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The Palestinian Authority textbooks: A review of research evidence

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Any errors in the report are the sole responsibility of the authors.

AI statement

AI was used to help compile and format the reference list and condense some sections of the original text. All substantive analysis and writing in this report is human-authored.

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Executive Summary

Palestinian Authority (PA) textbooks used in Palestinian schools across the Occupied Palestinian Territory have been a subject of sustained international scrutiny. Within the broader political context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this has contributed to some allegations that the content promotes incitement of hatred towards Israel. In this context, this paper examines the extent to which Palestinian textbooks adhere to UNESCO's 'Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development' (2023a).

The report notes that the PA curriculum development and reform process, which resulted in textbook changes, occurred in two main stages. The first stage, in 1998, marked the establishment of the PA curriculum, which significantly improved and ultimately replaced the older Egyptian and Jordanian textbooks between 2000-2006. The second stage, which began in 2016 and was fully implemented by 2019, with additional revisions made in 2020, brought key improvements to the textbooks. These included more inclusive religious representation, an increased emphasis on human rights and active citizenship, the reduction of problematic language and references, the defusing of violent content, and the removal or reframing of material that could be interpreted as symbolically or rhetorically escalatory in conflict contexts. While revisions take place on an annual basis, research on these changes is limited.

Based on existing evidence, this review identifies that the textbooks largely align with UNESCO's Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights (2023a; 2023b). It finds that the textbooks demonstrate a strong commitment to human rights education, global citizenship education, political participation, interfaith dialogue, coexistence, and tolerance, in line with the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights. The textbooks include critical perspectives on Israel, reflecting Palestinians' historical and political experiences under military occupation. This aligns with the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights (2023a, para. 24) in relation to curriculum and pedagogy that emphasise critical engagement with colonialism and neo-colonialism, and is also consistent with international research showing that textbooks in protracted conflict contexts often engage with the realities and power dynamics shaping learners' lives.

Overall, the report identifies that assessing alignment with the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights requires a nuanced understanding of the political and historical context shaping education in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The report concludes by outlining key implications for policy, international engagement, and future research, based on the findings of this review.

Introduction

The Palestinian Authority (PA)ⁱ curriculum, including textbooks,ⁱⁱ has been a subject of extensive debate, particularly regarding its alignment with international education standards, as reported in media and political forums. This debate has been shaped by ongoing political scrutiny, donor concerns, and contested claims regarding the content and orientation of Palestinian textbooks, particularly in relation to issues of peace, human rights, and representations of conflict. Within this context, this report presents a review of existing studies examining the Palestinian curriculum and associated teaching and learning materials, focusing on their development, recent textbook revisions (including abridged materials), and alignment with UNESCO's Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights (UNESCO, 2023a). This review of existing publications focuses primarily on textbooks as the main site through which curricular content is articulated and experienced by learners.

The analysis is structured around four thematic areas: (a) human rights; (b) global citizenship education; (c) non-discrimination, equality, and inclusion; and (d) conflict, memory, and multi-perspectivity. These thematic areas were selected to reflect key dimensions emphasised in the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights (2023a), while also addressing issues most commonly raised in relation to critiques of textbooks.

This report draws on existing literature, reviewing how different studies assess alignment with international standards and interpret the representation of these themes within the political and historical context of the Occupied Palestinian Territory.ⁱⁱⁱ The report concludes by outlining some key recommendations emerging from the analysis.

Methodology

Review of research on Palestinian Authority textbooks

The review examines Palestinian textbooks as the main carriers of curricular content, and assesses their alignment with UNESCO's Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2023a – see Annex 1). This report refers throughout to this as the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights (UNESCO, 2023a; 2023b). The UNESCO framework is adopted for the review because it represents an internationally recognised consensus for curriculum development and review in conflict-affected and politically-sensitive contexts, and is commonly used in international education policy and funding discussions.

The review draws on existing academic, policy, and institutional studies, which examine a range of subjects and grade levels. Studies reviewed include ones that conduct content and discourse analysis of Palestinian textbooks, as well as broader analyses of curriculum policy and design.

Search strategy

To identify relevant literature, a comprehensive desk-based search strategy was employed across multiple databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, the UNESCO Digital Library, Google Scholar, and OpenAlex. In addition, citation tracing was used, in particular to identify unpublished grey literature that may not have undergone peer review. Each source has been assessed for credibility, by reviewing the rigour of the methodology.

Inclusion criteria included studies that explicitly analyse Palestinian textbooks and/or curriculum materials in relation to themes of human rights, conflict, and education standards, with a focus in particular on publications since 2020 as this is the year the PA curriculum was substantially revised.

Data extraction involved cataloguing key findings from each source, which were cross-checked by different reviewers. The findings from identified sources were synthesised through a thematic analysis to identify common trends, strengths, challenges, and gaps in how the Palestinian curriculum and textbooks are represented in the literature in relation to UNESCO's Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights.

Analytical approach

The analysis provides a synthesis of published and grey literature assessing PA textbooks and curriculum materials in light of UNESCO's Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights (UNESCO, 2023a). The analysis differentiates between earlier textbook editions and the curriculum used since 2020, when revisions to textbooks have been made. In general, references to older editions are included for contextual purposes, to document representations that have since been revised, reframed, or removed.

The analysis is grounded in principles of comparative and international education, which

examine curricula in relation to internationally recognised standards, cross-national research, and the specific political and social contexts in which education systems operate (e.g. Hughes, 2018; OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2025). In line with this tradition, the report assesses the PA curriculum by situating it within global debates on education in conflict-affected settings. The analytical approach is guided in particular by UNESCO's normative framework on education for peace and human rights, which provides the primary reference point for assessing textbooks content and orientation (UNESCO 2023a; 2023b). The analysis also attends to how curricular language, representation, and framing may either exacerbate or mitigate social divisions in contexts of protracted conflict.

This review adopts a context-sensitive approach to the application of UNESCO's principles of multi-perspectivity and balanced representation in contexts of ongoing political asymmetry. While UNESCO promotes intercultural dialogue and constructive engagement with conflict, comparative research in conflict-affected societies highlights how education systems – and curricular representation in particular – are constrained by unresolved sovereignty disputes, contested identities, and structural power imbalances (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo & Smith, 2019; Alayan & Riley, 2023). A wider range of historically and politically contested contexts – including for example Northern Ireland, Rwanda, South Africa, India and Pakistan – suggest that, even where formal political settlements may exist, underlying social and historical divisions continue to shape curriculum development and representation (Smith, 2003; Freedman et al., 2008; Niaz et al, 2023; Chughtai, 2015). These comparative insights suggest that expectations of symmetrical representation should be assessed within the structural conditions shaping curriculum production. This aligns with the relevance of UNESCO's Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, which acknowledges the importance of contextual and political understanding in curriculum development.

Limitations

This review synthesises a defined body of existing studies and reported findings. It does not include a direct systematic review of the full corpus of PA textbooks, nor does it examine curriculum implementation or pedagogy through classroom practices. Findings are therefore informed by how existing studies have selected, translated, and interpreted materials. Several key sources are produced by stakeholders (governmental, advocacy, donor-funded, or UN bodies) with differing mandates. Their perspectives may shape interpretations, framing, and emphasis.

The PA textbooks undergo annual revisions; therefore, evidence drawn from earlier editions may not fully reflect current content across grades or subjects. Linguistic and cultural factors also introduce limitations: many sources (and the textbooks themselves) are in Arabic, and not all studies provide original text, full contextual excerpts, or independent translation verification, increasing the risk of misinterpretation. In addition, some influential evaluations give prominence to selected 'problematic' excerpts, which may skew overall impressions of the textbooks. Given this paper is a review of available evidence, it is shaped by the prominence of these reports in directing international debate, particularly around issues of violence and incitement. As a result, other areas of assessment of the curriculum alignment with the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, such as peace education, critical inquiry, and skills-based pedagogies, receive comparatively less focus in this analysis (UNESCO, 2023b).

Another key limitation concerns the asymmetry of scope. The review focuses on Palestinian textbooks. This reflects a broader pattern of limited and uneven international engagement with Israeli curriculum materials, despite their relevance for contextualising standards and benchmarks applied to Palestinian education. Given the longstanding imbalance in international scrutiny, evaluating the PA curriculum without equivalent analysis of the Israeli curriculum risks unintentionally reinforcing unequal standards and may perpetuate existing narratives, rather than offering a fully contextualised picture. Based on interviews with Palestinian curriculum professionals and policymakers, Abuhussein (2024) reports that while European financial aid has not been directly used in the writing or printing of textbooks, Palestinian authorities have faced sustained political pressure to modify curriculum content in response to allegations of incitement. The same study notes that requests by the Palestinian Ministry of Education for comparable European reviews of Israeli textbooks have not resulted in equivalent assessments.

Finally, curriculum reviews conducted in conflict-affected contexts are inherently shaped by contested histories and identities. UNESCO's guidance highlights principles that reinforce the importance to situate curriculum evidence within its broader political and social context (UNESCO, 2023a). The Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards for Education similarly emphasise conflict sensitivity, contextual relevance, the inclusion of community perspectives, and the need for teaching and learning processes that reflect learners' realities and foster safety, dignity, and social cohesion (INEE, 2024). In such environments, both the curriculum and assessments of it are influenced by the lived experience of conflict. Accordingly, findings should be interpreted with sensitivity to these contextual dynamics.

Context

This section examines the development, revision, and evaluation of the PA curriculum and textbooks within the broader framework of international education standards and ongoing political context. It situates the PA curriculum historically, from its introduction in 1998, following the Oslo Accords to its subsequent reforms and annual revisions. Drawing on the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights (2023a) as a normative benchmark, this section explores how curricula are expected to balance universal values, such as human rights, tolerance, and global citizenship, with local realities shaped by conflict, inequality, and historical memory. It further reviews major policy and research texts that have shaped international debate on the PA curriculum, critically assessing their methodologies and situating their findings within a contested political and scholarly landscape.

Overview of the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights

The UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, which serves as the primary normative framework for assessment in this study, underwent comprehensive revision in the version published in 2023. The version was explicitly aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and revised in response to evolving global challenges, including conflict, inequality, and environmental degradation. Recognising the critical role that education plays in shaping societal norms and behaviours, UNESCO's Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights provides guidance to Member States on integrating values related to peace, human rights, fundamental freedoms, global citizenship, and sustainable development into national education systems. It also highlights the importance of preparing learners to act as responsible global citizens, aware of global challenges, such as social justice and environmental sustainability, and capable of contributing actively to more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, and secure societies (see Annex 1).

In addition to promoting universal values, UNESCO emphasises that curricula must remain relevant to the lived realities of learners, connecting with the challenges and issues they face in their daily lives. This includes fostering critical engagement with sensitive and complex topics such as colonisation, conflict, violence, structural inequality, and exclusion, while equipping learners with the tools to analyse these issues from multiple perspectives and within a framework of peace, reconciliation, and solidarity. This highlights that the inclusion of such themes in curricula is not in itself problematic; rather, the key issue lies in how they are presented, framed, and contextualised within educational materials.

The UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights further stresses the importance of sustaining a duty of memory, which requires education systems to acknowledge historical harms, resist denial and distortion of proven historical events, and promote accurate, evidence-based representations of the past. This includes fostering learners' ability to recognise the legacies of injustice, dispossession, and racism, understand their contemporary implications, and explore pathways toward reconciliation and peaceful coexistence. The UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights also highlights that education should affirm learners' cultural, historical, and linguistic identities, ensuring that their heritage is respected, while simultaneously promoting intercultural

dialogue, the valuing of diverse perspectives, and the cultivation of global citizenship. Importantly, while the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights articulates universal values, it stresses that implementation must be adapted to local and national contexts. Accordingly, the application of UNESCO's Recommendation on Education and for Peace and Human Rights requires context-informed and conflict-sensitive adaptation and benchmarking to ensure both global alignment and local relevance (UNESCO, 2023b).

Context of curriculum reforms, 1998-2025

The introduction of the first 'new' PA curriculum took place in 1998, following the Oslo peace process (1993-1995), which established the PA and granted it administrative responsibility over civil affairs, including education, in parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The development of the PA curriculum marked a key moment in promoting national identity through education in both the West Bank and Gaza at a time when the education system was unified under the PA. Prior to this, the Israeli Civil Administration managed the education system in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, during which Jordanian textbooks were used in the West Bank and Egyptian textbooks in Gaza, subject to Israeli censorship. This censorship included the removal of content related to Palestinian national identity, national symbols, and references to Palestine as a historical or political entity, as well as the deletion of historical or political narratives that conflicted with the positions of the Israeli authorities (UNESCO, 2006; Alayan & Riley, 2023).

The formal development of the PA textbooks was first discussed with a 1994 UNESCO agreement, followed by the establishment of the Palestinian Curriculum Development Centre, under the authority of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. The process followed four stages: forming subject-specific national teams; assembling textbook author teams; conducting linguistic and scientific editing; and piloting the curriculum. Implementation was phased, beginning with supplementary 'National Education' books in 1998, finalising a pilot version by 2004, and scheduling full curriculum implementation by the 2006/2007 academic year. Overall, the rollout of the textbooks followed a long process but was implemented largely according to PA plans, beginning with national textbooks across all subjects by the year 2000. Full implementation was achieved across all grades by the 2006/2007 academic year, including the introduction of subjects such as civic and national education, technology, and arts, as well as earlier English instruction from Grade 1 in 2006/2007 (Sánchez Broco & Trad, 2011; UNESCO, 2006). PA curricula and textbooks were fully integrated in Gaza and the West Bank, completely replacing the Jordanian and Egyptian textbooks. This is also the time when political and administrative divergence between the PA and Hamas emerged, following a period of escalating tensions after Hamas's victory in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections. Since then, while the PA has continued to oversee education policy and curriculum development, the administration of education in Gaza has been managed by authorities under Hamas, including the local Ministry of Education, creating parallel governance arrangements within a broadly shared curriculum framework.

During the early 2000s, Israeli and Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) representatives agreed to jointly review Israeli and Palestinian textbooks, reflecting broader international efforts to assess educational materials in the context of the peace process (Moughrabi, 2001). However, this initiative was not fully implemented as a formal bilateral process. Instead, subsequent joint analysis was undertaken through independent research collaborations, most

notably the comparative study conducted by Israeli and Palestinian scholars (Adwan, Bar-Tal & Wexler, 2016), which applied systematic content analysis across both curricula.

In 2001, the European Union reviewed the new textbooks following allegations by the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP, now IMPACT-se) that they promoted hatred and antisemitism (Moughrabi, 2001). However, the European Union's findings, published in a letter dated 15 May 2002 (General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, 2002, para. 2), contradicted these allegations, concluding that:

“New textbooks, though not perfect, are free of inciteful content and improve the previous textbooks, constituting a valuable contribution to the education of young Palestinians.”

The European Union letter confirmed that many quotations attributed by CMIP to the PA textbooks were either traced back to older Jordanian and Egyptian books that the PA curriculum had replaced, taken from materials outside the official curriculum, or could not be traced at all (General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, 2002). Quotations that were confirmed were often found to be mistranslated or cited out of context, presenting a misleading impression of anti-Jewish incitement that the books did not contain. IMPACT-se has subsequently contested these conclusions in its later publications (IMPACT-se, 2019; 2021a; 2023; 2025a). However, CMIP/IMPACT-se critiques should be assessed in light of its methodological approach (see Annex 2 on methodological features of IMPACT-se), and its analytical approach as addressed further in the Findings section of this report.

The most recent PA curriculum reform began in 2016 and was fully implemented across schools by the 2018/2019 academic year (Alayan & Riley, 2023). The international scrutiny of Palestinian educational content has continued, particularly in relation to concerns raised by Israeli and pro-Israeli advocacy groups such as IMPACT-se and Palestinian Media Watch (Abuhussein, 2024). Criticism of the PA curriculum has been reported in media and political forums, such as the UK Parliament (Walker, 2020; Dickson, Walker & Gill, 2021). and more recently within European Union institutions in relation to foreign aid (Abuhussein, 2024).

In a study of PA textbooks from 2020 to 2021, IMPACT-se argued that the curriculum had continued to diverge from its interpretation of UNESCO's Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, citing what it described as the *"systematic insertion of violence, martyrdom, overt antisemitism, and jihad across all grades and subjects"* (2023, p. 5) as well as a rejection of potential peace with Israel. By contrast, research by George Eckert Institute (2021) has highlighted the existence of narratives on global citizenship, peace education, and human rights norms within the PA curriculum, stating how they abide by UNESCO's Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights.

In its report on the abridged curriculum for Gaza, IMPACT-se (2025b, p. 94) argues that *"the PA deliberately chose to retain and promote extremist narratives rather than implement meaningful changes"*, concluding that the PA's failure to reform the curriculum is *"a deliberate policy choice"*. This interpretation is undermined by two key points. First, in July 2024, the PA signed a Letter of Intent with the European Union (European Commission & Palestinian Authority, 2024), committing to a phased reform process running from September 2024 to December 2026. Second, the abridged curriculum issued in September 2024 was an emergency measure designed to condense two academic years into one to sustain learning

amid substantial interruptions to learning (INEE, 2025). This abridged curriculum was launched at the outset of the European Union-supported reform process – before there was sufficient time for reforms to take effect.^{iv}

In East Jerusalem, the Georg Eckert Institute (2021) notes that Israeli authorities review and amend textbooks used in schools.^v Research on education in East Jerusalem documents repeated Israeli attempts to censor or modify Palestinian textbooks, particularly where historical and national narratives are concerned (Alayan, 2018a; Bader, 2026; Masarwah, 2022; Abu Asab & Salha, 2025). The 2021 Georg Eckert Institute’s review of amended editions indicates that revisions predominantly target conflict-related material, including the removal of “*references to Palestinian identity or national symbols*”, “*the removal of symbolic maps of All-Palestine*” and the “*removal of entire chapters on regional and Palestinian history*” (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021 p.5).

Textbook review processes remain ongoing, with annual updates to textbooks and teaching materials, including changes to unit objectives, content expansion, and editorial adjustments.

Overview of key policy and research texts on the Palestinian Authority curriculum

This section provides an overview of the key reports that have shaped international debates on the PA curriculum, primarily over the period 2019 to 2025. This includes an overview of the methodology used in Palestinian textbook analysis by two organisations whose reports have been particularly prominent – IMPACT-se, and the Georg Eckert Institute.

IMPACT-se is an Israeli-based organisation that has reviewed PA education materials, including textbooks, abridged curriculum materials, study cards, teacher guides, and Tawjihi examination papers. Its reports include reviews of Palestinian textbooks and educational materials linked to themes relating to peace, tolerance, conflict, and identity (see for example, IMPACT-se 2019; 2021a; 2021b; 2022a; 2023; 2025a; 2025b). For this purpose, it identifies nine “*UNESCO-derived standards and guidelines on peace and tolerance*”^{vi} (IMPACT-se, 2025a; p.1). Its leadership and staff are primarily drawn from journalism, political advocacy, Middle Eastern studies, and strategic communications. As Annex 2 identifies in more detail, there are methodological weaknesses in the approach adopted by IMPACT-se. Its published methodological descriptions provide limited detail regarding sampling criteria, coding procedures, inter-coder reliability, or other quality assurance measures, making it difficult to assess independently representativeness and analytical consistency. The reports also frequently combine analysis of official textbooks with classroom displays, public statements, and supplementary materials, creating challenges in identifying distinctions between intended curriculum, enacted practice, and broader social or political discourse. In addition, some findings rely on selective examples presented with limited contextualisation of the wider socio-political and historical setting in which curriculum content is produced and interpreted.

Another influential report reviewing the PA curriculum was undertaken by the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research in 2021. As an institute focused on the examination of textbooks and educational media from a global perspective, this German institute offers a methodologically distinct perspective on the PA curriculum (see Annex 2). Commissioned by the European Union, the study provides an extensive review of 156

textbooks and 16 teacher guides published between 2017 and 2019, along with 18 textbooks from 2020. An assessment of the Georg Eckert Institute's methodology suggests a structured and transparent approach to the analysis of Palestinian textbooks in its 2021 report. The report specifies the textbooks analysed, provides translated excerpts alongside images, and outlines the selection process, guiding questions, and coding criteria. The criteria used are linked to the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights (UNESCO, 2023a) and to analytical approaches referenced from specialists at Stanford University, enabling readers to trace the analytical process and assess the evidence presented. The study applies a defined sampling strategy across subjects, grade levels, and publication years, while identifying both affirmative and critical examples related to themes such as peace, conflict, human rights, and tolerance. Methodologically, the report combines qualitative and quantitative approaches, including content and discourse analysis, with specified thematic categories and coding procedures intended to support consistency and comparability across the analysis. The report also situates textbook narratives within broader historical and political contexts, examining how issues such as displacement, occupation, and identity are represented in educational materials. In addition, the methodology incorporates multi-coder review processes and acknowledges interpretive challenges associated with analysing politically sensitive content.

In addition to the IMPACT-se and Georg Eckert Institute reports, the *Independent Review of Mechanisms and Procedures to Ensure Adherence by UNRWA to the Humanitarian Principle of Neutrality* was published in 2024 (United Nations, 2024a, hereafter referred to as the 'Colonna Report'). This report examines whether UNRWA's mechanisms and procedures adequately uphold the humanitarian principle of neutrality, and respond effectively to allegations of neutrality breaches following the 7 October, 2023 allegations against the agency. The report was commissioned by the United Nations Secretary General based on a nine-week independent review combining document analysis, stakeholder consultations, and external expert input. It notes that PA textbooks, which UNRWA relies on as part of its policy to use host countries' textbooks, have faced substantial criticism from Israeli authorities and NGOs for allegedly containing hate speech, incitement to violence, and antisemitism. However, the Colonna Report (United Nations, 2024a, p. 29) indicates that the most recent 2022/2023 UNRWA Rapid Review of textbooks "*found that 3.85 per cent of all textbook pages contain "issues of concern to UN values, guidance, or position on the conflict", either because they are deemed "educationally inappropriate" or because they are not in line with UNESCO standards.*" Similarly, a US Government Accountability Office report found that while textbooks may omit Israeli perspectives and include resistance-oriented narratives, they generally lack explicit incitement to violence or antisemitic content, despite some concerns regarding language and imagery (US Government Accountability Office, 2019).

Alongside policy reports and institutional reviews, a growing but still limited body of peer-reviewed academic research has been produced primarily from the early 2000s onwards, with increasing attention following the 2016 curriculum reform. This has examined the PA curriculum from educational, sociological, psychological, and global citizenship and sustainable development perspectives. This research spans analyses of earlier textbook generations as well as more recent curricular revisions, and includes both single-country studies and comparative work on Israeli and Palestinian textbooks. Despite the breadth of this scholarship, it has been less frequently cited in policy and political debates on the PA curriculum than institutional reports. Peer-reviewed research emphasises the need to situate

textbooks within broader structural, pedagogical, and political dynamics influencing the lived experience of Palestinian teachers and students, highlighting how curricular content reflects national narratives and contested political realities, rather than systematic incitement (Adwan, Bar-Tal & Wexler, 2016; Kriener, 2003; Masarwah, 2022; Moughrabi, 2001). Other peer-reviewed analyses of PA curriculum or textbooks similarly centre on curricular quality, systemic learning challenges, and broader structural conditions that affect learning, rather than on ideological content (Abualrob & Daniel, 2013; Alshwaikh, 2016; Al-Yamani, Attallah & Alsawayfa, 2016; Dawoud & Daher, 2022; Elyan & Al-Doulat, 2021; Naqeeb, 2024). Institutional evaluations likewise focus on pedagogical practice and curriculum implementation (British Council & Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education 2022; 2025).

Findings

Alignment with UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights

The following sections present the substantive findings of the review, organised around four thematic areas derived from the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights (2023a): human rights; global citizenship education; non-discrimination, equality and inclusion; and conflict, memory, and multi-perspectivity. Each area section synthesises evidence from the literature while evaluating alignment with these principles.

a. Human rights

The UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, identifies that education should ensure non-discrimination, inclusion, and equity for all learners, while empowering learners to learn and exercise their rights. Human rights education should be integrated across all subjects and contextualised within students' lived experiences. Additionally, it highlights that education should foster critical thinking, multi-perspectivity, and historical objectivity, enabling students to understand past injustices, colonialism, and their contemporary implications. This includes fostering critical views of, and supporting the struggle against, colonialism and neo-colonialism in all their forms and manifestations. Education should equip learners with the ability to demand and exercise their rights according to global human rights frameworks and engage in democratic participation, while reinforcing universal values of peace, justice, and human dignity.

In light of these principles, this section assesses whether the PA curriculum integrates human rights across subjects, promotes non-discrimination and inclusion, and enables learners to critically engage with historical injustice and contemporary rights claims.

Earlier comparative analyses conducted prior to the most recent PA curriculum reforms point to the presence of human-rights-related values in the Palestinian curriculum. For example, Adwan, Bar-Tal & Wexler (2016, p. 4) note that the Palestinian Ministry of Education explicitly emphasises “*human values such as freedom, justice, and equality*” as core educational aims. While these values were often embedded within national narratives, their inclusion provides important context for later findings that document a more explicit and structured engagement with human rights education in PA textbooks. The 2020 PA textbooks demonstrate an enhanced focus on human rights education, incorporating chapters specifically on human rights and contextualising national issues within a broader global political framework. For example, the Grade 6 social science textbook, published in 2020, incorporates an entire chapter titled ‘Human Rights’ (حقوق الإنسان, Huqūq al-Insān) to discuss the concept and its key characteristics (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021). Across the curriculum, human rights are framed as “*universal, interdependent, and inalienable*” (p. 49), with frequent reference to international human rights instruments. Social studies textbooks in particular draw on conventions such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and give sustained attention to the rights of women, children, and persons with disabilities, indicating alignment with international human rights frameworks (Georg Eckert Institute,

2021). Human rights education is integrated across multiple disciplines, including social studies, religion, Arabic language, history, and geography, with increasing complexity through academic progression. Reviews find that the PA curriculum emphasises both rights and corresponding responsibilities, covering civil, economic, social, cultural, and political rights comprehensively (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021; Alayan & Riley, 2023).

With respect to women's rights, earlier studies noted that gender representation in Palestinian Arabic-language textbooks was present but largely framed through traditional roles (Abu Ayyash, 2006). Subsequent curriculum reforms appear to have strengthened the inclusion of gender considerations (see Box 1). Quantitative analyses of the 2018/2019 curriculum show consistent incorporation of gender-related standards, particularly the use of gender-sensitive language across subjects, indicating measurable progress in inclusive representation over time. Even so, the depth of engagement with structural gender inequalities remains uneven (Elyan & Al-Doulat, 2021).

Box 1: Example of an activity that addresses misconceptions about women's rights

This example illustrates how human rights – particularly gender equality and non-discrimination – are explicitly addressed within the PA curriculum:

In an Islamic Education Grade 12 textbook from 2018, an activity presents historical female figures like Eve, Khadijah, and Sumayya as examples of women's esteemed position. The activity explains, "*Islam does not differentiate between woman and man*" but rather "*treats women with greater fairness*" and "*equates her with men in terms of humanity, rights and responsibilities.*" Students are asked to consider how they would convince others that denying women rights "*does not represent Islam*", referencing Qur'anic text: "*The believers, men and women, are allies of one another*" (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021, p. 55).

The Georg Eckert Institute report (2021) identifies how human rights are mentioned in textbooks with respect to the following (p. 48):

- *“Basic human rights:* Right to liberty; Right to equality; Right to freedom of expression; Right to freedom of religion; Right to nationality; Right to protection against forced migration; and Right to self-determination.
- *Rights according to Geneva Conventions:* Right to protection of civilians in times of war; and Right to protection of property in the event of armed conflict.
- *Other rights formulated in different international declarations:* Right to protection; Right to food and nutrition; Right to energy; Right to a safe environment; and Right to water and sanitation.”

The 2021 George Eckert Institute's analysis of PA textbooks shows that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is examined through a human rights lens. Around half of the human rights references in the 2019 textbooks relate to conflict-specific issues, including freedom of movement and mobility, children's rights to safety and protection, right to education, and rights of detainees in Israeli prisons. These discussions are supported by references to international conventions and the framework of international law, reflecting a commitment to universal human rights standards. In most cases, textbook references to human rights violations are framed in relation to Israeli actions and policies, reflecting how the conflict is represented through a human rights

lens within the curriculum. As noted in the Georg Eckert Institute report (2021), these representations draw on international human rights conventions and legal frameworks when addressing issues such as freedom of movement, detention, and access to education.

More broadly, research on education in conflict-affected and politically-contested contexts highlights the risks associated with disconnects between curricular narratives and lived realities. Studies on history and civics education in Lebanon, for example, show how the absence of a shared historical narrative and the politicisation of curriculum content have contributed to fragmented understandings of the past and reduced trust in official educational narratives (Akar, 2012; Haugbølle, 2010). These findings suggest that attempts to underplay references to lived experiences of conflict may undermine the perceived credibility and relevance of textbooks for learners.

The analysis by the Georg Eckert Institute's (2021) finds that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is frequently framed through a human rights and self-determination lens that aligns with the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights. Textbooks situate the Palestinian national struggle within broader anti-colonial movements across the Arab world, emphasising the right to self-determination and the defence of homeland (Georg Eckert Report Institute, 2021). Palestinian identity is found to be consistently emphasised through patriotic imagery and content throughout the textbooks, following a nation-building educational approach focused on identity formation and historical continuity (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021; Alayan & Riley, 2023). According to the Georg Eckert Institute's review of PA history textbooks, global contexts and liberation movements are incorporated into the curriculum. The Georg Eckert Institute report (2021) notes that "*in a lesson about 'The International Position regarding National Liberation Movements', resistance is described as a 'right held by the people' according to international conventions*" (2021, p. 63). The texts argue that being a colonised group under occupation, Palestinians are justified in their resistance against occupying forces or colonial powers. An excerpt from the 2019 history textbook discusses the contentious nature of the "*right to resist*" and self-determination, noting that many states do not recognise such a right, yet the report infers from the conventions that this right is indeed applicable (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021, p. 63).

Comparative research across different national curricula suggests that when countries attempt to build united nations across post-conflict societies, these should be inclusive of all groups. For example, research of education systems in conflict-affected contexts, such as Israel-Palestine, Northern Ireland, and Turkey-Cyprus, point to the risk of developing dominant national identity that privileges a dominant group (Adwan, Bar-Tal & Wexler, 2016). In the Israeli case, studies of public-school history curricula indicate an emphasis on Jewish national continuity, including the conflation of Biblical and historical narratives to sustain collective memory across generations (Kisler, 2022). Within this history education context, Weintraub & Gibson (2025) show that ethical engagement with the Nakba is limited in scope, allowing acknowledgement of Palestinian suffering while constraining responsibility, historical causality, and Palestinian perspectives. In language education, parallel dynamics have been identified, whereby English language textbooks marginalise Palestinian representation and constrain the inclusion of Palestinian collective memory, privileging Western and Israeli cultural narratives (Awayed-Bishara, 2015; 2021).

Approaches to analysing human rights education in conflict-affected contexts emphasise the

distinction between universal normative frameworks and the ways in which rights are experienced, narrated, and understood in everyday life under conditions of structural violence and occupation (Tawil et al., 2004). IMPACT-se frames PA human rights education as selective and instrumental rather than universal. In its 2021 critique of the Georg Eckert Institute report, it argues that, although Georg Eckert Institute identifies a strong focus on human rights, these rights "*can hardly be thought to exist in any real-life situation outside the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and within that context it is exclusive to Palestinians*", with little attention to Israeli rights, Palestinian violations of rights, or violations of Palestinian rights by non-Israeli actors (IMPACT-se, 2021a, p. 2). It gives examples such as prisoners' rights being taught only in relation to Israeli prisons, the Geneva Conventions being invoked only in relation to Israeli military action, and the "*right to resist*" being conflated with human rights (p. 85). However, this critique itself reveals a narrow perspective: IMPACT-se treats the conflict-centred framing of rights as evidence of politicisation, while giving limited weight to the fact that human rights education in any context, and even more so in conflict-affected settings, should centre learners' backgrounds and lived experiences. In addition, creating curriculum, including textbooks, needs to foreground the relevant social, political, and economic context of the society and country.

A similar perspective appears in IMPACT-se's broader PA curriculum reviews. In *The 2020–21 Palestinian School Curriculum*, IMPACT-se acknowledges that newly added chapters and adjustments address human rights, gender equality, racial discrimination, freedom of speech, and the right to education, including Social Studies Grade 8 materials on gender and Social Studies Grade 9 materials on racial discrimination and rights (IMPACT-se, 2021b.) Yet it frames additions as compromised because they are applied to Israel-Palestine, arguing that lessons on the right to education "*stimulate conflict discourse*" by discussing Israeli restrictions on Palestinian education (p. 6). The 2025 review repeats this perspective. It assesses 290 textbooks and 71 teacher guides and concludes that the curriculum violates UNESCO-derived standards, with examples selected primarily being identified as related to violence, antisemitism, maps, gender, and removed peace references, rather than systematically assessing all human rights related content (IMPACT-se, 2025a). This suggests that IMPACT-se recognises human rights material but tends to interpret it through a lens of incitement of violence, rather than acknowledging the pedagogical function of human rights education in conflict-affected contexts.

By contrast, applying a conflict-sensitive curriculum analysis, Georg Eckert Institute (2021) identifies that the 2019 textbooks broadly advocate a universal conception of human rights and focus predominantly on Palestinian rights and documented human rights violations affecting Palestinians, typically attributed to Israeli actors. The Georg Eckert Institute report (2021) observes that this framing is closely linked to students' lived realities and is frequently supported by references to international conventions. At the same time, actions undertaken by Palestinian actors that could be interpreted as human rights violations are generally contextualised within broader narratives of liberation, and self-determination under conditions of prolonged military occupation, consistent with the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights.

According to the Georg Eckert Institute's analysis, the PA curriculum presents peaceful responses to human rights violations, including recourse to humanitarian assistance and international legal or diplomatic channels. Students are introduced to real-world applications

of international relations and human rights advocacy through engagement with UN Security Council statements and similar materials (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021). Overall, the evidence indicates substantial alignment with the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, though this alignment is constrained by structural conditions of prolonged occupation.

When assessed against the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, the findings in this section indicate that the PA curriculum gives sustained attention to the global and normative dimensions of human rights education. It integrates international legal frameworks, emphasises dignity and equality, and frames learners as rights-holders engaged in lawful and institutional forms of advocacy, reflecting clear alignment with UNESCO's principles.

b. Global citizenship education

The UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights (UNESCO, 2023a) identifies that curricula should integrate education for peace, international understanding, and global citizenship, equipping learners with critical thinking skills to analyse global issues and actively contribute to a just and sustainable world. It notes that history and social sciences should encourage multi-perspectivity, historical objectivity, and critical engagement with colonial legacies, reinforcing respect for cultural diversity and international cooperation. Curricula should provide inclusive and respectful representations of diverse cultures, beliefs, and worldviews, encouraging intercultural dialogue, tolerance, and coexistence. Teaching and learning materials should be free from stereotypes, discriminatory bias, or incitement to hatred (UNESCO, 2023a).

This section assesses alignment with UNESCO's integrated framework of Global Citizenship Education and Education for Sustainable Development, including peace education and inclusive representation. While the previous section focused on the legal and normative dimensions of human rights, this section examines how the curriculum fosters global awareness, intercultural understanding, and active citizenship beyond national frameworks.

In line with the UNESCO Recommendation on Education and for Peace and Human Rights, Georg Eckert Institute (2021) identifies that the 2017-2019 PA curriculum demonstrates a strong commitment to global citizenship education. The report identifies that textbooks emphasise fundamental values, including tolerance, mercy, forgiveness, dialogue, peace, and justice, while incorporating essential concepts of civil rights and citizen-state relationships. These values are core to global citizenship education.

The Georg Eckert Institute report (2021) finds that social studies textbooks acknowledge pluralism and unity as a cornerstone of the Palestinian political framework and promote active political engagement as part of citizenship education. It also identifies that the PA curriculum highlights the crucial role of inclusion and harmony within society. It draws attention to the adverse effects of discord and stresses the importance of understanding and respecting diverse viewpoints to maintain societal harmony. The report shows that the PA textbooks cover diversity and intercultural understanding through various themes and representations, both explicitly and implicitly through text and imagery. This aligns with independent, curriculum-wide content analyses, including a peer-reviewed evaluation of the Palestinian

curriculum against the SDGs,^{vii} which finds that human rights principles, democratic participation, and citizenship-related norms are consistently present across subject guidelines, albeit with substantial variation in depth, balance, and thematic emphasis (Elyan & Al-Doulat, 2021). Comparative analyses of Palestinian and Israeli textbooks emphasise that while Palestinian curricular narratives are predominantly national and shaped by conditions of conflict and occupation, they do not systematically dehumanise ‘the other’, and should be understood within the reality of military occupation, rather than as evidence of incitement (Adwan, Bar-Tal & Wexler, 2016). This is reflected, for example, in specific curricular content, such as Grade 8 human rights lessons on ‘*Humane Treatment for All*’, grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and Grade 9 units introducing students to the International Court of Justice as a global mechanism for justice and accountability, which frame citizenship and rights in universal and international terms, rather than exclusively national ones (Albhaisi, 2017).

According to the Georg Eckert Institute, the 2017-2019 curriculum reform introduced significant additions, including new chapters exploring human rights and active citizenship. These additions examine the relationships between citizens and public spaces, as well as interactions between citizens and government. Throughout various subjects, the textbooks present an inclusive view of society, featuring respectful representations of diverse social, cultural, and religious groups. This diversity is reflected through variations in race, gender, and physical abilities, emphasising equal access to facilities, services, and participation in public life (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021). These aspects were implemented in the 2018/2019 curriculum, which demonstrates how global citizenship and sustainable development principles are embedded at the level of national standards. The analysis finds that all SDG-responsive national standards – covering the 17 SDGs – are formally incorporated, albeit with uneven levels of representation across goals. In particular, SDG 4 (quality education: 28.5%) and SDG 16 (peace, justice, democracy, and human rights: 7.1%) receive the strongest emphasis, with social studies accounting for the largest share of citizenship- and rights-related content (47.4%) (Elyan & Al-Doulat, 2021). These findings indicate integration of global citizenship education, particularly in relation to civic participation, peace, and justice, though coverage of broader sustainability themes remains more limited.

Religious education materials in textbooks, both Christian and Islamic, consistently emphasise interfaith dialogue, coexistence, and tolerance (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021). Excerpts from textbooks state that Palestine is an Arab country and part of the Arab world, that the Palestinian people are part of the Arab nation, and that “*Islam is the official religion of Palestine but extends respect and sanctity to all monotheistic religions*” (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021, p. 43). Islamic education textbooks specifically address moderation, avoidance of extremism, and religious freedom. In addition, Arabic language textbooks demonstrate Islam's emphasis on “*tolerance and forgiveness towards an oppressor even when revenge is possible and that this behaviour can prevent feelings of hatred from developing*” (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021, p. 41 - see Box 2). The textbooks for Islamic education also include lessons aiming to equip children in identifying the different aspects of moderation in Islam and ways to tackle forms of extremism in faith, behaviour, and thought. This emphasis is further reinforced through self-critical historical exemplars, such as an Islamic education lesson recounting Caliph Omar's acknowledgment of injustice toward an elderly Jewish man living under Muslim governance, which is used to exemplify Islam's obligation to uphold dignity and social responsibility, irrespective of religious affiliation (Adwan, Bar-Tal & Wexler, 2016). The 2019 curriculum

reform notably expanded the representation of Christian Palestinians (Alayan & Riley, 2023), with Christian education materials highlighting the church's role in promoting justice, peace, freedom, dialogue, tolerance, and human dignity, and the prohibition of killing and rejection of all forms of abuse (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021).

Box 2: Example of forgiveness in the 2019 The Arabic Language textbook (Grade 5, Unit 11, p. 10)

The Georg Eckert Institute (2021) report includes an example of content within the textbooks focusing on forgiveness. Based on the text below from the 2019 Arabic Language textbook (Grade 5, Unit 11), the report notes that: *“Arabic language textbooks discuss tolerance and forgiveness, for example, in [a] passage from year 5. The text shows how Islam emphasises the importance of tolerance and forgiveness towards an oppressor even when revenge is possible, and that this behaviour can prevent”* (p. 42).

Grammar Activity (sorting nouns and verbs into a table): Forgiveness is a noble feeling that results in tolerance, even if the victim is able to harm the oppressor. Forgiveness in this sense is a noble moral characteristic indicating good social behaviour, and our tolerant religion encourages forgiving in order to prevent hatred (extracted from Georg Eckert Report, 2021, p. 42).

In contrast to this evidence, which identifies that the textbooks incorporate elements of global citizenship education, interfaith dialogue, and tolerance, IMPACT-se, in its 2025 report on the PA abridged curriculum, comments that *“students are not being taught peace, tolerance, or pathways to coexistence. Instead, they are immersed in an education that glorifies violence, justifies terrorism, and ensures that the next generation continues to be shaped by hatred and conflict”* (IMPACT-se, 2025b, p. 94). This conclusion is illustrated through a series of examples that the report interprets as incompatible with global citizenship education. These include textbook portrayals of historical events, such as the 1929 Palestine riots – framed as forms of *“armed resistance”* and described as a *“natural and legitimate”* right (IMPACT-se, 2025a, p. 8), as well as representations of figures such as Dalal al-Mughrabi, who led the 1978 coastal road attack, as a *“hero”* and role model (p. 8). Other examples include references to the 1972 Munich attack, in which 11 members of Israel’s Olympic team were killed, described as an *“operation”* targeting *“Zionist interests overseas”* (p. 8), the use of maps that omit Israel (p. 10), and exercises in subjects such as mathematics and language that incorporate themes of martyrs and Palestinian prisoners. In addition, IMPACT-se highlights lessons on international law and human rights, such as prisoners’ rights, freedom of movement, and the right to education, but argues that these are framed primarily through Palestinian experiences and therefore do not constitute universal or globally oriented citizenship education (IMPACT-se, 2021b, p. 16).

However, the interpretation of these examples reflects a particular reading of global citizenship education that privileges depoliticised narratives of coexistence over rights-based and justice-oriented frameworks. Many of the examples cited, such as references to the right to resist grounded in international conventions, or discussions of restrictions on movement and access to education, can also be understood as attempts to situate global norms within concrete political and legal contexts, a recognised feature of global citizenship education. Similarly, the use of conflict-related examples across subjects may reflect the integration of lived realities

into pedagogy, rather than their substitution for universal values, while recognising that some of these depictions could be distressing for students.

The conclusion of IMPACT-se diverges from the findings of other peer-reviewed studies, which consistently identify the presence – albeit uneven and contextually constrained – of global citizenship, peace education, and human-rights norms within the PA curriculum, particularly in relation to SDG 16 on peaceful and inclusive societies (Elyan & Al-Doulat, 2021; George Eckert, 2021; Moughrabi, 2001).

The analysis in this section indicates that the PA curriculum demonstrates substantial alignment with the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights. This is in relation to global citizenship education and inclusive representation, in the sense that core global citizenship and peace education dimensions (such as the promotion of tolerance, coexistence, intercultural understanding, democratic participation, and respect for human dignity) are consistently integrated across subjects and supported by references to international frameworks and SDG-aligned standards. Evidence presented in this section shows the integration of human rights principles, democratic participation, and citizenship-related norms. The section identifies that, overall, the textbooks promote tolerance, coexistence, political engagement, and respect for cultural and religious diversity, while recognising that these principles are presented within the context of ongoing conflict.

c. Non-discrimination, equality and inclusion

The UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights identifies that education should actively promote non-discrimination, equality, and respect for human dignity, while combating racism, xenophobia, hate speech, and all forms of discrimination and violence. Teaching and learning materials should foster intercultural understanding, mutual respect, and social cohesion, and encourage dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution. Curricula should recognise and value cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity, ensuring that representations of different groups support inclusion rather than exclusion. This requires pursuing historical objectivity; promoting multi-perspectivity based on science, research and evidence; fostering critical views of and supporting the struggle against colonialism and neo-colonialism; sustaining a duty of memory; rejecting denial and distortion of proven historical events (UNESCO, 2023a).

To assess alignment with these principles, the following sections examine non-discrimination in two key domains of curricular representation as these are central sites through which inclusion, exclusion, identity, and belonging are constructed in education systems, particularly in conflict-affected contexts. These are: (1) religious and political representation, and (2) territorial and cartographic representation. These domains also reflect broader contestations around historical narratives, territorial claims, and the interpretation of past and present forms of occupation and possession.

Non-discrimination in religious and political representation

Non-Discrimination along religious and political lines involves distinguishing between belief systems and political ideas or ideologies, in order to avoid attributing oppression, injustice, or conflict to any particular religion, and to prevent collective attribution of responsibility or blame, consistent with international non-discrimination norms. This distinction supports respect for

religious diversity while allowing for critical engagement with political ideologies and their role in historical and contemporary conflicts. Extant research indicates that Palestinian curricula have consistently differentiated between Judaism as a religion and Zionism as a political ideology, framing the conflict as political rather than religious (Alayan & Riley, 2023). Recent curriculum revisions further maintain and systematise this distinction (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021).

According to the Georg Eckert Institute report (2021), several narratives that previously attributed hostile actions to 'Jews' as a collective group were either removed or reframed to narrow attribution and reduce collective religious labelling. For example, a teaching unit in Islamic education that linked negative characteristics attributed to Jews in early Islam was substantially altered in the 2020 textbook revisions. In addition, other passages in religious education were revised to narrow attribution by referring to specific historical actors or political contexts rather than to Jews as a religious group, thereby reducing the potential for collective religious stereotyping (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021). In other instances, references to Jews were replaced with the term 'Zionist occupation', signalling a shift away from religious labelling toward a more explicitly political framing of the conflict. In the most recent PA curriculum, references to Jews as a collective group are limited and increasingly framed in ways that distinguish religious identity from political views. Where the term 'Jews' appears, it is largely confined to religious education textbooks and is often situated within broader discussions of monotheistic faiths (George Eckert Institute, 2021). Judaism is presented alongside Islam and Christianity as one of the three Abrahamic monotheistic religions. Christian education textbooks adopt a neutral tone and largely refrain from reproducing negative theological stereotypes historically associated with New Testament interpretations (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021). Visual and textual elements accompanying textbooks were also modified in later editions. Materials that previously included more confrontational imagery or explicit religious attribution were revised or removed in the 2019 and subsequent editions (see Box 3 and Box 4 for example revisions to textbooks from 2017 to 2019).

Box 3: Change in image in Lesson 14, Islamic Religion Grade 5, Unit 11 textbook, from 2017 to 2019

The illustration accompanying Lesson 14 (The Female Companions of the Messenger of Allah) was altered between the 2017 and 2019 editions (see Figure 1). The earlier edition depicted a young woman carrying a sword in an arid landscape, while the later edition portrays a cloaked female figure on horseback against the same background. The lesson introduces early Islamic figures such as Sumayyah bint Khayyāṭ and Safiyya bint Abd al-Muttalib, situating the imagery within a historical-religious context rather than a contemporary political one. The visual framing draws on traditional iconography of early Islamic history, portraying female companions as morally exemplary and historically significant figures, rather than linking them to present-day conflict narratives (George Eckert Institute, 2021). This representation also engages with broader discussions of women’s roles in Islamic history, challenging simplified or exclusively passive portrayals of women. This example is not intended to be representative of the textbooks as a whole but is included to illustrate how specific revisions reflect shifts in representation, particularly in relation to gender and the contextual framing of historical-religious narratives.

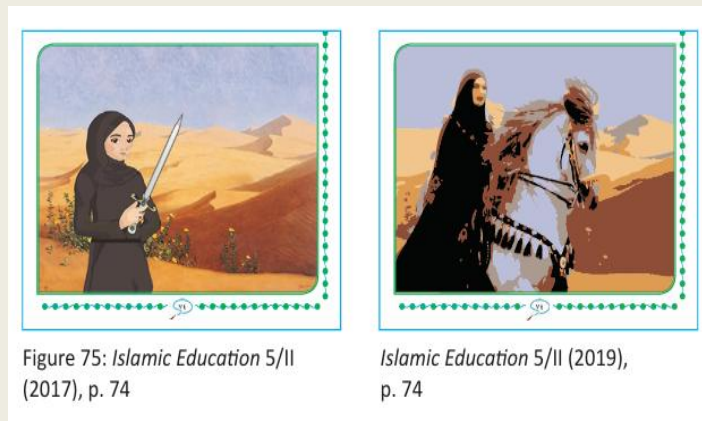


Figure 1: The Female Companions of the Messenger of Allah

Source: Adapted from Georg Eckert Institute, 2021.

Box 4: Examples of revisions to textbooks between 2017-2019

As part of ongoing annual revision processes (particularly in the 2017-2019 textbooks), content identified as problematic in earlier analyses of the Palestinian textbooks has subsequently revised. This can be grouped into three main categories. These categories reflect a synthesis of findings across the reviewed literature and are intended to illustrate key patterns of revision, rather than provide a comprehensive or representative account of all textbook changes.

1. Defusing escalatory language and conflict references

- Islamic education texts have softened calls for dedication/full commitment to a cause in a nationalistic sense (iftadā), removing any potential meaning of sacrificing one's life to protect their country.
- References to 'defending' religious sites have been changed to 'protecting' them, broadening the Palestinian identity beyond Islam to be more inclusive of Christians.
- Mathematics and science problems previously referencing Israeli-Palestinian violence (e.g. a settler shooting at passing cars) have been revised or removed, replacing them with other topics such as hunting or land calculations.

2. Revisions to the portrayal of resistance figures and armed struggle

- Dalal al-Mughrabi's portrayal has been altered by replacing her military uniform photo with a civilian one, and in some cases, her name has been removed or replaced.
- Protagonists from the armed Palestinian resistance and pre-1949 Palestinian independence movement have been removed or anonymised in some Islamic education texts.
- A teaching unit in Islamic Education Grade 5/Unit 1 on bravery in earlier editions explicitly referenced the two Intifadas and named individual fighters. In the 2020 edition, this section was substantially revised, shifting the emphasis toward struggle "*by pen and tongue*" and framing resistance in non-violent terms, with no mention of violent combatants.

3. Reduction of negative stereotypes and generalisations about Jewish communities

- The story of a deceitful Jewish woman attempting to poison Prophet Muhammad was removed.
- Some exercises and texts replaced 'Jews' with 'the Zionist occupation', reducing generalisations about Jewish groups.
- A caricature depicting a digger, marked with a Star of David to signify Jewish or Israeli identity, tunnelling beneath the Temple Mount, was removed from Social Studies Grade 7/Unit I.

Source: Adapted from Georg Eckert Institute, 2021.

These revisions suggest a pattern of efforts to moderate representations of armed struggle and limit generalised or potentially discriminatory portrayals, with indications of closer alignment with international standards on non-discrimination and conflict-sensitive education. However, as discussed earlier, attempts to remove or sanitise references to lived experiences

of conflict may undermine the perceived credibility and relevance of textbooks for learners in conflict-affected contexts.

By contrast, IMPACT-se (2025a) suggests that Palestinian textbooks and curriculum work against the principles of equality and diversity. Box 5 highlights an example of this from a Grade 11 history lesson.

Box 5: Example of anti-colonial narrative presented as antisemitic by IMPACT-se

IMPACT-se (2025a, p. 150) provided the example of Grade 11 History Studies lesson on colonialism to indicate that the Palestinian textbook was purporting antisemitic content (Figure 2). It states how the cartoon presented in Figure 3 “*appears as part of a chart which showcases different forms of colonialism; next to an item titled “cultural colonialism,” which is described as “the most dangerous form of colonialism,” the textbook places a small monochrome cartoon image showing two arms, one brandishing the Israeli flag and the other an American flag, holding the globe together. The cartoon heavily draws upon traditional antisemitic imagery, which would often depict Jewish people holding the globe to symbolize Jews’ excessive global influence and greed. In the textbook’s case, this antisemitic trope is employed to convey an anti-colonialist critique of global culture.*”

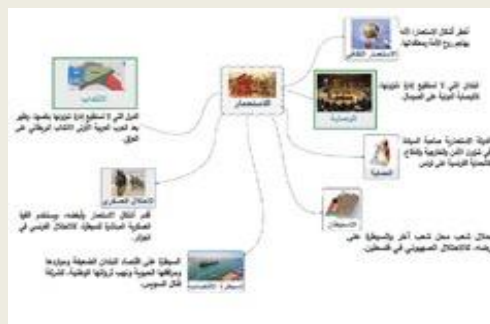


Figure 2: Forms of colonialism



Figure 3: Settler colonialism

IMPACT-se (2025a; p.150) then further gives the example of the image presented in Figure 4 which is described as “*replacing one people with another, and taking over their land*” and is directly equated with “*the Zionist Occupation in Palestine*”; this is visualized by an illustration of a Palestinian flag being trampled by masses of people” as an example of an antisemitism.



Figure 4: Settlements

The report interprets these visual representations as invoking “*antisemitic tropes*” associated with “*Jewish global control and domination*”, arguing that the imagery reinforces negative portrayals of Jews. However, it is notable that the textbook excerpts and images described in the report do not explicitly mention Jews or Judaism. Instead, they refer to Israel, Zionism, and colonialism. This highlights the importance of distinguishing between antisemitism and political critique of the Israeli state or Zionism.

Similarly, in another example, IMPACT-se (2025a, p. 173) cites the definition of “*settler colonialism*” as the replacement of one people by another, explicitly applied to “*the Zionist occupation in Palestine*”, accompanied by imagery suggesting displacement and domination. These examples are used to support the broader claim that the curriculum promotes exclusionary narratives and undermines principles of tolerance, coexistence, and respect for diversity.

However, this interpretation raises important questions about the nature of critical thinking in textbooks. The examples are referring to colonisation and occupation, and not directly attributing this to a particular religion or group. Therefore, the IMPACT-se critique fails to recognise that the textbooks are seeking to create understanding and critical awareness of colonisation and occupation in a particular historical context, as the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights recognises. Taken together, this suggests that IMPACT-se may overextend its claims by framing such content as inherently antisemitic. In addition, it is important to note that this is a protracted conflict setting, so the framing will be influenced by the long-standing tensions and reaction to occupation.

In another example IMPACT-se (2025a) draws on an example from the ‘Holy Qur’an and Its Sciences’, Grade 11 (Example 92), in a lesson titled ‘The Corruption of the Children of Israel and their Punishment.’ The lesson presents Qur’anic verses (Al-Isra 17:4–6) describing instances of فساد (corruption) by بني إسرائيل (the Children of Israel), which students are expected to identify and interpret. IMPACT-se argues that “*in the summary of verses from Al-Israa Surah, which discuss the corruption of the Israelites, students are taught that the Israelites killed prophets, distorted the original Torah given by God, and ignored its laws. This corroborates the antisemitic stereotype of Jews as deicidal and disobedient to God.*” (IMPACT-se, 2025a, p. 170). However, the lesson itself refers to بني إسرائيل (the Children of Israel) from the Qur’an as a sacred text. Thus, the interpretation of this lesson needs to see the contextual, historical moment of the narrative, and not extend its inference beyond its application.

Research on Israeli public education has similarly examined the relationship between national identity and historical narrative. Gilheany (2013) finds that while teaching about “*the other*” is limited across both the Palestinian and Israeli contexts, Palestinian teachers frequently emphasise Muslim-Christian coexistence and explicitly frame their opposition as directed toward the occupation rather than toward Judaism as a religion (Gilheany, 2013, p. 507). Analyses of Israeli state-authored textbooks illustrate how nationally bounded narratives, when embedded in curricular materials, marginalise Palestinian history, privilege Zionist perspectives, and make historical claims about possession and location based on particular interpretations of the past, contributing to the production of unequal citizenship for the Palestinian-Arab minority residing inside Israel (Nasser & Nasser, 2008).

The evidence presented in this section indicates that the PA curriculum demonstrates substantial alignment with UNESCO principles of non-discrimination, equality, and respect for human dignity in religious representation. Revisions documented in the 2020/2021 editions have reduced collective attribution to Jewish communities, removed or reframed content that risked stereotyping, and strengthened the distinction between religious identity and political ideology. These changes contribute to combating discriminatory representation, limiting language or imagery that could foster prejudice.

Non-discrimination in territorial and cartographic representations

In line with UNESCO’s emphasis on non-discrimination, inclusion, and respect for cultural diversity as well as sustaining a duty of memory, this section examines how territorial and cartographic representations in textbooks recognise diverse identities and perspectives, and whether such depictions foster inclusion, mutual respect, and social cohesion (UNESCO, 2023a).

Territorial representations in education systems operating within protracted and asymmetrical conflicts often reflect dominant national narratives shaped by unresolved sovereignty disputes and unequal power relations (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000). In particular, these representations are closely tied to competing historical claims over territory, where narratives of origin, belonging, and legitimacy – often linked to ideas of ancestry, territory, and historical continuity (Smith, 2010) – are used to justify possession and political authority. In such contexts, the depiction of borders, place names, and political actors becomes closely tied to collective memory and identity formation. From the perspective of UNESCO’s principles of non-discrimination and respect for diversity, the central question is whether these representations promote exclusion or hostility toward particular groups, or whether they express political contestation without inciting discrimination.

According to George Eckert Institute (2021), Palestinian textbooks rarely mention Israel by name, instead primarily using terms like ‘Zionist occupation’, ‘the occupation’, or ‘the occupying forces’. This is also identified in multiple IMPACT se reports (2019; 2022a; 2023; 2025a; 2025b). State institutions are typically described using the adjective ‘Zionist’ and occasionally ‘Israeli’. This terminology choice can be interpreted in two ways: either as a reference to specific occupation practices, or as a means to question Israel’s legitimacy as a state (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021). This terminology frames Israel primarily through institutional and military structures associated with occupation, rather than as a neighbouring state or a political actor in diplomatic terms. Extant research on curriculum reform in conflict-affected contexts suggests that territorial naming, political terminology, and the representation

of 'the other' function as mechanisms for constructing collective identity and asserting narrative sovereignty. Alayan and Riley (2023), drawing on textbook analysis and interviews with curriculum planners, interpret the 2018/2019 revisions as an extension of Palestinian nation-building and self-determination. They argue that the omission of explicit references to Israel reflects a deliberate strategy to define 'the other' through the lens of occupation and settler colonialism rather than as a neighbouring sovereign state. In this framing, Israel is presented primarily as a Zionist occupation or settler colonial structure, while Zionism is explicitly differentiated from Judaism. The curriculum thereby situates political conflict within anti-colonial discourse rather than religious antagonism. Alayan and Riley further note that this narrative consolidation paradoxically mirrors dynamics observed in Israeli curricula, which "*strives to create a collective memory solely based on European Jewish history*" (2023, p. 258), and where Palestinian national identity is often marginalised or presented through securitised frames.

While both systems exhibit forms of narrative consolidation, both also seek to project narratives of national unity, consolidation, and statehood through curricular materials. Scholars emphasise that the Palestinian curriculum operates within materially different structural conditions. Several scholars interpret the strategy of omitting explicit state recognition and framing Israel primarily as an occupying power as shaped by prolonged occupation and political asymmetry, rather than as solely ideological positioning (Nasser & Nasser, 2008; Alayan, 2017; Abuhussein, 2024). Israeli state-authored textbooks have similarly been criticised for limited or marginal treatment of Palestinian national identity and territorial claims, often omitting Palestinian place names or presenting Arab communities primarily through security or demographic frames, thereby reinforcing selective historical narratives and hierarchies of belonging (Culp, 2018; Peled-Elhanan, 2012).

Beyond terminology, territorial representation in textbooks is also conveyed through cartographic depictions. Maps play a central role in shaping historical memory and spatial belonging, particularly in contexts of contested sovereignty. From a UNESCO perspective, the critical issue is whether such cartographic framing promotes hostility toward a people or religion, or whether it reflects a historically grounded national narrative without targeting protected identity groups.

The Colonna Report (United Nations, 2024a), in its 2023/2024 review of the PA textbooks, identified issues relating to using outdated maps that omitted Israel's presence, designating Jerusalem as Palestine's capital, misidentifying Israeli cities as Palestinian, and employing politically-charged terminology such as "*Zionist occupation*" when referring to Israel (United Nations, 2024a, p. 29). According to George Eckert Institute's analysis of textbooks (2021), the representation of Israel in maps within the PA curriculum is limited, though some elements suggest a degree of recognition.

IMPACT-se (2025a) gives an example from the 'Geography and Modern and Contemporary History of Palestine', Grade 10, which presents the entire territory of historic Palestine as a single geographic unit, and in which Israel does not appear by name on the map. Cities that are today located within internationally-recognised Israeli territory, such as Jaffa, Haifa, Safed, Tiberias, Acre, and Nazareth, are included within this space without any political boundary demarcation or distinction. While the map does not explicitly state that these cities are Palestinian, they are included within a map labelled فلسطين (Palestine). In other IMPACT-se

reports (2019, 2021; 2023; 2025b) similar issues of not mentioning Israeli territories in maps have been raised.

Alayan (2017; 2018b) indicates that while most maps omit the State of Israel, other maps and images include the Green Line and West Bank settlements, indicating a level of contested acknowledgement. This illustrates the fragmented nature of PA-administered territories, and further exhibits a de facto recognition of the state of Israel (Alayan, 2017, p. 112). The 2025b IMACT-se report, however, interprets the absence of Israel from these maps as “*erasing the country in defiance of international law and political reality*” (p. 299). Yet in its 2022 report on the representation of Arabs and Palestinians in Israeli textbooks, it does not apply the same standard when Israeli textbooks omit Palestinian territory (IMPACT-se, 2022b). In addition, the 2017-2019 PA textbooks acknowledge key historical and political events involving Israel, such as the 1947 UN Partition Plan (see Box 6), the Green Line, the 1993 letter of recognition of Israel from the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), as well as aspects of Jewish history in Palestine (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021).

Box 6: The United Nations 1947, General Assembly Resolution 181, Partition Plan, 2019 History textbook, Grade 11, Unit 11

This example illustrates how textbook activities engage students in interpreting historical events through the combined use of maps and visual materials. This example is not intended to be representative of the textbooks as a whole but an illustrative case to demonstrate how themes identified in the literature, particularly conflict representation and the use of visual materials to support historical interpretation, are reflected in specific textbook activities.

نشاط (٤ / ١): نلاحظ الخريطة، والصورة، ثم نجيب عن الأسئلة التي تليها:

خريطة (٢): قرار تقسيم فلسطين ١٩٤٧م

◀ نناقش مضموني الخريطة، والصورة.

◀ نستنتج العلاقة بين الخريطة، والصورة.

This activity (Figure 5), found in a Grade 11 history textbook (p. 49), asks students to examine a map alongside an image depicting the displacement of Palestinians in 1948. The task prompts students to discuss the content of the map and accompanying illustrations and to analyse the relationship between them, encouraging interpretation of visual and historical narratives. The title reads ‘The map of the UN Partition Plan under General Assembly Resolution 181’. The map’s legend identifies Israel as the ‘Zionist project (Jewish state)’ in blue, the Arab state (Palestinian territory) in yellow, and ‘Jerusalem and Bethlehem’ in pink as an international administration (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021, p. 79).

Figure 5: History activity

While the dominant national perspective in Palestinian textbooks aligns with broader narratives of dispossession, some content suggests an acknowledgment of historical and diplomatic realities. A key example is the inclusion of the 1993 letter of recognition from PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, which appears in the 2019 textbook 'Geography of Palestine and its Modern and Contemporary History 10/II'. This document explicitly states the PLO's recognition of Israel's right to exist in peace and security, alongside its acceptance of UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, which form the basis of the Oslo peace process (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021).

The maps in Palestinian textbooks present a symbolic representation of historic Palestine that generally does not include the State of Israel or contemporary Israeli cities such as Tel Aviv. Arab-populated cities within present-day Israel, such as Akko and Haifa, are depicted as part of historical Palestine within the territorial boundaries of the British Mandate period (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021). This cartographic framing reflects a historical national perspective rooted in Mandate-era geography, rather than contemporary state borders. In this context, Alayan and Riley (2023, p. 245), based on key informant interviews with the Palestinian Ministry of Education teachers and staff, quote a respondent saying "... *we teach about historical Palestine and why would we include Israel in this?*", suggesting that the maps reflect a historical perspective. Another respondent remarked "*why [do] we have to mention Israel in our textbooks when Israel never mentions us?*" This aligns with broader critiques that Israeli curricula often omit Palestinian territories from maps (Peled-Elhanan, 2012). Analyses of Israeli history textbooks document how the omission or marginalisation of Palestinian presence and historical experience functions as a mechanism for shaping territorial narratives and collective memory, thereby limiting the scope of multicultural and democratic education (Culp, 2018).

Maps in PA textbooks include depictions related to spatial transformations, land confiscation, and settlement expansion, often framed in line with international law, reinforcing territorial claims. These representations can also be understood in relation to what Masalha (2015) conceptualises as 'memoricide' – the systematic erasure and replacement of indigenous historical memory through practices such as renaming, mapping, and the re-inscription of space. Masalha (2015) suggests that cartography and toponymy are not neutral, but are deeply embedded in power relations, shaping how land, history, and identity are remembered or obscured. In this sense, the inclusion of maps in Palestinian textbooks should not be reduced to a 'narrative' position, but understood as engaging with a longer history in which Palestinian presence has been subject to erasure and reconfiguration. Further, the PA's approach reflects long-standing disappointment with the Oslo peace process, which failed to achieve Palestinian independence. As such, the literature interprets these curricular choices as reflecting ongoing political contestation and stalled state-building processes (Alayan & Riley, 2023).

Collectively, the linguistic and cartographic representations examined in this section reflect a nationally grounded narrative shaped by unresolved sovereignty and prolonged political contestation. While these representations prioritise Palestinian historical and territorial claims, the inclusion of diplomatic documents and references to internationally recognised frameworks indicates awareness of contemporary legal and political realities. Under UNESCO's Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights on non-discrimination and respect for diversity, the key consideration is whether such representations

exclude or negatively portray particular identity groups or whether they remain within the realm of political-historical contestation. The evidence reviewed suggests that the framing primarily engages questions of sovereignty and territorial claims rather than religious identity.

Overall, the textbook territorial representations demonstrate engagement with historical memory and self-determination, while offering constrained space for reciprocal political recognition. The implications of this approach needs to be understood within the broader context of protracted conflict, where educational narratives reflect contested sovereignty rather than systematic discrimination against cultural or religious diversity.

d. Conflict, memory, and multi-perspectivity

The UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights emphasises that education should reject incitement, discrimination, hate speech, and all forms of violence, while fostering critical thinking, multi-perspectivity, and dialogue for peaceful conflict resolution. It calls for the teaching of history and social sciences to enable learners to develop a critical understanding of the relationships between past, present, and future, including the legacies of violence, exclusion, colonialism, and discrimination and their ongoing effects. Education should sustain a duty of memory, rejecting the denial and distortion of proven historical events.

In this context, this section examines how the PA curriculum represents violence, armed struggle, and historical trauma, and whether such representations encourage critical reflection and peaceful engagement, or risk normalising or legitimising violence.

Framing and critical engagement with jihād and shuhadā'

This section examines whether references to jihād (struggle) and shuhadā' (martyrdom) are framed as religiously sanctioned violence or are contextualised within historical, political, and ethical debates, in line with UNESCO's emphasis on rejecting incitement and promoting critical engagement.

In Islamic and Christian theology, jihād encompasses a range of meanings, including personal moral striving (often described as the 'greater jihād'), intellectual and discursive striving through thought, teaching, and expression, as well as armed struggle under specific historical and legal conditions (sometimes referred to as the 'lesser jihād'). Early versions of the PA curriculum introduced in 2000, included references to jihād (struggle/striving) and shuhadā'/shahīd (martyrdom/martyr), presenting these concepts in both historical and contemporary contexts. Jihād was portrayed both as a form of peaceful and constructive striving and, in certain contexts, as armed struggle, with particular emphasis on the defence and liberation of Palestine. In addition, the concept of shuhadā' in Islamic tradition is not limited to death in battle but encompasses a broader range of deaths understood as martyrdom, a nuance that is often flattened in Western translations where 'martyrdom' is more narrowly associated with intentional death in combat. Historical periods such as the Crusades, Ottoman rule, the British Mandate, and the Israeli occupation were invoked to illustrate narratives of Palestinian struggle. In some instances, jihād and shuhadā'/shahīd were framed as both religious and national duties, including cases in which content appeared to glorify the use of violence in defence of the homeland (IPCRI, 2004).

According to George Eckert Institute’s analysis, in more recent textbook editions, particularly following the 2017–2019 review process, these terms continue to appear but with differentiated and contextualised meanings. Within religious education textbooks, jihād is presented as encompassing both spiritual struggle and armed combat, alongside explicit explanations of ethical constraints, including prohibitions against killing innocents and requirements for the humane treatment of prisoners (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021). For example, in Christian Education Grade 9 (2018) (Lesson 12, Commandments and Beatitudes), the concept of ‘spiritual jihād’ (جهاد روحي, jihād rūḥī) is defined as the devotion of one’s energies to study, education, love, and care for others (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021, p. 71). However, the report does not explicitly distinguish whether such engagement in combat is framed as physical defence within conditions of occupation, which is a distinction that may be relevant for interpreting how these concepts are situated in context. The Georg Eckert Institute report observes that, outside religious education, conflict-related meanings of key terms such as jihād tend to predominate, with usage often embedded in narratives of armed struggle rather than exclusively spiritual striving (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021). For example, it notes that the term shahīd (martyr) is “*almost exclusively used in the context of the conflict*” and is applied to two distinct categories: individuals killed while committing violent attacks and civilians who were themselves victims of violence (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021, p. 171). The Georg Eckert Institute report (2021) emphasises the contextual and theological complexity of these terms, noting that their political charge derives from the diversity of meanings they hold across Islamic and Christian theology. While religious education textbooks foreground ethical restrictions and spiritual dimensions, Georg Eckert Institute (2021) observes that when these terms appear in other subject areas, their use may carry escalatory potential, particularly where linked to the contemporary conflict – as a result, they may assume more immediate conflict-related connotations and resonate within ongoing political tensions. Illustrative examples of how the term jihād is presented in both Christian and Islamic education textbooks are provided in Box 7.

Box 7: Examples of the use of the term jihād in Christian and Islamic Education textbooks

This example illustrates how the concept of jihād is presented across different religious education contexts, including both Christian and Islamic materials, with meanings that extend beyond armed struggle to encompass moral and ethical dimensions. The example is not intended to be representative of the textbooks as a whole, but is an illustrative case to demonstrate how the concept of jihād is framed in moral and ethical terms within different educational contexts, rather than exclusively in relation to violence.

Example of the use of the term jihād in Christian Education Grade 9 textbook (2018) quoting the New Testament:

Paul said at the end of his life: *‘I have fought the good jihād. I have finished my full course and I’ve kept my heart full of faith. There is a righteous wreath waiting in heaven for me, and I know that my Lord will reward me on his day of righteous judgment.’* (2 Timothy 4:8). (Georg Eckert Report, 2021, p. 71)

Example of the use of the term jihād in Islamic Education Grade 8/ Unit I textbook (2018), Chapter dedicated to courage to tell the truth:

‘Courage to tell the Truth [Courage against Injustice]’: To tell the truth with courage is proof of one’s true faith and is one of the greatest and best types of jihād. A man asked the Prophet (peace be upon him): Which jihād is better? He said: the courage to tell the truth to an oppressive Sultan. (Georg Eckert Report, 2021, p. 71)

The variation of meaning presented in the PA textbooks suggests that the curriculum does not uniformly equate jihād with armed struggle, but presents the term within both spiritual and conflict-related frameworks. This suggests that a broader reading is needed of the concepts used in the textbooks. Comparative analyses of Palestinian religious education further show that religious narratives are frequently embedded within ethical and self-critical frameworks, reinforcing the view that the meaning of religious concepts is shaped by pedagogical context rather than fixed ideological intent (Adwan, Bar-Tal & Wexler, 2016).

By contrast, an IMPACT-se report (2023, p. 111) provides a narrower explanation to the use of the term ‘jihād’: *“‘Jihad for the liberation of Palestine’ is presented as a ‘private obligation for every Muslim’ in a subsection discussing practices and duties obligated by Sharia law. In the 2018 and 2019 editions, the passage stated that jihad for Allah was only a private obligation for every Muslim, and only in 2020 this was specified to liberating Palestine.”* This interpretation is carried forward in IMPACT-se’s later analysis (2025a), as shown in Boxes 8 and 9, which examine how similar concepts are applied in its reading of a Grade 1 literacy exercise.

Box 8: Assessment of IMPACT-se's interpretation of content referencing jihād and shuhadā'

This example illustrates how IMPACT-se interprets visual material in early-grade textbooks, and how such interpretations may differ.

A Grade 1 literacy exercise, assessed by IMPACT-se (2025a), features an image of a uniformed figure holding the Palestinian flag as part of a phonics activity teaching the letter yā' (ي) alongside other images (see Figure 6). IMPACT-se interprets this illustration as encouraging jihād (often translated as 'struggle') and shuhadā' (often translated as 'martyrdom'), characterising their portrayal in the curriculum as *"conveying to the youngest students that they should see themselves as taking part in a violent armed conflict and that the best use of their bodies is dedicating themselves to nationalistic goals using violence"* (p. 87). However, while the figure carries a weapon, the image is static and does not depict combat, confrontation, or martyrdom. There are no religious references, glorification of violence, or calls to action. The figure functions symbolically, representing national identity; as such, the soldier can be understood as a visible symbol of nationhood rather than as an explicit representation of violence.

According to the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, curricula should respect national identity and culture while promoting non-violence. Interpreting the image of the uniformed figure holding a flag in this exercise as encouragement of jihād or shuhadā' risks attributing meanings that are not explicitly supported by the content itself, or by recognised good practices in identity formation in nation building contexts. Comparable representations of national identity and collective memory are also found in other curricula worldwide, including Western contexts, where they are used to convey patriotism, civic duty, and historical narratives (VanSledright, 2008).



Figure 6: Our Beautiful Language, Grade 1, 2020-2025, p. 83.

Box 9: Assessment of IMPACT-se's interpretation of content as politicising science and mathematics

This example illustrates how IMPACT-se interprets examples in science textbooks as violent despite no evidence of violence in the text.

A Grade 10 example from a General Sciences book (2020-2025), assessed by IMPACT-se (2025a), describes “a young girl shoot[ing] a slingshot (a rock tied with a string) towards a specific target” (p. 24) and includes a picture of a girl shooting a slingshot (Figure 7). The example is used in a question asking the student to calculate the acceleration of the rock. IMPACT-se accompanies this example with a statement: “In Palestinian culture, slingshots are strongly associated with attacks on Israeli soldiers, a technique popularized during the time of the First Intifada (1987-1993)” (p. 24). This draws an association between the example in the textbook and the use of slingshots against Israeli soldiers, despite the example not including any reference to soldiers.



Figure 7: General Sciences (Vocational Stream) Grade 10, 2020-2025, p. 55 (IMPACT-se, 2025a, p. 24)

Representations in textbooks of sacrifice and dying in defence of one's country are not unique to the Palestinian context. National curricula in many Global North countries, such as the UK and the US, similarly frame military service in terms of civic duty, sacrifice, and national remembrance – for example, through the teaching of the First and Second World Wars and commemorative practices such as Remembrance Day, as well as through symbolic representations of sacrifice and loss (Haight et al., 2019). Differences in interpretation may therefore reflect broader discursive and cultural framings rather than inherent distinctions in curricular intent, including, as noted in some scholarship, the influence of wider cultural and political sensitivities – such as concerns around Islamophobia – in shaping how concepts like jihād and shuhadā' are translated and interpreted in Western contexts (Asad, 2003; Asfaruddin, 2007).

The evidence in this section demonstrates that references to jihād and shuhadā' in the PA curriculum are not presented as unqualified calls to violence, but are embedded within

theological and historical contextualisation. In line with the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, the key criterion is whether such content rejects incitement and enables critical engagement with conflict and its legacies. Across the material examined, these concepts are predominantly situated within explanatory and reflective narratives – particularly in religious education – where they are framed through moral reasoning, doctrinal debate, and historical context, rather than as direct incitement or mobilisation.

At the same time, the presence of conflict-related meanings in certain subject areas reflects the curriculum's engagement with the historical and contemporary realities it addresses, including experiences of violence, loss, and displacement. In this respect, the curriculum operates within UNESCO's framework of a 'duty of memory', in which references to conflict and sacrifice are incorporated as part of historical understanding rather than as endorsements of violence.

Framing and critical engagement with conflict and resistance narratives

This section examines whether representations of conflict and resistance narratives are framed as historically contextualised elements of national struggle or risk normalising or legitimising violence, in line with UNESCO's emphasis on rejecting incitement, fostering multi-perspectivity, and promoting critical engagement with conflict.

Social studies textbooks from 2017–2019 frame violence primarily within a narrative of national resistance to Israeli occupation. In this context, violence is presented through descriptions of physical, military, and structural forms associated with the occupation, including practices such as settlements and checkpoints. According to the Georg Eckert Institute report (2021, p. 172), *"The portrayal of violence towards Palestinians is primarily descriptive and context-specific, whether in regard to physical, military violence against Palestinians or whether in depictions of structural or spatial violence (settlements, checkpoints, barriers). The opponent is described as aggressive and hostile. The language, however, is for the most part objective in tone and avoids inflammatory expressions."*

However, expectations of symmetrical representation of suffering risk transforming historically grounded narratives into perceived bias. This is further supported by critical scholarship that interrogates how external evaluations frame issues of memory and conflict. As Silmi and Hnaihen (2026) argue in their critique of the Georg Eckert Institute report, such evaluations often rely on universalist humanistic frameworks that risk depoliticising asymmetrical contexts. They highlight, for example, the report's claim that Israeli rights are not discussed; violations concern only Palestinians, while Israelis are portrayed solely as perpetrators. This is used to characterise textbooks as selective or biased. However, this critique itself reflects a particular expectation of symmetry in the representation of memory that may not be commensurate with lived realities under conditions of occupation. In this framing, the issue is not the absence of universal values, but the insistence on equivalence in contexts marked by structural asymmetry. Consequently, the representation of memory – particularly in relation to colonial violence, displacement, and lived experience – is problematised not for its factual grounding, but for its perceived lack of balance, reinforcing the need to interpret curricular content on memory within its broader socio-political and epistemic context.

Quantitative analysis further indicates that explicitly dehumanising or demonising characterisations are rare in Palestinian textbooks. Adwan, Bar-Tal and Wexler (2016, p. 207) report that extreme negative characterisations occur at a rate of only 0.0006 per page – lower than in Israeli state and ultra-Orthodox textbooks – and note that when such language appears, it functions as an extension of broader national narratives rather than as pervasive or systematic incitement. By contrast, the IMPACT-se (2025b) report characterises selected excerpts from the abridged curriculum as instances of “*Dehumanization and Demonization of Israel*” (p. 48), arguing that certain representations cross the threshold into incitement. These claims are examined further in Box 10.

Box 10: Assessment of IMPACT-se’s interpretation of excerpts claimed to be dehumanising

Three out of eight excerpts flagged by IMPACT-se (2025b, p. 48) as promoting content promoting “*dehumanization and demonization of Israel*” are absent from the abridged curriculum for Gaza released in September 2024, which the report assesses as failing to meet European Union reform benchmarks. With regard to the remaining five passages, the characterisation of the material as dehumanising is open to interpretation when assessed against UNESCO’s Recommendation on incitement and principles of conflict-sensitive education. The passages largely focus on the consequences of conflict, including Palestinian deaths, injuries, and disability. They primarily describe experiences of harm rather than explicitly dehumanising representations.

This is also relevant to examples from the IMPACT-se 2025a report. For example, one excerpt drawn from Social Studies, Grade 9, Vol. 1 (2020–2025), p. 58 describes the establishment of Israel as the creation of an “*intrusive human barrier*” (حاجز بشري دخيل) separating the Arab world geographically between Asia and Africa. IMPACT-se interprets this as dehumanising and as implying hostile intent and broader conspiratorial motives. However, the passage itself situates this description within a wider discussion of geopolitical challenges facing the Arab world, including territorial disputes and the legacy of colonialism, and does not explicitly attribute intention, nor does it directly reference Jews as a religious or ethnic group. While the language is clearly adversarial and reflects a one-sided political narrative, describing it as dehumanising goes beyond what is explicitly stated in the text.

Beyond direct physical violence, textbooks also address structural forms of violence, particularly through representations of Israeli settlement expansion. As illustrated in Figure 8, Box 11, students are asked to analyse images of settlements and reflect on their geographic distribution, architectural patterns, and political significance. Alayan and Riley (2023) note that textbooks use visual aids to depict settlements as progressively encroaching on Palestinian territory and its national symbols. In related discussions, the curriculum explicitly references international legal frameworks, including Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949)^{viii} and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016),^{ix} situating settlement activity within established international legal discourse. Within this framing, settlement expansion is presented not merely as urban development but as a structural dimension of the conflict and occupation. According to the Georg Eckert Institute report (2021, p. 95), such representations position settlements as a continuation of conflict through non-military means that alter the land’s “*cultural and demographic character*” within a broader settler-colonial narrative. From the perspective of UNESCO’s emphasis on critical engagement, the relevant question is not

whether these representations are affirmative or critical in tone, but whether they are grounded in verifiable evidence and reflect standards of factual accuracy (see Box 11 for example).

Box 11: Example of analysing settlement expansion in 2018 history textbook (Grade 11, Unit 1)

This example illustrates how textbook activities engage students in analysing spatial and political aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through guided interpretation. This example is not intended to be representative of the textbooks as a whole, but is included as an illustrative case to demonstrate how themes identified in the literature, particularly conflict representation and critical engagement with spatial and political realities, are reflected in specific textbook activities.



Figure 8 (History Grade 11/Unit I, 2018, p. 80) presents a lesson activity introducing the concept of 'Zionist settlement' and its components. Students are asked to examine accompanying images and draw conclusions based on visual analysis. The exercise prompts them to describe what they observe, discuss the significance of the locations where settlements have been established, compare construction patterns in Jerusalem with those in other areas, and reflect on the meaning of the term 'Zionist settlement'. Through this structured set of questions, the activity guides students to interpret spatial, political, and architectural dimensions of settlement expansion (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021).

Figure 8: History activity

While settlement expansion is framed as a structural dimension of the conflict, the curriculum also addresses violence in the context of Palestinian resistance. References to violence are framed within the curriculum as a form of national resistance to occupation and, in literary texts, is often portrayed as heroic struggle without explicit condemnation or endorsement of violent acts (Georg Eckert Institute, 2021). History and selected 2017–2019 social studies textbooks further situate such acts within specific historical periods, presenting violence as a phase in the Palestinian struggle for liberation. The First Intifada^x serves as an example of this narrative. This historical framing is consistent with earlier textbook analyses, which found that armed resistance is typically presented as a contextualised phase within the national struggle rather than as something students are encouraged to follow (Kriener, 2003). The textbooks

situate historical armed struggle within an anti-colonial narrative of national liberation and self-determination. At the same time, they include prompts across multiple years of social studies, geography, and history courses that invite reflection on both peaceful and armed forms of protest (George Eckert Institute, 2021).

These narrative patterns raise important pedagogical questions about how curricula engage with histories of violence and dispossession. Recent scholarship in international and comparative education more broadly cautions that peace-oriented curricula in contexts of ongoing colonial violence risk becoming depoliticised if they abstract conflict from its structural and historical causes. From a reparative education perspective, critical engagement with histories of dispossession, state violence, and resistance is understood as an ethical form of truth-telling and memory work essential to non-recurrence and justice-oriented futures (Sriprakash, 2023).

The analysis in this section indicates that representations of conflict and violence in the PA curriculum are predominantly framed within historical narratives of occupation, colonialism, and national struggle. Violence is contextualised through discussions of structural harm, territorial dispossession, and international legal frameworks, supporting engagement with the legacies of conflict and their ongoing effects. In this respect, the curriculum aligns with UNESCO's emphasis on fostering critical historical understanding and engagement with the relationships between past, present, including the legacies of violence, exclusion, and their ongoing social and historical consequences.

Summary: Alignment of Palestinian textbooks to UNESCO's Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights

This review examined studies analysing the PA textbook content and associated curricular materials in relation to the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights (UNESCO, 2023a). The review identifies three overarching conclusions. First, the PA curriculum broadly aligns with UNESCO's Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, particularly in its emphasis on human rights, inclusion, and global citizenship, although limitations remain in presenting multiple perspectives of the conflict. Second, the majority of peer-reviewed evidence does not support claims of systematic incitement to violence or hatred, instead indicating that curricular content reflects national narratives shaped by lived realities. Third, divergent conclusions in international debate are partly attributable to methodological differences across influential analyses, particularly in relation to sampling, transparency, and contextualisation.

Drawing on peer-reviewed scholarship, institutional reviews, and comparative curriculum research, the analysis assessed alignment across four domains: (1) human rights education; (2) global citizenship education; (3) non-discrimination, equality, and inclusion; and (4) conflict, memory, and multi-perspectivity. Within these domains, the review also examined the specific subdomains addressed in the report: the integration of international human rights frameworks and rights-holder perspectives; global citizenship education and inclusive representation; non-discrimination in religious and political representation and in territorial and cartographic representation; and, under conflict, memory and multi-perspectivity, the framing of jihād and shuhadā', conflict and resistance narratives, and the treatment of historical violence and memory.

Across these domains, the evidence indicates broadly normative alignment with UNESCO's Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights. Textbooks integrate international human rights frameworks across subjects, presents learners as rights-holders, and situates conflict-related issues within established international legal discourse. Crucially, references to occupation and conflict are consistently framed in political and legal terms rather than as expressions of religious difference, reinforcing a distinction between political realities and religious identity. Additionally references to international law, conventions, and multilateral agreements function as a central interpretive and justificatory framework through which historical events, political claims, and forms of action are understood within the curriculum. It promotes civic participation, interfaith dialogue, moderation, and non-violent civic engagement, and incorporates democratic values and principles of dignity, equality, and social inclusion. Recent textbook revisions have reduced collective religious attribution, narrowed potentially generalising language, and modified representations that could be interpreted as escalatory.

Areas of partial alignment emerge in relation to multi-perspectivity and the consistent operationalisation of UNESCO's principle of rejecting all forms of violence. Human rights discourse is predominantly applied to Palestinian experiences of dispossession and occupation, while Israeli historical and civic perspectives are largely absent. Representations

of resistance are generally contextualised within anti-colonial and national liberation narratives, often framed in terms of physical defence and justice. These patterns reflect nationally framed historical narratives and the structural conditions within which the curriculum is produced.

Interpretation of these findings must consider the context of an ongoing and asymmetrical political situation shaped by occupation, dispossession, historical injustice, and unresolved questions of sovereignty. Unlike several comparative cases frequently cited in the education literature, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains unresolved, and the education system operates under conditions of prolonged occupation, political constraint, and recurrent disruption. Comparative research on divided and post-conflict societies demonstrates that the development of genuinely plural historical narratives is closely linked to broader political settlements (Gallagher, 2004; Adwan, Bar-Tal & Wexler, 2016). Such processes require movement toward a just peace, in which addressing historical injustices is integral to the development of plural, credible, and sustainable educational narratives.

Overall, the PA curriculum demonstrates significant engagement with UNESCO's framework, particularly in its integration of human rights education, civic norms, and contextualised historical analysis. Areas of tension arise because UNESCO's framework is grounded in universal principles of multi-perspectivity and the rejection of all forms of violence, whereas the curriculum is developed within a context of ongoing occupation. Claims of systematic incitement are not supported by the majority of available peer-reviewed evidence. These tensions do not amount to systematic incitement based on the weight of available evidence but rather reflect the structural and political conditions under which education is developed in protracted conflict settings. Assessments of alignment should therefore combine normative benchmarking with conflict-sensitive contextualisation, as failing to do so risks alienating students by producing curricular frameworks that are disconnected from their lived realities and social contexts.

Implications for policy and research

The findings of this review have implications for both policy and international engagement, as well as for future research. Taken together, they highlight the need for context-sensitive, evidence-based, and methodologically rigorous approaches to curriculum analysis and reform in conflict-affected settings. The following sections outline key implications for policy and international engagement, followed by priorities for further research.

Implications for policy and international engagement

In light of the findings presented in this review, several implications emerge for policy and international engagement with the PA education sector.

a. Recognition of substantial normative alignment

The cumulative evidence indicates that the PA curriculum demonstrates substantial alignment with key normative dimensions of the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, particularly in its integration of human rights frameworks, global citizenship education, interfaith dialogue, and civic participation. Where concerns arise, they relate primarily to narrative framing within a context of ongoing and asymmetrical conflict, rather than to systematic incitement, explicit hate speech, or direct promotion of violence. This highlights the importance of continued textbook review and dialogue, particularly in the context of future peacebuilding efforts, to support representations of the conflict that align with international educational standards.

b. Evidence-based, transparent, and inclusive international engagement

International engagement should be grounded in evidence-based assessment and clear methodological transparency. This requires contextual analysis of Palestinian textbooks, with claims weighed in relation to the strength, scope, and representativeness of the available evidence. Oversight mechanisms should reflect the full evidentiary landscape, including peer-reviewed research and independent institutional analyses. Analyses that inform policy and funding decisions should clearly document their methods, sources, and analytical approaches, enabling independent verification and comparison across studies.

A central component of this approach is the meaningful inclusion of Palestinian educators, researchers, and institutions in the design, interpretation, and evaluation of curriculum analysis. Grounding review processes in local expertise and lived realities strengthens both the validity of findings and the legitimacy of international engagement. This is consistent with recent Palestinian-led calls for expanded dialogue involving civil society, educational experts, and relevant institutions in order to protect curriculum independence and strengthen its grounding in Palestinian realities (Wattan News Agency, 2026; A. M. Qattan Foundation, 2026).

c. Context-sensitive application of multi-perspectivity and epistemic justice

The UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights calls for fostering

multi-perspectivity, historical objectivity, and critical engagement with legacies of violence, colonialism, and discrimination. In history education, multi-perspectivity refers to engaging with diverse and sometimes competing interpretations of the past, while grounding analysis in evidence and critical inquiry. It also entails recognising historical injustices and their ongoing effects, and supporting processes of acknowledgement, repair, and reconciliation, in line with UNESCO's emphasis on the 'duty of memory'. In contexts of protracted and unresolved conflict, however, comparative research indicates that the scope and form of such balanced representation are shaped by structural power asymmetries, contested sovereignty, and ongoing violence.

This also raises broader concerns related to epistemic erasure and epistemic violence, where the knowledge, experiences, and perspectives of those directly affected by these asymmetries – particularly teachers, students, parents, and local education professionals – may be marginalised or excluded from international policy and evaluation processes. Addressing this requires greater inclusion of Palestinians in curriculum discussions, ensuring that policy engagement is informed not only by external analysis but also by lived experience and locally grounded expertise.

International actors should therefore apply UNESCO benchmarks with contextual sensitivity. This includes recognising that balance in representation does not necessarily imply equal or symmetrical treatment of all perspectives, but rather the inclusion of multiple viewpoints, alongside critical engagement with historical responsibility and its contemporary implications. Expectations of symmetrical narrative representation must be situated within the political and material conditions under which curriculum development occurs. This recognises UNESCO's own principle that implementation must be locally adapted and responsive to learners' realities.

Constructive engagement should support pedagogical approaches that strengthen multi-perspectival understanding, critical inquiry, ethical reflection, and non-violent civic participation, without abstracting conflict from its structural and historical dimensions, or from the legacies of harm that shape present realities.

d. Moving towards evidence-based and community-based collaborative engagement

UNESCO emphasises evidence-based evaluation, inclusive governance, and long-term capacity building in curriculum reform. Current patterns of high-intensity, compliance-driven scrutiny risk narrowing the evidence base and limiting opportunities for sustained curriculum development. International engagement should therefore prioritise balanced, methodologically rigorous analysis that supports curriculum enhancement in line with UNESCO's Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights. This includes:

- Ensuring meaningful participation of Palestinian educators and institutions in curriculum review and reform processes;
- Strengthening research capacity within Palestinian educational institutions;
- Applying transparent and evidence-based evaluation approaches that uphold principles of epistemic justice;
- Investing in teacher professional development aligned with justice and human rights education, as well as the wellbeing of learners and educators;

- Supporting transparent curriculum development processes and prioritising the knowledge and lived experiences of those directly affected by conflict.

Such an approach aligns more closely with UNESCO's framework for inclusive, evidence-informed, and continuous curriculum improvement than recurring compliance-focused audits.

Implications for research

This section focuses on recommendations for areas of potential further research, taking into consideration key evidence gaps – identifying why they are relevant and what the implications are for additional research – to better support practitioners and to guide donors in understanding the PA curriculum and how it is developed and implemented.

a. Divergent interpretations of Palestinian Authority textbooks

The review examines various sources, showing that interpretations of the text can vary significantly, as seen in the differences between the Georg Eckert Institute report (2021) and the IMPACT-se reports (2021; 2023; 2025a; 2025b). Given these divergences and ongoing concerns regarding methodological transparency and framing, further independent, peer-reviewed research is recommended using a longitudinal, system-level approach to examine how curriculum content evolves over time and is interpreted in context.

Further research should prioritise the development of a shared normative and methodological framework for textbook evaluation in conflict-affected contexts, to support consistency and transparency across studies.

This includes supporting Palestinian research capacity – particularly through sustained funding for Ministry-affiliated research centres and enabling teachers to participate in participatory research processes.

b. Palestinian Authority curriculum reform processes and structural constraints

This desk review identified a limited publicly available evidence base regarding curriculum reform processes undertaken by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education under the PA. As with any curriculum and textbook reform processes, ongoing research that adopts a rigorous approach is desirable for continued improvement, in particular in an evolving context of conflict and, hopefully, peace. Further primary research is needed to examine how curricular decisions are made, revised, and implemented in practice. Such research should also account for the material and institutional constraints under which reform occurs, including chronic budgetary shortfalls, interruptions to salary payments, and broader fiscal instability affecting the education sector.

It should also centre the perspectives of teachers and learners directly involved in the enactment and realisation of textbooks across diverse classroom contexts. Analysing curriculum reform processes in relation to these constraints would provide a more accurate understanding of implementation capacity and avoid evaluating reform trajectories in isolation from the political and economic conditions shaping educational governance.

c. Cross-curricular dynamics, Israeli education contexts, and conditions of educational disruption

Throughout the review, it is apparent that historical and current realities of conflict and occupation influence Palestinian educational narratives. In addition, recent large-scale destruction of educational institutions in Gaza has profoundly altered the conditions under which education is delivered, studied, and reformed. Palestinian educators and scholars have described these developments using the term ‘scholasticide’ to refer to the systematic dismantling of educational infrastructure, loss of academic life, and disruption of knowledge transmission through attacks that erase knowledge and identify and undermine international conventions on the right to education (Alousi, 2022; Dominguez, 2024; United Nations, 2024b). Further research is needed to examine how such conditions of educational destruction and emergency schooling intersect with curriculum content, pedagogical practice, and reform trajectories, and how they shape PA perspectives on education, identity, and international engagement.

Research examining Israeli curricula, textbook content, and education policy practices alongside these conditions of educational disruption would help understand relational dynamics shaping curriculum development.

d. Teaching practices, pedagogy, and conditions of ongoing disruption

The scope of this desk review did not include an examination of classroom-level teaching practices or the interaction between formal curricula and the hidden curriculum. While the PA has undertaken pedagogical reforms in recent years – particularly efforts to promote more communicative and student-centred approaches – further empirical research is needed to assess how such approaches are implemented in practice. Future research should also examine how teachers interpret, mediate, and frame textbook content, recognising that textbooks are not ‘teacher-proof’ and that teachers’ values, beliefs, and professional judgement play a central role in shaping how curriculum is enacted, both within the PA and Israeli education contexts.

This research should explicitly account for conditions of ongoing and recurrent disruption affecting schooling, including school closures, displacement, infrastructural damage, interruptions to instructional continuity, and the impact of attacks on schools, students, and educators, including those attributed to settler violence, particularly in the West Bank. Examining how teachers adapt pedagogical strategies under such conditions would provide critical insight into how explicit curricular objectives and implicit educational messages are negotiated in practice, as well as how teachers’ values, beliefs, and forms of professional development they are exposed to shape the interpretation and enactment of textbook content.

In contexts where disruption is continuous rather than episodic, further research should critically examine the applicability of ‘emergency’ and ‘trauma-informed’ pedagogical frameworks, and explore how teaching practices evolve under occupation when crisis conditions constitute the everyday environment of schooling rather than an exceptional interruption.

e. Context-specific comparative research under conditions of occupation and protracted crisis

If reform-oriented engagement is pursued, carefully bounded comparative research examining curriculum reform processes in other contexts of prolonged occupation or protracted crisis may be informative. Such analysis should recognise that the inclusion of national narratives, patriotism, and contested historical interpretation is a standard feature of education systems globally, particularly in conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts, rather than an exceptional characteristic of the Palestinian case. Comparative research on history and citizenship education demonstrates that processes of narrative selection, emphasis, and contestation are common across such settings. In addition, evaluating Palestinian textbooks against expectations of neutrality or depoliticisation, without equivalent consideration of these broader patterns, risks exceptionalising the Palestinian case and overlooking the historical and political conditions shaping curriculum content.

Research should therefore include not only contexts of ongoing conflict, but also those emerging from conflict, while continuing to negotiate long-term historical legacies. Relevant examples may include Algeria, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon, and Syria, where curriculum reform engages with contested pasts across extended historical trajectories. Framing Palestinian curriculum reform within these broader comparative dynamics supports more historically-grounded and context-sensitive evaluation, while avoiding the risk of decontextualised or overly sanitised expectations of education in conflict settings. Comparative analysis of this kind could help international actors avoid inappropriate analogies and better tailor support to the specific conditions shaping Palestinian curriculum reform.

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Annex 1: UNESCO's Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights relevant for this desk review

This Annex presents UNESCO's 'Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development' (UNESCO, 2023a). It highlights key guiding principles and action areas relevant to curriculum development and educational materials, aligned with the scope of this desk review. The principles and action areas are numbered consistently with the original document for ease of reference.

Guiding principles for education

- (c) irrespective of race, colour, descent, gender, age, language, religion, political opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, economic or social condition of birth, or disability and any other grounds, ensure non-discrimination, inclusion and equity, in and through education, as prescribed by international human rights law while empowering learners as rights-holders;
- (d) promote an ethic of care and solidarity through cultivating reciprocity and compassion with a view to encouraging convivial relations, neighbourliness and a sense of belonging;
- (f) recognize that everyone has the right to education and should be guaranteed equitable access to inclusive and quality education that is respectful of their identity and encourages knowledge of their history, traditions, language and culture, and that of others, without discrimination of any kind. As stated in the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, the defence of cultural diversity “implies a commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms [...]. No one may invoke cultural diversity to infringe upon human rights guaranteed by international law, nor to limit their scope”;
- (j) ensure freedom of thought, conscience, belief and religion as well as freedom of expression and opinion, which includes ensuring the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, in all forms and all media, while prohibiting any advocacy of hatred on any grounds that constitutes incitement to discrimination or violence, as established in relevant international human rights law;
- (m) promote intercultural and intergenerational dialogue for cooperation and solidarity and reinforce effective communication to help develop friendly relations between and among peoples, societies and countries;
- (n) raise awareness of the increasing interdependence of individuals, communities, societies, countries, natural resources and ecosystems, and cultivate an ethic of global citizenship and shared responsibility for peace, human rights and sustainable development for the benefit of all, within planetary boundaries.

Action areas

Curriculum and pedagogy: action areas pertinent to this desk review

19. Member States should ensure that educational activities serving the aims of this Recommendation on education for peace and human rights, international understanding, cooperation, fundamental freedoms, global citizenship and sustainable development are coordinated and form a coherent whole within curricula for different levels and types of education, knowledge, disciplines, learning and training.

20. Member States should support the development of contextualised curricula, for all subjects and topics, elaborated in an inclusive manner, that connects with the concerns and issues that learners face in their daily lives, as well as with diverse knowledge systems. The objective is to empower learners to apply their knowledge and skills, when responding to these issues in ways that actively support and advance the aims and guiding principles of this Recommendation.

21. Education for peace and human rights, international understanding, cooperation, fundamental freedoms, global citizenship and sustainable development should be provided to all learners, teachers, education personnel and educational communities, and contribute to universal values, the prevention of human rights' and fundamental freedoms' violations and abuses, promote a universal culture of peace, as well as enable every person to exercise their own rights and to promote the rights of others and participate democratically in the cultural and social life of their educational institutions, community and public affairs.

24. The teaching and learning of history, social sciences and related fields should provide learners with the opportunity to build a critical understanding of the complex relationships between past, present and future and of the legacies of violence, exclusion, and all forms of discrimination and their effects. This requires pursuing historical objectivity; promoting multi-perspectivity based on science, research and evidence; fostering critical views of and supporting the struggle against colonialism and neo-colonialism in all their forms and manifestations; sustaining a duty of memory; rejecting denial and distortion of proven historical events; highlighting the role of women in history and society; and exploring the factors that, over time, can either contribute towards violence and tensions, or foster reconciliation, peace and solidarity between and within countries.

26. Member States should promote an education that, throughout all levels and strands, includes the study of different cultures and their reciprocal influence. Such study should encourage the understanding and valuing of diverse perspectives, ways of life, worldviews, religions, beliefs and philosophies of life, and has the potential to reduce conflicts that are based on a lack of understanding. It should, among other things, give due importance to the teaching of languages and the promotion of intercultural competencies in an environment respectful of human rights and fundamental freedoms and helping students to become informed local and global citizens. Culture and arts education advances creative learning and the acquisition of new civic competencies, provides a better understanding of cultural heritage and strengthens a sense of belonging and social and emotional learning fostering the appreciation of cultural diversity.

28. In order to release the full potential of education directed towards the aims of this Recommendation, affordable, inclusive, sustainable, non-discriminatory, age-appropriate and context-specific approaches that promote gender equality are needed for all learners. Research-based learning, appropriate pedagogies and innovative approaches including active and collaborative pedagogical approaches should be utilized to integrate the cognitive, social and emotional, and behavioural components into education for sustainable development.

Learning and teaching materials and resources

35. Member States should work towards ensuring that all teachers and learners have access to quality teaching and learning materials and resources, including multi-media content, which are infused with the guiding principles set forth in this Recommendation. Access to such materials, in physical and digital formats, could be facilitated by encouraging the sharing of open educational resources and by establishing physical and/or digital resource centres offering materials and guidance, including human resources or training, that support the aims of this Recommendation throughout education and lifelong learning.

38. All materials and resources should be relevant to learners' context and background, adapted to their educational level as well as to their developmental and learning needs. Teachers and learners should be involved in the development of materials to enhance their relevance. Materials and resources should be inclusive, incorporate gender equality, be free from stereotypes, all forms of discriminatory and hateful bias, and elements that incite discrimination, racism, xenophobia, hostility or violence towards any individuals, groups or peoples. Materials and resources should also actively aim to challenge and eradicate underlying prejudices and stereotypes and contribute to overcoming their consequences.

Annex 2: Appraisal of the methodology used for the analysis of Palestinian textbooks by IMPACT-se and the Georg Eckert Institute

This Annex provides an appraisal of the methodology used for the analysis of Palestinian textbooks by IMPACT-se and the Georg Eckert Institute. The appraisal draws on established approaches in qualitative content analysis and comparative education research, and guides how their reports are referred to in the sections that follow, depending on their identified rigour. It uses a common set of evaluative criteria: (1) documentation and transparency (clarity regarding sources, selection processes, and analytical methods); (2) sampling and representativeness (the extent to which selected examples reflect the broader curriculum or corpus of textbooks); (3) analytical frameworks and coding (the use of systematic, clearly defined, and replicable analytical procedures); (4) contextualisation and discourse awareness (the interpretation of content in relation to its historical, political, and cultural context, including sensitivity to language and framing); (5) triangulation and bias mitigation (the use of multiple sources, methods, or perspectives to reduce selective interpretation and enhance reliability).

Methodological features of IMPACT-se curriculum analyses

The assessment of IMPACT-se's methodology draws on their reports and the general methodology outlined on their website. For the purpose of this study, a total of seven IMPACT-se reports published between 2019 and 2025 were reviewed. Of particular relevance, the *Review of the 2025–2026 Palestinian Authority School Curriculum (2025a)* presents what IMPACT-se describes as its “*first comprehensive review*” of PA educational materials since 2021. The report analyses 290 textbooks and 71 teacher guides across Grades 1–12, covering subjects including social studies, history, religious education, Arabic language, science and mathematics. It also includes analysis of supplementary wartime educational materials produced for Gaza and discusses post-October 2023 developments in curriculum reform and EU conditionality. This report also presents a relatively detailed methodology section compared to other IMPACT-se reports.

In addition, there are six complementary IMPACT-se reports, with related analysis. This includes a 2025 report (IMPACT-se, 2025b), which focuses on the newly introduced abridged curriculum in Gaza. Other reports (IMPACT-se 2023; 2022; 2021a; 2019) review the Palestinian school curriculum and teaching materials over different time periods. In addition, *The Review of the Georg Eckert Institute Report* was published in 2021 (2021b). This report does not analyse textbooks directly, but critiques the 2021 study by the Georg Eckert Institute.

These seven reports focus specifically on PA textbooks and curriculum content, with particular attention to recent revisions.

1. Documentation and methodological transparency

IMPACT-se reports list reviewed textbooks and provide excerpts with translations and images.

It benchmarks its analysis of textbook content against nine “UNESCO-derived standards and guidelines on peace and tolerance” (IMPACT-se, 2025a; p.1). In this selection, IMPACT-se omits key elements of the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights (UNESCO, 2023a), including attention to identity, cultural context and multi-perspectivity.

2. Sampling and representativeness

While the published methodology in IMPACT-se’s 2025 report (2025a) indicates that examples are selected based on their relevance to predefined themes, it does not specify clearly its sampling criteria. The selection of excerpts from textbooks is not described in a way that allows readers to assess their representativeness or the rationale for their inclusion. UNRWA has similarly argued that some allegations rely on selective use of examples and do not reflect the curriculum as a whole, raising concerns about the representativeness of such claims (UNRWA, 2022). Additionally, as Georg Eckert Institute (2021) notes, it is important to contextualise individual examples and avoid drawing generalised conclusions from isolated excerpts, given that interpretation may vary depending on context.

3. Analytical frameworks and coding

IMPACT-se outlines that it uses content and discourse analysis based on the nine UNESCO-derived standards noted above. However, it does not provide details of its approach, nor of its coding procedures or analytical steps.

Curriculum scope and level of analysis

IMPACT-SE’s (2025b) report blurs distinctions between official curriculum content, classroom implementation, and student or teacher practices. For example, it treats classroom posters, blackboard notations, ceremonies, and student performances as evidence of curricular intent, presenting these materials alongside textbook excerpts as proof of systemic incitement (IMPACT-se, 2025b). This analytical conflation makes it difficult to assess official educational policy, since practices observed in classrooms (such as posters, performances, or teacher improvisations) may not reflect systemic curricular intent. Educational research on curriculum theory (e.g. Bernstein, 1973; 2004) consistently recognises the differences between intended (official) curriculum, the enacted curriculum (teacher practice), and the realised curriculum (student learning outcomes). Failure to distinguish between these risks compromising both the validity of analysis and the relevance of policy recommendations.

4. Contextualisation

Curriculum content is frequently evaluated with limited contextualisation in IMPACT-se reports, without consideration of the socio-political, cultural, or historical context in which it was produced. Palestinian perspectives on occupation, identity, or justice – as well as portrayals of violence that reflect historical and ongoing experiences of displacement and continued conditions of conflict and loss – are frequently interpreted narrowly as incitement. This omission risks distorting meaning and exaggerating claims of extremism. In addition, IMPACT-se’s reviews of curriculum do not assess the structural factors and lived realities, and the structural and political conditions shaping curriculum development, including the context of prolonged occupation, institutional constraints, resource limitations, and external political pressures, which are essential to understanding both the content of textbooks and the dynamics of reform.

5. Triangulation and bias mitigation

IMPACT-se reports and publicly available methodological descriptions do not specify triangulation procedures or quality control measures, such as inter-coder reliability checks. The absence of explicitly documented safeguards against bias or reference to accepted methodological protocols for textbook analysis limits methodological robustness.

Methodological features of George Eckert Institute's textbooks analysis

This review of the Georg Eckert Institute's methodology draws on the stated approach in its 2021 report on Palestinian textbooks.

1. Documentation and methodological transparency

The George Eckert Institute's report specifies the textbooks analysed, provides excerpts with translations and images, explains the selection process, and outlines guiding questions and coding criteria. Findings are mapped to these criteria, which are drawn from the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights (UNESCO, 2023a), and from an approach developed by specialists at Stanford University, as referenced in the Georg Eckert Institute (2021) report. This documentation enables readers to trace the analytical process, assess the evidence independently, understand the selection of documents and excerpts used, thus enabling readers to assess the credibility of the findings.

2. Sampling and representativeness

The George Eckert Institute employs a structured and transparent approach to the selection of textbooks, ensuring coverage across subjects, grade levels, and publication years within the PA curriculum. In addition, the selection of excerpts within textbooks is guided by clearly defined analytical criteria. The analysis identifies both affirmative and critical content, providing a balanced picture of how Palestinian textbooks engage with themes of peace, human rights, conflict, and tolerance. In 2021, IMPACT-se (2021b) published a critique of the Georg Eckert Institute report, arguing that it underestimates the prevalence and severity of problematic content. However, the Georg Eckert Institute (2021) report outlines its sampling strategy, which enables transparency.

3. Analytical frameworks and coding

The Georg Eckert Institute applies a multi-method research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, as outlined in its methodological framework. Content analysis is used to extract relevant passages, clearly defined thematic criteria and structured evaluation questions derived from UNESCO's education guidance and Stanford's human rights indicators, alongside inductive codes emerging from the data. Discourse analysis explores symbolic meanings, while quantitative measures (e.g. ratios of conflict-related vs. non-conflict-related examples) identify patterns and scope in relation to the themes covered. The specification of analytical procedures – including defined units of analysis and coding guidance – supports replicability.

4. Contextualisation

The Georg Eckert Institute approaches textbooks as both pedagogical and cultural

documents, analysing them as instructional materials designed to convey knowledge and skills, as well as carriers of social values, collective memory, and identity narratives. Its discourse analysis examines how narratives of displacement, occupation, and identity are constructed in Palestinian education, and situates these within broader historical and political contexts. As such, the report distinguishes between expressions of identity, rights, and grievance that reflect lived realities under occupation, and instances it interprets as incitement to violence. In doing so, it aims to provide a nuanced account of how learners engage with contested narratives.

5. Triangulation and bias mitigation

The Georg Eckert Institute employs triangulation across multiple researchers, with at least two coders reviewing each passage to reduce subjective bias. The methodology acknowledges interpretive challenges, particularly in emerging areas (e.g. perceived politicised content in science or language textbooks), and aims to address these by combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. By recognising subjectivity and applying agreed methodological protocols (such as multi-coder verification and structured coding procedures), the report provides information to inform the reliability and credibility of its analysis.

Endnotes

ⁱ Palestinian Authority is the interim self-governing body established in 1994 under the Oslo Accords to administer parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

ⁱⁱ For the purposes of this report, curriculum is understood in the broad sense as encompassing curriculum frameworks, syllabi, assessment, textbooks, and teaching and learning resources, including teacher guides. The terms curriculum and textbooks are used interchangeably in this report, as much of the available literature does so. However, textbooks are the primary focus of this report.

ⁱⁱⁱ The term ‘Occupied Palestinian Territory’ is used throughout this report in line with international legal and United Nations usage, reflecting the status of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip as territories under occupation.

^{iv} Following the outbreak of war in Gaza, the PA also introduced adapted and condensed curriculum delivery in September 2024, including virtual learning models to sustain education during disruptions (Ministry of Education, 2025).

^v Education in East Jerusalem operates through a fragmented system including ma’arif (municipal) schools administered by the Jerusalem Municipality and Israeli Ministry of Education, recognised but unofficial schools (including many church-run institutions), Waqf schools, UNRWA schools serving registered refugees, and fully private institutions. While municipal schools fall under Israeli administrative authority, many have historically used the PA curriculum and Tawjihi examination system. In recent years, Israeli authorities have promoted increased adoption of the Israeli Bagrut curriculum through funding and regulatory measures, resulting in a mixed and evolving curricular landscape (Alayan, 2018a; Masarwah, 2022).

^{vi} The nine UNESCO-derived standards include respect, the individual other, no hate, no incitement, peacemaking, unbiased information, gender identity and representation, sexual orientation and sound prosperity and cooperation.

^{vii} The Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 (SDG 4.7) emphasises that global citizenship education aims to equip learners with the knowledge and skills needed to engage responsibly and effectively on global issues to foster peace, sustainability, and equity.

^{viii} Article 49 states: *“The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.”* This provision is widely interpreted by the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the majority of the international community to prohibit the establishment of civilian settlements by an occupying power in occupied territory. Under this interpretation, Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, established after the 1967 war, are considered illegal under international law, a position reaffirmed by the International Court of Justice in its 2024 advisory opinion on the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

^{ix} United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016, p.2) reaffirms that: *“the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law.”*

^x The First Intifada (1987–1993) was a mass Palestinian uprising against Israeli rule that primarily unfolded in the Occupied Palestinian Territory – the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip – and gradually subsided in the context of negotiations that culminated in the 1993 Oslo Accords (United Nations, 1993).



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE
Faculty of Education



Research for Equitable Access and Learning

REAL Centre

Faculty of Education

University of Cambridge

184 Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 8PQ, UK

Email: REALCentre@educ.cam.ac.uk

in @real-centre

www.educ.cam.ac.uk/centres/real

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