

Israel

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Overview of Country

Historical information.As every child knows, the story of Israel begins in antiquity. However, we begin *our* modern story with the end of the Crimean War in 1856 when the Holy Land was opened up for immigration and pilgrimage by the major European powers of the time, leading to successive waves of immigration by Jews in Eastern Europe suffering from vicious anti-Semitism and endless pogroms (anti-Semitic riots). In two ways, these waves of immigration set the tone for the modern State of Israel as well as the conflicts still faced by the country today in two ways. First, since Biblical times, there had never been an independent Jewish nation in the Holy Land. Immigrating Eastern European Jews had to carve out a small Jewish enclave in the massive Ottoman Empire. Unlike all other cases of emergent nations, these immigrants did not have any recent past upon which to build bureaucratic, governmental, or civil society structures which could lay the foundations for a modern nation (throughout Europe and the Middle

East, Jews were forbidden to own land or hold government office until the middle of the 19th century). Even the Jewish *lingua franca*, Hebrew, had to be modernized since it had not been spoken in 2000 years. Secondly, despite the fact that Jewish immigration to Palestine was increasing in the initial years of the 20th century, the area supported an indigenous population of mostly Muslims and Christians. Over the next 50 years, this majority population rapidly became a minority and lost their exclusive political, linguistic and cultural hegemony.

The modern State of Israel was established in 1948. One year later, the parliament, the unicameral *Knesset*, passed the Compulsory Education Law, providing free education to all children between the ages of five and thirteen. The law dictated that schools cater to the four primary political ideologies of the time and mandated the recognition and funding of Arab schools. The State Education Law of 1953 further consolidated the educational system into two trends: “State education” and “State-religious education.” State schools include secular Jewish and Arab schools (where Arabic is the language of instruction) as well as and educational institutions with a religious (Jewish) orientation. The law also permitted non-State education, as primarily expressed in Ultra-Orthodox Jewish schools. Today, the Israeli educational system includes four primary streams: State-secular, State-religious, ultra-Orthodox, and Arab (broken down into Druze and Bedouin sub-streams) and in its complexity reflects the mosaic of ideologies represented in the society it serves (Knesset Printing Office, 2005).

Structure of country. Located in the center of the Middle East, Israel shares its northern border with Lebanon and Syria, its eastern border with Jordan, its southern border with Egypt and its western edge with the Mediterranean Sea. Since independence,

a state of war has existed with Lebanon and Syria (peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan were signed in 1979 and 1994, respectively). Israel is a parliamentary democracy in which the prime minister is the leader of the majority political party and forms a ruling coalition in the *Knesset*.

Population. Israel is a small country (20,770 sq.km, or slightly larger than New Jersey) with a population of 8.06 million people, comprised of two primary ethnic groups: The Jewish majority (75.3%) and the indigenous Arab population (known as Israeli-Arabs or Israeli-Palestinians, 20.7%). The Arab population also includes smaller ethnic groups, such as the Druze and Bedouin (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012b). Jewish immigration is a central aspect of Israeli society and immigrants are afforded a unique status as Israel sees immigration as part of the gathering of the exiles (following the Roman destruction of Palestine in 135 CE).

As an immigrant country with a policy of open immigration for any Jew seeking citizenship (immigration by non-Jews is prohibited), successive waves of immigration have changed the course of the nation. For example, between 1989 and 1994, with the demise of the USSR, the population of the country increased by 20%, creating an enormous burden for the struggling economy and leading to a large increase in the number of school aged non-Hebrew speaking children being served by the educational system.

Racial/ethnic and religious diversity. Table 1 presents a breakdown of the primary ethnic and religious groups in the country.

Race/Ethnicity	% of Overall Population
Israeli Jews	75.3

Israeli Arabs* (including Bedouin and Druze)	20.7
Other	4.3
Religions	
Jewish	75.4
Muslim	16.9
Christian	2.1
Druze	1.7
Other	4.0

* Also known as Israeli-Palestinians or Palestinian-Israelis

Literacy/numeracy data. School life expectancy from primary to tertiary education is 16 years (16 years for females and 15 years for males) with a literacy rate of 96.8% for females and 98.7% for males.

Public Education System Overview

Description of compulsory schooling. Public education in Israel is universally available. The 1949 Compulsory Education Law required the state to provide education for every child between first and eighth grade; however, over the years the law has been periodically amended, such that education is now compulsory for all children between the ages of three and eighteen. Early childhood education frameworks (for children up to three years old) are widely available throughout the country; although they are not mandatory nor subsidized by the government. According to the Ministry of Education, in the academic year of 2014-2015 there were 2,131,521 students (aged 3-18) enrolled in Israeli compulsory education, attending 4,972 schools (Knesset Printing Office, 2005).

Funding. The public compulsory education system in Israel is nearly entirely publicly funded, with funds provided by both the Ministry of Education (MOE) and local municipalities. The MOE budget in 2014 was NIS (New Israeli Shekel) 43.6 billion (or \$11.02 billion, approximately 7% of Israel's GDP) (Ministry of Education, 2015). In addition to funding from the MOE and local authorities, every school levies a small additional payment from parents for products and services that state and local authorities are not obliged to provide free of charge, such as field trips, textbooks, and special supplemental programming. Parental payments range from NIS 200 to NIS 1,300 (\$51-\$333) per year, depending on the age and location of the child (Ministry of Education, 2016).

Organizational structure. The MOE is legally and politically responsible for implementing relevant legislation and regulations and for operating the education system. It establishes national goals, controls budget allocations, and monitors student achievement through national high-stakes testing, determines the national curriculum, and is responsible for supervising and employing teachers and constructing new schools.

The educational system is centrally managed by the MOE in Jerusalem and is divided into six districts (Northern, Haifa, Central, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and Southern), with each district overseen by a district superintendent. Each district is further divided into sectors (Jewish, Arab, and Ultra-Orthodox), with each sector having its own bureaucratic infrastructure. In the non-Jewish sector, the structure and secular curricula are analogous to those in the Jewish sector, with the addition of changes necessary to accommodate different linguistic and cultural needs. Further, the MOE recognizes three types of educational institutions: those in the formal educational system, "recognized but

not official” schools (which includes schools not operated by the State but which submit to some degree of regulation); and “exempt” institutions (most often ultra-Orthodox religious seminaries which have been exempted from fulfilling the general requirements of the education system) (Knesset Center for Research and Information, 2013)

Graduation rate. In Israel, all students can complete their high school education in two ways: by completing the required number of credit hours or by successfully completing a comprehensive series of academically challenging matriculation exit exams. All high schools encourage students to complete matriculation exams (matriculation diplomas are required for university admission) and are continually monitored and evaluated by their number of students completing high school matriculation exam requirements. Table 2 shows a breakdown of high school completion and matriculation per educational sector for the 2014-15 academic year for boys and girls. Compulsory education begins at age three in pre-primary education (ages 3-5). Primary (6-12) and secondary (12-18) education each last six years. The overall high-school graduation rate in Israel for 2014-2015 was 53.4% with different graduation rates for different sectors, with the graduation rate for Jewish students being 59.8%: 72.9% of secular and religious and secular Jews, 46.95 of Arab students, 32.3% of Bedouin students, 61.5% of Druze students, and 9% of Ultra-Orthodox Jews (this number may be skewed, as these students most often study in religious seminaries which do not grant high-school diplomas) (Ministry of Education: Economic and Budgetary Directorate, 2013)

Eligibility for matriculation diplomas by educational system and gender

Educational System		% of students entitled to Matriculation Diploma
Hebrew Education		72.1
	Boys	70.4
	Girls	78.9
Arab Education		60.3
	Boys	52.5
	Girls	66.3

Private School Education Overview

Percent of school-age population who attend private schools. Private schools in Israel are known as “recognized non-official” schools and can serve students from grades 1-8. According to the *Knesset's* Office of Research, in the year 2012, 648 “recognized non-official” elementary schools existed with 190,000 students enrolled. “Recognized non-official” school’s enrollment accounted for of 20.6% of the total population of school-aged students.

Types of private schools. Private schools are financed by the MOE and local authorities, are partially supervised, and are required to teach core-learning programs. These schools are permitted to collect payments from parents, select students based on their own criteria, and determine learning programs and staff employment. “Recognized non-official” schools often include unique regional schools, and offer a unique and autonomous learning programs and pedagogy (e.g., Rodolf Steiner schools).

Special Education/Special Needs Education System

Current legislative mandates. The Israeli Special Education Law (SEL) of 1988 was the first special education-specific legislation passed by the *Knesset* and mandates the education of children and youth (age 3-21) with special educational needs. Prior to passage of the law, special education policy was derived from the general terms of the Compulsory Education Law (1949) and the State Education Law (1953), supplemented by relevant case law and regulations. In the 1980s, an increase in court challenges brought by parent groups claimed that the existing bureaucratic structures lacked clarity regarding the education of children with special needs resulting in a segregated special educational school system. For instance, no eligibility guidelines were provided, there was no guarantee of free and appropriate special education services, and there was no mention of educational placement in a least restrictive environment. The SEL sought to organize and regulate special education services, including “teaching, instruction...physical therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy and...other professional disciplines...provided according to the exceptional child’s needs (Gumpel & Sharoni, 2007).

Population of students eligible to receive special needs education. Once identified as having difficulty in school, a child is typically evaluated by a school psychologist and referred to a local Placement Committee, which is responsible for determining eligibility and placement. This committee includes a representative of the local education authority, two MOE superintendents, an educational psychologist, a pediatrician, a social worker and a representative of the National Special Education

Parents' Organization (Meadan & Gumpel, 2002) and assigns the child to one of the recognized disability categories.

Where special education/special needs education services are provided. The Israeli special education system is based on a medical model of disability and is roughly organized around twelve different disability classifications. Educational placements are guided by a categorical system where inclusionary resources are available depending on the student's diagnostic category as opposed to his or her individual functional level. During the 2014-15 academic year, of the 191,918 children classified as having special education needs, 63.52% were placed in general educational settings, 22.54% were placed in self-contained special education classes in mainstream education settings and 13.95% studied in segregated special education preschools or schools (Meadan & Gumpel, 1996). Table 3 shows a breakdown for elementary versus secondary schools.

Inclusion and segregation in special education in Israel for the 2014-2015 academic year.

School level	Total Number	% General Education Class	% Special Day Class	% Segregated School
Elementary	108,217	63.33	23.01	13.58
Secondary	61,701	63.83	21.59	14.59

Focus of services/intervention/curriculum. The MOE has formally adopted three models of inclusionary special education: (a) the inclusion of students within general education classes; (b) self-contained special education classes for children with

learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral disorders, Autism Spectrum Disorder and mild intellectual disability; and (c) inclusionary classes, with a limited number of special needs students and two teachers (a primary “homeroom” teacher and a special education teacher) who work together and independently (this model is primarily found in early childhood education settings). The MOE strictly regulates all aspects of the national educational curriculum for the general education system, but does not mandate specific foci for special educational services, with even less emphasis on functional life or transitional skills.

Related services. The SEL explicitly included auxiliary services (i.e., occupational therapy, speech and language, physical therapy) which are calculated according to the number and type of children enrolled in each educational framework. In practice, auxiliary services are provided to the school based on budgetary allocations. At the beginning of every school year, each teacher must submit an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) for every child with special educational needs as well as a Classroom Educational Plan for the entire class. Additionally, each principal, in conjunction with the school staff, must complete a School-wide Educational Plan. Based on this hierarchy of programming, the school interdisciplinary team allocates auxiliary services based on one of two formulae (different formulae for complex versus more mild disability categories). Recently, however, the MOE has begun to roll-out a money-follows-child budgetary allocation system in which the individual principal and interdisciplinary team have no leeway in allocating auxiliary services based on the school’s pooling of resources.

As stated, in the general educational system, the highly regulated core curriculum is dictated by matriculation exit exams as well as yearly high-stakes testing. This core curriculum is not typically applied to children with special educational needs. Whereas the MOE tracks academic achievement and dropout rates in the general educational system, no such organized database exists for learners with special educational needs. Indeed, transitional planning for adolescents is also unregulated, and teachers are not required to prepare Individualized Transition Plans. Likewise, supported employment opportunities in Israel are rare, as this field has not adequately developed.

Prevalent practices used in special education services. All children enrolled in the special educational system receive supplemental assistance through a series of therapeutic agents. All segregated schools and stand-alone classes receive therapy hours from occupational and or physical therapists, child psychologists, behavioral experts (Board Certified Behavior Analysts), speech and language therapist, music and art therapists, and physical education. Additionally, schools can organize a wide variety of enrichment activities ranging from hiking, to horseback riding and swimming.

Teacher Training/Preparation

Minimum requirements to be a general education teacher. In the early days of the State, teachers were typically employed with a high school matriculation diploma along with a teacher's certification obtained from a teacher's college (akin to Normal Schools in the United States or École Normale in France). Today teachers are trained in two possible settings: teaching colleges for elementary school teachers and universities (there are seven universities in the country) for secondary school teachers (where teachers

first receive an undergraduate degree in their subject-matter and then complete another two years of teacher certification). In the early 1990s, teacher colleges began to offer B.Ed. degrees in addition to teacher certification, and in the early 2000s, they began to offer M.Ed. degrees.

In 2006, the “Ariav Committee” (a blue-ribbon government commission which examined all issues of teacher training in Israel) mandated that a B.A. or B.Ed. degree in addition to a teacher certification will be the minimum employment requirement for any teacher. The committee also recommended a core study program including three primary domains: (a) an academic discipline, (b) teacher training studies (including educational foundations such as pedagogy, teaching methods, research, field work, cognitive-emotional-social development, theories of teaching and learning, organization and evaluation methods, ethnic and cultural differences, and students with special education), and (c) compulsory studies in languages (i.e., Hebrew, Arabic, or English), culture, citizenship, and technology.

To receive certification, all teacher trainees engage in two years of field-based practicum, and one year of internship, followed by two more years of novice induction teaching, during which time they receive supervision, guidance and support from both an experienced teacher and an educational counselor from their relevant teaching college or university.

Minimum requirements to be a special education/special needs education teacher. Special education teachers are required to master the core subjects listed above as well as a special education specialization, focused either on children aged 6-21 years, or on specific disabilities in preschool, elementary, or secondary school. Some teacher

training colleges offer specialization in specific disabilities, such as learning disabilities (LD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), or Emotional or Behavioral Disorders (EBD) and three universities in Israel now have separated their specialization in learning disabilities from the special educational degree curricula and offer specialized post-baccalaureate degrees. Students studying special education have one or two days of field experience each week for every year of their training. This fieldwork includes observations of special education classrooms as well as actual teaching, with the support of both a college or university tutor and the classroom staff. Novice teachers are required to attend a 40-hour workshop in a teaching college or university and receive personal supervision from a mentor appointed by the school principal or superintendent. Evaluation the inductee's work prior to their being accepted as a permanent teacher eligible for tenure is performed by the school principal. A teacher is certified as a special education teacher by the MOE after two years of successful internships and induction. Further, over the last decade, a number of higher educational institutions have begun to offer supplemental training in Applied Behavior Analysis, leading to certification as a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA).

Types of special education personnel. Special education personnel vary according to disability category and needs, type of school (general or inclusive) and level of financial resources in the school. Educational staff (principal, educational counselors, itinerant resource specialists, special education and inclusive teachers, and auxiliary staff) as well as the therapeutic staff (educational psychologists, para-medical staff and social workers) collaborate to promote a child-centered service delivery model.

Nature of in-service training/professional development provided to special education/special needs education teachers. The MOE has established guidelines for the professional development of all teachers, including special education teachers and auxiliary staff. Two recent reforms have affected upon teacher's salaries and tenure: “New Horizon” (“*Ofek Hadash*” for elementary schools, 2008) and “Courage to Change” (“*Oz Latmura*” for secondary schools, 2012). The “New Horizon” reform distinguishes between four stages in teacher's professional development: beginner, basic professional, advanced professional, and expert. The “Courage to Change” reform focuses on the development of expertise in an academic discipline, school climate, quality of instruction, and the learning evaluation processes. A teacher’s promotion is dependent on performance in these areas as well as their participation in recognized in-service training focusing on three main areas: academic disciplines, pedagogical, and organizational-managerial studies. In addition, other topics are covered, such as advanced e-learning skills and technology (Shimoni & Avidav-Unger, 2013).

Barriers/Issues to Providing Quality Special Education/Special Needs Education Services.

Formally, the State of Israel aspires towards an inclusionary model of special education. Despite these aspirations, progress has been slow and has been impeded by significant constraints and challenges. Despite the SEL, several attempts to expedite and encourage inclusion in Israel have yet to succeed. For instance, in 2000 the “Margalit Committee” (another blue-ribbon government panel) concluded that due to the inadequate allocation of resources for the inclusion of students with special educational

needs, personalized educational programming was withheld, negatively affecting integration into the general educational system. The committee stated unequivocally that students with special needs have the right to learn together with their peers in order to achieve their full academic and social potential; unfortunately, the committee's recommendations were never implemented.

In 2007, the "Dorner Committee" (the most recent governmental panel to examine special education provision) investigated the special education system and inclusionary practices in Israel due to the disproportionate distribution of budgetary resources favoring segregated versus integrated settings. The committee's primary conclusion was that integrating students with disabilities cannot succeed without the government providing the necessary resources and adopting a clear policy supporting inclusion based on a money-follows-child budgetary shift. Despite this, the rate of students with special educational needs integrated into general educational settings has steadily decreased over the last decade.

There is a significant discrepancy between the law, which encourages the inclusion of children with disabilities, and actual educational practices. Many children have yet to be integrated into the general educational system because only special education placements allow for the provision of the resources needed for the support of these students. Despite the desire and intention, inclusion in Israel remains a challenge, and the general education system continues to lack the resources and training necessary to include of students with disabilities in mainstream settings (Ari-Am & Gumpel, 2014).

Promising Trends in the Future

Israel adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) on March 30, 2007 and the treaty was ratified by the *Knesset* on September 28, 2012. Israel boasts of having a very strong civil society, with a plethora of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) advocating for the educational and social rights of children with special educational needs. These NGOs can be roughly broken down into two groups: parent groups and legal advocacy groups. No Israeli parallel exists to the Council for Exceptional Children. These organizations remain on the forefront of efforts to ensure inclusionary practices and the full implementation of the CRPD.

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