Why Do We Need to Reform Higher Education Management in Palestine?

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This study aims at evaluating the current status quo of higher education in Palestine. It anticipates the challenges facing the higher education sector in terms of management and administration. This qualitative study was conducted by interviewing 17 of those working in senior leadership positions in higher education institutions. The study finds an urgent need for management reform. The study anticipates a vast number of challenges in terms of higher education institutions' administration where the majority of Palestinian universities suffer from an identity crisis. The study recommends the need to formulate a management reform model based on the anticipated challenges.

Keywords: management, administration, reform, higher education, Palestine, challenges

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions constitute powerful intellectual influence to shape the expansion of knowledge and science. Being a unique integral contributor to society; modern nations tend to reinforce and enhance the academic institutions' conditions in terms of administration, management, and government policies. Stipulated by the changing reality of knowledge, technology, and globalization impact, the reform of higher education management becomes the main concern of policy and decision-makers worldwide (Pham & London, 2010; Xiong et al., 2022; Khelifi, 2019). The effectiveness of higher education reform agendas should be measured and evaluated respectively to obtain the required educational outcomes. Lessons are taught from the countries' experiences in terms of reform in higher education contexts about realities, necessities, and challenges (Wetzinger, 2019; Fu et al., 2019). Focusing on the management of higher education reform can help different educational systems to overcome challenges initiated as a result of the continuous advancement of knowledge and technology (Quarchioni et al., 2020). Higher education in Palestine witnessed stages of difficulties, challenges, improvement, and footprints of success formulating a major step of the Palestinian identity and struggle. Higher education reform in Palestine is a crucial need and the management of this reform is a questionable matter. Aspiring to formulate a guiding theory for managing the reform in higher education is stipulated in the current time hence the management system in these universities should be a subject for continuous evaluation.

BACKGROUND

Higher Education and Theories of Change

Higher education is characterized by being heterogeneous and diverse in nature (Zafiropoulos & Vrana, 2008). This makes it highly challenging to address educational reform adequately and comprehensively.

Higher education constitutes many levels and objects of analysis about the governing management (Leiber, Stensaker & Harvey, 2018), systems that outline ranking and accreditation (Saisana, D'Hombres & Saltelli, 2011), budgets and financial management issues (Barr & McClellan, 2018), working faculty members (Goodall, 2009), the enrolled students (Heitor & Horta, 2014) and the scientific research contribution (Lockett, Kerr & Robinson, 2008; Paradeise & Thoenig, 2013). Different approaches and theories need to be deeply studied and analyzed to obtain the needed theoretical framework for the new planned reform. These approaches and theories can further serve to formulate new background theories that can suit the Palestinian higher education context and might be generalized worldwide. Because HEIs represent independent organizations (Bastedo, 2012a; Bastedo, 2012b), organizational change theories are considered suitable and were reviewed. According to Wu (2013), when people are intentionally organized to accomplish an overall set of goals, they represent a form of organization. Higher education represents an organized form of organization hence they incorporate social systems, divided up into smaller units or groups, that have various inputs in the forms of resources and certain deliverable outputs (Lenzen, Benrimoj & Kotic, 2010; Li, 2011). Highlighting the importance of change, organizational change theories embrace both change and innovation in the institutions making them capable to achieve their mission, goals, and planned objectives over the long term (Batras et al., 2016; Burke, 2017; Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015). Considerably, the researcher tracked different theories interlinked and connected to organizational change pointing to their contribution to this study. Research on organizational change such as Al Haddad & Kotnour (2015) and Manning (2017) were conducted to identify the influential organizational change models in the field of organizational development. In these studies, preference was given to theorists such as (Kurt Lewin, Everett Rogers, Chris Argyris, Donald Schön, Andrew Pettigrew, Ewan Ferlie, and Lorna Mckee) whose work appeared to have a foundational influence on the field of organizational change. Additionally, hence theories were explanatory in nature, they could provide interpretive value. Manning (2017), for example, argues that frameworks in higher education are rooted in disciplinary perspectives, broader institutional structures (e.g., governments and education systems), and social attitudes related to the "way things are done". Dependence only on one organizational paradigm to understand higher education, regardless of how powerful or explanatory, ensures that a singular approach to theory and practice is adequate. According to the researcher, this limitation in the approach cannot provide the range of understanding needed to lead these complex and dynamic organizations.

As organizations pass through a series of steps or stages, as they change, this formulates the core of stage theory. Throughout the process of change, after these stages are recognized, strategies to promote change can be matched to various points (Howlett & Ramesh, 2002; Howlett, Ramesh & Wu, 2015). McKeever (2017) argues that to semantically alter the denotations of referring terms, stage theorists need tense elements to give opportunities to represent past and future stages. Adopting innovation typically follows several steps following stage theory. Each stage involves a particular set of strategies that are based on the process of adoption, implementation, and maintenance of new methods and socio-environmental variables by the organization. Stage theory often defines how institutions implement their new goals, projects, technology, and concepts to apply this theory adequately. Before choosing the best methods for each stage, the social context, and the stage of growth of innovation must be carefully examined (Arnett & Tanner, 2009; Ferraris, Bresciani & Del Giudice, 2016). Modern stage theory is based heavily on Lewin's 3-stage model (1951) which involves: (1) Unfreezing of past behavior and attitudes within the organization; (2) Moving by exposure to new information, attitudes, and theories; (3) Refreezing through the process of reinforcement, confirmation, and support for change. Later research determined that individuals often adopt innovations as members of organizations while some variant of a stage theory is used for each policy report or decision. Stage theory helps to identify the problem by identifying or adopting specific solutions reaching the implementation phases. Here to say, the choice of stages is, to an extent, a matter of personal preference. It is also worth mentioning that while the division into components is useful for analytical purposes, reform is not neatly divided in this way, nor can any collection of headings accurately reflect the complexities of a reform process.

To plan educational reform programs with an emphasis on higher education efforts, a theory of change according to Jackson (2013) can be utilized by using examples from ongoing studies, papers, and consulting

work with HEIs. In the planning phase to produce the theory of change that satisfies four requirements, Jackson (2013) adopted Connell & Klem (2013) criteria which are: plausible, doable, testable, and meaningful. The advantages of this planning strategy can be used in the assessment and execution at the level of education reform in higher education institutions. Some theories have fundamental advantages over some current theories and approaches. Some theories are recommended for evaluating the educational institutions' reform efforts. Considerably, in the reforming process, rising questions can emerge which are related to the compelling early, intermediate, and long-term evidence of pay-off in investments. Other questions can stem effective strategies from the evaluation process involving the practitioners, policymakers, and public learning. The theory of change approach can support the answers to these questions and serve in the evaluation process (Connell & Klem, 2013).

Some theories draw on a lot of various sectors' involvement including stakeholders, economics, political science, and technological and organizational contributions like the new public management (NPM). The changing and developing nature of today's universities and the way they are managed and empower their academics stipulate the need for comprehensive reform theories. These changes are twofold where there is a shift towards managerial strength for a top-down form of leadership while the other is shifting towards complex dependency on the areas associated with political regulation, funding, evaluating, and governance (Bleiklie, 2018). As a result, reforms initiatives inspired by (NPM) have a global impact on HEIs internationally in terms of four respects which are: (1) the reform ideology concerning reforms justification by focusing on efficiency and higher quality of teaching and research in HEIs, (2) formal systemic frameworks for institutional assessment and competitive research funding, (3) the rise of managerial systems and the proliferation of systematic processes to ensure the achievement of performance and quality objectives, and (4) universities seriously weakened autonomy (Paradeise et al., 2009; Bleiklie, 2018). Applying such theories entails some drawbacks when applying in HE sectors. Some drawbacks entitled further the complexity theory where (Levy, 2015: 83-84) wondered if "complexity is capable of going beyond some useful insights and opening a rich new vein of organizational theory and analysis". Despite the efforts made by integrating different techniques such as computer simulation and qualitative methods, yet results indicate that institutions are still far from discovering the secrets of organizational adaptation, learning, and creativity. To an extent, the choice of theories that entail the reform process in the form of stages such as the stage theory can be a matter of personal and institutional preference. Being useful for analytical purposes, it is crucial to realize that this is not the reality of the reform when the complexities of the reform can cause inadequate representation (Corwin et al., 2011).

Higher Education in Palestine

For many years, the State of Palestine, as an Arab country, has been subjected to massive conditions of colonialism resulting in dispossession and displacement status wherein the majority of the Palestinians have been forced to leave their homelands and become refugees. The State of Palestine is defined according to the United Nations General Assembly Resolution No. 19\67 of the year 2012, as a State under occupation that requires an observer state in the United Nations (UN) General Assembly. Despite the harsh political and economic conditions that the Palestinian people are striving and living through as a result of the imposed occupation, particularly in the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, as well as the Apartheid Wall that has segregated the Palestinian territories in the West Bank; increasing the difficulty of normal daily access to most of the educational institutions, the Palestinians successfully have managed to combat illiteracy and make education available to all (Saleh, 2010).

By tracking the many stages of development in the Palestinian higher education sector during the past ten years, there is a noticeable witnessed gap in achieving the needed goals and outcomes aimed by the Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR) officials and decision-makers. Higher education institutions (HEIs) need to be fundamentally reformed in terms of management practices. Hence it is only back to the 1970s when the Palestinian universities came into existence, the development of higher education in Palestine is considered a relatively recent date. Initiated under the occupation restrictions, these universities represented the Palestinian's collective effort to preserve the national Palestinian identity by providing the needed opportunities to pursue high standards levels of

education in various fields of knowledge for the young Palestinians. After it became increasingly difficult for students to study abroad, these universities supported families' decisions to encourage their young members to proceed into achieving their graduate and post-graduate studies. After the Oslo accords of 1994, the education sector in Palestine fundamentally expanded and developed hence the educational process was mainly transferred from the Israeli authority to the Palestinian National Authority PNA (MOHE, 2021: www.mohe.ps). The resulting development aimed to expand the capacity of higher education institutions, increase access, enhance quality, and improve relevance to create a knowledge-based economy. Additionally, outstanding improvements took place including the introduction of the higher education law, higher education organizational structure, the establishment of the Council of Higher Education, the National Commission for Accreditation and Quality, the Council for Scientific Research, and the University Student Fund (Abu Al Hummous, 2006; Baalousha et al., 2009; Darwish, 2009). According to the researcher, the multi-changes in the governing bodies of the Palestinian higher education universities have contributed to the failure of achieving the management of the reform goals. After the existence of the PNA in the early 1990s, the MOHESR was established in 1996 to oversee, support, and guide the growth of Palestinian higher education through its various councils, bodies, administration, and units. Following that the Higher Education Law No. (11) was issued in 1998, setting out the objectives, roles, and powers of the ministry alongside levels and degrees of higher education, types of education, and academic institutions. Nevertheless, there is a considerable observation of the changing controlling bodies of the higher education sector throughout the past ten years. This concerns the unstable integration and separation between formal education and higher education where the policies changed, hence, they are sometimes treated as one entity and sometimes are not.

The university administration is responsible for the development of its educational system. The absence of a university administration with high efficiency that assimilates the highest mechanisms and techniques, it will be an obstacle to any fundamental development. Hence successful and creative university management means a successful and developed society, therefore, there must be individuals who provide institutions with future visions as well as formulate ideal roles for individuals working in these institutions (Alraqb, 2010). Palestinian universities need to practice several strategies in their academic and administrative management plans; whether in formulating objectives or in the method of selecting and formulating the strategy. It is also time for Palestinian universities to undergo a profound analysis that highlights the secrets of their uniqueness, especially as university institutions are in a global race for achieving quality. Hasaneen (2015) asserted that Palestinian universities today are in dire need of reassigning their strategic directions to solve their management problems to adapt to the requirements of the current era and keep pace with successive changes. Altiti, Hafez & Abusamra (2009) recognized the reality of the administrative process in Palestinian universities and identified some contemporary trends and global models in the development of university administration, in addition, to knowing some of the problems that hinder the Palestinian university administration in acquiring the highest level of performance in its assigned tasks. Hafez & Abusamra (2009) found that the Palestinian university administrations do not apply the administrative reengineering approach in the university administration. The Palestinian university management shall endeavor to determine the levels, functions, and requirements of the administration. Monitoring and evaluating administrative and educational processes as a comprehensive measure become an urgent need. The regulations, legislations, and universities laws should be reviewed to adjust to the requirements of the continuous changes leading to achieving total quality. Alongside, attention to human resources should be put into consideration in the light of providing the needed material and moral motivation (Al Titi, Hafez & Abusamra, 2009). Palestinian universities' management needs to be fundamentally reformed on a completely different and comprehensive basis in terms of vision, goals, content, and the proceeded mechanisms. A comprehensive reform that takes into account the reality of higher education in Palestine and the priorities of the Palestinian society and a specific perception of the role of Palestine regionally and globally. Despite the great effort exerted in the education process, under the relative stability achieved recently and the desire for development and improvement, many weaknesses need to be remedied. The main weaknesses range from education process outputs, the gap between general

education and university education, the inability to cope with the knowledge and technology revolution, the weakness of technical education, and the lack of a self-evaluation system.

According to the researcher, the process of management reform and change in the higher education sector should pay a great deal of focus on universities, where students bear the future responsibility for the Palestinian labor market. The researcher noticed a lack of research and articles targeting the educational reform of the higher education system in Palestine and measuring the crucial effect of this reform on the efficiency and the effectiveness of the higher education outcomes in the Palestinian universities. Most of the reviewed literature and studies focus on the reality of the system of higher education in Palestinian universities. Furthermore, researchers tend to highlight the difficulties facing these universities in general rather than targeting the reforming process itself and its effect on effectiveness and efficiency. In the Gaza Strip, the damaged higher education infrastructures have not been reconstructed and the economic conditions become increasingly much worse. This is further compounded by Israeli restrictions on the supply of construction materials due to the Israeli blockade (Robinson, 2010). Years under aggression left the universities in Gaza without supplies, waiting for queues of unemployed graduates, and the absence of improvement in scientific research. During the past ten years, the number of HEIs in the Gaza Strip increased noticeably to a degree that raises many questions targeting the education management reform plan in Palestine and the effectiveness and efficiency of the education system in these universities.

Identification of The Problem

Higher education and management practices are tools for sustainable development socially, culturally, and economically. However, in the Palestinian territories, higher education reform management does not play the role it should in promoting development. This asserts the need for managing the reform in these universities for different reasons. According to Bader et al. (2016), the higher education sector in the West Bank and Gaza Strip suffers from multiple management crises, most notably the crisis of chronic finances on one hand, and the level of graduates who experience a high rate of unemployment on the one hand. In addition, the existence of an identity crisis associated with the process of knowledge production under colonial circumstances; taking into account that higher education institutions originated mostly under Israeli occupation and national and local initiatives. According to Al-Tamimi (2016: 3), "The Palestinian government, like other governments in the Arab world, seeks to control and impose authority on the education sector. Considerably, there is a trend to strengthen and promote its political positions and achieve economic returns by investing in the education sector. As a result, universities became the doers of change which prompted the government to try to govern and authorize the sector of higher education through various procedures, mainly by controlling the funding share and the appointment of university presidents. The main problem of this research is related to the current status quo of higher education reform with a dire need to be analyzed and criticized. This evaluation will be in terms of the anticipated challenges and problems related to higher education institution management and policy efficacy. Therefore, the main study questions of this study can be formulated as the following:

Q1. What is the current status quo of Palestinian higher education?

Q2. What are the challenges that face Palestinian higher education in terms of universities' administration?

Q3. How can the proposed educational reform theory affect the effectiveness and efficiency of higher education in the state of Palestine?

METHOD

The study was designed to fulfill specific objectives in terms of providing educational actors or decision-makers with information that can help them to judge the merit of the current HEIs policies, programs, and management targeting the needed reform. Based on the aforementioned objectives, the researcher utilizes the qualitative method approach to conduct this study. The qualitative research design

was used to understand the management of HE reforms perspective and perception in the discussion board from the concerned HEIs. The obtained qualitative data, focusing on the people's experiences, are well suited for determining the meanings they assign to events and processes. Furthermore, observational analysis links the participants' experiences to the social world (Marino, 2012). The core of qualitative research is inductive interpretation through events, which yields correlations and themes (Hennink et al., 2020; Silverman, 2016; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The qualitative method in this research was conducted with different 17 participants working at HEIs with different senior management positions including universities' rectors, vice deans, councilors, vice councilors' academic staff as well as officials from the Ministry of Education, and policymakers and at their convenient time in the second semester of the academic year 2020/2021. Names of universities were replaced with alphabets while the participants' names were replaced with numbers from 1 to 17 to assert privacy. ATLAS. Ti software in this study is recognized as an important tool that promotes researchers' ability to conduct well-organized, systematic, accurate, and reliable data analysis in many studies (Friese, 2019; Rambaree & Faxelid, 2013). The conducted interview manuscripts were translated into English and imported to ATLAS.Ti for the first, second, and third stage analysis leading to drafting and formulating the major themes and the related concepts. In total, 17 interviews in word and PDF formats were uploaded into ATLAS.Ti. To realize how findings were congruent to the reality in this study, triangulation, member check, researcher's position or reflexivity, and peer examination were used. The study adopts Maxwell's (2012) interactive model of research design by which the relationships among the research's components are analyzed and conceptualized. The researcher uses this model because it supports the different theories that support reform as being an administrative, complex process and the need to understand the reform comprehensively. The correlation relationship among these five components in Maxwell's (2012) model is displayed in Figure (1).

FIGURE 1
AN INTERACTIVE MODEL OF RESEARCH DESIGN
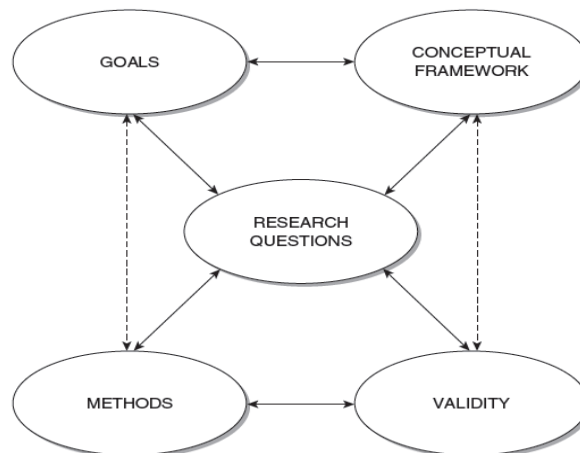
Source: Maxwell (2012: 6)

RESULTS

Results of the First Research Question: What Is the Current Status Quo of Higher Education in Palestine?

Based on the respondents' results and according to the open, axial, and selective coding process, three major themes emerged from the repeated codes. In turn, those three major themes were subdivided and grouped into other detailed sub-themes as follows (3).

Higher Education History Inception

Concerning the first theme, the majority of the respondents, when referring to the status quo of Palestinian higher education, the first thing that came to their mind was the inception of the Palestinian HEIs. 12 respondents referred directly to the initiation of these Palestinian universities under colonization and aggression. Their actual responses indicated the purpose of those universities' initiation. Respondents like (1), (3), (4) from universities (A) and (B) respectively, for instance, highlighted that the main objective of these institutions was to preserve the Palestinian identity and to represent a symbol of resistance and struggle despite the difficulties encountering all education actors including policymakers, senior leaders, faculty staff, students and stakeholders. In this regard, the respondent (1) from university (A) stated that: *Palestinian higher education did not start under a unified governing body hence it started as an urgent social need. There was no higher education ministry till 1994, therefore, most of the Palestinian universities were either private or public, local and national initiatives*. Similarly, according to the respondent (4) from university (B): *The Palestinian Higher Education Council (HEC) was established in the late seventies to supervise and coordinate higher education institutions and support them in achieving their main objectives at the time, which is teaching, and providing opportunities for enrollment in higher education for Palestinian youth, and to reduce their emigration abroad.* Agreeing with the respondent (4), the respondent (7) from university (D) further stated that: *The initiation of Palestinian higher education institutions was always correlated with academic teaching to preserve the Palestinian identity where education was the only possible hope. Therefore, the function of these universities was mainly teaching and not encouraging scientific research.* The previous responses asserted the history of Palestinian higher education while other respondents linked the initiation and the Palestinian struggle. Concerning this, the respondent (12) from university (F) for instance, stated that: *Since 1967, the occupation authorities have been practicing continuous harassment against higher education in the occupied Palestinian areas, to hinder its development in terms of quantity and quality and to keep the occupied areas with groups of unskilled workers who work for low wages in Israeli establishments.* Out of this main theme category, different subthemes were interlinked with the history of higher education inception such as success, ranking, and national, regional, and international status. Those themes were correlated and hence were interpreted later in the discussion section.

Success. The first subtheme was highlighted by those respondents who gave a high focus on describing the effort of higher education initiation throughout hardships as being judged in terms of success or failure. This was somehow noticed in replies obtained from respondents (5), (6), and (13). For example, respondent (13) from university (G) celebrated the honor and success of the Palestinian universities through periods of aggression and colonialization when he asserted that: *Our Palestinian people should be well-deservedly proud of the achievements of higher education in Palestine because if you take into consideration the cruelty of the occupation, the ferocity of the conditions and the entirety of our tormented history, it turns out that the establishment of universities together with other peer universities is a heroic collective act.* Similarly, the respondent (9) from university (E) clarified that despite the existence of challenges, the positive side of success needs to be highlighted as he stated: *I am afraid that I have drawn a bleak perspective. However, let me say that I am very proud of the achievements of Palestinian higher education and that the Palestinian people have the right to be proud of what they have achieved in comparison with the harsh conditions and in comparison, with the great sacrifices made by the people. This success cannot be minimized.*

Palestinian HEIs Ranking. The second subtheme ascertained the respondents' focus on the ranking of the Palestinian HEIs in terms of national and international recognition. Some respondents showed their unsatisfactory opinions regarding the HEIs ranking status despite all the paid efforts from the education actors while others refused to allocate problems in terms of ranking. Six respondents out of seventeen compared their universities and other regional universities such as in Jordan, Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt such as respondents (4) and (15), and (3). For instance, the respondent (4) from university (B) celebrated the Palestinian HE success in comparison to other regional countries and mentioned that: *What is considered remarkable, is the official issued figures that show that the percentage of enrolled students in HEIs among the Palestinian people is the highest in the Arab world, followed directly by Qatar, while Somalia, Mauritania, and Morocco are at the bottom of the list.* In contrast, respondents (17) respectively

highlighted the unsatisfactory sides of the Palestinian HE achievements in comparison to other countries and clarified that: *Different obstacles affect higher education in the Palestinian context where it now lags academically not just only at the international level but also at the regional level compared to other neighboring countries such as Jordan in terms of scientific research publications' contribution and citation.* The contradiction appeared in other responses that asserted the success of the Palestinian universities that surpassed other regional countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) such as respondent (3) from university (B) who asserted that: *Our universities are considered the top of MENA. This is actually due to the universities' devotion to contributing to raising the level of the academic quality of the university education with the technologies it provides.*

National-Regional-International Status. The third sub-theme highlighted the status of collaboration between higher education in Palestine with other regional and international HEIs. The competitive nature of these institutions nationally, regionally, and internationally has also shaped and contributed to shaping the status of Palestinian higher education. This was noticeable in some responses such as respondent (14) who clarified that: *Our universities work in collaboration and through memberships in the Association of Arab Universities, Euro-Mediterranean University, the Association of Quality Agencies in the Islamic World, the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher education, the Federation of the Universities of the Islamic World, and membership of the United Nations Academic Impact Program. These memberships allow for enriching the university's scientific research base, developing its faculty, qualifying its students, and providing them with the latest modern sciences and technologies.* Disagreeing with those who claimed the existence of good collaboration, the participant (8) from university (D) asserted that: *There is an absence of collaboration on the behalf of the private sector and higher education institutions in terms of scientific research in comparison to other Asian and European countries, where the private sector plays a crucial role leveraging research and fundraising.*

Higher Education Reform

The second anticipated theme resulting from the coding process was concerning higher education reform throughout its inception. The responses were categorized into three main sub-themes related to the previous reform attempts, the related project, and higher education Law No. (11) drafting.

Reform Attempts. The obtained first codes showed that respondents tended to highlight the previous reform attempts that were conducted since the initiation of higher education throughout history. The majority of the respondents declared that most of those reform attempts were primitive in nature and not fundamental. Others asserted that those attempts cannot be considered or described as being a reform attempt in the first place. In this regard, the respondent (2) said that: *Most of the reform attempts aimed to modernize higher education systems and their quality, to be in line with the latest education technologies. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research using these attempts sought to address and determine the national priorities and needs in this regard.* The same for respondent (6) when asserted that: *The reform attempts represent the ministry's endeavor to advance the reality of higher education and scientific research in Palestine, explaining that work is underway to develop programs in graduate studies that are compatible with the market's needs. Enhancing the opportunities for students, and academic and administrative university staff to participate in the process of knowledge and professional exchange programs between Palestine, European countries, and the region.* The contradiction resulted from reinforcing the notion of no existence of comprehensive national reform attempts since the Palestinian Higher education inception. In this regard, the respondent (8) clarified that: *With the absence of a comprehensive national reform agenda, all the reform attempts will remain marginal unless a fundamental plan is taken into consideration.*

International Projects. For the second subtheme, respondents referred to previous and current projects that were conducted in the context of reforming the higher education system or the related components. The majority of the respondents asserted that most of the reform attempts were limited projects targeting certain fields in higher education such as curriculum, management, and unemployment as examples. In this regard, respondent (3) from university (B) asserted that: *Most of the Palestinian reform attempts were merely humble and primitive initiatives through the funded project. They did not perform fundamental*

changes in the current status quo of Palestinian higher education. These attempts were funded projects or modifications on the behalf of the current Higher Education Low No. (11). Similarly, and in more detail, the respondent (9) from university (E) calcified that: *It is noteworthy to assert that the different efforts to reform higher education were collaborations in nature in terms of projects involving several activities and conferences related to the modernization and development of higher education during the coming period.* In the same regard, the participant (13) from university (G) ascertained that: *One of the successful projects is the "Erasmus +" program. The program includes three areas of support including building the capacities of universities, the academic mobility of students and lecturers, and encouraging scientific research between Europe and Palestine.* In the same regard, and referring to another project, the participant (11) ascertained that: *The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research further collaborated with the UNESCO office in Palestine to discuss mechanisms for implementing a project. The project entitled "Developing digital skills and improving the quality of technical and vocational education"; was funded by the Japanese government, and was implemented in partnership between the Ministries of Higher Education and Education and Labor.*

Higher Education Law (11) Drafting. Some respondents highlighted the changes and modifications entitled the higher education Law No. (11). These changes took form of drafting and integrating new statements. The purpose of such changes was considered as a reform attempt hence the aim was to enhance and improve the higher education status through governing rules. However, opinions still asserted the prospect that the current higher education law suffers from unclear and ambiguous shortcomings. Examples of the respondents' replies such as respondent (16) who believed that: *The necessity of establishing a unified structure for Palestinian university councils, and how to appoint their presidents and determine their authority should be redrafted in the Higher Education Law in Palestine.* In the same regard, the participant (7) ascertained that: *Law No. (11) of 1998 regarding higher education in Palestine, did not specify how the council of any Palestinian university, whether governmental or public, should be formed, nor did it specify how the president of this university should be appointed, creating a state of confusion without commitment to the higher education law, which should remain the main reference in everything related to higher education.*

Higher Education Challenges

The third theme after conducting different reviews revealed the participants' reflections on the general anticipated challenges in the education process in the higher education context. These are the general challenges they can grasp and anticipate before moving to the details. The major challenges were many but after the coding process through ATLAS.ti., they were grouped into three sub-themes including vision, instability, and unemployment.

Vision. In terms of higher education vision, most of the respondents highlighted challenges related to the absence of a unified higher education vision that governs systems and policies inside HEIs with all their different types and specializations. Participant (15) from university (H) declared his fears by saying: *I have a concern regarding the future that these achievements may be lost because of the absence of a unified vision.* Participants further declared the confusion about the ministry's future vision to go for academics or applied specializations based on the government's agenda. In this regard, the participant (1) and (6) respectively asserted that: *Without assigning the ministry's vision for our graduates in terms of selecting the academic or the applied majors, the ministry still fails to allocate the needed percentages in collaboration to the labor market.* There is continuous argumentation and disputes between higher education institutions regardless of their types. Respectively, some of the university presidents stressed the need to make a tremendous leap by asserting academic research education and at the same time reinforcing technical education. In the same regard, the respondent (12) from university (F) declared that: *We need to reframe the higher education vision to make it more compatible with our students' needs but also consistent with the general education outcomes. For instance, vocational education students coming out of schools still find difficulties when they want to proceed with their graduate studies.* The participants mentioned the need to take life skills and the 21st skills into consideration within HE's vision. In this regard, participants (8) and (9) respectively declared that: *University colleges and community colleges speak about their need*

to end up with graduates of high technical skills for serving the local and the international market alongside the distant work opportunities coping with the technological and the industrial revolution. There is a gap in which everything surrounding us has improved but still, our education is stuck in the 19th century and did not improve. The changes stipulate the need for challenging educational outcomes to cope with the continuous changes in terms of the nature of students and the changing world.

Instability. Instability is a major challenge that was highlighted in most of the replies. Instability according to respondents was referring to the changeable unsecure conditions of Palestinian life that stipulates uncertainty and ambiguity. The instability was associated with political aggression. The instability further affected the economic condition. The instability hence affecting the economic condition caused low students enrollment. According to the respondent (14): *Declining enrollment due to changing demographics, increased competition, and some programs that lack clear career alignment.* Respondents further say that it is difficult to reconsider the reform under the instability conditions. In this regard, participants (6) declared that: *The normal status when we need to consider the reforms is to have a sense of stability that encourages us to improve. We cannot reconsider the reform under unstable political and economic conditions. Once there is development and improvements, any unjustified war can take us back years before and this is disappointing.*

Unemployment. A clear argumentation aroused when referring to unemployment. Some respondents attributed the problem to HEIs while others rejected it. The first group of 7 respondents attributed unemployment to the repeated programs taught at those HE institutions. In this regard, the respondent (2) asserted that: *Yearly, universities send thousands of graduates to the labor market without paying attention that their repeated programs and their traditional methods of teaching can increase the unemployment problems.* In the same regard, the respondent (17), said that: *There is no choice for universities to suspend or terminate their programs just to control unemployment. Frankly, most universities believe that the unemployment challenge is not part of their responsibility.* The second group attributed unemployment to the absence of governing policies and lack of cooperation between those HEIs institutions and the labor market. In this regard, the respondent (3) from university (B) declared that: *With the absence of governing rules from the ministry, unemployment cannot be determined, the ministry does not draw roles of cooperation and collaboration between HEIs and the Ministry of Economic and the Ministry of Labor.* The third group refused to attribute the problem to HEIs claiming that the main duty of these universities is to teach and focus on the academic process. Respectively, respondent (15) from university (H) asserted that: *Problems in Gaza, such as unemployment, appear to be connected to shortcomings in the education system. There is a mismatch between graduates' overall talents and labor market needs, which is an issue that exists in many regions of the world.*

Results of the Second Research Question: What Are the Challenges of HEIs in Terms of Institutional and Administration?

The second question focused on HEIs and asked the participants about the challenges and limitations in terms of institutional administrative governance. ATLAS.ti. yielded different results based on the interviewees' responses. The respondents' general results were categorized into major themes and subthemes under the anticipated challenges as follows:

HEIs Institutional Governance

The theme of governance entailed different issues about HEIs' government, management practices, and organizational structure. Based on the respondents' overview, the resulted sub-themes from the coding process were as follows:

HEIs Classification. When being asked about challenges facing higher education institutions in terms of administration and governance some respondents referred to the nature of the Palestinian HEIs classification in terms of governmental, public, and private institutions. This was shown in replies the researcher received from participants (8) and (4): Higher education Law No. (11) classifies HEIs into three recognizable types governmental, public, and private, and those which are supervised by UNRWA. Respondents highlighted that the Palestinian HEIs have a special classification that does not exist regionally

in the surrounding countries such as Egypt and Jordan. In this regard, Respondent (11) from university (F) declared that: *Palestinian HEIs have distinguished themselves from other HEIs in other neighboring countries with the introduction of public universities. These universities are neither governmental nor private but can be considered quasi-governmental.* The nature of this classification affects the governance in different prospects related to the ministry supervision role and the allocated government fund. For example, the respondent (13) ascertained that: *The different classifications of the Palestinian HEIs entails different forms of organizational structure and then management. This considerably will be affecting the quality procedures in these universities.* Other participants believed that the classification might be correlated with the university's function as well as the appointed vision to accredit academic or applied tracks. Associated with this point respondents (6) highlighted that: *The nature of HEIs imposes competitiveness in terms of programs and accreditation. This can affect both staff and student enrollment.*

Hierarchical and Organizational Structure. When asked about administration and governance, the participants did not neglect the role of the hierarchical and organizational structure of the Palestinian HEIs. Hence the organizational structure is the backbone of the university departments, much attention should be paid to the challenges that might arise. Some participants referred to the complexity of the organizational structure concerning the nature of the Palestinian unstable conditions such as respondent (10) from university (E)*: The organizational structure integrates complexity and effectiveness of regulation that is influenced by the surrounding environment. There is a clear relationship between the stable environment, the mobile environment, and the complexity.* In another context, respondents (2) and (10) highlighted the issue of centralization and decentralization that affect the organizational structure in those HEIs by saying that: *The organizational structure requires a high level of decentralization so that the organization can respond to the surrounding changes. Lots of our universities are centralized in nature.* Respondents with experience in terms of management and leadership referred also to the different types that may be anticipated inside HEIs in terms of horizontal, vertical, and geographic. The challenges encountered may result based on the number of higher education units. In this regard respondent (7) said: *The greater the number of organizational units and their divisions, the greater the number and diversity of professions and disciplines, the more complex the organizational structure and vice versa. This requires HEIs to reconsider their units and departments as well as the proportion of staff increase.*

Change Resistance. Respondents talked about change resistance as one of the challenges that can be anticipated in terms of administration and leadership. The resistance can be familiar on the behalf of faculty and staff. Respondent (10) highlighted the technology resistance issue by declaring that: *The pandemic has uncovered lots of our higher education disruption, especially when refining our teaching methodologies and the integration of technology. Lots of academic staff resist changing the moralities of teaching practices, especially the elderly staff.* Change resistance can be anticipated in the form of changeable rules and administrative legislation. This was in responses such as in respondent (16): *Leadership at the department level can be much confronted with resistance in terms of overloading staff on one hand with the academic affairs from the other.*

Leadership Competency

As a major obstacle that encounters HEIs governance and administrative practices, leadership competency stipulates more stressful pressure on performing the best practices. Respondents' answers were categorized into three main sub-themes related to training, collaboration, and department management.

Training. Concerning training, about five respondents highlighted the issue where most of the senior leaders at HEIs are academicians with high university degrees who were appointed to leading positions. These seniors are mainly assigned the position for one two-year period which may be extended for two, nevertheless, still, the position is subject to mobility. Respondents' opinions regarding assigning the academics senior positions were divided into three groups. First, those who claim that there is no need to assign administrative senior positions to those who are professors or associated professors hence what is needed is leadership skills. In this regard, the respondent (5) asserted that: *Should the academicians who are assigned senior management positions be of full professors' degrees? What does this have to do with leadership? Where is the needed ability to assign and formulate policies, and manage to fund and maintain*

the needed administrative flow of the councils? I believe the leadership aspects are more important than the academic degree. Lack of interest in the administrative experiences of sensitive sites where attention is only appointed to the scientific degree. This does not mean that I underestimate the importance of a university degree but administrative skills matter. They are not going to conduct research, but they will be administrative counselors for their departments. The second group highlighted the issue of changeable leadership practices that need leadership skills and extensive training. Most of those who are assigned leadership positions rely on their accumulated experience and not on leadership practice knowledge. Therefore, this was asserted in responses such as (9): *Leadership needs training, nevertheless, when appointed to senior leadership positions, leaders do not receive the appropriate training. All they rely on is their expertise which might be not effective or enough.*

Collaboration and Coordination. The second subtheme entitled governance and HEIs management competence was about cooperation and collaboration between the administration and the departments on one hand and between the management in other HEIs nationally, regionally, and internationally. This was depicted in some responses such as with respondent (1): *Collaboration is a challenge when universities tend to be competitive in nature rather than collaborative. This competitiveness might have a positive side but it mostly hinders achieving higher education outcomes in terms of violating certain rules to attract more students.* However, despite most of the responses asserting the competitive nature, other respondents reflected the positive side of this competition, precisely confirming the existence of good collaboration. In this regard, the respondent (10) asserted that: *I disagree with opinions that highlight competitiveness neglecting the excellent cooperation between universities which can be anticipated in terms of joint programs and projects. The Ph.D. program in a fundamental education major, for example, was activated for the first time between two universities here in Gaza and this can be counted as a collaboration leap.*

Department's Management

At the management of the department level, lots of anticipated problems were reflected in the respondents' answers and replies. These challenges ranged from problems in communication in terms of the department level, decision-making alongside leadership style.

Communication. This is shown in responses from seniors in quality management positions and head departments such as respondent (17) who mentioned that: *Communication is questionable and problematic, in terms of the department level with other departments and the department itself with the academic affairs and with other units inside the institutions itself. Clarity is needed to be combined with clear vision but duplicity and discontinuity are sometimes against that.*

Decision Making. The senior interviewees encountered problems associated with the head department's leadership decision-making such as in respondent (2) reply when said: *As head department leaders inside HEIs try to make decisions, these decisions are confronted with resistance in terms of employees and the senior level management. This can be associated with the lack of training in terms of leadership.*

DISCUSSION

Discussion of the First Research Question: What Is the Current Status Quo of Palestinian Higher Education?

The first research question anticipated the participants' perceptions of the current status quo of higher education in Palestine in general to tackle the first impression and the major resulting themes. Concerning this question, the collected responses revealed three main themes which are the following: (1) higher education inception, (2) higher education reform, and (3) higher education challenges. These three main themes resulted in nine detailed subthemes. The majority of the responses highlighted the perception of higher education reform in terms of inception and challenges.

Higher Education Inception

The obtained results ascertained that most of the respondents when asked about the status of Palestinian higher education; the first anticipated responses generally refer to the initiation and inception of higher education reform. This signifies that over the past years, the rising numbers of higher education institutions, the increased enrolled students, as well as ambitious higher education platforms, have been developed to satisfy the demands of knowledge employers and higher-skilled employees that are altering the national economy. It is also noted that, out of the obtained responses, referring back to the history of Palestinian higher education is the foundation of the reform process itself. According to the researcher, it is tempting and easy to believe that higher education's history is unimportant or irrelevant to the challenges that today's colleges and universities face. Indeed, the history of higher education is replete with valuable lessons for anyone seeking to envisage and envision the future of higher education might be obtained when studying the history of higher education. One of these lessons is the longstanding debates evoked over the mission and the goals of higher education. Other lessons further denote the changeable forms of pedagogy and assessments to adapt to the shifting time demands. Palestinian higher education in the past has played a crucial role about social development and economic growth. The study in this matter agrees with different studies such as (Zelkovitz, 2014; Alfoqahaa, 2015; Isaac et al., 2019). According to (Abu-Saad & Champagne, 2006: 1035), "education in Palestine, from its very beginnings, was never under the control of the Palestinian people; but instead has been controlled by successive colonial/external administrations". Correspondingly, the study agrees with Zelkovitz (2014: 387) who further highlighted the Palestinian higher education's development and adaptability in the face of three decades of social and political upheaval spanning from its inception. The study ascertained that "Established under challenging circumstances and subjected to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the wake of the 1967 war, Palestinian HEIs have trodden a thin line between the training of human resources required to their national movement and compliance with the dictates of a military regime bent on curbing such aspirations.

When discussing the Palestinian higher education reform, this is also correlated with its success through years of struggle under occupation and harsh conditions. In this research, the majority of the respondents celebrated success in the Palestinian context in terms of higher education. In this matter, the study goes in line with other studies such as (Abu Saad & Champagne, 2006: 1035) in the sense that the Palestinian universities have been "a dynamic force across Palestinian communities since their inception under Israeli occupation in the early 1970s". According to (World Data ATLAS, https://knoema.com/ATLAS/Palestine/Adult-literacy-rate), "in 2018, the adult literacy rate for Palestine was 97.22 %. Adult literacy rate of Palestine increased from 94.06 % in 2008 to 97.22 % in 2018 growing at an average annual rate of 0.37%". The preceded data assures the success achieved in the field of higher education. Furthermore, the increasing number of Palestinian universities is a sign of success and the continuous need to cover society's needs of educating youth and enabling them to take their step into professional life despite years of struggle.

However, when discussing the reform in terms of ranking, opinions are divided into two categories. These categories refer to those who associate success with higher education ranking status and those who, in contrast, highlight the unsatisfactory sides of higher education achievements in comparison to other regional and international countries. Referring to the HEIs ranking status was highlighted in the results hence participants referred to the struggle of these HEIs to achieve a considerable ranking status whether nationally, regionally, and internationally. The HEIs ranking status and success are majorly associated with cooperation and collaboration with higher education institutions nationally, regionally, and internationally. This was mainly clarified with different responses that highlighted the collaboration spans. According to the researcher's interpretation, accreditation and ranking are mainly associated with quality. This goes in line with other studies such as (Alfoqahaa, 2015), nevertheless, (Blanco-Ramírez & Berger, 2014) claim that "quality alone is not enough". They asserted that there is a need for a process-oriented approach to increasing quality as part of the value that includes an emphasis on access and relevance supported by investment.

Throughout history, the collaboration between the Palestinian HEIs and the neighboring counterparts has proven to be the primary concern of the Palestinian National Authority for its development in the field

of higher education. Responses asserted the collaboration in terms of academic and scientific research, developmental and scientific research projects, internationalized curricula, quality assurance, and recruitment policies of international academic staff and students. This collaboration was highly asserted in different studies such as (Robinson, 2010). However, the efficacy of such collaboration might be violated. According to Koldas & Çıraklı (2019: 6), "most of the challenges faced by the Palestinian higher education institutions HEIs towards internationalization stem from the problematic nature of bilateral relations of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in West Bank and Gaza Strip with Israel". According to the researcher, the influence of geopolitical constraints placed on academics, visitors, and academic materials, as well as logistical constraints imposed on academics, visitors, and academic materials.

Higher Education Reform

The theme concerning higher education reform stated that there are considerable initiatives for conducting reform in terms of different reform attempts, projects and modifications in the issued Higher Education Law No. (11). In this study, respondents tended to highlight the previous reform attempts that were conducted since the initiation of higher education throughout history. The majority of the respondents declared that most of those reform attempts were primitive in nature and not fundamental. Others asserted that those attempts cannot be considered or described as being a reform attempt in the first place. The contradiction resulted from reinforcing the notion of no existence of comprehensive national reform attempts since the Palestinian Higher education inception. In this regard, the study is in line with (Bales, 2010: 23) in the sense that reform attempts have not paid enough attention to how to build an implementation framework that leads to educational improvements in practice. According to the researcher, higher education management reform becomes fundamental rather than just superficial. It is regarded as part of the evaluating and prioritizing process that yields a plan prioritizing first thing first, although it may be followed by other waves of continuous change.

The Palestinian reform attempt further need to match the regional counterparts' attempts in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and the international reform experience worldwide. In this regard, (Buckner, 2011) asserted that the various reform patterns indicate various responsibilities for countries in shaping young opportunities in a period of globalization, implying the necessity for more research into youth perceptions of these changes. The study results further indicated different reform attempts in the forms of collaborative funded projects. The results are consistent with other studies highlighting the cooperation in different reform attempts by exploring the role of UNESCO, the World Bank, and the US Agency for International Development as key international actors shaping education and academic development in Palestine. They act as macro policies where they affect the national Palestinian's education policies and educational perspective while the government represents the micro level. Similar studies such as (Alfoqahaa, 2015) presented the international influence, particularly through donor-funded projects, combined with limited capacity within the Ministry of Education and local universities, inhibits a comprehensive vision toward different fields in the context of higher education such as teacher education. This is further in accord with other studies highlighting the different fields of reform such as academic and scientific research, developmental and scientific research projects, internationalized curricula, quality assurance, and recruitment policies of international academic staff and students (Robinson, 2010; Shinn, 2012). According to the researcher, higher education in the MENA region can be categorized into two traditional models of higher education. These can be public-sponsored mobility, common in nearly all Arab States. However, in Palestine and other countries like Lebanon, they are characterized by private-based systems in terms of Higher education. This is further consistent with (Buckner, 2011: 21; Arnove, 2013). In this matter, nations in the MENA region are all changing their higher education institutions to match the global economic competitiveness, nevertheless, they are all following different reform approaches, notably neoliberal, quality assurance, and internationalization.

The results under the higher education Law drafting theme further highlighted the changes and modifications entitled the higher education Law No. (11). These changes took the forms of drafting and integrating new statements which is consistent with other studies such as (Koni et al., 2012: 2322). According to the research, the purpose of such changes was considered as a reform attempt hence the aim

was to enhance and improve the higher education status through governing rules. However, opinions still asserted the prospect that the current higher education law suffers from unclear and ambiguous shortcomings. The Higher Education Law No. (11) aims to shed light on important aspects related to higher education, as one of the rights that must be available for all. The first part of it includes some legal rules related to the right to education following the provisions of international charters and covenants. The second part reviews the most important provisions of Palestinian Higher Education Law No. (11), in terms of the objectives of higher education, the authority of the ministry and the minister, and the provisions for higher education institutions to review their management, the authority to issue licenses, accreditation, supervision, academic degrees, certificates, and study systems.

Higher Education Challenges

The main results for this question further appointed challenges confronting higher education and asserting the need for management reform including vision, instability, and unemployment. According to the interviews, higher education in Palestine lacks a unified vision in terms of governance and legislation. This is highly depicted in some literature such as (Chakman, 2019). According to the researcher, people acquire the agency and become more passionate about education improvements when they can perceive reform as a practical act of taking systematic steps towards a larger objective. People become significantly more confident that higher education reform is a feasible strategy that will generate beneficial outcomes when encouraged to conceive of change as compared to remodeling; based on their connections with upgrading structures. The starting point here is that the vast majority of Palestinian universities suffer from an identity crisis. This crisis is not necessarily or always related to occupation. Policymakers want universities that focus on academic research on the one hand. On the other hand, they also need to focus on the quality of education and the quality of graduates. However, HEIs are not able to combine these two goals simultaneously and that goes in line with (Chakman, 2019). This reinforces the need to unify the higher education vision to assert any management reform attempts now or in the future.

An abundance of interviews ascertained the instability as a source of most of the challenges in the context of higher education. Instability is a major challenge that was highlighted in different literature such as (Isaac et al., 2019; Hallaj, 1980). Instability according to respondents was referring to the changeable unsecure conditions of Palestinian life that stipulates uncertainty and ambiguity. The instability was associated with political aggression. The instability further affected the economic condition. As a result, the instability affecting the economic condition has caused low student enrollment.

Respondents differed in terms of associating the unemployment problem to HEIs where they were divided into those who support the claims that HEIs is the one who is responsible for the unemployment problem and those who disagree. A clear argument arose when referring to unemployment in literature. Respectively, this goes in line with some literature that attributed the unemployment problem to the absence of governing policies and lack of cooperation between those HEIs and the labor market such as (Salama, 2017, Kalfa, Wilkinson& Gollan, 2018). However, other studies refused to attribute the problem to HEIs claiming that the main duty of these universities is to teach and focus on the academic process. The study in the matter is in line with (Chakman, 2019).

According to the researcher, while Palestine shares with the Arab countries a high rate of unemployment among university graduates, the Palestinian situation differs for obvious reasons, including the fact that the harsh economic condition affects the graduation career. Despite that, some questions must be raised: Is the number of Palestinian universities, and hence their graduates, more than what is needed each year? How can the capacity of the labor market be determined? Was the market of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip originally the only employee and operator during previous decades with the existence of an Arab market that university graduates had been heading to for decades? What is the absorptive capacity of the labor market? What are the specific skills and knowledge needed? Have sufficient studies been conducted on these needs and the reasons for their change? Is higher education the main goal to meet the demand in the labor market? Are there other societal needs of the same importance? Does the increasing enrollment of high school graduates to universities in the Palestinian case reflect another crisis, including the lack of sufficient applied institutes of higher studies in the form of polytechnic institutes that qualify

graduates for their integration into the labor market? Why do High school graduates escape to avoid unemployment for four or five years? Why should universities absorb as many high school graduates as possible, even at the expense of quality? Is the role of universities to contribute to the "stabilization" of the political situation under occupation and to postpone unemployment for four or five years? All these questions need to be addressed properly when referring to unemployment in the Palestinian context.

To sum up, the results and discussion of the first research question, it is denoted that the linkage between higher education reform and its inception asserts the fact that higher education transformation is as much a part of history as continuity. It also supports the claims that the history of modern educational technology is mostly one of unfulfilled promises. The historical and political context provides an essential background for exploring key contemporary issues in Palestinian Arab higher education in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Mainly, the claims concerning higher education is in crisis are not new. Furthermore, the progress or decline narratives in the Palestinian higher education context conceal as much as they reveal. It links changes to real-world demands and ensures accountability for the way forward. It also helps education reformers to connect to a broader popular conversation about change, one that may seem less visionary at first but ultimately results in measures that are more in line with a larger vision. Respectively, the reform needs more reasoning, requiring more strategic framing. In this regard, the study is in line with (Levin, 1997; Bales, 2010: 17-26).

Discussion of the Second Research Question: What Are the Challenges of the Management of Higher Education Reform in Terms of HEIs Management?

The second research question anticipated the participants' perceptions of the challenges of higher education institutions in terms of institutional and administrative governance. Under this main category, three major themes were obtained from the research questions about HEIs management and administration. Participants allocated challenges in terms of (1) administrative governance, (2) leadership competence, and (3) department management.

Administrative Governance

The theme of governance entailed different issues about HEIs' classification, hierarchical organizational structure, and change resistance. Mainly, the challenges facing the Palestinian higher education institutions in terms of administration and governance highlighted the nature of the HEIs classification in terms of governmental, public, and private institutions. Respondents highlighted that the Palestinian HEIs have a special classification that does not exist regionally in the surrounding countries such as Egypt and Jordan. This was further highlighted in different studies such as (Buckner, 2011: 21; Arnove, 2013). According to the researcher, the university classification might contribute to the challenges that confront these institutions in terms of administration where the administration can be shared between the academic bodies and stakeholders in the case of public and private institutions. However, governmental institutions share boards of trustees that are mainly run by the government. In this regard, the study shares the concern with other studies such as (File et al., 2016).

Furthermore, the responses stated that the nature of HEIs classification affects the governance in different perspectives related to the ministry supervision role and the allocated government fund. While other participants believed that the classification might be correlated with the university's function as well as the appointed vision to accredit academic or applied tracks. Public and private HEIs do not receive any allocated funds from the government and that is why they focus mainly on their financial stability, and which is a challenge hence the university shifts its academic focus. As a result, the student's enrollment number becomes the major objective, and the running capacity might be endangered. In this matter, the study further goes in line with other studies such as (Ishola et al., 2020: 30). Lastly, and associated with the HEIs' classification, the vision of these institutions varies and hence following the administrative procedures from one university to another will take different forms and different organizational structure affecting its efficacy and productivity. This further goes in line with previous studies such as (Stensaker, Välimaa & Sarrico, 2012).

The obtained results further did not neglect the role of the hierarchical and organizational structure of the Palestinian HEIs. Hence the organizational structure is the backbone of the university departments, much attention should be paid to the challenges that might arise. Participants in the study asserted the complexity of the Palestinian HEIs structure concerning the nature of the Palestinian unstable conditions out of years of occupation and unjustified siege. Participants further referred to the centralization and decentralization that affect the organizational structure in those HEIs. In this matter, the study agrees with (Torraco & Hoover, 2005: 422-437; Roy & El Marsafawy, 2016: 87). In addition, respondents with experience in terms of management and leadership referred also to the different types of the hierarchical and organization structure that may be anticipated inside HEIs in terms of horizontal, vertical and geographic. The encountered challenges may result based on the increasing number of higher education units. According to the researcher, different studies questioned whether the organizational structure affects the management of HEIs. Different studies revealed that the organizational structure of universities significantly affects the management. According to the researcher, the Palestinian universities of today requires more flexibility to enhance their creativity and innovation as well as autonomy, however, our universities have organizational structures that contain high levels of formalization, rigidity, and more centralized decision-making process affect the competitive nature of these universities. This is further highlighted in different studies such as (Zziwa, 2014: 159-169). However, the study contradicts (Madi et al., 2018: 63) where study found that there is a high degree of satisfaction with the nature of the organizational structure in the Palestinian universities in the Gaza Strip from the point of view of the administrative staff. The study results reinforced a direct correlation between the nature of the organizational structure and the participation of decision-makers.

Under the category of governance, respondents further discussed change resistance as one of the challenges that can be anticipated in terms of administration and leadership. The resistance can be familiar on the behalf of faculty and staff. Change resistance can be anticipated in the form of changeable rules and administrative legislation. In his regard, Agasisti, Catalano & Erbacci (2018) tried to identify the primary sources of resistance to change and identify the sorts of organizational behavior that might counteract this resistance. The findings revealed a link between overcoming resistance to change and applying certain organizational practices that may mitigate its impact. Surprisingly, Agasisti, Catalano & Erbacci (2018) discovered that resistance was higher in the university, where the situation was simpler. According to the researcher, managerialist imperatives evoke resistance. In this regard, (Kalfa, Wilkinson & Gollan, 2018) revealed evidence of symbolic violence where staff compliance with and complicity in the changes. The study showed that vocal resistance was sparse with silence, neglect, and exit being the more realistic options.

According to the researcher, the effective management of this educational sector becomes necessary. In recent years, a powerful combination of change forces has been bearing down on Palestinian higher education and research institutions involving the consolidation of research resources, fluctuating levels of financial resources, negative demographic trends on the one hand, and the need for excellence and involvement in Palestinian higher education and research on the other. These developments, when combined, compel institutions to guarantee efficient change management to meet lofty targets outlined in planning documents where this is in alignment with (Grantins, Sloka & Jekabsone, 2017: 85) asserting that implementing reforms at universities asserts the development of particular concepts.

Leadership Competence

As one of the obstacles that confront HEIs governance and administrative practices, leadership competency forces more stressful pressure on performing the best practices. Results were categorized into three main sub-themes related to training, collaboration, and department management. Regarding leadership training, results highlighted the issue where most of the senior leaders at HEIs are academicians with high university degrees who were appointed to leading positions. These seniors are mainly assigned the position for one two-year period which may be extended for two, nevertheless, still, the position is subject to mobility. The results regarding assigning the academics senior positions were divided into two

groups of those who claim that there is no need to assign the administrative senior positions to those who are professors or associated professors hence what is needed is leadership skills.

The second group's results highlighted the issue of changeable leadership practices that need leadership skills and extensive training. Most of those who are assigned leadership positions rely on their accumulated experience and not on leadership practice knowledge. According to the researcher, senior management in HEIs, represented by Deans and heads of departments, has little potential for implementing dramatic cultural reform during the middle stages of administration. However, they are still capable of improving staff, and training practices, and introducing team spirit to their departments. While the beliefs and aims of manager academics differ significantly at this level, many of the tools utilized to drive reform progress remain consistent. This is consistent with (Eggins, 2003). The provided accounts by senior manager-academics are consistent with the current managerial agenda and are used as a legitimation for implementing reforms, especially organizational reorganization and the introduction of new modes of financial discipline and performance monitoring.

The second resulting subtheme entitled governance and HEIs management competence was cooperation and collaboration between the administration and the departments on one hand and between the management in other HEIs nationally, regionally, and internationally. However, despite most of the responses asserting the competitive nature, other respondents reflected the positive side of this competition, precisely confirming the existence of good collaboration. According to the researcher, collaboration in the context of higher education reinforces productivity in terms of leadership competency. Collaboration is further associated with elements that can contribute to quality procedures and sustainability. In this regard, the study agrees with other studies outside the Palestinian context such as (Stensaker, Hovdhaugen, & Maassen, 2019; Caniglia et al., 2017: 764-779).

According to (Caniglia et al., 2017: 764), there are success factors for transnational collaboration, including: "combining local and global considerations; making effective use of digital technologies; capitalizing on cultural and national differences, and making the best of available". Collaboration in the context of higher education must also question the existence or absence of collaboration within and among HEIs, the industrial sector, and the government in stimulating innovation. In this regard, Gachie, (2020: 203) recommended that "the government's role in the collaboration should be defined; highlighting that collaboration between HEIs and the private sector should be strengthened by applying the proposed new framework". Collaboration can be developed in the form of practical training, and internships and developed by HEIs and faculties with technical, natural sciences, and medical specializations. According to (Tetrevova & Vlckova, 2020: 105), "managers of the monitored HEIs consider collaboration with the nonacademic sphere to be very important. It is perceived to be more important and developed to a larger extent at the national level".

Department Management

At the management of the department level, the obtained results anticipated problems that were reflected in the respondents' answers and replies. These challenges ranged from problems in communication in terms of the department level, decision-making alongside leadership style. Based on the obtained results and according to the researcher, governance is associated with the communication. Effective communication can be reflected in work efficiency and productivity and when it comes to the department level, lots of challenges and problems are created resulting from miscommunication. According to Colocassides (2021), the use of leadership communication inspires and motivates people in an organization to act more powerfully and productively to meet strategic managerial objectives and choices. Good communication is also helpful when it comes from a successful leader who knows how to turn on a team to become more effective and productive in a very demanding and fast-changing global working environment. While misunderstanding can formulate a gap that hinders governance in terms of the academic department level with other departments on one hand and with the senior academic affairs on the other. Furthermore, miscommunication can result from a lack of leadership training where academic leaders cannot delegate tasks or they cannot listen actively to their academic staff members. Good communication is crucial when implemented in big complex institutions in the context of higher education where there is a

need to manage diversity for a better result especially under pressure when external economic reasons affect HEIs as the case in Palestine and other countries.

The obtained results under this category further manifested problems that were associated with the head department's leadership decision-making. When talking about decision-making it is worth mentioning that it is a process that needs skills where the good leaders can associate it with his or her leadership style and with other leadership theories, for instance, change management and distributed leadership to name a few. The study agrees with other literature that ascertains the vitality of communication to the success of an organization where the communication environment can provide support for organizational success (Schuttler, 2009, Abusamra, 2014).

There are different challenges that leaders face at the workplace generally and in the working department's environment formulating reasons affecting their decisions and actions to keep a team together. Heads of departments under the umbrella of the HEIs vision should strive to implement strategic organizational decisions and solve problems such as low morale, low productivity, poor quality, interpersonal conflict, intergroup conflict, unclear or inappropriate goals, inappropriate leadership styles, poor team performance, inappropriate organizational structure, poorly designed tasks, poor response to environmental demands, and poor customer service. The effectiveness of leaders' actions should motivate team building and employee relations, to create an organizational culture. The creation of an organizational culture should reach management's goals and achieve value for its human capital as asserted by (Colocassides, 2021).

Discussion of the Third Research Question: How Can the Proposed Educational Reform Theory Affect the Effectiveness and Efficiency of Higher Education in the State of Palestine?

The fourth research questions aim to draw lines of the required theory of education reform in terms of necessities and needs distributed to the main higher education factors. Mainly, results identified three major categories including organization, management, and scientific research as major areas that can directly benefit from the proposed theory of the management of higher education reform.

Organization

The findings emphasize the significance of modern education theory in framing and defining the responsibilities of higher education actors such as ministries, staff, students, parents, and stakeholders, as well as the labor market. Given that higher education is a complex platform of knowledge and power, it is critical to define the responsibilities of the education players, which include these institutions' personnel, students, society, the labor market, and associated ministries such as the Ministry of Economy and Labor. According to the researcher, when it comes to change, everything matters, therefore HEIs should be the first to allocate their goal. HEIs may not only organize but also describe the difference between anticipation and actuality. Another major point is the engagement of stakeholders and collaboration with several ministries which represent indications of the management of reform efficacy. The researcher reinforces what is truly required is proper coordination with the appropriate concerned authorities such as the ministry of economics and the ministry of labor. The government should monitor and supervise in an organizational capacity. The voice of the ministry should be heard and visible.

HEIs are in dire need to question their organizational structure in correlation to the practiced leadership. The types of organizational structure at all levels including the administration and the department level can be redefined and selected properly based on the proposed themes in this regard, the study is in accord with (Buckner, 2011; Arnove, 2013; File et al., 2016). Improving the organizational structure can help to support the recommended reforms by shaping the success of the communication and cooperation process. The reform agenda can also specify how the given governing responsibilities and legislations will be applied and communicated within the framework of the suitable structure chosen following a unified vision. Results further highly asserted the positive effect that can be resulted in effective communication in all prospects hence the organizational structure can sustain management. It also can be reflected by better communication between the educational actors at the management level. Meaning that, it is all about improving communication, whether top-down or bottom-up, at the department or institutional level, between HEIs at

the same regional or local level, or between HEIs and the government. According to the researcher, when the necessary reform agenda is implemented, it is important to improve management communication.

Management

The findings of this study assert the usefulness and urgency of the reform theory in improving HEIs' management practices. The reform hypothesis has the potential to improve management perception as well as behavior in areas like strategic planning, organizational structure, and quality management. Furthermore, familiarity with leadership styles and practices is a requirement that might specify the urgency of the transformation. As a result, the suggested change might center on preparing future senior leaders, as well as their peers and colleagues, to lead their departments and institutions to success. According to the researcher, the success of the reform should be based on management. This necessitates extensive study on the best management methods, as well as the assessment and feedback of leadership styles. Increased autonomy benefits policy and management reform, program formation, human resource management, financial structure and management, decision-making processes, resource distribution and management, student recruiting and assessment, and personnel management and appraisal. The study in this sense is similar to those (Varghese & Martin, 2013) asserting that the reform theory can help policymakers develop rules to improve the management of HEIs. Results further clarified that based on anticipating challenges and the proposed reform theory, training agendas can be reassigned based on the departments and the institution's needs. This matches other studies' results such as those (Zelkovitz, 2014; Tetrevova & Vlckova, 2020).

Scientific Research

The needed reform agenda can enhance the status of scientific research status in the Palestinian HEIs. Therefore, the management reform theory can correlate all the needed categories that can result in increasing, improving, and developing the scientific research efficacy as in line with studies (Sweileh et al., 2014; Saffarini, 2010). In this regard, the management reform theory can integrate planned strategic practices about scientific research status leading it to success. The new reform agenda must bolster scientific research activities in Palestinian institutions, especially when it comes to the assigned genuine difficulties. As scientific research is entitled to the name of the Palestinian ministry of higher education, tremendous efforts should be directed to challenges that entitled funding and encouraging applied research. Most of the research efforts are devoted to humanities and theoretical topics while research and development are missing. The Palestinian governance policies can help to coordinate the process of collaboration amongst HEIs in terms of scientific research. This can lead to increased productivity in terms of scientific research status. Much progress may be expected if cooperation and collaboration amongst HEIs in scientific research are explicitly foreseen. The reform theory may assert such coordination and establish the necessary leading policies. The results in this question are aligned with different studies in the Palestinian context such as (Saffarini, 2010), and in the international context such as (Chakman, 2019). When discussing the management of the reform, this research aims at ensuring a better future for Palestinian Higher education by anticipating challenges and formulating related theories. This section proposes management reform theories based on the obtained result categories. It highlights the researcher's interpretation and analysis of the proposed theory based on the obtained results from the aforementioned research questions. The obtained themes and subthemes helped the researcher to generate the needed reform theory. Anticipating higher Education challenges is the first step to put the new management reform paradigm forward to enable the Palestinian HEIs to deliver on their mandates more effectively and accountably, and therefore better positions Palestine to confront global challenges.

Education management reform is both a theory and a practice. It accepts the idea that funds follow the offers and programs produced and sought after by those closest to students, faculty, and the educational institutions they select. It is the flexibility and freedom that educators have to innovate. Higher education reform is a broad umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of alternatives and systems. Above all, it shifts authority away from the district and state and onto staff, staff leaders, policymakers, stakeholders, and students who choose what they require, what is to be assessed, and what success looks like. The

Management reform is about improving the Palestinian HEIs ability to deliver on their mandates. It seeks to improve its effectiveness, enabling it to act faster, more nimbly, with better information, and be more accountable. It seeks to achieve the objective of enhanced effectiveness and accountability and based on the obtained results the main categories helped the researchers to formulate the proposed management reform theories. Results assert the need for management reform based on the participants' views. The stage theory of organizational change theory can be applied where change needs to be implemented stage by stage. Under the previous literature such as (Arnett & Tanner, 2009; Ferraris, Bresciani & Del Giudice, 2016), stage theory asserts a series of changes that organizations have to pass in the change journey. Once the stages have been identified, tactics to encourage change may be linked to specific times in the change process. Each necessitates a distinct set of tactics based on the organization's stage of adopting, implementing, and maintaining new ways, as well as socio-environmental variables. Throughout the HEIs' administration, different leaders or "change agents" take on leadership responsibilities at various phases. The strategies that institutions choose are determined by their stage of transformation and whether the social context surrounding the innovation is supportive or not.

The stage theory is presented in figure (2) where the researcher highlights the process of change which should be based on a strong foundation depending on the assigned government regulation and governance. Then the change should be placed in the institutions' management and administration. Then finally it reaches staff and their scientific research contribution. However, based on regional and international reform experience in management reform, HEIs should be cautious of adopting or borrowing the proposed education reform concepts. The proposed reform agenda represents difficulties with contradicting goals and purposes entitling the Palestinian territories; reforms with identical titles end up appearing quite different due to contextual variations, and such reforms are only tangentially linked to teaching and learning, and therefore to results. The reform program, in a certain context, should be based on a strong sense of educational purpose that is appropriate for the social context. At its core, higher education management reform is the notion that the needs and merits of students must be prioritized in all policies and activities governing education. Adopting a philosophy of transformation in the educational system that includes the following components: (1) Change should be guided by a unified vision and results-oriented; (2) Government policies should provide consistently, but broad, guidelines; (3) widespread public support is essential, both for setting general directions and making local decisions; and (4) all interested parties should recognize that change will take time and support. The obtained themes from the first research question highlight the role of the higher education inception in reshaping and formulating the management reform theory. The higher education inception can revise the Palestinian HEIs management reform in terms of reasoning, assessment, and the future forward. According to the researcher, the Palestinian higher education origin and inception is the foundation of all the reform attempts where the Palestinian universities are attached to the reason of their establishment as a symbol of resistance, power, and freedom. They represent the hope of all the Palestinian youth generation. Respectively, the researcher reinforces that any reform attempts in the context of Palestinian higher education, should be based on the universities' inception to be the leading start. The inception, in consequence, will influence both the higher education vision as well as the witnessed challenges. The second theory was obtained from the second research question entitled the HEIs administration and management. The Palestinians Higher education institutions, like all other human organizations, represent vast, complex, adaptive social systems. Consequently, change is needed to adapt to the impact of changeable administrative practices and to alleviate the administrative disruption resulting from a lack of management experience and lack of practice. Even with the existing resistance the change can assert quality practices, help to assess the current status quo, and formulate new criteria of evaluation. This will also have a positive influence on the presented programs and accreditation. Eventually, it will assert its financial status by managing the resources and applying the best funding resources. According to the researcher, the growth in student numbers, changes in student financial status, greater marketization in the higher education sector, the changeable student choice, and the continued internationalization reinforce the need for a management rethink. As a result of the changing atmosphere of higher education, it is necessary to evaluate how to grow their leaders and what proper leadership conduct could be to adapt to these new conditions. This study in this is following (Black, 2015). Accordingly, some changes in the

Palestinian HEIs governmental frameworks, relative resource reductions, and institution development have resulted in changes in internal management. These changes include an increase in total managerial and administrative work at the institutional and infra/institutional levels, shifts in the tasks and relative power of academics and administrators within universities, an expanded range of tasks for non-academic administrators as well as an increase in their numbers, and the development of academic administration. Hence collaboration is a crucial matter, much depends on the structure of the Palestinian HEIs to fulfill stakeholders' needs, align with best practices internationally, and overcome the challenges of complying with the requirements of many regulatory bodies at the local, regional, and global levels. There are no variations in employees' perceptions of the nature of the organizational structure and their participation in decision-making. However, the process of cultural interaction between Palestinian universities and Arab and foreign institutions is still unsatisfactory at zero or less than 5%, limiting Palestinian universities' ability to influence other cultures. The process of cultural exchange with universities around the world, as well as offering joint economic, social, political, and other university courses, contributes to advocating Arab and international public opinion in keeping the Palestine issue at the forefront of Arab and international concerns. Receiving Arab and international academic missions also helps to increase university cohesion between abroad and Palestine, which has a positive impact on the internal Palestinian situation and a continued and regular interdependence with higher education institutions in the Arab world and around the world, which benefits the Palestinian people significantly.

Another theory attributed to staff involved in the management reform process is based on the appointed results. Increasing staff involvement can be attained by applying the needed training at the administrative levels sustained with alleviating the confronted challenges. This can be interlinked with the presented programs and curriculum. The HEIs in the management reform should ensure: (1) meeting curricular challenges for systemic reform, (2) linking staff professional development with reform activities, (3) aligning assessment with curriculum, and (4) maintaining political support for the reform efforts.

Based on the obtained results, the management reform should include three key areas for the three levels: a unifying vision and goals that provide a coherent direction/strategy for education reform throughout the system and are applied to all HEIs; a coherent system of state policy guidance that promotes these ambitious student outcomes; and a restructured governance system that defines the responsibilities of the various stakeholders (Figure 2). The management reform should be comprehensive in addressing these three areas to varying degrees where they overlap.

FIGURE 2
THE MANAGEMENT OF THE REFORM THEORY
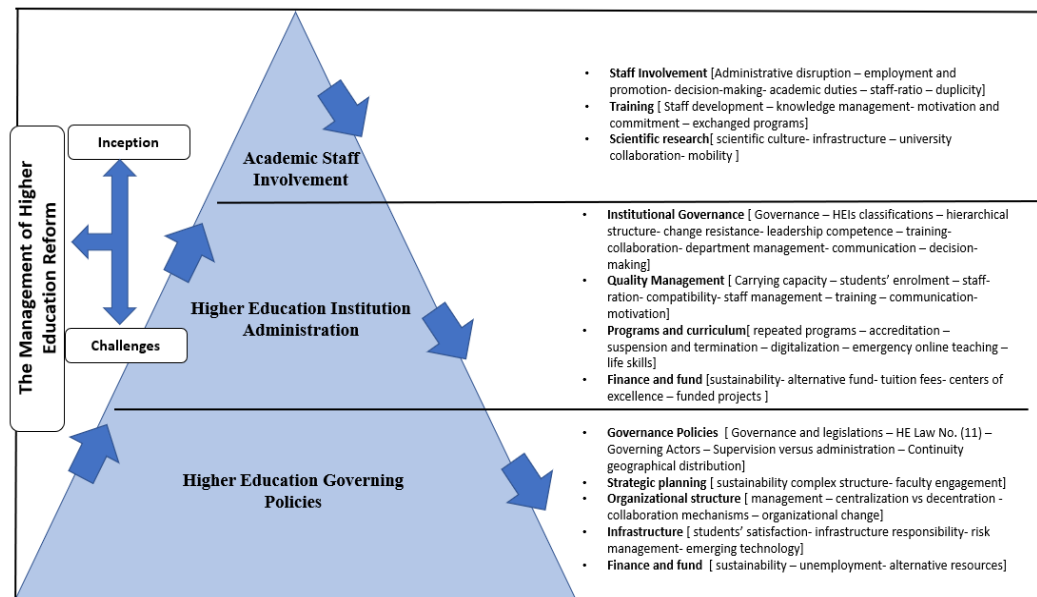
Source: The researcher

IMPLICATIONS

Based on the obtained results and the supported discussion, some implications are appointed in the following major fields that are interlinked with the management reform as follows:

1. When the various leadership paradigms anticipated in the Higher Education sector are compared to existing leadership theory and practice, additional complexities in the development of Higher Education leaders might be identified.

2. Each academic strategic plan must identify and align with the specific features of academic leadership and individual academic leaders to succeed.

3. The Palestinian universities are in dire need to maximize their government funding, it becomes even more important if HEIs are to attract additional resources, public or private. Thus, for HEIs eager to retain or expand their student numbers, and thus the fund that flows through them, attention must be paid to the program mix offered in attractively packaged programs, interdisciplinary programs, workplace learning, generic skills, and other Employability characteristics.

4. The Palestinian universities may contribute to regional development via "knowledge transfer" as well as fulfilling local and regional skill shortages. In addition to localized economic requirements, the promises of a "global knowledge economy" may be used to gain additional funds for research-related activities through partnerships and different entrepreneurial initiatives.

5. To address and meet the requirements of a diverse student body, HEIs must adapt their structures, culture, curriculum, and teaching programs. Researchers in higher education must focus their efforts on assisting the government, authorities, and other HEIs counterparts in determining the most suitable reforms and adjustments to curriculum and teaching in educational settings. More resources from various sources should be spent on technology-use training so that instructors may better educate pupils to utilize technology, particularly in the context of new evaluations.

6. Universities must successfully offer services to industry, such as consulting and implementation of co-developed curriculum, to stay financially viable. They should also think about utilizing novel funding structures including public-private partnerships and private equity investments. This requires a strong business attitude and well-structured processes.

7. Universities must comprehend education innovation and have plans in place to adapt to the latest digital developments with potential educational functions, such as augmented reality and artificial intelligence, to optimize tech-related efficiency benefits. To ensure data security and long-term viability, new infrastructure and systems should be built in collaboration with trustworthy providers.

8. The ideal way to start new cooperation is to start from the ground up with staff collaboration, then progressively develop it with official assistance. Universities should seek out "higher-ranked" partners to collaborate with in areas where they have complementary strengths.

CONCLUSION

In the Palestinian higher education context, the management of the reform is quickly becoming a critical component of the relationship between Palestinian society and higher education. It entails societal expectations of the higher education system as well as the HEIs' reaction to the rapid changes. Politics, economics, science and technology, and religion all have an impact on Palestinian social circumstances. Correspondingly, this research aims to addressing the management of higher education reform anticipating the confronted challenges and weaknesses. The research aims neither to be comprehensive nor to suggest solutions to these vexing challenges; rather, its only goal is to offer a simple theoretical framework that might help policymakers and university leaders simplify, focus, and assess the current challenges and weaknesses in their HEIs contexts. The study appointed major challenges in the HEIs administration and governance, staff involvement, and government policies. These challenges were represented by key themes based on the conducted interviews with different senior leaders and governing body members working in the Palestinian HEIs. Their perspective and opinions helped the researchers to conclude different theories to assert the management reform process. To satisfy the expectations of stakeholders and regulatory authorities, the Palestinian HEIs must determine whether to perform various administrative duties through specialized units/centers/offices or standing committees as part of governance. Furthermore, the ability to empower senior management resources must be connected with responsibility for mandate execution so that heads of entities are empowered to deliver on their mandates and can be held accountable for performance. The study found that the major component of systemic reform is a restructured governance system that defines the responsibilities of the various levels of the system to ensure that change is manifested in HE practices. This entails the Decentralization of decision-making authority where decisions should be taken at the point of delivery to ensure an effective and timely response. Furthermore, policies and operational processes must be simplified and streamlined to ensure a nimbler, more efficient, and effective mandate implementation nationally and globally. The research recommends conducting future studies that formulate different models of management reform based on the obtained results. It further recommends applying more future studies on the university students' needs, satisfaction, and their role in shaping the Palestinian higher education strategic plan hence they are considered the main input and output of the educational process. Further future studies can be allocated to the students' governing roles and participation in the decision-making at the university level as well as the ministry level. The collaboration between higher education and the private sector alongside other ministries is a persistent need under the increased unemployment disruption.

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