



Civil Society and Education Policy Change in Occupied West Bank/Palestine

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Canada 

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This project was funded by IDRC

ISBN: 978-1-914521-03-4

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Acronyms

CBO	Community Based Organisations
EDSP	Education Development Strategic Plan
GCSE	General Certificate for Secondary Education
GUPT	The General Union of Palestinian Teachers
IB	International Baccalaureate
IIEP	UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning
INGO	International Non Governmental Organisation
MEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
MOE	Ministry of Education
NGOS	Non Governmental Organisation
PA	Palestinian Authority
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
PCDC	Palestinian Curriculum Development Centre
OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territory
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Refugees in the Near East

Executive Summary

This study highlights the role of Palestinian civil society bodies in the Occupied West Bank¹ in the education sector. The study engages with the role of these bodies in terms of education programming and implementation i.e. service provision, policy making and change. The study also highlights the challenges that limit the ability of civil society bodies to positively engage in the formation of policies and vision of the education sector. It also explains the interconnected dynamics that frame the relation between civil society actors and the Ministry of Education (MOE)² which is the main provider of education in the Occupied West Bank and the main institution that creates and implements policies and strategies for the sector. The study is based on 8 in-depth semi structured interviews with representatives of Palestinian NGOs and collectives and discussions that took place in two workshops. The interviews lasted between 45- 60 minutes. The first workshop was for two hours and the second was a full day workshop. The first workshop was organized by an education and youth NGO attended by representatives of the Ministry of Education, UNRWA, INGOs, Palestinian civil society actors and educators. The second workshop was organized by a teachers' collective and attended by public school teachers from various West Bank cities. The data generated from the interviews and the workshops was thematically analysed and framed within existing literature on the Palestinian education system and the role of civil society. The data generation phase of the research took place in August 2023, followed by data analysis, further literature review, research teams discussions and reflections as well as a webinar that aimed to present the initial results of the study and gage reflections from various actors in the education sector in the region which were also included in this report. This was followed by a workshop in Beirut that included representatives from civil society in Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan to compare the results from the three countries.

It is important to note that the results of this research were delayed due to the genocide that is taking place in Palestine since October 2023 and the drastic shifts in needs, responses and engagement in the role of civil society as well as the total destruction of the education sector in the Gaza Strip and the substantial disruption to the education process in the Occupied West Bank due to increased arrests and killing of students and teachers by the Israeli army and settlers, ongoing settlers attacks on Palestinian villages and ongoing Israeli occupation army invasions of cities and refugee camps in the North of the Occupied West Bank. The analysis is based on the conditions prior to the genocide and the deterioration of the conditions in the Occupied West Bank.

The findings of the report are summarized as follow:

1. The Palestinian education system is fragmented and completely dependent on conditional external funding and volatile political and social conditions. In effect, there is no 'sovereignty' over the education sector.

¹ While the title of the study includes Occupied Palestine, the study itself only covers the education sector in the occupied West Bank. The fragmentation of the education sector in Palestine and for Palestinians in general is explained under the Palestinian Education System section in the text.

² In this report, MOE refers to the Ministry of Education since its inception until the publication of this report noting that the Ministry of Education Merged with the Ministry of Higher Education and changed its name multiple times as explained in the text.

2. Formally the Palestinian education sector is based on four pillars: the basic law (constitution), the declaration of independence, the first curriculum plan and the relevant international conventions. While these pillars seem to be in harmony, their implementation is contradictory which makes the education sector lack vision and coherent policies.
3. The Ministry of Education considers (I)NGOs and other civil society bodies and institutions as service providers and as tools to complement the ministry's work rather than active actors and partners in drawing and envisioning policies.
4. The education sector in all its government institutions is increasingly securitized which creates an environment that is oppressive for educators, learners and the community.
5. Civil society organisations and bodies are not independent, they are reliant on conditional funding and on mutual interests and favors with the ministry that ensure their continuity and ability to access and implement their programmes.
6. For any change to happen in policy there needs to be a political will not only from the Ministry of Education but also other governmental bodies such as the Ministry of Finance.
7. Funding agencies, just as the Ministry of Education, are not interested in change in the education sector. Any change towards contextualisation, more attunement to the community and linking education to a liberatory vision would potentially mean the end of the dependency of the sector on them. Hence, the education sector currently is based on a cycle of mutual political interests that is detached from the deteriorating context and the vision for liberation.
8. Real change in the education sector will have implications on other sectors such as the labour market and the stability of the ruling powers. Those who are in power positions in the economy and politics are not in favour of this change.

The report is divided into four main sections:

1. **Overview:** including background on the education sector in Palestine and civil society.
2. Research **Methodology**
3. Main **Findings**
4. **Conclusions** and **Recommendations**
5. A list of **appendices** that include the interview questions and the research sample



Overview

The Palestinian Education Sector

For over a century, Palestinians have had foreign governments prescribe their education without concern for the needs of the Palestinian people. The combined influences of Turkish, British, Jordanian, Egyptian and Israeli domination have created an educational system which does not address the needs of the Palestinians or have a clear vision, rather a system that is designed to create bureaucrats that serve the ruling authority at the time. This patchwork of hegemonic educational systems reflects on the dynamics, framing, planning and implementation within the education system(s) in the fragmented parts of Palestine today. The Palestinian Ministry of Education was established in 1994 following the signing of the Oslo Accords 1993() and the creation of the Palestinian Authority (PA). The Ministry's mandate only covers the education sector in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and parts of Jerusalem. The Ministry inherited a weak, neglected, and fragmented education system. Following the Nakba, Palestine was fragmented, the majority of its geography fell under the Israeli colonial occupation and the rest between 1949-1967 the West Bank fell under the Jordanian system of education and the Gaza Strip under the Egyptian system. Under the Israeli military administration post-1967, the curriculum content remained almost identical to that of Jordan and Egypt (UNESCO 2007) and elements in textbooks relating to Palestinian national identity and the Palestinian question were likely to be censored (Alayan 2012). UNRWA has been responsible for the education of Palestinian refugees after the Nakba in 1948, within the Palestinian lands occupied in 1967 and hosting countries, particularly Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. As the PA assumed control over the education sector in the West Bank, Gaza and parts of Jerusalem two days before the commencement of the school year 1994/1995, the education sector was in a shambles.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education was created in 1994. The MOE (MEHE at the time) had to deal with a situation where the schools and classrooms were overcrowded. 'Many school buildings were in a state of despair and books were dated' (Hovsepien 2009,

p.122). 'No overhaul was attempted in that year, except for reverting to the uncensored versions of the existing textbooks and the outlawing of corporal punishment' (Barakat 2007, p.194). The MOE aimed to keep the education sector functioning in the transitional period. The first steps taken by the MOE following that included the improvement of the service by increasing the number of schools and improving enrollment rates. The other aspect was to focus on the administrative framework of the MOE that supports the development and improvement of the education system. Finally, they assessed the gaps and needs of the sector in order to improve the quality of education. In 1995, the Palestinian Curriculum Development Centre (PCDC) was established and mandated to develop, in one year, a plan for a new curriculum to be gradually implemented over five years (Hovsepian 2009). Between 1995 and 1996 two documents were produced which guided the work of the MOE. First, in 1995, the UNESCO report on primary and secondary education in what they call the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), secondly, in 1996, was the Abu-Lughod et al. first Palestinian curriculum for general education: The comprehensive plan. In 1996, the merger between the MOE and the Ministry of Higher Education came to an end. A new ministry of higher education was created and was called the ministry of higher education and scientific research. By 1999 the MOE formed mechanisms for planning, budgeting and coordination as well as unify the education system in the Occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. Over the years the number of schools built increased and illiteracy rates declined; near universal enrolment in primary schools had been achieved. The change in the structure of the MOE continued with merger and separation from the Ministry of Higher Education. In 2002 the two ministries re-merged. In 2007 Hamas (Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya - Islamic Resistance Movement) took over the Gaza Strip and a separate ministry of education was created in Gaza until today. In the West Bank in 2012 the MOE and the ministry of higher education ended their merger to remerge again in 2013 but end this merger in 2019 until the date of the publishing of this report. This situation of chaotic structure reflects the political strife and fragmentation of the education sector which will be tackled under the findings of this report.

The Curriculum

In this section, we will refer to the textbooks as the curriculum. The first Palestinian textbooks for grades 1–12 were developed between 1998 and 2006. Some were not completed until 2008 (Alayan 2012). The rolling out of the new textbooks started in 2000 but was disrupted by the Israeli occupation invasion of the occupied west bank in 2002 and the decreased/ disruption of funding by donors for the curriculum design, printing and rolling out efforts due to allegations of inciting violence induced by Zionist groups, allegations which were never substantiated (Nicolai 2006). One of the most important departures from the old Jordanian and Egyptian curricula was the inclusion of human rights, civic, health and environment Education (UNICEF 2011). In the year 2000, the MOE published a five-year plan, which was supported by the IIEP, and received praise for its links with general development issues such gender, poverty, and participation (Lempinen & Repo 2002). The most recent textbook reform process began in 2016. After receiving feedback from teachers, the new curriculum was fully implemented by 2018/2019 in all PA schools (Alayan & Riley 2024). In Jerusalem,

In addition to teaching the host country curriculum (PA in this case), UNRWA delivers human rights education as a separate programme and curriculum. The programme began in 1999 with the aim to promote non-violence, healthy communication skills,

peaceful conflict-resolution, human rights, tolerance, and good citizenship. In May 2012, UNRWA endorsed its new Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Tolerance (HRCRT) Policy to further strengthen human rights education in UNRWA (UNRWA n.d). While UNRWA introduces this programme as a success, Palestinians, particularly teachers, parents and students consider it as part of cultural and academic normalization with the ongoing Israeli colonisation and an attempt to tame Palestinian resistance through foreign interference.

In private schools, the PA curriculum is used alongside other international textbooks for programs such as GCSE and IB amongst others.

Education Structure

There are three types of schools from perspective of gender in Palestine: boys' schools, girls' schools, and co-educational schools. This applies to PA run schools, UNRWA schools and private schools. Compulsory basic education includes Grades 1 to 10 which is divided into the preparatory stage (Grades 1 to 4) and the empowerment stage (Grades 5 to 10). Secondary education (general secondary education and a few vocational secondary schools) covers Grades 11 and 12. UNRWA schools offer Grades 1 to 10 and do not provide secondary education (Grade 11 and 12).

The educational system (schooling) comprises a total of 3,030 schools. The government (PA) operates 2,212 of these schools, with 1,811 located in the West Bank and 401 in Gaza. Private institutions contribute 451 schools, with the majority, 389, situated in the West Bank. Additionally, the UNRWA runs 377 schools.

The MOE has a responsibility for the whole education sector from pre-primary to higher education and for recruiting and training teachers as well. The MOE works as the liaison on training issues with the education directorates (Mustafa & Bisharat 2008). The MOE is also in charge of managing governmental educational institutions and supervising private educational institutions and institutions run by UNRWA. Education in Palestine is centralized in regard to its curriculum, textbooks, instructions, and regulations. The administrative structure of the general education is composed of 22 fields' directorates (districts offices) of education, including 16 in the West Bank and 6 in Gaza (Mustafa & Bisharat 2008).

Education Finance

Funding for the education system primarily comes from the government budget allocated through the Ministry of Finance, with government expenditure on education in 2022 amounting to 18.7% of total public expenditures (MIFTAH 2022). However, education funding also relies on donors and international organizations (Mustafa & Bisharat 2008). The PA faces severe financial instability due to the Israeli occupation's control over economic resources and borders, which limits their ability to generate independent and sufficient funds. The PA heavily depends on international funding, which is politically motivated and unreliable, creating challenges in educational planning, processes, and quality. The occupation has caused de-development of the Palestinian economy, exacerbating reliance on foreign aid for education. Despite international legal obligations mandating occupying powers to provide education services, Israel's policies fail to meet

these standards, contributing to ongoing financial crises for the PA. Recent cuts in foreign aid and economic downturns have further strained the PA's finances, resulting in significant budget cuts and salary reductions or non-payments in the public sector, including for Palestinian teachers (FoBZU n.d.). Furthermore, due to financial constraints and the inability of the PA to access schools in Areas B and C has led to crowding and deterioration in the learning environment. Due to the deteriorating financial situation of the families, schools have lost their revenue base from fees, and faced difficulties in securing basic school supplies and materials. The limited services for students with special needs, facing trauma, has also become evident³.

Education Policy

The PA is forced to plan for a complex mix of emergency and regular situations. As the MOE was ready to move towards improving the quality of education, developing a new national curriculum and advancing teachers' training, it was faced by a new wave of violence by the Israeli Occupation which stated a new wave of attacks and reinvasion of the West Bank in September 2000, which was faced by Palestinian resistance and was dubbed the second Intifada, just as the school year was starting. Furthermore, the internal strife of 2007 which led to the political separation between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the prolonged occupation led to devastating impacts on the education system.

A formal sector plan was not developed until five years after the creation of the MEHE but this does not mean that planning was ignored until then. A formal five-year plan was first discussed in 1998, and it took more than a year to prepare. UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) provided technical assistance in developing the plan, and the MOEHE set up two working teams; one focused on policy and another worked the details. Five-Year Education Development Plan 2000–2005 had five goals: 1) to provide access to education for all children, 2) to improve the quality of education, 3) to develop formal and non-formal education, 4) to develop management capacity in planning, administration, finance, and 5) to develop human resources across the education system (Nicolai 2007). Education Development Strategic Plan (EDSP) 2008–2012 has four goals: 1) to increase access of school-aged children and students of all education levels and improve the ability of the education system to retain them (Access), 2) to improve the quality of teaching and learning (Quality), 3) to develop the capacity for planning and management and to improve the financial and management systems used (Management), and 4) to realize a gradual conversion of the higher education sector from a supply-oriented to a demand-oriented sector, which will gradually guarantee more compatibility between higher education outputs and labor market(s) need from qualitatively and quantitatively (Relevance). Goal 1 to 3 is for pre-school, general, non-formal, higher education, and vocational education, and Goal 4 is only for higher education and

3 After Israel and the PLO signed the Oslo Accords, the West Bank was divided into three areas of control. Today, Area A constitutes 18 percent of the West Bank. The PA controls most affairs in this area, including internal security. In Area B, which comprises about 21 percent of the West Bank, the PA controls education, health and the economy. In both areas, Israeli authorities have full external security control. This means that the Israeli military retains the right to enter these areas at any time, typically to raid homes or detain individuals under the pretext of security. About 2.8 million Palestinians live crowded into Areas A and B whose major Palestinian cities and towns are Hebron, Ramallah, Bethlehem and Nablus. Area C is the largest section of the West Bank, comprising about 60 percent of the Palestinian territory (Aljazeera 2019).

vocational education (MEHE 2008). This was followed by the Education Development Strategic Plan (EDSP) (2014-2019), under the title: A Learning Nation, which was issued in March 2014. The three main goals under this plan are: 1) Ensuring safe, inclusive, and equitable access to education at all levels of the system; 2) Developing a student-based teaching and learning pedagogy and environment; 3) Enhance Accountable and Results-Based Leadership, Governance and Management. The final strategic plan issued by the MOE, in line with the State of Palestine adoption of the National Policy Agenda of the development plan 2017-2022, which drew on the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals approved at New York Summit in 2015, took into account national priorities, such as: ending the Israeli occupation which constantly destroys achievements made by Palestinians and available resources and potentials, the education sector began preparing the education sectoral plan for 2017-2022. Preparation of the plan was based on EDSP III (2014-2019), including its principles, objectives and programs which can be utilized in developing the Palestinian education system. It was also based on the National Policy Agenda and international obligations towards achieving the fourth goal of the Incheon / Korea Declaration of May 2015. The EDSP III was reviewed and aligned, using the ministry monitoring and evaluation system indicators with the participation of all stakeholders, including governmental organizations, NGOs, CBOs, higher education institutions, international organizations and supporters of the education sector. According to the MOE, the new strategic plan was prepared in partnership with other sectors preparing their plans at the same time aiming at reviewing and developing the draft education sector plan of 2017-2022 in alignment and complementarity. The plan aims to transform the Palestinian education system from a system that is based on instructional and memorization approach to a student-centered approach. The teacher under the new system shall become a facilitator whose role is to develop the skills and competencies of the students instead of providing and feeding information. This milestone change requires an in-depth reform of the current curricula, assessment system, teaching and learning methods, teachers' roles, supervisors' roles and the adoption of a result-based management system for education.

Teachers / Educators

In the West Bank, there are 39,914 teachers in PA run schools (IPS 2023). Within the MOE strategic plans, teachers appear under the need for professional development, the need to create a better working environment for them and increase the percentage of female teachers. It is not mentioned in any of the strategic plans the role of the teachers in leading planning processes or including them in consultations for policy change, although they are included in the workshops to design curricula, however not without caveats (this will be discussed in the findings section below). Since the Oslo accords and the creation of the PA, the role of teachers within the Palestinian society had shrunk from leaders of the political decolonial resistance movement to government employees in need of professionalization and who fight within complicit union structures for salary increases and better working conditions within the confines of the schools and with no connection to wider political engagement. While teachers do engage in political and social spaces and actions as individuals or with political parties, social and religious groups, as educators they seem to be detached from the anticolonial struggle as a collective force.

Shortly after the Oslo Accords, large sums of aid were poured into what has been dubbed as the OPT (parts of Palestine that constitute the West Bank, Gaza and parts of Jerusalem). These funds are considered to be political rent (Hovsepien 2009) or a peace

dividend (Leone 2011). Money was given to the PA in return for silencing the opposition and maintaining the peace process. This was reflected in education where the majority of the content of the textbooks was decontextualized, representing a statist approach far from the reality of a colonized nation and the brutality of the ongoing colonization. This was also reflected on the role of the teachers who were threatened regularly by the PA apparatus, imprisoned and suspended if they engaged in any political anti-colonial activism or opposition to the PA policies of normalization with the colonizer. Palestinian (teachers') agency remains contingent on the same basic determinants as during the 1990s. For example, the reform program executed by the Fayyad government, which came to power in 2007, has done nothing to challenge this. Rather, the PA's policies, particularly those that can be described as security-sector reform or neo-liberal economic reorganization, have in fact worsened the situation and made Palestinian agency even more dependent on the will of Israel and international donors (Leech, 2022). And this situation remains to this very day or even worse. As the Genocide is taking place in Gaza, the PA has played no role aside from continuing the collaboration with the colonizer to crush resistance in the West Bank and maintain its existence by oppression, where it has no financial means to sustain its sustainability where the Israeli Government has withheld all tax returns.

In spite of the ongoing oppression by the PA and the Israeli occupation, Palestinian teachers working at government (PA run) schools, have a [long history](#) of conducting direct action to demand their rights. Their direct actions include prolonged strikes. The main two direct actions that took place after the creation of the PA / MOE were during February and March 2016, when nearly 35,000 teachers initiated a series of strike actions across the West Bank. Classes were dismissed and students sent home as teachers marched through Ramallah's streets and organized sit-ins in front of MOE field offices and later Infront of the Prime Minister office. Though short-lived, the strike had wide resonance as teachers utilized their waning social capital in ways they had not done since the intifada (Abu Moghli & Qato 2018). On 5 February 2023, mass teachers' strike started and lasted for over 80 days excluded the GUPT⁴. For a substantial group of teachers, the strike aimed towards dissolving the GUPT in the interest of creating a democratic representative body (Naqabeh). Teachers also demanded to have their salaries paid in full. Various collectives were created in the different West Bank Governorates and negotiations between the teachers and the GUPT took place through some civil society organizations, led by the independent commission for human rights. Heading toward the new school year 2023/2024 the Genocide in Gaza started, and the teachers suspended their direct action. Teachers and students in the West Bank continue to struggle under the heavy hand of the colonial occupation where oppressive measures such as closures, incursions, settlers' attacks, imprisonments and assassinations of teachers and students are at a historical high, which impact the ability of students and teachers to access their schools and continue the education process. In many areas particularly in the North of the West Bank schooling has been taking place online, however with a very low quality, limited accessibility and random implementation.

Education and the Palestinian Civil Society

Since its inception, several civil society organizations assisted in developing the Palestinian education system, under the PA, in different educational domains, including

⁴ The General Union of Palestinian Teachers

teacher training, conducting research and developing learning and teaching methods as well as implementing innovative educational initiatives. Among these organizations are community-based and private universities and colleges, Palestinian Center for Teacher's Innovation, Tamer Institute for Community Education and A.M Qattan Foundation (MEHE 2017). For example, under the Israeli military administration post-1967, the curriculum content remained almost identical to that of Jordan and Egypt⁵ (UNESCO 2007) and elements in textbooks relating to Palestinian national identity and the Palestinian question were likely to be censored (Alayan 2012). Civil society organisation contributed into the design of the new Palestinian curricula under the newly found curriculum centre (PCDC). However, it is important to highlight two negative aspects: the Ministry of Education neglected major aspects of the progressive vision of the reformist educators, and there was a lack of popular and social engagement. Prior to the formation of the PA and in the context of the first Intifada, Palestinian activist educators and civil society actors who specialised in education, and were connected to social and political movements, played an important role in shaping ideas for building and reforming the education sector. They drafted ideas and plans for the creation of a Palestinian curriculum, they wanted to put an end to a style of education that relied on rote learning and discouraged critical thinking. They had a vision of a curriculum that would contribute to the Palestinian struggle for freedom and social change which was in part spurred by the experience of alternative education during the first Intifada (Velloso de Santisteban 2002). In terms of pedagogy, given that the Israeli occupation banned education for Palestinians, closing down their schools and universities, education was provided by Palestinian communities and activists in a semi-clandestine manner. Under such extraordinary circumstances, teachers experimented with the introduction of study guides and self-help packets which they wrote for students. In such a context, the content of education was made more relevant to the conditions of life. 'Students were able to interact with one another freely and teachers improvised as they sought new ways to teach children' (Hovsepien 2009, p.116). However, once education was institutionalised under the PA, such aspects were restricted. With the creation of the MOE and subsequently the PCDC, the centre received much praise for the quality of internal Palestinian curriculum debate it generated, its secular and political independence and its highly progressive and reform- oriented approach (Brown 2002). While the PCDC received much praise, there are a number of aspects within the PCDC's creation and its supposed reformist approach that call for a thorough investigation. In particular the issue of abandoning the liberation agenda and adopting a state-oriented approach. Progressive educators, and those involved in putting together the first curriculum plan, were disappointed by the direct interference of the deputy minister of the MOE who took over the task of producing the actual curriculum and textbooks. The curriculum that was subsequently published in 1998 toned down the progressive elements of the plan and the subsequent report published by the PCDC (Mazawi 2000; Velloso de Santisteban 2002; Brown 2002). The PA adopted the banking concept of education. Furthermore, when the MOE embarked on implementing some of the ideas recommended by the educational reformists, key academics who took part in putting together the initial ideas and recommendations were excluded. Popular engagement and consultations were overlooked; instead, there was a heavy reliance on MOE internal consultations and workshops that occasionally included representatives from some Palestinian NGOs (Hovsepien 2009). This representation is linked to mutual interests and funding, this point will be discussed further under the findings section below.

The MOE still struggles with the contradictory approaches between individuals who call for radical change in the education system and those who lean towards traditional methods and the status quo. The Palestinian education system still suffers from a lack of a unified philosophy and vision, as well as creativity and the space for critical thinking and innovation. It does not meet the needs of Palestinian society, which is going through a transitional phase and fighting a brutal coloniser.



Research Methodology

Scope

This research focused only on the West Bank (excluding Jerusalem). The focus of the research was on Palestinian Authority education frameworks, policies and implementation in government schools. The study excluded private and religious education as well as refugee education (UNRWA). The exclusion was based on the criteria that there are multiple education systems and multiple authorities controlling and shaping the education systems in the various territories, each will need separate detailed research which is beyond the scope of this project.

Instruments

See Appendix (1) for list of interview questions (in Arabic)

Sampling

The interviews were conducted based on a preliminary mapping exercise through which the researcher identified the key institutions, bodies and collectives that work in the field of education. The researcher also included the Ministry of Education and one higher education institution that focuses on continuous education. The researcher also depended on attending two major meetings for the representatives of the education sector. The first was a workshop organized by a Palestinian NGO aiming to question and examine the policies of the Ministry of Education and the second was a meeting for teachers focusing on teachers demands and the strikes. The researcher generated data from both meetings and had conversations with a number of the attendees. The data generated through both meetings are part of the data analysis and the findings.

Details of the sample can be found in appendix (2).

Data analysis

Thematic analysis of the qualitative data was used to identify main themes. The researcher transcribed the interviews which took place in Arabic and lasted between 45-60 minutes, then highlighted main recurring themes.

The main five themes that emerged from the data are:

- Fragmentation and Power Dynamics
- Internal and External Influences
- Implications on Other Sectors
- Role of Educators
- Envisioning Change

Limitations

- Access to key participants was hindered by political limitations. Teachers, essential to the study, were unable to participate in interviews due to threats from the Palestinian Authority (PA) security apparatus and their inability to move between cities and villages due to movement restrictions by the occupation checkpoints, same for the researcher.
- The geographical scope of the research was also limited, excluding Gaza, Jerusalem, and the 1948 land, which impeded the ability to present a comprehensive picture of the situation. These areas of Palestine are distinct, making it difficult to ascertain the role of Palestinian civil society in general.



Main Findings

Interactions between the main Actors: As mentioned in the sections above, civil society and international actors have played a substantial role in formulating education policies, funding and implementing programming, and providing technical support. At a first glance, the relationship between the MOE and other institutions seems to be smooth, complementary and coordinated. However, in reality, the relationship is negatively affected by political, social and financial tensions as well as severe conflict of interests and power dynamics.

Fragmentation and Power Dynamics

1. The Palestinian education system is fragmented and completely dependent on volatile political and social conditions that are impacted by the colonial conditions. In effect, there is no 'sovereignty' over the education sector.
2. The Ministry of Education considers (I)NGOs and other civil society bodies and institutions as service providers and as tools to complement the ministry's work rather than active actors and partners in drawing and envisioning policies.
3. Funding agencies are not interested in change in the education sector. Any change towards contextualisation, more attunement to the community and linking education to a liberatory vision would potentially mean the end of the dependency of the sector on them. Hence, the education sector currently is based on a cycle of mutual interests and an imbalanced power dynamic that leaves the NGOs and the Ministry dependent and unable to engage the community or meet its needs.

Internal and External Influences

1. Formally the Palestinian education sector is based on four pillars: the basic law (constitution), the declaration of independence, the first curriculum plan and the

relevant international conventions. While these pillars seem to be in harmony, their implementation is contradictory which makes the education sector lack vision and coherent policies.

2. The education sector in all its government institutions is increasingly securitized which creates an environment that is oppressive for educators, learners and the community.
3. Civil society organisations and bodies are not independent, they are reliant on conditional funding and on mutual interests and favors with the ministry that ensure their continuity and ability to access and implement their programmes.
4. Due to the lack of vision and sovereignty over the education sector, the direction of education policy and programming depend on reactionary political and social moves and sometimes attacks over some topics. For example, if the donors fund education programming on gender (decontextualized) certain social groups might protest and pressure the ministry to cancel the programme. The lack of vision and community engagement exacerbate the fragmentation of the sector and its policies and vision.

Implications on Other Sectors

1. Real, meaningful, contextualised and sustainable change in the Education sector will have implications on other sectors such as the labour market and the stability of the ruling powers. Those who are in power positions in the economy and politics are not in favour of this change.
2. There is no control of the MOE over its budget and so it cannot plan long term as the decision comes from the ministry of finance which is highly politicised and depends on donor funding and tax money which is usually withheld by the occupation as a form of collective punishment.

Role of Educators

Palestinian teachers have a long history of conducting direct action to demand their rights. Their direct actions include prolonged strikes. Their latest direct action took place on 5 February 2023. Mass teachers' strike that started in February 2023 and lasted for over 80 days excluded the GUPT. For a substantial group of teachers the strike aimed towards dissolving the GUPT in the interest of creating a democratic representative body (Naqabeh). Teachers' demands to have their salaries paid in full and most importantly have a democratic representation was such a priority that any involvement of the GUPT would have been considered as a failure and a betrayal of the teachers continuous struggle.

In a meeting for teachers from Hebron, Tulkarem, Nablus, Bethlehem and Ramallah that took place in Bethlehem on 23 August 2023, over 30 teachers discussed the details of the idea of democratisation of the GUPT. This meeting was one of many meetings taking place throughout the West Bank to find a common ground amongst the teachers and agree on the steps to be taken in regards to the GUPT expected elections. It was highlighted that over 60% of the teachers are not members of the GUPT and mass registration for membership is needed to ensure representation that is not monopolized by the ruling party. However, there is a loud voice amongst the teachers that is calling

for the complete dismantling of the GUPT and creating a new union for government schoolteachers. This is a point of contention especially amongst teachers and civil society representatives who believe that the GUPT should remain as it is a body under the PLO structure and dismantling it would be politically tragic and dangerous. The proposition under the various civil society initiatives is to keep the GUPT that will represent 5 unions: Higher Education, Private sector, UNRWA, Diaspora teachers and PA school teachers. The four sectors have their own unions, but the new initiative is to create a union for PA school teachers that will be under the bigger umbrella of the GUPT. Another point of contention that is contributing to the fragmentation of the HIRAK is the tools of their direct action. Some civil society actors who are involved in various initiatives including the democratisation committee and some teachers believe that strikes are ineffective and are a passive option to show dissent. What is needed is a direct action that would raise their voice, create public debate and culminate more support from students and parents. However, there are no clear plans or strategies for such actions. The third issue that is weakening the HIRAK is the lack of understanding of the dynamics within the GUPT, the membership, voting and candidacy procedures are not clear to most teachers which hinders their ability to take informed decisions and organise over particular issues. Finally, teachers feel that because of the prolonged strikes and the anger of parents due to the loss of teaching days, they are losing what the teachers call 'Al 7adineh Al Sha3bieh' – collective social support and solidarity. Hence, some teachers are calling for new approaches to involve the society as a whole in their struggle, but again the tools and strategies are not clear. Teachers are fighting difficult battles, the more obvious ones are against the PA and the GUPT leadership. However, there are other battles that they have to fight without choosing to. For example, in April 2023, the EU called the PA to end the crisis with the teachers and work towards ending the strike. Teachers are wary of the involvement of any international bodies and donor agencies in their strife as sometimes the accusations of having foreign agendas are used against them. Also, teachers are unable to involve their colleagues in the Gaza Strip or Jerusalem. Teachers in the West Bank prefer that Gaza teachers not join to avoid accusations by the PA that West Bank teachers are affiliated with Hamas which will be used as a pretext for political repression. As for Jerusalem, teachers believe that the crisis in Jerusalem schools which is a result of the repression of the Israeli Occupation from censoring the textbooks, to controlling education through better funded Israeli municipality schools is leading students to leave PA schools. If teachers in Jerusalem get involved in the strike, this might cause more students leaving PA schools and joining municipality schools controlled by the occupation which means national education and awareness about Palestine will be threatened amongst the Jerusalemite students.

Even when teachers stop their strike and try to negotiate with the PA and the GUPT through civil society organisations led by the independent commission for human rights, teachers and civil society actors see no end in sight or a solution to this crisis, not only in terms of finding ways to fulfill teachers demands but also the crisis of the education sector as a whole for Palestinians. The fragmentation of the HIRAK and the loss of a collective strategy and vision is a reflection of the political and social conditions for Palestinians as a whole. Almost thirty years of systematic depletion of the Palestinian struggle through dependency on donor aid, control of the PA which is a subcontractor of the occupation, continuous suppression of the Palestinian political and social dissent, geographic and political fragmentation have led to this dire situation where a vision and tools for collective action are difficult to achieve. Palestinian holistic demands for justice, equity and liberation have been watered down to day to day financial struggles and a loss of the bigger picture of struggle for liberation particularly through education.

Envisioning Change

For any change to happen in policy there needs to be a political will not only from the Ministry of Education but also other governmental bodies such as the ministry of finance. As mentioned earlier, funding agencies, just as the Ministry of Education, are not interested in change in the education sector. Any change towards contextualisation, more attunement to the community and linking education to a liberatory vision would potentially mean the end of the dependency of the sector on them. Hence, the education sector currently is based on a cycle of mutual interests.

Nominal and performative change through the shallow engagement of civil society with MOE planning processes is leading to a long term destruction of not only the sector as a whole but also the loss of faith that positive, sustainable, uninfluenced and independence decision to change is possible.



Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

This research highlights the critical but constrained role of Palestinian civil society bodies in the education sector with the focus on the Occupied West Bank. While these organizations and collectives contribute significantly to service provision and implementation, they face substantial challenges that hinder their capacity to influence educational policies, policy-making, and vision. The research highlights the complex dynamics between civil society actors and the Ministry of Education, revealing a lack of genuine partnership and an over-reliance on conditional external funding. The fragmented and externally dependent Palestinian education system lacks sovereignty and cohesive policies, despite being founded on seemingly harmonious pillars. The securitization of the sector by the PA further stifles the educational environment, impacting educators, learners, and the community. The intertwined interests of the Ministry, funding agencies, and civil society bodies create a cycle that resists contextualization and liberatory changes. True transformation in the education sector requires political will from multiple governmental bodies and a shift in the underlying power dynamics that currently favour stability over progressive change. This research provides insights and recommendations aimed at fostering a more independent, contextual, and visionary Palestinian education system highlighting the role of teachers. However, the ongoing Israeli colonisation and its devastating impacts, particularly the genocide since October 2023, present significant barriers to implementing any changes and achieving educational liberation.

Recommendations

Under the current conditions of an unprecedented genocide taking place in Gaza and across Palestine, where land grabs, killings, and displacement are occurring in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and territories colonized in 1948, and where over 6 million Palestinian refugees are banned from returning home against international law, it is challenging to propose recommendations with immediate impact. However, the

following strategies can provide a framework for sumud and long-term resistance:

1. **Planning for the Worst:** Develop contingency plans to prepare for and respond to escalating violence and displacement.
2. **Learning from Previous Experiences:** Analyse past struggles and successes to inform current strategies and avoid repeating mistakes.
3. **Unity:** Foster unity among Palestinian communities to create a stronger, more cohesive resistance movement.
4. **Pressure:** Apply consistent pressure on international bodies and governments to hold Israel accountable for its actions and to adhere to international law.
5. **Solidarity:** Build international solidarity, particularly with the Global South and other oppressed groups, to create a broad coalition against white supremacy and colonialism particularly within the education sector and teachers activism.
6. **Alternative and Sustainable Funding:** Seek alternative and sustainable funding sources to support Palestinian initiatives without reliance on traditional, often compromised, channels.
7. **Grassroots Planning:** Engage in grassroots planning to ensure that strategies are community-driven and reflect the needs and aspirations of the people on the ground.
8. **Work Close to the Land:** Promote projects and educational initiatives that are closely tied to the land, fostering a deeper connection and commitment to Palestinian heritage and rights outside institutional frameworks.
9. **Interconnected Work:** Recognize and address the interconnected nature of various issues, avoiding siloed approaches to ensure comprehensive and effective solutions

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Appendices

Appendix (1): Interview Questions

مفهوم التغيير وانشطة المجموعة او التجمع

١. انت منضم لتجمع يعنى بالتربية والتعليم، هل يمكنك إخبارنا بالمزيد عن الجمعية او التجمع؟ ماذا كان الهدف من هذه المجموعة؟ ما نوع التغيير الذي تهدفون الى تحقيقه؟ من بادر الى تأسيس التجمع وما الظروف التي دفعت الى تأسيسه؟ ما هو الجانب من القطاع التعليمي الذي كنت تحاول معالجته؟ لماذا تستهدفون هذا الهدف المعين من التربية والتعليم؟ على أي أساس اخترتم التركيز عليه دون أي هدف آخر؟

٢. لماذا قررت الانضمام لها؟ ما تطلعاتك من الانضمام لها؟

٣. هل تعتبر التجمع او الجمعية حركة جماعية من صلب المجتمع المدني؟ لماذا؟

٤. كيف نشأت المجموعة؟ متى و لماذا؟

٥. من هم الاعضاء وكيف يمكنهم الانضمام وهل هناك قيود على العضوية؟

٦. ما هو هيكل الحوكمة للمجموعة او التجمع؟

٧. ما هو نوع التغيير التعليمي الذي كنتم تدعون إليه؟ لماذا هذا التغيير على وجه الخصوص؟

٨. من الذي وضع هذه الأجندة وكيف يتم تطويرها؟ هل تغيرت الأجندة والرؤية بمرور الوقت؟

٩. حدد لحظات بارزة من تاريخ المجموعة (حملات معينة ومبادرات أخرى)؟

١٠. ما هي الاستراتيجيات التي اتبعتها؟ لماذا؟ ما الذي كان فعالاً وما الذي كان أقل فعالية؟ هل تغيرت مقاربتكم واستراتيجياتكم لاحداث تغيير عبر الوقت؟ كيف ولماذا؟

١١. ما هي المناقشات وطبيعتها حول كيفية إحداث التغيير؟

١٢. من الذي دعم عملك - إن وجد (حلفاء آخرون)؟

١٣. كيف تمول الجمعية والمجموعة؟ هل تتلقى أي دعم مالي لأنشطتك (من)؟

١٤. هل حقق أي من الأهداف؟ لماذا نعم او لا؟ ما الذي جعله ممكناً؟ من كان جزءاً منها وشارك فيها؟ ما العوائق؟

١٥. اذا ما وضعنا خط زمني لعمل المجموعة او التجمع، ما هي ابرز المراحل في حركة المجموعة، وكيف اختلف عملها، وانشطتها واستراتيجياتها خلال الأعوام الخمس الأخيرة؟

١٦. كيف تعرف التغيير؟ لماذا؟ ما نظرية التغيير التي تعتمد عليها المجموعة؟ هل وكيف قيمت التغيير؟

فهم كيفية مشاركة المجتمع المدني في تغيير التعليم

١٧. هل يمكنك إخبارنا عن جماعتك ودورها في التأثير أو المساهمة أو الدعوة لتغيير التعليم؟ هل ما زالت مستمرة؟ هل لها فترة زمنية؟

سياسات التعليم

١٨. من برأيك يُشكّل ويقود التغيير في مجال التعليم في البلاد؟ لماذا؟ من أيضا؟ من لا يشارك؟ من المستبعد. لماذا؟

١٩. اسأل عن دور الوزارة؟ الممولين؟ المجتمع المدني الدولي؟ النقابات؟ الأكاديميون ومراكز الأبحاث؟ الأحزاب؟ القطاع الخاص؟ المجتمع المدني جمعيات، نقابات؟

٢٠. كيف تصف علاقة التجمع أو المبادرة أو الجمعية بالوزارة؟ الممولين؟ المجتمع المدني الدولي؟ النقابات؟ الأكاديميون؟ هل تتعامل معهم فيما يتعلق بتغيير التعليم؟ النقابات (إذا لم تكن كذلك)

٢١. ما هي الجهات الفاعلة الأخرى في مجال التعليم التي تتعاون معها لتحقيق مهمتك؟ هل يمكنك إخبارنا بالمزيد عن هذه الشراكات وأوجه التعاون؟

٢٢. هل تستخدمون الأبحاث أو تتعاونون مع منتجي المعرفة والجهات الأكاديمية في تجميعكم وحراكمكم؟ ولماذا؟ وكيف؟

سياق الحراك والتغيير ومقاومته

٢٣. ما نوع المقاومة التي واجهتها جماعتك لدى محاولة أحداث التغيير؟ ممن كانت المقاومة؟ أثرها على نتائجكم؟ كيف تتكيف معها؟ (التحقيق فيما يتعلق بالسياق في كل بلد)

٢٤. ما الذي ساعد المبادرة؟ لماذا؟

٢٥. ما كان هو تأثير الجماعة والمبادرة؟ ماذا حققت؟ ما أثرها على الصعيد الشخصي؟

٢٦. هل يمكنك التفكير في أي مجموعات أو تجمعات أو جمعية حاولت إحداث تغيير أو التأثير في قطاع التعليم في بلدك خلال السنوات العشر الماضية؟ هل لديك شخص للتواصل لمعرفة المزيد

٢٧. ما رؤية المجموعة لمستقبل التعليم؟ وكيف يتكيفون معه؟

٢٨. أي ملاحظات أخرى حول دور التحركات والتجمعات المحلية المدنية في التأثير في التربية؟

Appendix (2): Sample

Institution / Event	Individual	Location	Duration of the interview/ workshop
Palestinian Cultural and education institution (Philanthropy)	Head of the education department	Ramallah	One hour
Palestinian education institution – Main focus children’s literature and reading	Head of the reading, writing and numeracy programme and the director of the NGO	Ramallah	Two hours
Regional collective (then registered as an NGO) – culture and education	Coordinator of outreach programmes	Ramallah	One hour
The second forum for educational policy dialogue and increased accountability	Deputy minister of education, director of the organising Palestinian NGO, teacher activist	Ramallah	Three hours
Teachers collective meeting		Bethlehem	
Parents committee	Head of the parents committee	Ramallah	
Ministry of Education			
Education NGO (organised the 2 nd forum)	Director	Ramallah	
Higher education institution – continuous education	Director	Ramallah	