

COLLECTING INTERNATIONAL STATISTICS ON JEWISH EDUCATION:
METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS AND PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Harold S. Himmelfarb

Studying social phenomena by comparing different societies has been a basic tool of social scientists for nearly a century.⁽¹⁾ Yet, the methodology for such comparative studies, particularly in educational research, has developed very slowly. It was not until the 1960s that major attempts were made to systematize the basic methodological strategies in the field.⁽²⁾

Given the gap in the development of research between the fields of general education and Jewish education, it is somewhat surprising that the first attempts to collate comparative statistics on Jewish education also came in the 1960s.⁽³⁾ These studies were rudimentary, at best, attempting to simply lay out the basic facts and figures of student enrollment, types of schools, teachers and teacher-training.⁽⁴⁾ Nevertheless, they held out the promise of a continuing development of comparative Jewish educational research. Yet, it was not until a decade later that a structure was established to actually continue these efforts - *The Project for Jewish Educational Statistics (PJES)*. This paper will briefly outline the goals of the project, discuss some of the methodological problems involved in this type of international research and summarize some early findings.⁽⁵⁾

The Project for Jewish Educational Statistics

PJES was established to provide up-to-date information about Jewish education in the Diaspora by substantially increasing the scope, detail, reliability and comparability of available data. The Project is sponsored by the Joint Program for Jewish Education of the State of Israel - Ministry of Education and Culture, the Jewish Agency for Israel and the World Zionist Organization. A basic premise of the Project is that Jewish educational statistics must be understood within the context of Jewish and general demographic trends. Therefore, it is conducted by the Division of Jewish Demography and Statistics of the Institute of Contemporary Jewry at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The Division has over twenty years of experience in collecting and interpreting data on World Jewry and is the only organization anywhere concerned with this task.

In order to fulfill its goals, PJES began work in several different but complementary directions:

a) *Synthesis of Existing Information*. One report was published on enrollment in Jewish schools during the late 1970s, another report was published on Jewish education attained among Diaspora Jews, and a third report is being prepared on general education attained among Diaspora Jews.⁽⁶⁾

b) *Estimates and Projections* of the Jewish school-age population are being prepared in a fourth report.⁽⁷⁾ It is a necessary prerequisite to under-

standing changes in enrollment.

c) *An International Survey of Jewish Schools* was begun in the summer of 1981. A short questionnaire requesting information about the schools, their students and their faculty was sent to principals of all (or as many as possible) part-time and full-time Jewish primary and secondary level Jewish schools in the Diaspora. This survey is to-date the largest international social science project related to Jews that has ever been undertaken.

d) *Periodic In-Depth Surveys* on selected educational topics is being planned. A questionnaire intended for a sample of teachers in Jewish schools has been prepared and is being pretested.

e) *Analyses of Jewish Population Studies' Computer Data Files* has begun. Four survey data files on the Jewish populations of the United States, South Africa, Italy and Greater Paris have been merged in order to study the differences and similarities between countries in the background characteristics of individuals who receive different amounts of Jewish education, and the impact of that Jewish education on adult Jewish identification.

f) Finally, *A Cross-Cultural Portrait of Jewish Education* is being compiled.⁽⁸⁾ In order to obtain background information that will enlighten the interpretation of the statistics being gathered, a series of standardized-topic essays, describing and analyzing the structure of Jewish education within the social context of the countries in which they are located has been commissioned.

Methodological Considerations

Many of the problems encountered in conducting this study can be anticipated from its international nature and the voluntary nature of affiliation with the organized Jewish communities of Diaspora countries.

First, in assessing existing statistical information it becomes clear that there is a great variety of information about Jewish education available with much variance in its reliability. Some countries conduct periodic surveys. Other countries collect information only sporadically or have relied on information from certain cities which have independently conducted one-time surveys. Existing information from one city or country is often not comparable to the information from another city or country. In compiling our enrollment report we had to rely on actual published information and unpublished reports which can be found in the files of the World Zionist Organization, the Joint Distribution Committee and other international Jewish educational organizations. It is difficult under these circumstances to establish standard categories of information, eliminate duplicated enrollment (e.g., it is often unclear how many schools actually exist in a particular locale and whether the reports are only dealing with those under the sponsorship of the reporting agency), and eliminate non-Jewish enrollment (which reaches above 90% in some "Jewish" schools).

Second, there is great diversity in the content of categories that are established. For example, whereas Jewish day schools are normally considered

intensive forms of Jewish education, there are places where the day schools offer less intensive Jewish education than supplementary schools, i.e., their student bodies contain a majority of non-Jewish students and Jewish studies are offered for as little as two hours per week. On the other hand, there are countries which offer a form of supplementary schooling which compares favorably in quantity of time offered for Jewish studies to most day schools. That is, the students attend after general school every day for almost a complete afternoon. The solution to this problem in our first report was to define categories as they are typically defined, and to emphasize that our data do not imply anything about the content of schooling. (E.g., a day school is a school which offers a full program of combined Jewish and secular studies.)⁽⁹⁾

Categories of school levels are not the same from place to place. Where pre-school ends and elementary school begins is not always clear and certainly not uniform. The same is true about the dividing lines between elementary, middle, and high school; and the dividing lines between high schools and higher level Jewish education. Under these circumstances, the need to collect original and standardized data becomes even more evident, but collecting new data raises new problems.

A third problem encountered is the decentralized nature of Jewish organizational life. We have tried, wherever possible to work through central Jewish educational bureaus or communal organizations. In some places, no such organization exists. In other places, such organizations exist but are generally staffed by volunteer help who are too busy to accept new projects. Then, of course, there are countries which have several central educational organizations staffed by professionals, and often they do not have a cooperative working relationship with each other. As can be imagined, more than a little time is spent just trying to locate the "right" persons to contact in particular places. In some cases the Project had to hire a local or regional coordinator.

Once having located such persons, a fourth problem of persuasion begins. Many persons are leery of social science research. Their hesitations may stem from perceived needs to protect their organizations, or from personal or general cultural biases against social science research. Very few countries have the "tell it all to a stranger" predilection that is common to Americans.⁽¹⁰⁾

Of course, the international nature of such a survey raises the problem of translation. The questionnaire for the first survey of Jewish schools was prepared in six languages: English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Hebrew. Moreover, because of differences in terminology there were three different versions of the questionnaire in English (for the U.S. and Canada; the United Kingdom; and South Africa, Australia and New Zealand).

The international scope of the Project also raises the problem of international communication. International mail service is very poor. Both Canada and Australia had mail strikes when the first draft of this paper was

being written. Mail service in Israel is generally poor, at least by United States' standards. In fact, the centrality of Israel in the Jewish world becomes evident when dealing with the problem of international communication because there are so many persons leaving to various parts of the world on both official and personal visits who can take mail and deliver messages personally. Also, many of the key-contact persons in Jewish education around the world visit Israel one or more times a year in relation to their educational and other Jewish communal responsibilities. International phone service is costly, but technologically quite efficient (often more so than local phone service), once the problem of time differences is overcome.

All of these problems, and many more not listed, make it difficult, but more interesting, to do international research. None of them are insurmountable, and despite drawbacks, it is possible to do such research. The following is a summary of some of our early (pre school-census) findings.

Findings

Tables 1 and 2 summarize information gleaned from Report 1 of the Project (see note 6). Table 1 shows the changes in Jewish school enrollment in major Diaspora countries between the middle to late 1960s (or early 1970s) and the late 1970s. Table 2 shows the changes in day school enrollment for the same period. The major Diaspora countries are the seven largest outside of the Soviet Union and contain about 81% of the total Diaspora Jewish-school enrollment. The previous enrollment report compared in the tables can be found in the references to specific country tables in Report 1. The previous enrollment estimate for the Total Diaspora was taken from Dushkin, 1971 (see note 3).

Table 1. Changes in Jewish School Enrollment in Major Diaspora Countries Between the 1960s and Late 1970s

Country	Year	Age Group	Number of Students Enrolled	Estimated % of Total Age Group	Enrollment Change from Previous Report		Estimated Change in % of Age-Group Enrolled
					Year	% Change	
Total Diaspora	Late 1970s	6-17	490,400 (a)	37.0	1967	-33 (b)	-1.5 (b)
U.S.A.	1978/79	3-17	357,100	37.0	1970/71	-22	+3.0
France	1978/79	3-17	21,700	22.0	1966	+61	(c)
Gt. Britain	1977	5-17	34,000	55.0	1967	-16	(c)
Canada	1978/79	3-17	22,000	39.0	1965	- 8	+3.0
Argentina	1979	3-17	18,600	52.0	1970	- 4	+8.0
South Africa	1978	3-17	15,000	67.0	1968	+13	+9.0
Brazil	1978-80	3-17	10,000	53.0	1970	- 5	(c)

(a) Total Diaspora estimates are for the 6-17 age-group, whereas the major country estimates, except for Great Britain are based on the 3-17 age-group.

(b) Total Diaspora, excluding the Soviet Union. Previous report was based on 5-17, and not 6-17, age-group, and relies on very rough assumptions on Jewish population age distribution.

(c) Not available.

The estimated Diaspora Jewish school enrollment among Jewish children 6 to 17 years of age (shown in Table 1) totalled slightly less than one-half million (approximately 490,000)⁽¹¹⁾ students in the late 1970s. This marks an overall decline in enrollment of one-third since the late 1960s. Virtually all of the decline in enrollment can be explained by a decline of a little more than one-third (36%) in the number of Jewish children during the same period.

Dushkin's previous estimate showed 43.5% of the 5-17 age-group enrolled in Jewish schools totally, not accounting for Jewish children in the Soviet Union. Our recent estimate, based on better demographic data (see note 7), shows a total Jewish school enrollment rate of 37%, which becomes 42% after excluding Jewish children in the Soviet Union. Thus, our data indicate overall stability in the percentage of Jewish school-age children currently enrolled in Jewish schools and even a small increase in some major Diaspora countries. This overall stability is actually marked by a great range between major regions and major countries - from as low as zero in the U.S.S.R. to as high as two-thirds in South Africa. In smaller countries the percentage of Jewish children enrolled in a Jewish school is very high (over 90%). Thus, the actual range is between almost no school-age children enrolled in formal Jewish schooling to almost all school-age children enrolled in some type of formal Jewish schooling.

The United States, which has approximately 77% of the total children in these countries, has only 73% of the total enrollment. In fact, except for the very low percentage of school-age children enrolled in a Jewish school in France (22%), the United States has a lower percentage (37%) than any other major Diaspora community, followed closely by Canada (39%).

There has been an increase in the number and percentage of students enrolled in Jewish pre-schools. There has also been an increase in the number and percentage of students (6-17) enrolled in day schools (34% in the late 1970s) with a concomitant decline in the percentage enrolled in part-time Jewish education (66% in the same years).

Table 2 shows changes in day school enrollment. As one can see from the last two columns, there has been an increase in day school enrollment in all major Diaspora countries, except Argentina. Consequently, the percentage of students enrolled in day schools compared to those enrolled in supplementary schools has also increased (by almost one-quarter in the total Diaspora). Because of the nature of available data on Jewish schools in Argentina, the decline in day school enrollment there reflects the overall trend in student enrollment in all Argentinian Jewish schools.

While in the total Diaspora over one-third (34%) of students enrolled in any Jewish schools are enrolled in day schools, there is much variation in the proportion between countries reflecting, in part, the availability and quality of the public schools in those countries and the tendency of the government to support private schools. In the United States about one quarter (23%) of Jewish school students attend day schools, but in neighbor-

Table 2. Changes in Day School Enrollment in Major Diaspora Countries, Between the 1960s and Late 1970s

Country	Year	Age Group	Number of Students Enrolled in Day Schools	Day School Enrollment as % of Total Jewish School Enrollment	% Changes in Day School Enrollment			
					from Previous Report	Year of Previous Report	% Enrolled in Day School out of Total Jewish School Enrollment	
Total Diaspora	Late 1970s	6-17	172,300 (a)	13	34	1967	+16	+23
U.S.A.	1978/79	3-17	82,100	8	23	1970/71	+11 (c)	+ 7 (c)
France	1978/79	3-17	11,200	(11) (b)	52 (c)	(e)	(e)	(e)
Great Britain	1977	5-17	13,100	(21) (b)	39 (c)	1967	+45	+13
Canada	1978/79	3-17	13,600	25	63 (c)	1965	+57	+27
Argentina	1979	3-17	12,900	36	69 (c)	1970	- 9	- 4
South Africa	1978	3-17	7,200	32	48	1968	+25	+ 6
Brazil	1978-80	3-17	7,400	(39) (b)	74 (d)	(e)	(e)	(e)

(a) Total Diaspora estimates are for the 6-17 age-group, whereas the major country estimates, except for Great Britain, are based on the 3-17 age-group.

(b) Estimates based on rough conjectures of child-age population.

(c) Includes small percentage of pre-school enrollment because current or prior reports do not distinguish between levels and types of schooling.

(d) All students not reported to be in day schools are in pre-schools, except for 3% in part-time schools in Brazil.

(e) Day school figures not available for previous reports.

ing Canada, nearly two-thirds (63%) attend such schools. In Argentina and Brazil nearly all Jewish school students attend day schools, but figures in the table (69% and 74%, respectively) reflect the proportions in pre-school. Pre-schools are often attached to day schools, or are similar in that they are the only school attended by the children.

DellaPergola and Genuth (see note 8) report that the percentage of Jews who receive some formal Jewish education at some time is two to two-and-a-half times greater than the percentage of school-age children currently enrolled in a Jewish school. This is due to the relatively short period of time which most Diaspora children attend a Jewish school, i.e., until Bar or Bat Mitzvah). In most countries there is a substantial gap between the number of students enrolled at the primary level and the number enrolled at the secondary level.

Other PJES reports show that the average numbers of years of general education attained by Diaspora Jews is substantially higher than the number of years of Jewish education attained. Often it is even greater than the average years of general education attained among non-Jews in the same country (Report 3, see note 6).

Notes

1. Durkheim, Emile, *Le Suicide*, is generally credited as the first empirical study in sociology. He compared suicide rates in eleven European countries.
2. For useful references see Bereday, George Z.F., "Reflections on Comparative Methodology in Education, 1964-1966" in *Comparative Education* 3 (June) 1967: pp. 167-187 and reprinted in Eckstein, Max A. and Harold J. Noah, *Scientific Investigations in Comparative Education*. New York: Macmillan, 1968.
3. See Eisenberg, Azriel, *World Census on Jewish Education, 5728-1968*, New York: World Council on Jewish Education, 1968. This was preceded by pioneering work in Europe by Stanley Abramovitch, *Status of Jewish Education in Continental Europe*, Geneva: ADJC, 1959, pp. 9-18; and followed almost immediately with a more comprehensive work by Alexander Dushkin, *Jewish Education in the Diaspora*, Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1971.
4. Only Dushkin, *Ibid.*, includes teachers and teacher-training.
5. During the 1980/81 academic year, I was the first (Acting) Director of the Project and helped shape the programs which were begun. Other key personnel directly involved with the design of the Project were: Professor U.O. Schmelz and Dr. Sergio DellaPergola of the Division of

Jewish Demography and Statistics at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The Project also benefitted from close collaboration with the University's Melton Center for Jewish Education in the Diaspora and the Departments of Education of the World Zionist Organization.

6. Himmelfarb, Harold S. and Sergio DellaPergola, *Enrollment in Diaspora Jewish Primary and Secondary Schools, Late 1970s*. Research Report 1, Project for Jewish Educational Statistics, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1982; DellaPergola, Sergio and Nitzà Genuth, *Jewish Education Attained in Diaspora Communities, 1970s*. Research Report 2, Project for Jewish Educational Statistics, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1983; DellaPergola, Sergio and Nitzà Genuth, *General Education Attained in Diaspora Communities*. Research Report 3, Project for Jewish Educational Statistics, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, (in preparation).
7. Schmelz, U.O., *Estimates of Jewish School-Age Population in the Diaspora by Geographical Regions 1975-2000*. Report 4, Project for Jewish Educational Statistics, The Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (in preparation).
8. Tentatively titled *World Jewish Education: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*.
9. The problems of comparability and equivalence are among the foremost concerns in cross-cultural research. For this secondary analysis of data we have chosen to develop categories which Berry would call "conceptually" rather than "functionally" equivalent (Berry, J.W., "Introduction to Methodology," pp. 1-27 in Triandis, Harry C. and John W. Berry (eds.), *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology, Methodology*, Vol. 2, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1980.
10. Pareek, Udai and T. Venkateswara Rao, "Cross-Cultural Surveys and Interviewing," pp. 128-179 in Triandis and Berry, *Ibid.*
11. Over one-half million, if pre-school students (ages 3 to 5) are added.