PALESTINE AHLIYA UNIVERSITY

NEWSLETTER

A monthly newsletter published by the
International Affairs and Public Relations Department

JANUARY 2026

جَامِعَة فِلَسطِين الأَهلِيّة
Palestine Ahliya University



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Palestinian Education amid Crises: Navigating Disruption and Recovery



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Palestinian education is currently undergoing one of the most critical junctures in its modern history, with the educational system positioned between resilience and systemic collapse. Although the illiteracy rate among Palestinians aged fifteen and above declined from 13.9% in 1997 to 2.1% in 2023—according to data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics—this notable quantitative achievement does not necessarily correspond to the quality, continuity, or stability of educational provision.

Ongoing Israeli aggression, sustained political fragmentation, and deepening economic and psychological pressures continue to undermine the regular functioning of the education sector. International and national indicators suggest that the primary challenge facing Palestinian education lies not in literacy attainment but in educational continuity and retention. Data from the Report on the Status of Palestinian Children's Rights issued by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics reveal a troubling pattern: while enrollment in basic education (Grades 1–9) reached 96.7%, participation at the secondary level (Grades 10–12) declined sharply to 75.9% during the 2022/2023 academic year. Consequently, approximately one in four secondary school students is no longer enrolled in formal education. This pattern of attrition indicates that large numbers of students are navigating fragmented or incomplete educational trajectories, eroding the coherence of their academic pathways and compromising the quality of educational outcomes over the long term.

Since 2016, the Palestinian educational landscape—particularly in the West Bank—has been marked by recurrent teachers' strikes that have occurred almost annually, with varying duration and scope some lasting weeks or even months. Strikes in 2016, 2020, 2022, and 2023 have rendered labor disruption a structural feature of the education system rather than an exceptional occurrence. With each cycle, public schools have experienced partial or complete closures. In 2025, these disruptions assumed a new form with the introduction of alternative attendance arrangements, including the reduction of instructional days to three per week in some schools, even as additional strike actions continued during those limited school days. This pattern of sustained instability has resulted in substantial learning loss and has disrupted the educational continuity of more than 870,000 students. Schools have increasingly become unstable learning environments, characterized by frag-

mented schedules and incomplete curricular coverage. While these strikes reflect legitimate professional and economic demands by teachers, they have simultaneously reshaped the realities of schooling: the academic year has become negotiable, and daily instructional regularity has shifted from a norm to a privilege. This erosion of routine has intensified learning disparities and weakened the cumulative structure of knowledge acquisition, raising urgent questions about unresolved educational gaps: What happens to lessons that are never taught? How can education loss be addressed under partial attendance—or in contexts where schooling is repeatedly suspended? Consequently, the central issue is no longer whether education formally exists, but whether it is delivered in a stable and continuous manner—a condition that ultimately determines educational quality.

In Gaza, the educational crisis has escalated sharply. Although enrollment in basic education reached 96.1% in the 2022/2023 academic year, the situation deteriorated dramatically following the recent Israeli assault. UN and UNICEF reports indicate that approximately 658,000 school-age children are now deprived of formal education due to the complete destruction of 172 public schools, damage to hundreds of government and UNRWA schools, and the impairment of 97% of remaining school facilities. This total disruption threatens the loss of an entire generation's cumulative learning and risks creating a long-term educational gap unless comprehensive and realistic emergency interventions are implemented.

The tragedy of Palestinian education extends beyond the destruction of infrastructure or the disruption of classes to the human dimension itself—to students and teachers living under constant psychological pressure. According to UNICEF reports, approximately 1.2 million Palestinian children are in urgent need of psychosocial support, indicating that education in Palestine can no longer be viewed solely as an academic process but must be redefined as a form of social protection that prioritizes psychological safety. Furthermore, the 2025 Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal published by the World Health Organization reports that 54% of children and adolescents in Gaza suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, 41% from depression, and 34% from anxiety. These alarming figures underscore that schools are no longer merely spaces for learning, but must be conceptualized as environments that foster psychological and social healing. Consequently, integrating psychosocial and emotional interventions into the educational framework is not an optional enhancement, but a strategic necessity for rebuilding resilience, restoring students' confidence and balance, and enabling effective learning. In this context, the Palestinian school is called upon to serve as a protective and supportive environment as much as an educational institution.

On the other hand, the 2023 TIMSS results reveal a concerning decline in the academic achievement of Palestinian students compared to regional and global levels. Palestinian students scored an average of 382 in

mathematics and 393 in science, below the Arab average (413 in mathematics and 427 in science) and well below the global average of 478 in both subjects. This decline reflects the deep structural weaknesses in the educational system, characterized by frequent disruptions in schooling, widening gaps in core skills, and insufficient teacher training in interactive and digital teaching methods.

The report evaluating the Strategic Plan for the Education Sector 2017–2022, issued by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, indicates that teachers' engagement in e-learning activities did not exceed 33.7%, a low level reflecting significant challenges in integrating modern technologies into the classroom. The report also notes that 89.8% of teachers experienced difficulties in developing instructional content, 89.8% struggled with inadequate technical infrastructure, and 54.9% experienced challenges in using educational technology applications. These figures demonstrate that weak digital integration in education is not merely a consequence of a pandemic or exceptional circumstance, but reflects a structural gap in teachers' digital competencies and teaching methods which exacerbates the impact of school disruptions on learning quality and student achievement.

The situation in Palestinian universities mirrors, in many ways, that of schools, as they too face unprecedented financial and institutional pressures. In the West Bank, these challenges are compounded by complex field conditions, including city closures and widespread Israeli military checkpoints, which have effectively created a new geographic map for higher education. Each governorate has become largely isolated, restricting student mobility and reshaping the Palestinian university landscape into a more localized and geographically fragmented system. In Gaza, the destruction of 63 university buildings has completely disrupted education for approximately 88,000 students, while the West Bank has also experienced widespread interruptions in university attendance due to security restrictions and closures that have affected daily mobility, class schedules, exams, and research activities. Consequently, more than 226,000 students across the West Bank and Gaza have had their academic trajectories directly disrupted since the outbreak of the recent conflict. Moreover, universities have not achieved a full transition to e-learning. The digital shift has largely been limited to temporary, emergency measures incapable of compensating for lost learning. Most efforts have involved simply converting in-person lectures to online platforms using the same traditional methods, without redesigning curricula or integrating modern interactive digital tools. This partial digital adaptation cannot be considered true e-learning in the modern academic sense; rather, it represents a continuation of traditional teaching practices in a different medium, limiting its effectiveness in ensuring learning continuity or addressing educational loss.

Despite the significant efforts of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to manage the education sector under exceptional financial and field pressures, the challenges continue to exceed available capacities. According to World Bank estimates, the funding gap for the Palestinian Authority reached approximately $2 billion in 2024, equivalent to 12% of GDP, directly affecting the government's ability to support and develop infrastructure for both general and higher education. The ministry continues to exert maximum effort to ensure the continuity of education, yet the current phase requires more than crisis management; it demands strategic planning to overcome it. Rescuing Palestinian education necessitates a comprehensive national vision integrating both official and community roles. The ministry and formal education institutions must develop a national emergency plan that identifies clear alternatives for education during crises, including digital learning, intensive courses, double-shift schooling, and remedial curricula. Additionally, a national education and recovery fund should be established under government supervision, with participation from international partners, to provide financial support for schools and universities and rehabilitate them post-crisis. Civil society, parents, and local associations must play a complementary role by creating temporary community learning hubs, organizing extracurricular activities that enhance students' psychological and life skills, and providing financial and logistical support for educational initiatives. Universities, meanwhile, should act as strategic partners in the education system, contributing actively to reform through preparatory programs for secondary students and the development of university curricula to address educational loss.

Palestinians do not need to start from scratch, as there are international experiences they can benefit from. In India and Nigeria, the "teaching at the right level" model groups students according to their actual abilities rather than their grade level, rapidly improving reading and mathematics outcomes at low cost. Likewise, Ukraine's establishment of a unified national digital education platform (All-Ukrainian Online School) during the war demonstrates that investment in digital transformation can ensure learning continuity even under extreme conditions. This approach could be adapted in Palestine through a national platform combining television broadcasting with offline digital content.

What the Palestinian people are experiencing today is an existential struggle targeting individuals, institutions, memory, and the future. It spares neither the government nor the people, but is directed at every Palestinian in an attempt to suppress knowledge, displace communities, break their resilience, and uproot them. In this context, protecting education becomes a central national priority, as it represents the last line of defense for identity, dignity, and existence. Continuity in education is a direct counter to policies of ignorance and emptying, as schools today play roles that go beyond classrooms and textbooks. They serve as spaces for psychological and social protection, centers of resilience, and incubators of hope for a threatened future. The responsibility to maintain this historic role surpasses that of any other institution, because disrupting

education means jeopardizing the entire future. Over past decades, Palestine has lost most of its economic resources, leaving human capital as its sole national wealth capable of building the nation. Every Palestinian student today represents a future citizen, scholar, doctor, engineer, lawyer, entrepreneur, worker, or professional—but this future is at risk if educational disruption and instability continue unabated. Coordinated efforts among the government, society, and families are the only way to ensure that Palestinian schools remain safe and well-functioning spaces, protecting the current generation while preparing the next to rebuild the nation from the rubble. Education is not a luxury; it is an act of resistance, an investment in life, and safeguarding the Palestinian generation today ensures the survival of Palestine tomorrow.

I therefore urge teachers, the Ministry, and all sectors of national society to fully assume their responsibilities and intensify their efforts to overcome the financial and economic crisis, ensuring that any solutions do not compromise Palestinian students, the future of our people, or their freedom.

International and Local Cooperation

Academic Collaboration: Palestine Ahliya University Signs Cooperation Agreement with An-Najah National University

H.E. Prof. Rami Al-Hamdallah, Vice Chairman of the Board of Trustees of An-Najah National University and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of An-Najah National University Hospital, received a high-level delegation from Palestine Ahliya University, in the presence of H.E. Prof. Abdel Naser Zaid, President of An-Najah National University. The visiting delegation included H.E. Dr. Dawood Al-Zeer, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Palestine Ahliya University; Prof. Imad Al-Zeer, President of the University; Dr. Faeyz Abuamria., Vice President for Academic Affairs; and Mr. Jiries Abu Ghannam, President Assistant for Public Relations and International Affairs.



A joint academic cooperation agreement was signed by the presidents of both universities. Both parties emphasized the importance of the agreement and expressed their commitment to maintaining ongoing communication and coordination, as well as ensuring the implementation of its provisions in a manner that serves the national educational mission and strengthens the standing of Palestinian universities.











Palestine Ahliya University Signs Cooperation Agreement with Nablus University for Vocational and Technical Education

Palestine Ahliya University, represented by its President, Prof. Imad Al-Zeer, and Nablus University for Vocational and Technical Education, represented by its President, Prof. Derrar Alyan, signed a Memorandum of Understanding for academic and professional cooperation. The agreement was finalized during an official meeting held at Palestine Ahliya University in Bethlehem, as part of efforts to strengthen institutional partnerships and develop areas of joint collaboration between Palestinian universities.





Prof. Imad Al-Zeer Participates in 34th Board Meeting of the Arab Council for Student Training and Creativity in Libya

Prof. Imad Al-Zeer, President of Palestine Ahliya University, participated in the 34th meeting of the Board of Directors of the Arab Council for Student Training and Creativity, hosted by the Open University of Libya in Tripoli. The meeting was chaired by Prof Nathir Obeidat., President of the University of Jordan and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Arab Council.

During the meeting, participants discussed the items listed on the agenda, most notably the Council's annual activities for 2026, the strategic plan, the bylaws and internal regulations, as well as the general budget for 2026, as well as other emerging matters.

Prof. Imad Al-Zeer, a member of the Board of Directors of the Arab Council for Student Training, emphasized the importance of student exchange programs in enhancing students' competencies and refining their skills. He noted that such programs contribute to preparing students to meet labor market demands, while strengthening their academic and professional experience and promoting cultural exchange.



Palestine Ahliya university receives a delegation from the Arab Bank to explore ways of enhancing joint cooperation, particularly in developing and expanding the use of electronic channels and services in line with digital transformation and service quality improvement.



Conferences

Under the Patronage of His Excellency the Palestinian Minister of Justice, Counselor Sharhabeel Al Zaeem, the Faculty of Law at Palestine Ahliya University held the Second Peer-Reviewed Student Legal Conference entitled: 'Law in the Age of AI: Student Perspectives on Future Legislation.'







The conference was organized to provide the faculty's students with a solid research platform to present their studies and discuss the challenges posed by AI to the legal system, as well as to explore ways to develop Palestinian legislation capable of keeping pace with the digital age. The initiative aligns with the faculty's commitment to fostering research leadership and preparing a generation of legal professionals able to anticipate the practical and legislative implications of AI. Through a scholarly environment, the conference encouraged students to develop innovative legislative models that serve Palestinian society and enhance its legal infrastructure.

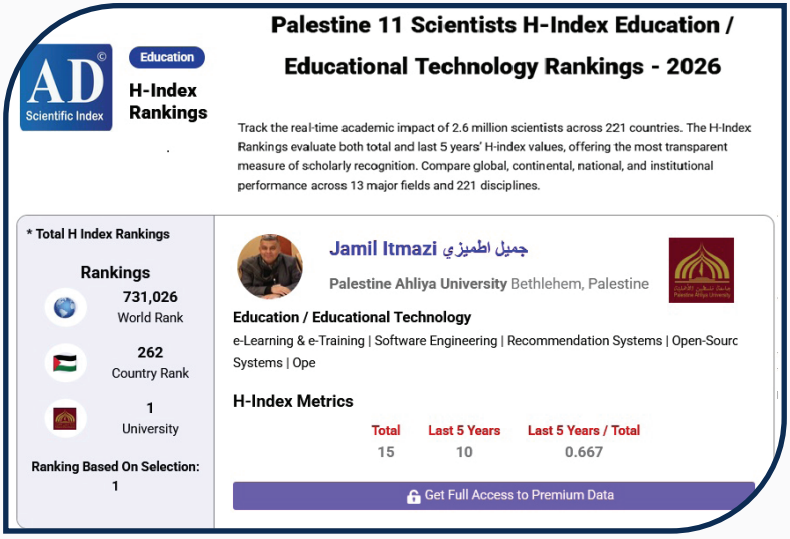




Scientific Achievements – Al-Ahliya Staff

Dr. Jamil Itmazi, Academic and Researcher at Palestine Ahliya University Achieves Top Ranking in the AD Scientific Index

In a new academic achievement added to the record of scientific excellence, Dr. Jamil Itmazi, an academic and researcher in the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at Palestine Ahliya University, has attained advanced rankings in the 2025 global AD Scientific Index. This index is recognized as one of the leading international systems for ranking and analyzing the scientific performance of researchers and academic institutions worldwide.



Dr. Itmazi's rankings are as follows:

- First place among Educational Technology researchers in Palestine.
- Fourth place among Education/Pedagogy researchers in Palestine.

This achievement reflects Dr. Itmazi's distinguished academic standing and his high-quality, impactful research output in the fields of educational technology and education, contributing to the strengthening of Palestine Ahliya University's presence in international scientific rankings.

University and Community

Community Service Students Implement a Series of Purposeful Initiatives:



Awareness Workshop Titled “Breathe Hope” on Lung Cancer, presented by Dr. Firas Awawdeh and Conducted by Students Mayar Salhab, Baraa Mizher, Sulafah Sabbarnah, and Ibrahim Samara.



Awareness initiative titled “A Nurse’s Message,” aimed at raising health awareness among students and staff about the importance of early screening for hypertension and diabetes.



As part of a recreational initiative targeting around 300 students, community service students brought smiles to the children of Dar al-Kalima school by conducting a range of engaging activities that brought joy and happiness to their hearts.

A Success Story: A Graduate Carrying the Message of Change



Samir Lahdo
Emotional and Behavioral Therapist

I began my professional journey at Palestine Ahliya University, where I earned a Bachelor's degree in Social Work in 2013. This laid the scientific and professional foundation for my career in social and therapeutic work. During my studies, I acquired both theoretical knowledge and practical skills to understand human behavior and work with individuals and families within a responsible professional and ethical framework.

After graduation, I focused on professional development by attending several specialized training programs, including courses on treating victims of sexual harassment, a diploma in music therapy, and courses on the role of social workers within therapeutic institutions. Over the years, I also received specialized professional guidance from experienced social workers and psychologists, which helped refine my therapeutic skills and enhance my professional competence. To further advance my academic journey, I later earned a Master's degree in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) from Newcastle Business College, UK, which deepened my theoretical knowledge and expanded my practical tools.

Additionally, I have worked in several therapeutic institutions and centers within the Arab community, providing services across multiple regions, including Jerusalem, the South, and Bethlehem. Throughout my professional journey, I have worked with diverse age groups, including children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly, and have addressed cases involving psychological trauma, anxiety, depression, behavioral disorders, and complex life stressors.

In my practice, I have relied on a combination of therapeutic approaches, including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and psychodynamic therapy. In the psychodynamic approach, I focused on understanding early experiences, internal conflicts, attachment patterns, and their impact on the present. I have also employed expressive therapy as an effective therapeutic tool through art, music, and creative expression, observing its positive impact in helping clients express emotions that are difficult to verbalize and in fostering a sense of safety and openness within therapy sessions.

In one case I worked on, following a structured therapeutic process, a noticeable improvement was observed in the client's ability to express emotions, regulate impulses, and build a more positive self-image. This progress had a clear impact on their social relationships and daily functioning, serving as a professional example of the tangible effect therapy can have on individuals' lives.

Today, I continue my work in the therapeutic field as a Social Worker and Cognitive Behavioral and Emotional Therapist, while pursuing ongoing professional development and participating in specialized training programs. I also focus on developing therapeutic initiatives and programs that serve the community, driven by my belief in the vital role of cognitive-behavioral and emotional therapy in promoting mental health and fostering a more aware and cohesive society.

Scientific Research Corner



Palestine Ahliya University is pleased to announce the release of the second issue of Volume four (2025) of the

"Palestine Ahliya University Journal for Research and Studies"

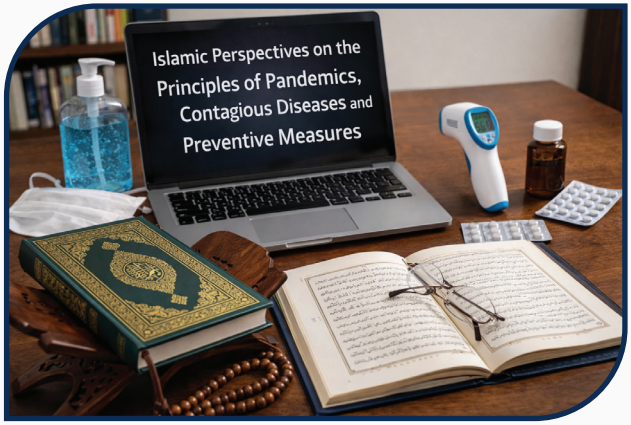
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The journal also invites inquiries from researchers interested in joining its editorial board. Interested candidates may contact us via email at: journal@paluniv.edu.ps



Dr. Jamil Itmazi published a new research paper titled "Digital empowerment of undergraduate students with vision disability"



Dr. Suhail Al-Ahmed published a new research paper titled "Islamic Perspectives on the Principles of Pandemics, Contagious Diseases and Preventive Measures"



Dr. Mu'taz Abo Sara and Mr. Murad Al-Zeer published a new research paper titled "Email Classification Through Data Analysis and Processing Techniques"



Pro. Ahmad Batran and Dr. Muath Abu Ejheisheh published a new research paper titled "Knowledge and Attitudes of Critical Care Unit Nurses Regarding Diabetic Ketoacidosis: Palestinian Perspective"

Palestine Ahliya University is pleased to open its doors for productive research partnerships with academic institutions and distinguished researchers in various fields.

You can contact us via email at: research.clinic@paluniv.edu.ps





The 100th among Arab Universities
The 5th among Palestinian Universities

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