

IMPACT-se

Jordan's New Curriculum The Challenge of Radicalism



Executive Summary

Eldad Pardo, PhD
Maya Jacobi

Editor: David M. Byer

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Executive Summary

This IMPACT-se report on Jordan's new curriculum evaluates a range of topics: moderating the education of Islam for students (with emphasis on diversity and openness); layers of national identity; the idea of good citizenship, which includes gender, economic and environmental responsibility; Jordan's approach toward the West Bank and the Palestinians; unresolved internal conflict toward its peace with Israel and proper conduct toward the disadvantaged.

Main Points

- A complete restructuring of Islamic textbooks
- Islamic education is judicious and conciliatory toward non-Muslims
- Diversity is a central theme
- Hashemite dynasty forms the foundation for Jordan's existence and identity
- Embraces local Christians, ethnic minorities, refugees and other foreigners
- Atheists and polytheists have rights
- Islam as a culture of life: opposition to Islamist terrorism as culture of death
- Manner toward women is respectful
- Jordan is committed to the West Bank and Palestinians, Hashemites to Jerusalem
- Minimal recognition of Israel and the peace treaty is a cause for concern

An Islam for Peace and Moderation

The curriculum derives from the principles formulated in the **Amman Message** of 2004, honoring every person regardless of color, gender or religion, showing compassion and benevolence toward all people, and respecting agreements and treaties. The curriculum unhesitatingly attacks Islamist terrorism. One textbook warns against: "terrorism and sabotage committed by terrorist organizations which use religion to disguise their actions."¹ *Jihad War* is seen as exceptional, and only occurs if an enemy forces it on Muslims.

Islam is shown to be tolerant. The curriculum's Islamic textbooks even call for tolerance toward atheists and polytheists. Friendship with foreigners and more so with local Christians is encouraged. Interfaith gatherings are seen positively. Personal friendship is demonstrated and inculcated throughout the textbooks.

There is a level of tolerance and limited respect for Jews. Peacemaking is introduced as a vital part of Islamic tradition, as well as part of Jordanian identity, evident in the care of Syrian and Iraqi refugees.

¹ *National and Civic Education*, Grade 8, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 43.

Jordan's National Identity

The Hashemite dynasty forms the foundation for Jordan's existence and identity. Yet, while their presence is significant in some textbooks, it is not overwhelming. This goes hand-in-hand with the concept of moderation, self-respect and commitment to democracy (admittedly a work in progress). The dynasty draws strength from its heritage of Islam and Arabism, Prophetic lineage, and historical credit as founder of the kingdom and leader of the Arab revolt. Jerusalem's custodianship, Arab heritage and commitment to Palestinian issues are important. In all of this, the army plays a key role.

King Abdullah II is shown to be close to the people of Jordan. Students are encouraged to follow his example.² Pilots are glorified, unsurprisingly, given the history of air force pilots in the royal family. The textbooks also emphasize Jordan's democratic institutions. The influence of British culture during the mandate period persists.

Religious tolerance and diversity are seen as part of Jordan's national identity. Christians living within Jordanian society are represented as equal citizens and good friends—members of the Jordanian family. Happy coexistence with the Persian Zoroastrians during the Umayyad Abbasid Caliphate is also mentioned. Textbooks teach about the Circassians, Chechens, Armenians and Kurds, among others.

Students are taught about various segments of society: city-dwellers, villagers and Bedouins; and the various ethnic and religious minorities. Different ethnic minorities are not only accepted warmly into the country, but diversity is lauded as an integral part of society-building and Jordanian identity, going back to the establishment of the Emirate of Transjordan (1921). Palestinians as a distinct group within Jordan are not discussed in the context of social diversity.

Jordan is proud of its open-arms policy toward refugees. The issue receives much attention in the curriculum.

The ancient peoples of Jordan—Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites and Nabataeans—are largely considered to be Arabs. Such connection to ancient civilizations, juxtaposed with its modern national parks and scenic beauty form important aspects of Jordan's identity.

² *Our Arabic Language*, Grade 2, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 60.

Women and Men

As early as the first grade, Jordanian girls and women are shown both with and without head coverings (hijab). The role of women in Islam is highlighted. Various female characters in Islamic history are given full chapters. There is instruction about rights particular to women, including the right to choose a husband and the right of dowry.

An Arabic language chapter entitled "Act Kindly toward Women," quotes the Prophet. Thus, the attitude toward women is respectful and largely positive given the conservative, patriarchal nature of Jordanian society. We did not find any discussion of the pressing question of "honor killings." There were no references to LGBTQ culture.

The West Bank and the Palestinians

The curriculum stresses Jordan's responsibility toward the Palestinian cause, and recognizes the role of the Palestinian Authority. There is mention of the 1988 Disengagement (of Jordan from the West Bank) and its agreements with the Palestinians over Jerusalem. The kingdom's relation to Jerusalem is presented as a special obligation, derived from the Hashemite dynasty's familial connection to the Prophet Muhammad.

Jordan's past rule of the West Bank from 1950 ("the complete unity between the eastern and western banks of the Jordan River"), is highlighted. King Abdullah I, the founding father of Jordan, proclaimed that this "emanates from the will of **one people and one nation**" (bold added).³ Past clashes with Palestinian radicals are downplayed or ignored. Maps show an inconsistent approach toward the land bordering Jordan from the west. Students are taught that borders can be changed.

Jordan, Israel and the Jews

The view of past wars is sober, but education for peace excludes Israel, believed to be the "Zionist Danger." And yet, the curriculum supports a two-state solution as the only way to peace.

One example of Jordan's pragmatism is understood through acceptance of responsibility for the Arab rejection of the 1947 partition plan and the subsequent 1948 Arab invasion. The refugee problem is described as a natural result of war. The textbooks emphasize the consequences of choosing an unending cycle of wars.

Israel is typically described as a Zionist entity with no rights. The signed peace treaty between Jordan and its neighbor is mostly ignored (it is mentioned only once). Jordanian textbooks also feature the Palestinian "right of return," and "wish to see Palestine liberated from the Zionist

³ *Modern Arab History and Contemporary Issues*, Secondary Stage (Literary Branch Levels 3–4, 2007, 2008–2016, pp. 227–30.

Occupation."⁴ In one book, Zionism is considered the same as Nazism and Fascism, and the Holocaust is not taught.

While the exodus of Jewish communities from the Arab and Muslim world is not taught, there are hints of Jews being a historically independent people attached to the region. The Babylonian conquest and return are mentioned. The Prophet shows respect during a Jewish funeral in Arabia, and Jews in Islamic Spain were enthusiasts of the Arabic language.

International Standards

The curriculum teaches students to show RESPECT and tolerance toward minorities at home and throughout the world. Educating for diversity is apparent regarding ethnic groups, such as the Circassians, Chechens, Armenians and Kurds, or when learning about the classic Levantine lifestyles of city-dwellers, villagers and Bedouins. The curriculum shows no respect for Israel but features brief explanations of Jewish history.

An important ingredient of **IMPACT-se's** standards is recognition of the INDIVIDUAL OTHER, and his or her desire to be familiar, loved and appreciated. A series of examples celebrating the friendship between Muslims and Christians are featured. Against the background of ISIS and the wave of hate levied toward Christians across the Middle East, this is heartening. The friendly depiction of Persian-Zoroastrians imparts an air of humanity (which perhaps counterbalances the kingdom's tensions with Iran). The curriculum is uncompromising in its view of equal rights for religious minorities (including those considered to be idolaters and atheists). The view toward Israel as the Other is negative, but students may have good feelings for the Jews of Spain, who are shown to have adored the Arabic language.

As a rule, with the exception of the portrayal of Israel (e.g., "Zionist entity"), the curriculum applies the principle of NO HATE.

The narratives as regards the sensitive issues of Israel and the Palestinians are limited and there are distortions that may lead students to misconceptions. In this area, the **IMPACT-se** standard of avoiding UNBIASED INFORMATION is only partially fulfilled. Generally speaking, the curriculum does not try to distort reality and keeps an attitude of soberness and realism as part of its thrust toward moderation and peace. The depiction of the 1948 War, for example, is balanced. Past clashes between radical Palestinians and the Jordanians are omitted.

As for the standard of PEACEMAKING and education for conflict resolution, the curriculum includes many practical exercises to help students understand difficult problems affecting Jordan and the world. A clear pro-peace message exists in principle, with war being the very last resort due to its futility and dire consequences. There is no discussion of an Israeli-Arab peace and

⁴ *Arabic Language, Grade 5, Vol. 2, 2017–18, pp. 50–51.*

friendship, and in this sense students are not afforded the perspective of the Other. There is need for a vision of the partnership in what the future represents between these intrinsically connected neighbors.

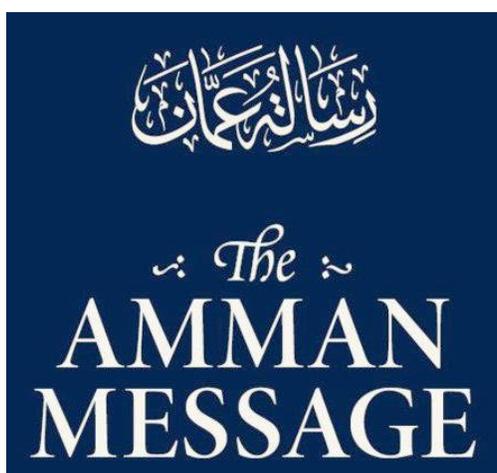
IMPACT-se's standards related to GENDER, SOUND PROSPERITY and COOPERATION are fulfilled, in part, within the section on good citizenship. The key themes of moderation, respect and decency are important in all of these standards. The spirit of pragmatism, respect for the rule of law and fairness, and a genuine and sincere posture regarding democracy is apparent. Despite antipathy toward Israel, there are no calls to boycott. King Abdullah's economic initiatives with tourism, agriculture, investments and industry are described as steps toward economic prosperity in the kingdom. In particular, students are encouraged to be proactive in developing tourism in their own hometowns.

The general attitude toward women is respectful and largely positive. More progress is needed, however.

Our findings demonstrate that the curriculum bravely offers an Islamic education which has begun the process to moderate the influences of radical Islamism, largely by encouraging tolerance and reconciliation within the Hashemite Kingdom.

While the textbooks have contradictions, the intended message of moderation, diversity, respect and international legitimacy remains intact. Likewise is the chosen path of conservative evolution rather than fast-paced revolution. Peace and compassion are evident throughout the curriculum, but relations with Jordan's neighbor to the west remain an exception and cause for concern.

We are impressed by the enormous and determined effort to shape an Islamic culture of tolerance and openness, beginning with the Amman Message on the foundation of international and Islamic collaboration and agreement, and culminating with the current curriculum.



Methodology

IMPACT-se's research utilizes a content analysis research method to examine the textbooks according to the following criteria which is a condensed version of UNESCO's standards for peace and tolerance in school education:⁵

1. **RESPECT:** The curriculum should promote tolerance, understanding and respect toward the "Other," his or her culture, achievements, values and way of life.⁶
2. **INDIVIDUAL OTHER:** The curriculum should foster personal attachment toward the "Other" as an individual, his or her desire to be familiar, loved and appreciated.⁷
3. **NO HATE:** The curriculum should be free of wording, imagery and ideologies likely to create prejudices, misconceptions, stereotypes, misunderstandings, mistrust, racial hatred, religious bigotry and national hatred, as well as any other form of hatred or contempt for other groups or peoples.⁸
4. **PEACEMAKING:** The curriculum should develop capabilities for non-violent conflict resolution and promote peace.⁹
5. **UNBIASED INFORMATION:** Educational materials (textbooks, workbooks, teachers' guides, maps, illustrations, aids) should be up-to-date, accurate, complete, balanced and unprejudiced, and use equal standards to promote mutual knowledge and understanding between different peoples.¹⁰

⁵ The methodology was initiated by Yohanan Manor. This is an updated version of the standards prepared by Eldad J. Pardo, Jean-Claude Nidam and Shimon Shetreet (May 2014). <http://www.impact-se.org/methodology/>

⁶ As defined in the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance Proclaimed and signed by Member States of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, Articles 1, 4.2. See also the UN Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding Between Peoples (1965), Principles I, III. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): Education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial and religious groups and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

⁷ The goal of education for peace is the development of universally recognized values in an individual, regardless of different socio-cultural contexts. See Ibid., Article 6. See also, on exchanges between youth, the UN Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples (1965), Principles IV, V.

⁸ Based on Ibid., Articles III.6, IV.7 and VII.39; and on the Integrated Framework for Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy, approved by the General Conference of UNESCO at its twenty-eighth session, Paris, November 1995, Article 18.2.

⁹ Based on the Integrated Framework for Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy, approved by the General Conference of UNESCO at its twenty-eighth session, Paris, November 1995, Article 9; and on the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance proclaimed and signed by member states of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, Article 5.

¹⁰ Based on UNESCO recommendation concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms, adopted by the General Conference at its eighteenth session, Paris, November 19, 1974, Article V.14.

6. **GENDER:** The curriculum should foster equality and mutual respect between women and men. It should refrain from stereotyped gender roles.¹¹

7. **SOUND PROSPERITY and COOPERATION:** The curriculum should educate for sound and sustainable economic conduct and preservation of the environment for future generations. It should encourage regional and local cooperation to that effect.¹²

¹¹ The preamble to the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance proclaimed and signed by member states of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, notes the Convention on the Elimination of Any Form of Discrimination against Women and emphasizes respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to gender.

¹² Based on UNESCO recommendation concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms, adopted by the General Conference at its eighteenth session, Paris, November 19, 1974, Articles III.6, and IV.7. On the imperative for developing “systematic and rational tolerance teaching methods that will address the cultural, social, economic, political and religious sources of intolerance,” see the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance proclaimed and signed by member states of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, Article 4.2. On education for international cooperation, see also the UN Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples (1965), Principle II.

List of Textbooks

The following Jordanian curriculum textbooks were analyzed for the research in this study. Please feel free to contact [IMPACT-se](#) for access to textbooks contained in our research. The titles both here and referenced in the text have been translated into English to aid the reader. [IMPACT-se](#) typically researches all available textbooks used in a curriculum. If new textbooks or previously unavailable books become available after a report's publication, every effort will be made to update reports to include any relevant material. We welcome any comments related to the acquisition of any omitted materials.

Islamic Education, Grade 1, Vol. 1, 2017–18.

Islamic Education, Grade 1, Vol. 1, 2015–16.

Islamic Education, Grade 1, Vol. 2, 2017-18.

Our Arabic Language, Grade 1, Vol. 1, 2018–19.

Our Arabic Language, Grade 1, Vol. 1, 2015–16.

Our Arabic Language, Grade 1, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

Our Arabic Language, Grade 1, Vol. 2, 2015–16.

Islamic Education, Grade 2, Vol. 1, 2017–18.

Islamic Education, Grade 2, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

Our Arabic Language, Grade 2, Vol. 1, 2017–18.

Our Arabic Language, Grade 2, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

Islamic Education, Grade 3, Vol. 1, 2017–18.

Islamic Education, Grade 3, Vol. 2, 2016–17.

Islamic Education, Grade 3, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

Our Arabic Language, Grade 3, Vol. 1, 2018–19.

Our Arabic Language, Grade 3, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

Islamic Education, Grade 4, Vol. 1, 2018–19.

Islamic Education, Grade 4, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

Social and National Education, Grade 4, Vol. 1, 2017–18.

Social and National Education, Grade 4, Vol. 2, 2016–17.

Our Arabic Language, Grade 4, Vol. 1, 2018–19.

Our Arabic Language, Grade 4, Vol. 1, 2016–17.

Our Arabic Language, Grade 4, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

Arabic Language, Grade 5, Vol. 1, 2018–19.

Arabic Language, Grade 5, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

Islamic Education, Grade 5, Vol. 1, 2018–19.

Islamic Education, Grade 5, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

Social and National Education, Grade 5, Vol. 1, 2017–18.

Social and National Education, Grade 5, Vol. 2, 2016–17.

Arabic Language, Grade 6, Vol. 1, 2018–19.

Arabic Language, Grade 6, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

Geography, Grade 6, Vol. 1, 2017–18.

Geography, Grade 6, Vol. 2, 2016–17.

History, Grade 6, Vol. 1, 2018–19.

History, Grade 6, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

Islamic Education, Grade 6, Vol. 1, 2017–18.

Islamic Education, Grade 6, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

National and Civic Education, Grade 6, Vol. 1, 2017–18.

National and Civic Education, Grade 6, Vol. 2, 2016–17.

Arabic Language, Grade 7, Vol. 1, 2018–19.

Geography, Grade 7, Vol. 1, 2017–18.

Geography, Grade 7, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

History, Grade 7, Vol. 1, 2018–19.

History, Grade 7, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

Islamic Education, Grade 7, Vol. 1, 2018–19.

Islamic Education, Grade 7, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

National and Civic Education, Grade 7, Vol. 1, 2017–18.

National and Civic Education, Grade 7, Vol. 2, 2016–17.

Arabic Grammar, Grade 8, Vol. 1, 2018–19.

Arabic Language, Grade 8, Vol. 1, 2018–19.

Arabic Language, Grade 8, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

Geography, Grade 8, Vol. 1, 2018–19.

History, Grade 8, Vol. 1, 2017–18.

History, Grade 8, Vol. 2, 2016–17.

Islamic Education, Grade 8, Vol. 1, 2018–19.

Islamic Education, Grade 8, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

National and Civic Education, Grade 8, Vol. 1, 2017–18.

Arabic Language, Grade 9, Vol. 1, 2018–19.

Arabic Language, Grade 9, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

Geography, Grade 9, Vol. 1, 2017–18.

Geography, Grade 9, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

History, Grade 9, Vol. 1, 2017–18.

History, Grade 9, Vol. 2, 2016–17.

Islamic Education, Grade 9, Vol. 1, 2017–18.

Islamic Education, Grade 9, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

National and Civic Education, Grade 9, Vol. 1, 2018–19.

National and Civic Education, Grade 9, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

Arabic Language, Grade 10, Vol. 1, 2018–19.

Arabic Language, Grade 10, Vol. 2, 2016–17.

Geography, Grade 10, Vol. 1, 2018–19.

Geography, Grade 10, Vol. 2, 2016–17.

History, Grade 10, Vol. 1, 2018–19.

History, Grade 10, Vol. 2, 2016–17.

Modern Arab History and Contemporary Issues, Grade 10, Vol. 2, 2014–2015.

Modern Arab History and Contemporary Issues, Secondary Stage (Literary Branch Levels 3–4), 2007, 2008–2016.

Islamic Education, Grade 10, Vol. 1, 2018–19.

Islamic Education, Grade 10, Vol. 2, 2014–15.

National and Civic Education, Grade 10, Vol. 1, 2018–19.

National and Civic Education, Grade 10, Vol. 2, 2016–17.

Arab and World History, Grade 11 (Literature Branch), 2017–18.

Arabic Language, Grade 11 (Academic and Vocational Branches), 2016–17.

Grammar, Grade 11 (Literature Branch), 2017–18.

History of Jordan, Grade 11, 2016–17.

Islamic Education, Grade 11, 2017–18.

Literary Issues, Grade 11 (Literature Branch), 2017–18.

Rhetoric and Criticism, Grade 11 (Literature Branch), 2017–18.

Arab and World History, Grade 12 (Literary Branch), 2018–19.

Arabic Language, Grade 12 (Academic and Vocational Branch), 2018–19.

Geography, Grade 12 (Literary Branch), 2018–19.

History of Jordan, Grade 12, 2018–19.

Islamic Education, Grade 12, 2018–19.

Islamic Studies (Ethics), Grade 12 (Literary Branch), 2018–19.