International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Volume 16 | Number 2 Article 9

May 2022

Construction of Teaching and Learning Cultures in Transnational Pedagogical Development: Discourses Among Palestinian University Instructors

Vesna Holubek
Tampere University, vesna.holubek@tuni.fi

Pauliina Alenius
Tampere University

Vesa Korhonen
Tampere University

Nazmi Al-Masri
Islamic University of Gaza

Recommended Citation

Holubek, Vesna; Alenius, Pauliina; Korhonen, Vesa; and Al-Masri, Nazmi (2022) "Construction of Teaching and Learning Cultures in Transnational Pedagogical Development: Discourses Among Palestinian University Instructors," *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*: Vol. 16: No. 2, Article 9.
Available at: https://doi.org/10.20429/ijsotl.2022.160209

Construction of Teaching and Learning Cultures in Transnational Pedagogical Development: Discourses Among Palestinian University Instructors

Abstract

This qualitative study explores teaching and learning cultures in the context of a community-oriented pedagogical development process initiated during Finnish–Palestinian transnational cooperation. Research data include focus group interviews and texts produced during a pedagogical training program with Palestinian university instructors. The study examines teaching and learning cultures as constructed by discourses in and around the Palestinian university. A poststructuralist discourse analysis identified five discourses of teaching and learning: disciplinary differences, traditional and modern education, improving education, sociocultural and religious context, and political and economic circumstances. The study shows that teaching and learning cultures are dynamic and fragmented as they are constructed by the contrasting discourses. The findings suggest that pedagogical development initiatives need to provide spaces for discursive transformation, especially in the transnational context that introduces additional alternative discourses into the institutional cultural meaning-making.

Keywords

teaching and learning, cultures, discourses, higher education institutions, transnational education

Cover Page Footnote

Acknowledgements: The authors would like to thank the participants of this study, and Dr Tahani Aldahdouh for her contribution to the data collection process.

Construction of Teaching and Learning Cultures in Transnational Pedagogical Development: Discourses Among Palestinian University Instructors

Vesna Holubek[1], Pauliina Alenius[1], Vesa Korhonen[1], and Nazmi Al-Masri[2]

[1] *Tampere University*
[2] *Islamic University of Gaza*

Received: 19 May 2021; Accepted: 28 July 2021

This qualitative study explores teaching and learning cultures in the context of a community-oriented pedagogical development process initiated during Finnish–Palestinian transnational cooperation. Research data include focus group interviews and texts produced during a pedagogical training program with Palestinian university instructors. The study examines teaching and learning cultures as constructed by discourses in and around the Palestinian university. A poststructuralist discourse analysis identified five discourses of teaching and learning: disciplinary differences, traditional and modern education, improving education, sociocultural and religious context, and political and economic circumstances. The study shows that teaching and learning cultures are dynamic and fragmented as they are constructed by the contrasting discourses. The findings suggest that pedagogical development initiatives need to provide spaces for discursive transformation, especially in the transnational context that introduces additional alternative discourses into the institutional cultural meaning-making.

INTRODUCTION

Educational processes at higher education institutions (HEIs) are strongly influenced by the institution's cultural characteristics, or "the way we do things around here" (Geertz, 1983, in Trowler, 2008, p. 1). Engaging with the organization's "cultural web" is particularly important when introducing and sustaining initiatives to develop university instructors' teaching practices (Kennelly & McCormack, 2015). Scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) has expanded the way pedagogical development in higher education (HE) is understood, foregrounding pedagogical competence as a continuous development process at the community level (Fink, 2013). For example, studies have shown that fostering a culture of collaboration among university instructors provides a collegial impetus to develop teaching approaches for improving student learning (Alenius et al., 2019; Korhonen, 2007). Therefore, community-oriented pedagogical development programs are important forums for establishing and renegotiating institutional cultures.

Predominantly organized as part of institutional efforts to enhance education quality, pedagogical development has been investigated mostly in the context of institutional or national programs (Fink, 2013; Thomas et al., 2016). Less research has been conducted on pedagogical development through transnational professional non-degree programs, the focus of this study (Allen, 2014; Korhonen & Alenius, 2018; Kosmützky & Putty, 2016). Transnational education, a term often used interchangeably with the term cross-border education, refers to movement of people, programs, policies, or other educational and research activities across national or regional borders (Knight, 2012).

HEIs have different rationales for transnational activities, including intercultural diversity, international research cooperation, and modernization of local systems. Nonetheless, transnational education programs have been criticized as profit-seeking endeavors of institutions in developed countries providing education in developing countries (Djerasimovic, 2014; Pyvis, 2011). Studies of transnational education emphasized the need to reexamine the transferability of pedagogical ideas in different national contexts (Han & Han, 2019; Jordan et al., 2014) and called for greater cultural contextualization to make learning relevant for learners (Allen, 2014; Bovill et al., 2015; Leask, 2008). Moreover, transnational education involves an ongoing explicit and implicit negotiation between teachers, learners, contents, and contexts (Kirkebæk et al., 2013) thus raising the importance of the environment within and around the HEIs. Transnational collaborators must address and manage complex relationships between individual mindsets, institutional cultures, national cultures, and wider sociopolitical environments (Alenius et al., 2019; Jordan et al., 2014).

This qualitative study explores cultural features of teaching and learning processes in the context of a pedagogical development process initiated during transnational cooperation between a Palestinian university and a Finnish university. The goal of the cooperation was to strengthen student-centered teaching approaches at the Palestinian university by initiating a community-oriented development process at the institution level. The Finnish and Palestinian partners developed a pedagogical training program that was integrated into the Palestinian institution's professional development framework. Four focus group interviews were conducted at the beginning of the cooperation to gain better insight into the pedagogical practices of Palestinian university instructors. The authors of this article acted as educators and coordinators of the transnational collaboration.

The Palestinian institution is one of the seven universities in the Gaza Strip. This multidisciplinary university has around 18,000 students and 400 full-time instructors. The university's discipline-based faculties organize undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate education. Palestinian HEIs operate in a challenging context due to the regional political and economic instability. Other challenges include the increasing demand for HE and the increasing student/teacher ratio, lack of resources, instruc-

tors' heavy workloads, and graduates' high unemployment rates (Tempus Office Palestine, 2012).

We use the term 'teaching and learning' to imply a unified understanding of the educational process in which teaching and learning are "different aspects of the same processes in which students and academics engage together" (Ashwin, 2012, p. 2). This term refers to all educational processes in an HEI, including teaching and learning practices, assessment processes, supervision, and curriculum work. Teaching and learning is understood and organized in different ways across and within different institutions guided by sense-making processes within HE communities in a specific context, i.e., by teaching and learning cultures (Roxå et al., 2011). Thus, we understand teaching and learning cultures as one analytical aspect of institutional cultures.

The study aims to enhance our understanding of teaching and learning cultures in the context of a transnational pedagogical development process. The transnational context of the pedagogical development process created a space of dynamic intercultural encounters drawing on differences and similarities in teaching and learning cultures in and around the Palestinian institution as well as between the Palestinian and Finnish institutions. We apply poststructuralist discourse analysis (Baxter, 2002; Willig, 2013) to examine teaching and learning cultures as they are constructed by discourses. Poststructuralist discourse analysis allows us to consider diverse viewpoints and contradictory voices (Baxter, 2002) that construct cultures in and around the Palestinian university.

Two research questions guided this study: What discourses of teaching and learning are identified among the Palestinian university instructors? How do discourses among university instructors construct teaching and learning cultures in this Palestinian university in the context of a transnational pedagogical development process?

We draw on theoretical and methodological conceptualizations from HE studies of institutional culture and poststructuralist discourse analysis. We elaborate these conceptualizations and then present the data, participants, methods, and findings.

RESEARCHING CULTURES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The many meanings of the concept culture in the literature lead to varied approaches to examining cultural perspectives in HE. Focusing on institutional culture (a term used interchangeably with organizational or campus culture) has become one of the most frequently explored perspectives in HE research (Välimaa, 2008). HE research into institutional culture tends to borrow frameworks developed in organization and management studies which have, in turn, been dominated by the so-called integrationist approach to organizational culture (Martin, 1992). This approach perceives an organization as a homogeneous entity with a stable culture (Martin, 1992; Trowler & Knight, 2000) that can be identified using survey measurements (Schneider & Barbera, 2014).

Often used in HE research, the integrationist approach has been widely criticized for offering limited insight into the unique attributes of organizational culture (Martin, 1992; Schneider & Barbera, 2014). Instead of seeing culture as a glue that holds members together, Martin (1992) proposed the so-called fragmentation perspective that expands our understanding of cultural phenomena by focusing on multiplicities of interpretations and complex relationships between different cultural manifestations. This perspective implies that culture is characterized by ambiguity, pluralism, and contradictions leading to fluid relationships and blurred boundaries of organizational culture (Martin, 1992).

There are similarities between the fragmentation perspective and an anthropological approach to researching culture in which the organization itself *is* culture (Alvesson, 2002; Tierney, 2008). Drawing on anthropological approach, Alvesson (2002) defined culture as "a system of common symbols and meanings" that governs the understanding of behavior, social events, institutions, and processes (pp. 3–4).

We use the anthropological and fragmentation perspectives as they offer a more nuanced understanding of cultural dynamism in the context of pedagogical development initiatives. Particularly relevant is work by Trowler and colleagues that explored the relationship between institutional culture and teaching and learning practices in HE (Knight & Trowler, 2000; Trowler, 2008, 2020; Trowler & Cooper, 2002; Trowler & Knight, 2000). Following the anthropological conceptualization of culture, Trowler (2008) proposed a "multiple cultural configuration approach" (p. 12) that emphasizes dynamism of cultures and openness to broader cultural contexts. Namely, teaching and learning practices are configured by multiple cultural factors, including departmental, institutional, and wider societal cultures. To understand better this process of configuring cultures in teaching and learning practices, Trowler and colleagues developed a framework of teaching and learning regimes (TLRs). Drawing on theoretical underpinnings of social practice theory, TLRs are permeable systems of social practices related to teaching and learning (Trowler, 2008, 2020). TLRs incorporate consensus and conflict, which means that competing understandings may coexist at one institution (Trowler, 2008, 2020).

The conceptualization of teaching and learning cultures in this study relates closely to Trowler's understanding of cultures in HEIs, particularly the emphasis on the dynamic nature of cultures stemming from the dynamic relationship between teaching and learning processes and institutional cultures (Trowler, 2008). However, instead of focusing on social practices as TLRs do, we analyze teaching and learning cultures from the perspective of discourses.

We understand cultures in HEIs as a process of discursive meaning-making. Cultures guide the ways in which social processes and actors are conceived based on common understandings but also disagreements. The process approach implies changeability and pluralism leading to multiple cultures existing simultaneously at an institution. Cultures have a dynamic relationship with individuals, workgroups, and wider sociocultural environments and can be examined at different institutional levels (organization, department, different sub-department levels). We focus on teaching and learning as one analytical aspect of institutional cultures. Thus, teaching and learning cultures are discursive meaning-making processes that guide the ways in which educational processes are understood and organized at an institution.

EXPLORING TEACHING AND LEARNING CULTURES THROUGH DISCOURSES

We adopt a poststructuralist perspective that perceives social spaces, including organizations, as discursive (Alba-Juez, 2009). Institutional cultures are constructed and enacted through discourses within smaller and larger HEI's communities. Discourses construct cultures by fostering specific patterns of meaning (Berti, 2017) or

as Roxå et al. (2011) pointed out, through "conversations where meaning is negotiated" (p. 101).

Michel Foucault posited discourses actively construct society at different levels (subjects, social relationships, objects of knowledge), and he emphasized the interdependency between discourses and institutions (Alba-Juez, 2009; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2015). Discourses are more than language; as Foucault (2002) explained, discourses "systematically form the objects of which they speak" (p. 54). Discourses not only represent the social reality but also actively construct it through power by constraining or enabling the possible ways of understanding and acting in a specific context (Ball, 2012).

Foucault's work has made significant contributions to the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of discourse analysis—a range of approaches to analyzing language in social contexts, including organizations (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011). Discursive and cultural approaches to researching organizations are two overlapping yet distinctive areas, or as Alvesson (2004) elaborated, discourse and culture are two "intellectual tools for addressing similar concerns" with different emphasis (p. 333). Thus, cultural studies can be characterized as more humanistic in their understanding that culture is produced by subjects. The Foucauldian discourse approach reverses this idea by seeing subjects (and cultures) as produced by discourses (Berti, 2017).

We apply poststructuralist discourse analysis, also called Foucauldian discourse analysis, that investigates what realities (ways of thinking, being, doing, etc.) are made possible within discourses (Baxter, 2002; Carabine, 2001; Willig, 2013). We follow Foucault's conceptualization that discourse, as an epistemological tool, is enmeshed with non-discursive (such as symbols and social practices), and in our data analysis, "what matters is not the factual veracity of a statement but rather the fact that it is believed to be true and acted upon as such" (Berti, 2017, p. 31). Therefore, our analysis does not focus on teaching and learning practices, development process or participants' experiences as such. We aim to understand the latent discursive meaning-making processes that shape teaching and learning cultures in the Palestinian institution. We identify discourses that constrain or enable certain ways of understanding teaching and learning.

Discursive meaning-making processes are implicit and often taken for granted by the subjects who, in turn, assume subject positions that the discourse makes available (Berti, 2017). The researcher makes the discourses visible by contrasting them with other discourses, with different historical contexts, or with different spaces (e.g., different geographic or organizational contexts). We focus on different discourses present within the Palestinian institution internally, and in relation to its wider societal environment. Additionally, we analyze the discourses in relation to the alternative understandings introduced by the transnational pedagogical development program organized in cooperation between the Palestinian university and the Finnish university.

DATA, PARTICIPANTS, AND METHODS

This study includes two textual datasets: (a) transcripts of four focus group interviews with 18 Palestinian instructors, and (b) assignments and reflections produced during the pedagogical training program with 16 Palestinian university instructors. The participants in the interviews and the training program represented teaching staff of all faculties, career levels, and genders. Participation in the study was voluntary and based on informed consent.

Eighteen interviewees were divided into four focus groups; two were conducted in Arabic and two in English. The two Arabic interviews were conducted by a native Arabic speaker, a former employee of the Palestinian university. The two English interviews were conducted by a Finnish researcher. During the semi-structured interviews, the interviewers facilitated the group discussion by asking participants to discuss a range of topics, including students' learning and ways of supporting it, teaching goals, assessment of learning, pedagogical and curriculum development. Interview participants discussed their opinions, experiences, and practices with examples from their departments and faculties. The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, and the Arabic transcriptions were translated into English for further analysis.

The second dataset included written assignments produced during the six-month training program organized as a blended course for Palestinian instructors. Four Finnish instructors acted as educators in the program. The program aimed to engage participants with SoTL through topics such as student learning and engagement, designing learning environments, and developing pedagogical expertise. The assignments included individual reflections and group discussions on pedagogical practices and conceptions in light of scholarly articles introduced by the program. The texts of the written assignments were collected from the learning management system used during the program.

We used ATLAS.ti software in the analysis process. The analysis was done across the two datasets and beyond the individual participants' inputs. The poststructuralist discourse analysis identified discourses the instructors drew on when they spoke or wrote about teaching and learning at the university. We adapted Baxter's (2002, p. 833) and Willig's (2013, pp. 384–389) procedure that draws on Foucault's genealogy; it allows the researcher to explore the text in relation to discourses constituted through a variety of discursive constructions and subject positions. Discursive constructions refer to "the ways in which discursive objects are constructed" (Willig, 2013, p. 384); the discursive object in this study is teaching and learning. In other words, we analyzed the variety of ways in which teaching and learning is constructed, and the available subject positions within the discourses. In practice, the first author identified five discourses that were discussed and refined with the coauthoring team.

FINDINGS: DISCURSIVELY CONSTRUCTED TEACHING AND LEARNING CULTURES

We identified five discourses that the Palestinian instructors draw upon when speaking or writing about teaching and learning: (a) discourse of disciplinary differences, (b) discourse of traditional and modern education, (c) discourse of improving education, (d) discourse of the sociocultural and religious context, and (e) discourse of the political and economic circumstances. These discourses are recognized across the two datasets; we will exemplify them in the analysis of the selected excerpts below. Some parts of the excerpts were shortened for brevity and anonymity (indicated with three dots in square brackets).

Taken from the second focus group interview with four Palestinian university instructors (P2.1, P2.2, P2.3, and P2.4), Excerpt 1 exemplifies the *discourse of disciplinary differences* and the *discourse*

of traditional and modern education and their importance in the ways teaching and learning processes are understood and organized at the university. The discourse of disciplinary differences refers to differences between knowledge, learning, and teaching in hard versus soft disciplines; such understanding significantly shapes the teaching and learning cultures. In the words of P2.3, teaching and learning "depends on the subject" (line 17). Teaching and learning in hard sciences is described in terms of the traditional teaching method of lecturing or giving information with no room for discussion (lines 2–5, 26-29). This way of teaching and learning in hard disciplines is contrasted with teaching and learning in soft disciplines invoking the idea of student-centeredness, discussions, and diverse knowledge sources, such as guest speakers and readings beyond textbooks (lines 17-22). Engineering (applied science) is placed between these two oppositions referring to lecturing and discussions (lines 6-7). Moreover, this discourse separates the teaching and learning parts of the teaching and learning processes and presents teaching as dominant in hard disciplines and learning as dominant in soft disciplines. The separation can be seen in the beginning of Excerpt 1; the interviewer asks about how students learn, and the participant speaks about teaching methods from the instructors' perspective (lines 1-5).

The discourse of disciplinary differences is intertwined with the second discourse, discourse of traditional and modern education. Both discourses resonate with different contrasts. Teaching and learning is constructed as being about two (opposite) options: traditional/teacher-led versus modern/student-oriented methods. Accordingly, lecturing and discussion are seen as opposite teaching and learning methods. The opposing perspectives are also seen in relation to the knowledge sources: Knowledge is provided only in the institutional context through instructors and (text)books, but there can be multiple sources of knowledge, including external speakers, other students through discussions, and additional reading material beyond textbooks.

The discourses of disciplinary differences and of traditional and modern education introduce several different subject positions of instructors and students. When teaching and learning is seen as traditional, the instructor has a central role in delivering knowledge (lines 2-5). However, when teaching and learning is seen as student-focused, the central position is given to the students (lines 19-22). For example, the interviewees delineate these two positions: "we give our students some span of discussion" (line 6) and "I concentrate more on the student" (line 19). Furthermore, the two discourses construct a set of student subject positions on a line between excellent and uninterested students. These positions are characterized by either high study engagement or none. Uninterested students are portrayed as passive, disengaged from learning, and moreover, wanting to maintain this passive position (lines 7-16).

Different oppositions between and within constructions of teaching and learning resonating in the two discourses can be seen in other data. In excerpts 2 and 3 from the second dataset, two university instructors (P1 and P2) report on their pedagogical projects in the training program. Excerpt 2 is an example of explicit use of the discourse of traditional and modern education introducing concepts such as traditional teaching, traditional teacher, and traditional student (lines 30-32). Modernization is seen as a trend in education that promotes moving away from the (traditional) teaching methods based on memorizing information to (modern) educational models that include analytical skills and critical thinking (lines 32-34). Excerpt 3 also draws on the differences between traditional and modern education (lines 36-40). Both excerpts refer to passive and engaged student subject posi-

Excerpt 1.

Interviewer: In your view, how do students learn?

P2.2: Yes, I think most of the system here is simply traditional learning. I mean the teacher or the professor make maybe 95% of the lecture. Only very few questions for the students, but in general, it is a lecture learning, [...] the discussion is not too much, simply because we teach principal courses. [...] In chemistry, the students don't have an idea about all the topics that we discuss, so we give them more than we need them to talk.

P2.1: In engineering [...], we give our students some span of discussion because we have lectures and discussion, so the students should go to discussion groups when they have some questions. [...] But mainly, they study from notes, they keep asking you, shall I study the book, or the PowerPoint [slides] or just what I write in the lectures? I say, you should study all of these. But when you grade their exams, you notice that they only study from the PowerPoints. [...] They hardly open the books—most of the students—not all the students, of course, there will be exceptions that will study from the books, and they will be distinguished students. [...] But I agree with [P2.2] that they really… We try to motivate them to have strong discussions or very intelligent questions, but it's only, I would say, few who could do this. But everybody else is satisfied by hearing the lectures. [...]

P2.2: May I give a comment [...] I and [P2.1] were in [another Palestinian university] 25 or 30 years ago, and we used to read every single word in all textbooks, [P2.1 nods their head in agreement], and now I'm sure that our students, in fact, they don't even have books. They only prefer—although we give them books as printed books or as electronic books—they only use the slides and notes we give them, and they don't want more. [...]

P2.3: Actually, I would like to disagree with my colleague [P2.2]. I think the issue depends on the subject itself. If the matter is a humanitarian issue like the [Palestinian–Israeli] conflict, so there is a chance to share the ideas and the discussion about the issue. For me, I concentrate more on the student, as the student is the center of the learning process. [...] Maybe the science subjects differ sometimes compared to the other humanitarian subjects. I concentrate on the students, I give them further readings plus the textbooks, also we are involved in a discussion, we receive some speakers from outside the university, some specialists [...] to share their ideas and thoughts with the students. [...] So, I believe that the students should be the center of the learning process. [...] But you know, I have to add something here, we are still living under the conflict, under the occupation, we really live every aspect of these procedures conducted against the people in Gaza. So, I think that people are not concentrating on their studies as lots of things can happen in their lives. But they are engaged with many things, [...] life expenses and situation, daily situation in Gaza.

P2.4: I will agree with [P2.2]. [...] In chemistry, we are in a simple traditional learning situation because that's what we need to do, I think. And in some subjects on the other hand, student can talk more, or discuss more with the lecturer, but in chemistry especially, you need to give student the information and to deal with something and then he will build his information on that information you gave.

Excerpt 2.

"The implementation of the project was not easy because, in my view, teaching in a traditional way is easier and a preferred choice for a traditional teacher whose main task is to convey to students the information. It is also an easy choice for traditional students who consider their task to be just memorizing the book; they think their success depends on what degrees they get. [...] I was working against the current trend in education in general, and this requires changing the mentality of students and turning them from a container to carry information to an active entity that thinks, analyzes and criticizes." (P1)

Excerpt 3.

"We all aspire to have the best graduates from our universities to better meet the work-market demands and to best serve their people, but the traditional styles of didactic teaching have proven to be futile and the self-learning is not good with our students because they were not trained to be independent learners. These all lead to a poor educational system in our part of the world. To teach university students, we need to follow specific productive strategies that suit their levels, abilities and the nature of the course, we have to focus on adult learning tools such as active and inclusive learning strategies, cooperative learning, role playing, flipped-class learning, problem-based learning and peer-peer learning." (P2)

Excerpt 4.

"[P16] did not present their perception about good teaching and learning clearly, but between the lines I understood that [P16] considers a combination between traditional learning style (pen and board) and active learning (utilizing technology and tools) to be very important in delivering knowledge to students." (P3)

Excerpt 5.

P4.4: Curriculum development is not always a joint activity. There is a traditional thinking, when I go to teach in a different department [they tell me]: no, it is not possible, you have crossed the line. [...] In an international university, he/she may be a graduate of education but can teach in management, because he/she is interested in this discipline. Unfortunately, curriculum development at [this university] [...] is done by a specialized committee. [...] We have developed new courses and content, even the syllabus has been changed, but we didn't develop the teacher. [...]

P4.1: How would you want the teacher to develop?

P4.4: [...] For example, [P4.3] mentioned rapid developments [in information technology]. The question is, does the faculty of education cope with these rapid technologies? No. [...]

P4.5: Some [instructors] do not know how to use [Microsoft] Word.

P4.4: [...] This is a serious issue especially when it occurs in the faculty of education…

P4.5: And in the faculty of Sharia as well.

P4.4: …because the teacher who will be teaching IT in schools, [...] the math teacher and all other teachers should graduate from the faculty [of education]. Still, the faculty of education cannot follow up on these recent technology developments. How can we solve this? By developing the teacher. [...] There are still some teachers who are supposed to teach ICT in education while they apply nothing of ICT. [...]

P4.1: What is the solution then?

P4.5: The older teachers don't accept change...

P4.3: Yeah. The resistance to change which we talked about.

P4.4: There are some academic staff members who reject the change just because it is a change. [...] Try the change and you will see how useful it can be. [...] What can I do? I could [for example] get help from other faculties. How can I serve the faculty of education through a multi-curriculum of multi-faculties? [...] I am an experienced university teacher, thanks Allah. However, I still need an IT teacher, I need to adopt those technologies. My students will graduate to teach the generation of iPhone, iPad, and other technologies which most of the academic staff members are not good at. [...]

P4.2: We should start from this [interdisciplinary] perspective in all disciplines. I mean, since I work at Sharia faculty, I am calling for Islamization of the curriculum so that when the physics teacher talks...

P4.5: I am always talking from Islamic point of view.

P4.2: The same should be said for other disciplines.

P4.4: There is another point, [...] the common [teaching] team in the same course. Suppose I have a certain textbook, I should not teach the whole textbook alone. I may invite [P4.3] to teach [some textbook] part. [...]

P4.2: Visiting lecturer.

P4.5: But the teacher has a specific teaching load.

P4.1: This doesn't exist in [this university].

Excerpt 6.

P2.1: It's the situation we all live in which causes a lot of consequences. [...] If you think about the student who takes 18 credit hours in one semester, and he has to study for these classes under three-hour electricity per day. [...] Also, we have been through three wars which has also affected the psychology of our students. [...] This also affects them unconsciously, in the way they study, in the way they're acting in the society. [...] They have to adapt to all these problems. [...]. And then we're supposed to find a job, but we can't find a job. [...]

P2.4: Most of our students now, they lost their motivation for learning because of the situation in general. I think, maybe we can help our students by giving them hope in the future, that is, a small....

P2.3: You know, but it's out of our hands, this is a political issue…

P2.4: Yes, yes…

P2.3: …and it's out of our hands, it's out of the [interview] discussion aim. So, I think we can talk about something we can do, like to enhance e-learning because most people cannot get to the university because of the expenses. We can provide them with the learning material or sources like e-libraries.

tions and the need to activate students in teaching and learning (lines 33-34, 37-40).

Another dimension implied in this discourse is that modern education means using modern technologies and digital learning environments in university teaching and learning. This is exemplified by Excerpt 4 from a group discussion assignment in the training program; the discussion is between two instructors (P3 and P16).

Excerpts 2, 3, and 4 illustrate how the third discourse, the *discourse of improving education,* builds on the discursive constructions and subject positions presented within the first two discourses. The discourse of improving education is to be expected in the context of a pedagogical training program for university instructors (as exemplified in excerpts 2 and 3 from the program). However, this discourse was also identified in the focus group interviews conducted before the training program. Excerpt 5 is from the fourth focus group interview with five Palestinian university instructors (P4.1, P4.2, P4.3, P4.4, and P4.5) discussing curriculum work in their faculties. The beginning of Excerpt 5 (lines 44-47) shows the discourse of disciplinary differences constructed as having a negative impact on teaching and learning by imposing separation between disciplines (i.e., faculties and teaching staff). Borders between disciplines decrease teaching collaboration across faculties in contrast to international universities that promote interdisciplinarity in teaching. Excerpt 5 also exemplifies the discourse of improving education that the instructors draw on, especially in relation to professional development and developing curriculum including interdisciplinarity, digital tools, and joint teaching. This discourse entails university instructors actively working together to modernize teaching and learning practices and environments. A reference to the importance of lifelong learning is implied; the instructors should continuously seek to improve themselves professionally in the same way students need to learn and grow during and after their university education (lines 47-66). For example, P4.4 implies that university instructors have a responsibility to "keep up" with societal and technological advancements and incorporate them in their teaching (lines 56-58, 64-66). Furthermore, university instructors who do not innovate their teaching practices are seen as using traditional, outdated teaching methods due to their resistance to change (lines 60-63); the participants give an example of the education and Sharia faculties that lag behind the rapid developments in information technologies due to the teachers' lack of skills (lines 50-54). Responsibility for improving teaching and learning is placed on the instructors (as individuals and a community) and on the university through its institutional regulations and development programs (lines 47-48, 56-57, 62-66, 71, 73-75).

The discourse of improving education emphasizes the need to modernize teaching and learning processes for overall improved education quality and increased graduate employability (lines 55-56). Similarly, the fourth discourse, the *discourse of sociocultural and religious context,* constructs teaching and learning in HE as an important engine for societal development by producing a qualified workforce that will serve societal needs (lines 35-37). HEIs and actors must adopt modern digital learning tools and follow technology developments in society (lines 64-66). The sociocultural and religious context is especially relevant in education aims and methods: HE is constructed as having an important role in disseminating religious values that benefit individuals and society by educating good citizens and professionals. "Islamization of the curriculum" (lines 67-70) highlights the Islamic perspective present in all university courses, no matter the discipline. Islamic religious tradition positions instructors as conveyors of knowledge that should be adopted by students in a "didactic" fashion (lines 36-37); at the same time, instructors must strive to activate students in teaching and learning (lines 32-34, 37-40). These two contested perspectives closely relate to the oppositions constructed in the discourse of traditional and modern education.

Furthermore, discourse of improving education introduces a value perspective in relation to the discourse of traditional and modern education and the oppositions that resonate within. Modern education is improved (therefore, better) and thus, should be strived for. However, the discourse of improving education implies a different set of discursive constructions and subject positions when placed in relation to the fifth discourse, *the discourse of the political and economic circumstances*. Excerpt 6 from the first interview exemplifies the discussion of the impacts of political and economic circumstances on teaching and learning.

The prolonged Palestinian–Israeli conflict has had significant impact on the political climate and economic development of the region leading to high unemployment and insecurity. These difficult political and economic circumstances are portrayed as the "daily situation in Gaza" (lines 25, 76) that significantly influences teaching and learning in HE but cannot be changed because "it's out of our hands" (line 83). Although the discourse of improving education implies an urgent need and responsibility to improve, the discourse of the political and economic circumstances allows only minor, local actions for improvement (lines 85-87). Teaching and learning is constructed as heavily affected by numerous negative influences (lines 76-82) that limit the power of individuals and the institution to improve educational processes and environments. In other words, the discourse of the political and economic circumstances constructs students and instructors as lacking power to act. In the other discourses, their subject positions include potential to act through student engagement or professional development.

DISCUSSION

The five discourses give us rich descriptions of the discursive meaning-making processes that construct institutional teaching and learning cultures at this Palestinian university. Contrasting discourses within and around this institution brings forth the dynamic and fragmented nature of teaching and learning cultures that are constructed through consensus and disagreement (Martin, 1992; Trowler, 2008). Numerous oppositions resonate in the five discourses as they construct teaching and learning and subject positions of students and instructors. The findings illustrate the "discursive struggle" (Trowler, 2008, p. 90) behind the institutional cultural meaning-making processes, or what Tierney (2008) called "cacophony of voices that make up an organization" (p. 49).

We examine these contested constructions in their transnational context. Namely, transnational pedagogical cooperation introduced (new) conceptions related to SoTL, such as student-centered teaching, student engagement, pedagogical expertise and self-reflection. These conceptions—and discourses that surround them—refracted through the institutional teaching and learning cultures lead to a hybridization of (foreign and local) perspectives (Allen, 2014; Djerasimovic, 2014). That is, transnational encounters prompt changes in teaching and learn-

ing cultures by introducing alternative discourses to the institutional meaning-making processes. The alternative discourses stem from the international SoTL literature (e.g., during the pedagogical training) as well from the cultures in and around the collaborating Finnish institution (e.g., by the Finnish educators). The discourses of traditional and modern education and improving education in this study reflect this process of hybridization of different perspectives.

Moreover, discourses surrounding transnational education influence the cultural meaning-making processes between the collaborating institutions. In an analysis of the current scholarship of transnational education, Djerasimovic (2014) criticized the dominant discourse of imposition that describes transnational cooperation through an exporter–importer or provider–receiver relationship. The hierarchizing polarities that resonate in the imposition discourse may guide the expectations and practices of the transnational collaborators and may have a negative influence on the pedagogical development initiative. In other words, the collaborators might embrace this provider–receiver relationship perpetuating the imposition discourse and closing the space for discursive transformation of teaching and learning cultures. Further research is needed to better understand the nature of collaboration in transnational education.

Another important aspect of the transnational context is use of English, a common working language for the transnational partners in this study, but not the first language of either partner. For example, we observed that the focus of the group discussions differed between the interviews conducted in English and those in Arabic. The participants interviewed in English assumed that the interviewer knew very little about Palestinian HE and spoke more broadly about the political and economic circumstances in which the university operates. The participants interviewed in Arabic addressed the researcher as someone who knew the local context, and the discussion focused on daily teaching practices across different faculties. Thus, transnational interaction may prompt differing discourses depending on the collaborators' language (cf. Han & Han, 2019).

This study also showed that the Islamic religious tradition, closely intertwined with the societal perspective, is an important framework for understanding teaching and learning in this institution. Previous studies on Islamic education ideas identified three closely related concepts in the Arabic language referring to education, each with a slightly different emphasis: (a) growth to maturity, (b) developing good manners, and (c) receiving and imparting knowledge (Halstead, 2004). The close interconnectedness of these three perspectives indicates education and religion are inseparable: "at the heart of the Muslim concept of education is the aim of producing good Muslims with an understanding of Islamic rules of behavior and a strong knowledge of and commitment to the faith" (Halstead, 2004, p. 519). It can be inferred that Islamic education ideas are based on a unified epistemological principle (Halstead, 2004), which, in turn, has a unifying effect and brings together Islamic traditions and modern education ideas. Therefore, looking at the contested constructions in these findings through the lens of Islamic education ideas, we may see that they are not necessarily incompatible.

Intercultural communication is an inevitable feature of transnational education, as well as of empirical research on transnational education. Similarly to previous research (Allen, 2014; Bovill et al., 2015; Dunn & Wallace, 2008; Jordan et al., 2014), this study showed the importance of an open (inter)cultural dialogue between transnational collaborators about their understanding of "good" university teaching that fosters "good" student learning. In other words, transnational pedagogical development introduces alternative discourses of teaching and learning and therefore, calls for creating and fostering spaces for discursive negotiation and transformation. Such spaces facilitate reciprocity of the transnational interaction toward hybridized discourses and overcoming the polarized provider–receiver understanding of transnational interaction (Djerasimovic, 2014). Moreover, transnational pedagogical development programs must engage with the multiplicity of cultures and facilitate open (inter)cultural dialogue between individuals, communities, and institutions. Community-oriented initiatives can provide space for such dialogue between different cultures. Previous studies suggested different interesting community-oriented models, such as pedagogical conversations and significant networks (Roxå et al., 2011), groups for talking about teaching and learning (Kennelly & McCormack, 2015), intercultural communities of practice (Dunn & Wallace, 2008), and international SoTL communities (Wang et al., 2011).

CONCLUSION

We identified five discourses among university instructors that construct teaching and learning cultures at a Palestinian university during its transnational cooperation with a Finnish university. Using poststructuralist discourse analysis, we gained insight into the dynamic and fragmented nature of teaching and learning cultures as illustrated by the numerous oppositions that resonate within and between the discourses.

This study showed that institutional leaders and education developers who initiate the educational development processes need to engage with the dynamism and fragmentation of teaching and learning cultures. Cultures are constructed through discourses at the institution as well as discourses drawing on the wider sociocultural, religious, political, and economic context around the institution. To facilitate student learning in daily practice, university instructors need to negotiate between the fragmented cultures of teaching and learning; thus, the pedagogical development initiatives should provide spaces for facilitating discursive meaning-making processes. In practice, pedagogical development programs for university instructors need to include reflective discussions on different cultures, i.e., different ways of understanding and practicing teaching and learning.

Dynamic and fragmented nature of teaching and learning cultures is especially important in transnational education that involves additional alternative discourses constructing cultures within and around the two collaborating institutions. In other words, one cannot assume to understand or learn 'the culture' of the partner institution as a homogenous entity. Understanding institutional cultural processes is particularly significant in the context of increased international and transnational collaborations among HEIs worldwide. Applying a similar discursive approach to examining different transnational cooperation contexts would provide further empirical, methodological, and theoretical elaboration of cultures in transnational HE.

This study limits its focus on university instructors' perspective. However, expanding the research data with student perspectives or with policy documents would potentially deepen our understanding of cultures at this HEI. Further exploration of the religious aspects and disciplinary cultures may offer new relevant

perspectives on discursive construction of cultures in (Palestinian) HE. Adopting a discursive approach to researching cultural features within and around HEIs could help us go further in understanding other HE processes (such as research collaborations, quality assurance, and policymaking).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank the participants of this study, and Dr Tahani Aldahdouh for her contribution to the data collection process.

REFERENCES

Alba-Juez, L. (2009). *Perspectives on discourse analysis: Theory and practice*. Cambridge Scholars Publishers.

Alenius, P., Aldahdouh, T. Z., Holubek, V., Al-Masri, N., El-Holy, A., Lindén, J., & Korhonen, V. (2019). Examining teaching approaches, academic culture, and self-efficacy beliefs of instructors at a Palestinian university. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 31*(3), 390–401.

Allen, D. J. F. (2014). Investigating transnational collaboration of faculty development and learning: An argument for making learning culturally relevant. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 8*(2). https://doi.org/10.20429/ijsotl.2014.080217

Alvesson, M. (2002). *Understanding organizational culture*. Sage.

Alvesson, M. (2004). Organizational culture and discourse. In D. Grant, C. Hardy, C. Oswick, & L. L. Putnam (Eds.), *Handbook of organizational discourse* (pp. 315–335). SAGE.

Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. (2011). Decolonializing discourse: Critical reflections on organizational discourse analysis. *Human Relations, 64*(9), 1121–1146. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726711408629

Ashwin, P. (2012). *Analysing teaching-learning interactions in higher education: Accounting for structure and agency.* Bloomsbury Publishing.

Ball, S. J. (2012). *Foucault, power, and education*. Taylor & Francis Group.

Baxter, J. (2002). Competing discourses in the classroom: A post-structuralist discourse analysis of girls' and boys' speech in public contexts. *Discourse & Society, 13*(6), 827–842. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926502013006760 2002

Berti, M. (2017). *Elgar introduction to organizational discourse analysis*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Bovill, C., Jordan, L., & Watters, N. (2015). Transnational approaches to teaching and learning in higher education: Challenges and possible guiding principles. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *20*(1), 12–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2014.945162

Carabine, J. (2001). Unmarried motherhood 1830–1990: A discursive genealogical analysis. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, & S. J. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse as data: A guide to analysis* (pp. 267–310). Sage.

Djerasimovic, S. (2014). Examining the discourses of cross-cultural communication in transnational higher education: From imposition to transformation. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 40*(3), 204–216. https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2014.903022

Dunn, L., & Wallace, M. (2008). Intercultural communities of practice. In L. Dunn & M. Wallace (Eds.), *Teaching in transnational higher education: Enhancing learning for offshore international students* (pp. 249–260). Routledge.

Fink, L. D. (2013). The current status of faculty development internationally. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 7*(2). https://doi.org/10.20429/ijsotl.2013.070204

Foucault, M. (2002). *Archaeology of knowledge* (2nd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203604168

Halstead, M. (2004). An Islamic concept of eduction. *Comparative Education, 40,* 517–529. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305006042000284510

Han, J., & Han, Y. (2019). Cultural concepts as powerful theoretical tools: Chinese teachers' perceptions of their relationship with students in a cross-cultural context. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 13*(1). https://doi.org/10.20429/ijsotl.2019.130108

Jordan, L., Bovill, C., Othman, S. M., Saleh, A. M., Shabila, N. P., & Watters, N. (2014). Is student-centred learning a Western concept? Lessons from an academic development programme to support student-centred learning in Iraq. *Teaching in Higher Education, 19*(1), 13–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2013.827649

Kennelly, R., & McCormack, C. (2015). Creating more "elbow room" for collaborative reflective practice in the competitive, performative culture of today's university. *Higher Education Research & Development, 34,* 942–956. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2014.911259

Kirkebæk, M. J., Du, X., & Jensen, A. A. (2013). The power of context in teaching and learning culture. In M. J. Kirkebæk, X. Du, & A. A. Jensen (Eds.), *Teaching and learning culture: Negotiating the context*. SensePublishers. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6209-440-6

Knight, J. (2012). *Internationalization: Three generations of crossborder higher education*. India International Centre.

Knight, P., & Trowler, P. (2000). Department-level cultures and the improvement of learning and teaching. *Studies in Higher Education, 25*(1), 69–83.

Korhonen, V. (2007). Individualistista vai kollegiaalista työkulttuuria yliopistoyhteisössä [Individualistic or collegial work culture in academic community]. In V. Korhonen (Ed.), *Muuttuvat oppimisympäristöt yliopistossa* (pp. 25–40). Tampere University Press.

Korhonen, V., & Alenius, P. (2018). Introduction: International and transnational dimensions in higher education. In V. Korhonen & P. Alenius (Eds.), *Internationalisation and transnationalisation in higher education* (pp. 15–39). Peter Lang.

Kosmützky A., & Putty, R. (2016). Transcending borders and transversing boundaries: A systematic review of the literature on transnational, offshore, cross-border, and borderless higher education. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 20*(1), 8–33.

Leask, B. (2008). Teaching for learning in the transnational classroom. In L. Dunn & M. Wallace (Eds.), *Teaching in transnational higher education: Enhancing learning for offshore international students* (pp. 120–131). Routledge.

Martin, J. (1992). *Cultures in organizations: Three perspectives*. Oxford University Press.

Putnam, L. L., & Fairhurst, G. T. (2015). Revisiting "organizations as discursive constructions": 10 years later. *Communication Theory, 25*(4), 375–392. https://doi.org/10.1111/comt.12074

Pyvis, D. (2011). The need for context-sensitive measures of educational quality in transnational higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 16(6), 733–744. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2011.570436

Roxå, T., Mårtensson, K., & Alveteg, M. (2011). Understanding and influencing teaching and learning cultures at university: A network approach. *Higher Education, 62*, 99–111. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-010-9368-9

Schneider, B., & Barbera, K. M. (2014). Introduction. In B. Schneider & K. M. Barbera (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of organizational climate and culture* (pp. 3–20). Oxford University Press.

Tempus Office Palestine. (2012). *Higher education in the occupied Palestinian territory*. Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/assessments/ec_-_higher_education_in_opt.pdf

Thomas, L., Harden-Thew, K., Delahunty, J., & Dean, B. A. (2016). A vision of You-topia: Personalising professional development of teaching in a diverse academic workforce. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice, 13*(4). http://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol13/iss4/5

Tierney, W. (2008). *The impact of culture on organizational decision-making: Theory and practice in higher education*. Stylus Publishing.

Trowler, P. (2008). *Cultures and change in higher education: Theories and practices*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Trowler, P. (2020). *Accomplishing change in teaching and learning regimes: Higher education and the practice sensibility*. Oxford University Press.

Trowler, P., & Cooper, A. (2002). Teaching and learning regimes: Implicit theories and recurrent practices in the enhancement of teaching and learning through educational development programmes. *Higher Education Research and Development, 21*(3), 221–240.

Trowler, P., & Knight, P. T. (2000). Coming to know in higher education: Theorising faculty entry to new work contexts. *Higher Education Research and Development, 19*(1), 27–42. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360050020453

Välimaa, J. (2008). Cultural studies in higher education research. In J. Välimaa & O.-H. Ylijoki (Eds.), *Cultural perspectives on higher education* (pp. 9–26). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-6604-7_2

Wang, B., Peng, J., Pearson, M. L., & Hubball, H. (2011). Internationalization of a faculty SoTL program: Immersion experiences of Beijing professors in a Canadian research-intensive university. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 5*(2). https://doi.org/10.20429/ijsotl.2011.050223

Willig, C. (2013). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology* (3rd ed.). Open University Press.