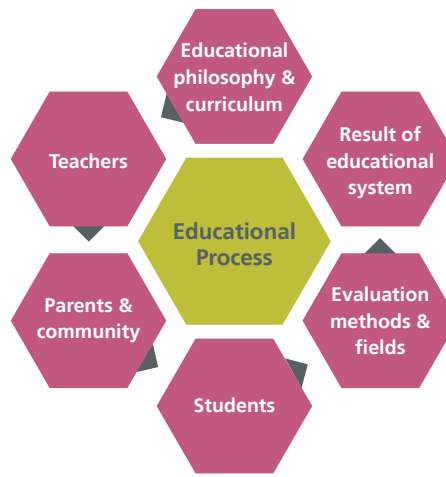


Optimal Educational System in Jerusalem

Dr. Yahya Hijazi - Jerusalem

There is no need to discuss achievements and failures of the various educational bodies or even listen to lengthy speeches from those who run the educational system at national level. It is enough to observe the production of each body, its composition, inputs and outputs both at individual and national levels.



There are many educational apparatuses in the city of Jerusalem, with different educational philosophies, ideological agendas, objectives and curricula. The final product of “community programming” process that they wish to see in their graduates also varies. Palestinian public schools, according to their declared goals, work towards crystallizing Palestinian students that are proud of their homeland, religion and heritage as well as able to study in local and international universities. Some private schools work towards shaping students that cherish their religious affiliation mainly at the expense of other affiliations or concentrate their efforts on students that can compete for seats in national universities. Schools under the jurisdiction of Israeli Ministry of Education aspire to engage Arab/ Israeli students in Israeli labor market, either as employees, technicians or academics, using sometimes the Israeli curriculum to prepare them or other methods of enticement to attract students to choose the Israeli path.

Despite Palestinian Ministry of Education’s progress to achieve its quantitative goals through increasing number of students enrolled in schools and reducing illiteracy rates among citizens, it is still wandering in the ways to raise the quality of education, which requires resources and efforts that are not available at the ministry¹. The educational system in Palestine in general and Jerusalem in particular is described as traditional, and changes in recent years on the quality of education, despite their importance, are only formal changes that lack depth and integrative features. Traditional schools’ curricula and programs are far from idealistic and unable to incorporate comprehensive educational visions. This is the case in the Palestinian situation in general and in the case of Jerusalem in particular.

After family, the school plays primary role in shaping children’s personality, reading, writing skills and mathematical development, as well as in helping them to deal with life’s requirements through cumulative capacity building throughout different stages of child development. Therefore, it is essential to create

1 Afwouneh, Sa’ida, Reality of Education in Palestinian Schools after the Rise of the Palestinian Authority, Al-Najah university Journal for Research (Humanities), 28 (2), 265-292, 2014.

harmony between education received in the family and school. Evidently, both institutions are products of one cultural and social system.

An ideal and exemplary school seeks to provide comprehensive education to all its graduates regardless of their mental development, social and educational backgrounds. Additionally, it should provide support and development programs in line with the accelerated development processes to help outstanding students reach their full potential.

There are many models that could reflect a “best educational model.” Successful global models that could be studied thoroughly include Singapore model and Finnish model. The Singaporean system focuses on the achievement of students in education using strategies and patterns of instruction that are considered the best in delivering educational material. Therefore, training and training of teachers is geared towards achievement through the introduction of strategies and teaching methods that enable students to learn habits of knowledge transfer towards excellence. These are traditional methods that do not necessarily deploy modern means and technologies to achieve optimal educational experiences². The educational system in Finland relies on playing, discovery and distance from evaluation with focus on quality of life rather than on education solely as education is the basis for life. The Finnish model also embraces inclusive education as an educational practice in primary schools. Class teachers accompany their students throughout primary education, giving them opportunity to know their students very closely, identify their strengths and weaknesses within a sufficient timeframe³. These two models are contradictory in form and adopted mechanisms; however, they are similar in terms of results that all other education systems aspire to; which is shaping a distinguished and valuable student who is able to engage with life positively. The two models emphasize the importance of local culture as a basis for education’s content and form as well as highlight equal quality education for all students both in cities and in remote villages, which requires the state to carefully select prospect teachers before entering universities/ colleges and engage in the educational system.

What are the advantages of an exemplary educational system?

1. It is based on educational philosophy/ philosophies with a clear and system of values that guides all schools, regardless of their administrative, religious or geographic affiliations.
2. It has a vision, educational mission and methods derived from its profoundly crystallized culture. The Arab-Palestinian culture in our case is the mother culture, which must be at the core of any vision or message that is worth spreading.
3. It prioritizes addressing diversity in society as an enriching factor for the benefit of society. Consequently, teachers must be qualified to work and deal with difference as a given rather than a problem. Jerusalem’s community is a multicultural society that includes different religions and races; therefore, the optimal system must deal with difference and similarity as strength and learning opportunity towards building comprehensive curricula and programs.
4. It offers space and resources to all students, is not elite and not selective. It values concepts of equality and justice in education and introduces them as its guiding principles. These features are not evident in many schools under municipality of Jerusalem in Israel and in some schools affiliated with Pastor and private schools.

2 Academia Newspaper, 29.03.2016, Is the Educational System in Singapore is the Model for Preparing 21st Century generations, <http://bit.ly/2psCONu>, accessed 07.03.2018

3 Educational System in Finland, <https://sites.google.com/site/educationinfinland1/6>, accessed 07.03.2018

5. It functions to discover outstanding students and invest in them. Outstanding students have a key role in leading change in their community and ultimately the world. If these outstanding students are identified and placed properly, they would be able to advance the situation of the world and contribute to the prosperity of their own countries.
6. It opens doors and develops models and branches that match students' preferences and abilities as much as possible, such as agricultural, arts, music, technology, sports, industrial and commercial branch in addition to scientific and literary streams.
7. It shapes personalities of valued students that are involved in addressing issues on the community and national level. These students that are interested in the issues of the world around them, whether through direct or indirect social action. An individual is part of his/her environment and must develop an interest in preserving and developing it.

Configuration	Practices	Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Existence of a guiding philosophy and educational vision. ● Qualifying teachers based on national plans and philosophy. ● Provide teachers with comprehensive teaching skills. ● Develop frameworks and provide resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Accommodate all methods and frameworks of teaching with accordance to educational visions and expected outputs. ● Take into account individual differences, give each student the opportunity to reach maximum capacity and provide appropriate frameworks that take into account differences within inclusive education. ● Focus on academic achievement and give the same attention to psychological and social aspects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students are able to discover themselves within appropriate frameworks for their abilities and preferences. ● Students are aware of the importance of belonging and preservation of their environment. ● Students are equipped with abilities and advanced life skills reflected in their personalities. ● Students are productive and contribute to their community directly and indirectly.

What can be done considering the complex reality of Jerusalem and limited available space to develop an educational system that is close to the desired educational model?

1. Palestinian Ministry of Education:

Attempt to establish channels to discuss a unified educational vision that includes public schools of the Palestinian Authority, schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and private Palestinian schools in Jerusalem.

2. Teachers' Qualification:

Update vocational rehabilitation programs for teachers in order to better prepare them by providing knowledge and skills that would broaden their horizons about their professional role in developing students not only delivering curricula. Teachers that recognize that their educational role is not limited to transfer of curricula comprehend difference in abilities and tendencies as a natural factor to ignite excellence and creativity.

3. Parents:

Parents must be aware of educational philosophies encompassing education that their children receive. Although there are philosophies and objectives declared in the educational system, often there is gap between what is written and what is applied. In that case, parents should have an active role in bridging this gap because family is a fundamental factor in community upbringing.

4. Schools:

Lack of a unified educational vision in Jerusalemite schools in Jerusalem to this day should not prevent each school from conducting meetings involving educational and administrative staff to formulate vision and mission of their respective school that would reflect its objectives.

5. Academics:

Invest in research and studies that will improve education. Investment in studies and research is very low within various fields in general and in the educational field in particular. Ultimately, any development that is not based on studies and research is considered incomplete development.

6. Civil Society:

Since schools lack sufficient resources to implement an optimal educational system, civil society actors have a crucial role in addressing students' needs, especially with regard to life skills. For instance, helping students discover their abilities and preferences, offer individual and group counseling, empower leadership capacities, improve communication skills and self-expression, dialogue skills, engagement in decision-making processes and writing skills, in order to bridge the gap between what is hoped for and what is delivered in schools.

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