Educide amid conflict: the struggle of the Palestinian education system

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to examine the devastating effects of the ongoing conflict in Gaza on its education system, a phenomenon termed "Educide". The study documents the systematic destruction of educational infrastructure, including schools and universities, as well as the targeted killing of students and educators, which impedes current and future access to education. The paper argues that this deliberate dismantling of Gaza's educational institutions aims to erase Palestinian culture, identity and resilience, thus hindering any prospects for SDG4. The authors emphasize the urgent need for international accountability and support to rebuild Gaza's education sector, preserving its role in societal development, identity preservation and human rights.

Design/methodology/approach – This research paper uses a qualitative design, using data gathered through a comprehensive review of both grey and scholarly literature to assess the impact of the ongoing conflict on Gaza's education system. By analyzing official reports, working papers and conference abstracts,

the study compiles evidence of the systematic targeting and destruction of educational infrastructure in Gaza. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the conflict's immediate and long-term effects on educational access, infrastructure and cultural preservation. The methodology underscores the critical implications of these findings and calls for urgent international intervention and accountability to protect education in conflict zones.

Findings – The paper's findings reveal severe, systematic destruction of Gaza's educational infrastructure, including schools and universities, with extensive loss of life among students and educators. The research shows that this "Educide" disrupts educational access for current and future generations, stifles intellectual growth and threatens the preservation of Palestinian identity and heritage. Evidence indicates that such deliberate targeting aims to destabilize Gaza's social structure and hinder long-term development. The findings highlight the urgent need for international accountability to halt these acts, safeguard education as a fundamental right and rebuild Gaza's education system to ensure resilience and continuity amid conflict.

Research limitations/implications – The research faces several limitations, including reliance on secondary sources, such as gray literature and official reports, which may limit firsthand insights and real-time data accuracy. In addition, the ongoing nature of the conflict restricts access to updated information and complicates direct assessment of damage. The study's qualitative approach may also limit the ability to quantify the full extent of destruction and long-term impacts on educational outcomes. Finally, the challenging political environment may affect the availability and reliability of certain sources, potentially leading to gaps in comprehensive data on Gaza's educational infrastructure and human resource losses.

Practical implications – The practical implications of this paper underscore the urgent need for international intervention to protect Gaza's education sector. Highlighting the concept of "Educide", the study calls for policies to prevent the targeting of educational institutions in conflict zones and mechanisms to hold perpetrators accountable. It advocates for comprehensive support to rebuild Gaza's educational infrastructure, ensuring students and educators can safely return to learning environments. This research also serves as a foundation for policymakers, NGOs and human rights organizations to implement sustainable educational recovery programs to preserve Palestinian identity, cultural heritage and long-term development amidst ongoing challenges.

Social implications – The social implications of this paper are profound, as it highlights the erosion of Gaza's educational foundations and its broader effects on Palestinian society. The systematic destruction of schools and universities disrupts education and impacts community resilience, cultural preservation and intergenerational knowledge transfer. This "Educide" undermines social cohesion by depriving young Palestinians of safe learning environments, vital support networks and prospects for socioeconomic stability. The study emphasizes the need for global support to restore these educational spaces, ensuring that education can continue to foster community strength, identity and hope within Gaza's society amid conflict.

Originality/value – This paper is original in its focus on the concept of "Educide" in Gaza, a term describing the systematic targeting and destruction of educational infrastructure as a means of cultural and societal erasure. By framing the deliberate dismantling of Gaza's education sector within a genocidal context, the paper offers a novel perspective on the intersection of conflict, education and cultural preservation. It contributes uniquely to academic and policy discourse by combining documented evidence with a call for international accountability, emphasizing the critical role of education as both a human right and a foundation for resilient societies in conflict zones.

Keywords Gaza, Scholasticide, War, School, Higher education, Justice, Peace, Crime, Human rights, Educide

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction
Education is a fundamental pillar of a society's identity and future. Access to education is a basic human right and is crucial for realizing all other human rights. Effective education eradicates illiteracy and helps achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as reducing poverty (SDG1), zero hunger (SDG2), gender equality (SDG5) and decent work and economic growth (SDG8). SDG 4 specifically emphasizes the importance of high-quality education, ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (Abu Hamad *et al.*, 2017; Rad *et al.*, 2022). However, wars and

armed conflicts profoundly affect education and students, resulting in displacement, discrimination, identity crises and worsening mental health, among other significant challenges (Belay *et al.*, 2023; Muthanna *et al.*, 2022).

In Gaza, a small and densely populated region in the Middle East, Israel imposed a blockade by land, sea and air in 2007, after Hamas assumed control of the Strip. This blockade has significantly restricted development and access to basic resources, contributing to severe socioeconomic and humanitarian challenges (Jebril, 2023; Manna, 2013; Nijim, 2023). Schools and higher education facilities in Gaza have been significantly impacted by the blockade and occupation, facing challenges such as restrictions on the movement of students in and out of the Strip, financial constraints and ongoing safety and security concerns (Alburai, 2023; Hussein *et al.*, 2024; Milton *et al.*, 2023). Despite these adversities, including a lack of quality and affordable learning environments and repeated military escalations, Gazans have demonstrated remarkable resilience, striving to maintain essential aspects of their educational processes (Bonello, 2024; Hasan, 2024; Massad *et al.*, 2018; Milton *et al.*, 2023).

Gaza has been subjected to intense and unprecedented Israeli military assaults since October 2023, resulting in severe consequences for its already fragile education system and infrastructure. Reports from euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and other credible sources indicate that hundreds of Palestinian academics and teachers, along with thousands of students, have lost their lives, and nearly all educational institutions, including universities and schools, have been destroyed (ACAPS, 2024; Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, 2024; Faculty of Education University of Cambridge/Centre for Lebanese Studies and UNRWA, 2024; Occupied Palestinian Territory - Education Cluster, 2024; ReliefWeb, 2024a). The impact of the widespread destruction of universities, schools and other educational institutions due to relentless bombardment and ground operations is especially dramatic for the current and future generations of Gaza (Bonello, 2024; Buheji and Buheji, 2024; Phusavat and Buheji, 2024). Yet, the academic literature studying the effect of the ongoing war on Gaza on the Palestinian educational and academic sector is still quite small.

Therefore, this paper introduces the concept of "Educide", which underscores the deliberate targeting and destruction of educational systems in conflict zones (Alousi, 2022) within the context of the Palestinian education system in Gaza. We argue that this concept, being especially relevant to Gaza, underscores the profound impact of conflict on education, a pillar essential for fostering societal stability and sustainable resilience. Drawing on grey literature and official reports, the paper builds a robust foundation of evidence to illuminate the pressing challenges confronting education system in Palestine, especially in Gaza. It underscores the urgent need for coordinated international intervention to address the widespread destruction and systemic obstacles impacting education in the Gaza Strip. By framing the education crisis in Gaza within the broader political, social and economic dynamics unique to the region, the paper offers a nuanced and in-depth analysis that not only informs but also advocates for actionable solutions.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 will define Educide, explain its short- and long-term effects and showcase studies and examples. The systematic destruction of education in Gaza before and during the ongoing war in Gaza will be investigated in Sections 3 and 4, respectively. The impact of this war on SDG 4 will be described in Section 5, whereas Section 6 will discuss the international efforts to protect educational facilities. Mitigation measures and recommendations for education recovery will be given in Section 7, whereas Section 8 will conclude the paper.

2. Educide: definition, effects and case studies and examples

2.1 Definition of "Educide"

"Educide" is the mass destruction of a country or region's educational infrastructure because of war, invasion, conflict, terrorism or mass killings. The term "Educide" combines "education" and "genocide" to describe the devastating impact of war, conflict, terrorism or mass killings on the educational infrastructure of a country or region (Alousi, 2022). This destruction not only involves physical damage to schools, universities and other educational facilities but also encompasses the loss of teachers, students and the disruption of learning opportunities (Korhonen *et al.*, 2024; McGahern, 2024; OHCHR, 2024).

Destruction of educational infrastructure deprives individuals of their fundamental right to education, impeding social progress, economic development and the overall well-being of societies. This term underscores the profound impact that conflict and war can have on education, hindering the development and welfare of individuals, communities and societies at large. It includes the destruction of educational institutions, the displacement of students and teachers, the disruption of educational programs and the long-term implications for access to quality education and societal advancement (Alousi, 2022; Rabaia and Habash, 2024). In Gaza, there is an urgent need for the reconstruction of educational infrastructure, the provision of support for students and teachers affected by conflict, the promotion of educational opportunities in conflict-affected regions and advocacy for the safeguarding of education during times of crisis (Faculty of Education University of Cambridge/Centre for Lebanese Studies and UNRWA, 2024; UNESCO, 2024).

2.2 Effects of Educide

The relationship between conflict, genocide and education is intricate and impactful. In times of conflict, education is often disrupted, leading to the closure of schools and universities, displacement of students and teachers and destruction of educational infrastructure. Conflict can also result in the targeting of educational institutions, hindering access to learning opportunities and knowledge dissemination (Sahar, 2024; UNESCO, 2010; Unfried and Kis-Katos, 2023). Genocide, as an extreme form of conflict, further exacerbates these issues by specifically targeting educated individuals, thus depleting human capital and eroding the intellectual resources necessary for rebuilding society. The trauma and psychological effects of conflict and genocide can also impede individuals' ability to engage effectively in education, perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage and hindering long-term development (Abudayya *et al.*, 2023; Milton, 2018a; Milton and Barakat, 2016).

In the short term, conflict and genocide have immediate and devastating impacts on higher education institutions. Disruption of academic programs, displacement of students and faculty, destruction of infrastructure and loss of human capital all contribute to a significant decline in the quality and accessibility of higher education. The psychological trauma experienced by individuals in conflict-affected areas further hinders their ability to engage effectively in learning, exacerbating the challenges faced by higher education institutions. In the long term, the effects of conflict and genocide on higher education can be profound and far-reaching. The erosion of academic freedom, the loss of skilled individuals and the destruction of educational resources can impede the development and progress of higher education institutions for years to come. Rebuilding and recovering from the impact of conflict and genocide on higher education requires sustained efforts to restore educational infrastructure, promote reconciliation and invest in human capital development. Addressing the long-term effects of conflict and genocide on higher education is essential for rebuilding communities, fostering social cohesion and preventing future conflicts from arising (Milton, 2018b; Phusavat and Buheji, 2024; UNESCO, 2011).

Rebuilding education systems in the aftermath of conflict and genocide is a critical component of post-conflict recovery, requiring significant resources, expertise and support to restore access to quality education, promote reconciliation and foster social cohesion. Efforts to address these challenges must prioritize the rebuilding of educational infrastructure, support for affected individuals and the promotion of peace, reconciliation and social justice within educational institutions.

2.3 Case studies and examples

2.3.1 Rwanda genocide and its impact on higher education. In Rwanda, the genocide in 1994 had profound effects on the education system, with attacks on schools and educators. The destruction of educational infrastructure had significant implications for economic growth and development in the country (Rwigema, 2020). Beyond physical destruction, the genocide caused widespread psychological trauma among students and educators, complicating efforts to revive the education sector. The loss of human capital and collapse of institutions created barriers to educational continuity and quality (La Mattina, 2018). These challenges underscore the importance of educational resilience in fostering national recovery and sustainable development.

2.3.2 Impact of the war in Iraq on the education sector. In Iraq, the education system suffered severe destruction and disruption due to conflict and political instability. Schools were targeted, leading to the destruction of educational infrastructure and creating a climate of fear. The deliberate targeting of schools in Iraq exemplifies how Educide can devastate the physical foundations of education (Alousi, 2022). Moreover, the effects of conflict extended beyond physical destruction. Internal displacement and the widespread loss of educators due to violence significantly hindered the delivery of education. For instance, over 500 academics were assassinated, and thousands fled the country post-2003, leaving institutions severely understaffed and undermining educational continuity. The collapse of Iraq's once-progressive education system highlights the profound long-term consequences of conflict on human capital and national development (Diwakar, 2015).

2.3.3 Impact of the Yugoslav wars on higher education institutions. During the Yugoslav wars, Educide manifested in the deliberate targeting of educators and intellectuals, resulting in a loss of human capital essential for a functioning education system. The persecution and killing of teachers and academics in Yugoslavia undermined the capacity to educate future generations (Jovanovic and Đureinović, 2020). This deliberate strategy highlights the role of education as a political tool, where its destruction was not merely collateral damage but an intentional act to weaken resistance and control the narrative of history. Such actions emphasize the need for international accountability mechanisms to safeguard education in conflict zones.

2.3.4 Lessons learned. Educide undermines social cohesion and exacerbates divisions within society. In Rwanda, Iraq and Yugoslavia, mass destruction of educational infrastructure fueled social unrest and violence, hindering efforts to foster unity and reconciliation. The experiences of Rwanda, Iraq and Yugoslavia underscore the urgent need to prevent Educide and safeguard education systems. Governments, international organizations and civil society must prioritize education and invest in protecting educational institutions and personnel (Hoepken, 1998). The cases of Rwanda, Iraq and Yugoslavia underscore the devastating impact of Educide on education systems and society. By learning from these examples and taking proactive measures, we can work towards a more inclusive and prosperous future for all. Safeguarding education from deliberate destruction is essential for promoting peace, equity and sustainable development (Alousi, 2022).

Educide undermines social cohesion and exacerbates divisions within society. In Rwanda, Iraq and Yugoslavia, destruction of education systems fueled social unrest and violence, hindering efforts to foster unity and reconciliation. Similarly, in Gaza, the systematic targeting of schools, universities and educators has amplified societal fragmentation and disrupted educational continuity (Desai, 2024; Gordon and Turner, 2024; Middle East Eye, 2024; OHCHR, 2024). The destruction of educational infrastructure in Gaza, much like in Iraq, exemplifies how conflict zones experience both immediate and long-term erosion of intellectual and human capital.

Although the cases of Rwanda, Iraq and Yugoslavia were marked by significant destruction, the scale of devastation in Gaza is unparalleled. Repeated cycles of conflict, coupled with ongoing blockades, have decimated the educational system in Gaza to an extent far greater than in the previously mentioned examples. The near-total destruction of schools, persistent lack of resources and the enduring trauma experienced by students and educators in Gaza underscore the dire need for urgent international intervention to rebuild and protect its education system. Without focused efforts, the long-term societal and developmental consequences will be even more catastrophic.

3. Destruction of education in Gaza before the ongoing war

3.1 Facts about public and higher education in Gaza before October 2023

In Palestine, two authorities or supervision bodies are managing primary and secondary education: Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) (AlDahdouh, 2018). UNRWA supports access to basic education (Grades 1–9) as well as vocational education to all Palestinian refugee students and youth, whereas MoEHE runs government schools and public higher education institutions.

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (Institute for Palestine Studies, 2023), the number of schools in the 2022 / 2023 academic year in the Gaza Strip was 796 schools distributed as follows: 442 government schools, 284 UNRWA schools and 70 private schools. The Gaza Strip is home to a total of 550 school buildings, comprising 303 government schools, 182 UNRWA schools and 65 private schools. As evident from the data presented, a double-shift schooling system, where two schools – one in the morning and another in the evening – share the same building, is widely implemented in Gaza.

The number of students in schools for the 2022 / 2023 academic year in Gaza Strip schools reached about 608,000 students, distributed according to supervision bodies as follows: 294,000 students in government schools, 293,000 students in UNRWA schools and 21,000 students in private schools. The number of teachers in the Gaza Strip schools reached about 22,000 teachers, including 12,000 teachers in government schools, 9,000 teachers in UNRWA schools and 1,000 teachers in private schools. The average number of students per class in schools in Gaza reached 38.6 students per class in government schools in the Gaza Strip, 41.1 students in UNRWA schools and 21.7 students in private schools.

As for the higher education sector, the number of higher education institutions in the academic year 2021 / 2022 was 17 institutions in the Gaza Strip, in addition to an open education university whose centers are distributed between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The higher education sector in the Gaza Strip comprises 17 institutions, including an open university with centers in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, collectively enrolling approximately 87,000 students and employing about 5,000 staff members, of whom around 2,000 are academics (Institute for Palestine Studies, 2023).

3.2 Political and contextual background

In 2006, the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) won the second Palestinian Legislative Council elections and was set to form the government. However, the power transition was a challenging process and resulted in political division between the ruling political faction, the Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fatah) and Hamas. To exert political pressure on Hamas, many Palestinian Authority employees in the education sector in Gaza have been asked to abstain from work in schools which disrupted classes. The Hamas Government in turn brought in large numbers of unqualified employees to work as teachers to cover this deficit (Al-Rozzi, 2022). In June of 2007, Israel imposed a land, sea and air blockade on the Gaza Strip, which is still ongoing to the date of writing this article. Moreover, Israel waged numerous wars on Gaza in 2008, 2012, 2014, 2021 and the most destructive war in 2023–2024. These political events have inflicted negative repercussions, severely hindering economic development, exacerbating poverty and limiting access to essential services (Abed Alah, 2024; Hussein *et al.*, 2024; Smith and Scott, 2023), all of which have long-lasting effects on the educational process.

3.3 Repercussions on education before October 2023

The systematic destruction of Palestinian education by Israel has been documented well before the ongoing conflict (Johnson, 1989; The Guardian, 2009). Consequently, the repercussions of Israeli assaults on the educational system in the Strip should be analyzed through a cause-and-effect lens to fully understand their long-term impact and underlying motivations. There was limited electricity supply, construction materials and mobility while the unemployment rate was very high under the Israeli blockade of Gaza. Electricity limitation in turn led to devastating effects on the provision of daily services in academic institutions, such as water desalination plants and laboratories (UNICEF, 2022). Likewise, the lack of construction materials has led to a sustained destructional damage from any Israeli war attack, according to Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA, 2022), not to mention the MoEHE's inability to respond to the natural growth of student numbers. Therefore, freezing the reconstruction operations resulted in overcrowding classrooms, with approximately 40 students per class in a double-shift schooling system, leading to a chronic crisis in the education sector of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (Institute for Palestine Studies, 2023; Nicolai, 2007). Restriction of individuals' mobility due to the Israeli blockade stifled the intellectual growth of teachers and students and has weakened the intercultural exchange and collaboration locally (between Gaza and the West Bank) and internationally (Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), 2021). In addition, the high unemployment rate resulted in increasing poverty, students' inability to cover studying expenses and eventually dropping out of their schools. The 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan indicated that over 450,000 basic, secondary and kindergarten students and teachers were identified as "people in need" (OCHA, 2018).

The devastating effects of the Israeli blockade were not limited to the infrastructure and the educational process in general, but rather it directly affected workers in the education sector, especially teachers. This effect manifests in restricted funding allocated for education and poor working and life conditions (Ramahi, 2015). The restricted funding led to low teacher salaries, a high workload and a lack of professional training opportunities, which in turn raised teachers' dissatisfaction, disengagement and turnover intention (Romahi and Issa, 2010). The poor life conditions led to the depletion of the teacher's time to provide basic and daily life needs; the time that was supposed to be used for self-development. These poor conditions also arose negative emotions and teacher ill-being in general (Aldahdouh *et al.*, 2023).

The catastrophic effects of the Israeli blockade on students cannot be ignored either. Overcrowded classrooms, for example, magnified tensions among students and contributed to an increase in violence in schools (Al Mezan Center for Human rights, 2021). In addition, the high student-to-teacher ratio leaves no room for reinforcing learning and providing remedial and extracurricular activities. Moreover, the shortage of teacher training has impacted the quality of instruction and support provided to students. For instance, about 50% of students (aged 5–17 years) do not achieve their full educational potential, leading to a deterioration in learning outcomes and difficulties in reading and writing (OCHA, 2018). According to the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these challenges, particularly when education suddenly shifted to online settings (NRC, 2021). Neither infrastructure (e.g. electricity and internet access) nor previous preparedness for online education helped to support students' learning and that has negatively affected students' mental health, well-being and digital literacy (UNICEF, 2022).

Higher education in Gaza has also severely suffered from analogous challenges like those of school education, such as the lack of funding, effective governance, difficult political situations and mobility restrictions. All these factors impacted the quality of academic programs and the competencies of university teachers and graduates. For instance, in a recent study, Milton and co-authors sheds light on the fact that universities in Gaza have endured relentless attacks on campus infrastructure, resulting in a cycle of destruction and reconstruction (Milton *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, another recent study by Jebril (2023) describes the concurrent tension between construction and destruction as a de-development process of higher education where physical construction projects and educational endeavors are juxtaposed with the destructive forces of bombardment and resource scarcity. Gazan academics and students find themselves deeply entrenched in this context of "de-development", grappling with multiple sieges imposed by both external forces, such as occupation and warfare, as well as internal constraints on their freedoms and life choices (Jebril, 2023; Smith and Scott, 2023; Traxler *et al.*, 2019). To illustrate the severity of these challenges, some 20,000 graduates in Gaza have been unable to receive their certificates due to their inability to pay tuition and other fees, further exacerbating the long-term crisis in higher education (OCHA, 2018).

3.4 Education resilience under the occupation

Palestinian educational institutions have demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of external conflict and internal restrictions, navigating challenges that threaten academic freedom, access and autonomy. Despite the occupation and the frequent disruptions caused by violence and political instability, universities and schools in Palestine have managed to sustain their operations and maintain a strong commitment to education (Akesson, 2015; Diab, 2024; Quneis and Rafidi, 2023). The role of free speech in Palestinian universities has emerged as a critical issue, shaped by external pressures such as the Israeli occupation and internal authoritarian practices within Palestinian governance. Academic freedom, though often constrained, remains an essential tool for fostering critical inquiry and upholding democratic values in oppressive contexts (Hamamra and Gould, 2024).

Moreover, the psychological toll on students and educators has been profound, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. A study on university students in Gaza revealed that academic stress was closely linked to fears surrounding the pandemic, with self-esteem playing a crucial role in mitigating stress. Surprisingly, social support proved less effective in this context, underscoring the unique challenges faced by students in politically unstable and conflict-ridden environments (El Khodary *et al.*, 2024). The pandemic also introduced new challenges to online education, such as increased surveillance practices in

universities. Faculty and students faced restricted freedoms in virtual spaces, with lectures monitored and administrative protocols limiting critical engagement and innovation in teaching practices (Hamamra *et al.,* 2022). Furthermore, marginalized groups, such as disabled students, encountered severe barriers during the pandemic, including inaccessible learning materials and inadequate emergency planning. These limitations exacerbated educational inequalities and psychological distress, particularly among students with disabilities in besieged Gaza (Al-Masri and Serhan, 2024).

These examples illustrate the complex interplay between external pressures, institutional governance and individual resilience. While Palestinian educational institutions have shown remarkable adaptability, their capacity to innovate and foster critical thinking continues to be undermined by systemic barriers due to the ongoing conflict. Addressing these challenges through reforms that prioritize academic freedom, inclusivity and mental well-being is essential for ensuring the long-term sustainability and advancement of education in Palestine.

4. Educide in Gaza since October 2023

In tackling the systematic targeting and destruction of education, Professor Karma Nabulsi, an Oxford don and Palestinian specialist on the laws of war, created the term "Scholasticide" to address the deliberate targeting and systematic destruction of education. The phrase is a combination of the Latin prefix "schola", meaning school, and the Latin suffix "cide", which means murdering (Ali, 2024; Desai, 2024; The Guardian, 2009). There is a close association between genocide and scholasticide, both of which are highly relevant to understanding the ongoing challenges faced by the education system in Gaza (Scholars Against the War on Palestine, 2023). Scholars Against the War in Palestine have documented 18 systematic actions targeting education in Gaza, including killings, detentions and harassment of educators and students; the destruction and looting of educational infrastructure and resources; and severe restrictions on access, rebuilding and international collaboration, among others. These measures collectively cripple the education system, stripping students and educators of their fundamental rights and undermining the future of education in the region. Moreover, many of these violations have long been committed against educational institutions and communities in the Occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, with similar challenges faced by Palestinian Israeli residents (Quneis and Rafidi, 2023; Shellah, 2024; Tseng *et al.,* 2022).

Numerous sources document devastating declines in Gaza's education system, which is characterized by huge human losses and systematic destruction of educational infrastructure, revealing an Educide/scholasticide occurring in Gaza since October 2023. Satellite-derived images confirm this mass destruction of educational infrastructure and provide further evidence for turning schools in Gaza into military bases. According to recent estimates, over 12,000 students and more than 500 teachers and educational administrators were killed since October 2023. It is recently reported that 85%–90% of schools sustained some level of damage to their buildings, more than while 65% of school buildings have been either directly hit or damaged (Gordon and Turner, 2024; McGahern, 2024; Occupied Palestinian Territory - Education Cluster, 2024; OHCHR, 2024; ReliefWeb, 2024a, 2024b; The New Arab, 2024).

At the higher education level, Israel destroyed every university in the Gaza Strip and killed many professors and other staff members and leading Palestinian academics, such as poet and literature professor Refaat Alareer and Sufian Al-Tayeh, a well-known physicist and president of Islamic University, among many others. Al Azhar University was razed to the ground in November 2023 by the Israeli army under the pretext that Hamas had operated there. Israel bombed and destroyed Al-Israa University and the Islamic University of Gaza.

Overall, 12 universities in Gaza have suffered complete destruction or significant damage due to intensive Israeli airstrikes or artillery shelling (Albhaisi, 2024; Osman, 2024; Whiteman, 2024). This has led to a complete and devastating annihilation of education in Gaza, severely impacting its institutions, educators and students, and leaving long-lasting scars on the educational landscape in this region (Al-mqadma *et al.*, 2024; Jebril, 2024).

It should be noted that the damage and destruction of schools and higher education institutions was not limited to buildings but also included related infrastructure and facilities, such as squares, playgrounds, roads, green areas and sources of energy, water, communications and sanitation. With the contents of those buildings and facilities, including specialized devices, equipment, machines, and even chemicals, educational materials, manuscripts, books and archives, it remains complicated to quantify the damage sustained in quantity and quality due to the continuation of the aggression and its repercussions. Therefore, an accurate measurement of the damage could be only performed when cease-fire is imposed and when the war ends to be able to conduct detailed investigations that reflect exact damages and losses (Faculty of Education University of Cambridge/Centre for Lebanese Studies and UNRWA, 2024; ReliefWeb, 2024a).

Furthermore, the systematic aggression against Gaza has had catastrophic, long-lasting effects on the scientific research sector. The destruction of higher education institutions, research laboratories and infrastructure has disrupted research and hindered access to essential resources. This has also limited participation of Palestinian researchers in international projects, conferences and cultural exchanges, while deterring international collaboration. In addition, training programs and graduation projects, particularly in health and medical fields, have been severely impacted by the destruction and looting of training facilities (ACAPS, 2024; Dader *et al.*, 2024; McGahern, 2024; Sparks, 2024).

Based on the reviewed literature, the main impacts of Educide in Gaza can be summarized as follows.

4.1 Short-term effects of Educide on the education system in Gaza

Educide has immediate and devastating impacts on higher education, intensifying existing challenges and creating new barriers. In Gaza, academic programs are frequently disrupted due to damaged infrastructure, the closure of universities and suspended classes, making it nearly impossible for students and faculty to maintain regular academic activities. The deliberate targeting of universities and the violence against educators and students lead to a significant loss of human capital, depleting the intellectual resources necessary for education and innovation.

Psychological trauma among the academic community further exacerbates the crisis, with students and educators suffering from stress, anxiety and fear, impairing their ability to focus and engage in learning. In addition, displacement caused by the conflict limits access to education as displaced students and educators face resource shortages, unsafe conditions and difficulty continuing their studies. Addressing these short-term effects requires immediate actions to rebuild educational infrastructure and provide support to affected individuals.

4.2 Long-term effects of Educide on the education system in Gaza

In the long term, Educide fundamentally reshapes the educational landscape in Gaza, with impacts persisting for years. Academic freedom is severely undermined by political pressures and restrictions that stifle intellectual inquiry and critical discourse. The destruction of educational infrastructure and the loss of skilled academics make rebuilding efforts slow and resource-intensive, requiring significant investment to restore facilities and support recovery.

The economic consequences of Educide are far-reaching, weakening the competitiveness and sustainability of higher education institutions while negatively affecting societal development. Socially and culturally, the loss of education disrupts social cohesion and threatens cultural continuity. Higher education institutions, which play a vital role in preserving cultural heritage and fostering resilience, face immense challenges in rebuilding their capacity. Addressing these long-term effects necessitates sustained investments in human capital, infrastructure and initiatives that promote peace and reconciliation to ensure the resilience and sustainability of higher education in Gaza.

5. Impact of the ongoing conflict in Gaza on achieving SDG 4

Wars and armed conflicts pose significant barriers to achieving SDG 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all. In Gaza, repetitive conflicts and blockades since 2007, exacerbated by the recent escalation in October 2023, have severely disrupted the education sector. Children have been deprived of their right to education, with schools frequently damaged or closed due to violence, making it increasingly challenging to maintain safe and accessible learning environments (Abusamra *et al.*, 2023; Faculty of Education University of Cambridge/Centre for Lebanese Studies and UNRWA, 2024).

Beyond school closures and destruction, the ongoing conflict has profound effects on learning and development of children. The stress and trauma of war hinder cognitive growth, causing children to fall behind in academic skills and critical thinking abilities (Abudayya *et al.*, 2023; Malaguti, 2023). Constant exposure to violence and instability leads to emotional and psychological disorders, including anxiety and depression, which impair the ability of children to focus, regulate emotions and engage effectively in their education. These challenges often result in long-term mental health issues, further compounding the barriers to learning. As the conflict persists, access to essential resources such as health care, nutrition and education becomes increasingly limited, amplifying developmental delays and widening educational inequities (Bürgin *et al.*, 2022; Malaguti, 2023).

The current situation in Gaza is a direct impediment to achieving SDG 4, as the destruction of schools and educational infrastructure, coupled with ongoing violence, denies children and youth the opportunity to learn and develop. Inclusive and equitable education is a fundamental pillar of SDG 4, yet the displacement of families and the conversion of schools into shelters have created unsafe and overcrowded learning environments. Teachers face insurmountable challenges, including limited access to teaching resources, power outages and restricted mobility, which hinder their ability to deliver quality education.

Addressing these challenges requires urgent international intervention to rebuild infrastructure, restore access to education and prioritize mental health and psychosocial support for students and teachers. Without immediate efforts to stabilize and support the education system in Gaza, achieving SDG 4 will remain an unattainable goal for an entire generation of Palestinian children.

6. International efforts to protect educational facilities

International agreements like the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child affirm education as a fundamental right for all countries. The necessity of free primary education is emphasized by this treaty, especially Article 28, which also promotes the extension of education to the secondary school level (UNICEF, 1989). Education is fundamental to raising awareness and equipping young people to face future challenges, but this right is often endangered in regions plagued by violence and armed conflict. Especially schools, which are vital places for education, are unluckily targeted in these kinds of confrontations, which leads to fatalities, serious injuries and significant damage to educational infrastructure.

Attacks on educational facilities have become more common in recent years; 17% increase over the previous year, which indicates an alarming trend worldwide (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

For example, in Syria since the arrival in power of Hafez al-Assad in 1970 and then his son Bashar al-Assad in 2000, the Syrian regime has employed education as a weapon under the pretext of patriotism and strengthening the state. Moreover, since the start of the Syrian revolution in 2011, education has suffered enormous losses due to the Syrian regime and Russian military airstrikes (Al Sakbani and Beaujouan, 2024). Similar weaponization of education and destruction of educational infrastructure have been reported in other armed conflicted such as in Ethiopia (Jones *et al.*, 2022) and Iraq (Hassoun, 2023).

Recognizing that children are entitled to special protection under international humanitarian law (IHL), the international community has expressed deep concern over the militarization of schools. Resolutions from the United Nations Security Council, which denounce attacks on schools and stress the significance of maintaining the civilian nature of educational establishments, have given impetus efforts to safeguard schools during armed conflict. IHL regulates the protection of educational facilities during armed conflict with the goal of reducing the devastation and suffering brought about by war. IHL mandates that people and civilian property be protected from the dangers posed by military operations. The principle of distinction requires that fighters and civilians, as well as civilian objects and military targets, be clearly distinguished from one another.

Therefore, many resolutions stress the protection of students, schools, universities and other educational facilities during armed conflicts. The first resolution to address school attacks was Resolution 1998 in 2011, which urged parties involved in armed conflicts to desist from exploiting schools for military reasons (United Nations Security Council, 2011). Resolutions 2143 (2014) and 2225 (2015) have reaffirmed the necessity of shielding schools and connected workplaces from violence (Alburai, 2023). The UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict's Leila Zerrougui launched a "Guidance note" offering helpful guidelines for putting these resolutions into practice and improving both individual and school safety (Zerrougui, 2014). More recently, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2601, calling on all relevant parties involved in armed conflicts to take special measures to protect children and to ensure equal access to education, safeguard of right to education and ensure the security of schools (United Nations Security Council, 2021). Unfortunately, despite these resolutions, the deliberate targeting of schools and other educational facilities persists in Gaza, undermining global efforts to achieve the protection and security of education in conflict zones.

7. Mitigation measures and recommendations for education recovery

The destruction of the education system in Gaza has disrupted generations of learners, eroded access to formal education and violated IHL designed to protect education in conflict zones. Immediate efforts must prioritize halting further damage and addressing the significant financial, political and logistical challenges of reconstruction (Milton *et al.*, 2024). A robust education recovery plan for Gaza should prioritize safeguarding primary and higher education through innovative and targeted strategies. This includes a comprehensive assessment of the full impact of attacks on schools and universities, encompassing infrastructure destruction, psychological trauma and disrupted learning. Beyond traditional approaches, it is crucial to think outside the box by incorporating non-formal education methods, such as community-based learning programs and digital platforms, to ensure continuity during the recovery process. Emergency funding and the establishment of alternative learning sites, including safe spaces for informal education, can play a pivotal role

in mitigating these effects and addressing the immediate educational needs of students and educators (Faculty of Education University of Cambridge/Centre for Lebanese Studies and UNRWA, 2024; Scott and Jarrad, 2023; UNISCO/UNICEF, 2015).

The international community must play a central role in addressing the ongoing educational crisis in Gaza by enforcing accountability mechanisms for attacks on schools and ensuring robust legal protections for educational institutions. Partnerships with global organizations, NGOs and academic institutions are crucial to mobilizing resources, rebuilding educational infrastructure and establishing sustainable systems that support education. These partnerships can significantly enrich academic programs through knowledge exchange and foster mobility opportunities for Palestinian students and educators. Moreover, leveraging international scholarships can play a pivotal role in fostering academic recovery in Gaza, as such programs have been shown to not only provide immediate educational opportunities but also contribute to rebuilding academic capacities and fostering long-term peacebuilding efforts in conflict-affected regions (Almassri, 2024a, 2024b).

Long-term recovery must address the severe psychosocial impacts of conflict through redesigned educational programs that integrate mental health support and peacebuilding initiatives. By fostering intercultural dialogue and incorporating reconciliation activities into the curriculum, schools and universities can promote stability and mutual respect. Professional development for educators and administrators should also be prioritized to improve teaching quality, enhance governance and ensure the efficiency of academic institutions.

These efforts, combining immediate interventions with sustainable strategies, are essential to rebuilding an inclusive, resilient education system in Gaza and ensuring progress toward long-term stability and development in the region.

8. Conclusion

The devastating effects of the ongoing unprecedented conflict on schools and the higher education sector in Gaza have been profound, dramatically impacting institutions, educators and students. In the short term, this Educide has resulted in severe physical destruction, disrupted programs, widespread trauma and a significant loss of intellectual capital. In the long term, the consequences include a weakened educational system, limited access to quality education, reduced opportunities for social and economic advancement and a society fractured by trauma and displacement.

Addressing this crisis requires a coordinated and actionable recovery strategy supported by local and international stakeholders. Key steps include rebuilding damaged infrastructure, providing emergency funding and ensuring access to safe learning environments. International organizations and governments must enforce accountability for attacks on educational facilities while offering financial aid and resources to restore the Palestinian education system. Long-term recovery efforts should include the integration of mental health and psychosocial support programs into educational curricula to address the deep psychological scars caused by the conflict.

In addition, fostering partnerships with global institutions can enrich academic programs, promote knowledge exchange and provide mobility opportunities for students and educators. Community engagement is essential, as local input ensures that recovery plans are contextually appropriate and address the needs of those most affected. Nonformal education initiatives and innovative approaches, such as digital learning platforms and alternative education sites, should also be explored to maintain education continuity during ongoing instability.

Further research is needed to explore long-term educational recovery strategies in post-conflict settings, particularly focusing on the psychological and social impacts of "Educide" on affected populations. Comparative studies on educational resilience in similar conflict-affected regions could provide valuable insights, such as evaluations of the effectiveness of international policies and interventions designed to protect and restore education. These investigations would not only enrich the understanding of recovery processes but also inform evidence-based strategies to build more resilient education systems in Gaza and beyond.

Finally, this is a call to action for all stakeholders, including policymakers and the international community to collaborate and commit to rebuilding the education system in Gaza as a cornerstone of sustainable development, peace and prosperity in the region. The challenges are significant, but through collective determination and innovative thinking, the potential for positive change and impact is immense. By working together with empathy, resilience and a shared commitment, it is possible to create a brighter future for the students, educators and all people of Gaza, ensuring education becomes a powerful catalyst for healing and progress in the aftermath of conflict.

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