

THE ART OF INCLUSIVE EXCLUSIONS: EDUCATING THE PALESTINIAN REFUGEE STUDENTS IN LEBANON

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For more than 65 years, Palestinian refugees have been living in Lebanon in a “temporary” State in over-crowded camps, deprived of basic rights such as the right to have a professional job. It has been argued that these restrictions have had a major effect on the fair provision and quality of education, an effect manifested in the increasing number of Palestinian students who are dropping out of school. This article examines the quality of education offered in United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees schools and the impact of Lebanese legal restrictions on students’ educational motivation and aspirations. A quantitative survey of the educational experiences and aspirations of 404 secondary students and 48 teachers in five secondary schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees was carried out. An in-depth study of a primary school also took place. The findings revealed that Palestinian refugee students are confronted by a paradox: forced inclusion because of having to learn the Lebanese curriculum, but exclusion because of simultaneously being pushed to the periphery of Lebanese society as a result of the Lebanon’s discriminatory laws and regulations.

Keywords: education for palestinian refugees, UNRWA, quality education, school dropout

1. Introduction

Education of refugees is a challenging task for many host countries. Striking a balance between the need to integrate the refugees whilst at the same time maintaining their specific culture, identity, and language has often proven to be a difficult task. One of the two main approaches to the education of refugees is generally observed. The first is focused on the refugees’ social, political, and economic integration, whilst the second considers them as temporary guests in a state of emergency who will soon return to their home countries. In the latter case, the education programmes for the refugees often teach the curriculum of their home country.

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The Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are a special case compared with most others, being under a “unique degree of political, economic and social exclusion”.¹ They have been living “temporarily” for more than 65 years in Lebanon as refugees deprived of their basic rights. They must learn the Lebanese curriculum but have no right to access professional jobs. This article aims to highlight the paradox facing Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, which is manifested in forced inclusion through having to learn the Lebanese curriculum, whilst at the same time being forced to the periphery of Lebanese society as a result of the Lebanon’s discriminatory laws and regulations.

To investigate the above, the study reported here examined the quality of education offered to Palestinians studying in schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and the impact of Lebanese legal restrictions on their educational motivation and aspirations. A quantitative survey of 404 secondary students (grade 12) and 48 teachers in five UNRWA secondary schools was carried out. An in-depth study of a primary school also took place. The primary school case study used focus groups comprising parents, students, and teachers. Finally, the principals of all six schools were interviewed individually. The article consists of two main sections. The first provides a general overview of the social, political, economic, and educational conditions of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and what has been described as “a state of exception”.² The second presents and discusses the findings of this study.

2. Palestinian refugees in Lebanon: an oppressive and coercive context

Following the first Arab-Israeli war and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled their homeland, with the majority seeking refuge in the neighbouring countries of Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Around 110,000 Palestinians arrived in Lebanon, settling in refugee camps established by the Red Cross and Red Crescent.³ They were later joined by further waves of refugees, fleeing subsequent rounds of conflict, most notably in 1956 and 1967, resulting in a growth in the number and density of the refugee camps. The actual number and distribution of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon is, however, not precisely known. At present there are in excess of 425,640 Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA in Lebanon.⁴ However,

¹ R. Sayigh, “No Work, No Space, No Future: Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon”, *Middle East International*, 2001, available at: <http://prn.mcgill.ca/research/papers/sayigh.htm> (last visited 6 Jan. 2014).

² S. Hanafi, “Explaining Spacio-Cide in the Palestinian Territory: Colonization, Separation and State of Exception”, *Current Sociology*, 61(2), 2012, 190–205.

³ International Crisis Group (ICG), *Nurturing Instability: Lebanon’s Palestinian Refugee Camps*, Middle East Report No. 84, 2009, available at: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/084-nurturing-instability-lebanons-palestinian-refugee-camps.aspx> (last visited 6 Jan. 2014); Issam Fares Institute (IFI), *Situation Analysis of Palestinian Women and Children in Lebanon. A Draft*, prepared by the IFI for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University in Beirut for the United Nations Children’s Fund, UNICEF, 2009.

⁴ See: <http://www.un.org/unrwa/publications/index.html> (figures as of Jan. 2010).

according to AUB-UNRWA survey figures, it is estimated that only between 260,000 and 280,000 are residents in the country, with a margin of error of ± 5 Per cent. Some 62 per cent of refugees live in the 12 camps across Lebanon, and the remaining 38 per cent live in 27 communities known as “gatherings” mostly in the vicinity of these camps.⁵ This number suggests that the Palestinians represent around 6–7 per cent of the Lebanese population.

Palestinian refugees have had a turbulent time in Lebanon, characterised by political instability, poor socio-economic opportunities, and deteriorating environmental conditions in the camps. Unlike other hosting countries such as Syria, Egypt, and Jordan, the Lebanese State was unwilling to set up specific institutions for the refugees, or to undertake their integration into Lebanese society and its welfare system. There is a declared objective to enable the Palestinians to exercise their “right of return” to their homeland,⁶ but it is indeed intimately related to Lebanon’s internal politics. Lebanon is a confessional consociational democracy where political power is distributed across the country’s religious sects by quota based on their share of population according to a prescribed formula.⁷ As most of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are Sunni Muslims, a process of naturalisation or “*tawteen*” would cause a dramatic demographic shift to the disadvantage of the country’s Christians, which their political leaders have been determined to resist.⁸ There is also hostility towards Palestinian refugees from different segments of the Lebanese population⁹ because of perceptions of the role the Palestinians played in Lebanon’s lengthy and destructive civil war.¹⁰

This combination of factors has led to the Lebanese State taking a discriminatory stance against Palestinian refugees. Authorities keep using two different statuses for the Palestinians: sometimes treating them as refugees but with regulations prohibiting access to basic rights such as the right to work and to own property, and sometimes as foreigners even if they were born in Lebanon. However, some Christian Palestinians have acquired Lebanese nationality, which protects them from such practices, but leaves the most disadvantaged groups stuck in the camps.

⁵ J. Chaaban *et al.*, *Socio-Economic Survey of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon*, Report published by the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), 2010.

⁶ S. Wangen, “Le droit au retour des réfugiés”, *Confluences Méditerranée*, 2(65), 2008, 145–158; S. Hanafi, “Opening the Debate on the Right of Return”, *Middle East Report*, 222, 2002, 2–7.

⁷ A. Lijphart & J.T. Hottinger, “Les démocraties consociatives”, *Revue internationale de politique comparée*, 4(3), 1997; E. Picard, “Le communautarisme politique et la question de la démocratie au Liban”, *Revue internationale de politique comparée*, 4(3), 1997, 639–657.

⁸ Z. Halabi, “Exclusion and Identity in Lebanon’s Palestinian Refugee Camps: A Story of Sustained Conflict”, *Environment and Urbanization*, 16(2), 2004, 39–48, at 40.

⁹ S. Haddad, “The Origins of Popular Opposition to Palestinian Resettlement in Lebanon”, *International Migration Review*, 38(2), 2004, 470–492; J. Sfeir-Khayat, “Identifications nationales et construction des frontières”, *Vingtième siècle. Revue d’histoire*, 3(103), 2009, 105–119.

¹⁰ A. Hroub, “A Longitudinal Study of Cases of Dropout Students in UNRWA Schools in Lebanon: Models of Internal Brain Drain”, *Idafat*, 20 & 21, 2012.

Very crowded camps have become sites of control and surveillance by the Lebanese Army. People's mobility and access to construction materials have been restricted by army check points at the entrances to the camps. Last but not least, Palestinian refugees cannot – since 2001 – own or inherit real estate in Lebanon; consequently, when a landlord dies, property goes to *Dar al-Fatwa* (the institution of legal reference for Sunnis in Lebanon).¹¹ Note that in the aftermath of the assassination of former Prime Minister R. Hariri, Lebanese–Palestinian relations have improved, notably through: (a) the establishment at the end of 2005 of a new governmental body, the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee (LPDC), under the office of the former Prime Minister F. Sanioura, to improve the situation of the Palestinians: and (b) in May 2006 by the re-opening of the PLO office in Lebanon, closed since 1982.

In spite of these modest improvements, all the restrictions imposed by the Lebanese State contribute to formation of a “state of exception”, where Lebanese law has been suspended within the confines of the camps. In these “spaces of exception”¹² that are the camps, refugees survive in a “zone of indistinction between outside and inside, exception and rule, licit and illicit, in which the very concepts of subjective right and juridical protection no longer make any sense”.¹³ This situation has also led authors to affirm that there is an “endemic crisis of governance in and between Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon”.

Being refugees for more than two thirds of a century did not change the perception of hosting countries like Lebanon or the international community, which continues to view these people as emergency refugees. This is clear from the fact that UNRWA remains mainly a service provider for Palestinian refugees, and so systematically adopts a relief perspective as far as Palestinians are concerned in the host countries. UNRWA was established in 1949 to “carry out direct relief and works programmes for Palestinian refugees”,¹⁴ and it moved slowly to provide some assistance, protection and advocacy for registered Palestinian refugees across the Arab East. The relation between UNRWA and the Palestinian communities has often been characterised by dissatisfaction and some resentment.¹⁵ UNRWA continues to be focused on relief while some argue that its policy should shift to development. Also some complain about bureaucracy in UNRWA which makes it like “a public sector, rigid and inflexible to

¹¹ N. Saghieh & R. Saghieh, *Legal Assessment of Housing, Land and Property Ownership, Rights, Transfers, and Property Law Related to Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon*, Oslo, Norwegian Refugee Council, 2008; Q. Qasim, “The Property of Palestinians: From Lebanon and to Lebanon it Returns [in Arabic]”, *Al-Akhbar*, 16 Feb. 2009.

¹² S. Hanafi & T. Long, “Governance, Governmentalities, and the State of Exception in the Palestinian Refugee Camps of Lebanon”, *Oxford Refugee Studies*, 23(2), 2010, 34–60.

¹³ G. Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998, 170.

¹⁴ UNRWA, *In Figures as of 1 January 2012*, Communications Office, UNRWA Headquarters (Gaza), Jan. 2012, available at: <http://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/20120317152850.pdf> (last visited 6 Jan. 2014).

¹⁵ R. Bocco, “UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees: A History within History”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28(2/3), 2009, 229–252; J. Al-Husseini, “UNRWA and the Refugees: A difficult but Lasting Marriage”, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 40(1), 2010, 6–26.

accommodate the new needs of the Palestinian refugees” (focus group with eight UNRWA teachers carried out in 2013).

3. Educational struggle of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon

Palestinian refugee children also have limited access to the public educational system in Lebanon. Only 11 per cent of “foreign” children can access free public education in Lebanon, while many refugees cannot afford the high tuition fees of private schools.

UNRWA has been organizing education services for Palestinian refugees since 1950. It currently runs more than 68 establishments across the country, offering 6 years of elementary, 3 years of preparatory and 3 years of secondary schooling.¹⁶ Lebanon is the only country where UNRWA offers secondary schooling, operating eight schools across the country. Until 2005, UNRWA only provided primary education when it started to provide secondary education. The schools follow both the Lebanese schooling structure and curriculum, but although attendance at pre-school is compulsory for Lebanese children, UNRWA does not offer any pre-school services to Palestinian refugees.¹⁷

The official number of pupils enrolled across all UNRWA schools is 32,213.¹⁸ Whilst this figure represents a slight increase on the previous year, overall, the total number of enrolments has been declining since 2001, when it was 42,259.¹⁹ These figures documenting the decline in refugee school enrolment should be considered alongside the total number of registered refugees in Lebanon, which has steadily increased over the same period.

Palestinian refugees who attend mostly UNRWA schools have an almost universal net enrolment rate. However, the attendance rate at pre-school level is marginal (due to a lack of pre-school provision by UNRWA), while the elementary sector comprises more than 60 per cent of students, with 28 per cent in intermediate and only 10 per cent at the secondary level. While the attendance rate for 7 year olds is 98.6 per cent, that of those aged 11 falls to 93.4 per cent. The primary completion rate was estimated at 37 per cent, entailing either a high number of dropouts or repetition among the refugee population.

The above figures reveal that education levels have indeed been progressively dropping in recent years. This is further supported by the pass rate in the Brevet Official exams (official diploma qualifying entry into the secondary level), which in some schools was as low as 13.6 per cent according to the UNRWA results, despite the average pass rate in UNRWA schools being 43 per cent for the 2009–2010 academic year. This decrease in educational attainment has occurred

¹⁶ See http://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/uiif-dec08_2.pdf (last visited 6 Jan. 2014).

¹⁷ B.C. Ben-Sichou, M. Imad, K.R. Evans & A. Robyns, *The Status and Situation of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon: A Review of Current Documentation*, Beirut, European Commission Humanitarian Aid Department, 2008.

¹⁸ UNRWA, *In Figures as of 1 January 2012*.

¹⁹ UNRWA, *Annual Report*, UNRWA, 2010, available at: <http://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/20121016105811.pdf> (last visited 6 Jan. 2014).

in spite of the fact that UNRWA has endeavoured to build new schools in most Palestinian camps, and has worked hard to eliminate “double shift” school days. However, most UNRWA schools still lack quality teaching, teaching resources, and basic laboratories – all that can promote engaged and active learning and critical thinking among students.

This educational haemorrhage amongst young Palestinians has been attributed to a number of factors, such as the deteriorating socio-economic conditions amongst Palestinian refugees and a growing disillusionment with schooling and the benefits it brings. Palestinian students also suffer from an education acculturation as they are forced to learn only the Lebanese curriculum without being able to access their own country’s system. The following section examines these three main challenges.

3.1. Socio-economic background of students: the exclusion

The socio-economic factors affecting Palestinian households and the particularly difficult living conditions of many Palestinian families (especially those with one breadwinner for example) result in poor school attainment and encourage drop out. Most houses in the camps are overcrowded and suffer from inadequate lighting, and poor heating, ventilation and sanitation.²⁰

A recent household survey of Palestinian refugees carried out by the American University of Beirut showed that two thirds of Palestine refugees are poor. The extreme poverty rate in camps is (7.9 per cent). The study also developed a Deprivation Index based on components of welfare such as good health, food security, adequate education, as well as access to stable employment, decent housing, and ownership of essential household assets. The Deprivation Index showed that 40 per cent of Palestine Refugees living in Lebanon are deprived. The study also reported that 56 per cent of refugees are jobless and only 37 per cent of the working age population is employed.²¹ It is unsurprising that the poor socio-economic situation often encourages students to leave school to get a paid job.

On the other hand, the household survey highlighted the important role of education in gaining employment. “A refugee with a vocational or university degree is more likely to be employed than one holding a Brevet or lower. Moreover, of those with a university degree, 70% work as professionals or associated professionals (many of those illegally), while those with a Brevet or less work mainly in crafts and elementary occupations”.²²

Despite the importance of education highlighted in the above survey, decreasing numbers of Palestinian refugee students are actually interested in continuing their higher education. Lack of motivation to learn is believed to be one of the main reasons for the high-dropout rates, as shown next.

²⁰ Chaaban *et al.*, *Socio-Economic Survey of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon*, xiv.

²¹ *Ibid.*, x.

²² *Ibid.*, x.

3.2. Student motivation

Motivation to complete education is negatively affected by perceptions of limited opportunities to progress to further education. Palestinian refugees' access to Lebanon's public university is limited by their status as foreigners, and their access to private universities is restricted by a lack of resources to pay tuition fees. Whilst some scholarships are available for those with strong academic results, these are not enough to meet demand. The lack of employment opportunities for Palestinian refugees also appears to be an important factor in reducing students' motivation to study. Evidence suggests that such feelings undermine their perceptions of the value of education.²³

Poor employment prospects are also judged to be one of the main factors behind the markedly high-dropout rates amongst Palestine refugee children. Whilst figures on dropout rates vary across different studies according to the definition and calculations used, there is consensus in the literature that the dropout rates of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are higher at all levels of schooling than those of Palestinian refugee communities in Syria, Jordan and the Occupied Territories,²⁴ and significantly higher than the dropout rates of Lebanese school children in the same age groups. There is evidence that many male dropouts in particular go on to engage in child labour. Dropout rates are also partially explained by a general dissatisfaction with the nature and quality of schooling and by social factors such as early marriage and parenthood, particularly amongst girls.²⁵

3.3. Education acculturation: false inclusiveness

The main aims of education worldwide are to prepare the individual to join the job market and to construct a common understanding of a "national" identity or, to quote Benedict Anderson (1991),²⁶ to have a common vision of the nation as "an imagined political community". Palestinians are prohibited from imagining themselves as members of a political and economic community. As a result, they not only suffer from economic and social exclusion, but moreover, it can be argued that being forced to learn the Lebanese curriculum contributes to a process of "acculturation"²⁷ of Palestinian youth in camps.

Based on an agreement between UNRWA, The United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), and the host countries in

²³ Hroub, "A Longitudinal Study of Cases of Dropout Students in UNRWA Schools in Lebanon", 7.

²⁴ S. El-Natour & D. Yassine, *The Legal Status of the Palestine Refugees in Lebanon and the Demands of Adjustment*, Beirut, Human Development Center (HDC) and Canadian International Development Research Center (IRDC), 2007, 110; Haddad, "The Origins of Popular Opposition to Palestinian Resettlement in Lebanon", 470–492.

²⁵ Hroub, "A Longitudinal Study of Cases of Dropout Students in UNRWA Schools in Lebanon", 9.

²⁶ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso Books, 1991.

²⁷ M. Herskovits, *Acculturation, the Study of the Culture Contact*, New York City, 1938; S. Abou, *L'identité culturelle, relation interethniques et problèmes d'acculturation*, Paris, Anthropos, 1981.

1954, students in UNRWA schools have to be taught the curriculum of the hosting country. This was done in order to facilitate refugees' access to the host country's secondary schools and University education.²⁸ However, with a restricted access to the right to practice professions, while being excluded through being confined in camps, Palestinian refugee students not only learn an irrelevant curriculum which they have to be tested in, but regardless of how well they do academically, they will not be able to have a professional career in Lebanon.

Acculturation moves from being a benign concept in general to a problematic issue when it is accompanied by social and economic exclusion. Acculturation of Palestinians is worsened by an over-emphasis on a narrow nationalist concept of citizenship in the Lebanese curriculum, especially following the end of the civil war in 1989. The two main stated goals of the new curriculum were "building the individual's personality and establishing citizenship".²⁹ A content analysis of the new curriculum developed in 1997³⁰ shows that citizenship education was the top priority. Moreover, the civics and social studies textbooks do not at all address the issues of Palestinian refugees or even the rights of refugees. On the contrary, civics textbooks are focused on Lebanese nationalism. The nation and its schools hence define the "we" that is the citizenship of a modern State. By default, it also defines a "them", as explained by Waters and LeBlanc.³¹ In the case of refugees, the issue of the construction of identity, of the assignation of the "we" and "them" poses itself with great acuity, especially because curriculum design and provision are highly embedded in politics and ideology. Teaching the Lebanese curriculum – that is constructed around a particular idea of the "Lebanese" identity and citizenship whilst overlooking the identity and rights of the refugees – contributes to reproducing a logic of discrimination towards the "others" who are the Palestinian refugees. This process of "indoctrination" as these authors state is "derived not from the consent of the governed but from the pseudo-state generated by the agencies of the international community" that is embodied in UNRWA in the case of Palestinian refugees.

Whilst many studies have focused on the social, political, and economic restrictions facing the Palestinians and their impact on students' motivation, there is paucity of research that delves into the quality of education and the learning experiences of students in UNRWA schools. This article aims to focus on these under-explored factors.

²⁸ UNRWA, *Assuring Quality Curriculum in UNRWA Schools*, UNRWA, undated, available at: <http://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/2012080242736.pdf> (last visited 6 Jan. 2014).

²⁹ MEHE, *The Programmes of General Education and their Aims*, Beirut, MEHE, 1997.

³⁰ M. Shuayb, "Education: A Means for the Cohesion of the Lebanese Confessional Society", in Y. Choueiri (ed.), *Breaking the Cycle: Civil Wars in Lebanon*, London, Stacey International, 2007, 167–195; and M. Shuayb (ed.), *Rethinking Education for Social Cohesion. International Case Studies*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

³¹ T. Waters & K. Leblanc, "Mass Public Schooling without a Nation-State", *Comparative Education Review*, 49(2), 2005, 129–147.

4. Methodology

The research methodology comprised quantitative and qualitative approaches. A quantitative survey of 404 students and 48 teachers in five UNRWA secondary schools was carried out. A case study of a UNRWA primary and middle school also took place. This included focus groups containing students, teachers, and parents. Finally, one-to-one interviews with six principals also took place. Since the quantitative survey was carried out only in secondary schools, the main objective of conducting a case study of a primary and middle school was to examine the educational aspirations of younger students who may not even progress to secondary school.

The students' questionnaire consisted of Likert scale statements designed around four main themes: learning and schooling experience, personal wellbeing, importance of education, and future aspirations. The teachers' questionnaire explored similar issues, but focused particularly on their educational and teaching philosophy, practises and attitudes to the students. The focus group interview schedule investigated similar educational issues to those explored in the questionnaire, with particular emphasis on students' educational motivation. The anonymity of participants was protected as they were not asked to give their names.

In total the study covered six UNRWA schools, five secondary, and one primary, in Beirut, Sidon, Tyre, Tripoli, and Baalbek. The main criterion for selecting the schools was to represent the various districts where the 12 refugee camps are located. A secondary criterion was to select an underperforming middle school, in order to explore the causes of students' poor results. The conditions of the camps vary significantly from one district and another. For example, while the refugee camp in Bourj Al Barjna is quite open, the camp in Sidon can be accessed only through a checkpoint monitored by the Lebanese Army.

The analysis of the quantitative results also draws on a similar study carried out in 2005 on Lebanese students in public schools in order to compare the learning experience in Lebanese public and UNRWA schools.

5. Teaching and learning: difficult paths

The findings of this study largely support assertions in the literature that teaching in UNRWA schools is mostly didactic and passive, with limited opportunities for other pedagogical approaches. The didactic nature of lessons is indicated by the fact that over 68 per cent of students surveyed agree that they always or regularly have to follow teachers' explanations without participating or commenting, see [Table 1](#). Less than 49 per cent of students agree that they always discuss class objectives with their teachers, whilst less than 36 per cent agree that students always have discussions in class on the themes of the lesson. Just over 48 per cent of students agree that they always have to memorise things in class, with a further 34.5 per cent agreeing that they do this regularly.

Table 1. Students' views of teaching and learning in the classrooms

Variable	Totally agree and agree (%)	Sometimes (%)	Totally disagree and disagree (%)
Teachers encourage us to work in groups	52.9	30.0	17.0
Follow teachers' explanations without participating or commenting	26.4	42.0	31.6
Analyse information and theories learned in class	42.9	42.9	14.1
Apply information learned in class	34.6	48.0	17.3
Give presentations	12.3	23.6	64.0
Participate in activities in the community organized by the school	14.7	28.9	56.4
Activities outside school	16.6	22.6	60.8
Research outside school	22.7	37.6	39.7
My school encourages critical thinking	14.7	35.6	49.7

The preponderance of teacher-led learning is also indicated by the fact that 64 per cent of students said they never give presentations. Opportunities for collaborative learning appear limited, with less than 29 per cent of students agreeing that they always do group work. Self-directed learning also appears limited in the surveyed UNRWA schools, with less than 23 per cent agreeing that they always conduct research outside school relating to their studies. Finally, less than 15 per cent of students strongly agree or agree that their school encourages critical thinking, with almost 50 per cent disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

When comparing the above findings to those of a similar study of Lebanese students in five public schools carried out in 2005, we notice that teaching and learning are more didactic in UNRWA schools compared to Lebanese public schools. Almost two thirds of the Lebanese students stated that they often give presentations whilst 81 per cent said they do group work in the classrooms. The lack of active interactive and cooperative learning pedagogies reported by the surveyed Palestinian students could be partly due to the over-crowding of UNRWA classrooms compared to those in public schools. Statistics indicate that just under half of the classrooms in public schools have less than 15 students per class while 20 per cent are overcrowded with 26–35 students per class. However, in UNRWA schools, the average number of students per classroom is 30 making them the most crowded classrooms in Lebanon.

Another explanation for the highly didactic and rote learning predominantly reported by the surveyed Palestinian students could be teachers' education philosophy. Data gathered from teachers in UNRWA schools support the above findings as 71 per cent of them maintain that "students are here to learn what the teacher knows". During the focus group interview with teachers, the majority of them stated that they underline the information students are expected to memorize and then students are often assessed primarily on how well they recall information.

6. School environment: an opportunity and an obstacle

The literature indicates that in some cases poor student–teacher relationships have an adverse effect on student progress and attainment. Overall, the findings of this study suggest that student–teacher relationships are quite poor, at least in terms of how they are perceived by students. As Table 2 illustrates, almost one fifth of students strongly agree or agree that they feel anxious when some teachers are around, with just under 13 per cent strongly agreeing or agreeing that they have bad relations with their teachers. Only just over half of students (56 per cent) strongly agree or agree that they like most of their teachers, and that they get along with most of their teachers, but an analysis of other results suggests that this rapport may be limited and superficial. Less than 27 per cent of students strongly agree or agree that their teachers understand their needs, and less than 30 per cent strongly agree or agree that they can talk to their teachers about their personal problems. Three-eighths (37.5 per cent) strongly agree or agree that their teachers care if they are bored, happy or sad, while just under 42 per cent strongly agree or agree that teachers care about their opinions, comments and suggestions.

Table 2. Teacher–student relations

Variable	Strongly agree and agree (%)	Sometimes agree (%)	Strongly disagree and disagree (%)
School pays attention to me only when I cause problems	37.4	18.9	43.7
I can talk to my teachers about my personal problems	29.3	27.2	43.5
I like most of my teachers	56.9	26.3	16.8
My teachers care if I am bored, happy or sad	36.9	35.6	27.5
I get along with most of my teachers	56.3	30.2	13.6
My teachers care about my opinions, comments, and suggestions	41.7	37.4	20.9
My teachers accept it when we disagree on things	38.9	36.6	24.6
My teachers understand my needs	26.6	39.1	34.3
I feel anxious when some teachers are around	19.2	21.7	59.1
My teachers show me affection and respect	58.8	24.8	16.4
I like going to school	50.9	29.2	19.8

The lack of support from their teachers that is perceived by students is further reinforced by teachers’ academic perception of their role. Also, a considerable percentage of teachers (44 per cent) believed the primary concern of a school is academic development and 58 per cent explain that the main function of a school is to develop students’ mental abilities.

The poor teacher–student relationships were accompanied by discipline difficulties. Table 3 shows that almost 50 per cent of students were expelled from the class, while 28 per cent were expelled from the school, 11 per cent of whom were expelled more than once.

Table 3. Students' reports of disciplinary measures they have experienced in their school

Variable	Never	Once	Twice	3 + times
Got called to the administration office to get reprimanded	56.0	25.7	10.9	7.4
Your parents are called to school because you broke school regulation	68.6	21.1	6.1	4.2
You were expelled from class by a teacher	52.5	28.8	10.7	8.0
You got expelled from school by the administration	72.4	16.3	6.3	5.0

The literature indicates that some of the strain in student–teacher relations comes from ways of enforcing discipline, which continue to include corporal punishment despite it being officially prohibited. Teachers have complained that they have not been given proper guidance on how else to discipline students, and that this is a source of concern. The majority (63 per cent) also reported that students generally do not respect their teachers at school.

In addition, 35 per cent of the teachers state that the school does not explain its discipline policy clearly to its students. During one of the school visits and while interviewing the principal the researcher saw a cane on his desk. When inquiring about the issue, the principal stated that although UNRWA banned corporal punishment, he still uses it and finds it to be a very effective disciplinary method. Following the interview, the researcher observed the principal punishing some of the students with the rod *rode*. Corporal punishment was only observed in one of the five schools whilst the remaining ones denied its existence. Unsurprisingly a considerable percentage of students do not feel the discipline systems in their schools are particularly fair, see Table 4. Only between 16 per cent and 35 per cent of students strongly agree or agree that their school's regulations are fair, with up to 34 per cent strongly agreeing or agreeing that punishments are harsh and unfair on students.

The focus group with the students highlighted that some teachers hit them. One of the interviewed principals said that she reported a case of a teacher regularly hitting and verbally abusing students to officials at UNRWA, who investigated the case but did nothing about the teacher. The teacher continued to teach the students in the same school. Interestingly, both the interviewed parents and teachers called for a return of corporal punishment as a method that could improve the educational attainment of children and their commitment to learning.

However, as one might expect, for the students the issue is different. Strict school discipline, according to almost half of the students, was also accompanied by limited opportunities to express their views and participate in the school decisions. As can be seen in Table 5, 41 per cent of students held this view.

The lack of participation and consultation was not only reported by students; teachers too felt that they did not have many opportunities to engage in the decision-making process in the school. Almost 80 per cent of teachers stated

that there is hardly any regular staff discussion about how to achieve school goals/targets, although all of the interviewed principals stated that their school has a five-year plan. This technical and hierarchical school management and leadership style, which is centred on the principal, was apparent in the five surveyed schools. It was also a feature of the Lebanese public schools that were surveyed in 2005.

Table 4. Students’ views of discipline policies and classroom management

Variable	Strongly agree and agree (%)	Sometimes (%)	Strongly disagree and disagree (%)
There are a lot of rules at school	49.1	29.8	21.1
Most of my teachers know how to manage a class and deal with any problems that occur	52.3	32.5	15.2

Table 5. Students’ perceptions of student voice

Variable	Totally agree and agree (%)	Sometimes (%)	Totally disagree and disagree (%)
Students have the opportunity to express their opinions about school regulations and activities	30.6	28.0	41.4
My school cares about my opinion	25.5	40.8	33.8

In the primary school the principal, who had just joined the school, had started to engage both teachers and students in the management of the school. Students were given responsibilities to oversee discipline and to consult with their peers about their needs. According to the interviewed students and principal this had decreased behavioural issues amongst students.

7. Future prospects: hopes amidst ghettos

The majority of students see a value in their school education in terms of their future employment prospects. As can be seen in Table 6, two thirds of students see success in education as being important to their prospects for success later in life. Just under 60 per cent of students strongly agree or agree that their chances of getting a good job in the future depend on their success at school, with only 8.5 per cent disagreeing or totally disagreeing.

The results are similar for higher education, with just over 65 per cent strongly agreeing or agreeing that they need to finish university to be able to achieve their goals in life, and almost 15 per cent disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Hence, despite the limited opportunities for pursuing a professional career in Lebanon, a high percentage of Palestinian students are still keen to continue their

studies. However, it is important to highlight that these high percentages could be due to the fact that this study investigated the views of grade 12 students, who might still see the value of education whilst those who did not see the value could have already dropped out. Another possible explanation could be the aspiration to leave Lebanon and work abroad with their qualifications.

Table 6. Perceptions of future after school

Variable	Strongly agree and agree (%)	Sometimes agree (%)	Strongly disagree and disagree (%)
Going to university and getting a degree is a waste of time	19.1	14.3	66.6
My chances of getting a good job in the future depend on my success at school	59.7	31.8	8.5
I need to finish university to be able to achieve my goals in life	65.2	19.9	14.9

Whilst the literature indicates that prospects are limited for most Palestinian refugee school children, both in terms of accessing further education after school and in terms of finding employment, this study suggests that students' perceptions of their prospects are actually quite mixed. Over 58 per cent agree or strongly agree that they have lots of opportunities to accomplish their dreams and goals, and almost 67 per cent agree or strongly agree that they feel optimistic about their future; these results can be read in the light of the resilience that characterises Palestinian youth, as we have mentioned earlier.

On the other hand, only 42 per cent strongly agree or agree that they have a good chance of accomplishing their goals if they stay in Lebanon, whilst one-third disagree or strongly disagree. There is a fairly even split between students who strongly agree or agree that thinking about their opportunities when they leave high school makes them feel depressed, students who sometimes agree, and students who disagree or strongly disagree.

Given these mixed views on the value of education and on students' perceptions of their prospects, it is interesting to examine students' reasons for continuing their formal education. The literature indicates that dropout rates are high amongst Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon because of a number of factors including: low motivation to learn driven by poor employment prospects; a preference to take on paid labour instead of staying in education to alleviate the difficult economic circumstances that many students' families face; and social factors such as early marriage and child-bearing. A question therefore arises as to why those students who stay on in school do so. Contrary to what we might expect, given the emphasis in the literature on students not valuing school education because of poor employment prospects, almost 78 per cent of students strongly agree or agree that they continue to attend school in order to get more qualifications, see Table 7. The desire to gain qualifications is the most common reason given, followed by students' parents insisting that they stay at school (with almost 62 per cent strongly agreeing or agreeing).

Table 7. Reason for attending school

Variable	Strongly agree and agree (%)	Sometimes agree (%)	Strongly disagree and disagree (%)
To get more qualifications	77.5	12.8	9.6
I couldn't find a job	21.9	15.1	63.9
My parents insisted that I stay at school	61.6	15.9	22.4
I need more time to think about what I want to do in the future	58.9	19.4	21.8

There is some evidence in support of the idea from the literature that the desire or need to find paid employment partially explains the markedly high dropout rates amongst Palestine refugee students in Lebanon. More than one fifth of students strongly agree or agree that they continue to attend school because they have not been able to find such employment. It is possible to infer that some of these students might have left school had they been able to.

As for future prospects, despite all the difficult conditions, which surround Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, the majority of students (66 per cent) felt optimistic about their future in general while only 42 believed they have good opportunities in Lebanon. Uncertainty about their future after they finish school was quite common amongst students (39 per cent) (Table 8).

The focus group with students and teachers showed that the limited prospect of having a future job in Lebanon was one of the main demotivating factors. Students gave many examples of university graduates who are working as taxi drivers. However, parents with higher educational attainments had higher expectations of their students and followed up their progress more assiduously than those who were less well educated. Nine out of ten interviewed students said that their aspiration was to finish the Brevet and enter vocational education. Only one wanted to continue higher education similarly to his two sisters. When asked about what could motivate them, they were not able to give any suggestions. They found the teaching on the whole to be boring and described the curriculum as irrelevant to their needs. They complained that they do not learn about their history and have to learn citizenship education that they are not eligible to practice. Focus groups with parents showed that whilst the majority wanted and hoped that their kids would continue their education, they had limited expectations. Most of them did not follow up on their children's homework or supported them in their studies. The vast majority complained about their inability to control their children's behaviour.

All of the interviewed students had a friend who had dropped out, some as young as grade three. When asked if they had thought of dropping out, only one student said that he had, but his parents did not allow him. In the primary middle school, the principal reported five cases of students who had dropped out. The principal pointed out: "we investigated some of these cases, and found that in a few, the student and the parent just dump the schooling package and

say ‘that’s it’, they do not want the school anymore. There is not a lot that we can do about it”. All the interviewed teachers mentioned that students often express their frustration about the opportunities available to them if they continue their education. One of them noted “our [the previous] generation was different, then education was seen as the only way out of suffering, of having a better life, but for this [new] generation they see education as means which will make them suffer more, due to job restrictions in Lebanon and the Arab world”.

Table 8. Future prospects

Variable	Strongly agree and agree (%)	Agree to some extent (%)	Strongly disagree and disagree (%)
I have lots of opportunities to accomplish my dreams and goals	58.2	27.9	13.9
I feel optimistic about my future	65.6	23.6	10.8
I have a good chance of accomplishing my goals if I stay in Lebanon	41.9	25.1	33.0
I have a good chance of accomplishing my goals if I leave Lebanon	56.0	21.7	22.3
Thinking about my opportunities when I leave high school I feel depressed	38.5	29.8	31.7

The social and economic exclusion of the camps was very apparent during the interviews and showed the severity of the rupture between those living in the camps and those living outside. To illustrate this point, one of the interviewed principals told the author the story of a school trip to a university fair for grade 11 and 12 students. He showed me the reports of the two teachers who accompanied the students. The teacher wrote “this was an awful journey. Our students felt so disheartened by all the opportunities available outside the camps. Two students sharing one bedroom, this is unheard of for most of them. All these different courses available at these universities, yet due to the high tuition fees they will never be able to afford them . . .”. Both teachers recommended that the school does not organize such event in the future as it was too disturbing for the students.

The gap between the camps and the outside world was best manifested in the idealistic image that some of the interviewed students had of public schools in Lebanon. When asked to describe types of learning that they would enjoy, one of the students noted that “I wish we could learn everything through computers and notebooks, just like in the Lebanese public schools”. Interestingly, most Lebanese public schools do not have even a computer lab or access to the Internet! The above two examples show the extent to which the Palestinian refugees in the camps have been isolated and marginalised and live in ghettos.

The results of the study show how the Lebanese constraining context influences how Palestinian youth foresee their future prospects. About 38 per cent

of the students are depressed when they think about their future and 56 per cent consider emigration as a way out. Indeed, the “expression of discrimination is so pronounced [in Lebanon] that many feel a sense of despair and look to emigration as the single most important option for improving their lives”.³² However, the constraints of the Lebanese context are not the only reason for the complex perceptions of the students of the education sector and of their future: there is a need for UNRWA to disengage from mere “relief” and to invest and specialise more in education as a long-term strategy. This is manifested at best in UNRWAs strategy of automatic upgrading of students, even if they have failed to meet the expected requirements, and also their refusal to accept students who have failed twice in one cycle. UNRWAs rationale is understood to be that it is a relief organization, and thus it wants to see students progressing through the system, but at the same time it cannot afford to spend a large amount of money on students who have failed twice in one cycle. As Rosenfeld maintains “a critical reading of UNRWA’s history leads to the conclusion that the ability of this organization to exert a meaningful long-term impact on the social situation of Palestinian refugees is contingent upon its specialisation in welfare services, primarily in education, and upon its ‘disengagement’ from relief”.³³

8. Conclusion

“The Palestinians are the most educated Arab nation”. This is the conventional wisdom often repeated in the Arab world, reflecting the great sense of agency of the Palestinian youth, where in spite of all the constraints, they have used creative coping strategies and mechanisms as means to survive in their exile. This is indeed just a myth nowadays. This article shows the pressing predicament of education among the Palestinian young people in Lebanon. Whilst Palestinians live in a state of exception and exclusion as a result of all the legal restrictions they are subjected to, they are forced to learn the Lebanese curriculum. This has resulted in the educational acculturation of Palestinian students accompanied by socio-economic exclusion.

Hence, it is unsurprising that Palestinian students have little motivation to take their school education seriously. They come from disadvantaged backgrounds with little support from their parents, and a local environment that does not inspire but only causes despair due to the legal discrimination applied in Lebanon. Palestinian refugees thus live in a “state of exception”; a process of reducing the refugee population to mere bodies to be fed and sheltered without acknowledging their political and socio-economic rights. As Hanafi³⁴ puts it, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon “do not have a right to defend their rights as a

³² D. Chatty, “Palestinian Refugee Youth: Resilience, Coping and Aspirations”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28(2/3), 2009, 318–338.

³³ M. Rosenfeld, “From Emergency Relief Assistance to Human Development and Back: UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees, 1950–2009”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28(2/3), 2009, 286–317.

³⁴ Hanafi, “Explaining Spacio-Cide in the Palestinian Territory”, 199.

minority or the right to have right”. This contributes to undermining their motivation in pursuing an education in a context where they face important limitations in terms of access to employment.

Whilst UNRWA has ensured “equal access” to education for Palestinian refugees, there appears to be a challenge in promoting the quality of education and most importantly addressing the socio-economic and cultural injustice, which undermines the educational attainments of students. Rigid instruction, rote learning and a curriculum alien to students’ interests, concerns, and experiences can contribute to lower motivation and reduced enjoyment of learning. UNRWA seems to have failed to provide equality of respect for all Palestinian refugees, notably by denying their identity in curricular selection and development and by adopting authoritarian forms of pedagogical relations that define learners as passive recipients of knowledge.

It is unlikely that the legal conditions of Palestinians in Lebanon will change. This renders it ever more urgent for UNRWA to revisit the underpinning premises of the education it currently offers in Lebanon, otherwise increasing numbers of Palestinians are likely to become disenchanted with pursuing an education.