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Arab and Jewish Education Systems in Israel: Differences, Disparities, and Challenges. A Comparative Review of Structure, Funding, and Outcomes in Local Authorities

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Abstract: This work explores the disparities between the Arab and Jewish education systems in Israel, focusing on structural inequalities, government policies, and recent developments in educational outcomes. Drawing on official data and academic research, it highlights persistent funding and infrastructure gaps, differences in teacher training, and varying levels of access to non-formal education. The paper pays particular attention to Government Resolutions 922 and 550, which sought to reduce inequalities through targeted funding and support for Arab local authorities in Israel. While these initiatives have led to some improvements - such as increased participation in higher education and improvement in teacher qualifications—many gaps remain, especially in infrastructure and academic achievement. The findings emphasize the need for sustained investment, structural reform, and culturally responsive education policy to advance equity between the two systems.

Keywords: Arab Education, Jewish Education System, Educational Gaps, Educational Equity, Israel, Student Achievement, Arab Local Authorities, Minority Education,

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INTRODUCTION

Demographic background

Israel is home to a diverse population, featuring a wide array of ethnic and cultural groups, with Jews and Arabs representing the two largest groups.

As of 2025, Israel has approximately 10 million residents, of whom 7.7 million are Jewish, constituting about 77% of the population, 2.1 million are Arabs (about 21% of the population), and members of other religions make up about 2% of the population (All Israel News Staff, 2025). Israeli Jews and Arabs generally live in separate areas. The majority of Arab population lives in places where they form the majority, and the Jewish population lives in places where the Jews are the majority. While major cities like Jerusalem and Haifa have significant Arab communities, internal segregation is still prevalent, with neighborhoods typically being predominantly Jewish or Arab. (Shwed et al., 2014). Mixed cities in Israel are where Jewish and Arab citizens live in close proximity, under same municipality. About 8% of Arab citizens reside in these cities, and the rest live in Arab-majority localities. Even in mixed cities, neighborhoods are generally segregated, with minimal co-residence. Outside mixed cities, the two population groups live in nearly entirely separate environments (Sales, 2016). Despite the close proximity of Jewish and Arab communities, issues such as socio-economic gaps, and civil inequalities, are often accentuated (American Council for International Task Force, 2021).

Due to the near-complete residential segregation, it is no surprise that the education system is also divided. Although Israeli law grants equal rights to Jews and Arabs, the two groups often live in distinct societies, attending separate schools, residing in different cities, consuming different media, and holding divergent political views. This separation largely arises from enduring structural factors such as language, culture, and religion.

The role of the education system in promoting social equality

One of the indicators for evaluating a society's level of development is its education level. Education and learning are crucial for human development, as they help individuals realize their abilities, understand the world around them, develop social awareness, and make decisions in their personal and professional lives. When a state invests in the education of its citizens, it can enhance the population's skills and unlock its potential.

Education as a means to bridge gaps

Education is considered one of the most effective mechanisms for breaking the cycle of poverty. According to an OECD report (2020), investment in education, especially in the early stages, improves the chances of success for children from low-income families. Additionally, education contributes to reducing gender and ethnic inequalities. Educational programs designed for marginalized groups, such as women or minorities, have been shown to increase their participation in the labor market and decision-making roles.

According to an Oxfam report (2019), quality education can reduce socio-economic inequality by providing equal opportunities to children from disadvantaged backgrounds, families, enabling them to access higher education and quality employment. The education system and the level of education are critical tools for promoting social equality. By providing equal opportunities, narrowing gaps, and empowering marginalized groups, education can transform lives and strengthen society. Investing in public education is an investment in a just and prosperous future.

A Brief Overview of the Development of the Two Education Systems in Israel

The Education System in Israel

Education is widely considered a key indicator of a society's modernization and development. It is also a crucial personal achievement that helps individuals develop their potential, form their perspectives, increase social awareness, and help making personal and professional decisions,

The Israeli education system operates under centralized control by the Ministry of Education. This ministry is primarily tasked with developing curricula, overseeing teachers, and constructing school facilities. Local municipalities, however, bear the main responsibility for the upkeep and equipment of school buildings (Diala Abu-Oksa, 2020).

The education system in Israel is divided into several education systems, with the two primary ones being the state-Jewish education system and the Arab education system. This division is based on language, culture, and sometimes governmental policy, reflecting the social and political complexity of the country (Blass, 2021). There are significant gaps between these two systems, reflecting budgetary, structural, cultural, and pedagogical inequalities. These gaps are particularly evident in local authorities, where issues of resource allocation, urban planning, and the functioning of local welfare

and education systems arise (Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel, 2017).

The education system in Israel is characterized by significant disparities between students from different socio-economic backgrounds, such as those living in the periphery. One of the most prominent gaps is between the Arab education system and the Hebrew (Jewish) education system. These disparities are most evident in two closely connected areas: funding and academic achievement. For many years, the Arab education system has suffered from budgetary discrimination compared to the Hebrew system—starting from elementary schools, through middle schools, and into high schools. The greatest disparities can be seen in schools serving students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Budgetary investment in Jewish students from low socio-economic backgrounds is significantly higher compared to the investment in students in the Arab education system. The majority of students in the Arab education system in Israel belong to disadvantaged populations. In recent years, the Ministry of Education's policy of increasing differential budgeting has helped reduce funding gaps in elementary and middle schools. However, inequality in funding still exist and need to be addressed (Haj-Yahya et al., 2021)

The gap between the resources allocated to Arab education and those allocated to Hebrew education is evident not only in budgetary aspects but also in the teaching infrastructure. There is a significant shortage of classrooms, physical facilities, and teaching aids. Additionally, the curriculum and its implementation do not provide Arab education students with the knowledge and skills necessary for successful integration into Israeli society and the labor market (Haj-Yahya et al., 2021). Haj-Yahya and others (2021) note a decline in the quality of teachers entering the Arab education system, a field that was previously considered one of the strengths of Arab education compared to the Hebrew education system.

The Education System in Israeli Jewish Society

The Hebrew education system in Israel reflects the cultural, religious, and social characteristics of Israeli society. The language of instruction in the Hebrew education system is Hebrew. The Hebrew-Jewish education system is divided into several streams: State education, designed for the majority of the secular Jewish population, where the curriculum includes core subjects, Zionism, science and technology, alongside Jewish and cultural values. State-religious education emphasizes Jewish studies, Torah, and tradition, as well as the core

curriculum. Ultra-Orthodox education is autonomous and focuses on Torah and Talmudic studies. In addition, there is also an independent private education sector that includes unique schools such as democratic schools and bilingual Hebrew-Arabic schools (Blass, 2020a).

The Arab Education System in Israel

The Arab education system in Israel is part of the national education system, but it faces unique challenges and characteristics. The language of instruction in the Arab education system in Israel is Arabic. It serves a diverse population and is divided into sectors: Arab (Muslim and Christian), Druze, Circassian, and Bedouin—each with its own distinct features and educational curricula (Haj-Yahia, 2018).

While most Arab citizens live mostly in separate communities, they frequently interact with the Jewish population through work, commerce, and higher education. Arab students constitute approximately 27% of Israel's school enrollment. Throughout their elementary and high school years, Arab and Jewish students largely attend separate institutions. Arabic, is Israel's second official language, and is the primary language of instruction in the Arab education system (Diala Abu-Oksa, 2020).

The majority of the Arab population in Israel (about 72%) lives in autonomous Arab local authorities, with 57% of these authorities managed by local councils (Hamaisi, n.d.). The majority of the Arab education system in Israel operates primarily within these Arab local authorities that include municipalities, local councils, and regional councils. These local authorities are responsible for managing the schools in their jurisdiction, under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. The Arab education system in Israel includes educational institutions ranging from kindergartens to high schools within the Arab local authorities, most of which fall into low socio-economic categories. Although the Arab education system is under the authority of the Ministry of Education, it faces unique challenges stemming from cultural, social, and economic factors.

PURPOSE

This paper aims to examine and compare the Arab and Hebrew (Jewish) education systems in Israel, with a focus on key differences and recent developments in areas such as student achievement, resource allocation, teacher qualifications and quality, curriculum, and overall educational

outcomes. Although the Arab education system has historically experienced significant disadvantages—including lower funding, limited resources, and reduced student achievement—recent years have witnessed notable improvements. Nevertheless, substantial disparities persist in funding, infrastructure, academic performance, and curricular content.

By synthesizing current research findings, this review aims to provide policymakers and educators with insights into ongoing challenges and advancements, thereby contributing to efforts to promote a more equitable education system in Israel.

METHODOLOGY

This paper utilizes a qualitative research approach, drawing on a range of textual sources to explore the topic in depth. The methodology includes a comprehensive review of academic literature, as well as official online publications such as government reports, policy documents, and institutional publications, in both English and Hebrew. This diverse and bilingual source base allows for a more nuanced and contextually grounded analysis.

Challenges facing the Arab Education in Israel Compared to the Jewish Education System

The Arab education system in the Arab local authorities in Israel has made some progress in recent years, yet it continues to face significant challenges. These challenges stem from persistent gaps in funding, infrastructure, and representation. Despite these difficulties, efforts have been made to improve the system and promote greater equity. The following section provides an overview of the current situation, key challenges, and the initiatives aimed at addressing disparities and strengthening the Arab education system.

Educational Achievement in the Arab Education System in Israel

The level of education in Arab society has increased considerably since the establishment of the State of Israel (Haj-Yahia, 2018). According to Haj-Yahia (2018), the improvement in education is both quantitative and qualitative. Between 2000 and 2016, the number of students in Arab secondary education doubled from 101,000 to 197,000.

The growth rate of students in Arab secondary education (96%) is significantly higher compared to the corresponding rate in the Jewish-Hebrew secondary education system (9.8%). The percentage of students eligible for a matriculation certificate

(Bagrut) also increased substantially, from 49% in 1995 to 63% in 2016 (Haj-Yahia, 2018). Nevertheless, despite this steady trend of improvement, academic achievement levels in the Arab education system are still considerably lower than those in the Jewish-Hebrew education system. Dropout rates among Arab high school students are significantly higher than among their Jewish counterparts. Although compulsory education in Israel extends through 12th grade, many students in the Arab education system, while officially enrolled, are frequently absent and effectively do not participate in school (Diala Abu-Oksa, 2020).

According to Diala Abu-Oksa (2020) 20% of students in the Arab education system drop out. with the highest dropout rates occurring as students move from middle school to high school. These dropouts are primarily male. Students in the Hebrew education system in Israel demonstrate significantly higher rates of matriculation and eligibility for university entrance compared to their counterparts in the Arab education system. However, academic achievement within the Arab sector varies considerably across religious groups. For example, in 2013, Christian Arab students (72.3%) and Druze students (72.2%) had substantially higher matriculation rates than Muslim students (58.4%), though still slightly below the rate in the Hebrew education (76.1%). Negev Bedouin students recorded the lowest rate at 55.5%. In addition, a greater proportion of Christian Arab students (64.6%) earned a matriculation certificate that met university entrance requirements - noticeably higher than among Druze (47.6%) and Muslim (41.6%) students (Haj-Yahia, 2018; Diala Abu-Oksa, 2020).

Budgetary and infrastructure gaps

Following the establishment of the State of Israel, the Arab education system faced severe infrastructure deficiencies. Until the mid-1950s, only one state-run high school for Arab students existed in Israel - in Nazareth. Although several expensive private Christian high schools were in operation, they were only unofficially recognized for the purpose of compulsory education and were not integrated into the official state system. Due to the high tuition fees at these institutions, many Arab students completed only the eight years of elementary education required by law at the time and did not continue to high-school, choosing instead to support their families financially. Arab students who did seek further education were often required to travel to Jewish communities to attend state high schools (Haj-Yahia & Rudnitzky, 2018; Diala Abu-Oksa, 2020).

Since 1948/49, the Arab education system has experienced significant growth in both infrastructures and number of student. While primary education expanded dramatically, the most significant change was in secondary education, which evolved from being nearly non-existent in the early years of statehood to becoming a standard component of Arab society (Haj-Yahya et al., 2021). In addition to schools from elementary through high school, other educational institutions were established in Arab local authorities, such as community centers (matnasim) and municipal cultural centers (Pais Centers), designed for educational activities in the afternoon hours. Between 1992 and 1996, the Israeli governments prioritized the field of education and adopted a policy of affirmative action, and added teaching hours and classrooms to elementary education in Arab local authorities. During these years, the per capita education budget for the Arab population in Israel increased by nearly 50%, making it the largest education budget in subsequent years (Haj-Yahya et al., 2021).

Shortage of Classrooms

There is a shortage of classrooms across the entire education system in Israel, but it is particularly severe in the Arab education system.

Despite the increase in student numbers over the past two decades, due to population growth and expanded compulsory education laws, construction budgets have not been adjusted. This, along with planning challenges and a lack of land in Arab local authorities in Israel, has led to a long-term shortage of classrooms. The problem worsened in the past decade with the introduction of the compulsory education law, starting at age 3 (Blickoff, 2014).

Between 2000 and 2011, approximately 27% of students in Israel were Arab, and the Arab education system saw classroom construction proportionate to its share of the total student population. However, this allocation was insufficient to close existing gaps that persisted from the past. This allocation also failed to prevent the continued use and increase in the number of substandard classroom structures (such as portables or rented buildings), which served as a partial solution instead of constructing dedicated classrooms. Furthermore, in the early 2000s, there was a tendency to cut kindergarten budgets, based on the assumption that renting could be a more cost-effective solution (Blickoff, 2014).

As part of the 2007 five-year plan, it was determined that approximately 9,000 classrooms were needed between 2008 and 2012. However, only about 2,600 classrooms were constructed between 2007 and 2011 as part of the plan. At the end of 2011, the

classroom shortage in Arab schools totaled approximately 4,502 classrooms, out of a total of 15,573 classrooms operating in the 2011-2012 school year. This meant approximately 29% of the classrooms operated in non-dedicated buildings, rented rooms, or portable classrooms (Blickoff, 2014). Upon the implementation of the compulsory education law for 3-4 year olds in 2015, there was a shortage of two-thirds of the required kindergarten classrooms in the Arab education system. Since then, the shortage of kindergarten classrooms has further increased.

Given the shortage of thousands of classrooms and the lack of standard buildings, the Ministry of Education and local authorities resort to alternatives such as portable buildings, renting facilities, or converting existing spaces (such as libraries and labs) for use as classrooms, rather than providing the standard classrooms required by compulsory education law.

In 2012, 75% of rented classrooms across the education system were in the Arab education.

The Ministry of Education partially covers the rent cost only for standard classrooms (not for libraries, labs, etc.). In practice, the Ministry of Education's contribution amounts to only about a quarter of the rent cost, leaving the Arab local authorities to cover the remaining 75% (Haj-Yahya et al., 2021).. For the Arab local authorities in Israel, which have very limited financial resources to begin with, this additional financial burden constitutes a further strain that they struggle to cope with. This situation makes existing inequality worse and places a greater burden on them compared to their stronger and more established Jewish counterparts. The direct consequence of the classroom shortage is more crowding, and the maximum utilization of all available rooms in existing school buildings, often at the expense of dedicated spaces like libraries or labs, which also negatively impacts the quality of learning.

Budgets in the Arab Education System Funding Policy for Arab Education in Israel

Government Resolutions 922 and 550 and Their Impact on Education in Arab Local Authorities in Israel

Government Resolutions 922 (2015) and 550 (2021) are five-year plans aimed at promoting socio-economic development in Arab society in Israel, with significant emphasis on education, and especially non-formal education. Following is an overview of their impact on education in Arab society, with reference to achievements, barriers, and criticisms.

Government Resolution 922 (2016–2020)

Resolution 922 is considered groundbreaking because it recognized for the first time the importance of non-formal education in Arab society and allocated a dedicated budget of approximately 650 million NIS over five years. The goal was to promote enrichment programs, culture and leisure activities, and youth movements' activities in Arab localities, while correcting discriminatory allocation mechanisms. The objective of Plan 922 was to reduce gaps as it aimed to improve educational infrastructure, add learning hours, and support struggling students to narrow educational achievement gaps compared to the Jewish sector (Klor et al., 2022).

Plan 922 achievements

Relating to education budget, out of a total budget of approximately NIS 13 billion allocated for the plan, about 70% was utilized by November 2021, with a significant portion directed towards education. The plan enabled the expansion of non-formal education programs in Arab local authorities, which until then were very few and funded by private sources. It increased participation in youth movement activities, extracurricular activities, and after-school programs, and supported Arab non-profit organizations in the fields of education and culture. The plan led to an improvement in achievements. There was a rise in the percentage of students eligible for a matriculation certificate (Bagrut) in Arab education, although compared to Jewish education (excluding Orthodox education) the gap remained significant.

Relating to infrastructure in the education system, resources were allocated to improve physical infrastructure in schools, such as buildings and classrooms for after-school learning and enrichment activities, laboratories and libraries, and the acquisition of computers and technology, but not to a sufficient extent to close the gaps (Klor et al., 2022).

Challenges in the implementation of Plan 922

There were also challenges in the implementation of Plan 922. Arab local authorities, most of which fall into a low socio-economic category, struggled to provide 'matching funds' (their participation in the plan's funding) or to handle the bureaucratic processes for using the budgets. Another challenge was the lack of coordination. Responsibility for non-formal education is scattered among various government ministries, which led to inefficiency in implementation. In addition, the budgets were not sufficient to close gaps that had accumulated over

decades, especially in infrastructure and the quality of teaching.

Plan 922 did not succeed in meeting its goals, and therefore a continuation plan, Plan 550, was decided upon (Ilan, 2021).

Government Resolution 550 (2021-2026) "Takadum"

Resolution 550 is a five-year plan that continues Resolution 922, which did not achieve its goals. The goals of Resolution 550 regarding education included:

Developing Cultural Identity: The plan emphasizes strengthening Arab identity within the education system, while improving infrastructure and expanding educational programs.

Addressing Educational Gaps: The plan focuses on increasing supervision hours, supporting students with difficulties, and investing in early childhood education

Promoting Inter-Community Integration: The resolution aspires to promote educational encounters between different groups within Arab society, and between Arabs and Jews.

In terms of budget, the plan includes an overall budget higher than that of Plan 922 (around 30 billion NIS), with significant allocations for education, but it is still in the early stages of implementation (Klor et al., 2022).

The plan introduced new initiatives such as early childhood education initiatives and the expansion of supervised frameworks, especially in Bedouin communities.

The plan also includes addressing the issue of identity and attempts to address the discourse of Arab-Palestinian identity, but has faced criticism for vague definitions (Klor et al., 2022).

Like the previous Plan 922, Plan 550 also suffers from difficulties and faces criticism. It is argued that it perpetuates ethnical division, divides Arab society, weakens the Arab identity of Arab students, and is perceived as maintaining alienation and segregation instead of promoting unity (Shchada, 2022). A bureaucratic challenge of the plan is slow implementation, similar to Plan 922. Bureaucracy and the economic situation of Arab local authorities in Israel continue to hinder the utilization of budgets. There is also concern about cuts to the five-year plan budgets due to political considerations (Ilan, 2021).

Overall Impact on Education in Arab Society

Resolutions 922 and 550 led to an increased investment in education in Arab society, especially in non-formal education, and to some improvement in achievements (e.g., matriculation eligibility). However, compared to Jewish education, the gaps

remain significant, particularly in infrastructure and quality of teaching, so the effectiveness of the five-year plans is in doubt. This is mainly due to the conduct of the local authorities in Arab society in Israel, that were unable to effectively use the proposed budget for the education system or the resources available to them, primarily due to personal and political motives (Wattad, 2021).

Teacher training and quality of teaching - professional staff shortage, gaps in pay and working conditions.

Teachers are the driving force of the entire education system. Without teachers, education as we know it would not be possible. Therefore, the quality and skills of the teachers is highly important.

Quality of the Teaching Staff in Arab Education in Israel

Despite the gaps in resource allocation, a significant positive trend has been noted in teaching force quality, in the Arab education system in Israel in the last two decades. There has been a significant improvement in the quality of teachers, as reflected in their education level. According to the Taub Center report (Blass, 2021), while the percentage of Jewish female teachers in the Jewish teaching force has not changed in the last twenty years, the percentage of female teachers in Arab education in Israel has increased by about 10%, from 60% to 70%.

The education level of teachers in Israel has significantly improved, particularly in the Arab education system in Israel. The percentage of teachers without a degree dropped from 47% in 2000 to just 3% in 2020, a figure even lower than that of the Jewish sector. Additionally, 38% of Arab teachers in Israel now hold master's degrees, a proportion comparable to their Jewish counterparts (Blass, 2021).

According to Blass (2020b), the quality of teaching personnel in the Arab education system has reached the level of the teaching personnel in the Hebrew education system. The Arab education in Israel is advancing more rapidly in improving teacher education levels. The proportion of academically-trained teachers in the Arab education system in Israel, is now higher than that in the Hebrew education system. Additionally, the percentage of teachers holding Master's degrees in the Arab education sector is increasing at a faster rate and is nearing the levels observed in the Hebrew sector, although the gaps are still considerable (Blass, 2020b). Blass also notes that the growth in seniority among teachers in primary and post-primary education within the Arab education system in Israel

matches that of the Hebrew education system, while in pre-primary education, the Arab education system is experiencing an even faster rate of growth (Blass, 2020b).

Challenges in Recruiting and Integrating Professionals

Despite the rise in the level of education of teachers, the Arab education system in Israel still faces significant challenges in recruiting and integrating professionals. The complex integration process, which operates on two parallel tracks - through the local authority and through the Ministry of Education - can lead to inefficiency and difficulty in identifying and employing the most suitable teachers for the job. Additionally, the strict admission requirements for the teaching profession for candidates from Arab society, such as entrance exams in the Arabic language and a Hebrew language knowledge exam, set a high standard that can make it difficult to recruit quality teachers in certain fields (Wattad, 2021).

Curriculum Content and Language

The Arab education system in Israel operates parallel to the Hebrew education system but faces unique challenges stemming from its status as the education system of a national minority in a Jewish state. The Israeli Ministry of Education determined that the language of instruction in Arab schools in Israel is Arabic, which is a second official language in Israel, with Hebrew and English taught as second languages. However, the State Education Law in Israel from 1953 did not recognize the uniqueness of the Arabic language, and only in 2003 an amendment was added to the law stating that the purpose of the State Education Law is "to recognize the unique language, culture, history, heritage, and tradition of the Arab population and of other population groups in the State of Israel, and to recognize the equal rights of all citizens of Israel" (The Knesset, 2023).

The curriculum includes core subjects identical to those in Hebrew education (mathematics, sciences, languages, history, civics, etc.), alongside an emphasis on studying the Arabic language, literature, and Arab history, but often with limitations and directives from the Israeli Ministry of Education, which prefers an approach of integration and inclusion of the Arab minority over granting autonomy to Arab education (Haj-Yahia, 2018). Consequently, there is inequality in the curriculum content. The curriculum in the Arab system does not always reflect the culture, history, and narrative of the Arab minority. There is an emphasis on Jewish-Zionist values, and Palestinian

national identity is not always discussed, which leads to feelings of alienation and frustration among students (Abu-Saad, 2021).

Gaps in Non-Formal Education

Non-formal education in the Arab society in Israel refers to all educational activities that take place outside the formal education system, such as youth movements, community centers, extracurricular activities, programs for at-risk youth, volunteering, community initiatives, and more. In recent years, non-formal education is increasingly recognized for its role in strengthening young people's identity and empowering them both personally and in their community. It is also recognized for developing social and personal skills, preserving Arab culture, and developing life skills. Investment in non-formal education can reduce socio-economic gaps, create more opportunities for Arab youth, and promote better integration into Israeli society. For many years, non-formal education in Arab society in Israel was a low priority and received little attention from the state. Resolution 922 marked the state's first recognition of the importance of this field for Arab society, allocating a special budget of hundreds of millions of NIS for its funding (Haj-Yahia, 2018). And yet, non-formal education in Arab society in Israel still suffers from chronic underfunding compared to Jewish society. Many of the Arab local authorities, which are responsible for the non-formal education in their areas, are in a low socio-economic category and find it difficult to prioritize non-formal education and allocate sufficient resources to it. In addition, the field of non-formal education in Arab society is divided among the Ministry of Education, local authorities, and non-profit organizations, and there is no authority that coordinates between them. This slows down the optimal utilization of resources and the advancement of the field.

And still, there is a large gap between non-formal education in Arab society compared to Jewish society in Israel. Despite governmental efforts and plans, the gaps have not been closed, and there is a need for investment, planning, and development of culturally adapted programs to realize the potential of non-formal education in Arab society in Israel (The Knesset, 2020).

Higher Education Achievements of Arab vs. Jewish Students in Israel Today

Recent research show persistent but narrowing gaps in academic performance between Arab and Jewish students, greatly affected by language barriers and socioeconomic factors:

First-year college performance: Arab students score ~10% lower than their Jewish counterparts in

the Hebrew education, with gaps shrinking to 4–5% by the third year (Halabi, 2023). According to Halabi (2023), in math, science, and English, initial gaps of 1–3% nearly vanish by the second and third years. Arab students in Arabic-taught courses (e.g., special education, civics) achieve near-parity with Jewish students. When controlling for socioeconomic status, Arab students' achievements are nearing or exceeding those of Jewish students. Arab students now achieve similar average scores to Jewish students from comparable backgrounds, with near-identical rates of qualifying for higher education. Arab students constitute 17–18% of undergraduates (up from 10% in 2009) (Halabi, 2023).

While the absolute number and share of Arab students in higher education have grown, the gaps with Jewish students have not necessarily narrowed at the same rate. Matriculation rates and higher education enrollment have risen for both groups, so the relative gap remains steady. Providing strong language support and fair distribution of resources is essential to help close the remaining gaps (Halabi, 2023).

DISCUSSION

This paper has highlights the persistent gaps between the Arab and Jewish education systems in Israel, with a particular focus on the role of local authorities and government interventions in shaping educational equity. Although significant progress has been made in providing Arab students with better access to education - especially in teacher qualifications, higher education enrollment, and the expansion of non-formal education - major gaps still exist in infrastructures, funding per student, and academic achievements.

Government Resolutions 922 and 550 mark significant policy shifts in acknowledging and attempting to correct historical gaps faced by the Arab population. These resolutions reflect a shift in state policy toward greater inclusion through measures such as increased budget allocation, and support for non-formal education. Challenges in implementation—especially bureaucratic problems, insufficient local Arab authorities resources, and the difficulty in matching governmental funds—have limited the effectiveness of these plans.

The findings also suggest that despite historical disadvantages, the Arab education system is undergoing a process of transformation. The rise in academic achievement, particularly among certain subgroups (e.g., Christian Arabs and Druze), and the fast professionalization of the teaching workforce,

indicate that targeted investments can show clear results. However, gaps in dropout rates, classroom shortages, and representation in the curriculum emphasize the need for an educational policy that is long-lasting, respects local cultures, and can be adjusted for different communities.

Non-formal education highlights another critical inequality. Although efforts have been made to expand non-formal education in Arab local authorities in Israel, a significant gap compared to Jewish society remains. The lack of coordination between ministries and local Arab municipalities lacking sufficient resources, slows down progress and indicates a deeper structural problem in the national educational policy regarding Arab education. The education system still reflects bigger socio-economic and political inequalities between Arab and Jewish citizens in Israel. Closing these gaps needs more than just technical solutions and resource allocation - it also requires big changes in the system, strong support from leaders, and a more inclusive vision of national identity.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper examined the gaps between the Arab and Jewish education systems in Israel, particularly within the framework of local authorities and national policy. Through a comprehensive review of literature, policy documents, and reports, this study analyzed issues such as budget allocation, infrastructure, teacher training and education, non-formal education, and academic achievement.

Notable improvements were found in areas such as teacher qualifications and higher education participation among Arab students, but there are still significant gaps. Government resolutions 922 and 550 have brought welcome attention and resources, yet their implementation has been uneven due to bureaucratic and financial challenges within the Arab local authorities in Israel.

This review concludes that while some progress has been achieved, the Arab education system remains disadvantaged. This disadvantage is rooted in inequities made worse by socio-political marginalization and a lack of curriculum autonomy. Addressing these issues requires ongoing investment, stronger governance capacity in Arab local authorities, and educational reform that respects cultural identity and promotes genuine equality.

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