Chapter 3
The Bright and Dark Sides of Online Learning in Palestine During the Pandemic

Saida Affouneh
An-Najah National University, Palestine

Soheil Salha
An-Najah National University, Palestine

Zuheir Khlaif
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7354-7512
An-Najah National University, Palestine

ABSTRACT

The shutdown of schools and universities due to the pandemic has impacted the global education system as well as Palestine's education system. The future of education is unpredictable now, but new features have emerged. The education system in Palestine responded to the pandemic in different ways, and the current experience in schools and universities with eLearning has two sides. One is bright and the other is dark. In this chapter the challenges that faced teachers and students will be discussed, and the best practices will be analyzed, according to the framework of eLearning developed by Khan. uture insights will be presented on reshaping education in the future under new morals, values, and quality standards.

INTRODUCTION

Online learning means different things to different people. A lot of different terminology is used to describe the same concept and process such as online learning, distance learning, open education, blended learning and remote learning. Vivolo (2016) believes online learning has become more accurate and relevant in the way in which it is taught. Online learning is considered as a central model of computational

learning theory (Auer et al., 2019). Distance or online learning is not a new concept; however, for many it is a shift away from traditional classroom teaching model for trainees (Schneider & Council, 2020).

Garcia (2019) described online learning as the availability to every student with Internet access as they have a choice to join, interact, and reflect based on their learning needs. While Riveros and Newton (2017) clarified that online learning focused on the concept of the digital divide, that which means gap between those who have access to computers and the Internet and those who do not. Online learning is considered an accessible, enjoyable, flexible, and suitable for current and future learners (Luo et al., 2019). It is one of the types of distance education, and is similar to eLearning, digital learning, and virtual learning. Different issues are connected with online learning like accessibility, affordability, flexibility, learning strategies and policies. These issues should be taken into consideration when insinuations integrate any online system in teaching and learning (Dhawan, 2020).

Palestine is one of the oldest hotspot crisis in the world. It has been in crisis for more than seventy years. Palestine is struggling from violence and continuous restrictions on movement due to the Israeli occupation procedures on the ground. Different checkpoints cut-off Palestinian cities and villages from each other. Different studies about the impact of occupation on the Palestinian daily life sectors have been conducted such as health (Giacaman et al., 2009), education (Traxler et al., 2019), environment (Alatout, 2006), and economic (Abu-Ras et al., 2018).

The Palestinian educational system has experienced many challenges because of the continuous of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict which caused various emergencies along the years of conflict (Shraim & Khlaif, 2010). Closing higher education institutions and public schools have been deeply influenced by the checkpoints and mobility restrictions since the last Intifada 2000. During 2002-2004, the Israeli occupation finished building the separation wall which affected the Palestinian family's life and the education system. Moreover, it created a barrier on movement and separating schools and teachers behind it which forced the Palestinian teachers to ask for a permission to access these checkpoints and go behind the separation wall to teach their students (Nicolai, 2007).

In response to the forced situation, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has worked on locating teachers in schools closer to their home and opening new classes in the schools located behind the separation wall (MEHE, 2008). The MoE procedures have distorted the distribution of qualified teachers among schools (Shraim & Khlaif, 2010). Teenage girls are affected more than boys because parents were anxious about their girls spending so much time travelling to and from school, being subject to humiliation by the Israeli soldiers, and face other dangers like crossing checkpoints (Traxler et al., 2019).

Despite the procedures implemented by the MoE in Palestine to mitigate the impact of the occupation on education system, the school schedules were interrupted, teachers' and student's attendance rates were low because they were spending more time on the way from and to school more than learning and teaching. Teachers cannot finish the curriculum on time as planned. Students in higher education institutions drop out and withdraw from their classes. In addition, some females rent apartments to stay away from their homes to attend their classes which doubled the expenses of studying in higher education institutions (MEHE, 2008). Palestinians have learned how to deal with crisis and have developed their own plans, tools and strategies to work in hard situations. Technology has been one of the main tools to use to respond to crisis in order to sustain access to quality education.

In a similar context and under the threats of COVID-19, Ministry of Higher education announced the closure of all universities and colleges and the shift to distance learning without any instructions or expectations and left the door open for each institution to develop its own emergency plan and policies.

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