Breakthrough and Innovative Case Studies in Formal Education in Palestine: Summary, Challenges, and Future Insights

Casos de estudio innovadores en la educación formal en Palestina: resumen, retos y perspectivas de futuro

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Palestinians universities and schools are innovative and committed. They design and implement a diversity of methodologies and technologies to support students and teachers in order to improve their performance and competence achievement. This special issue shows a number of selected case studies with practical and comprehensive work from practitioners.

RESUMEN

Las universidades y los colegios de Palestina son innovadores y comprometidos. Diseñan e implementan una diversidad de metodologías y tecnologías para apoyar a los estudiantes y a los profesores, de tal manera que mejoren su rendimiento y sus competencias. Este número especial muestra un número de casos de estudio seleccionados con trabajo práctico y completo realizado por expertos.

1. Educational context in Palestine

Palestinian universities and schools are focused on advancing teaching, learning, and research on a global level whilst meeting the local community's needs by participating in sustainable economic, technical, and human development. Universities and schools aim for international education practices and to cultivate a multicultural, pluralistic outlook amongst staff and students designed to foster cross-cultural dialogue and academic exchange, which includes localising education practices into a (new) shape that suits the current situation in Palestine. This collection of papers brings together education research and practice focused on approaches to ensure the continuous improvement and quality of higher education provision across the country, with a particular focus on academic capability building, academic development, and knowledge exchange with international higher education partners. Innovative ideas, best practices, and comparative case studies are presented, discussed, and compared with international ones to extract lessons on how sustainable development goals were nearly achieved.

This special issue targets research projects investigating education in Palestine. They were provided by a number of institutions: Ministry of Education in Palestine, An-Najah National University, Birzeit University, The Islamic University of Gaza, Al-Quds Open University, University of Porto (Portugal) and Universidad Internacional de La Rioja (UNIR, Spain). These papers running projects, case studies, innovative pedagogies, teacher training programs, and open education innovative ideas.

2. Summary of contributions

Seventeen papers were submitted to this special issue, eight of which were accepted for publication. The process went through several stages, from going through a blind peer-review process, the reviewers' recommendations, and the co-editors' decisions to publishing. The Palestinian education system is unique under different authorities, given the existing political situation, which impacts its quality and has led to innovations and best practices to overcome unpredicted challenges. Eight papers, in general, is insufficient for a special issue but should suffice considering the quality of the submitted papers. The following are brief descriptions of the papers, followed by our reflection on their contents.

The first paper, titled **Students' Characteristics Influence Readiness to Use Mobile Technology in Higher Education** (Shaqour et al., 2021), aims to explore learners' characteristics which impact their readiness to use mobile technology. The results showed that the existence of this technology and the students' capability are the most influential factors of these students' readiness to use such technology.

The second paper, titled **Enhancing EFL Secondary School Students' Writing Skills through a Suggested Model Based on Constructivism** (Srour et al., 2021), run a study with secondary school students focused on writing skills. They used a constructivist model to enhance the student's performance that proved to be effective in the experimental group.

The third paper, titled **The Efficiency of a Group Counseling Program Based on Psychodrama in Enhancing Self-Awareness and Reducing Tension Among Tenth Grade Students in Qalqilia City** (Khalili & Swilem, 2021), aims to assess tension and self-awareness levels among tenth graders. The study revealed high rates of tension and low rates of self-awareness among the participants. Also, the use of psychodrama counselling programs had a positive impact on reducing tension and enhancing self-awareness. This study used a quantitative approach.

The fourth paper, **The Motives and Challenges of Developing and Delivering MOOCs** (Khlaif et al., 2021), aims to describe the development of MOOCs and SPOCs through the perspectives of their team developers. The findings showed that the tendency to increase online Arabic content in this area was the main motif for this initiative, while the main challenge was the lack of technical support.

The fifth paper, titled **Effectiveness of E-learning Environments in Developing Skills for Designing E-tivities Based on Gamification for Teachers of Technology in Gaza** (Firwana et al., 2021), updates educational methodology because of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The paper provides a practical view on how to encourage learning through gamification strategies to support the role of technology teachers at school.

The sixth paper, titled **The virtual museum VM as a tool for learning science in informal environment** (Albadawi, 2021), works with parents and children of lower basic grades, and how they interact with a virtual setting to learn science and technology through gaming and multimedia resources. The study was complemented with a focused interview.

The seventh paper, titled **Disabled Students at the Palestinian Universities: Birzeit University as a Model** (Ramahi et al., 2021), aims to explore disabled students' perceptions towards their university experience and the main challenges they faced. The results indicated that the disabled students are distinguished by the 'desire' to achieve their dreams and to challenge the existing stereotype about them. They do not give up; they have a strong will and determination to achieve their goals.

The eight paper, titled **School Bullying from Multiple Perspectives: A Qualitative Study** (Shaath et al., 2021), aims to understand bullying from the victims' perspectives by listening to their stories and testimonies. The study revealed that the concept of bullying was unclear for the victims and there was a lack of school plans to address it. This sheds light on an important issue which needs to be addressed, recognised, and overcome. The research methodology was qualitative, an emerging approach in Palestinian universities.

The above papers concentrate on schools' best practices in dealing with three main issues school bullying, counselling program, and using technology, but also some papers concentrate on university students and best practices in technology, disability university experience and socio emotional factors.

3. Challenges and future insights

Palestine is in a peculiar situation that is, unfortunately, not new (Blunt, 1907; LeRoy, 1914; Naimark, 1995; Hart & Hart, 1998; Renda, 2001; Gordon, 2008; Mitchell, 2008; Dawisha, 2009). Living in an occupied country, state, or land brings many conflicts in education. Autonomy leads to the dispersion of students and lecturers as well as poor access to resources, information, or technology (Crowder, 1971; Carey, 1995; Kratoska, 1997; Tanrisever, 2000; Gammer, 2008; Moses, 2008; Azoulay & Ophir, 2012). Further – and in light of the COVID-19 pandemic (García-Peñalvo et al., 2021) – other potential issues challenge education, such as epidemics, earthquakes, hurricanes, and other natural or manmade disasters (Buus & Olsson, 2006; Andrade et al., 2020; Johns Hopkins University, 2020; Lin et al., 2020; Information is Beautiful, 2021). With this uncertain context, education becomes the cornerstone for development and progress. From primary to tertiary education, the whole system must be an inspiring and coherent journey for competence achievement, knowledge development, and hands-on, practical work.

The recent pandemic will undoubtedly change some aspects of global and regional education. Since mobility is drastically restricted, for starters, online learning has become a key for further lectures and academic activity. In addition, open education integrates unlimited resources, practices, and networks in formal programmes. Lastly, informal learning complements lesson plans and, on top of that, the network of users to allow for group progress. Most of these resources can be used, reused, shared, and embedded with formal learning (Burgos, 2013; Corbi & Burgos, 2017) under a number of licensing frameworks (Stracke et al., 2019): 'free-mium', free but registered, low-cost fee, pay per use, fixed price, free of charge during a specific period, open, universal, and free (such as the OUF code) (Burgos, 2020). In doing so, any educational system, school, university, student, parent, teacher, tutor, or academic manager can face this adversity with a bigger guarantee of success.

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