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**IN-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING IN PALESTINE**

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**Abstract**

Following the Oslo Accords in 1994, the Palestinian National Authority was established to take over the administration and control of most areas of Palestinian life including education. The newly established Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) faced the challenge of harmonizing and developing an equitable education system in two geographically separate regions - the West Bank and Gaza that were previously administered by Egypt and Jordan with separate education systems. Teachers were recruited in large numbers, many of whom lacked the necessary qualifications to teach their subject areas competently. As a result teacher induction training courses were introduced in order to familiarise teachers with the new Palestinian curriculum as well as student assessment and classroom instruction. These efforts can hardly be considered as systematic in-service training and the development of the first two Education Development Plans and the Teacher Education Strategy in Palestine (TESP) in 2008 paid particular attention to the further development of both pre- and in-service teacher training. This chapter focuses specifically on the description and analysis of in-service teacher training programmes in Palestine in the period 2005 to 2013. Main challenges and issues that were identified in the present in-service teacher training approaches include for example geo-political constraints and resultant financial pressure, the fragmented approach to training programmes as well as prevailing management and coordination programme structures in Palestine.

**Introduction**

The education system in Palestine (the Occupied Palestinian Territories: Gaza, East Jerusalem and the West Bank) is only 18 years old and has operated under difficult circumstances from the beginning, including occupation, conflict and internal political divisions. Inheriting a teaching cadre in 1994 who for decades had no or little professional development opportunities due to the lack of investment in Palestinian teachers, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) was challenged to bring their skills up to date (UNICEF, 2011). UNICEF however notes in 2011 that the Palestinian education system has nevertheless managed to produce one of the most educated populations in the region and has some of the highest indicators of education achievement including high enrolment rates and adult literacy rates, particularly for women (UNICEF, 2011).

This chapter focuses on the development of in-service teacher education in the Occupied Palestinian Territories with an emphasis on the period 2005-2013.

**Background to in-service teachers training and re-training programmes**

* **1948 - 2007**

Any discussion on education and teacher education in Palestine needs to take the region’s complex history into account. The formation of the state of Israel in 1948 led to a series of territorial disputes over borders and as the territory fell into war 750,000 Arab Palestinians fled to neighbouring countries. After an armistice was declared in 1949 the West Bank of the Jordan River up to East Jerusalem was absorbed by the state of Jordan and Gaza was occupied by Egypt. The education system in the West Bank was fully absorbed in the Jordanian system while schools in Gaza switched to the Egyptian curriculum. During the six-day war in 1967 Israel conquered territories of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem and over the first 12 years of occupation the education system fell directly under the authority of the Israeli Military Governor. The education systems developed under Jordanian and Egyptian rule were retained but construction of schools was stopped and the training of teachers received little to no support. The *first Intifada* or uprising started in 1987 and many schools were closed for periods ranging from two months to two years at a time and many teachers were obliged to accept compulsory retirement, arbitrary transfer or deduction of pay (Altinok, 2010).

Since 1994 when the Israeli Civil Administration handed over the administration and running of all public education institutions to the Palestinian National Authority, the priority was to rehabilitate an education system close to collapse. The two separate education systems (Egyptian and Jordanian) in two geographically unconnected areas (Gaza and the West Bank) needed to be harmonized in order to build a unified education system (Altinok, 2010). The majority of teachers and school administrators had no formal training in teaching and the priority between 1995 and 2000 was therefore to initiate efforts to upgrade the qualifications of the teaching staff in the absence of a well-functioning system of pre-service teacher education. As a first step, each teacher received on average about 7 days training and head teachers about 90 hours during the period 1996 and 2000 (Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE, 2006).

By 2000 and the establishment of the first 5-year Education Development Strategic Plan there were two major challenges in respect of the professional development of educators: the challenge of a new curriculum and teacher training. For the first there needed to be a plan to train every teacher in every subject in the new curriculum – essential training that every teacher needed to attend. One of the most important departures from the old Egyptian and Jordanian curricula was the inclusion of civic education, health and environment as well as English language in Grade 1. It needs to be noted that although the curriculum endeavours to promote more active learning, its volume and complexity have been criticised and have undermined teachers’ abilities to translate the training they have received into effective classroom practices that would promote effective learning outcomes (UNICEFF, 2011).

Regarding teacher training, the absence of a coherent and well-functioning system of pre-service teacher training led to the essential need for in-service training for all teachers new to teaching (MOEHE, 2006). The first 5-year Education Development Strategic Plan therefore included the notion that all teachers have an entitlement to training and that attendance of some of these programmes was essential (MOEHE, 2006). As a result obligatory programmes were designed in 2000 to meet the needs of individual teachers and in addition the more demand-led School as a Unit for Training (SUT) programme was developed, primarily to support the needs of teachers within the context of schools. The SUT programme therefore flexibly related teachers’ training needs to the development of their own contexts and also aimed to enable school principals and teachers to take more responsibility for their own professional development. An evaluation of the SUT programme in 2005 by the British Council with the support of the World Bank indicated that since 2000 almost every teacher in the Palestinian Authority were provided with some opportunities for training and that many have, to a reasonable extent, benefitted from the experience. However, the cascade model used in both programmes diluted the quality of teacher training by the time it reached schools and its intended beneficiaries (MOEHE, 2006). Also missing was an immediate follow-up on training impact as well as continuous in-school support to teachers on the application of the new skills they had acquired through training (USAID, 2010).

It also needs to be noted that the implementation of this first 5-year plan including the SUT programme was influenced by the second *Intifada* (2000 – 2005) that confronted the education system with repeated emergencies making school attendance and the coordination and delivery of education services at times almost impossible. UNICEF (2011) points out that much of the school infrastructure was damaged, students and teachers were psychologically affected and children missed months of schooling due to military operations, curfews and closures. The Palestinian Authority was forced to develop a complex emergency and regular situation plan that has defined and still is defining the nature and pattern of education provision.

* **The Second Five Year Plan and the National Teacher Education Strategy: development of in-service teacher education strategies**

The second five-year Education Development Strategic Plan (EDSP) (2008-2013) was launched in 2007 and the Teacher Education Strategy in Palestine (TESP) that is now the driving force behind present teacher training reforms, launched in 2008 (MOEHE, 2008 a & b). Both these documents pay more attention to the performance and quality of institutions carrying out pre-service as well as in-service teacher training and both have as overarching vision of the promotion of quality education for all in every educational institution in Palestine. According to the EDSP and TESP, this vision requires a new kind of teacher with new roles following specific standards that consider the child to be at the centre of the educational process. This will ultimately contribute to raising the professional and social status of teachers in order to enable them to educate children who are capable of facing the challenges of globalization and “*able to build and live in an independent, democratic, just and diverse Palestinian society that is in harmony with Arab, Islamic* *and human culture*” (MoEHE, 2008: 8).

The Teacher Education Strategy in Palestine (TESP) has proved to be the driving force behind the further development of teacher training reforms and highlights the need to reform university pre-service training, set national standards for both pre-service and in-service training and draws attention to adopting new and innovative approaches to in-service teacher training programmes. The TESP is a well thought out and necessary programme for the reform, management, regulation and accreditation of teacher education at pre- as well as in-service levels and places particular emphasis on provision being made for upgrading the qualifications of the large number of under-qualified teachers (estimated at about 75%) to enable them to meet new requirements for teacher certification in Palestine. A programme of teacher education capacity building for both in- and pre-service teachers was seen as a prerequisite for the effective implementation of the TESP and targets regarding the quality of teaching and learning in the document include at least 60 hours of training for each new teacher per year, 24.7 hours of in-service training per year for 52% of all teaching staff and 20 hours of training per year for supervisors (USAID, 2010).

**In service teachers training and Re-training programmes (InSTTR)**

* **Background**

Against the background of the TESP’s vision for qualifying and preparing teachers, 18 Higher Education Institutions in Palestine (traditional universities, open education, university colleges as well as community colleges) offer programmes in education and initial teacher qualifications. These programmes directly or indirectly support the TESP and prepare students to teach in different types of Palestinian schools. There are three types of schools in Palestine: public schools which are run by the Ministry of Education, UNRWA schools which are run by UNRWA, and private schools which are run by some private sectors. With specific reference to UNRWA it needs to be noted that following the 1948 Israeli-Arab conflict UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) was established by the United Nations to carry out direct relief and work programs for Palestinian refugees. It is a relief and human development agency providing education (including schools and teacher training provision in for example the Ramallah Men’s Training Centre), healthcare, social services and emergency aid to cover more than four million refugees living in the Gaza strip, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. In response to the cumulative effects of the occupation a ‘Schools of Excellence Action Plan’ was devised and implemented in all UNRWA schools in 2007/2008 (Altinok, 2010).

As mentioned earlier, the development of in-service teacher training programmes are also in general based on the TESP’s recommendations that a framework for in-service teacher education programs should be developed and adopted that would facilitate the capacity of the system to support the continued professional development of teachers (Hasweh, 2011).

* **Administration and organisation of in-service teacher training programs**

InSTTR in Palestine is provided by many agents, not all of whom are centrally co-ordinated by the Ministry of Education. The divisions of the MOEHE at both District and Ministry levels offer training to new and more experienced teachers in Government schools. The National Institute for Education Training (NIET), also a division of the MOEHE, is also tasked with providing in-service and professional training, although there remains some ambiguity between the responsibilities of NIET and the Directorate of Supervision and Qualifications (DSQ) in relation to InSTTR which are not fully resolved. NIET was originally established as an institute to provide training to managers and administrators in the MOEHE but has recently been asked to move towards becoming an entity that plans, provides and oversees in-service teacher training programmes. It has developed a database to register all training provided by the MoEHE since 2004.

The Higher Education institutions in the West Bank and Gaza also offer in-service training programmes and courses, some of which are aimed at teacher qualification, due to the large numbers of unqualified teachers currently in service in the West Bank and Gaza. There are also private schools, NGOs and private training organisations offering training in various educational areas. The NGOs work collaboratively with the MOEHE, offering in-service courses in areas such as civics education and human rights (e.g. the Teacher Creativity Centre)and early childhood education (e.g. the Early Childhood Resource Centre). The UNRWA organisation also provides training for teachers and school principals within the UNRWA school network.

Additionally, the donor community is extremely active in the education sector at varying levels of the system. Trans-national organisations such as UNESCO, USAID and the World Bank and individual countries such as Germany, Spain, the UK, Norway and Finland also provide both financial aid and training programmes. These are largely administered via the MOEHE, but are not necessarily available to all schools or teachers within the West Bank and Gaza. This is partly due to the difficulties of travel and communication within Palestine as a whole, but also to the constraints of financial, technical and human capacity (USAID, 2010).

* **Details and examples of in-service training programmes coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education**

*Examples of programmes presented by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE)*

The MoEHE provides INSTTR training at three levels. The first level comprises compulsory or obligatory training workshops in which in-service teachers are trained on school curriculum (content, teaching methods, and evaluation). The main audiences for these workshops are new teachers. In ‘developmental training workshops’ in-service teachers are trained on how to deal with the learning problems of their students (clinical and supportive teaching) as well as the innovative implementation of the curriculum in their classrooms in order to enhance their pedagogical skills and pedagogical content knowledge in all subjects within the new Palestinian curriculum (e.g. training in-service teachers on ICT use and implementation). Finally, there are ‘innovative or pioneering training workshops’. These are directed toward enhancing teachers’ training in pedagogical skills regarding a child-centered teaching approach in order to develop students’ critical thinking skills e.g. learning through life skills. These workshops are provided by the Directorate General for Supervision and Qualifications (DSQ) within the MOEHE.

Table (1) shows the main training workshop topics during the period 2004-2007 and the numbers of teachers who trained on these topics.

Table (1): Training topics and number of participants during (2004-2007) in West Bank and Gaza

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Topic** | **2004-2005** | **2005-2006** | **2006-2007** | **Total** |
| **Educational Planning** | 20 |  |  | 20 |
| **Assessment and Evaluation** | 954 |  | 111 | 1065 |
| **Students’ Projects** |  |  | 106 | 106 |
| **New Teachers Preparation** |  |  | 439 | 439 |
| **ICT** | 712 | 820 | 489 | 2021 |
| **Content& Teaching Methods** | 14275 | 9715 | 1195 | 25185 |
| **Training Skills** | 170 | 286 | 181 | 637 |
| **Clinical & Supportive Teaching** |  |  | 20 | 20 |
| **Classroom Management** |  | 60 |  | 60 |
| **Total Number of Participants** | 16131 | 10881 | 2541 | 29553 |
| **Total Number of Teachers** | 27527 | 30870 | 31340 |  |

The above summary indicates that the Ministry placed a greater emphasis on content and teaching methods and less emphasis on child-centered and supportive teaching during this period.

Table (2): Training topics and number of participants during (2008-2013) in West Bank only.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Topic** | **2007-2008** | **2008-2009** | **2009-2010** | **2010-2011** | **2011-2012** | **2012-2013** | **Total** |
| **Educational Planning** |  |  | 58 |  |  | 150 | 208 |
| **Assessment and Evaluation** | 147 | 36 |  |  |  | 400 | 583 |
| **Students’ Projects** | 19 | 120 | 200 | 350 | 400 | 400 | 1489 |
| **New Teachers Preparation** | 420 | 409 | 317 | 851 | 920 | 980 | 3897 |
| **ICT** | 517 | 1907 | 2035 | 2693 | 2350 | 3200 | 12702 |
| **Content & Teaching Methods** | 3444 | 3916 | 1868 | 2252 | 97 | 5200 | 16777 |
| **Training Skills** |  |  | 78 |  | 56 |  | 134 |
| **Clinical & Supportive Teaching** |  | 200 | 111 | 64 | 166 | 1520 | 2061 |
| **Classroom Management** |  |  |  |  |  | 250 | 250 |
| **Total Number of Participants** | 4547 | 6588 | 4667 | 6210 | 3989 | 12100 | 38101 |
| **Total Number of Teachers** | 24333 | 25090 | 26091 | 27178 | 27530 | 27999 |  |

Table 2 shows the increasing numbers of teachers involved, and a greater emphasis on clinical and supportive teaching compared to training workshops conducted in the period of 2004-2007. These increases may at least in part be attributed to the development of the TESP.

NIET has previously focused on training for school principals, and a professional diploma in school leadership was developed. NIET has, as discussed earlier, been tasked to co-ordinate the further development of training for under-qualified teachers but its status is still undergoing transition (USAID, 2010).

General examples of the wide spectrum of in-service training activities that are donor funded and overseen by the MOEHE include the World Bank Teacher Education Improvement Plan (TEIP), part of which is aimed at up-skilling under qualified teachers currently in service; Quality of Education for All, a partnership programme funded by a Spanish NGO in collaboration with Bethlehem University, which aims to increase democratic participation and active learning in schools; the Model Schools Network, funded by USAID and administered by AIMDEAST as well as the British Council English School Partnerships program that focuses on teachers of English.

*Specific examples of donor funded in-service teacher training programmes that are overseen by the Ministry of Education include the following:*

**The Teacher Education Improvement Plan (TEIP):** In support of the Teacher Education Strategy the World Bank funded a Teacher Improvement Project (TEIP) with two component parts: Component 1 aims at improving the quality and relevance of the school experience component of teacher education and component 2 is to provide programmes for the upgrading the estimated 75% of under-qualified teachers in the system (Burke & Cuadra, 2013). Component 1 now has an extended and more up-to-date reaching teaching practicum in place in the four participating universities and in-service capacity development opportunities focus on all involved in teacher preparation: education faculty members in the participating universities, school principals, mentor teachers, practicum supervisors, ministry inspectors as well as ministry personnel who oversee and/or accredit teacher education programmes (Burke & Cuadra, 2013).

**Programmes for teachers of English in public and UNWRA schools:** Teachers of English in Palestinian schools are typically graduates of English literature or language degree programmes or may be graduates in another subject but because they have some capability in English language are required to teach it as a subject at school. Consequently, many teachers of English have received little if any formal training in the teaching of English while studying at university. In such circumstances, teachers often find that have to rely upon guidance from other teachers in their school and also come to depend heavily upon the Teacher’s Books that accompany the English for Palestine course books used in schools. Over-reliance upon the course books may result in the adoption of a rather limited range of generic teaching strategies which tend to focus upon question and answer and choral response rather than more child-centred, interactive language teaching strategies. Once they enter the profession, they may be required to attend district based in-service teacher training courses or workshops organised by the Directorate of Supervision and Qualifications (DSQ) and conducted by Ministry supervisors. Although the focus of these workshops is often upon the adoption of communicative language teaching strategies, it appears that many teachers find it difficult to implement these in the classroom.

In addition to the courses offered by DSQ, which are organised in similar ways to the courses described previously, during the period 2005 - 2013 there was a steady increase in opportunities for teachers to attend a variety of short English language teaching (ELT) courses provided by a number of other organisations. Many of these courses have been organised by international bodies including the British Council, Macmillan Publishers, AMIDEAST, USAID, General Electric Foundation, and Boeing. These courses have been made available for teachers in public, private and UNRWA schools in both the West Bank and Gaza and typically take the form of 1 to 5 day workshops that are delivered on a district basis.

The British Council has been particularly active in providing such courses and workshops, mainly for government teachers, but also for teachers from private and UNRWA schools. Most of the British Council courses are in the region of 30 hours, but they also conduct one day workshops as well as longer courses. The courses and workshops have focused on a wide range of areas of need including language improvement, classroom management, the teaching of language skills, lesson planning, assessment and evaluation and learning technologies. In addition, the British Council have also provided a number of Trainer Development Courses. These are normally delivered through a cascade mode to mixed groups of supervisors from DSQ and UNRWA and teachers in government and UNRWA schools. For example between 2009-2011, the British Council provided a two phase programme of training with the first phase designed to develop the training capacity of MOEHE and UNRWA supervisors, and the second and third phase involving the British Council staff supporting Ministry supervisors to train experienced teachers. The idea was that these teachers would then train teachers in their schools. In the period 2010 – 2013, the British Council also trained mixed groups of teachers and trainers from all 16 West Bank Districts. British Council trainers also try to visit as many of the training groups as possible and provide feedback to local trainers in location. The third main type of in-service training that the British Council has been involved in is to support teachers to develop skills to adopt interactive child centred approaches to teaching the English for Palestine textbooks. In 2006 and 2007, the British Council conducted five day workshops in six districts of the West Bank to support teaching of the 1st edition of the English for Palestine textbooks for grade 6 – 9.

Macmillan Publishers has also played a significant role in recent years by conducting series of cascade training workshops to support the on-going implementation of the revised English for Palestine textbooks for the English curriculum in schools. These took place in September 2011 for teachers of grades 1 – 4, August – September 2012 for teachers of grade 5 and most recently in August 2013 for teachers of grades 6 – 9.

* **Methodological framework for training programmes**.

There are two main types of in-service teacher training programmes organized by the Ministry of Education: central training and district training programmes. The central training is held at the MOE, but the district training held at the directorates (or districts) of education (there are 16 directorate of education in West Bank and five directorates in Gaza). The methodological framework used in the Ministry’s in-service training is a cascade model. As a first step central trainers who are either supervisors from the Ministry or highly qualified teachers or university lecturers provide in-service training to district personnel trainers in order to prepare them to train on district level and then district trainers provide training to selected teachers. Overall criteria for selecting trainers on both levels include for example good interpersonal and communication skills and a good teaching record.

* **Career development/ teacher competence**

Thus far, there has not been a formal career development structure for the teaching profession in Palestine. The lack of such a structure may have impeded the motivation of teachers to engage in in-service training and re-training opportunities. However, the Directorate of Supervision and Qualifications is currently in the process of developing a career structure for teachers. This proposes that there will be a developmental ladder comprising four stages through which teachers may progress during their career. When student teachers graduate from university, having been assessed against a Readiness to Teach Index (RTTI), of core competencies that is being developed as part of the TEIP programme: Component 1 to determine that they have attained the Professional Standards for New Teachers in Palestine (2010), they will enter the profession as novice teachers. They will then have the opportunity to gain promotion progressively to the ranks of Teacher, First Teacher and finally Experienced Teacher. Promotion is likely to be linked to participation in on-going in-service teacher training and re-training. Teachers who attain the levels of First Teacher and Experienced Teacher are also likely to benefit from reduced teaching load in addition to taking on additional responsibilities within the school, including acting as a mentor to pre-service student teachers. There is also a possibility that there will be opportunities to become supervisor of a cluster of schools. However, it is not clear at this stage to what extent progression through these levels may also attract salary increments.

Although the development of this career structure is still in its early stages, it may be regarded as another positive move towards enhancing the quality of teaching and improving motivation within the teaching profession. However, the extreme financial constraints within which the Palestinian Authority and the Ministry of Education operate suggest that it is uncertain when the proposed career structure will be implemented.

**Main challenges & issues in InSTTR**

* **General influence of geo-political instability**

Political instability exists within the Palestinian system, as well as within the geographical region and has led in some instances to the restricted mobility of Palestinian teachers. Tensions between the two major political parties also affect for example the co-ordination of educational development in the West Bank and Gaza and potentially undermine the ability of the MOEHE to sustain the drive for change and development expressed in the EDSP and TESP. This appears to have led to some fragmentation and lack of coherence in implementing the TESP. It has been suggested that inadequate communication between some sections and divisions within the Ministry, has led to internal discord, and poor leadership, and that there has been inadequate administrative and technical capacity to support planned development. The mandates of the Department of Supervision and Qualifications (DSQ) and the National Institute of Education Training (NIET) are insufficiently clear in relation to InSTTR with the result that friction has sometimes existed between the two sections. It is also suggested that the prevailing top-down management style, itself a product of political uncertainty, is a further source of tension and lack of trust, which permeates the education system in various ways (USAID 2010).

Due to the unstable political situation, severe financial pressure is experienced as a result of the uncertain status of Palestine as an independent state despite the fact that it has now been recognised by the UN as independent state. Teachers’ salaries remain low and there are delays in payment. As discussed previously there is not yet a career ladder for progression within the profession and it is not unusual for (male) teachers to engage in additional employment in order to supplement their income. The fiscal situation is unlikely to be resolved without a political solution to the conflict within the region.

* **Capacity to develop and present in-service teacher training programmes**

There are several internal issues which can be related to capacity within sections of the MOEHE and National Institute of Education Training (NIET) themselves; to the effect of educational policy and pedagogical practice, and to issues of teacher selection, and teacher quality and status.

Previously, District Supervisors trained up to 8,000 teachers per week on an unstructured *ad hoc* basis (USAID, 2010). Recent changes to their role in InSTTR have reduced the amount of time and financial support available, and they are concentrating more on teacher support and evaluation. District Supervisors are expected to visit schools and observe teachers on a regular basis in order to ensure quality and to identify needs. However, District Supervisors often appear to function more as inspectors, than as professional support (World Bank, 2006, UNICEF 2011). Current policy requires teachers to cover all sections of the required text books, page by page, in order to deliver the large amount of content within the Palestinian National Curriculum. Lesson observations by District Supervisors often focus more on curriculum coverage than on teaching methods and pupils’ learning. This has the effect of reinforcing content focused curriculum delivery leading to an outdated rote learning methodological approach being used in classrooms (UNICEF 2011) rather than the more flexible, child-focused strategies that are advocated in the EDSP. Not all District Supervisors have been fully qualified for their roles, which further exacerbates this situation (Hasweh,2011: 29).

Another significant issue within the educational infrastructure at top level has been the lack of an effective Education Management Information System. Until recently inadequate information about teachers’ qualifications has made it difficult for under-qualified teachers to be identified and targeted with appropriate training. The situation was exacerbated by a teachers’ strike in Gaza in 2006, which meant that 5,000 teachers were then recruited at short notice to fill the gap, not all of whom were appropriately qualified (UNICEF, 2011: 13).

In 2008, as the TESP was published, the figures for unqualified teachers were not known for certain, due to these problems, but were estimated to be in the region of 80% (TESP 2008). In 2011 a report by AMIDEAST (Hasweh, 2011) indicated that around 75% of teachers in the West Bank were under-qualified according to the requirements of the TESP (BA degree with teaching certification).

* **Impact of pre-service teacher training programmes**

The large number of under-qualified teachers is however not the only difficulty faced by the Palestinian system in terms of teacher quality. There are also considerable shortcomings within the current systems of initial teacher education which mean that not all new teachers are adequately equipped in terms of effective classroom practice, according to the child focused principles outlined in the EDSP and Palestinian National Curriculum. These shortcomings result from several factors, including the quality of initial teacher training provided by some universities, the amount and quality of practical classroom experience provided during training and lastly, but importantly, the quality of students opting to study education courses within the university sector.

Significant numbers of students enter university education programmes: over 13,000 new entrants were registered in the West Bank and Gaza for various education programmes in 2009/2010. The level of academic achievement of many of these students is lower than that of students studying other subjects (UNICEF 2011), and teaching is generally seen as a low status occupation, particularly for men. Previously there were limited opportunities for students to undergo practical experience in classrooms, and although the TESP (2008) now requires a minimum of 180 hours to be spent in schools (equivalent to about 7 weeks), much of this time appears to be spent in observation rather than practical teaching in some university courses. In some universities field experience is concentrated in the final (fourth) year of the programme so that there is little opportunity for students to make connections between theory and practice earlier in their training. In some cases, student teachers are placed in classrooms with teachers who are themselves under-qualified, or who do not model effective classroom practice. Additionally, some university lecturers do not themselves hold a teaching qualification, or are inexperienced in relation to the age range for which students are training, which compound the difficulties faced by new teachers entering the profession.

A further barrier to improving teacher quality appears to be the selection process for new teachers entering the profession, which is predominantly examination based. The academic performance and practical experience of prospective teachers during their university program appears to carry little weight, as against their performance in a national examination. The development of the Readiness to Teach Index (RTTI) as an outcome of Component 1 of the TEIP project discussed previously is expected to provide a more accurate and informative measure of student teachers’ potential as classroom practitioners, and also of their individual needs for professional development.

As mentioned earlier, new teachers are expected to attend obligatory induction training programmes once appointed. This training focuses on curriculum content, teaching methods and evaluation (assessment of students), since the majority of the university courses followed by new teachers may not have prepared them adequately for their first appointment as classroom teachers. However, according to UNESCO (2011), there is a need to include issues regarding classroom management and school organization in the inductive training as well. From 2014 this situation will begin to be remedied, as the new requirements for appointment come into force. However, the obligatory training does not currently take individual circumstances into account so that although the induction training programme is regarded by teachers as the most useful training provided by the MoEHE, new teachers are not necessarily supported in the areas of their greatest need.

* **Prevailing management culture in InSTTR**

As a result of the ‘top-down’ management culture referred to previously, teachers in the West Bank and Gaza do not currently have sufficient autonomy to be able to identify their own training needs. Members of the AMIDEAST evaluation team for example found that teachers generally felt that MOEHE training no longer meeting their needs, in that it was too focused on subject area knowledge and theory, with insufficient emphasis on practical issues. Teachers are therefore not involved in the planning of in-service training opportunities with the result that content of training programmes is not aligned with what teachers want. Also, these programmes do not contribute towards any form of certification or to further career advancement (Hasweh 2011).

Furthermore, evidence from several international reports on the education system in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as internal reports from the MOEHE indicate that InSTTR in Palestine has not yet altered the professional practices, beliefs and understanding of teachers to use modern, child/learner focused teaching and assessment approaches in schools (Hasweh, 2011, UNICEF 2011, UNESCO, 2011).

* **Fragmented nature of training provided**

As mentioned earlier, a wide spectrum of in-service teacher training programmes are being implemented by a variety of organisations. This fragmented nature of INSTTR provision within Palestine makes it difficult to assess its effectiveness in moving towards the objectives of the TESP. As Hasweh (2011: 3) notes:

*“The absence of a comprehensive, detailed implementation plan and budget makes it difficult to follow the implementation process and difficult to identify who is responsible for what and when”.*

Although there are, as discussed, a large number of on-going opportunities for the further professional development of both teachers and trainers, a number of issues regarding its fragmented nature exist.

Firstly, as discussed earlier, the geopolitical reality of the separation of the West Bank and Gaza has meant that is that it has not always proved possible for organisations to provide the same opportunities to teachers and trainers in Gaza as in the West Bank. Furthermore, not all training courses and workshops are available in all districts.

The lack of a framework for a coherent professional development programme that provides continuous sustained skills improvement opportunities and support for all teachers has also contributed to the fragmentation of the impact of in-service training. Although teachers may be trained to use more interactive child centred approaches in their teaching, the reality of teaching an overcrowded curriculum mean that when teachers return to school the pressure to complete all the unit material in the course books makes it difficult for them to put into practice the innovative strategies that they have learned.

A further issue is that, thus far, most workshops do not contribute towards any formal qualification or recognition through, for example, promotion or salary increments. The lack therefore of a proper accreditation and rational teacher certification programme with coherent career advancement paths means that only the most motivated and enthusiastic teachers may wish to attend courses and workshops. This has meant that in some cases the same trainers or teachers attend multiple courses, while a larger number of teachers who could benefit from in-service training have not received it.

As mentioned earlier the cascade framework within which especially the Ministry’s training programmes is presented has also contributed to the fragmentation and dilution of the training by the time it reaches its intended beneficiaries (MOEHE, 2006). Furthermore some of the in-service training opportunities provided by donors and/or NGOs focus on some specific teaching and learning areas and are often narrow in focus rather than systemic in nature and have benefitted only a small number of teachers in specific schools rather than teachers as a whole (USAID, 2010).

**Discussion and concluding remarks**

There is no doubt that, despite the complex Palestinian geo-political context, much has been achieved regarding the further improvement and development of teacher qualifications and the quality of teaching in schools and classrooms in Palestine in the period 2005 to 2013. Education has been and continues to be a priority for the further development of a vibrant and stable Palestinian society. Systematic efforts to bring about an improvement in teachers’ qualification levels and their classroom practices have clearly increased in the past eight years.

The impact of professional development opportunities for in-service teachers should however be considered in the context of the nature and quality of these in-service programmes and its relation to significant change in the day-to-day practice in classrooms and students’ learning outcomes. Identified challenges in this regard all relate to what has been identified in the literature as specific characteristics of what can be regarded as good quality professional educational opportunities for in-service teachers. According to Desimone et al. (2002) these characteristics include a focus on specific content and how students learn; in-depth, active collaborative learning opportunities for the teachers involved; links to high standards within classrooms and opportunities for teachers to engage in leadership roles; extended duration; the collective participation of teachers from the same school and continued professional support for teachers in order to support the sustainability of the positive influence of these programmes on teachers’ classroom practices. Guskey (2002) also points out that significant change can only take place if teachers are motivated to engage in professional development that they believe are based on their own needs and that will expand their knowledge and skills and enhance their effectiveness with students.

The fragmented nature of the different in-service teacher training programmes presented by a variety of institutions and donors in Palestine, the choice that the Ministry continuously has to make between serving a larger number of teachers with less focused and sustained professional development opportunities and providing higher quality more individualised programmes for fewer teachers as well as a lack of adequate resources and funding sources provide evidence of the lack of a coordinated, coherent and sustainable approach across all education sectors. Careful attention to the expressed needs of teachers including career development opportunities as well the finalisation of a more comprehensive integrated national framework for in-service training and professional development that take situational and contextual variables into consideration should therefore be finalised as a matter of urgency. It is hoped that such an approach will contribute to change in the classroom practices of teachers, in their beliefs and perceptions of a more child-centred approach in teaching and learning and in the learning outcomes of all Palestinian students.

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