

HEBREW PUBLIC EDUCATION IN PALESTINE

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The establishment of the Jewish National Home in Palestine and the bringing together of thousands of Jews from many countries with their varying backgrounds, demanded a system of education designed to knit all the Jews into one organic whole and to contribute to the fulfilment of the ideals of the National Home.

There is a government system of education for the Arab population whose needs are evidently of a different nature from those of the Jewish population. The Jewish Community has found it necessary, therefore, to maintain and develop its own public system of education which receives an annual grant from the government. This system now controls 265 schools with 27,000 pupils, or 71% of all Jewish pupils and 29% of all pupils in schools of all types in Palestine. This paper will limit itself to the Public System.

In addition to the ordinary objectives of any system of education, Hebrew education aims to bring about the long-desired and much-needed change in the social and economic structure of the Jewish masses and their consequent productivization, and to maintain and carry on the age-old tradition of high intellectual and cultural attainments. This it has to do while much of the mental and material energy has to be spent on the upbuilding of an undeveloped country.

The control of the system is now vested in an Executive Education Committee consisting of members representing the Jewish Community and the responsible Jewish Institutions. The members also represent the three ideological groups into which the public schools are classified: "General," "Mizrahi" (orthodox), and "Labor." The "General" schools are in the majority and include about 60% of the pupils. They all impart in addition to a Hebrew education, instruction in general subjects. In the "Mizrahi" schools, more stress is laid on religious instruction and observance, while in those of the Labor Federation, which are chiefly to be found in the newer settlements, emphasis is laid on agriculture, the tendency being towards self-government, coöperation, and individual work.

The system is complete and includes: Kindergartens, elementary

schools (8 grades), secondary schools, technical and agricultural schools and training colleges for kindergarten and elementary teachers. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem though independent, forms the natural culminating institution of the system, and coöperates actively with the Hebrew Education authorities in all questions pertaining to policy, curriculum, and examinations. The income for the upkeep of the system is derived from two sources: external and internal. There has been a constant fall in income from external sources and a constant rise from internal sources: the participation of external agencies in the Education budget was large so long as the community was weak and poor and is diminishing with the growing strength and economic capacity of the community. The income for 1934-1935 is estimated as follows:

External Sources—

Jewish Agency	£P 20,000	(representing World Jewry)
Palestine Jewish Colonization Association	3,610	(an endowed association for the settlement of Jews in Palestine)

Internal Sources—

Government	25,254
Local Jewish Communities and tuition fees	37,870
Surplus from '32-33	800
	£P 87,534

If we consider the additional sum of £P 92,000 spent directly by the Local Communities for the maintenance of schools—particularly all public kindergartens and a number of elementary schools which are under the supervision of the Executive Education Committee but receive no support from it—the budget of the entire Hebrew Public System really amounts to about £P 180,000.

There is no compulsory education in Palestine, but practically all Jewish children receive some elementary education. Schooling normally begins at the age of three when children are usually admitted to the kindergarten where they spend a period of two to three years under a well-trained kindergarten mistress. The kindergartens occupy a prominent place in the system and in addition

to the usual functions of such institutions, they fulfill the important task of unifying the heterogeneous population by enabling children whose home language is not Hebrew to spend their infancy in a completely Hebrew atmosphere. Most of the kindergartens stress the development of the senses and of individual work. Over 5,000 children are attending these kindergartens, all of which are, of course, coeducational. Owing to financial difficulties however, some of the kindergartens are not housed in proper quarters, others have no playground or garden, and practically all suffer from the lack of proper and sufficient tools and apparatus.

The 115 elementary schools (8 grades) comprising a total of 20,000 pupils form the backbone of the system and are conducted by well-trained teachers. Most of these schools especially those in the settlements, are coeducational. The syllabus of these schools is not essentially different from that of the most progressive and modern schools in Europe or America, manual training and the sanctification of labor forming prominent features of the syllabus and of the objective respectively. The number of class hours per week is larger than in European or American schools, the average in the Hebrew schools being 30.5 hours per week—23 in the lowest and 34 in the highest grade. This is necessitated by the relatively large amount of time consecrated to the teaching of Hebrew and the Bible and either English or Arabic.

Worthy of special mention are the extremely progressive—educationally and socially—labor schools (over 80, comprising about 4,000 pupils) which are controlled by the Jewish Federation of Labor in Palestine. A few of them are situated in the country and are run as children's settlements, where teachers and pupils live together as one family, agricultural training occupying a prominent part of the curriculum. Most of these labor schools are found in the new settlements and in all of them the project method is intensively used.

Only a few years ago the child's development was still dependent entirely on the teacher, for there were very few textbooks and almost no reading material in Hebrew. But now, the principal Hebrew publishing companies have issued a large number of useful books, more particularly for class and individual work in elementary schools. As in the case of the kindergartens, most of the elementary schools also suffer from unsuitable school quarters, overcrowding, and lack of adequate playgrounds.

There are only three complete secondary schools, one each in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Haifa, which belong to the Public System, though there are quite a number of private schools in Tel Aviv. A graduate of an eight-year elementary school usually requires at least four more years to complete the full secondary course. All the three schools are coeducational. The syllabus and general distribution of work is similar to the German-Swiss system, though here, as in the case of the elementary schools, the average number of hours per week is higher owing to the time occupied by the Hebrew subjects. Arabic is becoming increasingly important as a school discipline and is gaining ground as a scholastic substitute for Greek or Latin in the minds of the classicists.

Unlike the elementary schools, the lack of suitable books is still strongly felt, though attempts are being made to improve the situation.

It is interesting to note that the proportion of secondary school pupils to the population—about 70 per 10,000 inhabitants—is higher than it is in Europe but much smaller than in democratic countries, such as America or Canada, where secondary education is free. The fear has been expressed that these secondary school graduates might swell the ranks of those seeking white-collared-jobs. The school as well as the surrounding atmosphere, however, is so imbued with the idea of manual work and its sanctification that a fairly large proportion of these youths actually become agricultural laborers on graduation.

In addition to regular inspection and in order to insure homogeneity of requirements and maintenance of the requisite minimum standards, the final graduation examinations of these public secondary schools are set and conducted by a joint commission of the Executive Education Committee and the Hebrew University at Jerusalem. Most of the private secondary schools also submit to such inspection and to the same examinations in order to secure the recognition of their diplomas by the Hebrew University and by the Hebrew public authorities.

In a pioneering country like Palestine with all the developments and improvements still in the incipient stage, the training of technical and agricultural workers should be an important feature of its educational system. In spite of the relatively immense achievements in this respect, the needs are very inadequately met owing to lack

of sufficient funds. This lack is doubly serious for the Jewish population which contains a relatively small class of skilled labor and artisans, and whose return to Palestine postulates the creation of such a class, viz., the productivization of the masses. Fortunately, however, this inadequacy in the provision for technical and agricultural training is somewhat mitigated by the fact that the majority of the new agricultural settlements—particularly those of the collectivist type—and a number of the federated Jewish trade-unions serve as training centers for the new immigrants and for the youths of the country who set their face towards manual labor. Manual instruction in most of the town schools, and agricultural work in all of the village schools, afford a basis for later technical and agricultural education. There are a number of institutions which provide such a training, particularly agricultural.

There are four training colleges for teachers which offer a good preparation for kindergarten and elementary teachers. In these colleges, secondary school subjects are studied simultaneously with educational science. They contain in general the four highest classes of the secondary school and an additional year devoted almost entirely to method. Kindergartens and elementary practicing schools are attached.

Most of the secondary and normal school teachers are university graduates from well-known European and American seats of learning and hold rather high academic qualifications. The few, without such qualifications, have had the opportunity to make a name for themselves in their chosen field of specialization.

The Hebrew teacher has had to contend with great odds; small salary, irregularity and arrears in its payment, lack of sympathy and help from the conservatives, etc., and he is keenly conscious of his possibilities and responsibilities in the common endeavor for the fulfilment of the ideals of the Jewish National Renaissance to which he has contributed in spirit and in matter. His organization, the Teachers' Union, holds summer conferences and publishes a monthly educational magazine.

Space does not permit me to do full justice to the problem of Hebrew Education in Palestine and it has, therefore, not been possible to present the work of the private schools, the education of defectives, adult education (with special reference to the constant influx of new immigrants), and so forth. It is evident that the Jewish

Community in Palestine is still faced with the mammoth task of meeting the many educational burdens and problems before it. Yes, a mammoth task if it is remembered that the Hebrew Department of Education has all the responsibilities, duties, and functions of a Government Department, but none of its prerogatives, powers, and facilities. In addition to administrative, financial, and academic limitations, the Hebrew School has not made much progress yet in trying to eradicate and correct some of the current defects in the habits and character of the Jew such as lack of discipline, excessive individualism, and the consequent lack of sufficient consideration for others, though it should be stated that these are fostered by the bustle and confusion caused by mass immigration and the necessity of rapid adaptation. And yet, when all is said and done, when stock is taken of the means and facilities available, of the multiple objects to be realized, and of the valuable experiments carried on, and of the results obtained, one cannot help but conclude that the Hebrew Public Educational system in Palestine is living up to its ideals and fulfilling its mission. Its product, the Jewish child—though undisciplined and noisy—is innocent, frank, enthusiastic, wide-awake and possesses a rather high sense of justice and of self-respect. He is erect, loves work, nature, sport, and games, and is loyal to his people and to his inheritance.

Reference:

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3. *Annual Report of the Department of Education of the Government of Palestine for 1932-1933.*
4. *Problems of the New Education in Palestine*, by Ren-Polani, 1930.