

Higher education and research in Palestine

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First of all, I would like to thank **EMUNI** University beside my home University, An-Najah, for giving me the opportunity to participate in the 2nd research souk and present this talk.

Overview

To be able to speak about higher education one must first speak about education and I start with a quote from the Brazilian educator Pablo Freire "Education is a constant process for the liberation of human beings". This quote captures the very essence of education "Education is liberating in that it enables people to overcome injustice, poverty and fear".

Education and higher education in Palestine are rich and challenging experiences. Rich because of the motivation and eagerness of the Palestinians to share their experiences with others and learn from them. Challenging because Palestine is not yet an independent state. Indeed, Palestinians consider higher education as the main wealth of Palestine in the absence of other natural resources and it plays a vital role in developing the economical, political and social situation of the Palestinian people.

Presented to the 2nd **EMUNI** Research Souk
The Euro-Mediterranean Student research Multi-Conference
"Living together in the Multi-Cultured Society"
An-Najah National University, Nablus – Palestine, 14th June, 2010

Since year 2000, the Israeli military has strongly interfered in the Palestinian higher educational process and imposed frequent prolonged curfews, military roadblocks and checkpoints, frequent closure of cities and thus preventing thousands of students and professors from reaching their universities. In addition to these restrictions Israel also built an illegal separation, isolation wall inside the West Bank which severely impacts the daily lives and movements of all Palestinians. It also barred students from Gaza from reaching their Universities in the West Bank

Despite all the aforementioned difficulties imposed by the Israeli security forces, Universities in Palestine, not only managed to survive, but also to compete regionally and world wide. For example, An-Najah this year, ranked first amongst Palestinian universities, 10th among Arab world and 1616 world wide among more than 7000 universities that were evaluated in Webometrics ranking.

Higher education in Palestine

The higher education system in Palestine is founded on universities in the West Bank and Gaza whose study programs were planned as one integrated system, which is based on the assumption that programs that exist in the West Bank and Gaza will serve both Palestinian population and thus there are professions which are taught in the West Bank and not in Gaza, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, dentistry, health administration and PhD in Chemistry.

In the West Bank there are Nine Universities, These are:

1. An-Najah National University, established 1918, ~ 20,000 students.
2. Al-Quds University, ~ 10,000 students.
3. Bethlehem University, ~3,000 students.
4. Hebron University, ~ 5,000 students.

5. Birzeit University, ~5,000 students.
6. Arab American University, ~3,000 students.
7. Palestine Polytechnic University, ~5,000 students.
8. Khodori Institute, ~? Students.
9. Al-Quds Open University (West Bank and Gaza) ~60,000 students.

In Gaza, there are Four Universities, These are:

1. Al-Quds open University.
2. Al-Azhar University, ~10,000 students.
3. The Islamic University, ~20,000 students.
4. Al-Aqsa University, ~5,000 students.

In addition there are about 14 community colleges, 12 technical Colleges and one Arts and music institute named after the late notable Palestinian Professor Edward Said (Edward Said National Conservatory of Music).

The majority of these universities are non-profit institutions which heavily depend on student fees (about 60% of universities operating cost). The remaining costs are covered by fundraising and governmental funding.

University Education in Palestine consists of 4 years of college education to obtain bachelor's degree, additional 2 years for a master's degree, and 3 more years to obtain a doctorate. Thus the Palestinian educational system is compatible with the Bologna process which makes it easier to internationalize An-Najah and other Palestinian universities. It is perhaps worth mentioning here that there is only one PhD program in chemistry offered by An-Najah University and that two more PhD programs in

Physics and Mathematics are submitted by An-Najah to the Ministry of education and higher education (**MOEHE**) for accreditation.

An educational development strategic plan (**EDSP**) 2008-2012 is proposed by the **MOEHE** and with regard to higher education it has to achieve a central goal "Relevance" meaning to realize a gradual conversion of the higher education sector from a supply-oriented to a demand-oriented sector which will gradually guarantee more compatibility between higher education outputs and labor markets. Also, **MOEHE** supervises Inter-University co-operation programs such as **MEDCAMPUS**, Palestine European Academic Co-operation in Education (**PEACE**) which are supported by the European partners, **UNESCO** and **UNDP**. **PEACE** program involves 23 Palestinian and European Universities and provides the possibility to dispatch missions of volunteer academics, on sabbatical, from Europe, North America to the West Bank and Gaza.

Research in Palestine

Developed countries spend around 2.5% of their Gross Domestic Product (**GDP**) on **R&D** activities (examples: Sweden~2.6%, USA~2.9%) while in underdeveloped countries (Palestine included) the expenditure on **R&D** is only about 0.2% (Qatar is an exception).

Research Centers in Palestine:

1. Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (**ARIJ**) in which research is focused on
 - Geographical Information System (**GIS**) and remote sensing.
 - Water and Environment.

- Biodiversity and Agricultural research.
- 2. National Agricultural Research Center (**NARC**) Jenin, Agricultural Research.
- 3. Institute for Palestine Studies.
- 4. **MAS** for economical studies.

Research fields at An-Najah

Research is undertaken in the following areas:

Natural Sciences: Nanotechnology; Photochemistry; Biodiversity; Natural Products; Water, Environment and Agriculture; Engineering: Chemical, Civil, Electrical, Mechanical and Communications; Physics; Mathematics and Chemistry.

Life Sciences: Medicine; Pharmacy; Nursing; Biology and Biotechnology.

Humanities: Arts and Fine Arts; Education; Law; Finance; Business administration; Marketing; History and Others.

An-Najah Scientific Centers

There are 14 scientific centers hosted by An-Najah, of those I list:

1. Energy Research Center.
2. Earth Sciences and Seismic Engineering Center.
3. Center for Urban and Regional Planning.
4. Construction Transportation Research Center.
5. Water and Environmental Studies Institute.
6. **UNESCO** Chair on Human Rights and Democracy.
7. Chemical, Biological and Drug Analysis Center.
8. Poison Control and Drug Information Center.
9. Korean Palestinian **IT** institute of Excellence.

Recommendations

To improve **HE** and research in Palestine I recommend the following measures:

1. Securing enough financial resources to achieve international standards of excellence in Palestinian higher education institutions.
2. Establishing an active Palestinian research foundation and charging it with the responsibility of preparing an action plan that takes into account the following points:
 - a) Provision of quality research, taking into consideration the limitation on available funds.
 - b) Preparation of a program of research priorities.
3. Establishing new effective partnerships and networking and strengthening and enhancing the already existing collaborations with international institutions to learn from their experiences in the fields of HE & R&D