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Principles and general objectives of education

The vision for education adopted by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) within the framework of the Education Development Strategic Plan 2008-2012 gives the overall long-term direction for education developmental work including policy formulation and educational strategic planning.

On the basis of this vision, Palestinian education will prepare human beings who: are proud of their religious values, nationality, country, and their Arab and Islamic culture; contribute to the development of their society; actively seek knowledge and creativity; interact positively with the requirements of scientific and technological development and are capable of competing in scientific and applied fields; are open to other cultures and regional and international markets; are capable of building a society based on equality between males and females and upholding human values and religious tolerance; and build up a higher education system which is accessible, multiple, diversified, flexible, effective, efficient, sustainable, competitive and qualitative.

The mission of the MOEHE is to ensure education for all, improve its quality and its standards in order to meet the learners' needs in coping with the requirements of the present era, and ultimately develop citizens with sound and balanced characters, who are qualified and able to defend their national rights, efficiently perform their duties, able to think, and who strongly believe in their Islamic doctrine and affiliation to the Arab and international communities. The following basic principles guide the operations of the Ministry:

- Education and development are human rights for all.
- Education should contribute to national identity and the national heritage.
- Education should contribute to the building of the Palestinian State.
- Education should contribute to facing challenges, crises and emergencies.
- Education should foster values and principles of democracy, humanity and tolerance.
- Education should support comprehensive development and openness to regional and international markets.
- Education should raise awareness concerning human rights and should guarantee equality between men and women.
- Education should keep abreast of scientific and technological progress and benefit from it.
- Education should center on the learner, build his/her integrated character, develop his/her creativity and address his/her personal abilities.
- The education system should reinforce the social and professional status of the teacher and lecturer.
- The education system should foster societal contribution in the responsibility for education. (MOEHE, 2008).

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

There is no general education law because the decision was made by the Palestinian Authority to defer development of a general law until the final status negotiations for the territory are completed. International law is used to guide education rights and responsibilities, and a number of regulations have been issued by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) on such issues as exam procedures, recruitment policies and procurement. (UNICEF, 2011). “The Ministry has prepared a compilation of educational rules and regulations that are in use. These policies are based on what existed before as Jordanian and Egyptian law, although they have been modified through experience to some extent. The compilation includes ten chapters covering aspects such as general education, educational activities, examinations, financial and administrative affairs, supplies, educational supervision, buildings and educational technologies.” (Nicolai, 2007).

The **Law on Higher Education No. 11** of 1998 stipulates that every citizen has the right to higher education (Article 2), and provides the legal framework for the organization and management of higher education institutions.

Basic education, covering ten years of schooling, is compulsory and free. As stipulated in Article 37 of the **Child Law** of 2005, every child shall have the right to free education and learning in public school until the completion of the secondary stage of schooling; education is compulsory until the completion of the stage of higher basic schooling as a minimum. Article 41 specifies that the child with special needs shall have the right to education and training in the same schools and centers open for non-disabled students. In the case of exceptional disability, the State shall be committed to provide education and training in special classes, schools or centers. (See: Nicolai, 2007).

A draft education law prepared by the MOEHE is still to be ratified. The new Palestinian **Civil Service Law** has resulted in many improvements related to the standard of living of employees (as compared to the Jordanian and Egyptian laws previously applied). Rules, regulations and directives are numerous. Some are old (from Jordan and Egypt) and need updating and modernization. Others need to be coordinated and harmonized, and all need classification under clear topics and headings in order to facilitate their retrieval and use. (MOEHE, 2008).

Administration and management of the education system

The Palestinian National Authority runs and finances the majority of basic and secondary schools in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In Jerusalem, government schools are run by the Islamic Endowment (Waqf) Department, under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

The **Ministry of Education and Higher Education** (MOEHE) is the official body in charge of the development of education at all levels. It also manages governmental educational institutions and supervises private educational institutions



and those run by UNRWA countrywide. The organizational structure of the MOEHE consists of 41 administrative units at the central level in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Of these, 22 units are at the level of Directorate General: five technical units are related to the higher education sub-sector, twelve are in the general education sub-sector, and five administrative and financial Directorates General serve both sub-sectors. Some responsibilities are delegated to 21 **Directorates of Education** at the district level. The **Curriculum Development Center**, under the MOEHE, is in charge of the development of syllabuses and textbooks. On the basis of the Law on Higher Education of 1998, the **Council of Higher Education** (reactivated in 2003) is responsible for drafting and enacting the rules that all higher education institutions must adopt. An **Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission**, a semi-autonomous body under MOEHE, has also been set up for accrediting higher education institutions and programmes.

The **United Nations Relief and Works Agency** (UNRWA) runs schools and post-secondary institutions for Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip where most refugee camps are located. Most UNRWA schools are in Gaza where more than half of the total number of schools is run by UNRWA. (MOEHE, 2008).

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is provided in different types of institution run by the MOEHE (vocational secondary schools and technical colleges), the **Ministry of Labour** (vocational training centers), as well as the private sector and NGOs (50% of all TVET courses and programmes). (MOEHE, April 2008).

Adult education is seen as social responsibility and collaborative action is considered of utmost importance. Initiatives in the field of adult and non-formal education are implemented by the MOEHE, the Ministry of Labour in collaboration with labour unions, the **Ministry of Social Affairs**, the **Ministry of Women Affairs**, local and international NGOs, universities and women's organizations. (*Ibid.*).

Structure and organization of the education system

Pre-school education

Preschool education (kindergarten) is for children in the age group 3 years and 8 months to 5 years and eight months. Nurseries and kindergartens are mostly managed by the private sector and women's charitable organizations. Preschool education is not compulsory.

Primary education

Compulsory basic education covers ten years, and on the basis of the Palestinian Curriculum Plan of 1998 is organized into two stages: the preparatory stage or lower basic level (grades 1 to 4), and the empowerment stage or upper basic level (grades 5 to 10). The admission age is 6.



Secondary education

Secondary education lasts two years (grades 11 and 12) and consists of academic and technical and vocational secondary. Upon completion of grade 12 students sit the school-leaving examination (national matriculation exam—*Tawjihi*) and if successful receive the general secondary school certificate.

Higher education

Higher education institutions include universities and university colleges, polytechnics and community colleges. Community colleges offer one- and two-year diploma programmes (the latter equivalent to an associate degree, taking approximately 72 credit hours distributed over four semesters) aimed at preparing middle-level workers and technicians. At the university level, professional diploma and diploma degree programmes are also offered; the duration of studies is one (professional diplomas) to two and in some cases three years (vocational programmes and pedagogical studies). The duration of bachelor's degree programmes is normally four years (six years in the case of medicine). At the postgraduate level, programmes leading to a higher diploma or a master's degree generally last two years. Programmes leading to a doctorate take at least two years to complete.

The school year consists of thirty-five working weeks, or 210 working days. The academic year is divided into two semesters.

The educational process

According to the Palestinian Curriculum Plan of 1998, the Palestinian curriculum must reflect the dimensions of the Palestinian identity and its special features. It should also reflect the Islamic affiliation, endeavor to achieve the unity of the Arab and Islamic worlds, work for its freedom, realize its independence, act constructively with other nations, and participate in the development of human ideas, and in humanitarian, political, economic, and cognitive issues.

Commitment to using the Arabic language as a means of communication and transmitting thoughts remains a basic principle of the Palestinian curriculum and encouraging students to use it with full competence in speaking, reading and writing. Mastering foreign languages is one of the gateways to other nations' cultures and keeping in touch with them. The Palestinian curriculum does not neglect this and emphasizes teaching foreign languages. The Palestinian curriculum is distinguished by being selective in various fields of knowledge, culture, and sciences with special emphasis and focus on technology, ecology, demography and their relation to development and social growth. All branches of culture and knowledge are introduced to students in ways which avoid preaching and reciting as these are useless in producing or building the character able to use the scientific critical thinking in research, analysis and application. Concentration on pure sciences is just one aspect of forming the personality of the character. The curriculum also concentrates on producing a psychologically and socially balanced people aware of others' limitation and themselves.



The new curriculum concentrates on establishing the Palestinian identity of the people of Palestine, provides Palestinians with roles of leadership and productivity instead of dependency on others and dispersion, and reforms the national structure. The Curriculum Plan also concentrates on four major dimensions: the national, the Arab national, the religious and the international dimension. The national dimension concentrates on realizing the Palestinian identity in its traditional, historical, political and social aspects. The Arab national and religious dimensions concentrate on strengthening the relations between the people of Palestine and the peoples of the Arab and the Islamic worlds. Palestinian education should be unified to consolidate the education of students who were exposed to dual curricula, such as students in the West Bank studying the Jordanian curriculum, and students in Gaza studying the Egyptian one. The task of the new curriculum is to realize national unity through education and overcome divergence. It should also cope with the ever-increasing technological changes.

The new curriculum aims to eliminate the traditional rigid educational system, by adding elective subjects starting from grade 7, to provide students with more comprehensive information. It also focuses on integration, balance and a variety of technical subjects. This kind of curriculum aims to establish continuous education in various stages of formal and non-formal education according to the ambition and ability of the student. In the lower basic (preparatory) stage (grades 1-4), the curriculum is comprehensive and linked to what is taught in later stages. In this stage new features include the introduction of English, of free activities and civics. Specialization is the main aspect of the higher basic (empowerment) stage (grades 5-10). Students at this stage can choose an elective subject (among home economics, a third language or health and environmental sciences) depending on the school's conditions. Technology and applied sciences are introduced in order to provide an opportunity for actual practical training in technical sciences in the technology field and with or without the use of computers. Four technical subjects are offered in grade 10 including agricultural sciences, commercial-management sciences and industrial sciences. The aim is to provide students with technical skills that are necessary for performing these economic activities. They can choose two subjects out of four according to their interests and abilities. These two subjects will help the students to: determine their vocational future and choose their option in grade 11 (either academic or technical secondary education); and achieve a balance between pure academic and vocational education and to prepare for technical professions in grade 11 (secondary education). (MOE, 1998).

As reported in the Education Sector Analysis of the World Bank, until 1998 there was no national curriculum in Palestine. In 2000 the implementation of the newly designed national curriculum started simultaneously in the first and sixth grades. Strong political will and consensus, together with the support of key international donors have allowed the Curriculum Development Center (CDC) to create and coordinate 27 subject teams and then produce 335 textbooks (422 by the end of 2006). In five years of implementation (2000-2005), and facing extremely challenging circumstances, the MOEHE was about to complete the implementation of the new curriculum in primary and secondary schools. The CDC was also in charge of designing teacher training relevant to the new textbooks, editing teachers' guides and producing some extra teaching materials to accompany the textbooks in selected subjects and grades.



The composition of the curriculum teams was mainly academics from the university, school supervisors and teachers from the schools, although academics were the majority and nearly always the team leaders. The process of curriculum design and development was carefully consulted with practitioners at schools. Every district directorate has a designated group of five practitioners (one supervisor and four teachers) in charge of providing such feedback. Moreover, external follow-up and evaluation of both curriculum guidelines and textbooks was taken into account.

Evidence from the first few years of implementation reveals a serious problem of overload. Principals and teachers, parents and students, supervisors and teacher trainers, all concur that the new curriculum is “too long” and “too demanding.” Therefore, it is necessary to systematically evaluate the new areas and main innovations introduced by the new Palestinian curriculum in a way that will enable the MOEHE and the CDC to review issues of articulation, scope and sequence, and to involve teachers and civil society in curriculum development and implementation.

Although there has been remarkable progress in recent years (more elective subjects, programme of inclusive education), the curriculum has remained quite rigid in basic and secondary education. Rigidity here means that the curriculum is not “customized” enough to care for the individual needs of different groups of students, including those with special needs, the gifted, etc. As far as secondary education is concerned, the school leaving examination (*Tawjihi*) also seems to be a strong determinant of the rigidity of the curriculum. An even more critical issue is the relatively weak alignment among the national curriculum, textbooks, teacher training and standards used to construct diagnostic instruments of student assessment.

In 2006 the CDC was working on new teachers’ manuals and on the production of extra teaching materials for some subjects (including packages; for instance, in English for every grade level). Using the website of the CDC, an “e-curriculum” has been designed and made available to teachers and students. The first step consisted in posting online all of the textbooks produced. (World Bank, 2006).

A UNICEF-commissioned study observes that the volume and complexity of the curriculum, coupled with the requirement for teachers to cover it fully during a school year, has often been identified as one of the obstacles to achieving quality education. Although the curriculum promotes active learning and child-centered pedagogy, its heavy content and the tendency of teachers to teach to the syllabus rather than to learning outcomes leads to outdated, rote learning methodologies being used in the classroom. (UNICEF, 2011).

Pre-primary education

Preschool education (kindergarten) is for children in the age group 3 years and 8 months to 5 years and eight months and is not compulsory. In general, early childhood education and care (ECCE) has witnessed progress in recent years. However, further investment and progress are necessary. Nurseries and kindergartens are mostly managed by the private sector and women’s charitable organizations, with MOEHE holding a supervisory status. In 2005/06, the number of kindergartens reached 935 which was a 10.9% increase in comparison with 1999/2000 but is still insufficient. Data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics for 2005 reveal that the



enrolment ratio of five-year-olds age group was 32.9%, with 33.5% for boys and 32.2% for girls. The child/nursemaid ratio reached 26 children per nursemaid in 2005/06.

According to MOEHE, the ratio of caregivers with intermediate diplomas decreased from 47.3% in 1999/2000, to 29.1% in 2004/05. There is a need to invest in participatory activities like drama and role play so as to develop cognitive awareness of children. In addition, there is a need to invest in hygiene, nutrition, developing educational and teaching aids, teaching methods for children and psychological educational guidance. There is also a requirement for investment in child protection, psycho-social support programmes as well as programmes addressing the needs of children with disabilities and special needs. In the area of ECCE four strategic objectives have been identified: i) developing and activating comprehensive and standardized policies and laws in the areas of protective care and development of early childhood; ii) improving access and enrolment to kindergartens and providing equal educational opportunities to all children in early childhood stage, including children with special needs, under all circumstances including emergencies; iii) achieve comprehensive education for children in all areas of development including psycho-social, emotional, physical and cognitive health; iv) improving the quality of education to enable children to acquire knowledge and skills. (UNESCO, 2008).

The MOEHE has always maintained the position that textbooks for preschool should not be used, favoring worksheets and practical activities instead. A curriculum is still needed, however, and guides for teachers are lacking especially in the light of the fact that it is the teachers who produce the learning materials for the children. Kindergartens are not licensed by the MOEHE unless they have signed contracts with medical doctors who conduct periodic medical checkups and keep a file for each child. MOEHE encourages the inclusion of children with disabilities in kindergartens, yet most of their needs have not been met due to lack of appropriate resources. The Ministry has not developed a system for educational and psychological counselling, although it has organized a number of activities related to ways of dealing with children in situations of emergency and conflict.

The percentage of grade 1 pupils with some previous preschool experience was estimated at 53.3% in 2005/06. The percentages of teachers holding secondary school certificates and post-secondary diplomas dropped noticeably. The MOEHE works to raise the skills of staff working in kindergartens through organizing annual training courses at central level for kindergarten supervisors from the districts, who in turn organize training courses for kindergarten principals and teachers at the district level. In addition to organizing training, supervisors also conduct field visits to kindergartens to assist them in maintaining the quality of preschool education. (MOEHE, 2008).

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2009/10 there were 731 kindergartens in the West Bank, mainly privately-owned (there were only two government kindergartens with 119 children enrolled). The total enrolment was 56,728 children, of whom 29,150 were boys and 27,578 were girls. The total number of teachers was 3,064, of whom 3,050 were female teachers. The average number of children per class was 23.9 and the children-teacher ratio was 18.5:1. In the Gaza strip

there were 260 kindergartens in 2007/08 (including one government kindergarten); the total enrolment was 28,219 children and the number of teachers was 1,098 (including two male teachers).

Primary and lower secondary education (basic education)

As mentioned, compulsory basic education covers ten years, and on the basis of the Palestinian Curriculum Plan of 1998 is organized into two stages: the preparatory stage or lower basic level (grades 1 to 4), and the empowerment stage or upper basic level (grades 5 to 10). The admission age is 6.

UNICEF reports that in 2008/09 about 75% of schools (or 1,871 schools) were managed by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE), 13% or 315 schools were managed by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), and 11% or 302 schools were in the private sector. UNRWA schools cover only nine grades, so all students complete their free compulsory basic education cycle (grades 1–10) in MOEHE schools. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2008 survey of school sanitation and infrastructure environment, 27% of schools in the West Bank and 30% of those in Gaza did not meet territory-wide standards for water and sanitation facilities in schools of one toilet per 30 students. A large number of co-educational schools in Gaza do not have separate toilets. A recent study by the MOEHE has also highlighted the deteriorating level of hygiene in a large number of government schools. (UNICEF, 2011).

“Government schools in the West Bank & Gaza are quite small by international standards, which has important implications for resource utilization and efficiency. Nearly 20% of government schools have fewer than 200 students, compared to only 3% among UNRWA schools. Part of the reason for this difference in school size profiles is that UNRWA schools are mainly located in refugee camps with high population densities. The predominance of single-sex schools is another important factor contributing to small schools, as only 31% of schools are co-educational.” (World Bank, 2007).

Although the percentages of schools possessing science laboratories, libraries, specialized resource rooms and educational and information technology have increased significantly, there are still many schools which need to be properly equipped. Furthermore, although available, these resources are still not sufficiently or adequately utilized, and lecturing and rote learning are still the predominant teaching and learning methods. (MOEHE, 2008).

School overcrowding still remains a challenge to overcome. According to the MOEHE, the average class size in 2005/06 was of 35 students, with an average of 30 in the West Bank and 40 students in Gaza. Within the West Bank, Jericho and Jerusalem showed the lowest class sizes (27) whilst Hebron had the highest with 34 students per class. In 2005/06, the average number of students per school varied significantly between the West Bank (376 students per school) and Gaza (669 students per school). In Gaza, the Khan Younis district registered the highest average (722 students per school) with Rafah registering the lowest (617 students per school) whilst in the West Bank, the Hebron district recorded the highest levels (424 students



per school) with Jericho showing the lowest (333 students per school). (UNESCO, 2008).

The weekly lessons timetables of basic education in Gaza and West Bank and according to the new Palestinian curriculum are presented below:

Palestine (West Bank and Gaza). Lower stage of basic education (grades 1–4): weekly lesson timetable (1997)

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade							
	West Bank Districts				Gaza Districts			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Islamic religion	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Arabic language	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
General science	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	4
Mathematics	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	6
Social sciences and national education	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	4
Arts and crafts	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
Physical education	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Music and anthems	1	1	1	1	–	–	–	–
Agriculture (boys) or home economics (girls)	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	1
Vocational education	1	1	1	1	–	–	–	–
Total weekly periods	27	27	28	28	27	27	28	31

Source: MOE, 1998. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

Palestine (West Bank and Gaza). Upper stage of basic education (grades 5-9): weekly lesson timetable (1997)

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade									
	West Bank Districts					Gaza Districts				
	5	6	7	8	9	5	6	7	8	9
Islamic religion	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2
Arabic language	7	7	7	7	7	8	8	7	7	7
English language	5	6	6	5	5	5	6	6	6	6
General science	4	4	4	5	6	3	3	4	4	4
Mathematics	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	5	5	6
Social sciences and national education	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4
Arts and crafts	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2
Physical education	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2
Music and anthems	1	1	1	1	1	–	–	–	–	–
Vocational education	2	2	2	2	2	–	–	–	–	–
Agriculture (boys)	–	–	–	–	–	1	1	1	1	1
Home economics (girls)	–	–	–	–	–	2	2	2	2	2
Total weekly periods	33	34	34	33	34					
Total weekly periods (boys)						34	35	33	33	34
Total weekly periods (girls)						35	36	34	34	35

Source: *ibid.* Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes. The school year consists of thirty-five working weeks.

Palestine. Lower stage of basic education (grades 1-4): weekly lesson timetable according to the new curriculum

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade			
	1	2	3	4
Islamic education	3	3	3	3
Arabic language	8	8	8	8
English language	3	3	3	3
General science	3	3	3	3
Mathematics	5	5	5	5
Social sciences and national education	2	2	2	2
Arts and crafts	2	2	2	2
Physical education	2	2	2	2
Free activities	1	1	1	1
Civics	1	1	1	1
Total weekly periods	30	30	30	30

Source: *ibid.* Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

Palestine. Upper stage of basic education (grades 5-9): weekly lesson timetable according to the new curriculum

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade				
	5	6	7	8	9
Islamic education	3	3	3	3	3
Arabic language	7	7	7	7	7
English language	4	4	4	4	4
General science	5	5	5	5	5
Mathematics	5	5	5	5	5
Social sciences and national education	3	3	3	3	3
Arts and crafts	2	2	2	2	2
Physical education	2	2	1	1	1
Free activities	1	1	1	1	1
Civics	1	1	1	1	1
Technology and applied sciences	2	2	2	2	2
Elective subject (a third language, home economics or health and environmental sciences)	–	–	2	2	2
Total weekly periods	35	35	36	36	36

Source: *ibid.* Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

According to the Curriculum Plan of 1998, under the new subject ‘free activities’ students will be engaged in additional activities to enable them to deal efficiently and competently with themselves, their school and their society. This new subject aims to encourage individualized ongoing learning, to show the effect of parent-teacher associations in this process and to reveal facts about the desires of learners at this stage. The suggested activities are: computer activities, for schools with computer laboratories; scientific activities, through societies and exhibitions; cultural activities, through library visits and wall-magazines; and physical activities, through sports teams and social activities such as scouting. Civics is a complement to the free activity class. It aims to teach students how to interact with others, how to preserve local environment, and how to establish responsible use of natural resources, water and electricity. It deals with the citizen, his/her rights and duties.

The tenth grade precedes the branching into academic or technical education at the secondary level, providing students with the opportunity to choose according to their abilities and interests. The students can choose two out of four technical subjects in addition to their vocational literacy class, in order to provide them with knowledge and skills needed to choose which branch (academic or vocational/technical) to pursue in grade 11. (MOE, 1998).

Palestine. Basic education, grade 10: weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods		
	West Bank	Gaza	New curriculum
Islamic religion	3	2	3
Arabic language	6	6	5
English language	5	6	4
General science (physics, chemistry, biology)	6	6	4
Mathematics	5	5	5
Social sciences and national education	3	5	2
Arts and crafts	1	2	1
Physical education	1	2	1
Technology and applied sciences	2	–	2
Elective subject (a third language, home economics or health and environmental sciences)	–	–	2
Vocational education	2	–	1
Music and anthems	1	–	–
Home economics (girls only)	–	2	–
Technical subjects (two subjects among: agriculture, industry, tourism, commerce & administration; three weekly periods each)	–	–	6
Total weekly periods	35	34/36	36

Source: *ibid.* Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

“Access to basic and secondary education is highly equitable with respect to gender, location (rural and urban), refugee status and household income. According to the 2005 Demographic and Health Survey, enrolment rate profiles are virtually identical in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank. Almost all children attend school up until the age of 12. Transition rates from basic to secondary education have been consistently in excess of 90% over the period 2000-2005, which is high by international standards. If the gross enrollment ratio is calculated using the Labor Force Survey 2005 and the Demographic and Household Survey 2004 data for this age group, then it was 83 to 85%. Secondary enrollment rates have increased by 13 percentage points for both boys and girls since 2000, reaching gender parity for this age group.” (World Bank, 2007).

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2009/10 there were 1,921 schools run by the MOEHE (of which 1,534 in the West Bank and 387 in Gaza), 325 schools run by UNRWA, and 331 schools in the private sector. Out of the total number of schools (2,577), 1,697 were basic education schools (1,181 in West Bank and 516 in Gaza) and 880 were secondary schools (736 in West Bank and 144 in Gaza). The total enrolment at the basic education level (grades 1-10) was 961,654 students, of whom 571,603 in the West Bank and 390,051 students in Gaza. The total number of school teachers (basic and secondary education) was 43,560 in 2007/08, of whom 24,129 were female teachers. A total of 27,450 teachers were in the West Bank

and 16,112 were in Gaza. The average repetition rate at the basic education stage was estimated at 1.6% in 2005/06 (1.8% for boys and 1.4% for girls), and the average drop-out rate at 0.6%.

Secondary education

Secondary education lasts two years (grades 11 and 12) and consists of academic and technical and vocational secondary. Upon completion of grade 12 students sit the school-leaving examination (national matriculation exam—*Tawjihi*) and if successful receive the general secondary school certificate.

The weekly lesson timetable of general secondary education (grades 11 and 12) in Gaza, West Bank and according to the new Palestinian curriculum is shown in the tables below:

Palestine. General secondary education, grade 11: weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade				
	West Bank		Gaza		New curriculum
	Liter.	Science	Liter.	Science	
Islamic religion	3	3	2	2	3
Arabic language	6	4	7	5	5
English language	6	5	7	6	4
Mathematics	3	5	–	7	4
General science	2	–	2	–	–
Chemistry	–	3	–	3	3
Physics	–	4	–	3	3
Biology	–	3	–	3	3
Arab society	2	2	2	2	–
History	3	–	3	–	2
Geography	3	–	3	–	2
Economics and administration	–	–	–	–	2
Arts and crafts	1	1	1	–	1
Physical education	1	1	2	2	1
Technology & applied sciences	–	–	–	–	2
Vocational education (boys)	2	2	–	–	–
Home economics (girls)	2	2	2	2	–
Total weekly periods	32	33	29/31	33/35	35

Source: MOE, 1998. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

Palestine. General secondary education, grade 12: weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade				
	West Bank		Gaza		New curriculum
	Liter.	Science	Liter.	Science	
Islamic religion	3	3	2	2	3
Arabic language	6	5	6	6	5
English language	6	5	6	6	4
Mathematics	3	6	–	7	4
General science	3	–	–	–	–
Chemistry	–	3	–	3	4*
Physics	–	5	–	3	4*
Biology	–	3	–	3	4*
Philosophy and logic	–	–	3	–	–
Psychology and sociology	–	–	3	–	–
History	3	–	3	–	3*
Geography	3	–	3	–	3*
Economics and administration	–	–	2	–	3*
Arts and crafts	–	–	–	–	1
Physical education	1	1	2	2	1
Home economics (girls)	1	1	2	2	–
Total weekly periods	28/29	31/32	30/32	32/34	32

Source: *ibid.* (*) Students must choose two subjects. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

On the basis of the Curriculum Plan of 1998, in grade 11 of general secondary education all students will follow the same programme, and the literary and scientific streams will be phased out, aiming to make secondary education compulsory in future. In grade 12 students will have the option to choose two scientific and two literary subjects, in addition to the basic subjects. Upon completion of grade 12, students who don't sit the school-leaving examination (national matriculation exam—*Tawjihi*) receive a certificate. Students who successfully pass the *Tawjihi* receive the general secondary school certificate. Within the framework of the 1998 Plan, the Curriculum Ministerial Committee decided that the exam should be taken in the following subjects: Islamic education; Arabic language; English language; mathematics; two scientific and two literary subjects. Students completing the technical and vocational education programme will receive a first diploma in the field of specialization. (MOE, 1998).

Enrolment in technical and vocational education is still low, e.g. only 5.06% of the total number of students in the secondary cycle in 2007/08, up from 4% in 1999/2000. Although the percentage of female students in vocational education increased, it still remained at 33.5% of the total number of students. Increasing these enrolment percentages remains the major challenge, in addition to improving the availability of well equipped schools. Important initiatives have been undertaken towards the gradual implementation of some components of the National Technical and Vocational Education and Training Strategy, including the production of competency-based modular curricula, the piloting of an apprenticeship training

scheme (dual training with private sector companies), and the piloting of a career guidance service. (MOEHE, 2008).

“The overall pass rate in the school-leaving examination (*Tawjihi*) has increased from 56.2% in 1995 to 69.6% in 2005. Students in the scientific stream, whose share of the total secondary enrolment has sharply decreased over the ten-year period, obtained a pass rate in 2005 of 86.9%, up more than 24 percentage points from the 1995 rate. In contrast, students in the literary stream have improved their rate by less than 11 percentage points and the small minority in vocational education by 16 percent. The evolution of pass rates for vocational students, however, is quite irregular, especially between 2000 and 2005, with a top rate of 77.8% in 2002 and a bottom rate of 59% the year before. The literary stream accounts for almost three out of four students who pass the exam, and the otherwise increasingly successful students in the scientific streams are becoming a minority. This trend has an obvious impact on patterns of student demand for tertiary education and clearly explains the unbalances in tertiary enrolments, i.e. shortage of science and technology students and overcrowding of faculties of humanities, social science and education. The relevance issue is especially obvious concerning the literary stream students who fail the exam (roughly 30% of the total number of students who sit the *Tawjihi*) as they leave secondary school with no relevant skills and no marketable diploma. Vocational education is not a real option for secondary school students (its enrolment share was down to 3% in 2005).” (World Bank, 2006).

“It is estimated that over 80% of grade 12 graduates who pass the *Tawjihi* go on to some kind of post-secondary education or training. Data from the Demographic and Household Survey indicate that 44% of 18–21 year olds were still in full-time education in 2004, which is a very high rate by international comparisons. In 2003 the average found in other Arab States was 15%.” (World Bank, 2007).

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2009/10 the total enrolment at the secondary level was 152,148 students, of whom 88,962 in the West Bank and 63,186 students in the Gaza strip. The average repetition rate at the secondary level was estimated at 0.8% in 2005/06 (0.9% for boys and 0.7% for girls), and the average drop-out rate at 2.6% (2.3% for boys and 2.9% for girls).

Assessing learning achievement nation-wide

The World Bank reports that “the scores of Palestinian students in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2003 are low by international standards and yet quite acceptable when compared with the rest of the participating countries in the Middle East and North Africa region. Science scores look particularly encouraging, not far from the international average and otherwise well above the scores of countries like Egypt or Tunisia. TIMSS scores in mathematics tell a somewhat different story. There Palestine is only above Morocco, Syria and Saudi Arabia. When looking at the science results of the three different types of schools in Palestine, there is a sizeable difference between Palestinian Authority (PA) and UNRWA scores with regard to the small private sector (which is even above the international average score). This points to wide dispersion of student performance between schools (and probably within schools as well) but those issues require more careful analysis. Data from the three different types of schools is not available for



mathematics scores, although a similar pattern to science scores should be expected. Using the results in mathematics, Palestine emerges as one of the most unequal cases of all the participating countries. Only Saudi Arabia, Ghana and South Africa present more unequal performance among their mathematics students. This high inequality is the result of low average scores and wide performance dispersion. More specifically, it should be noted that the Palestinian “elite” in terms of student achievement (95th percentile of the distribution) ranks 36 when compared to the corresponding “elites” of the 46 participating countries. And the very low achievers (5th percentile) rank 42 when compared with their “counterparts” of the other countries. Once again, this points to wide disparities in terms of achievement between Palestinian schools (notably the high average scores of the students in the private sector), which pose a huge challenge for the future of education quality. Steep differences in achievement happen with students attending the same school and the same classroom, so that the issue is not so much access to schooling by itself. The schooling system is pretty egalitarian in that it does not make much of a difference which school a student attends. However, it would appear that the socioeconomic and family conditions and awareness of parents with regard to the education of their children (variables usually associated with within school variations in student achievement) cannot be offset by school effects.” (World Bank, 2006).

In 2007, the performance of grade 8 Palestinian students in the TIMSS tests was 7.1% lower in science and 5.8% lower in mathematics than in the TIMSS 2003. (UNICEF, 2011).

“In June 2005, the Center for Assessment and Evaluation of the MOEHE administered two national standardized tests of Arabic and mathematics to a sample of grade 4 pupils throughout Palestine. These tests have come at a particularly crucial time, since they are the first ones to measure the impact on learning outcomes of the new Palestinian curriculum throughout its first four/five years of implementation. According to the MOEHE, these results can be compared with those obtained in 1998 and 2000 using similar instruments, although obviously the curriculum being used back then was a different one. There is little doubt that the most striking result coming from this national testing is the plummeting of average scores – and even more of pass rates – in mathematics. Thus, while average scores and pass rates in Arabic seem to remain stable with regard to scores from national tests previously administered, the results in mathematics are more than puzzling. The overall test performance of UNRWA schools has been consistently better than MOEHE schools. UNRWA has well-established systems for the continuous professional development of both teachers and school managers, and a more effective and relevant network of supervision and inspection services. On the other hand, UNRWA managers have administered their own achievement tests every year since at least 2000. Data are available for Arabic, mathematics and science in grades 4, 6 and 8. The data show an overall fall of student achievement in UNRWA schools between 2001 and 2003 of 14.3% altogether. And the drop in average scores is consistently about the same in each of the three subjects and for each of the three grades. Between 2003 and 2004 there is a slight recovery (a bit over 4% percent in average) although the scores of science in all three grades and mathematics in grades 6 and 8 continued to fall dramatically. Finally, there is a further drop of more than 6% between 2004 and 2005. It should be recalled that the new Palestinian curriculum was progressively introduced precisely throughout these years. It could very well be that the testing instruments had to be redesigned after the

introduction of the new curriculum and the resulting scores are just not comparable.” (World Bank, 2006).

In 2007–2008, only one in five sixth-graders in Gaza passed standardized tests in mathematics, science, English and Arabic, as did half of their peers in Nablus and Jenin. *Tawjihi* results showed alarming trends in learning achievement in sciences and literature, with the West Bank’s results in literature dropping by 12.7% and Gaza’s results in science dropping by 9.6% between 2008 and 2009. (UNICEF, 2011).

Teaching staff

“Every teacher in Palestine has undergone training at the tertiary level, fulfilling a substantial amount of academic requirements. However, the majority of the programmes do not include teaching practical training (extended internships) at schools, which severely undermines the quality of the training and, as a result, the skills with which graduates enter the teaching profession. Programmes offered by the UNRWA Faculty of Education Science and by Al-Quds Open University are some of the exception to that rule. The training received by prospective teachers in those institutions almost entirely deals with disciplinary knowledge. Pedagogical and psychological issues, classroom management, assessment techniques, school organization, etc., are either absent or very superficially covered. Likewise, teacher education programmes in Palestine are not aiming at equipping student teachers with the pedagogical skills and teaching competencies which are needed to implement a curriculum which is intended to stress critical thinking and high-order thinking skills. In other words, the current system of pre-service teacher training is too centered on traditional curriculum content and lacking the necessary practical training and internship components. Due to the impressive expansion of the school system in recent years, quality assurance of teacher training programmes and policies of teacher certification and recruitment have not taken priority.

While mastery of the curriculum content by teachers is still seen as critical, specific training in pedagogical skills and pedagogical content knowledge needs to be stressed. Proper accreditation and quality assurance of teacher training programmes, teacher certification and improved mechanisms for teacher selection, recruitment and induction should also become priorities. One of the necessary actions of the MOEHE is a thorough reform of pre-service teacher training in the context of a systematic strategy for teacher development. Prior to 2000, teachers had, on average, received only a few hours training. Since 2000, when the first five-year plan was established, almost every teacher has been provided with opportunities for training. On the other hand, the absence of a coherent and well functioning system of pre-service led to the essential need for an ‘on-the-job’ programme of training for all teachers new to teaching. Also, it was decided that all teachers should have an entitlement to training referred to as obligatory programmes to receive orientation to the new curriculum, teaching methodologies and subject knowledge. The School as a Unit for Training programme was developed subsequently, primarily to support schools to relate training to the development of the school and to enable them to take more responsibility for their own development. The Directorate for Training and Supervision and the Directorate for Assessment and Evaluation have, since 2000, developed and established a demanding range of in-service training programmes.” (World Bank, 2006).



Several studies have concluded that many teachers are not adequately trained or supported to teach the new curriculum. Practical activities specified in the textbooks and in teacher guides are not applied. Science laboratories and other teaching and learning resources are not sufficiently utilized. Frontal teaching and lecturing are the predominant methods of teaching. Although numerous in-service training courses have been organized during the period 2001-2005, they were not sufficient. (MOEHE, 2008).

According to a study commissioned by UNICEF, most of the newly recruited teachers possess good knowledge of a particular subject, but their formal education often does not prepare them for the classroom. As a result, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) must provide in-service teacher training to all recruited teachers as soon as they enter the system. Internal strife has also gravely affected the quality of the teaching force. As a consequence of the teachers' strike in 2006, for example, 5,000 new teachers were recruited in Gaza to fill the gap, many of whom were not sufficiently qualified, particularly in mathematics and science. There are concerns that the pre-service teacher training programmes, delivered by five universities and 25 teacher training colleges, are not attracting the best individuals into the teaching profession nor are they successful in training recruits in effective classroom practices. Classroom observations show that teacher-centered approaches, characterized by lecturing, dictation, note-taking, rote memorization and exam-based assessment, are predominant in Palestinian schools. (UNICEF, 2011).

The National Teacher Education Strategy was developed and launched in May 2008. A Teacher Education Reference Group (TERG) was formed consisting of 14 members with expertise in teacher education and chosen from Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE), UNRWA, higher education institutions and the civil society. The TERG met several times between April 2007 and January 2008. A Teacher Education Consultative Group (TECG) was also established under the leadership of MOEHE and consisting of 30 members from higher education institutions, directors at the Ministry, administrators at UNRWA, civil society and representatives of some teachers' unions. (MOEHE, 2008).

The Strategy sets out guidelines for teaching methodologies that include student-centered teaching, case-based approaches that incorporate reflective practice, and action-research activities that relate to actual classroom situations and practical application of course material. In 2010, the MOEHE formed a National Task Force to detail a framework for pre-service and in-service teacher training delivery based on the Strategy. Along with these efforts, in 2009, the MOEHE created the Commission for Developing the Teaching Profession, which is tasked with developing teacher and principal recruitment standards and creating a teacher licensing system. (UNICEF, 2011).

“As for the methodological framework used in in-service teacher training, a cascade model has been adopted. The first step is from the central trainers to the district trainers, and the second is from the district trainers to the teachers. In the design of future in-service activities, it is more effective if all those that will be training the teachers are directly involved in the development of the programme and the materials and have shared understandings of both the content and the process. Incentive arrangements are normally part of wider policies which encompass specific



interventions for the evaluation of teacher performance, teacher and school accountability mechanisms, and the role of school leadership, supervision and inspection services. Every District Office employs supervisors, who are in charge of school inspection. Ramallah's education district, for instance, has 31 supervisors for a total of 159 schools and 3,221 teachers (roughly 100 teachers per supervisor, which is quite a low rate by international standards). Supervisors have traditionally been in charge of teacher appraisal and evaluation, the official consequence of which was a tailored plan of in-service training for teachers. In terms of supervision, there are key differences between MOEHE and UNRWA systems. UNRWA has a central supervisor for each subject and s/he provides meaningful support related to specific subject issues. MOEHE supervisors appear to perform only inspection tasks, according to the relevant people interviewed. The common assumption is that supervision is better in UNRWA than in MOEHE schools; however, there is no empirical evidence to support this claim." (World Bank, 2006).

"A total of 45,892 teachers were employed in 2004/05 throughout Palestine, with 73% employed in the MOEHE, 17% in UNRWA, and 10% in private schools. The number of government teachers has increased 36% between 1999/2000 and 2004/05; UNRWA and private schools also registered increases of 25% and 17%, respectively. Payroll data indicates that 29,763 teachers were working at government schools in August 2005 supported by 1,518 school managers and 5,135 other support staff. The number of support staff (for which there is no clear definition of roles) has increased by almost four times in the past four years." (World Bank, 2007).

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Web resources

Ministry of Education and Higher Education: <http://www.moe.gov.ps/> [In Arabic. Last checked: September 2011.]

Palestinian Curriculum Development Center: <http://www.pcdc.edu.ps/> [In Arabic and English. Last checked: September 2011.]

For updated links, consult the Web page of the International Bureau of Education of UNESCO: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links.htm>