Quality Assurance in the Palestinian Higher Education Institutions: IUG as a case study

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Introduction: Higher education in Palestine

- Palestine recognizes education as a basic right and as one of the prerequisites for achieving social, cultural and economic goals.

- The Palestinian universities are considered to be young according to international standards, as the establishment of the oldest university was only forty years.

- The higher education system as a whole have witnessed large shifts after the war in June 1967, as there has been wide spread in establishing community colleges and then the establishment of the major Palestinian universities began in 1971.
Introduction: Higher education in Palestine

The Palestinian universities were created during Israeli occupation, as part of a Palestinian collective effort to preserve the Palestinian identity as well as to provide young Palestinians with the opportunity to pursue higher education, after it became increasingly difficult for them to go abroad for such studies.

The Palestinian tertiary education is struggling to exist because of the difficulties it faces due to the occupation.

However, its newness has made it relatively open and, therefore, ready to embrace change.
Higher Education Statistics

• Palestinian higher education is unique in its structure as most universities are non-profit and non-governmental (public).

• According to MOHE recent statistics (2011), the number of Palestinian higher education institutions is (49). They are distributed as follows:
  – (15) Universities: (14 traditional universities, 1 open university)
  – (9) public universities,
  – (3) private universities,
  – (3) State / government universities.
  – (15) University colleges: (9) public, (2) for UNRWA, (4) private.
  – (20) Community colleges. All are private.

• There are (213,973) students registered in the Palestinian higher education institutions; (6600) from them are master students.

• There are about (14600) who work in higher education institutions as academic, employers (21%) are not fully employed.
(IUG) establishment and development

- Islamic university of Gaza (IUG) is an public academic institution established in 1978 in Gaza.

- IUG is a member of many worldwide associations: e.g. International Association of Universities, Community of Mediterranean Universities, Association of Arab Universities and Association of Islamic Universities, ..

- IUG started with three faculties. Now, its structure developed to have eleven faculties (Arts, Education, Science, Engineering, Information Technology, Commerce, Medicine, Sharia’a, and Foundation of Islam, Nursing, health sciences) to offer 112 BA., B.Sc., MA, M.Sc., Diploma, and Higher Diploma in a variety of disciplines.

- IUG has developed in 2004 the 1st strategic plan (2005 to 2010). In 2010, IUG developed the 2nd strategic plan (2011-2013).
IUG vision & Mission

• **Vision:**

IUG is a leading academic institution of knowledge, culture, and humanity service aiming at bringing about comprehensive community-based revival and rebirth.

• **Mission:**

IUG is an academic institution seeking the advancement of the academic and scientific progress of the community to keep pace with recent trends in higher education and technological development. IUG also encourages scientific research and contributes to generation building and community development within the framework of Islamic values.
IUG Strategic goals

**First Goal:** Devising new programs and upgrading the level of the current ones so as to keep in tandem with quality standards

**Second Goal:** Promoting, supporting and investing in scientific and academic research with the intention of achieving sustainable development

**Third Goal:** Strengthening IUG role in serving and developing the community

**Fourth Goal:** Controlling and raising the institutional efficiency, both administratively and technically

**Fifth Goal:** Improving IUG environment and the level of services provided for students and staff

**Sixth Goal:** Strengthening partnership relationships and cooperation with local, regional and international
# IUG statistics

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<tr>
<td><strong>Full-time Faculty</strong></td>
<td>399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administrative &amp; service staff</strong></td>
<td>478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
<td>around 21000 students in two locations (60% are females)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Colleges</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Departments</strong></td>
<td>48</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Academic programs</strong></td>
<td>112   (one PhD, 28 masters, 69 B.A, 5 higher diploma, 9 professional diploma)</td>
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</table>
| **International projects & awards** | • QIF projects funded by EU & WB  
|                             | • WHO(5 academic programs)  
|                             | • Erasmus Mundus (2 projects)  
|                             | • Tempus (2 projects)  
|                             | • Al Maqdsi program (2)  
|                             | ............... |
Quality in Palestine

• The Palestinian universities and colleges did not have any formal mechanism for planning at the national level, or financing, or taking decisions in a systematic way till the establishment of the Higher Education Council in 1977.

• With the advent of the Palestinian National Authority in 1994, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) was responsible for “education” and “higher education”. In June 1996, a Ministry of Higher Education was established to be part of the executive authority. (MOEHE, 2003, 3).

• The Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission (AQAC) was established in 27-1-2002 as a governmental semi-autonomous body under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) and directly responsible to the Minister.
Accreditation & Quality Assurance Commission (AQAC)

• The general goal of (AQAC) is to improve the quality of higher education in Palestine, customize it to meet the national strategic priorities and control its quality through the clear instructions and methods to accredit the new programs and evaluate continuously the existing ones.

• The tasks included: evaluating higher education institution and programs, accrediting newly developed programs, insure that institutions meet the general and specific accreditation criteria, develop QA system and insure its implementation at HE institutions.
Quality Unit at IUG

Vision: Unit aspires to become one of the important centers of excellence through the development of renewable standards for quality, academic and institutional management in higher education at the local, regional and global levels.

Mission: To prepare IUG to meet the requirements and standards of the national accreditation commission, spread quality culture, lead the continuous improvement efforts regarding the institutional academic performance, and gain the confidence of the stakeholders & society with regards to graduates in the light of specific clear standards.
Quality Unit at IUG

objectives

• Gain the trust of the Palestinian society and the international output of the educational process by meeting the requirements of the local and regional labor market.

• Uphold the values of excellence and competitiveness in the colleges and centers of the University.

• Development of standards and benchmarks of performance fixed by the administrative concept of total quality.

• Continuous improvement of the university environment.
Quality Structure at IUG

University President

Vice president of administrative affairs

Vice president of academic affairs

Director of administrative quality unit

Director of Academic quality unit

Panning unit and development

Administrative quality council

Academic Quality Council

(chairs for quality committees in the faculties)

Excellence Teams

Department quality committees
• Quality was introduced at IUG as an authentic Islamic concept for the following terms: “Ihsan, Itqan, Tasdeed”.

• Concept of quality at IUG was integrated gradually in the system.

• Faculty and administrative staff were trained on quality concepts.

• Establishment of QA structure (academic and administrative) was in 2002.
Quality unit Activities

• Drawing the general policy of quality in education at the Islamic University, and then oversee their implementation (Process manuals...)

• Identify the foundations and principles of supervision, monitoring and periodic evaluation of the adoption and ongoing development in the context of local variables, Arab and international, (performance evaluation system, Questionnaire...)

• Coordination and preparation of new academic programs at the Islamic University.
Quality main tasks

• Follow-up evaluations (internal and external) for academic programs and institutional assessment.

• The development of administrative structures and job descriptions and administrative systems at the university, (Job description manuals....)

• Identify training needs of all employees at the university and to develop practical programs such as teaching skills of university, Use of technology in university teaching...etc

• Pursue the development of the performance appraisal process for employees at the Islamic University and benefit from the outputs.
Quality unit tasks

• Conduct studies aimed at improving the university environment and the development of consistent standards to be measured.

• Motivate and reward teams and individuals for excellence in the application of quality education, (academic and administrative excellence reward).

• Encourage the computing and make improvements to the software used in departments and centers and units.

• Preparation of annual and periodic reports. Attention to complaints of beneficiaries and their suggestions and follow up with the concerned authorities.
Activities

– Setting up quality committees in all university faculties and units, in addition to having quality representative for each department/unit.

– Holding in a regular basis a number of workshops & meetings on the different issues of quality in education.

– Issuing and distributing related educational materials on various educational quality topics.

– Having an reward system that enhances quality achievements and supports it.
Activities

• Developing the capacity of academic and administrative staff of the University.

• Conducting training courses based on either needs assessment studies or performance assessment results.

• Continuous assessment and evaluation of academic, administrative and institutional processes at IUG.
  – Academic staff (Student, Department, Dean, Annual report)
  – Administrative staff (Department chair, head of the unit, the employee himself)
  – Academic plans

• Institutional self-evaluation
Major challenges

• Occupation as Gaza is still under occupation & the political environment is unstable

• Limited financial resources

• Quality is a journey and as a concept needs time to be fully integrated in the institution.

• There is no standards & models for QA that fits with our culture.

• Administrative processes at IUG are not all automated.
Lessons learned

• Quality is linked to our culture and is not difficult to achieve depending on local expertise.

• QA worldwide experiences & models are good to be studied in order build our own models that fit with our culture and meet our needs. Collaborative work between Arab and Islamic countries is needed in this regard.

• The existence of well-designed and linked strategic system, performance measurement system and quality system accelerates quality processes (holistic approach to quality).

• Quality needs to be a priority to prevail in the institution. Moreover, it needed to be supported financially, technically and administratively from top management.

• Continuous professional development efforts for faculty and staff affected positively on the implementation of quality activities.
Future prospects

• Work cooperatively with Islamic countries in order to develop quality model that fits our culture to meets our needs and aspirations.

• Work with Islamic and Arabic countries to exchange experiences.

• Being open to successful higher education quality world wide experiences.