

# EDUCATION IN JORDAN

BEING A SURVEY OF  
THE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS  
AFFECTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SYSTEM  
OF EDUCATION IN JORDAN  
1921 — 1977

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## ABSTRACT

Since the establishment of the state of Jordan in 1921 it has been in the limelight of international affairs. The political manoeuvring between Jordan and her neighbours, as well as within the country itself, has been anxiously watched all over the world, and has brought an increased interest in Jordan and her people, a subject on which very little information has been available.

From 1921-1950, the political, economic, social and educational change was slow. During the second period from 1950-1977, the change was rapid and great. Jordan was one of the countries which were eventually affected by the impact of the dynamic western culture and whose major characteristic can be described in one word-change. Joseph S. Szyliowicz described the changes in the following words :<sup>1</sup>

The changes in Jordan from 1921-1972 have disrupted the old society and culture. Conflict and reaction are evident everywhere as the interaction of the two cultures has led to the dislocation of value judgement and a fundamental unsettling of ancient ways. By adopting Western technology and sponsoring policies of modernization, dynamic change has become an essential part of Jordan life. Symptomatic of the personal and social divisions caused by the disruptions of traditional patterns in Jordan are such factors as political instability, social tensions, psychological disorientations, and economic disequilibrium.

As a result of the British adaptive policy from 1921-1950, no coordinated program of social, economic or educational change was to be expected, and the government deteriorated into a repressive organization. The land owning elite which made up a large proportion of the ruling class prospered greatly. The result of such policies for Jordan was not happy. The British succeeded in weakening traditional forces in many areas and in laying the foundation for a modern state, but never created structures and institutions to facilitate succession and development or set the society so firmly on a path of modernization.

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1. Joseph S. Szyliowicz, *Education and Modernization in the Middle East*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell, University Press, 1973), p.1.



Moreover the educational policy did not affect the basic concepts and methods of teaching or the general organization of the system of education. Most of the changes were minor, including attempts to simplify an overcrowded syllabus and to introduce more practical subjects, the introduction of some degree of flexibility into the curriculum and an increased concern with extra-curricular activities. In consequence, the great majority of the students attended school for only one or two years. There was a high drop-out rate and deterioration of standards resulting from the fact that the slow increase in enrollments was not matched by a concomitant increase in physical and human facilities. Due to inadequate salaries and lack of opportunities for advancement morale in the teaching profession was already extremely low. The many weaknesses of the Ministry of Education adversely affected the quality of education in every school in the country, since the organizational structure provided for the total centralization of all activities in Amman. The educational process was of low quality and irrelevant to student needs. Extreme centralization resulted in great inefficiency and wastage of both resources and personnel, as no attention was paid to local needs and problems. Education was mainly concerned in preserving the *status quo* and encouraged the forces that were resistant to change.

As to development of education from 1950-1977 the political, economic and social conditions that appeared after 1950 made themselves felt in an accelerated rate of educational expansion. The percentage of the nation's children and youth attending school increased rapidly; the school term was lengthened, attendance became more regular; and education was given more adequate financial support. These impressive increases, however, reflect three serious weaknesses that characterized educational developments in that period. First, the political motivation of this expansion and the intrusion of political consideration into educational affairs did not permit the adoption and implementation of a systematic policy of educational expansion; second, the rise in student enrollment did not keep pace with the country's rapidly growing population with manpower requirements; and third, expansion outstripped the expenditures that were devoted to education with unfortunate consequences for quality.

Despite many weaknesses in various fields of Jordan's life, King Hussein, by 1977, created the structure of a modern state, and his educational reforms established a modern educational system within the country. The system was unified, coherent, secular, and closely tied to the goals of the regime in terms of socialization and political values.

During the period 1952-1977, the country enjoyed King Hussein's strong



leadership in transforming Jordan which was still essentially a feudal society into a strong and respected member of the international community. King Hussein had as his first concern to consolidate power, and he accorded priority to building a strong army.

Along with the efforts for the creation of a modern state, including those pertaining to education, the King was also working to achieve economic, social development and cultural transformation. In fact, it is no exaggeration to suggest that the dissemination of modernity from 1952-1977 occurred due to the personal efforts of King Hussein through the expansion of education in the country. King Hussein planned reforms that would change not only the outward appearance of the society but ideally the mentality and behaviour of the people as well. In this effort education was to play a vital role, but the existing educational system was in a pathetic state; physical facilities and human resources were totally inadequate, the overwhelming majority of the populace was illiterate, and the structure inherited from the colonial period was of limited utility for nation-building and development. Accordingly, after 1956 King Hussein adopted a conscious policy reorganizing the entire educational system expanding it in a systematic way and harnessing it to national goals as much as possible. He moved at once to create a unified integrated system of education which could serve as the mainspring for the drive of modernity.

As a result of the reforms of King Hussein, educational expenditure rose from J.D. 80 938 in 1953-54 to J.D. 1,073,817 in 1954-55, and rose to J.D. 2,581,085 in 1966-67 and to J.D. 18,610,500 in 1976-77. The ratio of pupil enrollment to population was 2.7 per cent in 1947-48 and rose to 21.24 per cent in 1966-67 and went up to 30.7 per cent in 1976-77. The ratio of pupils aged 0.15 to the population in the same age group was 21.2 per cent in 1960-61 and went up to 75.7 per cent in 1966-67, and 72.8 per cent in 1976-77.

A modern educational system had been established by 1976-77. Although many serious problems of equality of educational opportunities for different segments of the population remained unsolved the country possessed the kind of educational establishment that could serve as the basis for continued rapid development.

On the negative side of the picture, excessive centralization in all the major decisions, standardization and uniformity of curricula, feeling of insecurity, instability in top administrative positions, teachers preparation, status, and low salaries, unequal distribution of educational opportunities,

elimination of pupils, lack of adequate school buildings, equipment and instructional material; insufficiency of health services and the adaptability of the educational system to the developmental needs of the country are problems that the Ministry of Education has still to cope with. The process of decision-making, organizing, communicating, influencing, coordinating and evaluating need a basic revision to enable the education process to meet the basic educational needs of the pupils. The crisis that resulted from the rapid social economic and political changes that took place in Jordan from 1950-1977, and the adoption of the products of technology into the various aspects of the Jordanian life are a source of increased frustration and social unrest. There is the challenge of political, economic, social and cultural change in the life of the country. The challenges of the time, the conflicting ideologies on the international scene, and the continuous danger of Israeli aggression are all factors influencing the development of the educational system in Jordan.