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**THE DRUZE MINORITY IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN
ISRAEL**

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Abstract

This article will present the changes and modifications that have occurred in Druze education in the State of Israel since 1948. The structure of the pluralistic Israeli education system reflects the structure of Israeli society. All of them are educated to be loyal to the state, and for them their own education system is a means of retaining their group identity, with each of them stressing their own particularity. The main problem of the Druze minority in the State of Israel is how to guard Druze identity and to prevent total integration and assimilation with the surrounding society.

The article will provide a historical survey of the changes and modifications that have occurred in the Druze education system and its attempts to preserve Druze identity among the members of the community. In the first part of the article, I shall present the problems that were encountered by the Druze education system from the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 until 1975. In the middle of the 1970s, voices were raised in Druze society demanding that Israeli Druze identity should be strengthened by withdrawing Druze affairs from the hands of Arab departments, including the educational sphere. In the second part I shall present the changes in the Druze education system between the years 1975-1991. And in the final part of the article I will describe the integration of Druze education from 1991 until today.

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Keywords: Druze Minority, education system, pedagogical secretariat, elementary education, high school education, higher education.



1. Introduction

When the State of Israel was established, the Druze sector in Israeli society was identified with the Arab-speaking sector and therefore Druze pupils were included within the State Arab Education System.

The problem in the Druze community had raised at the end of the 1960s, the Druze community leaders began to worry about the assimilation of the younger generation within the Arab sector which was liable, in their estimation, to lead to alienation from the Druze religion, tradition and culture.

In my research I focused on the question: How did the Druze community in Israel save its heritage and traditions throughout the educational system?

In my research I depended on documents and articles that had been published by the Ministry of Education and Culture in Israel on the topic of education among minorities in Israel. In addition, I relied on statistical data.

As a first step, they requested detachment from the system of Arab education and the establishment of a separate Druze system. Detachment from Arab education would, in their opinion, allow them to introduce special contents into the study framework of the Druze sector such as Druze history and material relating to the Druze heritage.

2. Establishment of the Unit for Druze and Circassian Education and Culture

In many countries, tension exists between the state and minority groups in it that are native-born minorities (Kymlicka, 2001; Anaya, 2004). The situation in the State of Israel concerns minorities which are native nationals that desire to maintain their particularity and to establish their own public spheres, and therefore have demanded this privilege from the state ever since its existence. These native national minorities demand that the state grants validity and support for the various forms of autonomy in internal affairs and allow them to exercise their autonomous rights in the management sphere (Kymlicka, 1995).

In 1953, a law on state education was legislated in the State of Israel that regulated the structure of state education in two main streams: State Education and State Religious Education. The Arab education system had already existed before the establishment of the state as a separate system for the Arab majority in the State of Israel. It was then subordinated after its establishment to the Ministry of Education and became an inseparable part of state education in the State of Israel. In 1948, when the state was established, the Palestinian-Arab minority lost the education autonomy it had enjoyed under the British Mandate (al-Hajj, 1996). On the other hand, it may be said that a centralized and uniform state education system was set up in the State of Israel.

Therefore, in the Ministry of Education of the State of Israel a special branch was established for the Arab education system, the "Arab Education Division", which is subordinated to the instructions of the ministry, there is no autonomy except for the needs of technical adjustment of study programs or the general schedule (Saban, 2002). From another viewpoint, Arab education was separated from Hebrew education, and most of the teachers and headmasters are Arabs. Also, some of the study programs in the Arab schools were adapted, in certain aspects, to Arab pupils. Some also claim that Arab education in the State of Israel has never been granted independent Arab management, and it is in fact managed by Jewish decision makers and policy regulators (Jabareen, 2010; Golan-Agnon, 2004). Abu Asaba asserts that all

the schools in Arab society in the State of Israel are operated under the supervision and funding of the Ministry of Education, and they belong to some extent or other to the state education stream (Abu Asaba,1997). The language of study in the Arab education system is Arabic, with the aim of preserving the particularity of the Arab education system, and the Hebrew language is learnt as an obligatory subject from Grade 3 in elementary education. And today, the Hebrew language has begun to be taught in the Arab and Druze education system from the kindergarten level as a spoken language.

The significant turnaround occurred in the mid-1970s when the State of Israel accepted the recommendations of a number of committees to separate the sectors. Until then, education in Druze society was an integral part of the Arab education system. The Ministry of Education was the first of the ministries to carry out the decision, and in 1977 the Druze and Circassians were taken out of the division for Arab education.¹

In order to deal with the Druze sector, the ‘Unit for Druze and Circassian Education and Culture’ was established as an independent unit in the Pedagogical Secretariat,² which is concerned with the management and pedagogical aspects of the Druze and Circassian education system and with their special needs. The unit takes care of renovating old schools and building new schools, constructing new study programs with the aim of preserving the Druze heritage. New textbooks were written, the teaching staff was reinforced, and the number of qualified teachers among those in the Druze sector was increased.

The separation process of the Druze education system from the Arab education system realized the “rights of minority groups to independent management in the sphere of education and culture and their rights to set up independent educational and cultural institutions of their own” (Eide, 2000; Anaya & Wiessner, 2007). And also, the right of a native minority for self-management in matters concerning internal affairs, especially the right to conduct a particular education system (International declaration concerning the rights of native peoples – UNDRIP, 2007).

These rights, in spheres such as culture, education, language and religion, are testimonies for the collective identity of a native national minority and are supposed to serve as broad a base as possible for the continual promotion of its special characteristics through recognition and respect (Jabareen, 2012). This principle was realized in the education system in the State of Israel after it provided the opportunity of every sector to preserve its culture and heritage through the assimilation of special study programs.

In 1991, Druze and Circassian schools in Haifa and the northern regions were combined, and the ‘education unit’ continued as a staff unit within the Pedagogical Secretariat, and some of the areas it focused upon were:

Formation of a general perception of aims and goals in Druze education.

Preparation of study programs and special materials (history of the Druze and Druze heritage).

¹ The Circassians, who call themselves Adygeans, are a Caucasian people composed of 12 tribes and living mainly in the northern part of the Caucasus in Russia, in Turkey and in other parts of the Middle East. In Israel there is a small community of Circassians, most of them Sunni Muslims, living mainly in two villages in the Galilee: Kfar Kama in the Lower Galilee and Reihana in the Upper Galilee. The Circassians constitute 0.1% of the population in Israel.

² The Pedagogical Secretariat is responsible for designing the educational policy of the Ministry of Education. It deals with pedagogical planning, the development of study programs, and consolidating the teaching policy of study subjects and the way in which they are estimated, in the examination and approval of study materials, and also in encouraging and operating educational experiments and innovations. The activities of the Pedagogical Secretariat extend over all the sectors and all age groups from kindergarten up to the institutions for teacher training.

Promotion of special values Druze, (Circassian), Israeli and universal.

Some have claimed that the very existence of an educational system in the Arabic language does not fulfill the rights of the Arab and Druze minorities. On the other hand, Rabin asserts that "the essential right of a national minority in the educational sphere is the right to establish educational-cultural autonomy within the recognized public education framework in order to preserve its national and cultural identity and heritage (Rabin, 2002: 458). Layish shares the same opinion as Rabin, "There is no tradition of persecution of the Druzes by the Jews, on the contrary, the destinies of these two persecuted minorities have a great deal in common" (Aharon Layish, 1985).

From the time of the separation of the Druze education system from the Arab one, significant changes have occurred in advancing the Druze education system from the level of elementary education up to the level of higher education.³

3. Elementary Education

Immediately after the establishment of the state, the Ministry of Education opened elementary schools in all the Druze villages and expanded the schools that had existed during the Mandate period. In addition to the increase in the number of Druze village schools, there was an increase in the number of Druze pupils.

The law of compulsory education in the State of Israel determined that all boys and girls have to complete 8 grades. The law was carried out nearly in full for the boys in all the Druze villages, but until the beginning of the 1970s it was not carried out in a satisfactory manner for girls. Druze pupils in elementary schools in 1948 numbered 1158 boys and 248 girls, and in 1973-1974 the numbers reached to about 11,300 pupils, girls and boys (Falah, 1974)

Table 01. The increase in the number of Druze pupils in elementary schools and kindergartens

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1945	849	86	935
1948- 1949	881	100	981
1958- 1959	2,615	1,687	4,302
1968- 1969	5,097	3,553	8,650
1973- 1974			11,300
2014- 2015			25,801

The table shows a nearly fourfold increase until the years 2014-2015, which testifies to the awareness among Druze society of the importance of learning for its sons, and on the other hand the awareness of the importance of learning for girls in order to create a Druze society that is developing with changes and modernity.

³ The education system in the State of Israel is divided into the following levels: Kindergarten (ages 4-5), elementary (ages 6-12), high school (13-18), and higher education in universities and colleges.

4. High School Education

There was also an increase in the number of Druze pupils in high school education, in the colleges and universities. Although high school education did not expand to the same degree as elementary education, the increase in the number of pupils in high schools was recognizable. The establishment of the Druze education system and the building of high schools at the beginning of the 1970s doubled the number of high school Druze pupils a few times over. As a result, the number of students in institutions of higher education increased.

I was unable to locate the data for high school Druze pupils during the first decade of the State of Israel. The first data from the years 1958-1959 show that out of 4302 Druze pupils in the education system of that year, only 111 Druze pupils studied within the high school framework. On the basis of these figures, it may be assumed that at the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, only about 27 Druze pupils studied within that framework.

Table 02. The number of Druze pupils in high school education from 1958/59 to 2014/15

Year of Study	Boys	Girls	Total
1958 -1959	104	7	111
1968 -1969	499	34	533
1973 -1974	972	192	1164
1979-1980	1399	540	1939
1995- 1996			12,400
2007- 2008			13,200
2014-2015			15,465

During the school year 1979-1980 an impressive increase was already recorded in the number of pupils. While the number of boys rose considerably (18 times higher), there was a real revolution in the number of girls which increased by 77 times higher. The modernization which had penetrated into the Druze sector brought more and more girls out of the home and into high school and higher education studies (Falah, 1974).

Table 03. The number of Druze pupils in post-elementary education (Falah, 1974)

Type of School	Study Year 1967-1968	Study Year 1968-1969
High School	4	15
Vocational School	6	13
Agricultural School	7	14
Total	17	42

1. During the school year 1968-1969 a total of 575 Druze pupils studied in post-elementary education. And in the year 1973-1974 the number was doubled to 1,164.
2. A rise in the tendency of Druze youth to study in Jewish post-elementary schools.

5. Higher Education

From the establishment of the State of Israel until the end of 1966-1967 school year, 11 Druze students completed their academic studies: four of them in Medicine, four in Law, one in Eastern Studies, and two in Agriculture.

In the academic year 1967-1968, 32 Druze students studied in higher education institutions, and in the following year, 1968-1969, their number rose to 50 students.

In the academic year 1973-1974, 130 Druze students (including three women students) studied in all the higher education institutions in the State of Israel.

In the academic year 2014- 2015 4.6 thousand students studied in all the higher education institutions in the state of Israel.

At the initiative of the Adviser to the Prime Minister on Arab Affairs, an arrangement was reached between the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) authorities and the Ministry of Education and Culture regarding the status of Druze seminary and academic graduates. According to this arrangement, a Druze graduate of Grade 12 (the third and final year of high school) who wishes to study in a seminary, can have his military service deferred, and when he completes his studies at the teachers' seminary he will be appointed as a teacher in a Druze village. His teaching work for three years exempts him from the three-year regular army service.

This step was received with gratitude by Druze society and encouraged many to study in a seminary. In 1964, only 11 Druze students completed their studies at a teachers' seminary, and in 1974, there were 38 of them.

A similar arrangement was made for Druze university graduates. When a Druze student acquires an academic degree in one of the subjects taught at school, he can teach in a Druze high school instead of serving in the army.

Until 1973 Druze women were not only absent from universities but also from teachers' seminaries. Until that year, only two Druze women students completed their studies in a seminary. In the year 2012-2013 the number of women among B.A. students was higher among Druze in comparison with Jews, and they were also younger in age.

In the year 2013-2014, the number of Druze students in higher education was 776, of which 517 were women and 259 were men (Central Bureau of Statistics, 097/2014). These figures indicate the modernization undergone by Druze society in giving women the right to become integrated into the life of the state and to allow them to continue their studies in institutions of higher learning.

6. Problems in the Druze Education System

In spite of the development in the Druze education system, it confronted and still confronts problems relating to the characteristics of Druze society as a traditional and secretive one based on Druze religion. The most outstanding are the following:

6.1. Religious education

The study program in the Ministry of Education in the State of Israel includes a number of weekly hours devoted to religious studies. During these hours, pupils in all the Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities receive lessons in religion and tradition. But Druze pupils do not study this because of the character of Druze religion which does not allow for the study of religion in an open manner. Therefore, voices were raised in favor of lessons the history of the Druze and ethics instead of religion, with the aim of enhancing Druze awareness. To realize this aim, a few of them have requested the separation of Druze

education from Arab education and to construct a special study program for Druze pupils. The state made this separation possible by setting up a Druze education system and approved the program for teaching the Druze heritage. But there are still some voices in Druze society that say this heritage program is insufficient to preserve the special Druze identity and to prevent the assimilation of the Druze community with other societies, and they demanded the allocation of hours in the Druze education system for religious education and the establishment of schools for religious students.

6.2. Mixed Education

After the establishment of the State of Israel and the building of schools in the various Druze villages, the Druze faced a new situation they had not known before. Mixed education was conducted in all the schools, including Druze schools. This was an innovation for them and some of the members of Druze society regarded this step as a threat against Druze tradition, causing a dropout of pupils from elementary and high schools, especially the dropout of Druze girls. This was because Druze society in the 1950s was still a traditional society which did not accept contact with other societies.

Because of the high dropout rate among the girls in the higher classes of elementary schools, the Ministry of Education reviewed the matter and decided at the beginning of the 1960s to separate the boys and the girls and to open special schools for girls in the larger villages. In the course of time, the division between boys and girls in Druze schools was halted and mixed education was reinstated with boys and girls studying together in the classes.

7. Findings and Conclusion

To sum up, it may be said that Druze schools have taken a big step forward over the years since the establishment of the State of Israel. Changes in the Druze education system testify to the good relations the Druze community has acquired in the State of Israel ever since it was established. In spite of the negative forces that tried to twist the facts and describe the situation as the dominance of the state over the processes in Druze society, prominent positive voices can be heard to describe the process of development in Druze society in the State of Israel as one that promotes modernization and advancement in the various spheres of life, whether in education, economics, culture or other spheres.

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