

# “Our Identity is Our Dignity”: Digital Transformations: Palestinian Aspirations, Idealism, Reality and Pragmatism

**Howard Scott**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2995-2393>  
University of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom  
howard.scott@wlv.ac.uk

**Montaser Motia Ujvari**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1455-2952>  
Palestine Technical University  
montaser.owda@ptuk.edu.ps

**Matthew Smith**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7693-3323>  
University of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom  
matt.smith@wlv.ac.uk

## Abstract

This article reports on a collaborative project for the digital innovation of language teaching in Palestine, and it argues for the necessity of mobile learning to circumvent disruption created by the Israeli occupation causing challenges that result in marginalisation and disenfranchisement of opportunity. This partly occurs through the oppression of a sovereign curriculum that supports Palestinian self-determination. This oppression is against both the United Nations Development Goals protected rights for education and the Palestinian Ministry’s vision for a society with an education sector that embraces the use of technology to invigorate the value of its culture, produce knowledge and promote emancipation. The article proposes the integration of digital technologies with student-centred learning to enhance and support transformation through three main elements: 1. Digital competence to develop confidence and agency in teachers; 2. Continuous teacher learning to develop autonomy and collaboration within organisations; 3. Problem-solving competencies, which can result in continuous improvement loops and local solutions to barriers. This article will resonate with those recognising the need for critical theory to challenge policy and practice where it deepens disadvantage. It draws upon the voices of 20 teachers from four higher



Education as Change  
Volume 28 | 2024 | #13828 | 14 pages



<https://doi.org/10.25159/1947-9417/13828>

ISSN 1947-9417 (Online)

© The Author(s) 2024



Published by the University of Johannesburg and Unisa Press. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

education institutions in Palestine, who reflect on the barriers to innovation and a reclaiming of educational terrain.

**Keywords:** collaboration; agency; innovative pedagogy; professional development; ownership; sovereign; culturally situated curricula

## Introduction

Palestine is an occupied country existing under a system of apartheid. The life of the people is scattered across divided areas, with walls and checkpoints, razor wire, surveillance cameras, gun turrets, and signs declaring the exclusion of this people or that from entering different demarcated areas common features against the deep red Semitic poppies and Faqqa iris that mottle and permeate the desert landscape.

With challenges to infrastructure, it is not uncommon for school life and education generally to face disruption from the physical to restrictions on movement, privacy, and digital rights (Muhtaseb, Traxler, and Scott 2023). Indeed, Israeli soldiers have regularly entered school buildings to confiscate computers and files, while students on higher education campuses are often teargassed and raided by Israelis. It has also been reported that student activists, including Layan Nasir (released on bail in August 2021), have been arrested for simply discussing politics or visiting other students—acts which are criminalised under Israeli law, according to the Institute for Middle Eastern Understanding. We have written elsewhere (Scott and Jarrad 2023) about the tanks parked outside schools while pupils are inside, or of classroom chairs that are left empty except for a single photograph that commemorates the martyr killed by the military who once sat there (Traxler et al. 2019). Amidst the complex landscape of these social and educational challenges, it is important to recognise that the difficulties faced by students, staff, and organisations during the Covid-19 pandemic globally mirror the persistent hurdles that Palestinians habitually confront on their domestic front. These challenges include enforced campus and building closures, the absence of both staff and students, the sudden requirement for asynchronous planning, and the urgent scramble to acquire technical expertise in order to leverage technologies that may help to mitigate disruptions. Furthermore, the lack of access to necessary hardware and sufficient bandwidth adds yet another layer of obstacles to the equation (Shraim and Khlaif 2010; Svirsky 2023).

The town of Huwara is used here as an illustrative case in point. Huwara is a Palestinian town in which 63% of its land is labelled as Area C, which is administered by the Israeli government in terms of security and civil affairs, and it is located on the only main street that connects the north of the West Bank to the south. The Israeli dominance in Huwara is visible and manifests in the tight security measures in the town, as many Israeli soldiers were deployed there following the “Huwara Progam” incident when hundreds of Israeli settlers attacked the town, killing one Palestinian, injuring 350 others, and burning dozens of houses and hundreds of cars. In addition, the Israeli domination of Huwara manifests in the linguistic landscape where Hebrew is the dominant language

on the road signs in this town (Ujvari 2022). However, the most salient aspect of Israeli dominance over this town is the frequent blockades imposed there. Most of the inner roads are closed to allow settlers to pass through the town freely. Main roads are also frequently closed, and Palestinians have to look for alternatives to be able to go to their work and university. Thus, Palestinians have created a Telegram channel that currently has over 83,000 subscribers just to get live feeds on the situations of the roads in the West Bank, especially those that exist in Area C. Problems may arise when a road is blocked without further notice and students and teachers are not able to get to university (Saffarini 2010). When this happens, teachers have to call their supervisors so that they can in turn tell the students that the teacher is not able to make it and tell their supervisors that a certain teacher is not able to attend on that day. Teachers then have to arrange for a catch-up lesson in a time slot that does not conflict with any students. Furthermore, students who are not able to make it have to present an alibi for their absence on a given day; the explanation that “there is a roadblock on the road” has become very common even among those who do not have to cross a checkpoint, and it is extremely difficult to follow the route that every absent student takes to check the truth behind their narrative, while the perpetrators causing this disruption are able to remain hidden in plain sight (Svirsky 2023). This situation affects the educational process at universities, but more significantly it may also have an impact on a teacher’s view of a student’s integrity; it has succeeded in distorting the subjective reality of the oppressed who blame themselves rather than the colonialist.

When roads are blocked and when students and staff cannot get to university, they can announce that lectures on that day are going to be delivered through virtual meetings and learning management systems, especially at universities located in the northern cities of the West Bank whose students and lecturers have to pass through Huwara. Distance learning then becomes the normalised process and online platforms of choice, or the walled garden of the institution, the focal point for learning (Smith, Scott, and Traxler 2022). For example, An-Najah National University in Nablus city announced on its Facebook page that during the second semester of the 2022/2023 academic year that lectures had to be delivered via Zoom on at least seven occasions due to road blocks. Similarly, Palestine Technical University-Kadoorie in Tulkarm city announced that lectures would be delivered using Zoom and Moodle for a whole week during the first semester of the 2022/2023 academic year. These issues show the level of disruption that staff and students have to accept as a norm of everyday life.

Beyond this, another problem is when Israeli soldiers storm university campuses and use teargas grenades forcing students and staff to evacuate. This scenario has become common at Palestine Technical University-Kadoorie, which is located to the north-west of Tulkarm city just next to the separation wall. So commonplace are such attacks that when teargas raids do not disrupt campus life, staff come to remark on their absence. This reveals something of the alief that Palestinian educators and students (if not the public generally) have come to experience as part of the vulnerable complexity of reality. (Alief, in philosophy, is a belief that shapes attitude and behaviour (Gendler

2008) but is at odds with people's implicit beliefs such that it creates a dissonance between what is perceived and what is believed.) This is represented commonly in the example of somebody standing on a glass balcony over a drop. Their belief is that they are safe, but the transparent glass gives people alief—in this case the impression of walking on thin air. Continual disruption to everyday life eventually creates alief that precarity, tension and aggression are normal. The response to such continual stress-testing makes Palestinian educators naturally innovative, as in the case of the intifada in the 1980s, which led to the use of video-recorded lessons to mitigate against the disequilibrium of continual hostility. The role of the teacher in these scenarios is critical. Higher education students are often undergraduates looking for answers and direction, and teachers themselves face enormous constraints in working life, with reduced and unstable contracts, large class sizes, archaic resources and curricula, and prescribed and didactic methods of delivery.

### TEFL-ePal Project

TEFL-ePal was an EU-funded project between countries that sought to initiate transformative approaches to teaching through digital technology. The motivation from the outset of the project was to generate change from within the local staff. It was quickly understood that this is largely predicated on promoting Palestinian sovereignty and identity, which a culturally situated curriculum may facilitate. The need for a culturally situated and humane educational approach was ascertained in large group processes (LGPs) with teaching staff. LGPs are used in action research methodology and social psychology to engage communities to consider and plot change (Martin 2005, 200), which is often aligned directly to practitioners' work in organisations. LGPs enable ways to collect rich data from participating groups as they are tasked with ways to think and dialogue about a subject through constructed activities that may contain prompts. In an LGP in Ramallah between the different partners involved in TEFL-ePal, an approach was taken to analyse the Palestinian higher education (HE) system following presentations on the results of a multi-site survey issued to HE language students in 2019 and compiled into a report prepared by Barghouti and Sbeahat (2019). This report was critical of existing practices in teaching and learning, and it chimed with the education problems that were found to be inherent in existing research (Bakeer, 2018). A commonly found problem is poor-quality instruction, which is exacerbated by a lack of access to technology alongside the occupying aggression against campus life. It would also be fair to repeat that instructors themselves work in difficult circumstances and conditions (such as limited funding). The 2019 report stresses the importance of textbooks, but criticises the materials that are in use. In field trips during the TEFL-ePal project, it was noted how the teachers sometimes used dilapidated English texts from the 1950s in a rote manner, with students copying out arcane language terms or phrasing longhand into exercise books. This type of approach, alongside challenges for students in moving or studying abroad, means that motivation for learning English can be low (Bakeer 2018). The desire to learn English exists, but the opportunity to practise English with native speakers or even to develop and utilise conversational skills in the classroom

with peers is rare. Other typical problems such as large class sizes mean differentiation or personalised learning to engage students is less feasible and teachers continue to teach from the front, rather than enact collaboration or group work. The institutional problems are common in the report, and the students migrating to private sector providers affirm the desire to learn English. The HE sector is, according to the authors, “losing credibility” (Barghouti and Sbeahat 2019, 26) and is below international competence frameworks, partly due to students’ rejection of traditional curriculum approaches such as the direct instruction of grammar and lack of a stimulating syllabus. It is in this context that the title of this article asserts that education can be about change, where the curriculum in occupied countries promotes and celebrates national sovereignty and identity as acts of resistance against dissolution, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. This stems from the resources made explicitly by teachers preparing for careers based on a transformative and critical paradigm as an approach to education. To undertake innovation that encompasses these facets requires recognising the realities Palestine as an occupied country faces, while being pragmatic about the educational innovation that is needed (and possible).

The Barghouti and Sbeahat (2019) report focuses mainly on Palestinian infrastructure and technical capabilities, but it overlooks the very real issues outside the doors of buildings. In teacher education, the use of technology is often perceived as belonging to a domain aligned to other requisites, such as content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, framed most commonly in such models as TPACK (technological pedagogical content knowledge) (Koehler and Mishra 2009) in order that a mastery of these components enables the flexible adaption of technologies. However, more recently Fawns (2022) has argued for an “entangled” approach that moves beyond pedagogy and technological skillsets to acknowledge how multiple other factors shape pedagogy, such as the social context, internal or national policy or the lives of students themselves, which are all entangled contexts that influence the activity taking place. This is important, since as Fawns reminds us, views that technology will necessarily have a positive impact on outcomes or events can be determinist and unhelpfully optimistic or pessimistic. In his entangled model, Fawns also emphasises a regard for teaching agency being negotiated between multiple elements, not just teachers and students but the technology itself and policymakers and other involved staff. This provides a more dynamic vision of teaching as a collective endeavour that supports agency for different stakeholders. In Fawns’s model, an aspirational view asserts that purpose, context and values are emphasised over methods and technology being used. This can result in collaboration between teachers and students who more readily and openly acknowledge uncertainty and imperfection. While it is never straightforward to transplant theoretical concepts from one context to another, what this model offers is a way of thinking about teacher agency that encourages flexibility and sight of the different relational aspects that impact the educational experience.

## Research Problem

A central question emerged from the TEFL-ePal project: How is it possible to innovate in teaching the English language by broadening the reference points to promote and celebrate local and national culture and practices, particularly under stifling curriculum management and against the backdrop of sociopolitical tensions? Our view is that anticipating and considering the use of digital technologies alongside the other elements Fawns identifies in teaching and learning contexts, including the backdrop of a culture that is being systematically eradicated, may support innovation and professional development. The research problem is in the paradox of what is sought in innovation: the idealism of what educators wish to achieve and realise against the pragmatic challenges these entail.

This article will now move to the research design where we draw on teachers' insights to plot changes in teaching, broadly moving from didactic practices to a more participatory, dialogic, and dynamic curriculum model, supported by online and mobile technologies in order to realise positive affordances in teaching and learning (Shraim and Crompton 2015). The aims are, as the title of this article suggests, probably flawed, since the aspirations are set against the realism of the backdrop of the context. The aspirations in common with the vision set forth by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, which seeks to create a sector at the centre of Palestinian society pursuing capabilities for transformation, remain steadfast (Ministry of Education and Higher Education 2017, 37). By aligning with this vision and incorporating the recommendations put forth by UNESCO, Palestine may foster a transformative and inclusive education system. This system would empower individuals to navigate the obstacles they face, while also equipping them with the necessary tools and resources to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world. Thus, it is essential that efforts are made to overcome the challenges of enforced closures, absences, asynchronous planning, and limited access to technology infrastructure. By doing so, Palestine may move towards an education sector that not only meets the needs of its students and educators but also empowers them to play an active role in the liberation and development of their society. This was borne out by the previously mentioned LGP where the Palestinian higher education institution (HEI) educators and leadership attending in Ramallah identified a code of values that the teaching of English needs to comprise. This was a small group task for the participants that sought consensus among those present of appropriate guiding values for a "cultural curriculum" and pedagogical repertoire that reflect the identity of Palestine and resulted in descriptors of an educational approach that aspires to be:

- truth seeking;
- forward thinking, nurturing youth as the future and developing leadership capacities;
- implicit in support of national and local identities while developing a global outlook;

- supportive of an authentic, personalised curriculum that is culturally diverse and open;
- able to utilise flexible, adaptable materials;
- able to foster creative and critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, employability, and life skills as well as developing character;
- found in an inclusive, safe environment in which student input is (more) active, celebrated, and valued;
- focused on developing mobile and technological capacity in staff members and students in order to support capabilities for autonomous and independent lifelong learning; and
- friendly, facilitating, fair, fun, and firm (plus familiar).

The authors conceive of the above criteria as elements for education that are more transformative than what had been observed and reported on in the 2019 report. While seemingly idealistic in nature, we do not consider that aspirations such as idealism in education should ever be deemed a pejorative force, especially for marginalised, subjugated, and displaced people. We acknowledge that for the innovation needed for this transformative approach to be realised depends largely on a number of factors, previously outlined. We wished to explore the perceived barriers and opportunities of our partners for these properties to become enabled in their systems and cultures. What followed through the course of the project were workshops hosted in respective countries, the creation of open educational resources and new textbooks. This article now presents innovation opportunities and barriers experienced by the participants—HE English language teachers—who worked across the TEFL-ePal project.

## Research Design

The research had a qualitative design, employing diverse approaches to represent the opportunities we had to explore periodic reflections on transformative teaching practices. Some of this occurred during Covid-19 campus and school lockdowns when educators had time to consider the testing circumstances and their innovative approaches, while other opportunities were made during cultural exchanges. We were guided by three central research questions:

- What are the main barriers to innovation?
- What are the main drivers for innovation?
- How is innovation and transformation in pedagogy enabled?

## Results

Our data gave us three distinctive elements to teacher innovation and potential for transformation in educational approaches in this context. At the foundation of this is the

common understanding that there is a need for modernisation in this context. The three elements are shown below:

1. Digital competence to develop confidence and agency
2. Continuous teacher learning to develop autonomy and collaboration within organisations
3. Problem-solving competencies, which can result in continuous improvement loops and local solutions to barriers.

We will return to these elements throughout but continue by responding to the above research questions (RQ), using the forums, interviews and focus groups held with teachers to answer these.

### **RQ1. What are the main barriers to innovation?**

Barriers to innovation were described on three main levels: the infrastructural limitations afforded to teachers and organisations, which included poor resources, low bandwidth, lack of access to hardware, and insecure contractual obligations. Secondly, teachers regularly identified the organisation's own control of teacher's autonomy to be able to innovate. Thirdly, the occupying power was continually identified as creating obstacles for education to be conducted in a normal fashion, with roadblocks, road closures, checkpoints, arrests and even incursions into campuses. Despite the passionate dedication to education that Palestinians uphold, these factors inevitably lead to low motivation among some teachers, reflected in the following quote:

During my early career, I followed the syllabus that I was given by the course coordinator step-by-step. The syllabus itself had nothing interesting as it focused mainly on grammar and making students memorise important lexis in order to pass their exams. Teaching the same thing repeatedly in such a way that students and I found boring started affecting me negatively. This routine and lack of interaction between my students and me made me feel unproductive, lazy, even self-loathing. I lost motivation to teach, and stopped planning for my lessons because I had already known what I was going to say by heart because I had repeated it three times a day!

Professional development is a hindrance, "The main obstacle was lack of training at the technical level" but it is eventually initiated, as is evident in later quotes where innovation is necessary. Others mentioned the "large class sizes that were not conducive to dialogue and speaking and listening interaction", where Arabic was spoken more than English practised. This was overcome by using separate online rooms in platforms such as Teams for small breakout groups, where students discuss problems using scaffolded vocabulary. Still other teachers used Whatsapp and Messenger to interact. Recognition overall was made to the limitations of the classroom and using technology to extend beyond the remit of a course curriculum to negotiate the student's own world: "[T]o extend student's learning beyond the classroom by including knowledge building, keeping oneself educated about new trends and technology in education, and problem-

solving in today's world." In such situations as campus closures due to military incursions, roadblocks, or pandemics, the key aim for teaching and learning has to be participation, so all teachers noted the move away from didactic instructional techniques based heavily on grammar structure, that tend to dispirit students. Blended learning, integrating technology into the classroom, but also incorporating it outside, enabled teachers to circumvent some of these barriers. However, blended (i.e. the mixture of face-to-face and online interaction) is the optimal approach, and not something always afforded Palestinians whose internet quality may be poor or disrupted.

Transformation must necessarily arise by giving teachers agency and autonomy in their classrooms, which is impeded here by the apparently stultifying curriculum, resources and approach to rote memorisation, however effective that may be.

## **RQ2. What are the main drivers for innovation?**

Fortunately, the teachers involved in TEFL-ePal were afforded some licence to innovate and trial different approaches using mobile phones for learning or to imagine new possibilities. We may contrast the above with the quote below:

I am looking forward to the more advanced, new ways of teaching that the Metaverse would help us in teaching English. The new ways have even new methods. There will be some kind of new meta universities, new meta classrooms, where we can interact with students, interact with speakers and take our students to a major city.

One teacher spoke of how they managed to make a change in their organisation with, for instance, the attribution of grades: "30% of the marks are devoted to online work, interactive activities and projects. The 30 marks are part of the holistic assessment of the course." This shift in grade weighting from final assessment with 100% of marks awarded through exam to marks being leveraged via diverse assessment methods represents a distinct cultural change initiated by staff involved in the TEFL-ePal project. Other teachers echoed this freedom:

I try to mix between both forms of assessments (exams, projects, research papers, videos, presentations, etc.) in my courses whenever I am allowed to create a course syllabus from scratch.

Participants who were interviewed ranged from new and more experienced classroom teachers to management, who also recognised the importance of moving teaching and assessment culture away from a hierarchical and prescriptive process: "A learned lesson is that decentralisation is a key factor in the process of decision-making for development." This is echoed in contemporary literature, where an 'identity crisis' (Abusamra, 2023) is noted among leadership in higher education institutions. Innovation must be encouraged, as noted in interview:

If we want to conceptualize capacity-building, it fundamentally means improving effectiveness at the organisational level and at the individual level as well. It purports to make my profession more adaptive and responsive to the changing conditions. This can be done if we, the staff, are provided with greater access to resources, training programs, consultations and expert advice. All this can be coupled with strategic planning and networking opportunities.

The framing of what drives innovation is rarely personal or individual, and is always stated as a collective good: “I think the most important value of the project is the capacity enhancement of the staff members that enable us to integrate tech in teaching and learning and also assisted our academic staff to develop almost from scratch parts of the newly developed curriculum.” Elsewhere, technicians described how the project supported their own development: “For me as a technician and lecturer at Engineering and IT department, the most important value of the project is we trained all the staff at our university how to design the interactive content and materials for different courses in particular the difficult one. Such as math and law courses.” Nevertheless, this progressive approach entails some standardisation of what teachers need in terms of skillsets:

Modernisation necessitates mastering digital skills, and I value this is one of the factors to be considered in designing a faculty development programme. Some educators were excluded from the project because they lack digital competences and could not improve them.

It is, however, ultimately recognised that teaching with digital technologies requires innovation and a need to adapt to cultural circumstances and the epoch, as reflected by the senior leadership:

Capacity building is the act of acquiring and honing the skills, instincts, abilities, processes, and resources that organisations and communities require to survive, adapt, and prosper in a rapidly changing environment and a method to ensure that the teacher has the intellectual and interpersonal abilities necessary to teach successfully.

The quote from a senior leader above is critical and reflects the power of teachers to feel rejuvenated and energised in their roles when given autonomy. Where there is prescription over how to carry out educational practices, teachers can believe their own agency is compromised and lose their will to innovate. Continual professional development and the freedom to do so is paramount.

### **RQ3. How is innovation and transformation in pedagogy enabled?**

Another classroom teacher acknowledged the ethos guiding these transformational approaches to pedagogy: “Through TEFL-ePal project, we sought after an emancipatory education developing new content, implementing new approaches, philosophies and tools that facilitated integrating technology in the process of teaching and learning.” This suggests the importance of collaboration in challenging constraints within

organisational cultures, echoed by another teacher who identifies the collectivist spirit of collaboration as helping all partners to develop their skillsets:

There were many instances where some participants who lacked experience with technology were quite dependent on those who were skilled. Assisting them in facing their obstacles was always at the expense of learning something new or practicing what was learned during the training sessions.

Innovation can be an attractive notion, but must be substantively developed, probably at a slow pace by exploring through collaboration between peers, investigation of ideas, understanding students' perceptions and through grounded research, rather than rushing to use new fads. Then, innovation can become a bedrock of continuous development. Innovation is only possible with competence and some trial and error may be necessary: "[T]he whole situation at the very beginning was blurred. Since I lacked experience in and knowledge of digital learning, the experience was challenging at first." Teachers had clearly felt stifled before but understood the appeal of new approaches:

Change is something desirable, especially in teaching methodology and syllabus. For me there was a need for change from teacher-centred to learner-centred approaches. The whole approach ostensibly saw the demise of traditionally-based approaches.

Others mentioned that this positively impacted their own self-belief about their role and responsibility: "The whole attitude has been rejuvenated. I now believe in blended learning and approaches that are based on digital technology as such approaches engage students more."

Most importantly, innovation may be enabled by an understanding of student need:

I've noticed that students like to use e-learning if the facilitator knows a lot about technology and uses it well. So, this promotes me to learn more, and as a result, we developed our technological capacity.

This in itself means that teaching staff are seeing their classrooms and curricula through the lens of the student, which is an important factor: "Encouraging students to become autonomous learners, in my opinion, was the priority of the project." This has necessarily incorporated the importance of a culturally situated education that promotes agency and self-determination: "The activities are diverse and culturally loaded and give students ample opportunities for self-expression and negotiation of meaning."

## Theoretical Discussion

There are a number of challenges highlighted here when drawing from Fawns's (2022) view of teacher education. For example, we see some restraints to change in the above illustrations from organisations that the educators work for. This tension between idealism and pragmatism among organisations and educators is nothing new, but more concerted innovation between stakeholders is arguably necessary for societies whose

identities are threatened by colonialist powers. This contextual backdrop is inseparable for Palestinian educators, since innovation with technology is often driven more by necessity (that is, due to displacement, campus closures or roadblocks) than it is in Western countries. In Fawns's view, pedagogy and technology can be untangled, but in the responses above, the technology is often considered implicit and paramount as a resource to allow education to continue among common disruption. Technology also facilitates change: as educators need to become more innovative in their practices, their organisations need to enable that innovation. The notion of alief was mentioned before and shown as something that is often in contradiction to one's personal beliefs. This is apparent in the paradoxes that education as something transformational represents. Bsharat et al. (2023) show that openness and conscientiousness are intrinsic to the character of good teachers, which lead to good learning experiences. Yet, however much people believe that education can be humanly transformational, oppression, violence and genocide persist that seemingly prevent holistic change and empowerment from happening. The alief is the spirit of hope to continue despite this: in contradiction to the circumstances, we must believe in education as a force for change, regardless of the surrounding social and political contexts that may appear bleak. Palestinian educators' resilience and dignity to carry on is an inspiration to the world.

## Conclusion

TEFL-ePal was a unique project that facilitated opportunities for innovation and change. We acknowledge that many organisations and cultures cannot equally indulge the scope for exploration and transformation in pedagogical practice afforded here. Palestine is a nation beset by geopolitical challenges impacting every social area and throughout its institutions and organisations. Given the issues manifested by the military occupation, its macro instruments of surveillance and oppression and micro-aggression, our conclusion is that where innovation is born of necessity, then regardless of organisational directive, it will likely happen anyway as practitioners struggle for the site of agency in their teaching. If it is not happening, this may be symptomatic of stagnation in an organisation. We hope through this article that we may add to wider calls to reclaim a degree of innovation for practitioners, who, to be empowered, require trust, autonomy, and agency in their professionalism.

## References

- Abusamra, A. 2023. "Why Do We Need to Reform Higher Education Management in Palestine?" *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice* 23 (5): 62–90.  
<https://doi.org/10.33423/jhetp.v23i5.5926>
- Bakeer, A. M. 2018. "Students' Attitudes towards Implementing Blended Learning in Teaching English in Higher Education Institutions: A Case of Al-Quds Open University". *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 8 (6): 131–139.  
<https://doi.org/10.30845/ijhss.v8n6a15>

- Barghouti, N., and T. Sbeahat. 2019. "Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Palestinian HEIs: An e-Learning Initiative that Bridges Educational and Socio-Political Gaps 'TEFL-ePAL'". Dissemination Report (2019).
- Bianchi, R., and A. Hussein-Abdel Razeq. 2017. "The English Language Teaching Situation in Palestine". In *English Language Education Policy in the Middle East and North Africa*, edited by R. Kirkpatrick, Language Policy, Vol. 13, 147–169. Cham: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-46778-8\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-46778-8_10)
- Bsharat, T. R. K., F. P Behak, S. B. Selamat, M. Y. Barahmeh, K. A.-J. Dweikat, M. Zyoud, I. A. A. Salama, and E. I. Issa. 2023. "Effectiveness of Big Five Traits on Classroom Management in Teaching English Language in Palestinian Schools". *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal* 10 (9): 318–331. <https://doi.org/10.14738/assrj.109.15492>
- Fawns, T. 2022. "An Entangled Pedagogy: Looking beyond the Pedagogy-Technology Dichotomy". *Postdigital Science and Education* 4 (3): 711–728. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-022-00302-7>
- Gendler, T. S. 2008. "Alief in Action (and Reaction)". *Mind and Language* 23 (5): 552–585. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0017.2008.00352.x>
- Koehler, M., and P. Mishra. 2009. "What Is Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK)?" *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education* 9 (1): 60–70. <https://www.learntechlib.org/primary/p/29544/>
- Martin, A. W. 2005. "Large Group Processes as Action Research". In *Handbook of Action Research*, edited by P. Reason and H. Bradbury, 200–208. London: Sage Publications.
- Ministry of Education and Higher Education. 2017. *An Elaboration of The Education Development Strategic Plan III (2014-2019)*. [https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/palestine\\_education\\_sector\\_strategic\\_plan\\_2017-2022.pdf](https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/palestine_education_sector_strategic_plan_2017-2022.pdf)
- Muhtaseb, R., J. Traxler, and H. Scott. 2023. "Educators' Perceptions of the Influence of Culture on Social Media Use in Education in Palestine". *Asian Journal of Distance Education* 18 (1): 271–300. <https://www.asianjde.com/ojs/index.php/AsianJDE/article/view/698>
- Saffarini, G. 2010. "Higher Education and Research in Palestine". Paper presented at the The Euro-Mediterranean Student Research Multi-Conference "Living together in the Multi-Cultured Society", An-Najah National University, Nablus, Palestine, June 14, 2010. Accessed February 2, 2024. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259257820\\_Higher\\_education\\_and\\_research\\_in\\_Palestine](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259257820_Higher_education_and_research_in_Palestine)

- Scott, H., and S. Jarrad. 2023. “‘To Exist Is to Resist’: A Reflective Account of Developing a Paradigm Shift in Palestinian Teaching and Learning Practice”. In *Critical Digital Pedagogy in Higher Education*, edited by S. Köseoğlu, G. Veletsianos and C. Rowell, 189–204. Athabasca: Athabasca Press. <https://www.aupress.ca/books/120310-critical-digital-pedagogy-in-higher-education/>
- Shraim, K., and H. Crompton. 2015. “Perceptions of Using Smart Mobile Devices in Higher Education Teaching: A Case Study from Palestine”. *Contemporary Educational Technology* 6 (4): 301–318. <https://doi.org/10.30935/cedtech/6156>
- Shraim, K., and Z. Khlaif. 2010. “An E-Learning Approach to Secondary Education in Palestine: Opportunities and Challenges”. In “ICT Education in Development”, edited by S. Assar, R. El Amrani and R. Watson, special issue, *Information Technology for Development* 16 (3): 159–173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02681102.2010.501782>
- Smith, M., H. Scott, and J. Traxler. 2022. “When Classrooms Aren’t an Option: Researching Mobile Language Learning through Disruption”. In *The Routledge Handbook of Language Learning and Teaching Beyond the Classroom*, edited by H. Reinders, C. Lai and P. Sundqvist, 395–407. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003048169-32>
- Svirsky, M. 2023. “The Israeli Elephant in the Settler-Colonial Room”. *Postcolonial Studies* 62 (4): 508–524. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2022.2080153>
- Traxler, J., Z. Khaif, A. Nevill, S. Affouneh, S. Salha, A. Zuhd, and F. Trayek. 2019. “Living under Occupation: Palestinian Teachers’ Experiences and Their Digital Responses”. *Research in Learning Technology* 27: 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.25304/rlt.v27.2263>
- Ujvari, M. M. 2022. “Linguistic Landscape in the West Bank: Road Signs as Manifestations of Occupation”. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 4(1), 374-387. <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v4i1.881>