2007-2008/>.

²² CBS, Statistical Abstract of Israel 2008, No. 59, Table 8.3. Illiteracy among Arabs is concentrated in the 45+ age range. The definition of an illiterate person employed in these calculations is a person who has completed 0-4 years of schooling.

²³ See H.C. 2773/98 and H.C. 11163/03, *The High Follow-up Committee for the Arab Citizens in Israel, et al. v. The Prime Minister of Israel* (decision delivered on 27 February 2006). As stated above, the government's division of the country into National Priority Areas was found to constitute illegal discrimination against Arab citizens of Israel by the Supreme Court in February 2006. However, thus far the state has yet to implement the court's ruling to cancel the government's decision and

The MOE has also admitted before the Supreme Court that its “Shahar” academic enrichment programs have privileged Jewish schools to the detriment of Arab schools.²⁴ The Shahar programs, established in the 1970s, were intended to assist academically weak school pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds to reach a par with other pupils. In 2000, the Supreme Court confirmed a state commitment to allocate 20% of Shahar funds to Arab schools. Prior to this commitment, the MOE had not implemented the Shahar programs in any Arab schools, although their pupils were often in most need of extra educational assistance. The Supreme Court accepted the state’s request that it increase implementation of the program in Arab schools on a gradual basis, thereby prolonging discrimination against them. The program has still not been implemented in any Arab schools.

Under-investment in Arab education is most blatant in the Naqab. An example is the funding for psychological counselors to Arab Bedouin and Jewish schools. Psychological counselors are appointed by the MOE and are primarily responsible for identifying, diagnosing and treating students with learning and developmental disabilities, providing suitable educational frameworks for students with special needs, and providing consultation to educators. The following table details the number of psychological counselors allocated to selected schools in Bedouin and Jewish towns in the Naqab, compared to the number of positions needed according to the MOE’s own criteria. In June 2005, in response to a petition filed by Adalah challenging the lack of psychological counselors in the seven recognized Bedouin villages in the Naqab, the state acknowledged before the Supreme Court that the MOE had discriminated against schools in the villages in the appointment of psychological counselors.²⁵ No psychological counselors work in schools in the unrecognized villages.²⁶

Allocation of psychological counselor positions in Jewish and Bedouin towns in the Naqab²⁷

Town (Jewish towns shown in grey)	No. of positions needed according to MOE criteria	No. of positions allocated	% of required positions allocated
Rahat	18.8	6.0	31.9
Ofakim	8.9	7.4	83.1
Houra	4.4	1.3	29.5
Dimona	12	9.2	76.6

has not come up with an alternative set of clear, objective and fair criteria for the distribution of additional educational benefits to towns and villages identified as priority areas.

²⁴ See, H.C. 2814/07, *The Follow-Up Committee on Arab Education, et al. v. The Ministry of Education, et al.*, submitted to the Supreme Court by Adalah in May 1997.

²⁵ See H.C. 4177/04, *Yusef Abu-Abied, et al. v. The Ministry of Education, et al.*

²⁶ Adalah demanded the appointment of psychological counselors in five Arab Bedouin schools in the unrecognized villages in the Naqab serving 3,650 students, none of which has such a position. On 1 July 2009, the Supreme Court affirmed the urgent need for such counselors and the necessity of exerting the maximum possible effort to resolve the problem. However, the court was satisfied with the state’s commitment to establish special educational courses to prepare counselors in order to overcome the shortage. See H.C. 3926/06, *Al-Sayed Abed El-Dayem et al v. The Ministry of Education and The Abu Basma Regional Council* (decision delivered 1 July 2009).

²⁷ Data cited in a letter from the Ministry of Education to Adalah, annex 4 , H.C. 3926/06, *Al-Sayed Abed El-Dayem et al v. The Ministry of Education and The Abu Basma Regional Council*.