CHAPTER IV

Educational disruption and recovery in Palestine

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INTRODUCTION

The West Bank and Gaza Strip were occupied by Israel in 1967. Although the occupied territories retained many of the pre-existing legal and administrative structures, the military authorities superimposed more than 1,000 military orders which practically cancelled the legal provisions. Education was one of the major sectors to have suffered from these overriding military orders. As a result, the education system in the West Bank and Gaza Strip has had somewhat of a schizophrenic status. While the administrative terms of reference remain those of the Jordanian and Egyptian systems, the education system has been controlled and censored by the Israeli occupation authorities since 1967. When the Palestinians gained control of their education system in August 1994, the Ministry of Education (MOE), the largest Palestinian service sector, had to simultaneously confront numerous challenges while reconstructing the education system.

This paper will examine the Palestinian response to the schizophrenic nature of the education system. The paper begins with a description of the education system under Israeli administration (1967-1994). It is followed by a brief overview of educational policies during the Intifada period and the innovative Palestinian responses to Israeli obstructionist strategies particularly during the period of the uprising. The following section examines the impact of extended occupation on the Palestinian education system, particularly in terms of deteriorating quality. The paper then goes on to present the current challenges that the Palestinians face in regaining control of their education system.

EDUCATION UNDER OCCUPATION

The Palestinians had never controlled their education system prior to 1994. Indeed, since the Ottoman empire, the formal Palestinian education system had been administered by foreigners. Modern formal education in Palestine grew out of a reaction to Ottoman attempts to promote and impose Turkish culture. Later, during the British mandate, expansion of formal education came as a response to the British need for civil servants. Mahshi (1989) summed up the educational situation during that epoch in the following terms: 'despite the inadequacies of government education by the British, the traditional value of education, especially formal schooling, was strengthened over time. Formal education was perceived as a means for securing white-collar jobs with steady income, and to enhance social status, in a predominantly peasant society.'

After the 1948 war and the creation of the state of Israel on parts of British Palestine, the West Bank was administered by Jordan while the Gaza Strip was administered through Egypt. Furthermore, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) established

schools in refugee camps throughout the West Bank and Gaza, as well as in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. The fragmented situation was further complicated after the 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza when the education system fell under the complete control of the Israeli authorities.

Multiple delivery systems

In addition to the duality of education systems in the West Bank and Gaza, one may add the diversity of delivery systems. Indeed, the schools in the West Bank and Gaza can be classified into three clusters: Government, UNRWA, and private schools. In 1996, government schools catered for 67.6% of all students, while UNRWA served 26.3% and private schools 6.1%. Table 1 shows the relative weight of each of these school types within the overall Palestinian education system.

TABLE 1: Schools in West Bank and Gaza listed by authority, 1995/96

	Schools	Classrooms	Students	Teachers
Government				
1995	1,084	11,817	418,807	13,533
1996	1,112	12,524	447,822	14,742
UNRWA				
1995	253	3,702	161,332	4,370
1996	259	3,918	174,284	4,642
Private				
1995	147	1,563	40,521	2,175
1996	147	1,640	40,765	2,210

Source: Educational statisticsal yearbook 1995/1996, MOE & PCBS, PNA.

Before the transfer of power to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), salaries for government school-teachers were paid by the Israeli administration, while UNRWA paid its own teachers and private schools sponsored themselves through student tuition or through some form of charitable support. Since 1994, the entire school system has progressively been unified and adheres to the same curricula, identical class periods and structure.

Highly centralized management and control

A major characteristic of the public education system under occupation was its highly centralized management system. All administrative and decision-making powers, including the hiring and firing of teachers, were entirely in the hands of a few officers in the 'civil administration'. Many teachers were denied their right to oppose decisions pertaining to lay-offs. In the rare cases where such decisions were justified, they were based on 'security reasons'. Furthermore, hiring was also restricted to specific school districts. Hiring a teacher from a different district implied the almost impossible mission, particularly during the Intifada period, of modifying the address registered on the identity card issued by the military authorities. Moreover, decisions to build or expand individual schools were also taken by the Israeli administration.

Although teachers were recruited and nominated by the Palestinian district directors, such decisions had to be approved by the Israeli authorities. Once nominated, teachers did not immediately become civil servants; they had to pass a probationary period which could last from three months to a whole year. Probationary periods are common features of teacher recruitment practices in other countries where the period is used to provide further classroom-based training and to allow for the assessment of new teachers before final appointment. However, the purpose in this case, unlike that in other systems, was for the

military intelligence to approve or refuse appointments. Furthermore, employment conditions were not clearly defined and employment regulations, rights, and responsibilities were never clarified. This resulted in a high degree of frustration and job dissatisfaction among teachers.

Curriculum and censorship

West Bank schools followed the Jordanian curriculum while those in Gaza followed the Egyptian curriculum. Although both curricula could be characterized as being culturally relevant to an acceptable degree, they were not nationally relevant. Israeli censorship ensured that these curricula remained irrelevant to Palestinian nation-building efforts. Military Order 101 imposed the need to have all reading materials, books and periodicals approved by the military censor. Any reference to Palestine or to the Palestinian question were thus systematically censored. Each year, Israeli authorities subjected schoolbooks brought in from Egypt and Jordan to strict censorship, deleting any words, paragraphs, chapters or refusing entry of books that address the Palestinian question, roots, or cultural heritage. It is important here to note that this did not only apply to history and geography textbooks, but also to those used for the teaching of language and religion.

Teaching under occupation was tough and restricted, teachers were not allowed to use any supplementary material to enhance the curriculum which was narrowly defined to mean the textbook material regardless of the degree of irrelevance to Palestinian culture. This restriction was an important factor in demoralizing students and partly explains their lowered commitment to education and the resulting behavioural problems.

In-service training

Teacher training was not a common phenomena and very few discrete training courses were offered. The participation of Palestinian educators, from universities and non government educational institutions, in the design of these courses was restricted by the Israeli authorities. In many cases teachers and directors were requested to attend courses at the Hebrew University, although they were never allowed to take similar courses at local universities. Under such circumstances, the notable efforts made by school supervisors to provide some training through workshops were largely marginal due to their limited resources, often inadequate skills and lack of support.

Even in the rare situations where teachers did find their way to further study/training outside the country, study leave was not easy to obtain. In order to leave even for a limited time, teachers not only had to forgo their salaries but also their appointments. Loss of both salary and job discouraged many teachers with excellent potential from taking sabbatical leave abroad for further training.

THE INTIFADA PERIOD

School closures as collective punishment

The administrative restrictions and military harassment characteristic of education under occupation were further intensified during the period of the uprising. Indeed, since the beginning of the Intifada in December 1987, there had been an escalation of Israeli repressive measures. These severe measures of collective punishment included: (1) the arrest and deportation of students and faculty; (2) intensified financial harassment; and (3) school closures. The imposition of collective closures of educational institutions as of 1988 was but a new form of a long-standing strategy of interference in Palestinian education by Israeli authorities. The systematic closures of educational institutions for a two-year period may

indeed be interpreted as the expression of a policy of enforced ignorance. Such measures were designed and implemented as a form of collective punishment aimed at coercing the Palestinians into ceasing their uprising. Initially justified by the need to maintain order and security, the Israeli policies aimed to render the costs of the uprising unbearable for the Palestinian society as a whole.

The initial sixteen-month phase of systematic closures was followed by a second phase as of May/June 1989. Although this phase was characterized by the progressive reopening of schools, the Israeli obstructionist policy continued both through the intermittent closures of individual schools and universities as well as through curfews. The extent of disruption in the schooling process caused by these measures are clearly illustrated in Table 2. It is interesting to note that it was at the elementary level that the extent of disruption was the greatest. Such an observation clearly contradicts the official Israeli justification of such strategies based on security reasons.

TABLE 2: Maximum number of days that schools were open 1988-89 (total number of school days 205-210)

Level	Total no. days/year	% of school year
Elementary (Grades 1-6)	135	64
Preparatory (Grades 7-9)	115	55
Grades 10-11	85	40
Grade 12	120	57
Source: *Educational network*, no. 2, September 1990.		

Alternative forms of education

In response to these military closures affecting education, Palestinians initiated alternative forms of education in the hope of minimizing the educational loss to their children and communities. Neighbourhood communities organized 'popular (off-campus) education' that may be better termed 'underground education' in homes, churches and mosques where instruction was provided by teachers, parents, and university students: 'This community-based education presented a grave threat to the Israeli authorities since they were no longer in control of the process and contents of Palestinian education'. As a result, popular education was declared illegal by the Israeli authorities in August 1988 and locales were repeatedly raided by Israeli military. These raids generally resulted in the arrest of students and teachers, and any person found participating was subject to harassment, arrest, and liable to be jailed up to ten years and to pay a fine of US$ 5,000. The 1988 Al Haq report provides an illustration:

. . . on 6 September 1988 the Society of Friends of Al-Najah University in Nablus (a community organization providing support to the university) was closed down 'indefinitely' after soldiers raided the Society during a small make-up class for high school students. Two students and two teachers were arrested. In this case the director of the Society was told he would be charged and prosecuted for permitting make-up classes to take place on the premises (p. 298). Due to these measures and to the reopening of schools for interrupted and short periods, popular education ... is virtually non-existent at present (*Educational network*, no. 1, June 1990).

Private and UNRWA schools attempted to implement a second alternative strategy based on distance teaching with study packs prepared to be used by students in homes. This second alternative strategy was also considered illegal by the Israeli authorities.

Impact of school closures

In the absence of viable educational strategies during the period of the uprising, school closures had an adverse impact on the academic, social and economic levels. As of the 1988/1989 school year, educators and school teachers, in particular, began facing a drop in students' academic standards. Teachers had to follow regulations restricting to a maximum of 6% the proportion of repeaters. As a result, students were promoted to the next level even in cases where the assigned curriculum. had not been completed. A dilemma was imposed, being out-of-school for an extended period, because of closures, and the danger of illiteracy relapse among second grade students. School closures also severely disrupted the process of socialization of children within the school community. Moreover, it was not possible to recover the academic loss due to short school days, strikes, curfews, and prolonged closures. Lack of continuity and repeated interruptions during occupation was a major disruptive force in the teaching process and resulted in lowered teacher motivation. Finally, Israeli measures against Palestinian education reduced the number of qualified teachers. The education officer announced the closure of all schools on 15 April 1988 and teachers were paid only half of their already low salaries for the month (Al-Haq Report, 1988). As a consequence of such measures, teachers faced difficult financial problems.

DETERIORATING QUALITY

Class size

It is generally recognized that large class sizes have an adverse effect on the teaching/learning process. Large class size and overcrowding has indeed been a characteristic of Palestinian schools. The 1988 Al-Haq report illustrated the extent of overcrowding in the following terms:

. . . in 1987 teachers reported that in Bethany Elementary School in Izarya [a Jerusalem suburb] there were 55 students in one second grade class. Five of these students had to stand during classes because there was simply no space in the room for extra chairs.

With over 33% of all classrooms comprised of over forty students, Table 3 clearly illustrates the extent of overcrowding. Given the rate of national population growth estimated at 3.7% according to PCBS figures, a major effort in quantitative expansion of the education system must be foreseen in terms of classroom construction. Recent data published by the MOE and PCBS indicate that each student at the basic level has, on average, 1.0 square meters of classroom space, while secondary students have an average of 1.4 square meters/student. UNESCO (1995) described the situation in the following terms:

The classrooms are very small (16-20m^2). There is often neither enough ventilation nor lighting, and no specialized rooms such as laboratories and suitable playground or sports facilities are available. Many of the buildings have deteriorated to an extent that they are collapsing, as is the case of some rented schools in Tulkarm, Nablus or Hebron. They have cracked ceilings and walls which leak in the winter.

Overcrowded classrooms have many negative effects on classroom management which consequently results in lower student learning. Students' discipline weakens (Mansour 1995), and, more importantly, the quality of the learning process may be reduced as teachers become overloaded. Another aspect of the overcrowding of the school system is the widespread use of double shifts with more than 50% of schools in Gaza operating on this mode.

TABLE 3: Distribution of classrooms by authority and number of students /classroom

No. of students	Government	UNRWA	Private

1-19	666	16	413
20-25	1165	82	320
26-30	1696	162	292
31-35	2098	207	276
36-40	2688	374	159
41-45	2523	755	71
46-50	1253	1754	18
55+	77	2	10
Total	12509	3352	1559

Source: Educational statistical yearbook, 1995/1996. MOE & PCBS.

TABLE 4. Distribution of schools by supervising authority, school shift and stage

	Basic	Basic and secondary	Secondary
Government			
one shift/morning	604	263	8
one shift/evening	1	1	0
2 shifts/ 1 administration	23	13	1
2 shifts/2 administrations	135	18	3
UNRWA*			
one shift/morning	110	0	0
one shift/evening	1	0	0
2 shifts/1 administration	12	0	0
2 shifts/2 administrations	130	0	0

Source: Educational statistical yearbook 1995/1996, MOE & PCBS.
*Note: UNRWA runs basic schools only.

Drop outs

Although data on enrolment patterns were relatively scarce, the Israeli 'Statistics of the Administered Territories' provide some useful information. These data show that no more than 50% of those enrolled in first grade reach ninth grade and only one third of those enrolled in the first grade reach twelfth grade. These high dropout rates may be largely explained through economic pressures and the increased need for young people between the ages of 14 and 16 to enter the labour market. This is all the more so given the lack of legislation regulating the entry of young people (mainly males) in the workforce. The level of qualification of the workforce has consequently gone down with a resulting shortage of skilled labor (i.e., teachers, pharmacists and other professionals).

Student achievement

Very few studies are available on the assessment of learning achievement since government school educators (which comprise over 70% of all teaching staff) were not allowed to conduct studies. A recent study conducted by Tamir Institution (1991) was designed to investigate the achievement (strengths and weaknesses) of 1,200 Grade 4 and Grade 6 students in Arabic language skills in the following areas: reading comprehension, listening comprehension, grammar, dictation, and writing. The results indicated that both Grade 4 and Grade 6 students have serious deficiencies in almost all of the skills measured. Less than one-fourth of the pupils tested, for instance, were able to correctly elicit information directly stated in the text.

A second study by the same institution (1991) was designed to investigate the nature and extent of the deterioration in student's mathematics achievement. Six major skills were investigated including computational skills, elementary geometry, estimation and

approximation, measurement, number theory, and problem-solving. The results of this study indicated that the performance of the fourth and sixth graders was very poor on every one of the six skill areas tested. For example, only 37% of fourth grade students and 58% of sixth grade students were able to solve the following question: $3,479 = 9 + 70 + 400 + ?$. The study showed that although students performed well on items requiring simple recall, they did poorly on items requiring deeper understanding.

The National Centre for Educational Research and Development (NCERD, Jordan), conducted a comparative study (1993) to investigate how Jordan and the West Bank ranked among the other participating countries in the International Assessment of Educational Progress (IAEP II) with respect to eighth grade student achievement in mathematics and science. The results indicated that West Bank students' achievement was low. Indeed, the IAEP II international average percentage correct statistics (58) is far above that of the West Bank (33.6). The highest scoring country was China (with 80% correct), and the lowest was Mozambique (28%). The West Bank ranked third to last among the twenty-one countries surveyed while Jordan scored 39.4% and Israel 63%. The performance of West Bank students on the science achievement test was also extremely low (52.2%). The IAEP II international average was 67% and the highest scoring country was the Republic of Korea (78% correct), and the lowest was Brazil (46.6%). Jordan scored (57.6%), Israel (70%) and the West Bank ranked second to last among the twenty-one countries surveyed.

Behavioural problems

Whenever schools are poorly maintained, classrooms are overcrowded, student/teacher ratios are high (33:1 for example), teachers enjoy minimum professional development, curricula are irrelevant, and the schooling process is continuously interrupted, one would expect this to be reflected in levels of students' achievement as mentioned in the previous section. The other major effect of such a situation is on students' psychology and behavioural patterns. A correlation exists between feelings associated with failure at school and the emergence of behavioural problems, 'Institutional violence feeds the violence of individuals, and a vicious circle then sets in' (Mansour, 1996). Based on their experience as ex-students, teachers know how to run systems that are based on student's obedience to teachers. The Intifada planted the seeds of confrontation not only in the streets, but also in the school, within the home and society at large. Students were forced to be aggressive as the Israeli army invaded their daily lives, whether in the school, the home and even in children's nightmares (Mansour, 1996). Mansour refers to students as the 'Intifada generation' rightly pointing out that '. . . the pupils of today are the young people of the Intifada, the same who, just yesterday, were demonstrating and throwing stones at Israeli soldiers'.

Higher education

Palestinian universities were established in the last three decades, the first of which was Bir Zeit University. Significant progress has been made in educational development at the tertiary level with, at present, eight universities and four colleges with over 37,000 students enrolled.
Palestinian universities are perceived by the Palestinians above all as centres of political struggle and national resistance. Being independent institutions and enjoying a greater degree of autonomy than schools in terms of academic programs and selection of staff, Palestinian universities played a leading role in resistance and nation-building. Realizing this role, the Israeli authorities implemented the following measures against universities:
- Limiting the expansion of buildings and facilities.
- Limiting students' access to library material (special permits were required to import

new books).

- Obstruction of external financial assistance, particularly that originating in the Arab world. Universities were denied their right not to pay value added tax (VAT) which reached 17%.
- Restriction of academic freedom through the imposition of military orders.
Military Order No. 854 requested universities to apply for annual permits in order to operate. Faced with the rejection of the order by the Palestinians and some Israeli professors, the order was not implemented, although it was retained as a potential threat. Another attempt to obstruct the operation of universities in 1982 demanded that all 'foreign' staff apply for a work permit and sign a pledge constraining their academic and political freedom. The statement of the pledge read as follows:

A commitment for granting a work permit for the academic year 1982-83. Following my application for a work permit for scholastic year 1982-83, which was submitted on ----, and without affecting my comprehensive commitment indicated in the above mentioned application, I hereby declare that I am committed not to do any kind of work and not to give any service directly which will help support the so-called PLO organization or any other hostile organization which is considered hostile as indicated in the order concerning the banning of protest actions and hostile publicity.

TABLE 5: Students at Palestinian universities and colleges

University	Male	Female	Total
Birzeit	2161	1370	3531
Al-Quds	928	1181	2140
Al-Quds open university	3055	2462	5517
Al-Najah	4146	2679	6825
Bethlehem	754	1340	2094
Hebron	809	818	1627
Islamic	3790	1910	5700
Al-Azhar	3494	2644	7038
Colleges offering B.A:	1158	1500	2658
Total	21190	15904	37094

Source: *Educational Statistical Yearbook*, 1995/96, MOE & PCBS, PNA.

At that time, the size of foreign staff (i.e. those not holders of West Bank or Gaza IDs) was critical (approximately half the teaching staff at Bethlehem University and more than 25% in Bir Zeit University). As a result of protests against this measure, several staff members were deported, including presidents (e.g. Dr. Salah of Al Najah University), deans, heads of departments and teachers.
- Continuous disruption of the learning process as a result of student arrests and interrogations, and shootings, not only by the army, but also by settlers. In July 1983, for instance, settlers from Kiryat Arba in Hebron killed three students and injured more than thirty in a gun attack on the Hebron University campus.
- Harassment of university graduates, particularly as of 1992, who were denied the right to apply for positions as civil servants on the grounds that they had graduated from universities that were officially closed. This was an indirect strategy to limit the effectiveness of off-campus teaching strategies adopted by many Palestinians in response to closures, curfews and disruptions.

THE RECOVERY PROCESS

In a small country with 2 million inhabitants in the West Bank and Gaza, the education sector

is the largest service sector. More than 35-40% of the total population are either employed or directly served by the education system. The planning process for the recovery and reversal of the deterioration of the Palestinian education system began with the signing of the 'Declaration of Principles' between the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel on 13 September 1993. Very little was done initially both because the outcomes and implications of the declaration were not clear to educators and because of the lack of reliable educational data. In August 1994 the Ministry of Education (MOE) took control over the educational sector, including Basic, Secondary and Higher Education.

Educational authority transfer

The transfer of educational authority to the Ministry of Education (MOE) on August, 28, 1994 was an historic event both in terms of the political development of the Palestinian nation whereby the Palestinians were granted full responsibility over the education of their children for the first time, and also because it reflected the scale of the challenges that faced the MOE from the outset. As the school year usually starts on the first day of September, two days were not enough, by any standard, to prepare for the beginning of a new school year. Moreover, the entire population had very high expectations relative to the newly-founded Palestinian MOE. Given the shortage of time and human resources, the MOE decided that during the first year of operation it was inappropriate to rush into administrative or educational changes. A decision was therefore taken to maintain the management system as it was, for it was not possible to disrupt a system (despite its deficiencies) which people had got used to. The MOE simultaneously initiated more systematic data collection in view of gaining a better understanding of existing learning and enrolment patterns in order to reverse the process of qualitative deterioration.

Demographic data collection

Realizing the urgent need for reliable data, the MOE established a unit in the planning department in view of implementing an Educational Management Information System (EMIS). The development of the EMIS is a prerequisite for any medium and long term planning and decision formulation. This unit was established with the help of UNICEF and funding from the European Union and Sweden. A major co-operation between this unit and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) organized and published the Education Statistical Yearbook for the academic years 1994/1995 and 1995/1996. In addition, the MOE started the process of enhancing its own capacity in educational management and planning. Major steps were taken in the direction of unifying the two education systems (Gaza and West Bank). As all schools now have the same calendar, recruitment procedures, textbook prices, nominal tuition, and supervision procedures, data collection for planning purposes is facilitated.

Setting priorities

As stressed by Weiler (1982) planning depends very much on the specific environment in which it is called to operate. This implies that setting educational priorities is a function of the characteristics of the social and political system within which educators operate. Palestinian society has certain characteristics that are crucial in the process of educational planning:
- Palestinians value education highly, partially because they have realized that it is a portable product in an area in which they have been subject to displacement and harassment. However, although a significant proportion went on to universities, the

quality of education during the occupation period fell dramatically.
- The general economy in Palestine is still weak and the MOE programs are still highly dependant on international aid.

The above characteristics have had a major impact on educational planning and the setting of educational priorities:

1. Education and training systems have to adjust to the requirement of structural changes in the Palestinian economy. The Palestinian economy has indeed become interdependent with the regional economies and expectations are high. This implies the need to develop competitive skills and competencies through education and training of high quality. Education and training that fosters human skills and competencies is a major aim that the MOE is working toward. Because of the value that Palestinians place on education, a growing proportion of students should extend their education beyond compulsory education which will inevitably create a demand for the expansion of school infrastructures. Table 6 indicates that there will be approximately 60-70,000 new students enrolled every year, implying the need for the construction of 40-50 new schools every year.

2. Although improved student learning is the final aim of the MOE, meeting the needs of teachers is the means to reach such an end. All possible efforts should be geared to provide teachers the opportunity, the time, the means, and the materials for improving their practices.

TABLE 6: Expected number of students in Palestine

Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
No. students	629,069	757,196	819,131	879,966	938,491

Source: Students, classrooms, educational gap in Palestine, MOE, PNA, 1996.

3. Palestinian pupils have lived in a closed country where opportunities for travelling abroad have been rare. All school children and university students have been born under occupation. This implies the need for a national curriculum that stresses national values with emphasis on history, culture and modern issues that are linked to global issues. For this reason, the MOE has created the Curriculum Centre whose challenge is to develop a curriculum that stresses the promotion of democratic values and tolerance, and which supports academic and social learning. The curriculum has to guarantee both equity and effective learning.

The MOE is currently shifting to the development stage by strengthening policy formulation through a five-year plan. A major sector of interest for the MOE is the contribution and provision of equal opportunities for girls by increasing their enrolment in rural areas. The most recent data indicates that although the gender gap is narrow at the primary level (48% of pupils enrolled are girls), the gap widens at the secondary level (44% of total enrolment being female).

The MOE is also launching school-based counselling activities (200 school counsellors have been hired) in order to help students overcome psychological problems experienced under occupation.

It is too early to assess the impact of changes implemented since 1994 since the independent education system is still in its infancy. The degree to which the system is able to respond to the basic aspirations of its people and contribute to the international community is a question to be addressed at a later stage.

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