

# EDUCATION

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Courtesy The  
Jerusalem  
Foundation / S.  
Sabella



## EDUCATION

Education in Israel is a precious legacy. Following the tradition of past generations, education continues to be a fundamental value and is recognized as the key to the future. The educational system aims to prepare children to become responsible members of a democratic, pluralistic society in which people from different ethnic, religious, cultural and political backgrounds coexist. It is based on Jewish values, love of the land, and the principles of liberty and tolerance. It seeks to impart a high level of knowledge, with an emphasis on scientific and technological skills essential for the country's continued development.

אין העולם מתקיים אלא בשל הבל פיהן של תינוקות של בית רבן  
(שבת קי"ט: ב')

The very world rests on the breath of a child in the  
schoolhouse. (Babylonian Talmud: Shabbat, 119b)

## CHALLENGES

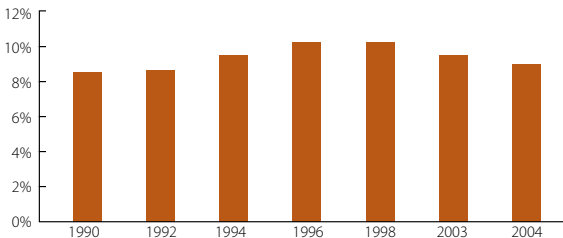
When the State of Israel was founded (1948), a fully functioning education system already existed, developed and maintained by the pre-state Jewish community, with Hebrew, which had been revived for daily speech at the end of the 19th century, as the language of instruction.

However, since shortly after the establishment of the state, the education system has faced the enormous challenge of integrating large numbers of immigrant children from over 70 countries – some coming with their parents, others alone – thereby fulfilling Israel's *raison d'être* as the historic homeland of the Jewish people. The mass immigration of the 1950s, mainly from postwar Europe and Arab countries, was succeeded in the 1960s by a large influx of Jews from North Africa. In the 1970s, the first sizable immigration of Jews from the Soviet Union arrived, followed intermittently by smaller groups. Since the beginning of the 1990s, over one million Jews from the former Soviet Union have come to Israel, with tens of thousands more still arriving each year. In two mass movements, in 1984 and 1991, almost the entire Jewish community of Ethiopia was brought to the country. Over the years, many Jews from the Americas and other Western countries have also settled in Israel.

In addition to meeting urgent demands for more classrooms

and teachers, special tools and methods have had to be developed to help absorb youngsters from many cultural backgrounds into the school population. Programs designed specifically to meet the needs of the newcomers include preparation of appropriate curricular aids and short-term classes to introduce immigrant pupils to subjects not learned in their countries of origin, such as the Hebrew language and Jewish history. Special courses were initiated to train teachers to deal with immigrant youngsters, and retraining courses for immigrant teachers have facilitated their employment in the education system.

At the same time, the Ministry of Education is involved in an ongoing process of bringing educational standards in line with modern pedagogic practices, such as mandating gender equality, upgrading teacher status, broadening humanistic curricula, and promoting scientific and technological studies. A key aspect of its policy is to provide equal opportunities in education for all children and to increase the number of pupils passing matriculation examinations.



**National Expenditure on Education as a Percentage of GDP**

## PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

Courtesy of the Jerusalem Foundation/H. Mazor



Education in Israel begins at a very young age in order to provide children with an augmented head start, particularly in terms of socialization and language development.

Many two-year-olds and almost all three- and four-year-olds attend some kind of preschool framework. Most programs are sponsored by local authorities, some within day-care centers operated by women's organizations; others are privately owned. The Ministry of Education allocates special resources for preschool education in disadvantaged areas.

Credit of the Bible Lands Museum, Jerusalem



Kindergarten for five-year-olds is free and compulsory. The curriculum aims to teach fundamental skills, including language and numerical concepts, to foster cognitive and creative capacities, and to promote social abilities. The curricula of all preschools are guided and supervised by the Ministry of Education to ensure a solid and well-rounded foundation for future learning.

## SCHOOL SYSTEM

School attendance is mandatory and free from age 6 to 18. Formal education starts in primary school (grades 1-6) and continues with intermediate school (grades 7-9) and secondary school (grades 10-12). About nine percent of the post-primary school population attend boarding schools.

The multi-cultural nature of Israel's society is accommodated within the framework of the education system. Accordingly, schools are divided into four groups: **state schools**, attended by the majority of pupils; **state religious schools**, which emphasize Jewish studies, tradition, and observance; **Arab and Druze schools**, with instruction in Arabic and special focus on Arab and Druze history, religion, and culture; and **private schools**, which operate under various religious and international auspices.

In recent years, with the growing concern of parents over the orientation of their children's education, some new schools have been founded, which reflect the philosophies and beliefs of specific groups of parents and educators.

Private ultra-orthodox school  
 • G.P.O. / A. Ben Gwershom



Arab school

• Courtesy of the Jerusalem Foundation/S. Sabella

## **EDUCATION FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN**

Gifted children, who rank in the top 3 percent of their class and have passed qualifying tests, participate in enrichment programs, ranging from full-time special schools to extracurricular courses. A classroom for the gifted is characterized by the level of its students and its studies, with emphasis not only on imparting knowledge and understanding, but also on applying the concepts mastered to other disciplines. Children in these programs learn to research and handle new material independently.

Children with physical, mental, or learning disabilities are placed in appropriate frameworks according to the nature of their handicap, to

## **Curriculum**

Most hours of the school day are devoted to compulsory academic studies. While the subject matter to be covered is uniform throughout the system, each school may choose from a wide range of study units and teaching materials, provided by the Ministry of Education, which best suit the needs of its faculty and pupil population. With the aim of enhancing pupils' understanding of their society, each year a special topic of national importance is studied in depth. Themes have included democratic values, the Hebrew language, immigration, Jerusalem, peace, and industry.

## ADMINISTRATION AND STRUCTURE

The Ministry of Education is responsible for school curricula, educational standards, supervision of teaching personnel, and construction of school buildings. Local authorities are charged with school maintenance as well as with acquisition of equipment and supplies. Teaching personnel at the kindergarten and primary school level are ministry employees, while those in the upper grades are employed by local authorities, which receive funding from the ministry according to the size of the school population. The government and local authorities finance 80 percent of education, while the rest comes from other sources.

help them eventually achieve maximum integration into the social and vocational life of their community. Thus some are taken care of in special settings, while others attend regular schools, where they may be assigned to self-contained groups or to mainstream classes with supplementary tutoring.

Responsibility for their well-being is shared by health-care personnel, psychologists, social workers, and special education professionals, as well as by the family and various community support groups. A committee constituted by law and appointed by the minister of education determines the eligibility of handicapped children for special education programs and facilities, which are free from age 3 to 21.

## SECONDARY EDUCATION

**Educational Television (ETV)**, a unit of the Ministry of Education, produces and broadcasts scholastic programs for use in school classrooms and educational programs for the entire population. In addition, ETV collaborates with education professionals at universities and teachers' seminars in developing new teaching methods. Dedicated to providing

The majority of secondary schools offer academic curricula in science and in the humanities leading to a matriculation certificate and higher education.

Certain secondary schools offer specialized curricula, which lead to a matriculation certificate and/or vocational diploma. Technological schools train technicians and practical engineers on three levels, with some preparing for higher education, some studying towards a vocational diploma, and others acquiring practical skills. Agricultural schools, usually in



**Percentage of Matriculation Examinees in 17-Year-Old Population**

a residential setting, supplement basic studies with subjects relating to agronomy. Military preparatory schools train future career personnel and technicians in specific fields required by the Israel Defense Forces. Yeshiva high schools, mainly boarding schools, with separate frameworks for boys and girls, complement their secular curricula with intensive religious studies and promote observance of tradition and a Jewish way of life. Comprehensive schools offer studies in a variety of vocations, ranging from bookkeeping to mechanics, electronics, hotel trades, graphic design, and more.

Youth not attending one of the above schools are subject to the Apprenticeship Law, requiring them to study for a trade at an approved vocational school. Apprenticeship programs are provided by the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Labor in schools affiliated with vocational networks. Lasting three to four years, these programs consist of two years of classroom study followed by one/two years during which students study three days a week and work at their chosen trade on the other days. Trades range from hairstyling and cooking to mechanics and word processing.

lifetime learning, ETV gears its production to people of all ages through enrichment programs for preschoolers, entertainment programs for youth, educational courses for adults, and news broadcasts for all.



Intermediate  
School technology  
class

G.P.O. / A. Ohayon

## HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education plays a pivotal role in the economic and social development of the country. Almost a quarter of a century before the state came into being, the Technion – Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa was opened (1924) to train engineers and architects and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem was founded (1925) as a center of higher learning for youth in the Land of Israel and to attract Jewish students and scholars from abroad. When Israel attained independence (1948), enrollment at the two universities totaled about 1,600. In 2009-2010 some 280,000 students attended the country's institutions of higher learning. Of these 38 percent attend universities and 41 percent are enrolled in colleges, while 21 percent participate in courses through the Open University.

Accorded full academic and administrative freedom, Israel's institutions of higher education are open to all those who meet their academic standards. New immigrants and students lacking the necessary qualifications may attend a special preparatory program, which upon successful completion enables them to apply for admission.

### **Council for Higher Education**

Institutions of higher education operate under the authority of the Council for Higher Education, which is headed by the minister of education, and includes

academics, community representatives, and a student representative. It grants accreditation, authorizes the awarding of academic degrees, and advises the government on the development and financing of higher education and scientific research.

The Planning and Grants Committee, composed of four senior academics from different fields and two public figures from the business or industrial sectors, is the intermediary body between the government and the institutions of higher education regarding financial matters, submitting budget proposals to both bodies and allocating the approved budget. Public funds provide 70 percent of the budget for higher education, 20 percent derives from tuition, and the rest from various private sources. The committee also promotes cooperation among the various institutions.

### **Students**

Most Israeli students are over age 21 when they begin their studies, after three years' compulsory military service for men and two years for women. Until the early 1960s, students pursued higher education mainly to acquire knowledge, while in recent years they have been more career-oriented, with larger numbers enrolled in the wide range of professional studies now offered. At



GPO / M. Milner

present, well over half of Israelis in the 20-24 age group are enrolled in one of the country's institutions of post-secondary or higher education.

## THE UNIVERSITIES

**Technion – Israel Institute of Technology** (est. 1924, Haifa) has graduated a high proportion of the country's engineers, architects, and town planners. In recent decades, faculties for medicine and the life sciences were added. The Technion serves as a center of basic and applied research in the sciences and engineering to advance the country's industrial development.

**The Hebrew University of Jerusalem** (est. 1925) comprises faculties which cover nearly all areas of scholarship, from art history to zoology, and houses Israel's National Library. Since its inception, Hebrew University scientists have been actively involved in every phase of Israel's national development, and its Jewish studies departments rank among the most comprehensive in the world.

**Weizmann Institute of Science** (est. 1934, Rehovot), originally founded as the Sieff Institute, was expanded in 1949 and named after Dr. Chaim Weizmann, Israel's first president and a renowned chemist. Today, it is a recognized post-graduate center of research in physics, chemistry, mathematics, and the life sciences. Its researchers are engaged in projects designed to accelerate the development



of industry and the establishment of new science-based enterprises. The institute includes a department for science teaching, which prepares curricula for use in high schools.

**Bar-Ilan University** (est. 1955, Ramat Gan) embodies a unique integrative approach which combines enrichment

programs in Jewish heritage with a liberal education in a wide range of disciplines, particularly in the social sciences. Blending tradition with modern technologies, it houses research institutes in physics, medicinal chemistry, mathematics, economics, strategic studies, developmental psychology, musicology, Bible, Talmud, Jewish law, and more.

The Ministry of Tourism



**Tel Aviv University** (est. 1956) was founded by incorporating three existing institutions to meet the need for a university in the Tel Aviv area, the country's most populous region. Today it is Israel's largest university, offering a wide spectrum of disciplines and placing considerable emphasis on both basic and applied research. The university houses specialized institutes which focus on strategic studies, health systems management, technological forecasting and energy studies.

**The University of Haifa** (est. 1963), which serves as a center of higher education in the northern part of the country, offers opportunities for interdisciplinary studies; its interdepartmental centers, institutes, and overall architectural plan are structured to facilitate this approach. The university includes a unit for the study of the kibbutz as a social and economic entity, as well as a center dedicated to the advancement of understanding and cooperation between Jews and Arabs in Israel.

**Ben-Gurion University of the Negev** (est. 1967, Be'er Sheva) was established to serve the residents of southern Israel and to encourage the social and scientific development of the country's desert region. It has made major contributions in arid zone research, and its medical school has pioneered community-oriented medicine in the country. The university's campus at Kibbutz Sde Boker houses a research center for the study of the historical and political aspects of the life and times of David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister.

**The Open University** (est. 1974), patterned on the British model, offers distinctive, non-traditional higher education opportunities toward a bachelor's degree by utilizing flexible methods based primarily on self-study textbooks and guides, supplemented by structured assignments and periodic tutorials, with final examinations.

## COLLEGES

Regional colleges offer academic courses. A number of these colleges operate under the auspices of one of the universities, making it possible for students to begin studying for a degree near their home and complete it at the university's main campus.

Some specialized institutes provide various disciplines in art, music, dance, fashion, nursing, rehabilitation therapies, teaching, and sports. Several private degree-granting colleges offer subjects in great demand such as business administration, law, computers, economics, and related topics. At some, additional tracks are available, leading to certificates or vocational diplomas in a variety of subjects ranging from technology and agriculture to marketing and hotel trades.

## ADULT EDUCATION

A wide range of courses sponsored by the Ministry of Education, as well as by public and private institutions, addresses individual needs ranging from learning the Hebrew language and upgrading basic educational skills to promoting family well-being and expanding general knowledge. The Ministry of Labor provides vocational training and retraining for adults in many fields, available in the large cities, as well as in many towns.

Hebrew language instruction on many levels, using the specially developed "ulpan" method, helps immigrants and other population groups to integrate into the mainstream of Israeli life. Compensatory education, designed to reduce educational and cultural disparities among adults, is tailored to the world of adult learners. Vocational training courses, both in day and night classes, are available at centers jointly operated by the Ministry of Labor and industrial enterprises, as well as in institutions for technological and professional training. 'Popular universities' all over the country offer hundreds of adult education classes and workshops in academic subjects as well as the arts. Special radio broadcasts for immigrants include a "university on the air" program.