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Background Paper

Round Table (4)



**Education in Gaza Amid War:
From Survival to Recovery and Renewals**

July 2026



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**PALESTINE ECONOMIC POLICY
RESEARCH INSTITUTE (MAS)**

Tel No. +970 (2) 2987053/4

Fax No. +970 (2) 298055

info@mas.ps

ww.mas.ps

Education in Gaza Amid War: From Survival to Recovery and Renewal

Prepared by: Dr Adnan M. Aish, Lecturer at Al-Azhar University, Gaza
Raheeq Hurani, Assistant Researcher

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1. Background and Context

Even before the current war, the Gaza Strip faced deep-rooted structural challenges that had shaped its educational system for nearly two decades. Since the imposition of the Israeli blockade in 2007, restrictions on the movement of people and goods, recurrent rounds of armed conflict, and chronic economic decline have constrained public investment, weakened educational infrastructure, and limited access to learning resources. These conditions contributed to persistently high poverty and unemployment rates, placing considerable pressure on the educational sector (World Bank, 2024a; PCBS, 2025).

This phase cannot be understood in isolation from the pre-war educational reality in Gaza. Even before the war, the sector was grappling with chronic structural challenges, manifesting in school overcrowding, a double-shift school system, and limited resources. These pressures were particularly acute in UNRWA-run schools, which served approximately 294,086 students in 284 schools across Gaza during the 2022/2023 academic year, with 71% running on a double-shift basis because of overcrowding (UNRWA, 2023).

Nevertheless, despite these prolonged constraints, Gaza achieved remarkably strong educational outcomes. Prior to the war, adult literacy exceeded 97%, enrolment in basic education was close to universal, and the territory had one of the highest rates of participation in higher education in the region, supported by 17 higher education institutions. These achievements reflected the strong societal commitment to education and the resilience of educational institutions, even under conditions of protracted conflict and economic hardship (PCBS, 2025)

A recent study by Aldahdouh et al. (2026) argues that the impact of the current war on Gaza's education system extends beyond the destruction of schools and universities. The systematic erosion of scientific capabilities, research institutions, and knowledge production has profound implications for human development and institutional continuity. It also undermines the Palestinian society's capacity to recover and pursue sustainable economic development. This broader perspective highlights that rebuilding education is not solely a matter of reconstructing physical infrastructure but also of restoring the scientific and institutional capacities that underpin long-term recovery and resilience (ibid.).

The current war that began in October 2023 marked an unprecedented turning point in the trajectory of education in Gaza. Schools, universities, and Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutions sustained extensive damage, accompanied by substantial human losses among students, teachers, and education sector personnel (UNESCO, 2025).

This paper is based on an analytical review of Palestinian government reports, UN documents, and sector assessments issued by the Education Cluster¹, as well as international literature on education in crises and post-conflict recovery. It also draws on field experience and practices associated with educational response during the period from October 2023 to June 2026.

2. State of Education During the War on Gaza Strip (Oct 2023- June 2026)

The education sector in Gaza has experienced one of the most extensive waves of destruction affecting education systems in modern conflicts. Estimates by the Education Cluster and UNESCO indicate that over 95% of schools in the Gaza Strip have sustained varying degrees of damage, with a large number either completely or partially destroyed. Many schools have also been turned into shelters for internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Education Cluster, 2025; UNESCO, 2025).

Higher education institutions have likewise been directly affected. Universities, such as Al Azhar University, The Islamic University, and Palestine University, colleges, and Vocational Training Centers (VTCs) have suffered severe damage, disrupting learning and scientific research and adversely affecting higher education opportunities for tens of thousands of students (MOEHE, 2025).

Beyond disrupting teaching and learning, the destruction of universities has severely undermined Gaza's scientific and research capacity. **Rather than viewing this solely as damage to higher education institutions, a recent study refers to this phenomenon as “scienticide”, which denotes the systematic destruction of a society's scientific capabilities.** This includes the loss of researchers, research infrastructure, institutional leadership, and knowledge-production systems. The study emphasizes that such damage deprives society of a critical component necessary

1. Education Cluster is the humanitarian coordination mechanism for education, co-led globally by UNICEF and Save the Children and comprising United Nations agencies, national and international NGOs, donors, and education authorities

for development and post-war recovery. Therefore, rebuilding scientific and research capacity is essential for long-term human development (Aldahdouh et al., 2026).

Data indicate that over 625,000 school-age children have been affected by the disruption of schooling, while the studies of approximately 88,000 students enrolled in higher education institutions have been disrupted. More than 19,000 students have been killed, in addition to over 1,000 teachers and administrative staff members. Thousands of others have been injured or forcibly displaced (OCHA, 2025).

The impacts of the crisis have not been confined to physical infrastructure damage and human losses, but have included the prolonged educational wastage, heightened risks of school dropout, and the deterioration of the mental health of children and young people, thereby posing a long-term threat to human and social development, while simultaneously undermining the scientific capabilities and institutional knowledge required for Gaza's future recovery (WHO, 2025; Aldahdouh et al., 2026).

Educational wastage is defined as the gap between the level of learning expected of a student for his or her age and grade, on one hand, and the actual level of learning achieved due to disruptions or interruptions in the educational process, on the other. It is usually measured using standardized diagnostic assessments that gauge basic skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and science, or through estimating lost years of learning relative to the normal learning trajectory (UNESCO, 2024). In the case of Gaza, preliminary indicators point to widespread educational wastage, which may amount to between two and three academic years for some groups of students. This situation calls for remedial education and accelerated learning programs during the recovery phase (Education Cluster, 2025).

As of 26 June 2026, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that the "Orange Line" placed approximately 64.9 per cent of the Gaza Strip under tighter and more direct Israeli control. Areas affected by these restrictions contained dozens of humanitarian facilities, including schools and UNRWA sites, alongside essential health, water, and food-service infrastructure. Although no verified public estimate was identified for the precise number of educational institutions located within these areas, their presence indicates that territorial restrictions may significantly limit the rehabilitation, reopening, and equitable geographical distribution of education services.

3. How Has Education in Gaza Adapted?

Despite the scale of destruction inflicted on the education sector in Gaza since October 2023, the educational process has not come to a complete halt. Rather, it has seen the emergence of an array of responses and initiatives to preserve learning continuity and mitigate the effects of education disruption. Reports issued by the Education Cluster and UNICEF indicate that education and humanitarian actors have resorted to a variety of alternative solutions to ensure that children and students have access to the minimum educational services. Such solutions encompassed e-learning, Temporary Learning Spaces (TLSs), community-based learning programs, and psychosocial support activities. Despite resource constraints, ongoing displacement, and security challenges, these interventions have helped prevent a complete interruption of education while preserving educational and social connections for many children and young people (Education Cluster, 2025; UNICEF, 2025).

The most salient adaptation strategies that emerged during the war can be grouped into four main areas: (3.1) online and distance learning; (3.2) TLSs; (3.3) community-based initiatives and informal learning; and (3.4) international partnerships and academic solidarity. This not only ensured the continuity of learning during the crisis but also generated valuable experience in flexible service delivery, community engagement, and multi-stakeholder collaboration that can inform more resilient education recovery efforts.

3.1 Online and Distance Learning

Following the suspension of in-person learning across most areas of the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) and Palestinian universities have increasingly employed digital learning tools to maintain continuity of the learning process. These efforts included launching the Ministry-run Virtual School initiative, using university electronic learning and social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and Facebook to disseminate educational materials and maintain contact with students. Several universities have produced recorded lectures and digital educational materials that could be downloaded and used under conditions of limited internet connection (MoEHE, 2025).

These initiatives have helped maintain contact between teachers and students and provided thousands of students with alternative learning opportunities. However,

their effectiveness remained limited due to recurring power outages, poor internet connectivity, damage to telecommunications infrastructure, and the limited availability of electronic devices among many households. Gaza's experience mirrors challenges encountered in Syria during the years of conflict, where poor digital infrastructure constrained the effectiveness of distance learning. In contrast, Ukraine benefited from a more advanced digital infrastructure that helped sustain the educational process on a broader scale (UNESCO, 2025).

3.2 Temporary Learning Spaces (TLSs)

TLSs became a key tool of emergency education response during the war. UNICEF, UNRWA, the Education Cluster, and numerous local and international organizations established TLS within shelter centers, camps, and affected communities to provide children who had lost access to formal schools with basic learning opportunities (Education Cluster, 2025).

The role of TLSs extended beyond the provision of basic educational activities to include psychosocial support services, recreational activities, and child protection programs, thereby providing war-affected children with a safer and more stable environment. These interventions are particularly important in the context of Gaza. Even before the war, the education system had faced significant challenges concerning school overcrowding and a double-shift school system, particularly in UNRWA-run schools, which accommodated a large number of students despite limited space and resources. These longstanding pressures were exacerbated by the mounting challenges confronting UNRWA, including chronic funding shortages, restrictions on its operations, and political and legislative measures affecting the Agency in several contexts. As the principal provider of education for Palestine refugee children in Gaza, any reduction in UNRWA's operational capacity had significant implications for access to education, continuity of learning, and the resilience of the education system as a whole

With the outbreak of the war, the destruction or damage of most schools, and the subsequent conversion of many schools into shelter centers for IDPs, overcrowding intensified in an unprecedented manner. TLSs were consequently required to operate in highly overcrowded settings with large numbers of children from different age groups and educational levels. Such initiatives also faced additional challenges, including shortages of educational materials, limited numbers of teachers and

volunteers, and difficulties in accessing certain areas due to recurrent displacement and Israeli-imposed movement and access restrictions. As a result, although TLSs succeeded in providing learning opportunities and psychosocial support to a large number of children, their intake capacity fell short of actual needs. They therefore served as an essential transitional solution but could not fully substitute for formal education (UNICEF, 2025).

3.3 Community-based Initiatives and Informal Learning

Local communities in Gaza demonstrated a remarkable ability to develop alternative learning mechanisms in response to the disruption of formal education and the difficulty of accessing schools during the war. These initiatives became particularly visible during periods of temporary lull and so-called ceasefires that occurred from late 2023 through 2024 and 2025. During periods of relative stability, teachers, volunteers, and parents organized small learning circles within shelter centres, residential neighbourhoods, and temporary communities. These community-based initiatives built on Palestinian experiences during the First Intifada (1987–1993), when prolonged school closures led to the establishment of informal learning groups in homes, mosques, and community spaces to ensure the continuity of education. Drawing on this legacy of educational resilience, local communities in Gaza adapted similar approaches to sustain learning under conditions of displacement, insecurity, and the widespread disruption of formal schooling. University students and graduates volunteered to provide remedial lessons and educational activities for children whose schooling had been interrupted for long periods. With more than 650,000 school-age children experiencing prolonged interruptions to formal education, community-based learning initiatives became an essential mechanism for maintaining educational continuity (UNICEF, 2025)

These initiatives reflected a high degree of community solidarity and an acknowledgement of the importance of education as a means of protection and resilience in the absence of a stable learning environment. They also helped mitigate the effects of the disruption of education and preserve children's educational and social connections, particularly in areas where schools could not operate and organized TLSs could not be established. However, the scale of these initiatives remained closely linked to the prevailing security situation and accessibility of affected communities. They typically declined or ceased during periods of intense military escalation and resumed during periods of relative calm (Education Cluster, 2025).

This experience closely resembles community-based learning models that emerged in Syrian refugee camps across Jordan and Lebanon, where local communities played a pivotal role in ensuring the continuity of learning when access to formal education was disrupted. These experiences demonstrate that while community-based learning can serve as a key mechanism for maintaining learning continuity during crises, it remains a transitional solution that cannot replace the formal education system or fully compensate for all aspects of the educational process (UNESCO, 2024).

3.4 International Partnerships and Academic Solidarity

Despite the unprecedented scale of the crisis facing higher education in Gaza, the international response from the global higher education community has remained limited and fragmented. While a number of universities, academic networks, and international organizations launched initiatives to support affected students and scholars, these efforts have fallen far short of the needs created by the widespread destruction of higher education institutions, the displacement of students and academics, and the disruption of academic mobility. Nevertheless, the partnerships that have emerged have played an important role in mitigating some aspects of the academic isolation imposed by the ongoing conflict. Numerous international universities and academic institutions have launched initiatives to support Palestinian students and researchers affected by the war through scholarships, distance learning opportunities, and access to digital libraries and Open Educational Resources (OERs). Examples include the Students at Risk initiative, which has supported students and researchers from conflict zones; academic host programs offered by European universities as part of international academic cooperation networks; and initiatives launched by universities in the UK, Germany, and Canada to provide scholarships and flexible learning opportunities for Palestinian students. In addition, many universities worldwide granted affected researchers and academics free access to scientific databases and electronic libraries (UNESCO, 2025).

At the institutional level, Palestinian universities, including the Islamic University of Gaza, Al-Azhar University, and Al-Aqsa University, expanded the scope of cooperation with international academic partners to provide online learning and academic exchange opportunities for students unable to pursue their studies through conventional means. International academic solidarity networks contributed to sustaining research collaboration while providing professional development and training opportunities for Palestinian academics.

The disruption of academic mobility has also emerged as a major challenge for higher education. Thousands of students admitted to universities abroad or awarded scholarships were unable to leave Gaza because of border closures and severe restrictions on movement, resulting in the loss or postponement of educational opportunities. At the same time, many Gazan students already enrolled in universities overseas faced significant obstacles in continuing their studies, including difficulties in renewing visas and residence permits, accessing financial support, obtaining official academic documents, and coping with the humanitarian consequences of the conflict affecting their families. These challenges underscore that the impact of the war on higher education extends beyond the physical destruction of universities to include the interruption of international academic mobility, educational continuity, and the future development of Gaza's human capital.

This experience highlights the importance of international partnerships in preserving the continuity of higher education during times of crisis, as it happened in Ukraine, where European universities offered host programs and academic scholarships to war-affected students and researchers. **In the case of Gaza, however, there remains a need to transform these initiatives from temporary responses into long-term strategic partnerships that support institutional recovery and the rebuilding of academic and research capacities (UNESCO, 2024).**

4. Assessing the Survival Phase

The survival and emergency response phase that began in October 2023 constituted a severe test of the resilience of Gaza's education system amid the large-scale destruction of educational infrastructure, recurrent displacement, and prolonged disruption of formal education. This phase cannot be understood in isolation from the pre-war educational reality in Gaza. Even before the war, the sector was grappling with chronic structural challenges, manifesting in school overcrowding, a double-shift school system, and limited resources. These pressures were particularly acute in UNRWA-run schools, which served approximately 294,086 students in 284 schools across Gaza during the 2022/2023 academic year, with 71% running on a double-shift basis because of overcrowding (UNRWA, 2023). With the outbreak of the war, this structural vulnerability escalated into a large-scale educational crisis. Most school buildings were damaged or destroyed, while schools previously attended by more than 503,500 children and employing approximately 18,900 teachers sustained direct strikes or damage in varying degrees, according to estimates by the Education Cluster (Education Cannot Wait, 2024; Education Cluster, 2025).

4.1 Strengths

The principal strength of the survival phase lies in the ability of education and community-based actors to maintain at least minimal continuity of learning despite the collapse of formal in-person schooling across Gaza. At the official level, the Palestinian MoEHE, together with Palestinian universities, sought to activate online learning, the Virtual School initiative, and available digital learning platforms, thereby maintaining a degree of educational engagement with students, particularly during periods when electricity and internet connectivity were available (MoEHE, 2025; UNESCO, 2025).

At the humanitarian level, UNICEF, UNRWA, and the Education Cluster-supported TLSs serve as essential emergency response tools. In September 2024, UNICEF reported that 39 TLSs were established, benefiting more than 12,400 students. Subsequent data indicated that these TLSs expanded considerably in 2025, serving tens of thousands of children. UN and media reports estimated that over 50,000 children benefited from these safe learning environments, noting that some UNRWA reports on TLSs and digital learning provided a higher estimate of the number of such children (UNRWA, 2025). This model stands out as a strength, as it extends beyond the provision of basic education and includes psychosocial support, child protection, and recreational activities.

Community-based initiatives have also emerged as a key strength. Teachers, volunteers, university students, and graduates helped organize small learning groups within shelter centers and residential neighborhoods, particularly during periods of relative calm or temporary ceasefires. Although no consolidated official data is available on the number or specializations of volunteer teachers, these initiatives appear to have involved teachers in core subjects such as Arabic, mathematics, science, and English. They also involved university students who assisted younger children with reading, writing, and mathematics. These initiatives demonstrate that local communities continued to view education not merely as an institutional service but also as a tool of protection and resilience (Education Cluster, 2025).

Higher education also served as a strength because of its ability to maintain a certain degree of engagement with international academic networks. Although the studies of approximately 88,000 higher-education students were disrupted, various academic solidarity initiatives emerged, including limited scholarships, distance-learning opportunities, access to digital resources, and support networks for affected

students and researchers. This response bears some resemblance to the experience of Ukraine, where universities and international academic networks played a key role in supporting war-affected students and researchers (UNESCO, 2025).

Collectively, these responses demonstrated the value of sustained coordination among governmental institutions, humanitarian organizations, universities, and local communities, highlighting the importance of collaborative approaches as a foundation for future education recovery.

4.2 Weaknesses

The survival phase exposed deep structural gaps that existed before the war and were subsequently further entrenched by it. Before October 2023, the education system was already operating under the strain of overcrowding and on a double-shift basis, with limited resources. The war then destroyed or rendered most educational infrastructure non-operational, while many schools were converted into shelter centers, severely limiting the prospects for the rapid restoration of in-person learning (UNRWA, 2023; Education Cluster, 2025).

The experience also revealed constrained digital preparedness. While some students were able to benefit from online learning when devices, internet connectivity, and electricity were available, many others were unable to access these alternatives owing to poverty, power outages, poor telecommunications, damaged devices, and recurrent displacement. Consequently, digital learning was not equally accessible to all students, benefiting primarily households that possessed the minimum level of digital resources and alternative energy sources (UNESCO, 2025).

The crisis also exposed institutional weaknesses that extend beyond service delivery. Limited coordination among education stakeholders, fragmented planning processes, the absence of integrated education information systems, and dependence on short-term humanitarian financing constrained evidence-based decision-making and limited the educational sector's ability to prioritize and sequence recovery interventions effectively (MAS, 2025).

Visible gaps also emerged in the provision of inclusive education. Children with disabilities, those who had lost their official documentation, those displaced multiple times, and children who remained outside the education system for prolonged

periods had greater difficulty in gaining access to regular educational services. Moreover, most emergency initiatives lacked sufficient technical capacity and resources required to provide specialized services for these groups in a sustainable manner (UNICEF, 2025).

4.3 Opportunities

Despite the scale of the crisis, any future recovery process provides an opportunity to rebuild Gaza's education system on more flexible and equitable foundations. Moving beyond the physical reconstruction of schools toward a "Build Back Better" approach could offer the possibility of designing safer schools, expanding blended learning, connecting schools to renewable energy sources, and setting up national digital learning platforms that could be used in emergencies. International partnerships likewise offer an important opportunity to bolster higher education, scientific research, and vocational training. Palestinian expertise in the diaspora can be leveraged to support remote training, academic supervision, and the development of supportive curricula. They can also be harnessed to provide technical assistance to universities and schools (UNESCO, 2025).

The recovery process also provides an opportunity to institutionalize successful emergency practices rather than treating them solely as temporary responses. Experiences with blended learning, community-based initiatives, and collaborative partnerships can inform the development of a more resilient education system supported by stronger governance, improved coordination mechanisms, and sustainable education planning (MAS, 2025).

4.4 Threats

The most significant threats are manifested in continued political and security instability, the ongoing conflict, continued internal displacement, and limited long-term financing. Together, these factors risk confining education to a temporary humanitarian response and preventing the transition to sustainable institutional recovery (OCHA, 2025).

Prolonged educational wastage also constitutes a major threat, as it may lead to higher school-dropout rates, declining basic skills, and widening gaps among students based on geographic location, gender, disability, and economic status.

Unless large-scale remedial education and accelerated learning programs are implemented, educational wastage may ultimately translate into a long-term loss of human capital (Education Cluster, 2025).

The brain drain of educational and academic talents poses an additional long-term threat to the recovery of Gaza’s education sector. The death, injury, detention, displacement, and possible migration of qualified teachers, professors, researchers, educational administrators, and technical specialists working in technical and vocational education, and university staff risk weakening institutional capacity and reducing the availability of experienced professionals needed for educational recovery. UNESCO’s 2025 assessment reported that 1,112 higher education staff—representing approximately 22% of the sector’s workforce—had been killed, detained, or injured, highlighting the scale of human capital losses already sustained (UNESCO, 2025). Although no precise estimates are currently available on the scale of emigration, deteriorating living conditions, loss of income, and the destruction of educational institutions may increase the likelihood that these trained professionals will either leave Gaza or migrate to other sectors, thereby weakening the education system’s capacity to recover (UNESCO, 2025).

Table 1: SWOT Analysis of the Education Sector in Gaza

Strengths	Weaknesses
Continuity of learning in some forms despite the war	Large-scale destruction of educational infrastructure
Teachers and volunteers’ commitment	More extensive educational wastage
Community-based initiatives and TLSs	Poor digital infrastructure and unequal access
Academic, humanitarian, and international partnerships	Weak education governance, coordination, and education information systems (EIS)
Opportunities	Threats
Building back better through resilient and adaptive education systems	Relapse into conflict and instability.
Digital transformation and blended learning	Continued displacement
Development of technical and vocational education	Brain drain and erosion of scientific capacity
Leveraging Palestinian expertise in the diaspora	Limited long-term financing

The continued deterioration of higher education institutions and research capacity also poses a long-term threat to Gaza's recovery. Beyond limiting access to higher education, the erosion of scientific capabilities, academic leadership, and knowledge production weakens the foundations for innovation, institutional development, and future human development (Aldahdouh et al., 2026).

5. Transitioning from Survival to Recovery

The recovery phase marks a major turning point from emergency humanitarian response to the sustainable rebuilding of the education system. Recovery is not restricted to reopening schools or resuming education, but includes addressing the lingering educational, psychosocial, and institutional effects of the war while building a system that is more resilient and better equipped to respond to future crises. This transition also requires recovery planning that is sufficiently flexible to respond to different post-conflict scenarios while strengthening institutional coordination, governance, and evidence-based decision-making across the education sector.

5.1 Rehabilitation of Educational Infrastructure

Rehabilitation of educational infrastructure serves as a crucial starting point for any educational recovery process in Gaza. However, comprehending the scale of the current challenge requires taking into account the reality of the sector before the recent war. Before October 2023, Gaza's education system served more than 625,000 students enrolled in general education through approximately 800 public, private, and UNRWA-run schools, in addition to 17 higher education institutions. Although this system succeeded in absorbing the majority of students, it was already operating under immense pressure owing to school overcrowding, a double-shift school system, high population growth, and the limited availability of land earmarked for educational expansion (MOEHE, 2023).

With the outbreak of the war, most schools sustained damage in varying degrees, while many ceased operating or were turned into shelter centers for internally displaced persons. According to UN estimates, over 95 per cent of school buildings sustained damage or were destroyed to varying degrees, resulting in the loss of a substantial share of the education system's capacity (Education Cluster, 2025).

The current challenge is not confined to the number of damaged school buildings, but includes the gap between available educational capacity and actual demand for schooling. Even if all schools that can be utilized in the short term are brought back into operation, transitional solutions will still be required to absorb tens of thousands of students, particularly in areas that suffered the highest levels of destruction and displacement. It is, hence, important to combine the rehabilitation of existing schools with the establishment of TLSs and the expansion of modular learning modalities during the transitional period.

At the same time, reconstruction should not be limited to replacing damaged infrastructure. It should incorporate resilience measures such as flexible school design, emergency preparedness, renewable energy solutions, and digital infrastructure to ensure continuity of education during future crises (MAS, 2025).

Recovery experiences in Syria and Ukraine demonstrate that the swift reopening of schools constitutes an educational and psychosocial priority, even before comprehensive reconstruction is complete. In Syria, recovery efforts focused on reopening the least-damaged schools and using TLS to minimize prolonged disruption of schooling. In contrast, Ukraine relied on a combination of school rehabilitation, blended learning, and digital learning to maintain continuity of learning (UNESCO, 2023). In Gaza, however, applying these lessons requires careful consideration of the specificity of the Palestinian context, where reconstruction is expected to take place amid continuing displacement, severe shortages of resources and infrastructure, and ongoing restrictions on the import of construction materials, educational equipment, technology, and other essential goods. These constraints are likely to slow the rehabilitation of educational facilities and limit the pace of educational recovery.

5.2 Supporting Teachers and Restoring Educational Capacities

Teachers are the most important element of the education recovery process. Thousands have experienced displacement, loss of income sources, or have been afflicted with war-related trauma. Therefore, recovery requires the implementation of specialized psychosocial support programs alongside professional development programs focusing on remedial education, multi-grade class management, blended learning, and psychosocial support methods within the school environment. In a similar vein, professional and financial incentives should be developed to retain

qualified educational personnel and reduce brain drain from the education sector (UNICEF, 2025). Teacher support should also be embedded within a broader institutional strategy that strengthens school leadership, peer learning, and continuous professional support to enhance the education system's resilience during future crises (MAS, 2025).

Educational recovery should also recognize the important role that parents and local communities can play in supporting learning continuity. In particular, parents with university degrees, teaching experience, or other professional backgrounds—many of whom have lost their livelihoods because of the conflict—represent a valuable human resource that could contribute to educational recovery. Through community-based tutoring, small learning groups, homework support, mentoring, and psychosocial encouragement, these parents can help address learning gaps, especially for children who have limited access to online education or are unable to attend Temporary Learning Spaces (TLSs). Mobilizing qualified parents through structured community education programmes, supported by training and coordination from education authorities and humanitarian partners, could complement the work of teachers and strengthen the resilience of the education system during the recovery process

5.3 Restoring Learning and Addressing Educational Wastage

Educational wastage is among the most significant challenges facing the education sector in Gaza. Estimates indicate that a large number of students have lost between two and three years of regular learning as a result of the war, displacement, and prolonged education disruptions. Not only does addressing this challenge requires the implementation of nationwide diagnostic assessments to determine students' learning levels and measure gaps in basic skills, but it also requires the design of remedial education and accelerated learning programs focusing on reading, writing, mathematics, and science.

International experiences confirm that reinstating traditional educational curricula without first addressing educational wastage often leads to the accumulation of learning gaps and increases the likelihood of school dropouts, particularly among the most vulnerable groups. Accordingly, the complete reinstatement of the regular education pathway should be preceded by a transitional phase focusing on restoring basic skills and reintegrating students into the educational environment (UNESCO, 2024; UNICEF, 2024).

In this context, community-based initiatives and informal education can play a key role in mitigating the effects of educational wastage during the early years of recovery, particularly in areas experiencing shortages of educational facilities or the lingering effects of displacement. During the war, experience showed that community-based learning circles, TLSs, and volunteer programs were able to reach children who could not enroll in formal education (Education Cluster, 2025).

Nevertheless, reliance on informal education should be viewed as part of a transitional and complementary framework for formal education rather than a substitute. A phased model could be adopted that allows for the formal recognition of selected learning outcomes acquired through informal education through approved assessments and diagnostic tests, enabling students to be gradually reintegrated into the formal education system according to their actual learning levels. Conflict-affected states, such as Syria and South Sudan, have implemented accelerated education programs and gradual reintegration pathways to facilitate students' return to formal schooling after prolonged years of interruption (UNESCO, 2023).

5.4 Adapting the Implementation of the Palestinian Curriculum

During the recovery phase, priority is not to develop a separate curriculum for the Gaza Strip. Rather, given that the Palestinian curriculum is unified across the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the priority shall be accorded to adapting its implementation to reflect the effects of the war and students' current learning levels.

Not only does this require the reprioritization of learning objectives, but it also focusing on basic competencies and developing supportive educational materials and compensatory programs that enable students to remedy educational wastage. It also calls for enhancing critical thinking, problem-solving, digital skills, and self-learning through both teaching methods and extracurricular activities (MOEHE, 2025).

5.5 Digital Transformation and Building Crisis Preparedness

The war has highlighted the importance of educational technology in sustaining learning continuity. However, it simultaneously reveals the scale of the persistent digital gap. Therefore, the next phase should adopt a national strategy for digital transformation in education. Such a strategy should be centered on developing technological infrastructure, providing digital devices and services, and training

teachers and students on the effective use of such devices and services. Moreover, the next phase should build a flexible education system that combines in-person learning, online learning, and blended learning to ensure continuity of learning during future crises. These orientations are consistent with recent international experiences, which recognize digital resilience as an essential component of education systems' capacity to withstand emergencies and conflicts (UNESCO, 2025).

6. Education and Renewal: Toward a Future Vision for Education in Gaza

While the recovery phase seeks to restore the core functions of the education system, the renewal phase goes beyond this by reconceptualizing education in ways that are consistent with future challenges and sustainable development requirements. Major crises not only call for reconstruction but also provide an opportunity to reconsider education policies, institutional models, and traditional approaches to learning. This requires strengthening educational governance and institutional coordination to ensure that future reforms are both sustainable and responsive to emerging challenges.

In the case of Gaza, future education recovery and reconstruction efforts provide a historic opportunity to build a more resilient, inclusive, and adaptable education system while addressing longstanding structural challenges and strengthening preparedness for future crises. The fulfilment of this vision requires a shift away from an educational model that relies almost wholly on the traditional school building toward a multi-path learning system that integrates in-person, digital, and blended learning while harnessing modern technologies to foster access to and improve learning outcomes.

Palestinian universities will play a pivotal role in this phase by rebuilding scientific capabilities and research ecosystems, leading applied scientific research that supports reconstruction and development, developing academic programs that respond to future needs, and promoting international research collaborations. Palestinian expertise in the diaspora can also be leveraged through long-term academic and scientific partnerships that facilitate the transfer of knowledge and expertise, and support innovation (UNESCO, 2025).

7. Future Scenarios for Education in Gaza

The future trajectory of education in Gaza will depend not only on the evolution of the political and security environment, but also on the capacity of national institutions, local communities, and international partners to move from emergency response toward coordinated recovery and long-term system transformation. Given the considerable uncertainty surrounding these factors, scenario planning provides a useful framework for identifying policy priorities for different possible futures.

7.1 Scenario 1: Continued Crisis Management and Survival

This scenario assumes the persistence of political and security instability, continued constraints on resources available for reconstruction, and ongoing damage to—or non-operational status of—a substantial portion of educational infrastructure.

Under this scenario, educational institutions will continue to rely on temporary solutions such as TLSs, blended learning, and emergency education, while education governance remains largely humanitarian-driven and has limited capacity to address educational wastage or improve the quality of education. Simultaneously, the risks of school dropouts, widening learning gaps, and further deterioration of psychosocial well-being are likely to increase.

Policy priorities in this scenario should focus on preserving the continuity of education rather than achieving full system recovery. The MoEHE should maintain core governance functions, coordinate emergency education provision, and establish minimum learning standards despite severe operational constraints. Civil society organizations should expand community-based learning, remedial education, psychosocial support, and outreach to children at risk of exclusion, particularly displaced children and learners with disabilities. International partners should prioritize predictable humanitarian financing, support the operations of TLSs, provide learning materials and teacher incentives, and strengthen protection mechanisms that safeguard children's right to education throughout the prolonged crisis.

This represents the least preferable scenario given its adverse implications for human development and long-term social and economic stability.

Given the current circumstances, the immediate priority is not yet large-scale educational reconstruction but sustaining the education system under conditions of prolonged crisis. The expansion of Israeli military control over large areas of the Gaza Strip, ongoing displacement, severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods, and continued limitations on the import of construction materials, educational supplies, technology, and other essential items continue to impede the restoration of educational services. These challenges are further compounded by measures affecting the operations of several international humanitarian organizations that have provided psychosocial support, financial assistance, and educational services, thereby reducing the capacity of the humanitarian response. In this context, priority should be given to maintaining learning continuity through Temporary Learning Spaces (TLSs), community-based learning initiatives, distance learning where feasible, psychosocial support, teacher, and volunteer support, and the protection of educational infrastructure and personnel. While planning for long-term recovery remains essential, current efforts must primarily focus on preserving the functioning of the education system and preventing further learning loss until conditions allow for comprehensive reconstruction.

7.2 Scenario 2: Gradual Recovery

This scenario assumes a gradual improvement in the security environment together with the availability of medium-term financing and increasing national and international commitment to education recovery.

Under this scenario, education stakeholders would progressively restore the largest share of basic education services, rehabilitate damaged schools, implement large-scale remedial and accelerated learning programs, expand psychosocial support services, and gradually improve educational infrastructure. Digital learning as well as technical and vocational education would also become more integrated into the education system than before the war, contributing to greater flexibility and resilience.

The main priority under this scenario is to shift from humanitarian response towards nationally led recovery. The MoEHE should lead school rehabilitation, teacher deployment, curriculum implementation, learning assessment, and the restoration of education governance and information systems. Civil society organizations should complement these efforts through remedial education, teacher professional development, inclusive education initiatives, and stronger community

engagement. International partners should progressively move beyond short-term humanitarian assistance towards medium-term investments in institutional capacity, resilient infrastructure, education information systems, and sustainable financing mechanisms that enable the education system to recover while strengthening its resilience to future crises.

This represents the most realistic medium-term scenario, provided that political conditions improve and international support is maintained.

7.3 Scenario 3: Reconstruction and Inclusive Transformation

This scenario assumes the emergence of a relatively stable political and security environment, considerable investments in reconstruction and development, and the adoption of a long-term strategic vision for the educational sector reform.

Under this scenario, efforts would not be confined to rebuilding schools and universities but would also include the inclusive redesign of the education system on more resilient, inclusive, and future-oriented foundations. This includes strengthening educational governance, fostering digital transformation, developing curricula and teaching methods, expanding the scope of technical and vocational education, and establishing stronger links between education, innovation, and economic development. Universities would also evolve into dynamic centers for scientific research, supporting reconstruction efforts and long-term sustainable development.

Achieving this scenario requires coordinated long-term actions across all stakeholders. The Palestinian education sector, under the leadership of the MoEHE, should pursue comprehensive educational reform, strengthen governance and educational information systems, and promote innovation across all educational levels. Civil society organizations should support inclusive education, community participation, educational innovation, and partnerships that strengthen local ownership of educational system reform. International partners should prioritize long-term financing, strategic institutional partnerships, research collaboration, and investments in digital transformation that rebuild higher education and scientific research alongside school education, recognizing that restoring Gaza's knowledge and research capacity is essential for sustainable recovery and development.

This represents the most ambitious scenario and offers the greatest potential to transform the current crisis into an opportunity for education renewal, institutional resilience, and long-term human development.

8. Proposed Recommendations and Policies

Based on the analysis of the reality of education in Gaza during the period Oct 2023-June 2026, the anticipated future scenarios, and lessons learned from education recovery experiences in conflict-affected environments, the following recommendations seek to support a flexible and coordinated transition from survival to recovery and renewal. Their implementation should remain responsive to evolving political, security, and financing conditions, recognizing that priorities and institutional roles may vary across various recovery scenarios.

8.1 Immediate Priorities

1. Developing and Implementing a National Plan for Educational Recovery

A holistic national education recovery plan should be developed under the leadership of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), in close collaboration with universities, UNRWA, civil society organizations, and international partners. Recognizing the current operational constraints, the plan should adopt a phased and scenario-based approach that distinguishes between immediate education continuity, early recovery, and longer-term reconstruction. It should define clear priorities for each phase, establish coordination and monitoring mechanisms, clarify the responsibilities of key stakeholders, and include contingency arrangements that allow implementation to adapt to changing security, humanitarian, and access conditions. Such an approach would enable stakeholders to maintain learning continuity under current circumstances while preparing for more comprehensive educational recovery when conditions permit (Education Cluster, 2025).

2. Restoration of Access to Education

This involves expediting the rehabilitation of schools that can be used, expanding TLSs, and providing transitional solutions that enable students to return to safe and organized learning environments as quickly as possible (UNICEF, 2025).

3.Addressing Educational Wastage

This involves implementing nationwide remedial education and accelerated learning programs based on comprehensive diagnostic assessments, with particular emphasis on basic skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and science (UNESCO, 2025).

4.Integration of Psychosocial Support

This involves the institutionalized and sustainable integration of psychosocial support services in schools. It also involves offering training to teachers and school counsellors to address the impacts of trauma and war (WHO, 2025).

5.Protection of Educational Data and Records

This entails rebuilding and digitally preserving education databases and academic records while restoring integrated Education Information Systems (EIS) to strengthen evidence-based planning, monitoring, and resource allocation throughout the recovery process.

8.2 Medium-Term Priorities

1.Rehabilitation of Educational Infrastructure

This involves implementing programs to rehabilitate schools and universities in line with resilience, sustainability, and risk management standards through investments in renewable energy and digital infrastructure while ensuring coordinated implementation among the MoEHE, humanitarian actors, and development partners to avoid duplication and promote equitable access across affected areas (World Bank, 2024b).

2.Development of Teachers' Capacities

This involves implementing ongoing vocational training programs in the fields of blended learning, remedial education, utilization of educational technology, and psychosocial support (UNESCO, 2025).

3.Strengthening Digital Education Systems

This involves creating a unified national digital education platform, improving access to the Internet and digital devices, and enhancing the preparedness of the education system for future crises (UNESCO, 2024).

4.Enhancement of Technical and Vocational Education

This involves expanding the scope of technical and vocational education programs and aligning them with labor market needs and the requirements of reconstruction and economic development.

5.Fostering Academic Partnerships

This involves establishing long-term partnerships between Palestinian universities and international academic institutions to support the restoration of scientific and research capacities, promote collaborative research and innovation, and strengthen institutional capacities that contribute directly to Gaza's long-term recovery and human development (Aldahdouh et al., 2026; UNESCO, 2024).

8.3 Long-Term Priorities

1.Building a Flexible and Resilient Education System

This involves developing national policies for education in emergencies. Such policies should be intended to ensure learning continuity under diverse circumstances, strengthen institutional preparedness, coordination, and evidence-informed decision-making to enhance the education system's resilience to future crises (Education Cluster, 2025).

2.Transformation towards Blended Learning

This involves firmly anchoring blended learning as an integral part of the national education system in a way that sustainably combines in-person and digital modes of learning (UNESCO, 2024).

3.Development of Future-Oriented Skills

This involves integrating twenty-first-century and digital skills, artificial intelligence (AI), entrepreneurship, and innovation into the educational process.

4.Promotion of the Universities' Role in Development

This involves supporting Palestinian universities in becoming centers for scientific research and innovation, while enhancing their contribution to reconstruction and sustainable development efforts (UNESCO, 2025).

5.Building Sustainable Development Partnerships

This involves transitioning from short-term relief funding models to long-term development partnerships that support the sustainability of the Palestinian education system (World Bank, 2024b).

9. Conclusion

The educational experience in Gaza during the Oct 2023- June 2026 period illustrates one of the most complex educational crises in contemporary Palestinian history. However, it simultaneously reveals an unparalleled capacity for resilience, adaptation, and innovation. Despite the large-scale destruction of schools and universities and the heavy human toll among students and educators, educational efforts did not completely halt. Instead, they continued through a range of initiatives spearheaded by educational institutions, local communities, and international partners.

This experience has proven that education is not merely a social service that can be deferred during times of crisis. Rather, it is a crucial tool for the protection, resilience, and preservation of human capital and national identity. It has also demonstrated that investing in education during times of crisis is not simply a complementary humanitarian response but a prerequisite for recovery, stability, and development.

However, the greatest challenge lies not only in restoring the education system that existed before the war, but also in harnessing the post-war period to build a more resilient, adaptive, and inclusive education system that is better equipped to respond to future crises. Achieving this objective requires a transition from crisis management to long-term planning, emergency response to sustainable recovery,

and physical reconstruction of infrastructure to rebuilding human, scientific, and institutional capacities through coordinated action among national institutions, civil society, and international partners.

Discussion Questions

The following questions are intended to guide the discussions among participants and support the elaboration of practical, actionable recommendations:

1. What are the most urgent priorities in the area of restoring the right to education for children and young people in Gaza over the next three years?
2. How can a balance be achieved between emergency humanitarian response and the longer-term requirements of education recovery?
3. What are the most effective mechanisms to address the significant educational wastage resulting from the war?
4. How can psychosocial support services be sustainably integrated into the education system?
5. What roles should the Palestinian Government, universities, civil society organizations (CSOs), and international partners play across different education recovery scenarios?
6. How can international experiences, particularly those of Ukraine and Syria, be capitalized on to rebuild the education system in Gaza?
7. What are the requirements for developing a more resilient education system that is better equipped to respond to future crises?
8. How can digital transformation and blended learning be leveraged to enhance the continuity and quality of education?
9. What role can technical and vocational education play in supporting reconstruction and economic development efforts?
10. To what extent is the education sector acknowledged in current and future Gaza reconstruction plans, and how can it be positioned as a strategic priority alongside the housing, health, and infrastructure sectors?
11. What role could a future transitional administration or committee of technocrats play in leading the education recovery process, and what institutional and financing mechanisms would be required to ensure that education is integrated into the long-term reconstruction and development agenda?
12. How can the post-war period be transformed into an opportunity to redesign an education system that is of better quality and more inclusive and sustainable, rather than simply rebuilding the pre-war system?

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Annex 1: Key Figures and Statistics

Indicator	Figure/ Percentage
School students deprived of education since October 2023	625,000+
University students deprived of education	88,000
School students killed (as of May 2025)	14,513
University students killed (as of May 2025)	984
Public education teachers and personnel killed	419
University academics and faculty members killed	111
Percentage of educational buildings damaged or destroyed	95%
Government schools completely destroyed (as of May 2025)	111
University buildings completely destroyed (as of September 2024)	51
University buildings partially destroyed	57
Estimated losses to the education sector	USD \$3 billion