Palestinian Universities Capacity Snapshots

Context

The USAID-funded Pre-Service Teacher Education Activity (PTEA) set out to develop a quality assurance framework for Palestinian universities and to support them to enhance the management and continuous improvement of their services and programs, particularly pre-service teacher education programs for grades 5 – 9. In support of this aim, the PTEA team visited six Palestinian universities in August 2018 to facilitate a capacity assessment using the Higher Education Institutional Quality Assessment Tool (HEIQAT), co-developed with the Palestinian Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission (AQAC).[1] **82 faculty and staff participated in these capacity assessment activities.** A "Capacity Snapshot" was produced for each participating HEI.[2] Select aggregate findings are presented below.[3]

The Higher Education Institutional Quality Assessment Tool (HEIQAT)

The HEIQAT provides a framework for review of academic programs and institutional quality assurance systems. This participatory assessment tool engages different departments of the university to ensure that a range of perspectives are considered in assessing capacity and performance and to build consensus and ownership of identified strengths and opportunities for improvement. It is designed to facilitate in-depth reflection and provide a structured framework for a broad qualitative review of evidence, which is accompanied by a "capacity score". Aligned to AQAC's 2018 Licensure and Accreditation Manual and informed by international good practice, it is divided into performance categories. Within each category, the matrix presents a series of criterion and a rubric to score the institution using evidence from interviews, observation and document review. Once scores are manually inserted into the scoring matrix, a Performance Dashboard auto-populates providing a snapshot of the institution's strengths and weaknesses. The average scores across the six universities are presented below.

HEIQAT CATEGORIES

Program Quality Assurance
- Program Development and Approval
- Program Characteristics
- Program Management, Monitoring and Enhancement
- Program Entry, Progression and Graduation Standards

Institutional Quality Assurance
- Quality Assurance and Enhancement
- Student Affairs and Support Services
- Learning Resources and Facilities
- Strategic Planning and Effectiveness
- Transparency and Integrity
- Staff Management and Professional Development

Quality Assurance of Educational Programs

Program Development and Approval	Program Characteristics	Program Management, Monitoring and Enhancement	Program Entry, Progression and Graduation Standards
1.87	1.85	1.30	1.83

Institutional Quality Assurance Capacity

Quality Assurance and Enhancement	Student Affairs and Support Services	Learning Resources and Facilities	Strategic Planning and Effectiveness	Transparency and Integrity	Staff Management and Professional Development
1.32	1.87	1.57	1.32	1.35	1.55

Scoring Key:

0 = Serious weakness that puts the institution at risk

1 = Inadequate and opportunities for improvement are evident

2 = Adequate for institutional progress

3 = Institutional strength

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1   The assessments had a dual purpose: 1) to form a baseline and identify opportunities for organizational performance improvement, and; 2) to pilot and test the developing HEIQAT which formed an integral part of a Common Framework for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, being co-developed with AQAC. Several modifications were made on the basis of these pilot assessments.

2   Arab American University, Al-Quds Open University, Palestine Polytechnic University, Al-Quds University, Hebron University, and Palestine Technical University – Kadoorie.

3   PTEA was an intensive 18-month intervention requiring an accelerated assessment. The findings are therefore presented as a starting point for additional analysis and planning, as opposed to a definitive statement of the universities' current capacity.

Institutional Quality Assurance — sector wide strengths and opportunities for improvement[4]

	Strengths	Opportunities for Improvement
Strategic Planning and Effectiveness	**5/6** institutions could demonstrate a systematic and participatory strategic planning process **5/6** institutions had formal policies and mechanisms in place to collect and record core institutional data	**4/6** institutions had limited or no meaningful participation in strategic planning processes from students and employers **3/6** institutions had no central unit or officer with responsibility for coordinating and aggregating institutional data [5]
Transparency and Integrity	**6/6** institutions have a managed online presence (website and social media) providing information to staff, students and the public **3/6** institutions have a robust online profile	In **4/6** institutions, the information shared publicly tends toward the celebratory and promotional, with a wider range of performance data absent or difficult to find In **4/6** institutions, policies and procedures for student complains and appeals are "known" but not documented **3/6** institutions lack clear, documented procedures and/or student guidance and training on academic misconduct such as plagiarism, falsification and cheating
Staff Management and Professional Development	**5/6** institutions can demonstrate how Teaching and Learning Centers orient new hires and support staff professional development **4/6** institutions have policies to promote scholarly activity, including formal workload allocation models that protect research time	In **3/6** institutions, the faculty performance review procedure does not include self-assessment and in 2/6 institutions the faculty performance review procedure is suspended
Quality Assurance and Enhancement	**4/6** institutions have a dedicated, centralized quality assurance unit **5/6** institutions have a documented QA procedure that includes some kind of periodic review and enhancement	**3/6** institutions were unable to specify and/or produce data used in QA suggesting a need for better documentation, archiving and dissemination of QA data In **4/6** institutions, student engagement in QA was limited to student feedback questionnaires with no further engagement evident **4/6** institutions have no or very limited internal/external moderation/verification of their assessments, grading and feedback
Student Affairs and Support Services	**6/6** institutions have taken steps to improve their alumni engagement	**4/6** institutions need to build a more systematic alumni database and expand the scope of their engagement with alumni
Learning Resources and Facilities	**5/6** institutions have a virtual learning environment **3/6** institutions have a program of extracurricular activities which includes soft skills and employability/entrepreneurship	**2/6** institutions report that their virtual learning environment is not widely used and 3/6 institutions report that faculty need additional support to effectively use these platforms

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4   The table below includes only the strengths and opportunities for improvement that were identified in at least three of the six HEIs under study. A wider range of factors and more comprehensive analysis was provided in the individual HEI capacity snapshots.

5   Beyond that which is required by MOEHE.

Pre-Service Teacher Education Programs

In addition to institution wide assessment of quality assurance capacity, PTEA took a deep dive into the provision of pre-service teacher education for grades 5 – 9. This review has been conducted at a time when changes to the requirements for pre-service teacher education at grades 5 – 9 are proposed. The Palestinian General Education Law (2017), and Teacher Education Strategic Plan (2008) provide a framework for a more coordinated and streamlined teacher preparation, recruitment and professional development system with a clear pathway into the profession. Within this framework, it is proposed that those wishing to enter the upper basic and secondary teaching profession must obtain a subject bachelor's degree plus a teaching diploma for grades 5 - 9 or grades 10 - 12. Currently, institutions are offering several accredited pathways including education bachelors, education "minors" where education content is embedded within a wider bachelor's degree, and diploma programs as envisaged by Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) plans.

Across the HEIs under study, PTEA identified the following dominant themes:

- HEIs have been proactive in transferring practicum good practices developed through the World Bank's Teacher Education Improvement Project, focused on grades 1 – 4, to their grades 5 – 9 programs. This includes full integration of taught courses and practicum, professional learning outcomes assessment, and improved school guidance, support and management

- HEIs have been proactive in responding to MOEHE calls for new course content and structures and are well positioned to adapt as further changes are proposed

- At the institutional level, the majority of HEIs have taken some steps to engage employers in the development and approval of new courses but this practice is not uniformly applied to teacher preparation programs. HEI's should be encouraged to engage practicing teachers and school principals in the course development and approval process

- While learning outcomes are developed and assessed in all institutions, HEIs have been less proactive in assessing the long-term professional performance of their teacher graduates. There is potential for more systematic engagement of schools and/or Educational Supervisors to collect data on long-term outcomes and inform course enhancement

- Several programs are in urgent need of re-accreditation

- Several institutions currently offer accredited minor and bachelor's programs which do not align with the MOEHE's future plans for upper basic teacher preparation. Consultation and an adequate transition period will be required to enable these institutions to adapt their programs.

Teacher Education Snapshot

	Education Faculty	Education Students	Education Programs (Grade 5 – 9)	Credit Hours [6]	Practicum Hours	Year of AQAC Accreditation	Compliant with Future MOEHE Plans
Arab American University Palestine	5 (2% total faculty)	250 (2% total students)	Diploma in Education for Upper Basic Level [7]	33	6	2012	Y
			Minor in Education	124 - 128 (27 education content)	6	2016	N
Al-Quds University	24	150 (< 0.1% of total students)	Higher Diploma [8] and Masters in Methods of Teaching	24	0	Unknown	N
			Minor in Education for Upper Basic Level (5 - 9) [9]	124 - 128 (27 education content)	6	Unknown	N
Palestine Technical University Kadoorie	13 (0.5% of total faculty)	170 (0.4% of total students)	Diploma in Education	27	6	2014/15	Y
Palestine Polytechnic University	3 (1% of total faculty)	10 (< 0.1% of total students)	Educational Qualification Diploma [10]	32	6	2014/15	Y
Al Quds Open University	131 (31% total faculty)	11,779 (23% total students)	Education Diploma	35	5	2002	Y
			BA Teaching for upper basic level (5 - 9) [11]	129	5	2002	N
			Minor in Education	-	-	2002	N
Hebron University	20 (11% total faculty)	2,493 (25% total students)	BA in Education & Method of Teaching for Upper Basic Level (5 - 9) [12]	135 (36 education content)	6	2002 (2010 - English specialism)	N
			Teaching Diploma	33	6	Unknown	Y

6   A credit hour is the unit for measuring educational credit, usually based on the classroom hours per week throughout a 16-week term.
7   Specialisms in English, Arabic, Math, Science.
8   A Higher Diploma is a postgraduate qualification.
9   Specialisms in Social Studies, Science, English, Arabic, Math and Technology.
10   Specialisms in Math, Science, Technology.
11   Specialisms in Islamic religion, Social Studies, Science.
12   Specialisms in Arabic, English, Math, Science, Technology and Social Science.