

The Reality of Education in Gaza: An Analysis of the Impacts of the Israeli Blockade and Identification of its Humanitarian Recovery Needs 2006-2018

**واقع التعليم في غزة: تحليل لتأثيرات الحصار الإسرائيلي وتحديد احتياجات التعافي الإنساني
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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the impact of the Israeli blockade on Palestinian education and to identify the humanitarian recovery needs necessary for the quality and continuity of education. The study used the descriptive analytical method which involved examining at the phenomenon under investigation. To answer the questions of the study, the Comprehensive Literature Review Meta-Framework of the Seven-step Model was employed to guide the methodology of this research to introduce profound inferences about the impacts of the Israeli blockade on education in the Gaza Strip as well as about the recovery needs necessary to ensure the quality and continuity of Palestinian education. The findings revealed that the Israeli blockade severely impacted Palestinian education in the Gaza Strip and hindered student access to quality and inclusive education in various ways. Students were the most affected by the 12-year blockade. They were repeatedly exposed to a huge loss of lives, severe psychological traumas, and worsening economic conditions. As well, teachers were not immune from the grave consequences of the blockade in terms of murder, denial of mobility and exchange, deprivation of professional development, psychological traumas, and chronic power-cut-offs. Also, the entire Palestinian educational system was impaired by the Israeli blockade in terms of direct school destruction, stuck school reconstruction, chronic power supply deficit, unprotected learning environment, and controlled educational curriculum. Targeting and controlling students, teachers, educational infrastructure, and curricula caused long-lasting impairment to the whole Palestinian educational system. The Israeli blockade was detrimental to the students' right to quality education that would advance their competencies and responds to the compelling current and future development needs in the Gaza Strip. Therefore, the study identified some foremost humanitarian recovery needs to be addressed by Palestinian policy makers to redress the forbidding impacts of the Israeli blockade on Palestinian education.

Keywords: Palestinian education, Israeli blockade.

1. Introduction

Education has always been strongly linked to social wellbeing and economic development in both advanced and developing countries. It is the key to economic and social development and stability because it prepares individuals to effectively participate in economic activities by facilitating their access to necessary life competencies and skills. Highly educated citizens are more likely to involve in social and economic activities and in working on conceptions of better societies. According to Welch (1999), education has two functions. First, it is important in the reforming of societies that are developing or modernizing because it builds the capabilities and reinforces the skills of individuals. Second, education contributes to the stability of society by providing that society with highly qualified citizens. In this sense, education is envisioned as a tool for development in the Palestinian society.

Yet, unlike other educational systems of the world, Palestinian education has been undergoing unprecedented conditions. It has been targeted by the Israeli occupation in various ways. Of all these ways of subjugation to Palestinian education, the Israeli blockade which has been imposed on the Gaza Strip since 2006 is the most adversely striking. The ongoing Israeli blockade has had a detrimental effect on Palestinian education to the extent that it has transformed this envisioned role of education to a mere wish. It has risked the entire Palestinian educational system and deprived it from acting as a source of social and economic transformation in the Palestinian society of Gaza by targeting all the key elements of the educational system, namely, the students, the teachers, the educational infra-structure, and the curriculum. Consequently, the Palestinian educational system has been broken down and stalled in ways that denied Palestinians their right to education and deprived them from achieving development and growth. Most detrimentally, the Palestinian society has been doomed to failure and underdevelopment as the entire educational system is about to dissolve and turn into a dysfunctional body. (Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, 2010; Jalbout, Dryden-Peterson, and Watkins, 2014; Safi, 2012)

Therefore, this paper examines the impact of the ongoing 12-year Israeli blockade on Palestinian education in the Gaza Strip and identifies the most necessary humanitarian recovery needs to ensure its quality, survival and continuity.

2. Statement of the Problem

Since 2006, the Israeli blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip has been a major impediment to Palestinian education and, in return, to economic development. This long-lasting Israeli blockade has been a source of devastating effects on all aspects of life in the Gaza Strip, particularly on education, which is the key contributor to economic development in the Gaza Strip. To Palestinians, education is a basic social value and a cornerstone of economic development in a world governed by knowledge economies and intense competition. It creates

job opportunities and increases national output by providing the community with trained and qualified human resources to participate effectively in various economic activities. It also enhances the technological capacity necessary for growth, progress, innovation, entrepreneurship, and productivity.

Nevertheless, given the adverse impacts of the Israeli blockade on the Palestinian education, the Palestinian right to education has been severely violated as a growing number of Palestinians are denied access to good and inclusive education as well as to lifelong learning. Undoubtedly, by targeting the Palestinian educational system, the Israeli occupation is deliberately undermining one of the pillars of economic growth, development, political stability, and social cohesion in the Palestinian society (Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, 2017 & Abu El-Haj, & Adely, 2016).

These extremely unfavorable conditions of Palestinian education due to the Israeli blockade on Gaza formed a trigger need for a profound and synthesized analysis of the grave impacts (Effects) of the blockade on Palestinian education. They also created a demanding need for an authentic identification of the recovery needs and responsive interventions to guarantee the survival, continuity, and progress of Palestinian education. Therefore, this study examines the impacts of the blockade on the Palestinian educational system and identifies the key humanitarian recovery needs to be addresses in order to ensure good, inclusive, and equitable education for all and to enhance lifelong learning for all as a milestone towards economic development in Gaza.

3. Objectives of the Study

Specifically, within the context of Palestinian education in the Gaza Strip, the study will fulfill the following objectives:

1. Diagnose the impacts of the Israeli blockade on Palestinian education.
2. Identify the key humanitarian recovery needs to be addressed in order to ensure good, inclusive, and equitable education for all and to enhance lifelong learning for all.

Questions of the Study

The study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the impacts of the Israeli blockade on the educational process in the Gaza Strip?
2. What are humanitarian recovery needs necessary for the survival, continuity, and progress in the educational process in the Gaza Strip?

Research Methodology

The study used the descriptive analytical method, which involves looking at the phenomenon under investigation “in order to describe, compare, contrast, classify, analyze and interpret the entities and the events that constitute the various fields of inquiry” (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007, p. 205). To answer the questions of the study, the Comprehensive Literature Review Meta-Framework of the Seven-Step Model was employed to guide the methodology of this research. The rationale for using this methodology is that it suits the

nature and the purpose of this study, whereas the ultimate purpose involves introducing profound inferences and implications about the impacts of the Israeli blockade on education in the Gaza Strip as well as about the recovery needs necessary to ensure the quality and continuity of Palestinian education. According to Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2016), “literature review represents a method because the literature reviewer chooses from an array of strategies and procedures for identifying, recording, understanding, meaning-making, and transmitting information pertinent to a topic of interest” (p. 49). In this sense, literature review involves documenting the study and analyzing knowledge about a specific topic in order to reach a set of inferences and generalizations about it.

The CLR Meta-Framework of the Seven-Step Model includes seven sequential steps embedded into three phases. The Exploration Phase incorporates steps (1-5): Exploring Beliefs and Topics; Initiating the Search; Storing and Organizing Information; Selecting/Deselecting Information; and Expanding Search to include one or more modes (media, observation(s), documents, expert(s), or secondary data). The Interpretation Phase comprises step (6): Analyzing and Synthesizing Information. Finally, the Communication Phase involves presenting the comprehensive literature review (CLR) report.

Unlike traditional literature reviews, which involve only the first four steps, the CLR Meta-Framework of the Seven-Step Model advances into steps (5-7) to reach profound inferences through interpreting, evaluating, and synthesizing the information gained from various sources about the topic of interest as implied by step (6). Then, the seventh step involves the presentation of the literature review report orally, visually, or in writing.

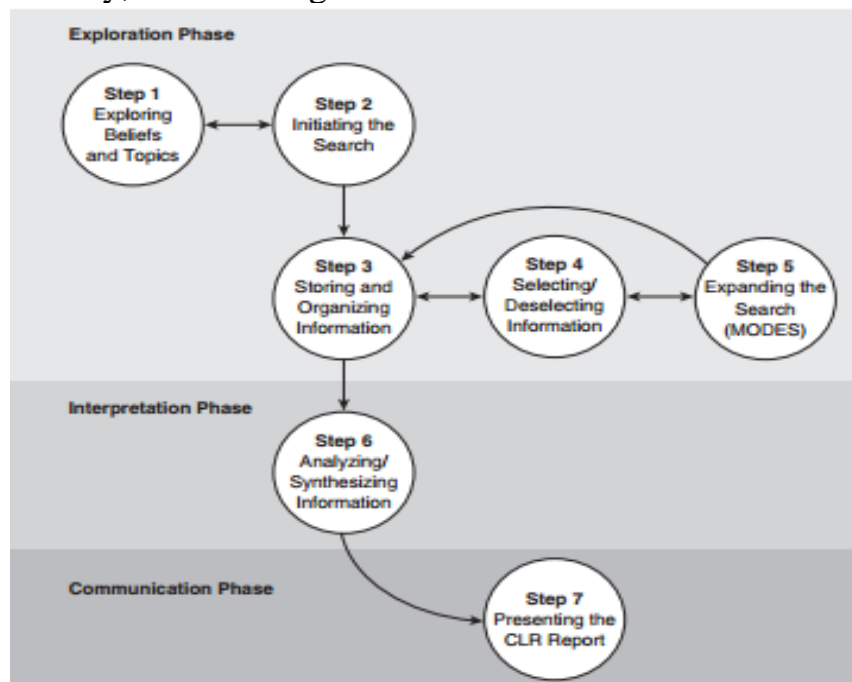


Figure 1 The Seven-step Model for a Comprehensive Literature Review, adopted from Onwuegbuzie and Frels, (2016)

The current literature review was conducted in the sequence demonstrated in the CLR Meta-Framework of the Seven-Step Model. First, an initial search for related literature resulted in a substantial body of research on the impact of the Israeli blockade on Palestinian education. Then, a first screening of the accumulated research papers was conducted to assess their relevance to the current study based on two criteria: the degree of relatedness and the significance of findings to the research topic. Then, a sample of strongly related papers and reports was selected for further intensive review. A second screening of the selected sample of research papers was conducted to organize the selected papers in divisions and subdivisions, i.e., ‘papers related to the impacts of the blockade on Palestinian education’; ‘papers related the humanitarian needs of education’; ‘papers related to impacts on students/teachers/infrastructure/curriculum’, etc. Then, the sample papers were reviewed and much information was highlighted and extracted. Subsequently, only the information that serves the purpose of the research was selected, while unrelated information was deselected. At this point, to ensure the trustworthiness of the literature review, the search was expanded to include an array of official reports and studies issued by human rights centers and concerned local and international entities and research centers such as Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights; Ministerial Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza; UNESCO; Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information; and US Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division. Later, the information obtained from the final sample of papers and reports was thoroughly interpreted, evaluated, and synthesized to reach inferences and insights into the impact of the Israeli blockade on Palestinian education and the humanitarian recovery needs to guarantee its quality and continuity. Finally, the literature review along with its inferential findings were consolidated and presented in the form of research paper.

Impact of the Israeli Blockade on Education

Since 2007, the Israeli-imposed blockade on the Gaza Strip has been the most detrimental factor to hinder the right to education for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. This is due to the damaging effects this blockade has on education and, consequently, on all the other segments of life in the Gaza strip including health, industry, economy, politics and social welfare. In this respect, the educational system has been perceived in research to be the most targeted sector by the Israeli blockade in the most deliberate way that always ended up with adverse strategic outcomes (Al Ela & Hamad, 2018; Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, 2010; Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, 2017; and Palestinian Center for Human Rights, 2010). The ultimate end is to block economic and social development in the Gaza Strip through preventing individuals' access to inclusive and quality education as a fundamental driver of social and economic

change. Not only this, but also by hampering economic development in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli occupation can subjugate Palestinians and draw them into the sphere of its political influence.

As a substantial body of research shows, the 12-year Israeli blockade which escalated by three major deadly military attack campaigns and frequent incursions and air strikes have various unfavorable effects on Palestinian education. These effects are not isolated and have a common purpose: destroying the future and hope of Palestinian children and youth by denying them access to means of education (Jalbout, Dryden-Peterson, and Watkins, 2014). The deliberate targeting of the Israelis to the various elements of the educational system including teachers, students, buildings, learning environment, instructional technology, etc. as well as the negative blockade-driven living conditions such as psychological trauma, poverty, and the power supply deficiency affected individuals' access to inclusive quality education.

It is worth noting that the current study discusses the effects of the Israeli blockade on education in the Gaza Strip within the context of the 4th goal of the sustainable development goals (SD4) which states "Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning". That is, it tends to demonstrate how the Israeli blockade deliberately hinders Palestinian individuals' access to inclusive and quality education, and how it consequently prevents the transformation and development of the Palestinian society.

Impacts on Students' Right to Education:

Various studies and reports noted the acute suffering of most Palestinian students due to the deliberate aggressive measures repeatedly undertaken by the Israeli occupation during the ongoing 12-year blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip. These hostile measures which included the blockade, three deadly military attack campaigns, destruction of schools, frequent power supply deficiency, and deteriorating economic conditions deprived students to have access to inclusive and quality education. According to Jalbout, Dryden-Peterson, and Watkins (2014) these savage inequalities resulted in "half of Palestinian students do not meet the basic learning outcomes according to international benchmarks" (p3).

Tragic Loss of Lives:

Students were not immune from the Israeli assaults. They were deliberately targeted for murder by the Israeli occupation in ways which explicitly violate their right to education. In this respect, records of Al Mezan Center for Human Rights (2017) confirmed that (2140) male and female students were murdered by the Israeli occupation since Al-Aqsa uprising in September 2000, and that this number forms about (29%) of the total number of Palestinians murdered within the same period. The center also confirmed that the Israeli occupation murdered (1082) students and wounded (3869) students in the three deadly military attack campaigns on Gaza (2008, 2012, and 2014).

These savage murders have a twofold interpretation. From one side, it marks an outrageous means to deprive Palestinians from their right to education. From the other side, it can be understood in terms of ending the Palestinian hope of a prosperous future. It is inevitable that causing such a huge loss of student lives can only mean that the Israelis intend to eliminate the youth as drivers of change and transformation off the scene.

Severe Psychological Trauma:

The ongoing blockade and the accompanying Israeli military assaults, operations, incursions, air strikes as well as the resulting killing of relatives, neighbors, and peer students have all led to psychological traumas that hinder students to achieve their full educational potential (Gaza Education Cluster factsheet, 2017). The exposition of Palestinian students to severely repeated violent incidents caused psychological damages and disorders that are harmful to their capability to learn and focus on their studies and to their hopes for the future (Ministerial Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza, 2015).

Undoubtedly, students with severe psychological traumas are more likely to suffer from a lack of motivation to learn, dropping out of school, poor concentration, distraction, difficulty in acquiring knowledge, and poor achievement (Affouneh, 2014). Considering the psychological effects of the (2014) Israeli military attack on Gaza alone, it was reported that (7128) students suffered from psychological, behavioral, and academic problems such as full-year school delay, frequent class delay, absence, and drop out (Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, 2017). Also, there is an evidence that the post 2014-war psychological impacts alongside the overcrowded classrooms and the double and triple school shifts undermined the quality of education (Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, 2017; El-Haj & Adely, 2018; Gaza Education Cluster factsheet, 2017; Ministerial Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza, 2015; & Jalbout, Dryden-Peterson, and Watkins, 2014).

Moreover, a survey conducted by the UNRWA to trace the impact of the Israeli blockade on student performance in Math concluded that (80%) of the fourth and ninth graders together suffered from educational failure in Math, and that the fourth graders demonstrated a higher rate of educational failure in Math which was (90%) (Deba, 2017).

The Ministerial Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza (2015) provided a clear-cut and holistic image of the status quo of students under the Israeli blockade. It is a situation of war where a whole generation of students aged 16-24 and forming (20%) of the total population of the Gaza Strip has grown with ever growing feelings of isolation, deprivation, marginalization, and desperation, and even aggravated by lack of employment opportunity.

Given the status quo, it is then evident that the blockade alongside the three major military assaults on Gaza created an unsafe and unprotected surrounding environment that jeopardizes students' ability to learn and deprives them from their right to education. Therefore, the conclusion that can be made is that the

psychological traumas caused by the Israeli blockade form a devastating obstacle that undermines the efforts of the Palestinian educational system to ensure an inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.

Poverty and Reduced Socio-economic Status:

A key factor that has a grave impact on students' access to good and inclusive education is the economic status of Palestinian families. Consistent reports claimed that the Israeli blockade is the main cause of the worsening economic conditions of most of the Palestinian families in the Gaza Strip, with a poverty percentage ranging from 65%-80% (Deba, 2017; The Ministerial Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza, 2015; & Safi, 2012). The already intensified socio-economic status of Palestinian families has also been aggravated by the political measures and decisions imposed by the Palestinian Authority. These measures formed another economic challenge to the already suffering families and the Palestinian educational system in ways that adversely affected students' ability and motivation to learn (Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, 2017).

The synergy between the Israeli blockade and the PA-backed political measures presented a destructive impact on the socio-economic status of Palestinian families in ways which ruthlessly affected their children's access to education. As a result of lack of opportunity, growing unemployment rate, declining income, and decreasing consumption, families have become in a situation where they cannot afford their children with good nutrition, books and educational materials, pocket money, and tuition fees. In many cases, Palestinian students were forced to leave their colleges and schools in order to work to support their families. Also, serious reports by the Ministry of Health indicated that inadequate food supplies to families resulted in anemia to the majority of school children (Jalbout, Dryden-Peterson, and Watkins, 2014 & Safi, 2012). As such, severe living conditions and economic deprivation have become determinants of poor educational performance because they rigorously hamper students' capacity and desire to learn (Al-Eila & Hamad, 2018 & Ministerial Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza, 2015).

Power Deficiency:

The blockade is also responsible for the electricity crisis which imperiled students' access to education in the Gaza Strip. Chronic electricity deficiency is one of the major challenges that students face at home and at school, which violates their right and ability to access education. With little more than 3-4 hours of electricity a day, it is evident that most school students suffer from insufficient power supply. The drawbacks are clearly demonstrated in terms of students being unable to study and review their lessons, to do their homework and assignments, and to access the internet for research and supplementary materials. Certainly, power deficiency accounted for student physical and psychological exhaustion, and low educational performance (Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, 2017 & Affouneh, 2014). In this context, it was indicated

that the electricity crisis caused half of the students to fail to meet the basic learning outcomes with reference to international standards (Jalbout, Dryden-Peterson, and Watkins, 2014). The consequences of the electricity deficit were also extended to the classroom where teachers are unable to utilize modern instructional media, web-based learning activities, and learning management systems to facilitate student learning. Unquestionably, frequent electricity cut-offs are detrimental to the student right to education (Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, 2017).

Impacts on Teacher Wellbeing, Mobility, Development, and Quality Instruction

The Israeli blockade was meant to be deliberate in its targeting of the pillars of the Palestinian education system. Its grave manifestations have not been limited to students, but it also targeted teachers to hinder the provision of quality education. Unlawful targeting of teachers is certainly a major impediment to student right to good and inclusive education. In this respect, various scholars linked the blockade to the serious deterioration in the quality of education offered in schools in the Gaza Strip (Gaza Education Cluster factsheet, 2017; Deba, 2017; Ministerial Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza, 2015; Affouneh, 2014; Jalbout, Dryden-Peterson, and Watkins, 2014; & Safi, 2012). This is because teachers have also been brutally victimized by the Israeli blockade in ways which marginalized their role in the educational process. The idea here is simple; if the student is the center of the education process, the teacher is the most crucial input in the education system. When teachers are targeted and killed or fatally wounded, no quality education can be provided to students. In this respect, it should be noted that, during the three military attack campaigns on Gaza (2008, 2012, and 2014) only, (60) teachers were murdered and (108) were severely wounded by the Israeli military forces (Gaza Education Cluster factsheet, 2017).

Teachers were plagued by the blockade in various ways. They were targeted for murder, denial of mobility and exchange, and deprivation of professional development. The subsequent consequences were detrimental to the students' right to quality education. The following section tackles the grave concussions of the Israeli blockade on teacher wellbeing, mobility and development, and quality teaching.

Teachers as Victims of the Israeli Blockade

Teachers were persistently made to suffer from the Israeli-imposed blockade by means of murder, psychological traumas, and chronic power-cutoffs. The figures disclosed by Al Mezan Center for Human Rights (2017) revealed that (100) employees in the educational sector were murdered and (117) were wounded by the Israeli occupation during the three military attack campaigns on Gaza (2008, 2012, and 2014). In addition, teachers were also exposed to psychological traumas as a result of the violent scenes of killing of relatives, neighbors, colleagues, and students (Gaza Education Cluster factsheet, 2017).

In this respect, (76.8%) of primary, preparatory and secondary school teachers reported that they have less ability to teach than they had before the military attack campaigns (Jalbout, Dryden-Peterson, and Watkins, 2014). These traumas left teachers helpless, demotivated, and oppressed in ways that made them lose their full potential to teach effectively. Furthermore, teachers suffered from frequent power cut-offs with only little more than 3-4 hours of electricity connection a day. This electricity deficit kept teachers falling short of adequately preparing for their lessons, using effective instructional media, and implementing web-based teaching activities, and using learning management systems or electronic learning to boost educational outcomes.

The targeting of teachers marks endless and premediated Israeli endeavors to eliminate and neutralize teachers as the cornerstone of the educational system so that Palestinian children are easily deprived from their right to quality education. When teachers are insecure and unprotected, mentally ill, or deprived from utilizing instructional technology, they are likely to fall short of providing quality education. The implication is that the targeting of teachers guarantees poor education and hinders opportunities for development and growth.

Teachers and the Denial of Mobility, Exchange, and Professional Development

A blockade is a war measure taken by a belligerent State against another State, with the intention of denying it all contact with the outside world. This is done by closing all border crossing points; preventing ships from entering, approaching, or departing the ports and coasts of the State; preventing aircrafts from landing or taking off from the State's airports; and breaking off the State's communications abroad (Al-Eila and Hamad, 2018). Thus, by definition, the Israeli blockade can be considered a deliberate measure aimed at breaking off connections of Palestinians with the outside world with the purpose of choking any opportunities for transformation and development in all aspects of economic, social, political, and educational activities. The focus of this paper is to highlight the severe impacts of the Israeli blockade on teacher mobility, exchange, and professional development which serve as conduits to transfer and exchange knowledge and guarantee quality education.

Generally, the Israeli blockade banned opportunities of mobility and intellectual exchange for Palestinian teachers in ways that caused education to significantly deteriorate in quality. Universities and schools in the Gaza Strip have been lacking specialized expertise in specific fields of knowledge which are indispensable for development in the Palestinian society. With the purposes of transferring knowledge from advanced countries in mind, teachers increasingly seek to travel abroad within mobility and exchange programs to improve their expertise, knowledge, and competencies and to work on the envisioned nationally agenda of better schooling. Nevertheless, over the many years of the blockade, teachers have not been allowed to travel abroad to attend

professional conferences and specialized training programs. This oppressive measure denied teachers access to extremely needed professional development and kept them under qualified and impacted their competencies and morale (Gaza Education Cluster factsheet, 2017). In return, students were also deprived access to effective and quality education. Thus, poorly trained teachers, combined with overcrowded classrooms, limited hours of instruction due to double shifting, and frequent electricity cut-offs, resulted in an oppressive learning environment and, consequently, declining student outcomes compared to national and international standards. (Ministerial Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza, 2015).

Given the adverse impacts of Israeli blockade on the provision of quality education, a reflective analysis of the current pedagogical practice in schools will be enough to judge the quality of education provided to students as well as the nature of the learning environment in Palestinian schools. Pedagogical practice in Palestinian schools was commonly viewed as outdated, traditional, and transmissional in nature in ways that resulted in significant deterioration in teaching and learning (Ramahi, 2015). Normally, what is being practiced in classrooms is consistent with what Paulo Freire (1970) called the 'Banking Concept of Education' or 'Narrative Education', where education has become an act of depositing, and where students are the depositories, and the teacher is the depositor. Similarly, the current pedagogical practice in Palestinian schools also corresponds to what Sartre termed 'Digestive or Nutritive Concept of Education' where the primary task of the teacher is to feed students with knowledge to fill them out (Kakkori, & Huttunen, 2010). In this sense, the emphasis of Palestinian education is merely about transferring information to students in a traditional, mechanical, and good-for-nothing manner. The following account by Freire (1970) presents a thorough description of the current schooling and defines what it is really like to be a teacher or a student in Palestinian schools under the blockade:

A careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally narrative character. The relationship involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students) ... Narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse still, it turns them into 'containers', into receptacles to be filled by the teacher. The more completely he fills the receptacles, the better a teacher he is (P71-72).

It is demonstratively evident that what Freire (1970) and Sartre (1947) described does really happen in Palestinian schools where the teacher is a depositor or narrating subject, the student is a depository or a listening object, and the content is the deposit or narration which is lifeless, alien, and detached from students' real life and experiences. The primary task of the teacher is to fill students with the content, and students have to mechanically record, memorize,

and repeat the narrated content. That is, students are mere containers to be filled by the teacher.

As an expression of an oppressive manner of schooling, the depository or container analogy raises a crucial question: Are Palestinian schools under the blockade offering the already oppressed students a pedagogy for freedom? The implication of the banking concept of Palestinian education can be considered a natural result of the Israeli blockade which purposefully hindered teacher mobility and exchange. By denying teachers access to new expertise and professional development, the Israeli blockade prevented the Palestinian educational system to advance in pedagogy and to offer students with liberating and redemptive education that awakens their voice for freedom, dignity, and salvation. It is intended to maintain the current oppressive status quo as a means of control by reproducing new forms of oppression in every single aspect of Palestinian life even in schools. It is concluded that the Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip not only denied students access to critical pedagogy and quality education, but it also deliberately meant to compel it to mirror the imposed oppressive conditions and to prevent Palestinian education from becoming a means of liberation. Freire (1970) put it this way: "The capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students' creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed" (P. 73).

Impacts on the Educational System's Capability to Ensure Access to Inclusive and Quality education:

It is universally acknowledged that education is a core value as well as a profitable means of investment in individuals for nations. It is a basic human right which is worth protecting and fighting for (Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, 2010; & Ramahi, 2015). Yet, this is not the case when it comes to Palestinian education under the Israeli blockade which deprived Palestinians from their right to access education and hindered their opportunities for development. Over the past 12 years, the Israeli blockade triggered a major and pervasive damage to the entire already fragile educational system in the Gaza Strip. It targeted Palestinian education for weakness and impoverishment by all means possible. Combined with three harsh military assaults on Gaza and constant rounds of bombarding, the blockade was a key cause of major problems to the Palestinian Educational system such as direct school destruction, stuck school reconstruction, chronic power supply deficit, unprotected learning environment, and controlled educational curriculum which negatively impacted the provision of quality and inclusive education to Palestinian students (Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, 2017 & Ministerial Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza, 2015).

Destruction of Educational Facilities

One critical outcome of the Israeli blockade on Gaza was the destruction of schools due to direct and indirect Israeli bombing. Although consistent statistics are hard to find as they slightly vary from one reference to another, yet the common fact is that the Israeli blockade heavily impacted the Palestinian system and kept it brutally impaired. According to records confirmed by Education Cluster (2017), a total of (1220) educational facilities were partially, severely, or totally damaged during the three major military assaults on the Gaza Strip between December 2008 and August 2014. As shown in figure (1) below, (25) higher Education institutions, (369) kindergartens, (191) UNRWA schools, and (635) MoEHE (governmental) and private schools were partially, severely, or completely destroyed. In its turn, the Ministerial Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza (2015) reported that in the 51-day Israeli war of (2014) on Gaza alone (6) governmental schools, (1) UNRWA school, (11) kindergartens, and (3) higher education institutions were completely destroyed, whereas (532) schools and (14) higher education institutions were partially or severely destroyed. In addition, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights (2017) reported partial or full destruction of (734) educational schools in total during the three Israeli Wars on Gaza, including (497) MoEHE schools, (174) UNRWA schools, and (63) private schools.

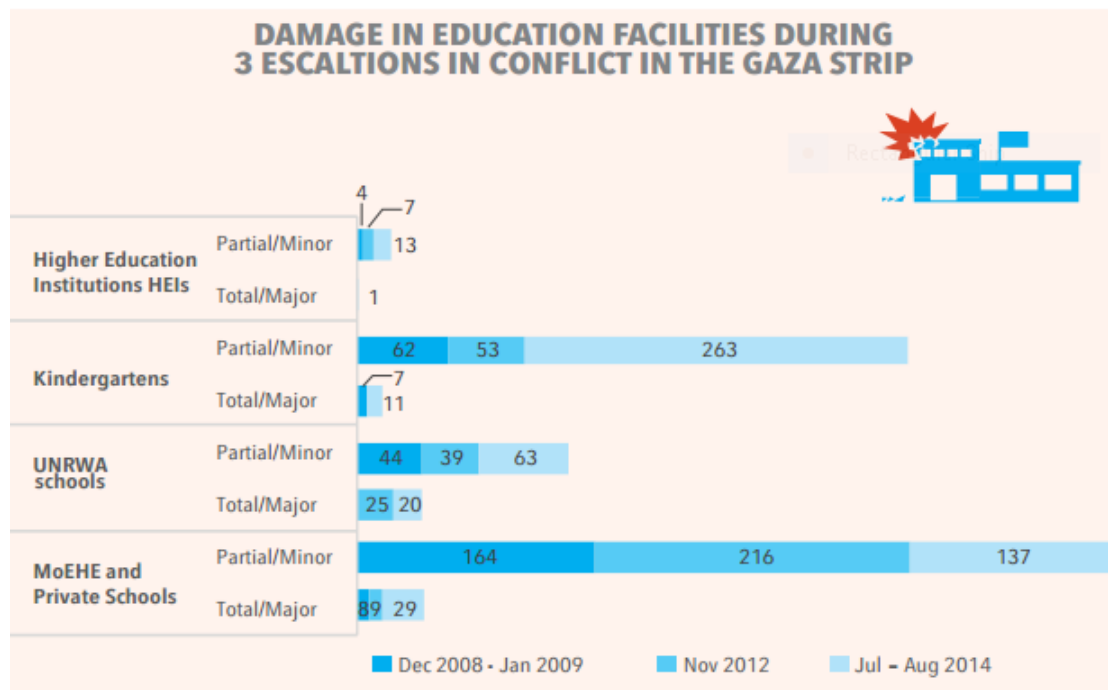


Figure 2 Damage in Educational Facilities During Three Major Military Attacks on the Gaza Strip, Adopted from Education Cluster, 2017.

This brutal scene of destruction of Palestinian educational facilities extremely reveals a more pervasively deliberate, systematic, and persistent Israeli violation of the right of Palestinian children and youth to quality and

inclusive education (El-Haj & Adely, 2018). This excessive violation of the Palestinian right to education can only impose restrictions on students' access to education and to a safe, protected, and well-provided learning environment where they can, ultimately, grow and develop and contribute to national development. As confirmed by the UN Qatari Commission on Education in Gaza, Palestinian education is significantly deteriorating in quality due to the repeated targeting of educational facilities during the last (10) years (Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, 2017).

School and Classroom Shortage, Multiple Shifts, and Overcrowding

Repeated targeting of educational facilities resulted in dramatic drop in educational quality due to a tragic shortage of schools and classrooms, lack of school readiness to accommodate an ever-growing student population, and an urgent double shifting implementation in schools. Not only has the ongoing blockade impaired the Palestinian educational system, but also it prevented it from the reconstruction of damaged schools as well as the construction of new ones. Therefore, the emphasis was placed on constant school repairs to accommodate an ever-increasing student enrolment, which was estimated as a 4% annual increase. However, as school repairs and rebuilding were insufficient to enable the school system to adapt to the huge growth in student population, schools were forced to work in double shifts, thus limiting the school day to (4) hours: one shift in the morning and the other in the afternoon (Ministerial Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza, 2015). In this context, it was stated that (58.4%) and (70.1%) of the schools run by MoEHE and UNRWA respectively were urgently forced to work in double shifts. Consequently, classrooms have become overcrowded with an average classroom density rate of (38.6) and (39.9) in MoEHE and UNRWA schools respectively. In this regard, it is worth noting that a United Nations' report on education in the Gaza Strip predicted that by the year (2020) the number of Palestinian students would have increased to (665.000) students, and by the year (2030) (900) new schools should have been built to accommodate the growing demand on education among Palestinians (Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, 2017).

The implications of inappropriate school shifting, and classroom overcrowding have been detrimental to the quality of education provided in Gaza Schools. The worthless practice of double shifting in schools exposed students to a limited time of schooling in core and foundational school subjects, inadequate knowledge, and minimal teacher-student interaction. Furthermore, students attending the afternoon shift suffered from inhumane physical conditions in their classrooms out of extreme heat that makes learning a painful and tough experience. However, overcrowding restricted student learning, created a discouraging learning environment, and undermined opportunities for personalized learning and student growth and development. In association with poorly trained teachers as stated in earlier sections, inadequate infrastructure, overcrowding, the practice of school shifting, and frequent disruptions by the

Israeli military attacks caused the quality of education to drop significantly in terms of declining student outcomes, attendance, and completion rates (Ministerial Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza, 2015; Safi, 2012; & Romahi & Issa, 2010).

Restrictions to Educational Curriculum:

Generally, curriculum and textbooks are considered a foremost gateway to the provision of quality education in Palestine (Affouneh, 2014 & Romahi & Issa, 2010). Yet, due to restrictions imposed by successive Israeli governments, backed by donors' advocacy of global agenda on education, Palestinians' right to design, supervise, and implement educational reforms including the design of indigenous educational curriculum has always been compromised. By targeting Palestinian curriculum as a basic quality milestone, the quality of education provided in schools is also undermined. As the Palestinian Authority was resourceless, it relied on international financial support and technical expertise to design its curriculum. Chief donors such as the World Bank, the US, and the EU tend to assume an undisputable right to mandate their insights, values, and interests over those of the Palestinians. Their interference with the process of designing Palestinian curriculum was always justified by advocating global political agendas on education, particularly with regard to educational curriculum as a key element in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. As international financial and technical support is contingent on Palestinian conformity with donors' values, interests, and agendas on education, the donors have always been capable of drawing Palestinian policy makers into the sphere of their policy and reform influence in ways that undermined Palestinian autonomy in designing curriculum (Ramahi, 2015).

In order to ensure its conformity with international agendas on education and for purposes of funding, Palestinian curriculum has always been monitored by international research centers which provide key political donors with implications on Palestinian education. Such sponsored centers include the *Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP)*, *Israeli/Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI)*, and the *Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research Project on Israeli-Palestinian Textbooks*. Their primary task is to analyze and write policy papers on Palestinian educational reforms including curriculum and text books to examine whether students are prepared to accept the right of the 'other' (Israelis, Jews, and Zionists) to exist (Pina, 2005) and whether children are educated in 'democratic ideals of mankind' and know themselves as well as their neighbors (Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, 2004). The research output of these centers on Palestinian education and whether it plays a desirable role in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict informs if foreign aid and technical support should be continued. In this regard, unfavorable research findings on Palestinian curriculum by the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP) in (2001)

initiated sustained accusations by the Israeli security and civil milieus to Palestinian curriculum of being biased, hatred-evoking, defaming, and anti-Semitic. Such Israeli accusations caused donors to terminate funding the design of Palestinian textbooks and triggered wider research and analysis campaigns by many research centers on Palestinian curriculum (Webb, Hashweh, & Avenstrup, 2006 & Abukhayran, 2011).

Thus, the strict censorship on Palestinian educational textbooks can be considered a hidden form of Israeli siege on Palestine, not only the Gaza Strip. It provides the Israeli occupation with a powerful tool to ensure that Palestinian educational reforms abide by international agendas and standards regarding its envisioned role in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Or, otherwise, it restricts foreign aid to Palestinian education by means of accusing Palestinian textbooks of being biased against the 'Other'. Either way, Palestinian curriculum is undermined, and the quality of education is damaged because "economic dependency on foreign aid for educational reconstruction is tenuous at best and lays hostage an entire nation's education system and aspirations" (Ramahi, 2015, p. 4).

As a result, the current state of Palestinian curriculum indicates that the whole education system is at stake. From one site, it shows how Palestinians are denied their right to design an indigenous curriculum that reflects their historical realities, values, and aspirations. From the other side, it reveals a hidden deliberate Israeli agenda to prevent access of Palestinian students to quality education by influencing the process of designing Palestinian curriculum for its favor. The question that comes to mind is: Are Palestinian textbooks under the blockade offering students quality education? The inferences that can be made about educational curriculum under conditional funding and research lobbying in favor of the Israeli vision for the role of Palestinian education in the conflict are not encouraging. At best, the heavily controlled Palestinian curriculum is not fully serving the primary purposes, values, and interests of the donors. Yet, it is guilty by omission and exclusion as stated by Webb, Hashweh, & Avenstrup (2006). Their informative review of research on Palestinian education concluded that there is more evidence of omission of sensitive issues than there is evidence of incitement for hatred and defaming. Two clear-cut examples which were derived from the reviewed papers demonstrated how Palestinian textbooks partially yielded to donor's agendas on education. The first example was taken from the Civic Education textbook which tackles problems facing the Palestinian society such as children's rights and domestic violence but neglects human rights violation by the Israeli occupation. The other example relates to the geography textbook and shows that although 'Israel' was not named on the map, yet Palestine was not clearly referred to in terms of territory and demography.

Given the previous political conditions, Palestinian expertise in planning and designing curriculum is overtly immature and novice. Therefore, some supporting evidence denoted that the current Palestinian curriculum falls short of providing students with quality education that guarantees the fulfillment of the intended educational goals. With reference to Affouneh (2014), the (8000+) specialists who participated in designing the Palestinian curriculum were not aware of the philosophy behind the textbooks and, therefore, this philosophy was not mirrored in the textbooks. Also, the design teams were working in isolation, the matter which resulted in disintegration and lack of coherence in the whole structure of the curriculum. In this regard, Webb, Hashweh, & Avenstrup (2006) referred to some 'didactic aspects' in the Palestinian curriculum such as segregation as they noted that the curriculum lacks cross-referencing, coherence, consistency, and overall structure in the whole curriculum and within individual textbooks. Nonetheless Affouneh's (2014) intensive review of literature raised some other didactic aspects in the Palestinian curriculum in terms of being irrelevant to student age and needs; traditional; difficult; long; overcrowded with theoretical knowledge; and neglecting such pivotal 21st century competencies as critical thinking, problem solving, and inquiry. In addition, consistent remarks came from Romahi and Issa, (2010) who realized that the Palestinian curriculum is not effective because it neglects students' needs and fails to transform them into transferable skills. That is, the curriculum is very traditional and emphasizes memorization over the development of analytical, critical, and creative skills of students. What this implies is that Palestinian curriculum does not provide students with quality education, neither does it prepare them to fulfill current and future life needs whilst developing their capacity for sustained and lifelong learning.

In sum, targeting and controlling the fundamental elements of the teaching learning process (students, teachers, educational infrastructure, and curriculum) have resulted in causing long-lasting impairment to the whole Palestinian educational system. Palestinian education was deliberately neutralized and was made deficient to deprive Palestinian students access to quality education that advances their competencies and responds to the compelling current and future development needs in the Gaza Strip. In short, the Israeli blockade left the Palestinian education system with inherited savage inequalities which prevented it from empowering Palestinian people through development.

Humanitarian Recovery Needs of Palestinian Education

The Israeli blockade was harshly violating the Palestinian right to good and inclusive education. Its impacts irreparably hit the core elements of Palestinian education causing them to severe malfunction. Precisely, students, teachers, physical infrastructure, and educational curriculum were systematically and repeatedly targeted to undermine the ability of the whole

Palestinian educational system to provide quality education that empowers Palestinians and transforms them into development and restoration. The damage to Palestinian education has been so pervasive and deep that it requires urgent and critical recovery interventions to restore Palestinian education both as a human right and as a means to equip students with essential competencies to satisfy current and future development needs (Ministerial Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza, 2015; & Gaza Education Cluster factsheet, 2017). Therefore, based on the stated destructive impacts of the blockade on education and founded on a substantial body of research, the following recovery humanitarian needs are prioritized in order to preserve Palestinian education and ensure its quality and inclusiveness.

1. Lifting the Israeli blockade on Gaza. For twelve years now, the ongoing blockade has been the primary source of miserable living conditions of Palestinians in all domains of life, including education. Therefore, there should be intensive and sincere efforts in collaboration with the international community, international human rights organizations, international activist groups, peoples of the world to pressurize the Israeli occupation to end the blockade of Gaza. Without terminating the blockade, Palestinians are most likely to be deprived of their basic rights including their right to quality and inclusive education.
2. Enforcing new guidelines on protecting education in the Gaza Strip. In all circumstances, particularly during conflicts, schools and higher education institutions must be preserved as centers for learning. Therefore, international laws on protecting academic institutions must be enacted, applied, and monitored including the International Human Rights Law, the International Humanitarian Law, and the Safe School Declaration known as the Lucen's Guidelines for protecting schools and universities during armed conflicts. Such protective laws must be applied in conditions in the Gaza Strip as a conflict zone to protect education. This is a pre-requisite to stop Israeli attacks on educational facilities and to protect schools, educational staff, and children and guarantee their (them) to access to quality education which is consistent with current and future needs. Regardless of any conditions, the protection of education should also include new guidelines to prevent any political decisions and measures by local governments or international bodies against educational personnel to ensure quality and continuity of education.
3. Adopting new guiding philosophy and strategy for Palestinian education that take into account the unique social, political, economic, and psychological conditions being undergone by the Palestinian people. To resolve the crisis of Palestinian education, the philosophical and strategic guidelines of education should be based on such key elements as **why, who, what, how, when** and **where** Palestinian students should be nurtured and educated. The answer to

these six philosophical ‘Ws’ questions provides guiding principles for Palestinian educational behavior which results in effective and efficient Palestinian education. To put it another way, the ‘**Why**’ element of education relates to the ultimate purposes and goals of Palestinian education. That is, for what purpose Palestinian students should be prepared. The ‘**Who**’ elements refers the needs assessment to determine what our students already know and what they really need to know. The ‘**What**’ element determines the kind of curriculum needed to meet students’ needs and to ultimately fulfill the goals of education. The ‘**how**’ element refers(to) the relevant type of pedagogy that should be used in consistence with the current oppressive conditions Palestinian student are facing. The ‘**when**’ element refers to the most appropriate time for Palestinian students to learn. And the ‘**where**’ element highlights the type of physical learning environment in which students should be learning.

4. Ensuring that the adopted Palestinian philosophy and strategy are pervasive, deep, and indigenous. Although the success of Palestinian education does depend on providing the right answers to the previously mentioned 6‘Ws’, yet two other conditions apply. First, these philosophical and strategic assumptions and guidelines of Palestinian education should be deep and pervasive in that they affect the whole system. That is, they have to be shared by all those involved in the educational system from the top to the bottom including policy makers, strategy developers, curriculum planners and designers, educational leaders, teachers, students, and the public. Second, they should be indigenous in that they should reflect pure Palestinian culture, needs, and aspirations whilst taking into account the historical connection to the greater Arab and Islamic world as well as the ideals of humankind.
5. Setting high priorities to financing education as a means for investment and development. Possible sources of funds could be the government and the philanthropic community, but not foreign donors. This serves two purposes. By Self-financing education, the education system emancipates from the donors’ values, interests and advocacy of international agenda on education and becomes indigenous and more responsive to national agenda. Also, it supports the educational system with the needed infrastructure to reconstruct damaged schools and build new ones in ways that overcome the problems of double shifting, overcrowding, and frequent electricity cut-offs and, thus, facilitate student access to quality education.
6. Initiating systemic psychological interventions to address the psychological and needs of both students and teachers in order to facilitate student access to quality and inclusive education. This includes ending all the political decisions and procedures that put teachers in a severe socioeconomic status in ways which hinder their contribution to the provision of quality education.

7. Developing a more effective model of education in schools that guarantees students' mastery of key life competencies and ensures access to quality education and fosters life-long education. The proposed model should be competency-based rather than content-based where fulfillment of key competencies is preferred over the coverage of a given content. Based on this model, key sequential pedagogical practices include identifying students' needs which are later transformed into learning outcomes; applying appropriate learning assessment that sets milestones or enabling objectives toward intended competencies as reflected in the lesson plan; and utilizes a personalized, self-directed, and no-student-left-behind pedagogical approach that matches the learning outcomes, which, in turn, are measured against a rubric of performance standards. The outcome of such personalized model is promising as it ensures that students are working toward the essential competencies throughout the lesson. The proposed model also introduces a workable action plan for the national vision for the development of the educational system as outlined in the third strategic plan (2014-2019) of the Government of the State of Palestine which states: "A results-based, student-centered and inclusive education system that provides 21st century relevant education services at all levels with high quality and full equity considering individual needs and being at the heart of the political, economic and social development in and for Palestine" (Ramahi, 2015).
8. Implementing a liberation education approach to instruction and avoiding such traditional pedagogies that are rooted in the banking concept of education as described by Paulo Freire (1970). A liberation approach to pedagogy supports the provision of competency-based and personalized instruction as stated earlier and advances critical consciousness, creative powers, and higher-order thinking competences of students. With liberation pedagogy, Palestinian education serves as a means for liberation rather than oppression and prepares students as active change agents who work on conceptions of a better Palestinian society. The synergy between competency-based and personalized education and liberation education guarantees the provision of critical pedagogy and quality education. It also creates a continuum and self-perpetuating radical change in the entire educational system as well as in individuals.
9. Leading a methodological planning and design process of Palestinian curriculum that fosters the quality of education. The first step would be to conduct a comprehensive self-assessment to the current Palestinian textbooks with consideration to the findings of research on Palestinian textbooks. The second step implies thoroughly reviewing international best practices in curriculum design. Then, the design teams should be made fully conscious of the Palestinian educational philosophy, strategy, and instructional model. Finally, the design teams start designing a fully indigenous Palestinian

curriculum that is responsive to the shared educational philosophy and the national goals and aspirations.

A significant remark which is worth mentioning is that the design of the curriculum should be consistent with the wished-for personalized, competency-based, and liberation pedagogy to ensure student access to quality education. Therefore, it has to be noted by curriculum designers that the curriculum should necessarily focus on essential competencies and student-centered activities and tasks. By highlighting intended competencies, the issue of overcrowded textbooks is no more a problem. That is, textbooks must emphasize essential educational competencies rather than coverage of unnecessary information. In this respect, there is an ample evidence that teaching less content leads to more quality of student learning in condition that it is taught well. In addition, it was indicated that both German and Japanese students outperformed their American counterparts in Mathematics achievement despite that US mathematics textbooks addressed 175 percent and 350 percent more topics than do German and Japanese textbooks respectively. As well, although US science textbooks covered 930 percent and 433 percent more topics than do German and Japanese textbooks respectively, yet German and Japanese students outperformed their American rivals in science achievement (Sornson, 2016).

Also, the curriculum should be highly structured and coherent both within individual textbooks and across all subjects. Finally, and topmost, the design process must be financed locally without reliance of foreign aid so that our educational system will not be laid hostage to donors' political agendas on education, policy borrowing, and reform transfer (Ramahi, 2015).

10. Developing a nation-wide philosophy of teacher education in the light of the adopted educational philosophy, strategy, pedagogy, and curriculum. Teachers are considered the most vital input into the educational system. Without adequate preparation that takes into account the trend toward implementing competency-based, personalized, and liberation-oriented curriculum and pedagogy, the whole system falls apart. The provision of quality and liberation education is contingent on teachers as critical agents of educational reform and change implementation. Therefore, significant emphasis should be placed on teacher preparation programs in universities and on in-service training programs nation-wide. Accreditation and reaccreditation of teacher preparation programs must be conditional on conformity of these programs with the national guidelines and standards of teacher preparation as clarified in the teacher preparation philosophy.

Conclusion

Palestinian education has been the hardest damaged by the Israeli blockade on Gaza. The deteriorating conditions of Palestinian education under the Israeli blockade are but a blatant facet of the inherited savage inequalities

imposed by the Israeli occupation. They provided a stunning empirical evidence of how the transformation and development of the Palestinian society was hampered by means of deliberate surveillance and targeting of the core elements of the education system: students, teachers, curriculum, and infrastructure. Not only did the Israeli measures against Palestinian education deny Palestinian children and youth the right to education, but also, they destroyed their future and hope and ended the Palestinian dream of a prosperous future by exterminating the youth as drivers of change and transformation. In sum, the Israeli measures against Palestinian education formed a step forward to subjugate Palestinians and to deprive them from realizing their independence and wellbeing.

The previous unfavorable impacts of the Israeli blockade on the provision of quality and inclusive Palestinian education call for prompt interventions to meet the resulting recovery humanitarian needs in order to preserve access to good education for all Palestinians as a means of sustainable development. However, acting in a reactive manner in response to these needs will be good-for-nothing. Rather, what Palestinians need is a comprehensive educational reform strategy that takes into account taking a step backward to understand the status quo of education and define learned lessons, envisioning the needed change for renovating and reforming education, and achieving this vision with the inspiration and collaboration of all the stakeholders involved educating the Palestinian children and youth.

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