



Education in East Jerusalem

The Directorate of Education: Establishment, Current Status, Realities, Achievements, and Challenges (1967-2025)

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Abstract

This study examines the development of Palestinian education in East Jerusalem from 1967 to 2025 by analyzing the role of the Directorate of Education as a central actor in safeguarding national identity within the context of prolonged settler-colonial domination. The study seeks to trace the structural transformations that Jerusalem's education system has undergone, beginning with the phase of popular resistance following the occupation, through the institutionalization of private and endowment-based (*waqf*) education, and up to the phase of direct administrative control and the escalation of Israelization policies, especially after 2019.

The study investigates Israeli modes of intervention in education, including conditional funding schemes, curricular regulation, direct school management, and interference in the appointment of educational leadership, as forms of structural (soft) coercion aimed at redefining the function, content, and social role of education.

At the same time, the study highlights forms of educational resilience developed by the Jerusalemite community through private education, community initiatives, and educational practices led by teachers despite **the restrictions on institutional margins**.

Methodologically, the study adopts a historical-analytical approach drawing on United Nations and human rights reports, as well as critical literature in the sociology of education and settler-colonial studies, concluding that education in Jerusalem remains a central arena for the struggle over identity and existence, and that its protection requires a distinct national vision that takes into account the city's unique character and its political and legal context.

Keywords: Education in East Jerusalem, Directorate of Education, Israelization, Soft Structural Coercion, Educational **Steadfastness**, National Identity.

Introduction

Education in East Jerusalem is one of the most prominent arenas of structural conflict between the Israeli colonial project and Palestinian attempts to preserve their national and cultural presence in the city. Since the occupation of Jerusalem in 1967, the education sector has been subjected to a series of policies aimed at reshaping its structure and function as a tool for the production of knowledge, identity, and belonging. In this context, the Jerusalem Directorate of Education has played a central role in organizing the educational process and preserving its national character, within a highly complex political and legal context.

This study examines the development of Palestinian education in East Jerusalem during the period from 1967 to 2025, by examining the origins of the Directorate of Education, the evolution of its roles, its achievements, and the challenges it has faced throughout successive historical phases. The research is based on the hypothesis that education in Jerusalem has developed along an abnormal institutional trajectory and took shape under accumulated structural pressures, manifested in occupation policies aimed at dismantling the Palestinian educational authority and subjecting schools to an increasingly strict system of administrative oversight.

The study also analyzes the major shifts that have occurred in education in Jerusalem, beginning with the period following the direct occupation, through the strengthening of the role of private and endowment-based (*waqf*) education, then the post-Oslo Accords period and its resulting legal and administrative vacuum, up to the phase of Israeli escalation since 2019, which has been characterized by intensified direct interventions in curricula, school administration, and the funding of educational institutions.

The study also seeks to highlight education in East Jerusalem as a sphere of community steadfastness (*sumud*), where educational, political, and legal dimensions intersect, and emphasizes that for this sector to continue fulfilling its national role, it requires a special approach that takes into account the city's unique character and responds to the rapid structural changes taking place in the Jerusalem education sector.

Part One

Historical Context and Structural Transformations in Education in East Jerusalem (1967–1973)

Education in East Jerusalem has been one of the most sensitive areas of conflict since 1967, having transformed from a service sector into a political and cultural battleground between the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian community. Immediately following the occupation of East Jerusalem, Israel began attempting to reshape the educational environment to serve its colonial objectives of imposing Israeli sovereignty and identity on the city.

This led to a direct clash with the parents of Jerusalemite students, who viewed



the Jordanian curriculum, used at that time, as a bastion of national identity and a shield protecting collective consciousness. In this context, the role of the Islamic Endowment (*waqf*) schools - founded by the Jordanian Ministry of Endowments (*awqaf*) and still administered by it to this day - emerged as a national alternative that preserved the Arabic curricula and resisted Israeli pressure to impose Israeli curricula on Palestinian students.

The Jerusalemite educator Husni al-Ashhab played a pivotal role in leading this educational resistance project, by building school networks, providing curricula, and recruiting teachers who refused to submit to the occupation's administration.

First: Israeli Policies of Control over Education after 1967 (Immediately Following the Annexation of East Jerusalem)

1. Imposition of Israeli Administration on Palestinian Schools:

Following Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem in June 1967, a systematic process was started to reshape education by way of changing the administrative structure of schools and imposing upon them a new legal reality.

According to a report by the Israeli Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), Israel appointed in the first week of occupation an official for "the administration of Arab education", to take control of all schools in East Jerusalem, to grant them new licenses, and require them to operate in accordance with Israeli laws (ACRI 2019). These early control measures included the following:

- Forcing schools to re-register with the Israeli Ministry of Education.
- Closing schools under the pretext of "lack of licenses" in order to pressure their administrations.
- Forcing school principals to sign a commitment to operate in accordance with Israeli education laws.
- Attempting to introduce the Israeli curriculum or its modified version, known as the «Unified Curriculum.»
- Numerous studies agree that the aim of these ostensibly administrative measures was the reshaping of the political and ideological consciousness of Palestinian students in Jerusalem.

2. Abolition of the Jordanian curriculum and attempts to impose the Israeli curriculum:

Before 1967, all schools in East Jerusalem followed the Jordanian curriculum, as the city was under Jordanian administration. After annexing Jerusalem, Israel attempted to replace the Jordanian curriculum with an Arabic version of the Israeli curriculum,

naming it the “Unified Curriculum.” Jerusalemites viewed this move as a direct assault on national identity and an attempt to shape a generation of students with an awareness disconnected from their historical roots. A report by (Ir Amim 2021) states that Israeli curricula aim to make students accept the Zionist narrative as an axiomatic truth and to gradually erode Arab and Palestinian consciousness.

Second: The Jerusalem Strike and Rejection of Israeli Curricula (1967-1968-)

1. The Popular Educational Strike:

When the Israeli Ministry of Education announced the implementation of the Israeli curriculum for the 1967–1968 school year, one of the largest protest movements in the modern history of Jerusalem erupted. Families formed popular committees that called for a general strike in all schools in East Jerusalem, as documented by historian Walid Khalidi in his study on education in Jerusalem (Khalidi, 1992)

The strike included the following steps:

- Parents withdrew thousands of students from schools placed under Israeli administration.
- Teachers refused to report to schools under Israeli administration despite threats of dismissal.
- All segments of Jerusalem society - individuals, institutions, and unions – pressured school administrations not to accept the Israeli curricula.

ACRI describes this strike as an expression of comprehensive civil resistance to the policy of educational Israelization(ACRI 2019).

2. The Educational Vacuum Crisis:

The strike left thousands of students at various grade levels without schools, making it necessary to seek a national educational alternative to fill the educational void - one that would preserve the Arab-Islamic identity of Jerusalem, protect national consciousness, nurture the Arabic mother tongue, and maintain the Jordanian national curriculum.

This need served as the catalyst for the establishment of the Islamic Endowment (*waqf*) Schools, as the crisis prompted parents’ committees, nationalist teachers, and the Ministry of Islamic Endowments to take action to establish a new educational system that could fulfill its national duty toward the younger generation.

According to an (UNRWA, 1980) report, “Education in Jerusalem during that period was on the verge of total collapse had it not been for the intervention of local community institutions and Endowments (*awqaf*).”



This marked the first step toward the establishment of Islamic Endowment (*awqaf*) schools.

Third: The Emergence of Islamic Waqf Schools and the Role of Husni al-Ashhab

1. The Beginnings: The Need for a National Alternative:

In response to the 1967 crisis, the Jordanian Ministry of Endowments (*awqaf*) decided to establish national schools independent of the occupation, overseeing them administratively and financially, and which would fully adopt the Jordanian curriculum.

According to a report by the Jordanian Ministry of Endowments (1995), the first schools opened in rented buildings and in mosque facilities, due to the lack of ready school infrastructure.

These schools aimed to protect the Arab curriculum from Israeli influence, provided an educational environment free from Israeli oversight, and accommodated students who had withdrawn from schools under Israeli administration.

2. Educator Husni al-Ashhab: An Educational Leader:

The name of educator Husni al-Ashhab emerged in this period as one of the most important educational figures in the establishment of schools in East Jerusalem. His influential role led Islamic Waqf schools to be known as “Husni al-Ashhab” schools.

Al-Ashhab contributed to the selection of buildings suitable for conversion into schools (Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf, 1995). He also collected Jordanian curriculum books and distributed them to Awqaf schools, in cooperation with the Jordanian Ministry of Education, and established internal and administrative regulations for the school network. In addition, he recruited teachers who refused to work under the Israeli administration. He was among the most prominent of those who refused any Israeli interference in appointments, curricula, budgets, and oversight, for which he faced intense pressure from the Israeli Ministry of Education, which repeatedly threatened to close the schools.

Fourth: The Alliance of Islamic Waqf Schools with Private Islamic and Christian Schools

The Waqf schools alone were not sufficient to accommodate tens of thousands of students, but the combined total of Christian and Islamic private and community schools formed a comprehensive structure that proved effective, completely emptying the schools of the occupation municipality, and paralyzing the occupation’s ability to impose Israeli curricula, forcing the Ministry of Education to gradually reintroduce

the Jordanian curriculum in East Jerusalem from 1969 through 1974, and Jerusalem schools saw the return of teachers who had been working under the Jordanian curriculum to their former posts.

Research by (Ir Amim, 2019) indicates that this was one of the most successful instances of Palestinian societal resistance to an imposed educational policy, and it worked because of the unity of the community, the alliance of individuals, institutions, committees, and unions, and the fact that the Waqf's ownership of extensive real estate enabled it to quickly establish new classrooms, in addition to the power of Christian schools which were independently funded internationally, such that Israel could not easily pressure them. This dealt a decisive blow to Israeli plans at the time.

Fifth: The Impact of This Phase on the Identity of Jerusalem's Education

The educational victory in East Jerusalem led to the following:

- The consolidation of the concept of “resistant education” as part of national identity.
- The securing of an Arabic reference-point for education for several decades.
- The strengthening the position of religious endowment schools and Christian and Islamic private and community schools as a primary line of defense.
- The creation of a permanent structural divide between the occupation's schools and the Waqf schools and their allies among Islamic and Christian private and community schools.

The years following the annexation of East Jerusalem marked a decisive moment in the history of Palestinian education. The establishment of Waqf schools was part of an integrated educational resistance coalition that included Christian and Islamic community schools, that forced the occupation to reinstate the Jordanian curriculum.

This underscores the fact that education in Jerusalem has been a battleground for the preservation of Palestinian identity for decades, but the occupation did not give up or renounce its project to Israelize education, but rather employed a strategy of advance and retreat with patience, reorganizing its ranks anew to achieve its goals at a new stage.

Part Two

The Jerusalem Directorate of Education (1974–1987): Challenges, Achievements, and Aspirations Under Occupation

Since the mid-1970s, the Jerusalem Directorate of Education entered a new phase



in its work characterized by by growing public awareness of the dangers posed by the Israeli educational project on the one hand, and the mounting need to rebuild the national educational system within the city on the other. After the occupation's attempts to impose Israeli curricula on Arab schools failed, the features of a new phase began to emerge aimed at consolidating national education, a phase that lasted from 1974 until the outbreak of the First Intifada in 1987.

These years were crucial for the rehabilitation of Islamic Waqf schools and the formation of a broad network of private Islamic and Christian schools that stood shoulder to shoulder with the Waqf in confronting the policies of Israelization. These schools, in all their diversity, formed a united front to protect the Jordanian curriculum and the Palestinian pedagogical structure and identity (Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1970).

First: The Political and Educational Context Between 1974 and 1980

The year 1974 marked a turning point in the history of education in Jerusalem, as the Jerusalemite community realized that the conflict had become a battle for minds, narratives, and the future. This was accompanied by a growing awareness among educational leaders of the importance of having a powerful administrative body capable of formulating coherent educational policies. Thus emerged the Directorate of Education in Jerusalem as the primary national authority guiding educational work in the city.

The occupation attempted to restrict the Directorate's work, particularly regarding school licensing and academic supervision (UNESCO, 2012), and despite the tireless efforts of Jerusalemite educators - through the development of community support networks, local committees, and parent-teacher associations - the Directorate faced systematic pressure from the occupying authorities at that stage, manifested in the following:

- Reducing budgets for Arab schools and increased surveillance on the movement of teachers and students.
- Attempts to increase the proportion of vocational education at the expense of academic education to strengthen the "dependent working class" (UNESCO, 2011)
- Closing classes or schools under security or administrative pretexts.
- Imposing complex hiring procedures for teachers to weaken national educational institutions.

However, despite these policies, the Directorate of Education, with the support of the Jerusalem community and the Awqaf, managed to maintain academic continuity and thwart plans for a gradual shift toward Israeli curricula.

Second: Rebuilding the Waqf School Network (1974–1982)

This phase was marked by a qualitative expansion of Islamic Waqf schools, which became the backbone of national education in Jerusalem. The Directorate worked to renovate the schools' infrastructure, upgrade classrooms, and strengthen the teaching of national identity, religion, and history, at a time when these concepts were suppressed in schools under the occupation.

The Directorate and the Waqf schools achieved key milestones, including:

- The restoration of historic endowment schools in the Old City. This reestablished the educational process at the heart of historic Jerusalem despite occupation restrictions.
- Increasing the number of trained teachers through professional development programs in collaboration with Jordanian and Palestinian institutions.
- Introducing national enrichment materials — not officially authorized — but presented through extracurricular activities, such as field trips, lectures, and scouting activities.
- Enacting a flexible student admission system, enabling Waqf schools to accommodate thousands of students who withdrew from schools that the occupation had attempted to take over.

This expansion was a major achievement, as the occupation sought to transform Waqf schools into institutions administratively subordinate to it; however, their administration remained independent because the local educational system remained dedicated to maintaining its role and legitimacy (Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1986).

Third: The Role of Private Islamic and Christian Schools (1975–1985)

It is impossible to discuss the period (1974–1987) without mentioning the pivotal role played by private schools in supporting the Directorate; they operated in parallel with the Ministry of Religious Endowments' schools and constituted a second line of defense for preserving national education. They succeeded in this for the following reasons:

- Their financial and administrative independence made them less vulnerable to pressure from the occupation.
- They continued teaching the Jordanian curriculum without alteration, which provided a safe haven for students who rejected Israelization.
- Their high academic reputation attracted students from various neighborhoods in Jerusalem.
- Their ability to attract qualified teachers and establish partnerships with Arab and



Islamic educational institutions (Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1985).

The Impact of Private Schools on the Occupation

The alliance of Waqf schools and private schools represented a powerful blow to the occupation, as it realized that its attempt to replace the Israeli curriculum had failed, and it could not continue to run empty schools. As a result of this failure, the occupation gradually resumed allowing the Jordanian curriculum to be taught in schools under its administrative and financial control. This was an implicit acknowledgment of the victory of the people of Jerusalem in their educational struggle (Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1985).

Fourth: Reinforcing National Identity in the Classrooms (1978–1987)

At the end of the 1970s, the Directorate's efforts to consolidate national identity in schools intensified through several initiatives, including:

- Fostering historical awareness of Jerusalem through special student activities, competitions, and heritage exhibitions.
- Establishing educational counseling systems to provide psychological support to students amid increasing arrests and persecution by the occupation.
- Improving the quality of Arabic language and Islamic education in the face of the forced spread of Hebrew within the city (Palestinian Studies Institute, 1981).
- Organizing educational leadership courses for teachers with the aim of creating a core of Jerusalemite educational leaders capable of protecting schools in times of crisis.

These initiatives played a significant role in shaping the resilience of the generation that later participated in the First Intifada, as a conscious and strong national identity took shape within the halls of Jerusalem's schools.

Fifth: The Accumulated Challenges on the Eve of the First Intifada

Despite significant achievements, in the years leading up to the First Intifada, the Directorate faced a series of mounting challenges, most notably:

- Complex bureaucratic procedures imposed by occupation authorities on graduates of the Jordanian Secondary School system in Jerusalem, such as imposing additional requirements on them for admission in Israeli universities, requiring them to take special equivalency exams, and complicating registration procedures.

- Arrests and administrative summons targeting a large number of teachers on political charges (ACRI, 2012).
- Closure of schools or classes on security pretexts or failure to meet requirements (Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1986).
- Lack of classrooms, especially with population growth and insufficient funding.
- Pressure on extracurricular activities, as the occupation has attempted to prevent any activity with a nationalist theme.

However, the Directorate succeeded in maintaining the regular operation of schools and the independence of the curriculum.

Sixth: Educational Aspirations Until 1987

By 1987, the Jerusalem Directorate of Education had defined its priorities:

- Strengthening educational autonomy as much as possible by establishing new schools outside areas under the occupation's direct administrative control.
- Increasing the number of Waqf schools, with the aim of reducing parents' reliance on schools under Israeli administration.
- Deepening partnerships with cultural institutions in Jerusalem, such as Beit al-Sharq and community centers.
- Strengthening the role of women in the educational process by training new female teachers and educational leaders.
- Enriching Arabic curricula to compensate for any shortcomings in the official curriculum.

These aspirations laid the foundation for a long-term phase of steadfastness (*sumud*) (UNESCO, 2011).

Part Three

Education in East Jerusalem during the First Intifada (1987–1993)

The First Intifada began in December 1987 and marked a turning point in Palestinian history, as popular demonstrations and protests spread to all sectors, including education.

This period witnessed major changes in the administration of schools, in response to the demands of popular resistance, and the occupation's attempts to control school



curricula and infrastructure (Abu Arafa, 1992).

During this period, Islamic Waqf schools, private schools, and Christian schools were pivotal for the steadfastness (*sumud*) of the educational system and the preservation of national identity, in the face of challenges of funding and Israeli surveillance.

First: The Impact of the Uprising on the Educational Process

1. **School Disruptions:** Most schools in East Jerusalem experienced partial or complete closure as a result of protests and clashes between students and Israeli forces, which disrupted the regular school schedule (United Nations Children's Fund, 1988).
2. **Security risks:** Teachers and students were subjected to persecution and arrests, particularly in schools located near conflict zones, which necessitated the development of alternative plans to ensure the safety and continuity of education (Jerusalem Center for Social Rights, 1991).
3. **Curriculum Changes:** Waqf and private schools continued to use the Jordanian curriculum. The occupation attempted to introduce some Israeli subjects in schools; however, resistance from teachers and parents prevented the widespread imposition of these subjects (UNRWA, 1989).

Second: The Steadfastness (*sumud*) of Waqf and Private Schools

1. **Preserving National Identity:** The Awqaf schools preserved Palestinian identity by integrating formal education with national activities, organizing history competitions, field trips to Palestinian landmarks, and lessons in national culture and the Arabic language (Institute for Palestinian Studies, 2000).
2. **Cooperation with the local community:** Parents and community committees played a role in supporting the schools, whether by providing partial funding, organizing school security, or offering psychological support to students (Abu Arafa, 1992).
3. **Alternative Education:** Temporary facilities, such as mosques and community centers, were used to continue schooling when public schools were closed, which helped ensure the continuity of the educational process even during the most tense periods (Abu Arafa, 1992).

Third: Challenges of This Phase

1. **Ongoing Israeli pressure:** The occupation imposed restrictions on movement,

searched schools, and banned certain national activities, which posed a direct threat to the schools' autonomy (Jerusalem Center for Social Rights, 1991).

2. **Lack of resources:** The need for books, school furniture, and teachers increased as a result of repeated closures and a lack of official support from the Jordanian (UNRWA, 1989).
3. **Psychological pressure on students:** Students were subjected to harassment and arrests, and the presence of the Israeli army in their neighborhoods affected their academic performance, requiring educational and psychological interventions in schools (Al-Sarhan, 1993).

Fourth: Achievements of Palestinian Education During the Intifada

1. **Education Continued Despite the Circumstances:** Waqf schools, private schools, and national community schools managed to ensure the continuity of studies, representing a practical success in the face of the occupation's attempts to subjugate education. (Hilal, 1991)
2. **Promoting National Values:** National enrichment programs and workshops on civil and political rights were introduced, which helped foster a sense of national consciousness among students during times of tension. (Hilal, 1991)
3. **Development of educational networks:** Schools collaborated with international organizations such as UNRWA to secure funding and logistical support, in addition to coordinating efforts among different schools to ensure the continuity of education (UNRWA, 1989).

Fifth: Groundwork prior to the Palestinian Authority assuming its duties (1993)

1. **Preparations for autonomous educational administration:** As the Oslo Accords approached, the Directorate began developing plans for the independent administration of national education, including the development of Palestinian national curricula and the preparation and training of teachers.
2. **Expanding infrastructure:** Despite constraints, plans were made to establish additional classrooms and temporary educational centers to alleviate overcrowding, with a focus on marginalized areas (Jerusalem Center for Social Rights, 1991)
3. **Establishment of alternative educational programs:** Informal educational initiatives emerged, such as evening classes and cultural activities in mosques and community centers, to fill the educational void resulting from ongoing closures.

There is no doubt that the period of the First Intifada (1987–1993) marked a turning point in the history of in East Jerusalem, as Waqf and private schools demonstrated



their steadfastness (*sumud*) and ability to preserve national identity. Despite difficult conditions, Israeli pressure, and a lack of resources, these schools succeeded in providing continuous and coherent education, while reinforcing national identity and preparing the generation that would face the challenges of the period following the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994 (Al-Khalidi, 1991).

Part Four

Education in East Jerusalem Since the Palestinian National Authority Assumed Its Duties (1994 - 2000)

The establishment of the Palestinian National Authority in 1994, following the signing of the Oslo Accords, marked a turning point in the process of building Palestinian national institutions, including the educational system. However, this transformation, which held great promise for Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, took on a complex character in East Jerusalem, given that the city was explicitly excluded from arrangements for the PNA's administrative sovereignty and remained under direct Israeli control (Palestinian Ministry of Education, 1998).

In this context, education in East Jerusalem has become a true test of the Palestinian National Authority's ability to exercise its national role beyond its geographical jurisdiction, and one of the most prominent arenas of conflict over identity, authority, and symbolic sovereignty. This part aims to analyze the reality of education in Jerusalem during the period 1994–2000 by examining the political and legal framework of the time, the nature of the relationship between the Palestinian Ministry of Education and the Jerusalem Department of Education, as well as the changes in the curriculum and the conditions of schools, teachers, and students.

• The Political and Legal Framework of the Palestinian National Authority Period

The Oslo Accords created an ambiguous legal situation in East Jerusalem, as they left the city outside Areas A, B and C, and entirely under Israeli control, while implicitly allowing certain Palestinian service-providing activities. This situation created a structural contradiction between the imposed Israeli legal framework and the Palestinian national framework seeking to consolidate its institutional presence. (Institute for Palestine Studies, 1999)

The Palestinian Ministry of Education was not granted official authority over the education sector in Jerusalem; however, since 1994, it began to play an effective, albeit indirect, role, by:

- Developing general educational policies.
- Preparing the unified Palestinian curriculum.

- Providing technical and financial support to schools in Jerusalem, and Implicit oversight of educational staff.

The Jerusalem Directorate of Education has served as a link between the Ministry of Education in Ramallah and the schools, drawing on its community-based legitimacy and the Jerusalemite community's need for a clear national authority in the face of increasing attempts at Israelization (Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1999).

• **Rebuilding the National Framework for Education**

One of the most notable achievements of the 1994–2000 period was the reconstruction of the national framework for Palestinian education following decades of dependence on external curricula and systems. The Palestinian Ministry of Education launched a comprehensive national initiative aimed at unifying the Palestinian education system and developing curricula that reflect Palestinian identity, history, and culture.

This project took on a special political dimension, as the adoption of the Palestinian curriculum represented a symbolic act of sovereignty, challenging attempts to impose the Israeli curriculum. The Directorate of Education supported the following approach:

- Encouraging the adoption of the Palestinian curriculum in public and private schools.
- Providing the necessary training for teachers.
- Coordinating with Jerusalem-based institutions to overcome restrictions on the import of textbooks.

Despite the confiscation of many textbooks and delays in their delivery, schools resorted to alternative solutions, such as using old editions or teaching and explaining the content orally, which reflects the extent of the community's determination to protect the national authority on education (Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1999).

• **The State of Educational Infrastructure in East Jerusalem Schools in the Absence of Sovereignty**

The educational infrastructure in East Jerusalem was one of the sectors most affected by the absence of Palestinian sovereignty after 1994, when the PNA inherited a national education system in a state of disarray, long been subjected to occupation policies, without possessing the tools for direct intervention. This reality was clearly reflected in the conditions of schools in terms of their number, geographical distribution, capacity, and level of equipment. (Dajani, 1997)

After the signing of the Oslo Accords, the occupation authorities continued to implement discriminatory urban planning policies that limited the Jerusalemite community's ability to develop its educational facilities. The occupation municipality subjected any school expansion to complex licensing requirements, demanding



security and engineering approvals nearly impossible to obtain, particularly in densely populated Arab neighborhoods such as Silwan, Shu'afat, Al-Issawiya, and Beit Hanina. As a result, construction projects for new schools or to expand existing ones came to a standstill, despite the natural increase in student numbers. (Palestinian Ministry of Education, 1998)

This situation exacerbated the classroom crisis, as educational reports in the late 1990s reveal a severe shortage of classrooms stricken by overcrowding, exceeded 40 students per class in some schools. This had a direct impact on the quality of education, teaching methods, the mental health of students and teachers, and the ability of schools to implement interactive educational activities.

Some schools were forced to adopt a double-shift system, which led to chronic exhaustion among students. In other cases, school administrations, in coordination with the Jerusalem Directorate of Education, resorted to renting residential buildings and converting them into temporary educational facilities, despite the fact that these often lacked adequate space, playgrounds, or sanitary facilities. (Palestinian Ministry of Education, 1998)

In this context, Islamic endowments and Jerusalem-based institutions played a prominent role in attempting to fill the void, by restoring old waqf schools, particularly within the Old City, and rehabilitating them to ensure the continuity of the educational process. However, these efforts, despite their importance, had limited impact given the scale of accumulated needs, and were repeatedly been met with demolition notices or stop-work orders issued by the occupation municipality.

It should be noted that the crisis in educational infrastructure was the result of a systematic Israeli policy aimed at undermining Palestinian education in Jerusalem and pushing students toward schools run by the occupation municipality or toward early dropout. This was evident in the stark disparity in the level of investment in Israeli schools within Jerusalem and the deliberate neglect of Arab schools, whether in terms of maintenance, equipment, or space allocated per student.

Despite these challenges, the Jerusalem Directorate of Education sought to manage the crisis with limited resources, focusing on continuity and preventing collapse. It worked to coordinate among schools to distribute students according to capacity, supporting community initiatives to renovate educational facilities, and documenting structural deficiencies to report them to international and human rights organizations.

This approach helped maintain a minimum level of continuity in the educational process, but it was insufficient to address the deep structural flaws that plagued education in Jerusalem in the absence of Palestinian sovereignty and amid continued Israeli control over the land, planning, and resources; rather, Jerusalem's schools were a daily battleground over the right to education, existence, and identity.

- **Conditions of Teachers and Students in East Jerusalem (1994–2000)**

The conditions of teachers and students in East Jerusalem during the period 1994–2000 were closely linked to the political and legal context that emerged in the post-Oslo Accords era. An extremely complex educational reality was formed, in which an emerging Palestinian national authority overlapped with an Israeli system of control over land, infrastructure, and administrative procedures. As a result, education in Jerusalem became a space of daily conflict for identity and continuity (Institute for Palestine Studies, 1999).

- **Teachers' Conditions: Between the Absence of a Legal Framework and the National Role**

After the Palestinian National Authority assumed its responsibilities in 1994, teachers in East Jerusalem were not integrated into the official organizational structure of the Palestinian Ministry of Education, due to the exclusion of Jerusalem from the Authority's administrative jurisdiction. As a result, teachers continued to work within various frameworks, including Islamic Waqf schools, private and community schools, and some schools affiliated with the Israeli municipality and the Israeli Ministry of Education, leading to significant disparities in working conditions and job security.

Teachers in Jerusalem faced great legal uncertainty, as most contracts lacked long-term employment guarantees, and there was no unified union body capable of protecting their rights. In addition, a number of teachers were subject to restrictive Israeli measures, including requirements for work and travel permits, security summonses, and monitoring of educational content, particularly in subjects with a national dimension (Hilal, 1998).

Despite these constraints, the Palestinian Ministry of Education, through the Jerusalem Directorate of Education, played a positive, albeit indirect, role by providing educational oversight, organizing training sessions, and offering professional guidance. This helped maintain teachers' connection to the national educational framework, albeit in an informal setting. (Dajani, 1998)

- **Professional and psychological burdens on teachers**

Teachers in Jerusalem worked in an educational environment characterized by overcrowded classrooms, a lack of teaching materials, and frequent closures and military checkpoints, which imposed double professional and psychological burdens on them. The teachers' role was not limited to merely imparting knowledge; it extended to addressing the psychological effects that political conditions had on students, particularly in cases of arrest, the loss of a family member, or daily exposure to violence.

Pedagogical studies indicate that these circumstances contributed to rising levels of occupational stress among teachers, in the absence of institutional psychological support programs, and the reliance on limited-scope individual or community initiatives (UNESCO, 1998).



- **Students' circumstances amid political and social restrictions**

During the period 1994–2000, students in East Jerusalem faced a range of structural challenges that affected their educational trajectory: most notably restrictions on movement, irregular school attendance, and poor educational infrastructure. This was reflected in a relative increase in school dropout rates, particularly at the highschool level, as well as a decline in academic achievement among certain groups. Pedagogical reports also showed that students in Jerusalem suffered from accumulated psychological stress resulting from the reality of the occupation, constant fear, and family and economic instability, which affected their ability to concentrate and interact within the school environment (UNICEF, 1999).

Nevertheless, clear signs of steadfastness (*sumud*) emerged, manifested in students' adherence to their right to education and the role of families and community institutions in supporting their continued schooling, despite increasing difficulties. (Palestinian Ministry of Education, 1999).

- **Disparities in the allocation of resources and their impact on equal opportunity**

One of the structural factors affecting the conditions of teachers and students was the clear discrimination in the distribution of educational resources between Arab schools in East Jerusalem and Israeli schools in West Jerusalem. Human rights reports show that the financial allocation per Palestinian student was significantly lower than that of their Israeli counterparts, whether in terms of the number of teachers, educational facilities, or support services (Association for Civil Rights in Israel, 2000). This disparity was directly reflected in the higher education opportunities available to students from Jerusalem, whereby high school graduates faced difficulties related to tuition costs and limited chances for admission (Djani, 1998).

- **Pedagogical Resilience**

The conditions of teachers and students in East Jerusalem during the period (1994–2000) can be viewed as a manifestation of what might be called «educational resilience,» as the school became a space for preserving national identity in addition to serving as a traditional educational institution. Teachers continued to fulfill their educational and national roles despite restrictions, while students clung to their right to education as a form of survival and civil resistance. This contributed to the establishment of a solid educational foundation -despite its apparent fragility – that paved the way for the subsequent phase after 2000, which would see an even greater escalation in Israeli control policies (Institute for Palestine Studies, 1999).

Part Five

Israeli Policies Toward Education in East Jerusalem and the Education Directorate (2000–2011)

The outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000 represented a decisive turning point in Israeli policies toward East Jerusalem generally, and toward the education sector in particular. Following the 1990s, which were characterized by attempts to indirectly co-opt Palestinian educational institutions, Israel shifted in the first decade of the 21st century to a more overt and systematic policy aimed at restructuring the educational landscape in Jerusalem to serve its political agenda - one based on consolidating annexation, undermining Palestinian national authority, and reshaping the collective consciousness of the younger generations.

- **The Shift from a Policy of Containment to a Policy of Direct Control**

With the start of the new millennium, the occupation authorities intensified their direct intervention in educational affairs in East Jerusalem, taking advantage of the political situation that followed the failure of the Camp David negotiations and the escalation of direct confrontation. This shift manifested itself in the expansion of the powers of the occupation municipality and the Israeli Ministry of Education at the expense of Palestinian educational institutions, and the imposition of stricter oversight on schools that followed the Palestinian curriculum. The Jerusalem Directorate of Education became a direct target of these policies, as its activities were restricted, its staff were persecuted, and it was prevented from exercising any official supervisory role within schools, under the pretext of “lack of legal legitimacy,” although it maintained an informal presence in society and education (Institute for Palestinian Studies, 2005).

- **Curriculum policies and attempts to impose Israelization**

Educational curricula constituted one of the most significant areas of Israeli intervention during the period (2000–2011).

Occupation authorities sought to:

- Prevent the circulation of Palestinian textbooks within Jerusalem schools.
- Confiscate deliveries from the Palestinian Ministry of Education.
- Impose censorship on nationalist content in Palestinian curricula, subjecting textbooks to a systematic review resulting in the removal of all content related to
- national identity and Palestinian history under the pretext of “incitement.” This review was closely linked to licensing and funding procedures, transforming the curriculum into a tool of soft structural control.

National reports confirm that these policies were not isolated but part of a broader effort to redefine the function of education in Jerusalem (Institute for Palestine Studies, 2009; Palestinian Ministry of Education – Jerusalem Affairs Unit, 2011).

Conditional educational alternatives were proposed, in the form of providing additional financial support to schools that agreed to adopt the Israeli curriculum or the “corrupted curriculum,” which Palestinian institutions viewed as a blatant attempt to



impose Israelization in exchange for financial inducements - akin to the carrot-and-stick approach.

Despite this pressure, the majority of Jerusalem schools, with the support of the Ministry of Education and civil society organizations, continued to adopt the Palestinian curriculum, considering it a red line for national identity, even through indirect means meant to circumvent Israeli censorship (Palestinian Ministry of Education—Jerusalem Affairs Unit, 2008).

- **Targeting the Institutional Structure of the Jerusalem Directorate of Education**

During this phase, the occupation authorities systematically worked to weaken the institutional structure of the Education Directorate in Jerusalem. This took the form of: summoning employees for questioning and imposing restrictions on holding meetings and educational activities.

The occupation authorities justified these measures by characterizing the Directorate as “an arm of the Palestinian Authority.” This was a violation of the Jerusalemite community’s right to manage its educational affairs even in non-sovereign frameworks to provide services (Association for Civil Rights in Israel, 2009).

- **The Separation Wall and the Reshaping of Educational Geography**

The construction of the Separation Wall after 2002 had profound effects on education in East Jerusalem, as it cut off tens of thousands of students from their schools, particularly in areas such as Kafr Aqab and Shu’fat Refugee Camp. Getting to school became contingent on receiving permits and crossing checkpoints, leading to higher rates of absenteeism and school dropout, as well as students transferring to lower-quality schools within isolated areas. This placed further pressure on schools within the boundaries of the occupation municipality (UNICEF, 2007).

Faced with this reality, the Directorate of Education lost its ability to conduct regular on-site monitoring, further undermining East Jerusalem’s educational system.

- **Conditional Funding and Soft Control Mechanisms**

Between 2000 and 2011, Israel adopted a policy of “soft control”, linking the provision of municipal budgets, school renovations, or the addition of classrooms to a set of political and educational conditions, most notably:

- Compliance with the instructions of the Israeli Ministry of Education.
- Reduction of activities of a national character.
- Accepting direct Israeli supervision.

These policies created a divide within the education sector between schools that were forced to accept these conditions to survive, and others that refused to do so and

bore severe financial burdens and faced administrative consequences (Institute for Palestine Studies, 2005).

- **Education as a Tool of Struggle for Identity (2000–2011)**

Israeli policies toward education in East Jerusalem during this period reveal a strategic vision that considers schools as a critical arena for the reproduction of control. Education was targeted as a tool for shaping awareness, identity, and belonging. In contrast, despite restrictions and constraints, the Jerusalem Directorate of Education maintained its symbolic and national role as a moral authority for Palestinian education in the city, and contributed to strengthening the concept of educational steadfastness (*sumud*), which has become the most prominent feature of Jerusalem's education in the shadow of the occupation (UNESCO, 2007).

- **Jerusalemite initiatives and achievements in confronting Israeli policies toward education (2000–2011)**

Despite the systematic escalation of Israeli policies toward education in East Jerusalem after 2000, the Jerusalemite community and its educational institutions did not remain passive victims; rather, this period saw the emergence of a broad network of educational and community initiatives aimed at protecting Palestinian education, preserving national identity, and ensuring the continuity of the educational process under extremely harsh conditions. Collectively, these initiatives constituted one of the most prominent manifestations of institutional steadfastness (*sumud*) in the city through the following:

- **Establishing the Palestinian curriculum as a national educational achievement**

Maintaining the adoption of the Palestinian curriculum in the majority of East Jerusalem schools is considered one of the most significant achievements of the 2000–2011 period, despite ongoing Israeli attempts to impose the Israeli curriculum or distorted, altered, or even falsified versions of it. This achievement was realized through the combined efforts of the Jerusalem Directorate of Education, school administrations, parent committees, and supportive Jerusalem-based institutions.

Despite the confiscation of books, delays in their delivery, and threats to cut funding, schools have resorted to creative solutions, such as: using photocopies or old editions of the books, with a focus on national content in the oral explanations (Palestinian Studies Institute, 2005; UNESCO, 2007), and exchanging educational materials between schools. This collective determination sent a clear message that the curriculum is a symbol of identity and symbolic sovereignty (Institute for Palestinian Studies, 2005).

- **The Role of the Jerusalem Directorate of Education as a Moral and Regulatory Authority**

Despite legal restrictions and the prohibition on its official operations, the Jerusalem



Directorate of Education has maintained its presence as a national moral authority for education in Jerusalem. This is reflected in:

1. Coordinating efforts among public, private, and community schools.
2. Organizing occasional unannounced educational meetings to avoid prosecution.
3. Providing educational guidance and professional support to teaching staff.
4. Advocating for Jerusalem's educational issues before national and international institutions.

This role has helped to limit the disintegration of the educational system and prevent its complete slide into Israeli control, despite limited resources (Institute for Palestine Studies, 2009).

• **Civil Society and Community Initiatives in Support of Education**

During this phase, Jerusalem-based civil society organizations played an active role, serving as a key pillar of support for education, particularly in the most marginalized areas. Local associations and centers implemented a variety of programs, including:

- Remedial classes for students affected by closures and checkpoints.
- Psychological and social support for children affected by violence and detention.
- Scholarships and financial aid to reduce school dropout rates.
- Rehabilitation of school buildings and maintenance of educational facilities.

These initiatives reflected advanced social awareness of the importance of education as a tool for steadfastness (*sumud*) in the absence of sufficient official support (UNICEF, 2007).

• **Parent-Teacher Associations as Agents of Educational Resistance**

The period from 2000 to 2011 saw a notable growth in the role of parent committees in Jerusalem schools, whereby they evolved from limited representative bodies into influential educational advocates. These committees contributed to the following:

- Defending schools' right to adopt the Palestinian curriculum.
- Countering Israeli attempts to interfere in school administration.
- Organizing legal and media campaigns against closures or confiscations.

These committees served as a link between schools and the community and helped strengthen the societal base of Palestinian education in Jerusalem (Association for Civil Rights in Israel, 2009; Institute for Palestinian Studies, 2008)

• **Openness to international support and human rights documentation**

One of the significant achievements during this phase was the success of Jerusalem-based institutions in internationalizing the issue of education in Jerusalem through cooperation with international organizations, such as UNICEF and UNESCO, and providing them with documented reports on Israeli violations. This approach helped in the following ways:

- Exposing discriminatory policies in international forums.
- Securing technical and financial support for certain educational programs.
- Inclusion of education in Jerusalem in international human rights reports.

Although the direct political impact of this approach was limited, it contributed to safeguarding a minimum level of educational rights and prevented the issue from being sidelined on the international agenda. (UNESCO, 2009)

• **Jerusalem's Educational Steadfastedness (*sumud*)**

It can be said that these achievements and initiatives contributed to establishing the model of educational steadfastedness (*sumud*) in Jerusalem, based on collective action, community initiative, and adherence to identity, despite the absence of political sovereignty and persistent pressures. These activities prevented the collapse of Palestinian education in the city. Thus, the period from 2000 to 2011 marked a pivotal phase in which education in Jerusalem shifted from crisis management to institutional steadfastedness (*sumud*), paving the way for a subsequent phase with more complex challenges. (Institute for Palestine Studies, 2008)

Part Six

Education in East Jerusalem (2011–2018): Building Resilience Amid Escalating Direct Israeli Intervention

The period between 2011 and 2018 saw a marked escalation in direct Israeli interference in Palestinian education system in East Jerusalem, through legal and administrative measures aimed at reshaping supervision and educational content, and linking financial support to surrender to the Israeli system (UNESCO, 2012; Ir Amim, 2017)

• **The Political and Legal Framework for Education**

This phase was marked by an expansion of the powers of the Israeli municipal authorities and the Israeli Ministry of Education to oversee Arab schools, and the imposition of strict licensing criteria that were used as a tool for political pressure rather than as a professional measure (ACRI, 2014; UN OCHA, 2018).

• **Targeting the Palestinian Curriculum**



In 2011, the Israeli Ministry of Education intensified scrutiny of the Palestinian curriculum under the pretext of searching for “incitement,” which led to the removal or modification of content related to national identity, Jerusalem, and Palestinian history, and the denial of funding for schools if the amendments were not made. (Palestinian Ministry of Education, 2017; Ir Amim, 2017)

- **The State of Schools and Infrastructure**

Official reports show that East Jerusalem suffers from a severe shortage of classrooms and chronic overcrowding in public schools, as a result of discriminatory planning policies and the difficulty of obtaining building permits (Jerusalem Governorate, 2016; UN OCHA, 2018)

- **Jerusalemite Teachers Under Pressure**

Teachers in Jerusalem faced increasing professional and psychological pressures, including indirect threats, restrictions on freedom of expression in the classroom, as well as significant disparities in pay and job security (Palestinian Ministry of Education, 2014)

- **Role of the Directorate of Education**

Despite the lack of legal authority, the Directorate of Education assumed an important coordinating and guiding role, supporting schools by documenting violations and maintaining the Palestinian curriculum as the national educational framework (Palestinian Ministry of Education, 2017).

There is no doubt that this period (2011–2018) laid the groundwork for the comprehensive policies of Israelization that accelerated after 2019; at the same time, it represented a phase in which Palestinians accumulated experience in managing the educational conflict within a complex colonial reality (UNESCO, 2017)

Part Seven

Education in East Jerusalem during the period (2019–2021)

Escalation of Israelization, Deepening of Resistance, and Future Prospects

The period from 2019 to the present is considered one of the most complex and dangerous phases in the history of Palestinian education in East Jerusalem, where Israeli policies have shifted from indirect pressure tactics to a comprehensive and overt project of Israelization, targeting the structure, content, and function of education all at once.

Education in East Jerusalem has become a central arena for reshaping Palestinian collective consciousness, through the imposition of the Israeli curriculum and the linking of educational rights to political and administrative submission. (Ir Amim,

2021) Jerusalem's education system entered this phase with a long history of steadfastness (*sumud*), yet it faces unprecedented challenges in terms of the rapid pace of policies, the diversity of their tools, and their convergence with political and health crises, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying deepening of educational and social gaps, as well as the decision to close the headquarters of the Directorate of Education in the Old City of Jerusalem.

First: Features of the Shift in Israeli Policies After 2019

- The Transition to Systematic Israelization

The years 2018–2019 marked a pivotal turning point, with the Israeli government's approval of multiple plans to “bridge the disparities in East Jerusalem,” for which unprecedented budgets were allocated, but which were directly linked to the adoption of the Israeli curriculum, or what is known as the “adapted Israeli curriculum,” in Arab schools (Ir Amim, 2020), and thus Israeli policy shifted from a strategy of pressure to structural coercion, whereby funding, class licensing, and school construction became conditional on renouncing the Palestinian curriculum.

- The overt targeting of the Palestinian curriculum

This phase witnessed an unprecedented escalation in the attack on the Palestinian curriculum, through the following:

1. Confiscation of Palestinian textbooks.
2. Deleting and adding content that serves their occupation-related goals regarding national identity and Palestinian history. Previously, the content was deleted and the page left blank, but at this stage, the blank pages were filled with material serving occupation goals and undermining the educational context. (Ministry of Education — Jerusalem Affairs Unit, 2019)
3. Demonization of the curricula and accusing them of “incitement” as a justification for intervention (UNESCO, 2021). This had direct repercussions on the classroom environment, where strict censorship was imposed on teachers, particularly in history and civics classes.

- Strengthening the role of the occupation municipality and the Ministry of Education

The Israeli municipality and the Israeli Ministry of Education expanded their administrative control over education in East Jerusalem through direct management of schools, interference in the appointment of principals, and the imposition of a civil service program.

1. **Direct administration of schools and interference in the appointment of principals (soft control)**



Direct administration of schools in East Jerusalem is manifested through the occupation municipality's and the Israeli Ministry of Education's control over funding, appointments, and administrative oversight, including interference in the appointment of school principals or prior approval of such appointments, and vetting of their professional and political (security) backgrounds. This model of administration is used as a structural control mechanism that strips schools of their autonomy and transforms educational administration into an extension of the Israeli administrative apparatus, without any official declaration to that effect (Ir Amim, 2021).

2. Imposition of Civil Service Programs

- **The Reality of the Civil Service Program:** «Civil Service» is an official Israeli program that separates education from its Palestinian national context and is offered to Palestinian youth in East Jerusalem as an alternative to military service. Those who complete the program are considered “discharged soldiers,” but it is marketed under various guises such as volunteering, community service, skills acquisition, and improving employment and educational opportunities. However, in the political and educational context of Jerusalem, this program is viewed as a tool for politicized civic integration, aimed at redefining the relationship between Palestinian Jerusalemites and the occupying state, without granting them equal political rights (PASSIA, 2020; UNESCO, 2019).
- **Link between the Civil Service Program and Education:** The program is linked to high schools, as it encourages students to enroll in the civil service program as a path to “success” after school, as a responsible citizen, while offering conditional privileges such as university scholarships and preferential treatment in academic admissions, as well as the provision of employment opportunities for students. This effectively separates citizenship from Palestinian national identity, thereby influencing students' awareness and identity during a sensitive stage of their lives and shifting the conflict from the political to the individual moral level.

Ultimately, the promotion of civic education programs in Jerusalem schools cannot be separated from the broader project of Israelization, as these programs serve as a mechanism for civil normalization, redefining the concepts of citizenship and social responsibility in isolation from the reality of the occupation (Institute for Palestine Studies, 2021).

Second: The Reality of Jerusalem Schools Under Structural Extortion

1. The division of the school landscape: Financial policies have led to the division of the Jerusalem educational landscape as follows:
 - A. Schools that adhere to the Palestinian curriculum despite financial losses.
 - B. Schools that were forced, either partially or entirely, to adopt the Israeli curriculum due to structural necessity.

It should be emphasized that the division was the result of disparities in resources, not a product of differences in national consciousness, as well as financial blackmail and the absence of independent funding alternatives (Ir Amim, 2021).

2. **The ongoing infrastructure crisis:** East Jerusalem continues to suffer from a severe shortage of classrooms, chronic overcrowding, exacerbated by discriminatory planning policies and difficulties in obtaining building permits, which is worsening the school dropout crisis, particularly at the secondary level (UN OCHA, 2022)

Third: Jerusalemite Teachers in a State of Exhaustion

Since 2019, Jerusalemite teachers have faced the following:

- A constant threat of job loss.
- Restrictions on freedom of expression in the classroom.
- Increasing psychological pressure resulting from surveillance and harassment.
- Clear disparities in wages and job security.

Nevertheless, teachers have remained one of the most important factors in preserving identity through conscious educational practices that rely on subtle cues, context, and informal activities (Palestinian Ministry of Education, 2021).

Fourth: Students and Education Under Daily Pressure

Students' suffering has been exacerbated by daily military checkpoints and raids in the vicinity of schools, as well as arrests, especially at the secondary level. The COVID-19 pandemic has also had effects that have deepened educational disparities (UNICEF, 2021).

All of the factors mentioned have contributed to rising levels of anxiety and stress, as well as an increased risk of dropping out of school, particularly among boys.

Fifth: Forms of Steadfastness and New Initiatives

Despite the harshness of the situation, more conscious and organized forms of steadfastness (*sumud*) have emerged, most notably:

- The development of parallel educational programs that reinforce national identity.
- The expansion of the role of non-formal education.
- Psychological and social support initiatives for students.
- Community awareness campaigns on the dangers of Israelization.
- Systematic documentation of educational violations (Jerusalem Governorate, 2021)

These initiatives have reflected the Jerusalemite community's shift from a reactive stance to managing educational conflicts with greater awareness.



Sixth: Closure of the Jerusalem Education Office in the Old City

On July 21, 2019, the Israeli occupation authorities closed the East Jerusalem Education Directorate office, confiscated its contents, and arrested its director, educator Samir Jibril, pursuant to an order issued by the Israeli Minister of Internal Security. The closure order was initially set for six months but was extended for another six months, part of a broader context of interference in Palestinian education in the city.

Seventh: The Role of the Directorate of Education at the Present Stage

Despite legal constraints, the Directorate of Education has continued to fulfill its advisory role in cooperation with the Jerusalem Affairs Unit at the Palestinian Ministry of Education, which played a significant role in supporting and sharing the finest details, as well as participating in planning at both the short- and long-term levels, through:

- Educational coordination with Jerusalem schools.
- Supporting teachers professionally.
- Defending the Palestinian curriculum.
- Documenting violations and reporting them to the relevant authorities.

This role is considered one of the most important elements in preserving the unity of the educational authority in Jerusalem.

Eighth: Prospects for Education in Jerusalem in the Near Future

The reality of Jerusalem education shows that its future depends on several factors:

- Establishing relative financial independence for schools.
- The continued existence of a community base that rejects Israelization.
- Effective national and international partnerships.
- Investment in teachers as the first line of defense.
- Developing a Palestinian Educational Vision for Jerusalem (UNESCO, 2021)

The state of education in Jerusalem since 2019 confirms that the conflict on education is relevant to its content, function, and identity. Despite the significant imbalance of power, education in Jerusalem continues to retain its national essence, thanks to a historical legacy of steadfastness (*sumud*) and a collective awareness that the loss of education means the loss of the future.

Part Eight

Schools of the Jerusalem Directorate of Education in East Jerusalem: Reality and Transformations (Late 2021 - 2025)

Schools under the East Jerusalem Directorate of Education have faced significant challenges since 1967, but in late 2021, these challenges intensified, and in 2023, following the war on Gaza, and shifts in Israeli political and security policies, the challenges became openly acknowledged.

This chapter sheds light on the reality of these schools, the changes they have undergone, and the role of the Directorate in preserving Palestinian education and national identity during this most difficult period since the annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967.

First: The Reality of the Directorate of Education's Schools in East Jerusalem (2021–2025)

The Directorate of Education continues to oversee Palestinian public schools in East Jerusalem, which follow the Palestinian curriculum without any distortion or alteration. Recent official reports indicate that these schools face ongoing structural challenges, most notably a shortage of classrooms, overcrowding, and poor infrastructure, in addition to restrictions imposed by the occupying authorities on expansion and renovation (Palestinian Ministry of Education, 2023).

Data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics also indicate that the number of available classrooms does not meet students' actual needs, which increases pressure on the educational process and affects the quality of education (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2024).

Second: Israeli shifts and policies since late 2021

The period from 2021 to 2025 saw a marked escalation in Israeli interference in East Jerusalem schools, particularly following the events of October 2023. The most significant of these changes can be summarized as follows:

1. **Intensified imposition of the Israeli curriculum:** The occupation authorities continued their attempts to impose the Israeli curriculum (Bagrut), and link funding and official accreditation to Palestinian schools' adherence to this curriculum, which constitutes a direct threat to Palestinian educational identity (UNESCO, 2024).
2. **Oversight and Administrative Investigations:** Human rights organizations have documented cases of school administrations and teachers being summoned and investigated, as well as restrictions on extracurricular activities of a national and cultural nature, particularly after October 2023 (Human Rights Watch, 2024).
3. **Conditional Financial Pressure:** The policy of conditional funding for schools



continued, with financial support used as a tool to pressure schools into accepting the Israeli curriculum or making changes to Palestinian textbooks (OCHA, 2023)

Third: The Role of the Directorate of Education at the Current Stage

The Directorate plays a pivotal role in addressing these challenges by:

- Supporting schools committed to the Palestinian curriculum and providing textbooks despite delays or confiscation.
- Documenting violations against schools and reporting them to the Ministry of Education and international institutions.
- Strengthening extracurricular educational programs that preserve Palestinian national and cultural identity (Palestinian Ministry of Education, 2024).

Reports indicate that the Directorate represents the first line of defense for Palestinian education in East Jerusalem, and ensures the continuity of the educational process despite mounting pressures (UNICEF, 2024).

Fourth: Impact of Political and Security Events (Late 2021 – 2025)

The educational process in East Jerusalem was directly affected by political and security events in 2021, particularly following the war on Gaza in October 2023. These impacts included:

- **Waqf schools began facing one of their most complex educational crises:** Political, economic, social challenges collided, threatening the stability of the educational process. The problem lay in the salary crisis of teachers at Ministry of Religious Endowments schools, given that the occupation's withheld Palestinian clearance funds, and salaries began to be issued in partial installments (50–80%) of the monthly salary, driving dozens of qualified teachers to leave the profession, while casting a shadow of anxiety over families who feared that each school year would begin without stability, causing them to hesitate to enroll their children in Awqaf schools. Thus, these schools found themselves facing a difficult dilemma: a shortage of qualified staff on the one hand, and a decline in student numbers on the other.

In Jerusalem in particular, where the cost of living is the highest in the region, a regular salary is a fundamental condition for a teacher to continue fulfilling their mission. Jerusalemite teachers receive meager wages that do not match the high cost of living in Jerusalem, and this has been a complaint since the Palestinian National Authority assumed its duties in 1993.

By the end of 2024 and the beginning of 2025, the salary crisis had entered a more serious phase: salary payments were delayed for several months, and deductions in some months reached 65%, leaving teachers with only 35% of their monthly pay. This shortfall left teachers unable to pay their rent, cover their children's schooling,

or even cover the most basic necessities of life.

Under the pressure of these circumstances, a large number of Awqaf teachers resorted to drastic measures, either turning to open-ended leave – by more than 150 teachers –, or the resignation of some qualified teachers who found opportunities in private schools or other educational institutions with more regular pay. Some have resorted to leaving the education sector entirely, moving to other sectors that provide them and their families with a decent livelihood.

This exodus has left some schools unable to fill core teaching positions and has led to the closure of nearly 30 classes. According to statistics from the Jerusalem Directorate of Education for the 2022–2023 school year, the number of classes in Waqf schools was 597. In the 2023–2024 school year, this number dropped to 568, and in the 2024–2025 school year, it reached 567. This caused concern among families, leading to a decline in enrollment in Waqf schools due to a lack of stability.

According to statistics from the Jerusalem Education Directorate, the number of students in Waqf schools in the 2022–2023 school year was 10,693 students. In the 2023–2024 school year, it decreased to 10,375, and in 2024 it reached 9,297 students. In other words, over the past three years, Waqf schools lost 1,396 students. (Jerusalem Education Directorate, Planning Department, 2024–2025 school year).

In the 2025–2026 school year, amid recurring reports of potential strikes or delays in the disbursement of wages, parents' concerns have grown, prompting some of them - despite their commitment to Awqaf schools and their recognition of their vital role as a safety valve preserving the Palestinian national curriculum - to transfer their children to private schools despite the high tuition fees, or even to municipal schools run by the occupation or those following the Israeli curriculum for those who cannot afford it. This is not because they prefer these schools and their curricula, but rather out of fear that their children will lose an academic year.

Recognizing the gravity of the challenges facing Waqf schools in Jerusalem, the Palestinian government issued an exceptional decision on October 15, 2025, stipulating that no portion of the salaries of teachers in the Jerusalem province would be withheld, and would be paid to them in full, in recognition of their steadfastness in the face of the occupation's policies.

- **Decisions were issued regarding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) schools:** On May 8, 2025 six UNRWA schools in East Jerusalem were permanently closed, affecting the education of more than 800 Palestinian students and raising concerns about rising absenteeism rates or the redirection of students to other schools, including those following the Israeli curriculum or schools run by the occupation authorities. (Jerusalem Directorate of Education, Planning Department Report, 2025). UN reports have shown that these conditions exacerbate existing educational disparities and threaten the right to a stable and safe education (UNESCO, 2024).



The educational reality in East Jerusalem from 2021 to the present confirms that the schools under the Directorate of Education constitute a central arena for the struggle over national and cultural identity. Despite increasing pressures following October 2023, the Directorate continues its efforts to protect the Palestinian curriculum and ensure the right of Jerusalemite students to a national education, making support for this sector an urgent national and human rights priority to save what can be saved.

Part Nine

Methodological Framework and Study Findings

First: The Methodological Framework of the Study

This study falls under the category of interpretive-analytical case studies. The Directorate of Education in East Jerusalem was selected as a case study to examine the management of education under complex sovereignty conditions and a prolonged conflict over identity and legal authority.

The research adopted a composite methodology consisting of:

1. The historical-analytical approach: To trace the evolution of administrative and educational structures since 1967, with a phased chronological division reflecting the political shifts that have influenced the educational structure.
2. Policy Analysis: To examine policy instruments in the education system and analyze the relationship between policy decisions and institutional performance.
3. Institutional Structural Analysis: To study the impact of financial and administrative variables on organizational stability.
4. Quantitative Descriptive Analysis: To interpret numerical trends related to student numbers, class sizes, and teaching staff stability.

These approaches were employed within a theoretical framework that views education in Jerusalem as a field of symbolic and institutional conflict, where political, economic, and cultural dimensions intersect in shaping educational decisions.

Second: In-Dept Analysis

Structural Shift in the Function of Education: The analysis reveals that education in East Jerusalem has shifted from being a social service to being a tool of strategic conflict. This shift manifested itself in:

- Attempts to reshape the curricular framework.
- Linking funding to political acceptance.

- Intensified administrative and legal oversight of schools.

This suggests that education has become part of the management of the public sphere, rather than a sector independent of it.

5. Financial Instability and Its Systemic Impact: The data reveals that the salary crisis was not a mere temporary financial setback, but rather exposed the fragility of the financial structure. The analysis shows that:

- Any delay in salaries leads to a brain drain.
- Decreased job stability directly affects student achievement.
- Financial pressure weakens an educational institution's bargaining power. This underscores that financial stability is a crucial factor in the sustainability of the education system.

6. Dynamics of Changing Family Behavior: Recent trends have shown that some families have turned to educational alternatives not out of pedagogical conviction, but rather in search of stability. This reflects that families' educational decisions have become more tied to institutional security than to identity.

7. Impact of the Security Context Post-2023: Political and security developments have led to:

- Irregular attendance.
- A decline in the sense of safety at school.
- Increased psychological stress on students and teachers.

The analysis indicates that security crises affect the quality of the educational process in indirect yet profound ways.

Third: Key Findings of the Study

The study concludes the following:

1. There is a direct positive correlation between financial stability and educational stability.
2. The education system in Jerusalem is subject to systematic political pressure that undermines its independence.
3. Education has become a battleground for identity and cultural sovereignty.
4. Institutional resilience is weakened in the absence of a sustainable funding framework.
5. The Jerusalemite community is highly sensitive to any change in educational authority.



6. The need for educational crisis management models tailored to politically unstable environments.

Fourth: Recommendations

1. At the financial level:
 - Establish an educational support fund for Jerusalem with a legally protected funding mechanism.
 - Decouple teachers' salaries from political fluctuations through an independent financial guarantee system.
2. At the administrative level:
 - Develop a specialized unit for managing educational crises within the Directorate.
 - Adopt rapid response plans in the event of security disturbances.
3. At the academic level:
 - Strengthen training programs in flexible and digital education.
 - Integrate educational and psychological support into the permanent school structure.
4. At the legal and international levels:
 - Document any violations of the right to education in accordance with international standards.
 - Activate channels of cooperation with international educational institutions to protect educational identity.
5. 5. At the research level:
 - Conduct qualitative field studies (in-depth interviews, focus groups).
 - Build an annual statistical database to monitor educational indicators in Jerusalem.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study reveals that the management of education in East Jerusalem cannot be understood within a traditional administrative framework, but rather as an institutional case operating within a contested sovereign environment, where educational, political, and economic dimensions intersect within a single, intertwined structure.

The analysis has shown that the education system is subject to systematic structural pressures that affect its independence and stability, and that any disruption to its financial or organizational foundations directly impacts its sustainability and quality.

Nevertheless, the data confirm that the Directorate and the local community have demonstrated a remarkable degree of institutional and social steadfastness (*sumud*), indicating that education in Jerusalem constitutes a strategic pillar in safeguarding identity and ensuring the continuity of cultural existence.

The study also highlights the importance of building a flexible educational management model that is financially secure and capable of adapting to crises, to ensure the protection of the right to education in complex political contexts. Consequently, the future of education in Jerusalem depends on the ability to transform steadfastness (*sumud*) from a temporary defensive stance into a sustainable institutional strategy, grounded in long-term planning, secure funding, and professional crisis management, thereby reinforcing education's role as a factor in stability and nation-building.

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