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HIGHER EDUCATION AMONG ARAB STUDENTS FROM ISRAEL: THE DILEMMA OF STUDYING IN AN ISRAELI UNIVERSITY OR ABROAD

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the unique dilemma faced by Arab students in Israel regarding the pursuit of a higher education and the reasons for the rapid increase in the number of Arab students from Israel seeking higher education degrees abroad, especially in Jordan and in Europe. In providing a meta-analysis of the theoretical literature and the current research on the accessibility of higher education for Arab students in Israel, this paper reveals that lenient admissions requirements for Arabs from Israel at foreign universities, especially for prestigious faculties of medicine and para-medical studies promote this trend. Nevertheless, Arab students from Israel perceive higher education abroad as a constrained solution, preferring to study in Israel despite the difficulties they encounter at Israeli universities. In light of the internationalization of higher education and the benefits accruing from it, it should be noted that studying abroad has made an important contribution to the lives and personal careers of Arab students from Israel, especially those of women. New programs being offered by the Israeli Higher Education Council may contribute to even greater access to higher education to its Arab citizens.

KEYWORDS

- Higher education
- Arab students from Israel
- studying abroad

Introduction

Arab students from Israel perceive higher education as an important (and sometimes the only) means to advance their social mobility both individually and as a group. Since the 1970s, there has been a constant rise in the number of Arab students from Israel studying in the Israeli higher education system. Following reforms in the 1990s that enabled the establishment of academic colleges in addition to the eight universities in Israel, this trend has even accelerated, notably

in regard to the proportion of women enrolled in the higher education system. In fact, in 2005, the number of Arab women studying for higher education degrees surpassed that of men. Despite these encouraging facts, the Arab minority in Israel still falls behind the Jewish sector with regard to the proportion of the population gaining acceptance into institutes of higher learning, especially universities. In light of the difficulties encountered by Arab students from Israel who seek acceptance into the faculties in which they wish to study, studying overseas has long been considered a popular alternative.¹

This paper offers a meta-analysis of existing theoretical literature regarding the accessibility of higher education for Arab students from Israel and investigates the various obstacles that still persist. It also presents an explanation for their course to higher education abroad.

The paper relies on the research methodology of content-analysis as applied to official documents, statistics, and research on access to higher education in Israel or abroad for students from the Arab minority of Israel. As an endogenous model that seeks “both possible causes and possible effects as located within the country being investigated,”² the pattern of study for higher education in the Arab community of Israel is analyzed as systematically as possible, reflecting the social characteristics of the State of Israel and its policies.³

The paper tries to answer the following questions: what are the obstacles inhibiting higher education among Arab students from Israel at Israeli universities and what are the patterns of their higher education studies? Do they face structural inequalities that prevent or restrict their access to higher education at universities in Israel? What are the factors attracting Arab students from Israel to study at universities abroad, especially in Jordan and other European countries? This paper answers these questions with empirical data relating to the pursuit of higher education by Arab students from Israel both inside Israel and abroad.⁴

A primary issue in this discussion is the difficulty faced by Arab students from Israel in gaining access to institutes of higher education in Israel. This indicates the presence of various structural socio-economic obstacles to studying certain prestigious disciplines. The paper investigates the increase in the number of female Arab students who obtain higher education — a trend which has significant influence upon the development of the Arab society in Israel — as well as the phenomenon of Arab students from Israel studying abroad.

This study’s conclusions have obvious implications for higher education policy in Israel as well as for the socio-cultural, economic, and employment status of its

1 K Arar & M Mustafa, ‘Access to higher education for the Palestinians in Israel’, *Education, Business and Society: Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2011, pp. 207–228.

2 Qyen, 1990, *apud* Arar and Mustafa, 2011, p. 208.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 208.

4 K Arar & K Haj-Yehia, ‘Higher education abroad: Palestinian students from Israel studying in Jordanian universities’, *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2013, pp. 95–112.

Arab citizens. The following review of theoretical literature sets the context for the conceptual framework of the paper.

The Dilemma of Higher Education among Arab Students from Israel

The ethnic Arab minority in Israel, numbering 1.5 million, constitutes 20.2% of the total population.⁵ For several decades this minority has been undergoing serious socio-political changes. As the community views higher education as a means of social and political empowerment⁶, increased participation in higher education not only assists the modernization of society, but also plays a major role in this on-going change. The majority Jewish government uses higher education as a tool for controlling the Arab minority, both culturally and economically. Arabs in Israel feel that they are subject to discriminatory government policies in almost all domains including access to higher education.⁷

Although there are a few separate teacher education colleges for Arabs, there are no separate universities.⁸ While the higher education system in Israel allows Arab students an opportunity to integrate into the country's academic socio-political life, at the same time it acts as a tool for the propagation of state-enforced cultural and political hegemony. Arabs in Israel see this as a threat to their national-cultural identity.⁹

Arab students in Israel perceive higher education as sometimes the only means for obtaining social mobility both individually and as a group.¹⁰ The number of Arab students accepted to Israeli universities under-represents their proportion in the general population.¹¹ While institutes of higher education in Israel have aspired to include more students from the marginal segments of society since the 1990s, equality between minority and majority in the higher education system has not been achieved. The following figure shows the growing percentage of Arab students from Israel studying at Israeli universities in several academic years. Figure 1 shows that the number of Arab students enrolled in Israeli universities from 1991-2011 comprises only 11.3% of the total number of students in Israeli universities. This does not reflect their total percentage of the population of Israel which is 20.2%.¹²

5 R Khamaise, (ed.), *Arab society in Israel 3, Population, society, economy*. Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem, 2009, p. 42. [Hebrew].

6 Arar & Mustafa, 2011, p. 208.

7 Arar & Mustafa, 2011, p. 208; Suleiman, 2002, p. 757.

8 S Abu-Rabia-Queder & K Arar, 'Gender and higher education in different national spaces: Palestinian students in Israeli and Jordanian universities'. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2011, pp. 353-370.

9 M Al-Haj, 'Higher education among the Arabs in Israel: Formal policy between empowerment and control', *Higher Education Policy*, no. 16, 2003, pp. 351-368; H Ayalon & A Yogev, 'Field study of student stratification in an expanded system of higher education: The case of Israel', *European Sociological Review*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2005, pp. 227-241.

10 M Al-Haj, *Education, empowerment and control: The case of the Arabs in Israel*, Albany: University of New York Press, 1995, p. 159; K Arar & K Abu-Asbah, 'Education and employment as an opportunity for change in the status of Arab women in Israel' in K Arar & K Haj-Yehia (eds.), *Academics and higher education among Arabs in Israel: Trends and issues*, Ramot, Tel Aviv University, 2007, p. 74.

11 Y Jabareen & A Agbaria, *Education on hold*, Dirasat and Haifa University, School of Law, Nazareth, 2011, pp. 7-8 [Hebrew].

12 Khamaise, 2009, p. 43.

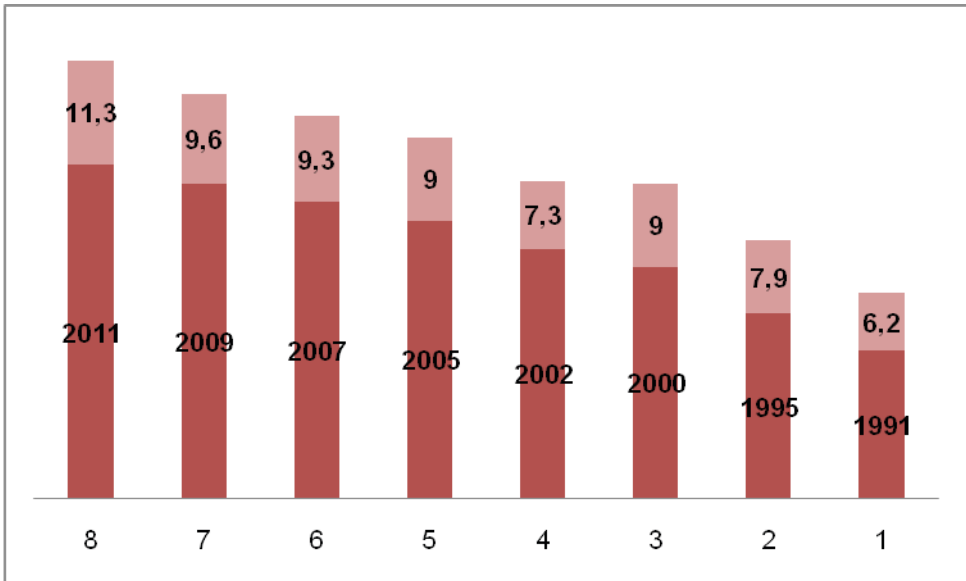


Figure 1. The percentage of Arab students from Israel studying at Israeli universities according to some academic years (Arar & Haj Yehia, 2013, p. 98).

The establishment of academic colleges in the mid-1990s made tertiary education more accessible for the entire population in general and for female Arab students in particular.¹³ The close proximity of the colleges to Arab communities allowed female students the opportunity to return home every evening. The combined percentage of male and female Arab students studying in institutions of higher education increased by 220% in academic years 1990-2001. In the same period, the overall increase in students enrolled in institutes of higher education in Israel amounted to 12.5%. By 2011, Arab students from Israel constituted 11.3% of all higher education students in Israel, 8% of all university students, 6.7% of all students at academic colleges, and 22.5% of all students enrolled at teachers training colleges.¹⁴ Figure 2 shows that the proportion of Arab students studying at Israeli universities is 41%, 20% study at teacher training colleges, especially female Arab students, 9% study at private academic colleges, while 30% study abroad.

¹³ Arar & Haj Yehia, 2013, pp. 98-99.

¹⁴ Khamaise, 2009, p. 45; Arar & Haj Yehia, 2013, p. 98.

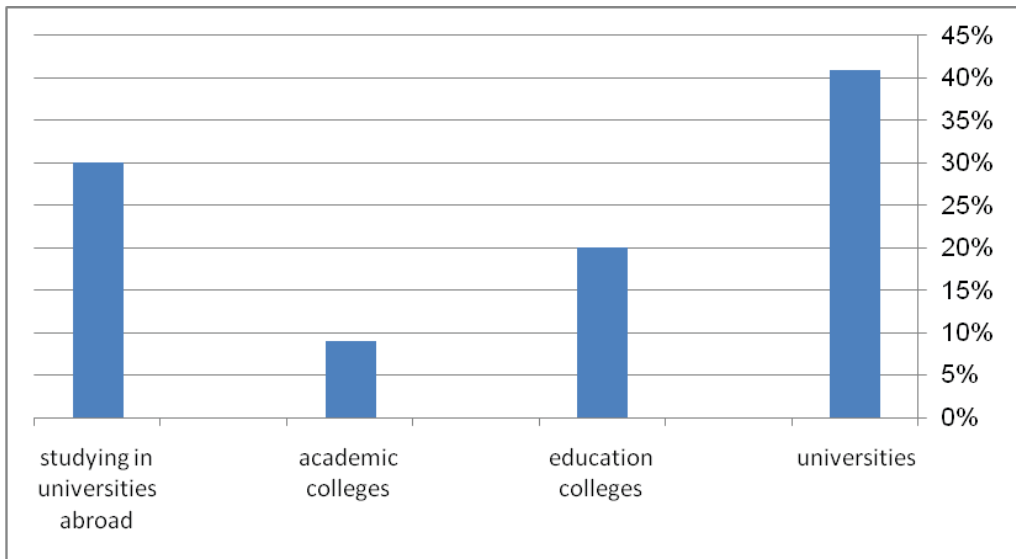


Figure 2. The distribution of Arab students from Israel studying at institutions of higher education for the academic year 2011 - 2012 (Processed from: Arar & Haj Yehia, 2013).

Despite these encouraging facts, Arab students from Israel still fall behind students from the Israeli Jewish sector with regard to acceptance into institutes of higher learning, especially universities. In 2011, for example, 37.6% of the university applications submitted by Arab applicants were rejected (Table 1) as compared to the 20.5% rejection rate for Jewish applicants.¹⁵ Moreover, the proportion of students seeking a higher education within the 20-34-year-old population is almost three times higher in the Jewish sector than in the Arab sector (9%, and 3.3%, respectively).¹⁶

¹⁵ Arar & Haj Yehia, 2013, p. 98.

¹⁶ Khamaise, 2009, p. 46.

Table 1. The distribution of Arab students from Israel according to acceptance/rejection at Israeli universities by some academic years. (Processed from: Arar & Haj Yehia, 2013, p. 98)

academic year	% accepted and studied	% accepted but did not study	% rejected
1990	33.7	11.9	51.9
1995	40.9	12.7	45.4
2000	42.5	14.2	43.3
2004	37.6	13.2	49.2
2011	49.1	13.3	37.6

There are many impediments to proportional access for Arab students from Israel in the Israeli higher education system. University entrance requirements in Israel demand high achievement in both matriculation exams and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). Two factors making Israeli higher education less accessible to Arab students are: (1) Low proportion of eligibility for high-school matriculation certificates, and (2) Low SAT scores — with the average score in the Arab sector about one standard deviation below that in the Jewish sector.¹⁷ The inherent cultural bias of this exam negatively affects the enrolment rate of candidates both from the Jewish population residing outside the centre of the state and Arab students.¹⁸ This is compounded by inferior elementary and high schools servicing these populations so that Arab students from Israel find it almost impossible to gain admission to the disciplines of their choice at Israeli universities.

Female Arab students from Israel are subject to unique pressure when aspiring toward higher education as the realization of that goal may necessitate special consideration.¹⁹ Despite trends towards modernization and liberal thinking, Arab society in Israel still maintains a conservative and patriarchal view of women's status.²⁰

In this context it should be noted that at certain Israeli universities some popular fields of study such as medicine and para-medical disciplines do not accept students who are under 20 years of age. Most of the Jewish population is not discharged from compulsory military service until the age of 21, so this age limit is not a problem for them. As the Arab sector in Israel is not required to perform

17 Arar & Mustafa, 2011, p. 213; D Maagan & L Shapira, *Results of the Israeli Scholastic Aptitude Test SAT 1991-2006*. Oral presentation given at the 5th annual meeting of the Israel Psychometric Association ISPA, Jerusalem, Israel, 2009, pp. 15-16 [Hebrew].

18 Arar & Mustafa, 2011, p. 214; Jabareen & Agbaria, 2011, p. 78.

19 Abu-Rabia-Queder & Arar, 2011, p. 356.

20 K Arar, 'Trapped between two worlds-Muslim Palestinian women from Israel in Jordanian universities: new identity and the price it demands', *Social Identities*, vol. 17, no. 5, 2011, p. 631.

military service, most of their students are available for academic study at age 18. As a result, those wishing to study these age-limited subjects have to delay their studies by about two years.²¹ Table 2 shows that Arab students enrolled in the Israeli universities are mainly concentrated in the social sciences and the humanities, while being under-represented in the fields of medicine and Para-medical subjects which are their preferred disciplines.

Table 2. The distribution of Arab students at Israeli universities by disciplines in the academic year 2010\2011. (Higher Education Council- Israel, 2011)

Discipline	Total %	% of female students
Humanities	16.2	0.1
Social Science	32.6	25.3
Law	2.1	1.8
Medicine	1.5	2.5
Para-medical	9.4	15.1
Math & Science	21.2	11.4
Agriculture	0.6	0.1
Engineering	16.3	3.6
Total	100	100

Although higher education is one of the core elements of long-term advancement for the Arab minority and the increase in Arab students obtaining a higher education in Israel rose by 5 percentage points between 1991 and 2011²², this increase is significantly lower than that of the Jewish sector. Arab students are poorer on the average than their Jewish counterparts and most of the available scholarships are conditioned upon military or national service. Furthermore, there are cultural factors that Arab students from Israel face when navigating the higher education system. They are usually two years younger than their Jewish peers and are experiencing living outside their local community for the first time.²³

Arab students from Israel planning to study the preferred professions of medicine, pharmacy, and Para-medical subjects which enjoy high prestige in the Arab community in Israel, but who are rejected by Israeli universities, turn to higher education abroad.

²¹ Arar & Mustafa, 2011, p. 215.

²² Arar & Haj Yehia, 2013, pp. 98-99.

²³ Arar & Mustafa, 2011, p. 215.

Arab students in Israel and the phenomenon of studying abroad

Many studies investigating indigenous ethnic minorities who migrate outside their states to study indicate that the motives behind such action include: economic, historic, colonial, and cultural ties and the sharing of a common lifestyle with the target country.²⁴ Arab students from Israel mostly base their decision of a target country for migration for purposes of higher education on practical considerations: easy acceptance, good prospects for successful completion of studies, reduction of costs since there is no repetition of years of study, etc., and high potential of future employment. Their motives are similar to those of students from other foreign countries that choose to study in the UK or the USA.²⁵ Similar utilitarian considerations motivate some Jewish Israelis to study prestigious disciplines in Italy, Hungary, or Romania.²⁶

Universities in former Communist Eastern Europe were a popular academic destination among Arab students from Israel during the Communist era, partly due to scholarships from the Israeli Communist Party.²⁷ However, the collapse of these Communist regimes reduced the number of Arab students from Israel seeking higher education in these countries. Correspondingly universities in Western Europe have become more popular among Arab students from Israel, with Germany being the most popular destination²⁸. In general, Arab students do not need to take a psychometric exam when applying for admission to universities abroad, especially in Jordan, but also at certain Western and Eastern European universities.²⁹

A survey conducted by Haj-Yehia in 2002, on Arab students from Israel studying in Germany, identified several factors behind Arab students gravitating there to study: (1) relatively low tuition fees; (2) high prestige of the German universities; (3) geographical proximity to Israel; (4) opportunity to work while studying; and (5) the relationship between Germany and the Arab world. However, the popularity of Germany as an academic destination for Arab students from Israel is declining, due to the growing xenophobia towards Muslims, and the new employment regulations that limit job opportunities for foreign students.³⁰ In 1994

24 S Ball, D Reay & M David, 'Ethnic choosing: minority ethnic students, social class and higher education choice', *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, vol. 5, no. 4, 2002, pp. 342-343; R Brooks & J Waters, *Student mobilities, migration and the internalization of higher education*, Palgrave Macmillan, New-York, 2011, pp. 44-46; S Gorard, 'Who is missing from higher education?', *Cambridge Journal of Education*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2008, p. 426; D Reay, M Davudand & S Ball, *Degrees of choice - Social class, race and gender in higher education*, Trentham Books, Staffordshire, 2005, pp. 26-28; T Modood, 'Ethnicity, Muslims and higher education entry in Britain', *Journal of Teaching in Higher Education*, no. 11, 2006, pp. 248-249.

25 Brooks & Waters, 2011, pp. 44-46; P Croll, 'Educational participation post-16: A longitudinal analysis of intentions and outcomes', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, vol. 57, no. 4, 2009, pp. 405-408; M David, 'Equity and diversity: Towards sociology of higher education for the twenty-first century?', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol. 28, no. 5, 2007, pp. 678-679; Gorard, 2008, p. 426.

26 Ayalon & Yogev, 2005, pp. 239-240.

27 Al-Haj, 1995, pp. 160-161.

28 K Haj-Yehia, 'Dream and reality: Research on Arab academics, Graduates of Universities in German', Ramot, Tel Aviv, 2002, pp. 42-44 [Hebrew].

29 K Arar & K Haj-Yehia, 'Emigration for higher education: The case of Palestinians living in Israel studying in Jordan', *Higher Education Policy*, vol. 23, 2010, pp. 358-380.

30 Haj Yehia, 2002, p. 47.

Israel signed a peace treaty with Jordan, according to which Israeli citizens were allowed to study in institutes of higher education there. It is estimated that 5500 Arab students from Israel study in Jordan, comprising 20% of the foreign student population in Jordan.³¹

Table 3 shows the main foreign destinations of Arab students from Israel. Currently, the most popular country is Jordan (54.5%), then the universities of the Palestinian Territories which have become more popular in recent years, and finally the European countries.

Table 3. The distribution of Arab students from Israel according to their study at universities abroad in the academic year 2011\2012. (Processed from: Arar and Haj Yehia, 2013)

State	Number of Arab Students Abroad
Jordan	5,000 (54.5%)
Germany	550
Italy	400
Romania	1200
Moldova	1.650
Palestinian Authority	2.500
Other Countries	500
Total	10.800

Most of the Arab students from Israel prefer to study medicine and para-medical subjects abroad. Table 4 shows that in the academic year 2005/2006, of the 387 Arab students from Israel studying at Romanian universities all were enrolled in either the faculties of medicine, dentistry, or pharmacy. Romanian universities are still considered the preferable academic destination of Arab students from Israel.

³¹ Ararand Haj-Yehia, 2010, p. 365.

Table 4. The distribution of Arab students from Israel at Romanian universities in the academic year 2005\2006. (Haj Yehia & Yakobi, 2007)

Romanian universities	Number of Arab students from Israel	Disciplines
Cluj	70	Medicine, dentistry, pharmacy
Iași	282	Medicine, dentistry, pharmacy
Bucharest	20	Medicine, dentistry, pharmacy
Oradea	10	Medicine, dentistry, pharmacy
Timișoara	5	Medicine
Total	387	

A 2007 study by Arar and Haj-Yehia investigates the reason for Arab students from Israel studying in Jordan, how they perceive their studies, how comfortable they feel on Jordanian campuses and in Jordanian culture, and how applicable their Jordanian degrees are to the Israeli job market. This study was based on semi-structured interviews with 17 Israeli-Arab graduates of Jordanian universities. Each participant was queried about: (1) the factors of life in Israel that motivated the choice; (2) the attractive factors of Jordanian higher education; and (3) the main issues regarding study in Jordan. Arar and Haj-Yehia concluded that the main motivating factors for study in Jordan are the difficulties in gaining admission to higher education in Israel as elaborated above. These difficulties hardly exist in the higher education system in Jordan.

However, the study's participants also mention serious drawbacks in studying in Jordan: high tuition fees, high cost of living as compared to Israel, difficulties in obtaining accreditation for Jordanian degrees, a feeling of alienation in Jordanian universities, and low prestige of the Jordanian universities. Arar and Haj-Yehia³² noted the relatively large number of female Arab students from Israel studying in Jordan, as compared to the number of Arab women from Israel studying in any other country outside Israel.³³

32 Arar & Haj-Yehia, 2007, pp. 237-238.

33 Haj-Yehia, 2002, p. 46; Arar & Haj-Yehia, 2007, pp. 238-239; K Haj Yehia and K Arar, 'Emigration for higher education: The case of Palestinians living in Israel studying in Jordan', in R. Khamaise (ed.), *The Arab Society Book 3*, Van-Leer Institute, Jerusalem, 2009, pp. 227-252 [Hebrew].

Table 5 shows the enormous increase in the number of Arab students from Israel enrolled in Jordanian universities since academic year 2004. In academic year 2011/2012 5000 students enrolled, representing 20% of all foreign students studying in Jordan.

Table 5. The distribution of Arab students from Israel at Jordanian universities in the academic year 2010\2011. (Processed from: Arar & Haj Yehia, 2013).

Academic year	Number of foreign Students	Number of Arab students from Israel	% of Arab Students From Israel	% of female Arab students from Israel
2005-2004	20,934	1,645	7.8%	30.1%
2006-2005	23,053	2,155	9.3%	31%
2007-2006	24,699	5,400	21.8%	31%
2011-2012	25.000	5.000	20%	31%

Arab students from Israel study “minority subjects” such as medicine, pharmacology, and other para-medical subjects, as well as obtaining PhD’s in social studies and the humanities at foreign universities. Universities in Western Europe are selected for their high reputations and their great prestige in the fields of global media, economy, and technology.³⁴ The USA is considered to be the academic destination for future Arab PhD’s because of the research scholarships available via the Fulbright program which supports the intellectual pursuits of highly qualified students who are engaged in social activities or community service and who demonstrated leadership. The Fulbright Foundation has awarded scholarships and research grants to more than 1300 Israeli academics, including Arab academics, since its inception. Since 2007, 8-10 Arab students from Israel receive “Fulbright” each year.³⁵

34 S Marginson, ‘Global field and global imagining: Bourdieu and worldwide higher education’, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2008, pp. 310-311.

35 M Shalabi, *The higher degrees: a planned choice or forced choice*, Dirasat, 2010, pp. 63-67 [Arabic]; K Haj Yehia, ‘Reasons and factors for obtaining PhD’s abroad; the case of Arabs from Israel’, Paper published at the *Knowledge Crossing Borders Conference*, West Chester University, June 1, Pennsylvania, USA, 2012, pp. 1-12.

Discussion

This paper sheds light on the situation facing Arab students from Israel when planning their academic or vocational future. As members of a minority seeking power, material and cultural resources, Arab students from Israel aspire to higher education as a means of obtaining accelerated social mobility in the hope of overcoming disadvantages within the complex Israeli political-economic setting.³⁶ Arab students from Israel face statutory obstacles such as the minimum age, the psychometric test, acceptance interviews, and cultural and linguistic difficulties.³⁷ This may partly explain the stagnation in the proportion of Arab males enrolled in institutions of higher education in Israel and the growing number of Arab students from Israel pursuing higher education abroad.³⁸ The present paper indicates that the most important factor in deciding where to study is practicality: the ease of acceptance, the probability of success, and the financial cost. Similar considerations influence other immigrant minorities in Europe and the USA.³⁹

The difficulties encountered by the Arab minority in attaining access to institutes of higher education in Israel are similar to those encountered by other ethnic minorities in other countries.⁴⁰ However, the difficulties encountered by Arab students from Israel entering the Israeli job market and civil service⁴¹ put Arab students from Israel at a disadvantage. Israeli universities require high matriculation and SAT scores in order to be accepted to schools and faculties that train students for prestigious professions such as medicine and para-medical disciplines.⁴² The lower proportion of Arab students from Israel possessing a high-school diploma, together with their consistently lower scores in matriculation and SAT exams make these obstacles significant motivation for achieving their goals by studying abroad.⁴³

36 Al-Haj, 2003, pp. 356-357; I Abu-Saad, 'State-controlled education and identity formation among the Palestinian Arabs in Israel', *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 49, no. 8, 2006, pp. 1087-1089.

37 Al-Haj, 2003, pp. 357-358; Arar & Mustafa, 2011, pp. 218-219.

38 Arar & Haj-Yehia, 2010, pp. 366-367.

39 Brooks & Waters, 2011, pp. 344-345; D Reay, M Davudand & S Ball, *Degrees of choice - Social class, race and gender in higher education*, Trentham Books, Staffordshire, 2005, pp. 28-29.

40 M Shiner & T Modood, 'Help or hindrance? Higher education and the route to ethnic equality', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, no. 23, 2002, pp. 225-226.

41 M Semyonov, N Lewin-Epstein & I Braham, 'Changing labour force participation and occupational status: Arab women in the Israeli labour force', *Work, Employment and Society*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1999, pp. 120-121; K Abu-Asbah, 'The learning achievements of Arab students in Israel as a factor in their entry into the employment cycle and opportunities for change in their social status' in A Paldi (ed.), *Education in the test of time*, Teachers' Union Publication - Reches Publishers - Educational Projects, Tel Aviv, 2005, pp. 631-632 [Hebrew]; Abu-Saad, 2006, p. 1089; Sikkuy Report, A Hider (ed.), Sikkuy Association, Jerusalem, 2007, pp. 55-56; A Manna (ed.), *Arab society in Israel (2). Population, society, economy*, Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem, 2008, pp. 48-50 [Hebrew].

42 E Gamlieland & S Cahan, 'Unfairness in university screening procedures: a modern version of bible Parable of the 'Poor Man's sheep'', *Magamot*, no. 3, 2004, pp. 438-440 [Hebrew]; D Golan-Agnon, 'Separate but not equal: discrimination against the Palestinian Arabs in Israel', *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 49, no. 8, 2006, pp. 1079-1080; K Abu-Saad, T Horowitz, & I Abu-Saad, *Weaving tradition and modernity: Bedouin women in higher education*, Ben Gurion University, Negev Centre, 2007, pp. 44-45.

43 A Mazawi, 'Concentration of disadvantage in resources and accessibility to matriculation certificates in Arab and Jewish settlements in Israel' in Y Dror, D Nevo & R Shapira (eds.), *Changes in education - Outlines for education in Israel in the 20th century*, Ramot Publications, Tel Aviv, 2003, pp. 57-77 [Hebrew]; Golan-Agnon, 2006, pp. 240-244; Magan & Shapira, 2009, pp. 15-16; Manna 2008, pp. 48-50.

In light of the difficulty in obtaining a higher education in Israel, Jordanian universities have lately become a target for Arab students from Israel who want to study prestigious professions, such as medicine and para-medical disciplines. Jordan is a popular choice because of the common culture and the subjects of study are more than likely related to the similar studies already undertaken on Arabic language, history, and Islamic culture.

Arab students from Israel who study in Jordan are mostly men who study medicine and para-medical subject matters. In addition to the factors mentioned above, other factors motivating them are geographical proximity to Israel, perception of the high prestige and quality of the institutes of higher education in Jordan and their lenient acceptance policy. The same perception applies to universities in Romania, Moldavia, and other East European countries and to Palestinian universities as well. However, despite the attraction of studying abroad, participants in the study perceive studying in Israel as their natural default as represented by the higher quality and prestige of Israeli institutions of higher education.

The proportion of female Arab students from Israel studying medical and para-medical subjects in Jordan is greater than that in Israeli or that of foreign universities, compared to the proportion of Arab men. In addition, the perception of higher education as a means of social and cultural capital as well as the perception of the high standard of Jordanian institutes of higher education is greater among Arab women in the present sample than it is among Arab men.

In the light of the above, it seems that the possibility of study in Jordan is an appealing alternative to the complicated situation encountered by Arab students from Israel within the Israeli higher education system. Studying in Jordan offers not only a solution to the strict admissions requirements of Israeli universities, but also an environment that is very similar in culture, language and religion, as 60% of the population is Palestinian.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Arab students from Israel are a 'perpetual minority', maintaining the behavioral patterns of emigrating minorities in other countries⁴⁵, despite the fact that Jordan is an Arab-Muslim country with a Palestinian majority.

When returning to Israel, Arab students from Israel face difficulties of academic credibility caused by inadequate practical experience in training abroad. These inadequacies may be caused either by lack of practical experience per se or by the fact that their practical experience gained abroad do not fit into the Israeli context and regulations.⁴⁶

Studying in foreign countries is a worldwide phenomenon that is not unique to Arab students from Israel. It calls for comparison between Arab students from

44 U.S. Department of State. Diplomacy in Action. Retrieved April 2009 from: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ci/bgn/3464.htm>.

45 M Justiz, R Wilson & B Lars, 'Minorities in Higher Education', Oryx Press, Phoenix, 1994, pp. 28-30; A J Branch, 'How to retain African-American faculty during times of higher education' in L Jones (ed.), *Retaining African-Americans in higher education*, Stylus, Sterling Virginia, 2001, pp. 177-178; Heller, 2001, pp. 35-36; Masry-Herzalla, 2008, pp. 15- 16 [Hebrew].

46 Ararand Haj-Yehia, 2007, pp. 238-239.

Israel and other foreign students studying in foreign countries. It is difficult to find an equivalent Western minority for the purpose of comparison. It appears that Arab students from Israel have a different type of rationale when considering studying abroad: for the majority, studying abroad is not the preferred choice. Attending an Israeli university is, but since that option is not available, studying at a European university is considered an honorable substitute, guaranteeing smooth access to the local labor market.

One of the observations of this paper is the low representation of women among Arab students from Israel who study abroad. In comparison to their enrollment in first and second degree programs at Israeli universities⁴⁷, Arab women from Israel do not seek out a foreign education in large numbers partly due to traditional family constraints.

Concerning the academic value of studying abroad, it is a fact that having an international academic background has a direct, positive impact upon Arab academics. It enables them to strengthen the academic identity of Arab students in their society in Israel. While adding to the current globalization of higher education, the experience of studying abroad enhances their professional profile. International acculturation via higher education creates new opportunities for Arab students, not only professionally, but also in the development of self-identity.

The paper shows that despite its advantages, studying abroad is a problematic solution to difficulties experienced by Arab students from Israel in the Israeli higher education system. The under-representation of Arab students in Israeli universities in general and in the prestigious disciplines in particular indicates the need for diversified programs and reforms that will bring more Arab students onto Israeli campuses. Obviously, these programs should begin with a thorough and long-term reform of the Arab school system in Israel, an issue beyond the scope of the present paper. An affirmative action policy should be considered in order to increase the proportion of Arab students enrolled in Israeli universities, especially in disciplines such as medicine, pharmacy, and the para-medical disciplines. These are especially attractive for minority Arab students since they offer employment outside of the government sector.⁴⁸ Israeli universities should also increase the awareness of their personnel in “minorities liaison” to be more attentive to the specific difficulties of Arab students. The “minorities’ coordinator” could also assist with specific cultural difficulties faced by Arab women within the Israeli higher education system.

The easing of this situation will benefit both Arab students from Israel and the State of Israel. This can be achieved by affirmative action policies and/or by establishing an Arab university in Israel that will maintain the academic standards of Western universities’ while adhering to Arab culture and values.

47 G Yair, ‘The curved table of numbers at universities: ambition and different reality among female PhD students in the academia’ in R Herz-Lazarowitz & Y Oplatka (ed.), *Feminism and ethnicity in Higher education in Israel*, Pardes Publication, Haifa, 2009, pp. 75-91 [Hebrew].

48 Arar & Haj-Yehia, 2010, pp. 365-366; Reay et al., 2005, pp. 28-29.

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