

THE POLICIES OF THE ZIONIST OCCUPATION TOWARDS THE EDUCATION SECTOR IN PALESTINE AND THE OPTIONS OF THE PALESTINIANS TO CONFRONT THEM 1994 – 2023

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Abstract:

This article analyzes Israeli policies toward education in East Jerusalem between 1994 and 2023, with emphasis on how curricular interventions are deployed to reshape Palestinian identity. Through a mixed-method approach combining interviews, surveys, and documentary analysis the study shows how Israeli authorities impose revised curricula that erase national and religious references while enforcing structural constraints on Palestinian schools. Although economic pressure has produced partial compliance, the findings highlight the enduring resilience of local communities as the main barrier to the Judaization of education. At the institutional level, Palestinian organizations face severe external restrictions, financial shortages, and limited Arab or international attention, enabling these policies to advance with little accountability. The article concludes that education in Jerusalem constitutes a central front in the broader political struggle, requiring coordinated local, national, and international responses to safeguard Palestinian cultural and national identity.

Keywords: Israeli occupation, Education policies and Palestinian identity

1.1 INTRODUCTION:

Education and cultural awareness are key to nation-building, sustaining identity and resisting external domination. For Palestinians, strong educational traditions and cultural resilience have long supported their struggle, though Israel has treated these traits as threats to its settler-colonial project. Israeli authorities have therefore restricted Palestinian education, institutionalizing forms of enforced ignorance to weaken current capacities and shape future social trajectories in line with colonial control.

This logic traces back to Herzl's assertion that if Zionists gained Jerusalem, he would erase everything not sacred to Jews (Ahmad, 1982). His words encapsulate the exclusionary ethos of Zionism, later reflected in policies that since 1948—and especially after 1967—have marginalized Palestinian, Arab, and Islamic dimensions of Jerusalem to consolidate exclusive claims. From a settler-colonial perspective, these measures reflect efforts to impose a singular ethno-national narrative.

In East Jerusalem, education has been a primary arena of contestation. Since 1967, Israeli authorities have imposed hybrid curricula and sought to fold Palestinian institutions into the state's framework, undermining heritage and identity (Hussein, Wong, & Bright, 2022; Sokolower, 2017). The system's fragmented administration—split between the Jerusalem Municipality's Arab Education Department and the Israeli Ministry of Education—further reproduces domination through budgetary neglect and structural inequality (Siam, 2018). Curricula function as tools of identity politics, aiming to reshape Palestinian consciousness.

The coexistence of Israeli-controlled institutions and those tied to the Jordanian Awqaf or UNRWA reinforces fragmentation. This asymmetry has historical roots in the British Mandate, when Palestinian schools were constrained while Zionist ones advanced independent agendas (Al-Qaid, 2015). Since the Nakba, Israeli curricula have been used to erase Palestinian narratives and weaken national aspirations (Saad Eddin, 2020; Miyari, 2019). Structural deficiencies—overcrowding, underfunding, and shortages of qualified teachers—compound these challenges, reflecting overlapping and restrictive policies by the municipality, Israeli ministries, and international bodies (Media and Information Department, 2009).

1.2 Research Problem

Education, and school curricula in particular, constitute a central arena in the struggle over Palestinian identity. Curricula are not neutral tools of instruction; they can sustain national consciousness and resistance, or conversely, act as instruments of erasure that fragment collective memory. Israel has long sought to manipulate this duality,

especially since its occupation of Jerusalem, by using education as a strategic means of reshaping Palestinian youth to internalize the occupier's narrative and thereby reinforce its control over land and holy sites.

Within this context, curricula remain a foundational pillar in maintaining awareness of the Palestinian cause, and one of the constants in the broader struggle. Their importance is magnified against Israel's wider policies of erasing Jerusalem's Arab and Islamic character, enacting "Jewish Nation-State" legislation, and consolidating its claim over Jerusalem as its capital (Palestine Studies, 2023). Following the occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967, Israel transferred governance and administrative authority to its institutions, expanding municipal jurisdiction from 6.5 km² to nearly 72 km². The passage of the 1980 "Basic Law: Jerusalem, Capital of Israel" further entrenched this annexation as final (Al-Dar, Aqiba, & Adait, n.d., p. 504).

Israel's approach has systematically targeted students, teachers, and curricula alike. By restricting the right to free and compulsory education, it has violated international conventions concerning occupied populations. The separation wall, which forces nearly 20% of Jerusalem's students to pass military checkpoints daily, has disrupted access to schools. At the same time, limits on school construction, demolition orders, and permit denials have deepened overcrowding and fueled dropout rates (Curriculum Studies, 2025).

On the curricular front, Israel has inserted Zionist symbols and narratives into the education of Arab students—ranging from the national anthem and the Law of Return to commemorations of Herzl, Ben-Gurion, and Rabin (Mohsen, 2011, p. 59). Recent Knesset data indicate that of roughly 120,000 Palestinian students in East Jerusalem, only 20,000 still follow the unaltered Palestinian curriculum; 55,000 use the Israeli curriculum, while the remainder study hybrid versions overseen by Israeli authorities (Knesset News, 2024).

Despite these pressures, Palestinian curricula have broadly preserved their role in safeguarding national, Arab, and Islamic identity. This persistence underscores the limits of Israel's efforts to impose its biblical narrative wholesale. Yet, the occupation's strategy reaches beyond textbooks, seeking to reshape Arab-Islamic educational thought in ways that erase collective memory and normalize Israel as a "democratic and civic state" where Palestinians coexist under a settler-colonial order (Curriculum Studies, 2025).

Accordingly, this study interrogates Israel's post-Oslo educational policies in Jerusalem and considers potential avenues of resistance to them.

1.3 Research Questions

This study is structured around a primary research question: **What are the policies of the Israeli occupation toward education in East Jerusalem following the Oslo Accords, and what are the possible strategies to confront them?**

The study also addresses a set of subsidiary questions:

1. What are the ideological and strategic underpinnings of Zionism that shape the Israeli occupation's educational policies in East Jerusalem after the Oslo Accords?
2. To what extent do the occupation's educational policies affect Palestinian national values and collective identity in East Jerusalem, particularly in the post-Oslo period?
3. What role do Palestinians play in confronting the occupation's policies and measures regarding education at both the grassroots and institutional levels, and what are the capacities available to counter these policies?

1.4 Research Significance

Undoubtedly, the conflict between the Palestinian people and the Israeli occupation constitutes a central axis of contemporary conflicts and represents the most critical element within this struggle. Education, in particular, occupies a pivotal position in this conflict due to its profound and long-term influence, shaping both the consciousness and the resilience of the Palestinian society. The importance of the study can be highlighted from two dimensions:

- **Scientific Significance:** School curricula and the broader educational process serve as essential instruments for preserving national identity and transmitting cultural heritage across generations. Curricula constitute the most effective means of preparing emerging generations to understand, embrace, and assume responsibility for their national cause. Any conscious society must therefore allocate serious attention to educational curricula to safeguard its identity, cultural heritage, and political and religious structure. From this perspective, the study gains significance by laying the groundwork for developing mechanisms to expose Zionist conspiracies targeting school curricula, while simultaneously proposing strategies to counter and resist such attempts.

- **Practical Significance:** One of the most dangerous misconceptions that could distort the nature of the conflict and render the Palestinian people vulnerable is the assumption that the struggle with Zionism is limited solely to military and political arenas, thereby overlooking the systematic attacks on educational curricula. Such neglect can have devastating long-term effects, potentially undermining the Palestinian community in the broader confrontation with global Zionist initiatives. The practical significance of this study, therefore, lies in raising awareness of this educational dimension of the conflict, highlighting its critical importance, and mobilizing intellectual, organizational, and governmental resources to develop effective mechanisms to resist, remediate, and reconstruct what has been undermined by these systematic attacks.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Background

The historical and ideological underpinnings of Zionism that facilitated the occupation of Palestine

Israeli educational policies function as a central tool for undermining Palestinian cultural identity within the Green Line. By minimizing Palestinian history and privileging the Zionist narrative, these curricula attempt to assimilate Palestinians into Israeli society while eroding their national consciousness. Themes such as the Nakba are marginalized, and persistent disparities in funding between Arab and Jewish schools deepen structural inequality and limit Palestinian mobility.

In the West Bank and Gaza, educational content faces external pressures, with international donors—particularly the European Union—linking UNRWA funding to textbook revisions (2022, مجد حمد). In East Jerusalem, the Israeli curriculum is imposed directly, reflecting efforts to normalize integration and fragment Palestinian identity (MIFTAH, 2023). Education thus emerges as a contested arena over identity, compelling Palestinian actors to safeguard historical memory and cultural continuity.

These strategies are rooted in the broader Zionist project. Early European powers framed Jewish migration as serving imperial goals: Napoleon's 1799 proclamation sought Jewish support for French ambitions, while Britain's Palmerston in 1840 promoted settlement as a buffer against Arab unity (Al-Owais, 1992). Philanthropists like Edmond Rothschild financed colonies such as Rishon LeZion, which by 1885 displayed Zionist symbols of territorial aspiration (Al-Dhameen, 2008). The ideological foundations were codified by figures like Birnbaum, who coined "Zionism" in 1885, and Herzl, whose 1896 work *The Jewish State* dismissed the Palestinian presence (Barghouthi, 2021). This trajectory culminated in Britain's 1917 Balfour Declaration, embedding support for a Jewish homeland and laying the groundwork for Israel's creation at the expense of Palestinians (Kreiner, 2025).

Education under Ottoman and British Rule in Palestine

The development of Palestinian education under Ottoman and British rule reveals how schooling intersected with struggles over governance and identity. Ottoman Tanzimat reforms expanded access through the Ma'ārif system but kept education limited; by World War I, 98 state schools remained against 209 private institutions, many missionary or Jewish (Ghannam, 2020). The 1913 Ottoman Education Law centralized oversight, while colleges such as al-Ṣalāhiyya in Jerusalem reflected growing Arab cultural aspirations (Shalah, 2003).

Under the British Mandate, education became deeply politicized. Enrollment rose from about 30,000 in the 1920s to 150,000 by 1948, but funding stayed minimal: only 5.5% of the 1945–1946 budget went to education, compared to 30% for defense (Asoul, 2018). Arab curricula were stripped of political content (Hammouda, 2014), while Jewish schooling—especially secondary—received greater support, with Jewish secondary enrollment far surpassing Arab access by the mid-1940s (Mousa, 2020).

Exclusion was stark in vocational and higher education. Agricultural training for Arabs began only after 1936, whereas by 1946 Jews had 17 such schools (Ghannam, 2020). No Arab university was allowed, while Hebrew University and Technion advanced Jewish higher education (Shalah, 2003). Teacher training for Arabs was limited to two small institutes, leaving many schools with unqualified staff (Ghannam, 2020).

Structural barriers persisted: kindergartens were absent, rural secondary schools required villagers to cover costs, and access skewed toward urban elites. Community efforts—hundreds of denominational and unsubsidized private schools—became central in sustaining Arab education (Mousa, 2020).

Overall, Ottoman reforms and especially British policies turned education into a colonial instrument, marked by underfunding, depoliticized curricula, and structural inequalities that entrenched disparities between Arab and Jewish communities beyond 1948.

The Drivers and Origins of the Conflict

Jerusalem has long held a central place in Islamic thought, rooted in its association with the Isra and Mi'raj, which elevated the city into both a spiritual and political symbol across centuries (Al-Qaradawi, 2004). In contrast, the Zionist movement appropriated selective biblical narratives—particularly the idea of a "divine promise"—to frame Jerusalem as simultaneously sacred and strategic, thereby mobilizing Jewish migration and securing international backing for a settler-colonial project (Annab, 2002). After 1948, Israeli state policies advanced this vision through systematic Judaization, including land seizures, settlement expansion, and residency restrictions aimed at reshaping the city's demographic balance (Salim, 2011). These measures built on foundations laid during the British Mandate, which facilitated Jewish immigration and culminated in the Nakba, when mass expulsions transformed West Jerusalem into an exclusively Jewish space (Al-Khatib, 2018). In recent decades, the separation wall has further restructured the city's geography by fragmenting Palestinian neighborhoods, deepening socio-economic exclusion, and limiting access to essential services and livelihoods (Al-Atrash, 2015).

Some of the Zionist policies implemented in Jerusalem

Israeli policies in Jerusalem reflect a calculated approach of demographic engineering aimed at consolidating authority over the city while diminishing its Palestinian presence. The expansion of Jewish settlements, alongside systematic restrictions on Palestinian building permits, illustrates an intentional restructuring of the urban environment to privilege one community at the expense of another. At the core of this strategy lies the pursuit of a demographic majority through both the displacement of Palestinians and the facilitation of Jewish settlement. Simultaneously,

excavations beneath and around al-Aqsa Mosque threaten the physical integrity of the site and signify broader attempts to undermine its religious and political significance. The construction of the separation wall has further institutionalized this dynamic, fragmenting Palestinian neighborhoods and reinforcing Israeli control over contested space (Al-Tawil, 2019).

Zionist Settlement and the Control of the Demographic Balance in Jerusalem

Since the 1967 occupation of Jerusalem, Israeli authorities have consistently advanced policies intended to secure a lasting Jewish majority in the city. These measures combined the expansion of Jewish settlements with restrictions aimed at reducing the Palestinian Arab presence, particularly after the unilateral annexation of East Jerusalem on June 28, 1967. Such actions were declared illegal by the United Nations, and the General Assembly explicitly condemned attempts to alter the city's demographic and cultural character. The broader objective was to entrench a new demographic order that marginalized Palestinians and presented Jerusalem as the "eternal capital" of Israel, in line with the Zionist settlement project (Al-Bitar, 1998).

Settlement growth accelerated in the decades that followed. Between 1967 and 1993, roughly half a million settlers arrived in Palestine, with about 37,697 concentrated in Jerusalem, steadily shifting the population balance. This trajectory was reinforced by external political support, most notably the U.S. Congress resolution of October 24, 1995 recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, a position reiterated in September 2020 under the Trump administration. Both moments underscored and legitimized Israeli strategies to consolidate Jerusalem as a predominantly Jewish city (Amara, 2021).

Zionist Policies to Control the Demographic Balance

In pursuit of demographic dominance, Israel has employed a range of policies designed to systematically reduce the Palestinian presence in Jerusalem. Central among these measures is the revocation of residency permits for those unable to demonstrate continuous residence, effectively stripping Palestinians of legal status and forcing many to relocate outside the city (Saleh, 2005). The 2003 "Family Reunification Law" further entrenches this exclusion by denying residency to thousands of children with one non-Jerusalemite parent, thereby restricting access to housing and education (Annab, 2002).

Additional mechanisms include punitive house demolition practices and the imposition of prohibitively high building permit fees, which place severe economic burdens on Palestinian families and often compel displacement (Annab, 2002). The reunification process itself is deliberately obstructive, requiring extensive documentation and the payment of taxes such as the "Arnona," further undermining family cohesion (Annab, 2002). Movement restrictions compound these pressures, as Palestinians must obtain temporary permits to cross checkpoints, with non-renewal resulting in the loss of residency rights. Collectively, these policies reflect a calculated strategy to marginalize Palestinians and secure a Jewish majority in Jerusalem.

The Israelization of the Educational System in Jerusalem

The education sector in Jerusalem is undergoing a profound structural crisis, largely shaped by Israeli policies aimed at weakening Palestinian identity and marginalizing Arab presence. Central to this crisis is a shortage of 2,000–2,500 classrooms, driving dropout rates to nearly 50%, among the highest worldwide (Palestinian Ministry of Education, 2020). Restrictions on West Bank teachers entering Jerusalem have further deepened the shortage of qualified staff, undermining educational quality (Palestinian Ministry of Education, 2020).

Since 1967, Israel has sought to impose its curriculum on Palestinian schools, using education as a tool to erode national consciousness. Law No. 564 of 1968 placed private schools under Israeli authority, enabling narratives that present the land as inherently Jewish and detached from the Palestinian context (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Reports further document systematic deletions from Palestinian textbooks, including the flag, Quranic verses, and references to Yasser Arafat (Shuttleworth, 2014). Meanwhile, research by ACRI and Ir Amin highlights persistent infrastructure deficits in East Jerusalem schools, leading to legal challenges against municipal neglect (Tatarsky, 2013).

Overall, the educational crisis in Jerusalem reflects not incidental neglect but a deliberate strategy of Israelization, designed to restructure the schooling system as part of the broader Zionist project.

The Politics of Education in East Jerusalem: Contesting Identity under Occupation

Education in East Jerusalem has become a central arena of contestation between Israel and the Palestinian community since 1967. Despite chronic shortages in infrastructure, Palestinians have treated schooling as a means of preserving identity, even as Israel has attempted to impose its own curriculum in place of the Palestinian one (Faisal, 2022).

Israel's strategy of integrating East Jerusalem into its legal and municipal systems—abolishing Jordanian regulations, subjecting schools to Israeli authorities, and enacting measures such as Military Order No. 107—illustrates a broader effort to reshape cultural memory (Zuhd, 2013). While educators resisted, often under threat of arrests or closures, private institutions continued to teach the Jordanian curriculum under censorship.

The Oslo Accords further entrenched fragmentation: the Palestinian Authority assumed responsibility for the West Bank and Gaza, but East Jerusalem remained under Israeli control (Abu Jalala, 2016). Since then, policies have targeted Palestinian identity through restricted school construction, curriculum manipulation, and financial

dependency on Israeli subsidies, often conditioned on removing Palestinian symbols and adopting the Israeli curriculum (Faisal, 2022).

The Faisal Hussein Foundation (2022) identifies three main challenges: sustaining the Palestinian curriculum in municipal schools, maintaining the independence of private schools through external funding, and reinforcing Waqf and UNRWA institutions. A severe classroom deficit—capacity for 31,500 versus actual enrollment of 45,500—further facilitates the imposition of the Bagrut curriculum.

Ultimately, education in East Jerusalem is not only a pedagogical issue but a political battlefield, where control over curricula and resources reflects the broader struggle for identity, sovereignty, and self-determination.

The Structure of the Education System in East Jerusalem

The education system in East Jerusalem is deeply fragmented, reflecting broader struggles over identity and control. By 2016, around 109,391 students were enrolled across schools run by multiple authorities (PASSIA, 2016). Private and UNRWA schools continue teaching the Palestinian curriculum to preserve Arab-Palestinian identity, while municipal schools, overseen by Israeli authorities, serve roughly 41% of students and promote Israeli curricula. A growing sector of “recognized but unofficial” schools—privately managed yet heavily funded by Israel—has expanded under the “Law of the Day,” with enrollment rising from 2,000 in 2001–2002 to over 40,000 today. These institutions face mounting pressure to adopt altered Palestinian textbooks, part of a wider Israeli effort to reshape educational narratives and Palestinian consciousness in Jerusalem.

The Impact of the Oslo Accords on Palestinian Education

The Oslo Accords, signed in 1993 between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel, had far-reaching implications for the Palestinian educational system. The agreement formally transferred limited powers from the occupying authorities to the newly established Palestinian Authority, including administrative responsibility over education in the occupied territories. Yet, the implementation of these provisions was fraught with structural and political obstacles, which ultimately hindered the development of an autonomous and coherent Palestinian educational framework.

The Negative Implications of the Oslo Accords on Palestinian Education

One of the most significant negative outcomes of the Oslo Accords was the continuation of Israeli restrictions on mobility in the West Bank and Gaza, which obstructed access to schools and hindered improvements in educational infrastructure. The Palestinian Authority, meanwhile, operated under political pressures that limited its ability to incorporate curricular content reflecting Palestinian national identity or directly addressing the occupation (Saleh, 2010).

Equally problematic was the cooperative framework with Israel, which resulted in the removal of materials considered “hostile” or inconsistent with the peace process. This narrowing of educational space curtailed the teaching of Palestinian historical narratives, weakening education as a tool of cultural and political resistance and sparking sharp criticism from Palestinian academics and society at large (Zablawi, 2005).

Ongoing Challenges in the Palestinian Education Sector after Oslo

Nearly thirty years after the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian education sector still faces deep structural and political challenges. In East Jerusalem, Israeli authorities have sought to enforce their curriculum in Palestinian schools, aiming to weaken cultural and national identity while embedding students in the Israeli system (MIFTAH, 2019). The Palestinian Authority, however, has largely responded with symbolic gestures rather than concrete strategies, failing to build alternative frameworks or leverage international actors. This limited approach has left schools, particularly in East Jerusalem, in severe shortage of resources and infrastructure (Meyari, 2019).

Palestinian Educational Policies and the Struggle Against Judaization

Education has long served as a cornerstone of Palestinian national identity and collective memory. Since the Oslo Accords of 1993, however, the sector has been shaped not only by the constraints of occupation but also by the Palestinian Authority’s (PA) own policies. Although Oslo transferred formal responsibility to the PA, it restricted curricular content, removing or softening references to Palestinian identity and Israeli occupation under the rhetoric of the “peace process” (Zablawi, 2005). This moderation was reinforced by the PA’s limited response to Israel’s enforcement of its curriculum in East Jerusalem, where temporary condemnations replaced structural countermeasures, leaving schools underfunded and exposed (Meyari, 2019). The resulting fragmentation of educational authorities deepened pedagogical inconsistencies and weakened national cohesion (Totah Al-Zablawi, 2005).

Civil society and the PA have sought to counter these pressures through curriculum development affirming Palestinian narratives, institution building, and international advocacy (Independent Commission for Human Rights, 2020). NGOs have further contributed with awareness campaigns, psychosocial support, and scholarships, while international donors have offered partial financial relief (MIFTAH, 2021). Yet such initiatives remain insufficient against Israel’s systematic imposition of its curriculum and restrictions on mobility. Education in Palestine thus emerges as both a site of resistance and a reflection of constrained sovereignty, underscoring how struggles over knowledge production are deeply entangled with broader structures of power and contested state-building.

Review of Previous Studies

The literature offers a crucial lens for understanding how Israeli educational policies shape Palestinian identity, especially in East Jerusalem. Across different perspectives, scholars converge on the systematic marginalization of Palestinian narratives in formal education. Kabha and Hussein (2018) show how state policies erode Palestinian cultural identity in the occupied interior, while Arar (2018) traces the historical phases of these policies—military rule, the “melting pot,” and the post-Oslo era—demonstrating their structural intent to reshape Arab identity. Ziad (2019) further underscores the reproduction of inequality through denial of cultural specificity and unequal resource allocation.

In East Jerusalem, Abu Asab (2022) highlights two key dynamics: curricular amendments that erase Palestinian symbols, weakening national identity, and parental choices favoring Israeli curricula for their perceived advantages despite political costs. Together, these works reveal education as a contested arena where state power intersects with identity politics. Yet, they also expose a gap: the lack of strategies to strengthen Palestinian national identity in a fragmented educational context. This study aims to address that gap through a deeper analysis of Israeli policies and their long-term implications for Palestinian state-building.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research population

The study population encompasses all students enrolled in public schools in occupied Jerusalem, totaling roughly 98,428 (excluding kindergarten). About 45,500 of them attend 146 schools affiliated with the Palestinian educational system—whether run by the Islamic Waqf, UNRWA, or private institutions—while the rest are in schools administered by Israeli authorities. Many of these were originally Palestinian schools taken over after 1967, supplemented by rented spaces and a few newer buildings.

The limited availability of suitable facilities has been leveraged by the occupation to enforce the Israeli curriculum, turning education into a tool of political control. Yet most Jerusalemite students remain within schools adhering to the Palestinian curriculum, highlighting how education in Jerusalem functions as a contested arena where sovereignty and identity are negotiated.

3.2 Research Methodology

To arrive at the findings of this study, the researcher employed two complementary methodological approaches:

1. The Inductive-Analytical Method:

This entailed a close examination of the school textbooks currently taught in Jerusalem, with particular attention to the alterations introduced by the Israeli occupation authorities. The analysis focused on identifying and interpreting the modifications that reshaped the content and orientation of these curricula.

2. The Descriptive-Analytical Method:

Alongside textual analysis, the researcher conducted a series of structured interviews with a purposively selected yet constrained random sample, shaped by the restrictions imposed by the occupation on the mobility and social interaction of Jerusalem’s inhabitants. Additionally, a survey questionnaire was distributed to a random sample of teachers, in order to triangulate perspectives and enrich the empirical base of the study.

Research Instruments

The study relied on two primary instruments for data collection:

1. Textbook Analysis

Palestinian textbooks were systematically compared with those subjected to Israeli alterations, with emphasis on revisions that erased or reconfigured Palestinian national, religious, and historical symbols.

2. Interviews and Questionnaire

In-depth interviews were conducted with educational officials, teachers, parents, and students to provide a deeper understanding of the lived realities of education in Jerusalem. Furthermore, a structured questionnaire was distributed among teachers in both Jerusalem and the West Bank to elicit their views on the tangible effects of Israeli educational policies on Palestinian schooling.

Research Questions

As this study seeks to examine the policies of the Zionist occupation toward the education sector in East Jerusalem following the Oslo Agreement, as well as the strategies Palestinians have pursued to confront them between 1994 and 2023, a set of guiding research questions was formulated to structure the inquiry and direct its analytical framework:

1. What are the ideological and strategic underpinnings of Zionist policy shaping the occupation’s approach to education in East Jerusalem after the Oslo Agreement?
2. To what extent have these educational policies affected Palestinian national concepts and values in East Jerusalem, particularly in the period following Oslo?
3. How have Palestinians responded to the occupation’s educational policies and practices—both at the societal and official levels—and what are the prospects and limitations of such resistance?

Interview Findings (Interview 1, Theoretical Framing)

An interview on June 20, 2024, with Dr. Dima Al-Samman, Head of Jerusalem Affairs at the Palestinian Ministry of Education, highlights how education in East Jerusalem functions as a political battleground over identity. She explained that Israeli authorities' curricular interventions are not mere pedagogical reforms, but mechanisms of symbolic domination aimed at reshaping the cognitive and cultural horizons of Palestinian youth.

According to Dr. Al-Samman, replacing the Palestinian curriculum with the Israeli one seeks to erase national identity and historical consciousness, replacing them with mythologized Zionist narratives. This extends beyond textual revisions to include erasing cultural and religious symbols, inserting blank pages into textbooks, and using extracurricular activities to normalize occupation. Such practices reflect a soft power strategy where coercion and persuasion work together to secure compliance.

While financial incentives have pushed some schools to adopt Israeli curricula, Dr. Al-Samman viewed these as outcomes of a broader “carrot and stick” policy. The Rosary Sisters School, where students raised the Israeli flag, illustrates how educational spaces are symbolically reframed under occupation. Yet Palestinian institutions remain constrained: a 2017–2018 support plan collapsed due to financial limits, leaving grassroots actors to resist by distributing Palestinian textbooks, rejecting normalization, and mobilizing parents.

Teachers and administrators face particular pressures, with employment tied to Israeli security approval and resistance risking dismissal or punishment. More subtly, occupation policies seek to undermine family authority by imposing alternative narratives, eroding trust across generations.

Overall, the interview reveals how education is instrumentalized as a site of control in East Jerusalem, combining coercion with persuasion. At the same time, grassroots resilience and parental involvement expose the limits of hegemonic domination and sustain the struggle over cultural sovereignty.

Interview Findings (Interview 2, Theoretical Framing)

On June 25, 2024, Abdel Hakim Abu Jamous, Head of the Center for Humanities and Social Curricula at the Palestinian Ministry of Education, reflected on the contested nature of schooling in East Jerusalem. He described education as a battleground of competing epistemologies: Palestinian curricula anchor students in national memory and belonging, while Israeli authorities attempt to recast consciousness through what he called the “distorted curriculum,” selectively purged of national and religious signifiers. Such interventions, he argued, constitute epistemic violence aimed at eroding identity by reshaping categories of knowledge.

Abu Jamous noted that the effects vary by school, depending on which curriculum is adopted and the disposition of teachers, who are vetted by Israeli authorities to ensure alignment with hegemonic goals. Despite these controls, he rejected claims of Israeli success, pointing instead to recurring youth mobilization as proof that students retain a sense of national belonging that resists colonial narratives.

He further highlighted structural barriers to Palestinian counter-strategies. Textbooks designed by the Ministry of Education to foreground Jerusalem's history were obstructed both by Israeli restrictions and by donor conditionalities, particularly from the World Bank. This dual pressure reveals how global governance frameworks inadvertently reinforce occupation policies.

Analytically, the interview illustrates education in East Jerusalem as a case of symbolic domination in Bourdieu's terms—where power works through cultural meanings rather than sheer coercion—while also exposing the paradox of Palestinian institutional weakness under asymmetric sovereignty.

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

This section engages with the study's findings by addressing the research questions and hypotheses in light of both the empirical data and the broader political context.

First: Addressing the Research Questions

The first research question asks: “What are the policies of the Israeli occupation toward the education sector in East Jerusalem, and what options are available to Palestinians to confront them during the period 1994–2023, as perceived by teachers in East Jerusalem schools?”

To answer this question, statistical measures—including arithmetic means and standard deviations—were extracted for each item in the research instrument. The following tables illustrate these results.

Section One: Policies of the Occupation toward the Education Sector

Table 6: Mean Responses of the Study Sample on the Items of Axis One: Occupation Policies toward Education				
No.	Item Statement	Std. Deviation	Mean	Level
1	The Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem are culturally isolated from the rest of Palestine.	.68343	1.7600	Very Weak
2	Israeli demographic dominance affects the culture of Jerusalem's residents.	.70173	2.3500	Weak
3	Building policies, house demolitions, and construction permits negatively affect education in East Jerusalem.	.91425	3.7500	Strong

4	The impact of apartheid is strongly evident in the education sector.	.97006	3.7800	Strong
5	Zionist associations actively undermine Arab schools and educational institutions.	.94836	3.6400	Strong
6	The policy of confiscating homes and land weakens educational institutions.	.99752	3.4300	Strong
7	The higher quality of Israeli schools affects the number of Jerusalemite students enrolled in Arab schools.	.94980	3.6300	Strong
8	The deliberate neglect of Arab schools' needs results in lower student numbers.	.91425	3.6500	Strong
9	The local community in Jerusalem provides sufficient financial support for Arab schools.	.96588	3.4200	Strong
10	The Arab community supports schools and teachers with bold political stances.	.93695	3.5300	Strong
11	The Palestinian Authority deliberately neglects the educational needs of East Jerusalem.	.90453	3.5000	Strong
12	The Israeli government interferes in curricula and attempts to impose Judaization.	.87033	3.5100	Strong
13	Low salaries and insufficient financial support cause teachers to lose motivation.	.85375	3.7200	Strong
14	The imposed Israeli curricula strongly erode the identity of the younger generation.	.91293	3.5700	Strong
*	Axis One: Occupation Policies toward Education	.57351	3.4743	Moderate Impact

The preceding table demonstrates that the overall arithmetic mean for **Axis One: Occupation Policies toward Education** reached (3.374), with a rating of high. This indicates a strong consensus among members of the study sample that the policies of the occupation exert a significant and detrimental influence on education and educational institutions in Jerusalem.

The items that recorded the highest means were as follows:

- **Item 4**, stating that “the impact of apartheid is strongly evident in the education sector,” with a mean of (3.7800) and a high rating.
- **Item 3**, which highlights that “policies of construction, demolition, and building permits negatively affect education in East Jerusalem,” with a mean of (3.7500) and a high rating.
- **Item 13**, asserting that “low salaries and insufficient financial support cause teachers to lose motivation,” with a mean of (3.7200) and a high rating.

By contrast, the lowest means were recorded in the following items:

- **Item 1**, which states that “the Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem are culturally isolated from the rest of Palestine,” with a mean of (1.7600) and a very low rating. This reflects the strong attachment of Jerusalem’s residents to their broader national and religious identity, and their refusal to accept cultural or social isolation despite the pressures imposed by the occupation.
- **Item 2**, which affirms that “Israeli demographic dominance affects the culture of Jerusalem’s residents,” with a mean of (2.3500) and a low rating. This outcome illustrates the spirit of resilience and defiance among Jerusalem’s inhabitants, particularly Muslims, who actively assert their cultural and religious practices in the face of occupation. The enduring traditions of murabitun and murabitat in the courtyards of Al-Aqsa Mosque epitomize this determination, as they embody Jerusalemites’ refusal to surrender their cultural agency or accept the hegemonic imposition of Israeli narratives over the city’s social and religious life.

Section Two: Strategies for Confronting Occupation Policies

Table 7: Mean Responses of the Study Sample on the Items of Section Two: Strategies for Confronting Occupation Policies				
No.	Item	Standard Deviation	Arithmetic Mean	Level
1	Filing complaints and reports to international forums contributes positively to confronting occupation policies.	.89052	3.5700	High

2	The Palestinian Authority works to provide financial needs for teachers and schools.	.91475	3.4600	High
3	The Palestinian Authority works to unify the curriculum in Jerusalem with that of the rest of Palestine.	.95151	3.4848	High
4	The Palestinian Authority works to renovate and develop schools.	.93695	3.4700	High
5	The local community is the most influential actor in resisting Judaization policies.	.81674	3.8600	High
6	Partnerships with international institutions support education in East Jerusalem.	.91115	3.4100	High
7	Popular resistance in Palestine is a fundamental pillar in confronting Israeli occupation policies.	.83333	3.5500	High
8	Israeli-imposed curricula must be actively countered in schools.	.85776	3.5400	High
9	Arab states should accommodate graduates of Jerusalem's Arab schools.	.84393	3.5700	High
10	The absence of media coverage of occupation crimes in Jerusalem contributes to distorting Jerusalemite identity.	.86597	3.7600	High
11	Raising public awareness through the media constitutes the most effective strategy to counter occupation policies in Jerusalem.	.96917	3.4900	High
12	Engaging parents and spreading awareness among students beyond the boundaries of schools is essential.	.98350	3.3200	High
	Axis Two: Strategies for Confronting Occupation Policies	.62044	3.5547	High

The findings show that Axis Two: Strategies for Confronting the Occupation's Policies achieved a mean score of (3.554), rated high, reflecting strong agreement among participants on the effectiveness of these strategies in countering efforts to Judaize education and undermine Jerusalem's Palestinian identity.

Two areas stood out with the highest means. Item Five emphasized the decisive role of the local community in resisting Judaization, scoring (3.8600). This illustrates how grassroots mobilization provides the primary safeguard for Jerusalemites in the absence of meaningful political or institutional protection. Item Ten highlighted the impact of limited media coverage of the occupation's crimes, with a mean of (3.7600), showing how neglect—whether global or Arab—distorts Palestinian narratives and weakens collective identity, particularly in education.

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study argues that Israeli policies in East Jerusalem's education sector operate as a deliberate mechanism to undermine Palestinian identity and reshape national consciousness. This is evident in curriculum alterations driven by racial motives, the removal of national and religious symbols, the exclusion of refugee and right of return issues, and the promotion of a favorable image of Israeli citizens and the occupation's history. The analysis also underscores the silence of international institutions, including the World Bank, and the limited capacity of Palestinian authorities to counter these measures.

Field findings reveal strong consensus among teachers that occupation policies deeply influence education, while local communities remain central in resisting Judaization. Jerusalemites continue to affirm their national and religious identity despite cultural isolation. Data analysis further shows no significant variation in teachers' perceptions by gender, qualifications, or teaching stage, though years of experience did produce measurable differences.

Recommendations:

Based on the study's findings, strategic recommendations can be distilled to safeguard Palestinian education in East Jerusalem and reinforce national identity:

1. **Strengthening Educational Institutions:** Provide financial and professional support for schools and teachers, while establishing mechanisms to monitor violations and document curriculum distortions.
2. **Empowering Local Communities:** Activate the role of parents and community initiatives in teaching the authentic Palestinian curriculum, and reinforce grassroots activism and national cultural activities.
3. **Academic and Media Resistance:** Promote research and field studies on the Judaization of education, and leverage local and international media to expose violations and occupation policies.

4. **International and Legal Pressure:** Channel legal and political efforts toward UN bodies and international courts to protect education and Palestinian identity, while monitoring indirect international support that enables occupation policies.

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