

IMPACT-se Review

Sikkuy Report on: “Representation of Arab Society in Educational Materials in Jewish Israeli Schools”

[Sikkuy English Report](#)
[Sikkuy Hebrew Report](#)

Introduction

The Israeli NGO, Sikkuy, has published a brief report in Hebrew, Arabic and English on the depiction of Israeli Arab citizens in the textbooks used by Jewish Israeli schools.

IMPACT-se welcomes many of Sikkuy’s policy recommendations, including the need for more representation of Israeli Arabs/Palestinians in the Israeli Hebrew curricula.

The report is highly limited in scope, depth, and comparative perspective, based on only eighteen elementary and junior high school textbooks.

This is, as Sikkuy states, a report based on samples from textbooks covering just five subjects: Hebrew language, mathematics, science, English and homeland/geography. There are many hundreds of textbooks in the Israel curricula. Despite the apparently serious policy recommendations that are made, this limited research cannot be characterized as an empirical study. As such, much more research is required.

That said, we agree that Israeli Arabs (and other underrepresented groups) should as a rule be represented more fully and positively. The public conversation on this issue must lead to a clearer policy from the Ministry of Education.

Why an IMPACT-se Review?

IMPACT-se’s methodological standards derive from UNESCO and UN declarations, recommendations and documents on education for peace and tolerance. Our approach is designed to take into account every detail within the textbooks; it does not paraphrase, rely on interpretations, or attempt to illustrate preconceived notions. IMPACT’s studies encompass many curricula across the region and beyond.

Main Positives from Sikkuy Report

- Arab cities and villages appear on Israel maps. Palestinian-controlled areas (West Bank, Gaza) appear on maps. (Sikkuy Hebrew report; English report says no Arab cities and villages appear on Israel maps.)
- Islam and Ramadan are stressed in the teaching of the lunar calendar. (Sikkuy Hebrew report; there is no mention of this in the English report.)

- The homeland/geography textbooks include discussion of Arab society in the context of subjects studied; for example: texts about Arab families in the Galilee and the Negev, mention of a visit to a Bedouin community as part of a trip.
- There are texts covering evident differences among Jewish and Arab children.
- A short explanation on the citizens of Israel as a Jewish majority and an Arab and Druze minority are mentioned.

In high school books, there are far more examples, explanations and lessons on the Palestinian “Other,” often discussed in some depth. —IMPACT-se

- In texts for the study of Hebrew, sciences, mathematics and English, no Arab images or Arab places were included among hundreds of illustrations and photographs, names, and citations from sources.

These representations do appear in other subjects/grades including: civics, geography, history, Israel studies, Israel thought, Jewish-Israeli culture and others. —IMPACT-se

- There is a need to expand, improve, and add depth to the representation of Arab society, but certain geography textbooks can certainly provide a preliminary model as part of the efforts toward change. Jewish students in Israel need up-to-date, authentic and complex representations of Arab society to help prepare them for life in a country in which both Jewish and Arab citizens are living.

Sikkuy Report Samples of Arab Exclusions

The report focuses on one Hebrew language textbook, which covers Jewish holidays and events with no mention of the Arab holidays. (Yet Arab holidays are clearly taught in other textbooks. —IMPACT-se.)

The report is critical about the way in which Arab locations are represented on maps; the few math textbooks examined depicted travel between various towns in Israel though not one of them included a destination that was clearly Arab in character.

In a warning about picking wild plants, there is no mention that these plants are used in the Arab kitchen, as a part of the Arab culture. (Sikkuy Hebrew report; no mention of this in English report.)

In another text there were two passages with statistics about Jewish society in Israel, with no mention of Arab society. (Sikkuy Hebrew report; no mention of this in English report.)

Texts for the study of English also serve the Arab school system and hence the instructions in these books are written in both Hebrew and Arabic, but neither includes images of Arabs or Arab places. (**These are included in high school textbooks —IMPACT-se.**)

Sikkuy Policy Recommendations

- **Formulating detailed guidelines:** Determine the manner in which Arab society and other groups are assured an “appropriate” presence in texts, illustrations, and photographs. Address the quantitative dimension of representation for Arab citizens (**20 percent of examples to equal the approximate Arab population of Israel!**).
- **Creating an approval and enforcement mechanism:** Written guidelines should be formulated and published by the Ministry of Education director-general and should include a mechanism for approving textbooks and associated learning materials. The approving parties (a committee or lectors) should function according to clear criteria for approval or non-approval of instructional materials. An enforcement mechanism should be constituted that can intervene as may be required, to prohibit the use of “inappropriate” content.
- **Systemic/declarative backing:** The Ministry of Education—apart from formulating concrete policy tools—must make a clear and unequivocal public statement to provide backing for these changes.
- **Developing awareness and raising consciousness:** The Ministry of Education should create a formula to enable certification by the Standards Institute of Israel (SII) for learning materials that successfully meet the criteria.
- **Establishing an advisory body for the process and formulation of guidelines:** The Ministry of Education should establish an advisory body to oversee the processes detailed above and to provide oversight for implementation. This is critical to ensure the sustainability of the policy and its assimilation over time.

Critique of Sikkuy Report

- The report is based on a very narrow sample: eighteen lower-grade books were selected from many hundreds of potential books covering grades 1–12. Thus it is not an empirical study.
- **IMPACT-se**’s multiple reports over many years covering a far wider range of Israeli textbooks of all grades and subjects shows discussion of Arab presence in Israel before 1948, expression of the development of a national Palestinian identity and varied aspects of the Palestinian narrative, rationale and experience, including Palestinian suffering.
- Maps recognize Palestinian physical presence in the area, including major Palestinian cities and other forms of Palestinian geographical presence.
- **IMPACT-se** points out that the lack of consistency in the way Palestinians are represented geographically must be quickly addressed by the Israeli Ministry of Education.
- Clearly, Israeli textbooks do not include messages of incitement or stereotypes against Arabs or Palestinians; Israeli textbooks explain the complexities and political disagreements within Israeli society but maintain a clear message of tolerance and coexistence in regard to Arab and Muslim minorities, and toward Arab-Israeli citizens in particular. Textbooks include respectful representation of Arab and Muslim culture

and heritage, including direct and personal narratives of Arab and Muslim minorities in Israel. Political peace is portrayed as the ultimate goal and is depicted as highly desirable and achievable, while war as a negative though sometimes necessary occurrence. (For further insight, see [IMPACT-se Reports](#))

- The only real issue remaining then is that of quantitative parity between the 20 percent Arab Israeli population and the insistence by Sikkuy to include an equal amount of Arab-related information in the Israeli curriculum. One assumes that Sikkuy considers this to be equitable to the Arab Israeli population. Where, then would such a policy stop? Would we also need to provide equivalent parity to all the other minority populations, both ethnic and religious within Israel? There certainly should be positive portrayals of all groups in Israeli society throughout the curriculum. But the assumption made by Sikkuy that Israeli and Arab students have no knowledge or understanding of the Other, because there is not enough information in their textbooks, is simplistic and somewhat illogical.

Conclusion

We support Sikkuy's call for inclusivity, joint activities, and respect for diversity among the various segments of Israeli society. Additional representation of Israeli Arabs presumably could enable them to more fully take advantage of all the opportunities offered by the State of Israel. More translations from Arabic and other regional languages, including those of repressed minorities in the region is certainly an issue that must be addressed. Israel can certainly do more to integrate culturally with the surrounding region.

[IMPACT-se](#) certainly agrees that the Israeli curricula in their many forms need to continue evolving. More can and should be done on various levels to create integrated environments of inclusion for all segments of society, including its diversified Arab Israeli population.

[IMPACT](#) for its part will continue to support those positive efforts, while criticizing those which lead children away from peace, tolerance and recognition of the Other.

Though not the place to elaborate on comparative issues, our research has shown Israel to be above the curve among advanced countries in allowing and recognizing minority expression. Still, we recognize there is always room for improvement.

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