

EDUCATION IN PALESTINE COMPARED WITH EDUCATION IN FINLAND AND JAPAN

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Abstract - The article reveals the importance of reading about education in Finland and Japan comparing them with our educational system in Palestine, highlighting the most important and similar points between systems of education in these countries. One would think that an occupied land like Palestine and countries of Europe like Japan and Finland have different systems for education their children. Comparison of the school system in Europe and Palestine reveals several similarities and differences. The sustainable development goals were adopted by the United Nations discuss the right for every child in an equal education, no one will have left behind. They are the leaders of tomorrow, to achieve this vision, countries have to reform their educational system, this was our main goal behind the comparison between educational system in Finland, Japan and Palestine. In this report, we reveal the result of this comparison, we wish to be benefit in reforming education in Palestine because it is an investment in the future of Palestine and Palestinian.

Keywords - Higher Education, School Education, Compulsory Education, School Curriculum, Educational System, Curriculum Reform, Curriculum.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is not preparation for life; it is life itself. It plays a vital role in shaping people's success, providing us with the opportunities to become productive members of civilized society by acquiring all the necessary skills to learn how to meet challenges and overcome obstacles by getting a proper education which enables us to lead a successful life, enhance our intelligence, skill, knowledge and positive change in our life [1]. In this report, we discuss the educational systems of both Finland and Japan, comparing them with the educational system of Palestine aiming at revealing the similarities and the differences between them. Also, we are comparing between these countries in terms of educational system, curriculum, teachers and the teaching methods in each country. This may be a positive step toward developing the system of education in Palestine through benefiting from their educational system. It is important to mention that developing educational system in Palestine is a unique experience, rich and full of challenges and obstacles. It is one of the few countries where the Ministry of education was established under crises [2]. It is a challenge indeed because Palestine faces a daily life conflict with the Israeli occupation [3]. The Separation Wall has increased Palestinian daily suffering, it prevented them to access their school safely, this forced them to travel for long distances and cross the gates and get to their schools, [4].

That's why The Ministry of Education developed a strategic plan, because education is an investment in the future of Palestine and Palestinians. The more we invest in referring to our educational system, the higher returns we will harvest in economic, social, and political terms. In addition, education must meet the

needs of students. The Ministry of education's document strategic plan 2014-2019 is the result of intensive hard work by a team who provided a valuable input to develop education in an occupied land; Palestine. The importance of this report comes from reading about education in Finland and Japan comparing them with our educational system in Palestine, highlighting the most important and similar points between systems of education in these countries.

II. EDUCATION IN PALESTINE

Education represents the core of Palestinian values, as basic and secondary education is free for all, and the Education Act of 2017 came to provide for compulsory Education for All for a period of 10 years [5]. The Palestinian educational sector Vision is "A Palestinian society that has values, culture and technology to produce knowledge and employ it for its liberation and development". The Strategic Goals of the Education Sector focus on three goals: Ensuring safe, inclusive, and equitable access to quality education at all levels of the system Developing a student-centered teaching and learning pedagogy and environment. Enhancing Accountability and Results-Based Leadership, Governance and Management [6].

A. A Brief on the Education Sector

The subsectors of the education sector in Palestine are multiple. These subsectors intersect with many other sectors in their interest and importance; these subsectors are:

1. Pre-school Education: It is a learning space offering early childhood education to children

aged three years and seven months, prior to the commencement of compulsory education at basic schools.

2. **School Education (Basic and Secondary):** Basic Education stage starts from first grade through ninth grade. It is divided into two parts:
 - First stage of Basic Education (grades 1-4) the preparation stage: This is considered the primary stage of Basic Education. It is considered the foundation stage to ensure balance and full development of the personality of the child (mentally, emotionally and physically).
 - Second stage of Basic Education (grades 5-9) the empowerment stage. This stage is designed to enable the child to acquire diversified knowledge and sciences.
 - Secondary Education (Acquisition): This stage covers grades (10-12) with their academic, vocational and technical streams.
3. **Higher Education:** It is the high stage of education served by universities, academic and technical colleges that provide students with university certificates.
4. **Non-Formal Education:** Unlike formal or standard education, it is conducted outside the frame of the standard education settings. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education has programs of non-formal education; The Parallel educational program provided for those who dropped out after 5-6 years from basic school [7].

B. Statistical indicators on education in Palestine:

The school enrollment rate in the year (2016) was (98.2%) for the basic stage for grades (4-1), (98%) for the upper basic education level for grades (5-10), and (63%) for secondary school for grades (11-12). And females recorded more enrollment rates than males in these stages. The enrollment rate in pre-school education increased between 2012 and 2016, to reach (56%), while the enrollment rate for students for one year before entering basic education was (75%).

The national report on the situation of children outside the school indicated that the enrollment rate for children with disabilities in the age group (6-9) years reached (67.5%), and for children in the age group (10-15) years (69.8%). The illiteracy rate among persons with disabilities was (31.7%) in 2017, (34.6%) in the West Bank and (29%) in the Gaza Strip.

Vocational and Technical education enrollment rates do not exceed 2.6% in 2015, with a clear gap in favor of males. The percentage of youth in the age group (18-24) and enrolled in higher education institutions (25.8%), with a gap in favor of females. Since 1995, literacy rates have continued to rise up, and there are approximately (30%) of Palestinian students familiar with information technology.

Palestine has made clear progress in terms of bridging the gender gap in education. Rather, it has exceeded the gross enrollment rate in basic education among females compared to its rate among its male counterparts. In 2017, the gross enrollment rate in basic education for males was (96.6%), while that for females was (99%) [8].

Palestine participated in the (TIMSS) study of international trends in mathematics and science, the results indicated that Palestine is still in the ranks of the lowest achievement countries, [9].

C. The Curriculum in Palestinian School

Prior to finalization of the Oslo Accords in 1994, the Israeli Civil Administration managed the educational system in the Palestinian territories. The Civil Administration assigned Jordanian books to school in the West Bank and Egyptian books to school in Gaza, and content of which the Administration disapproved was censored. The First Palestinian curriculum, which began in 1998. The Ministry of Education promised to create an independent Palestinian curriculum, immediately established the Curriculum Development Centre. They published its report on national curriculum development in 1996. It changed in the methodology adopted in schools were proposed, encouraging the promotion of critical thinking skills. Preparation of the Curriculum has involved four consecutive stages: formulating of the national teams for each subject, formulating of teams of authors for specific textbooks, linguistic and scientific editing, piloting and evaluating the curriculum [10].

The Palestinian curriculum demonstrates clearly the aspiration of Palestinian for the future and their understanding of the role of that education plays in the development of society. It is based on the general educational philosophy of Palestinian-Arab society. The principles of which have been derived from its heritage, religion, and the Declaration of Independence.

The first Palestinian Curriculum Plan completed in 1998. The MOEHE has a responsibility for the Whole education sector from pre-primary to higher education and for training teachers as well. The first refugee camp school for were established by the Red Cross in 1949. UNRWA schools offer grades 1 to 10. They don't provide Secondary education (11-12). UNRWA's education play a major role in Palestinian education since 1967. They started to hold workshops to train the teachers. It's important to say that the Ministry of Education held workshops to train teachers to deal with the new curriculum, and it trains the new teachers for the same purpose and to use new ways of teaching and technology in the classroom [11].

D. Challenges facing the educational system in Palestine

The educational system in Palestine faces many challenges, most notably the Israeli occupation and its direct impact on the educational process in all its aspects, and the structure of the Ministry of Education, where there is a clear overlap in the tasks and responsibilities of public administrations and directorates, in addition to the centralization of the administration [12]. There is also a decline in the government budgets allocated for education from the government budget, and the lack of universities' share, especially the budget for scientific research from the government budget, reflects negatively on the reality of scientific research and its importance in Palestine, and the interference of external bodies through funding poses another challenge to the education system Palestinian [13]. The decline in teachers' job conditions and the low standard of living for them and those working in the education sector has negatively affected the social position of teachers, and hence their position within their schools and among students [14].

III. EDUCATION IN FINLAND

As shown in the map, Finland is located in Europe's northeastern corner, and shares its border with Sweden, Russia and Norway. This location leads to significant effect on its climate, which is too cold with very long winter and night hours [15]. Finnish and Swedish are the official languages, so the schools are separated into two groups, but parents prefer Swedish-language schools because they are smaller, and they provide bilingual curriculum outcomes.

The main success factors in the Finnish education are related to their educational efforts towards equity, high quality education and professional responsibility of teachers, as well as the trust in the educational system and actors [16].

A. Compulsory Education

In the compulsory education stage, students begin at seven rather than six years old [17]. This is because the school is far away, and parents are worried about them, especially in low population areas. Most classes count twenty-five students. This stage continues until they become 16 years old when they pass the matriculation examination. After that, students attend either general upper secondary school which lasts for three years and leads to university, or vocational upper secondary school for three years leading to polytechnic. Students can enroll in a university after some extra study as shown in figure1 [18]. The government is responsible for determining the educational objectives, subjects and credit hours per subject. There are common core subjects for all students of heterogeneous groups. The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (NCCBE) framework

defines the objectives, provides core course description, and performance scales in each taught subject. Finland offers free- of-charge education at all levels, which covers books, work material, hot meals, transportation, and health care [19].

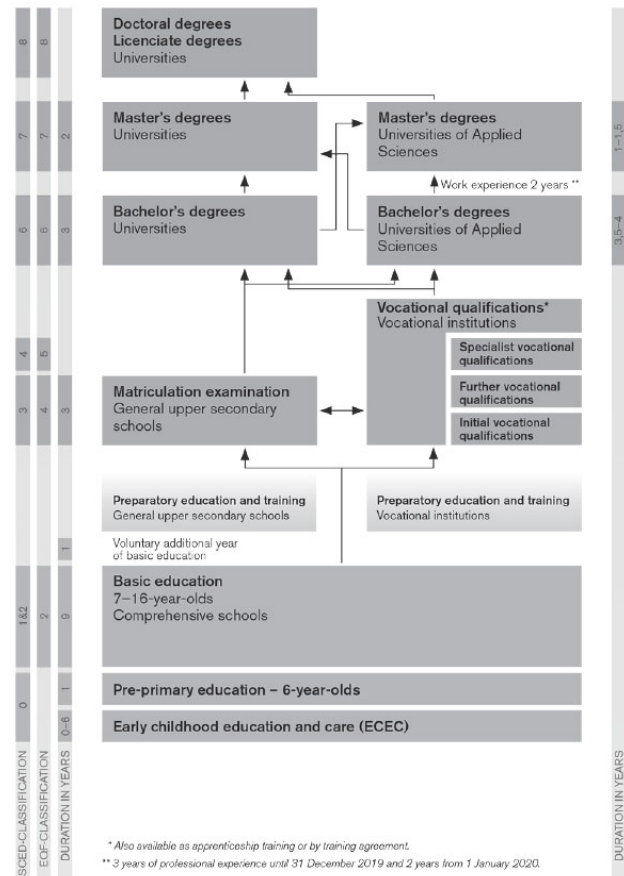


Figure 1: Education System in Finland (Ministry of education and Culture 2019a)

B. Finland Teachers

In general, Finnish teachers have been getting their education at universities since 1976. All teachers are required to pass specific pedagogical studies [20]. Teachers' selection for classrooms passes into two stages; the number of semi-finalists who are selected from the applicants is three to four times the number of positions. The selection is based on their results in the matriculation examination and the accumulated school marks. Then, additional points are based on experience in working with children [21].

In vocational schools, there are two types of teachers who teach crafts: class teachers and subject teachers. For grades (1-6), they are called class or primary teachers. They study pedagogy as their main subject at university. As minor studies, they also study different school subjects in basic education with a scientific and a didactic point of view. Class teachers have a broad knowledge of all subjects in basic education [22]. Crafts in basic education, including grades (1-6), are traditionally taught by primary school teachers who

have a minimum of 5 ECTS credits in basic studies or up to 60 ECTS credits from crafts as a minor study in their teacher examinations [23].

The national curriculum framework guides teachers in developing school curriculum. This includes defining learning outcomes, providing suitable content, learning process and assessment methods. Moreover, local school representatives define local priorities leading to municipal curriculum. In addition, schools have extended organizational autonomy with independent allocated funds, where school principals and headteachers have the right to choose their teaching staff [24].

IV. EDUCATION IN JAPAN

Japan is a legitimate monarchy with a parliamentary government, and its capital city is Tokyo. Japan consists of about 6,852 islands, with five main islands [25]. Education has always held an important role in Japanese educational system which is based on the Fundamental Law of Education, and it was passed on the 31st of March 1947 [26].

In Japan, it's compulsory for all children for nine years, which includes six years of primary school and three years of lower secondary school. Children start their schooling at the age of six. After completing their compulsory educational period by the age of 15. Most students move along to upper secondary school for three additional years, followed by four years of university education for an even more select group [27].

The academic year starts from April and ends in March, having summer vacation in August and winter vacation in the end of December to the beginning of January. School generally starts at 8:30 a.m. and ends about 3:00 or 3:30 p.m., five days a week [28].

The Japanese language is mainly used in Japanese schools, which is highly dependent on context to determine meaning, it has an accurate ordering of words in a sentence, and they use three different types of character systems in the written language (kanji, hiragana, and katakana) [29]. The written language is so difficult that students spend many years studying their own language [30]. Although Japanese is the prevailing language of instruction, schools could use other languages. For example, English is used to teach science and mathematics classes [31], and it is used in the higher education system [32].

A. Use of Technology:

Since 1998 Japanese emphasized the use of technology in education at all levels, in which it is advocated the use of computers throughout the educational system. Seemingly, that has brought even

more attention to the need to increase the disclosure of Japanese students to instructional technology [33].

Audiovisual media are widely used in Japan, especially in primary schools. Television, audiotapes, and videotapes are common support for teaching. Another technology that Japan has started to use is distance education. Some educational institutions are now becoming quite active in this field. One admired institution, Waseda University, has linked up with five universities around the country to offer real-time online classes, as part of a trial program. The spread of Internet and related technology suggests that Japan will be a major player in distance education in the coming years [34].

B. Entrance Exams:

The Japanese system places great emphasis on the use of exams as qualifiers for all levels of schooling. Exams exist for students entering preschool, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and universities. Yet clearly, the most decisive tests are those given for entrance to the upper secondary schools and universities. Both private and public high schools require such tests and usually test students in five main fields: English, mathematics, Japanese language, social studies and science [35].

C. Curriculum Reform:

Japanese reflect the interest of improving their educational system by analyzing and responding to problems with the curriculum in Japanese schools. In 1998 by the Curriculum Council submitted a report to the Minister of Education which suggested that the public school system should do a better job of emphasizing problem-solving activities, independent thinking, the use of computers in all subjects at all levels, and interdisciplinary courses that assimilate content from varied content areas [36].

D. Sufficiency in the Japanese Education System

Japanese Education System aim to improve student's basic scholastic proficiency through easy to understand classes' by implementing smaller class sizes, equipping classrooms with IT facilities and introducing national academic achievement surveys. Second encouraging students' participation in community services and programs. Then creating a lower stress learning environment by broadening sports and cultural experiences to deal with problem behaviors. In addition to training teachers to take responsibility for the quality of education they deliver by establishing awards, bonus and promotion systems for performance.

Finally, the promotion of the establishment of universities of international standard by reinforcing the function of universities as the well-spring of future national leaders, establishing competition between universities and granting greater autonomy to national

universities so that they can compete in an open market, creating a more open academic job market [37].

V. CONCLUSION

A nation's purpose in educating its children is to prepare them to become productive members of society. Each country in the world has developed a system of education based on its need [38]. One would think that an occupied land like Palestine and countries of Europe like Japan and Finland have different systems for educating their children. However, a comparison of the school system in Europe and Palestine reveals several similarities and differences. The educational system in Palestine and both Japan and Finland is similar in a number of ways as shown in table 1. To begin with, education is compulsory everywhere. They offer books and work material. They choose well qualified teachers. In addition, Palestine and other countries use technology and development methods of teaching. There is technical education in Palestine and both Japan and Finland.

Despite these similarities, the educational system differs greatly in several areas. For example, the years of compulsory education is different; in Palestine students have to end the high elementary stage (in the

age of 13), but in both Japan and Finland, they have to finish the secondary stage (in the age of 16). In addition, in Palestine and Japan, students begin their school in the age of six rather than seven like Finland. The Ministry of Education in both Palestine and Japan choose the school syllabus but in Finland the teacher chooses the suitable one for his students. Besides, the Ministry of education in Palestine and Finland choose the qualified teacher after passing an employment exam but in Japan they choose the highest achievement student then they enrolled him under a training program. Another major difference between these countries is the assessment methods; in Palestine and Japan they use tests as a main tool of assessment besides new ways of assessments, but in Finland they deleted all tests in schools and adopted new ways and techniques to evaluate students and determine the point of strength and weakness. Palestine is different from them in one point, which is the informal education; it's for those who dropped out after 5-6 years from basic school. In addition, Japan is different from them all because it focuses on ethical, moral and values in their curriculum. In Palestine, teachers are the people who modify the wrong behavior of students through civics books. In addition, that the vision of the Palestinian education sector is a society that have values. But in Finland they concentrate more on the quality of education and student's achievements.

In Terms of	Palestine	Japan	Finland
Compulsory Education	(Students have to end the high elementary stage in the age of 13) They begin school in the age of 6	They end it in age 16 They begin school in the age of 6	They end it in age 16 They begin school in the age of 7
Assessment	The way of assessment They use tests as a main tool of assessment besides new ways of assessment.	They use tests as a main tool of assessment besides new ways of assessment	The don't use tests in schools and the adopted new ways and techniques to evaluate students to determine the point of strength and weakness.
School Curriculum	The Ministry of education choose the school syllabus	The Ministry of education choose the school syllabus	The teachers choose the suitable syllabus for their students
Teachers	The Ministry of Education chooses well qualified teachers after passing an employment exam. There is informal education in Palestine.	They choose the highest achievement student then they enrolled him under a training program	They choose the highest achievement student then they enrolled him under a training program

Table 1: A comparison between the educational system in Palestine and both Japan and Finland.

It is important to mention here that Palestine is a state under occupation, suffers day by night from the Israeli occupation, the interference of external bodies through funding, the decline of teacher's job conditions and the low standards of living for them [37] Despite these suffering, Palestinians have become one of the most educated people in the Middle East. They can be proud of their 3037 schools in Palestine, there are 1,282,054 students who attend school, (2234) are governmental schools, (370) are UNRWA schools and (433) are private schools.

It is clear that the educational system varies from country to country. Even though Palestine, Japan and Finland seem very similar in many ways, their educational system is actually quite different.

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