



Online Training of Trainers:
Initiative to Develop
Pedagogical Practices
in Palestinian Higher Education
(eTraining FinPal)

01.03.2017 – 31.05.2020

Project implementation overview



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List of acronyms:

AEU - Academic Excellence Unit
IUG - Islamic University of Gaza
TOT - Training of Trainers
TAU - Tampere University

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Online Training of Trainers: Initiative to Develop Pedagogical Practices in Palestinian Higher Education (eTraining FinPal)

eTraining FinPal is a development cooperation project between Higher Education in Transition (HET) research group operating at the Faculty of Education and Culture, Tampere University and Academic Affairs at the Islamic University of Gaza. The project aims to improve pedagogical competencies and academic teaching capacity of staff members at the Islamic University of Gaza and other higher education institutions in the Gaza Strip. The long-term goal of the project is to enhance the quality of educational process in Palestinian higher education thus supporting societal development. The project implementation between 2017 and 2020 was funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland through its Higher Education Institutions Institutional Cooperation Instrument (HEI ICI).

Duration of the project: 01.03.2017 – 31.05.2020

Coordinating institution: **Tampere University (TAU), Finland**

Partner institution: **Islamic University of Gaza (IUG), Palestinian Territories**





“Teaching and Learning in Higher Education”

Online Training of Trainers programme

07.08.2018 – 31.01.2019

A six-month Training of Trainers (TOT) programme was organised through online webinars combined with individual and group assignments for the participants. The goal of the training programme was to strengthen the capacities of IUG academics to implement modern pedagogical approaches in university teaching as well as to train other university teachers on these pedagogical approaches. The programme was held in English.

TOT was designed based on the training needs identified in the joint project study published in an international peer-reviewed journal (Alenius et al., 2019¹). Five main themes were covered in the TOT:

- Student learning and engagement
- Designing learning processes and environments
- Special features of teaching at university
- Expertise in academic teaching
- Online environments and tools

5 TOT participants visited Finland during an intensive training week in September 2018 while other participants joined the sessions through video-conference connection.

16 IUG academics with different disciplinary backgrounds successfully completed the TOT and became certified trainers on university pedagogy.



TOT training session at TAU, 10.9.2018



TOT group work at IUG, 14.9.2018



TOT certificates awarding ceremony at IUG, 26.2.2019

¹ Alenius, P., Aldahdouh, T. Z., Holubek, V., Al-Masri, N., El-Holy, A., Lindén, J. & Korhonen, V. (2019). Examining Teaching Approaches, Academic Culture, and Self-Efficacy Beliefs of Instructors at a Palestinian University, *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 31(3), 390-401. [Available online.](#)

6 months

5 modules

16 Palestinian participants

4 Finnish trainers

8 guest speakers

5 intensive training days in Finland

22 webinars

20 assignments

190 hours workload



“Teaching Excellence in Higher Education”

Pedagogical training programme at IUG

03.08.2019–07.11.2019 & 11.01.2020–27.02.2020

IUG’s Academic Excellence Unit (AEU) launched its new pedagogical training programme “Teaching Excellence in Higher Education” in July 2019. A team of 9 certified pedagogical trainers designed and delivered the local training programme with the support of the FinPal project team. The programme included intensive contact sessions, lively discussions, individual and group assignments. Developed on the basis of the TOT programme, the training was organised in Arabic for two cohorts of Palestinian university teachers:

Cohort 1: 03.08.2019 – 07.11.2019 & Cohort 2: 11.01.2020 – 27.02.2020.

The AEU’s training programme covers four main themes:

1. Student learning and engagement
2. Designing learning processes and environments
3. Special features of teaching in university
4. Expertise in academic teaching



Training session at IUG, 3.8.2019

111 Palestinian academics working in different academic disciplines across the eight universities and colleges in the Gaza Strip successfully completed the AEU’s pedagogical programme. 80% of the participants are IUG staff while 20% come from other higher education institutions in the Gaza Strip.



Opening event of the new programme at IUG, 29.7.2019



Training session at IUG, 3.8.2019

To support pedagogical development of its teaching staff, IUG implemented a new institutional policy that recognises the merits of the pedagogical training in the annual academic performance appraisal and academic career advancement.



Certificates were awarded in the 2nd International Symposium at IUG, 3.3.2020

1 new training programme
2 cohorts
4 themes
9 certified trainers
111 Palestinian academics
60 hours workload



Network of academics supporting pedagogical development and building expertise

The project implementation was coordinated by a Finnish-Palestinian project team consisting of 5 TAU & 6 IUG members. Due to travelling restrictions in the Gaza Strip, only 3 IUG team members visited Finland during the project while TAU members did not travel to Gaza.

The IUG project team travelled to Finland in September 2019 together with 2 IUG pedagogical trainers and 2 IUG professors of education. The project team collaborated mainly online: 36 meetings were arranged online and 3 were held in Tampere.



Project team meeting in Tampere, 19.9.2019

The work of the project team was supported by the Advisory Board established in March 2018. The Advisory Board consisted of 2 project team members and 2 external international experts in the field of education and educational research (including one academic from IUG). The expertise of the Advisory Board supported the project implementation, especially the assessment and research phases. 3 Advisory Board meetings were arranged online during the project.

The continuous support and commitment of the IUG's management and relevant institutional structures have been crucial for the success and sustainability of the project's achievements.



IUG team in an online project meeting, 9.11.2017



Project team meeting in Tampere, 4.9.2019

The project was implemented based on the identified local needs through inclusive decision-making and equal partnership between the project partners. The training programme built local pedagogical expertise and context-appropriate solutions to enhance quality of Palestinian higher education. A team of qualified pedagogical trainers further trained a larger number of Palestinian university teachers disseminating modern academic teaching approaches. 127 academics from 8 higher education institutions in the Gaza Strip participated in pedagogical development activities during the project.



Training planning workshop at IUG, 16.4.2019



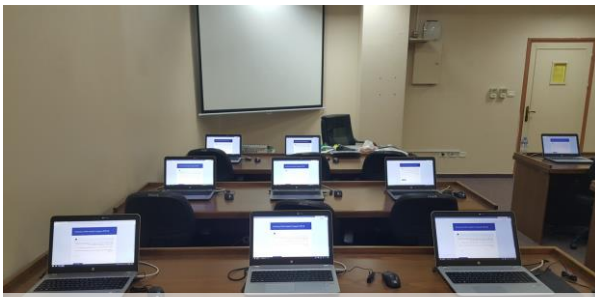
Academic Excellence Unit at IUG

Supporting pedagogical development in the Gaza Strip area
31.07.2018

The Academic Excellence Unit (AEU) at IUG was officially established in a public opening ceremony on 31 July 2018. The project funding enabled setting up two multipurpose classrooms at IUG to be used for the needs of AEU:

1. Computer classroom equipped with 25 laptops, smart screen and wireless microphones.
2. Studio classroom equipped with state-of-the-art equipment for recording and editing video materials such as recorded lectures.

Operating within the IUG's Academic Affairs, AEU's mission is to enhance the teaching competencies of the academic staff at IUG and promote a culture of continuing professional development. AEU offers its new certified pedagogical programme "Teaching Excellence in Higher Education" to teaching staff working at IUG and other Palestinian higher education institutions. AEU organises also lectures, workshops and discussions related to enhancement of teaching.



Computer classroom opening ceremony at IUG, 28.2.2018



Computer classroom opening ceremony at IUG, 28.2.2018

AEU's facilities and equipment enabled the project to organise the online Training of Trainers and supported the implementation of the project that relied heavily on online collaboration between the project team members. Two multipurpose classrooms benefit the whole university community and enrich the learning environment at IUG.

IUG teaching staff uses the AEU facilities to record lectures for their students thus enabling distance education. 360 lectures were recorded in the studio classroom during the project. AEU uses the computer classroom to organise training on using different digital learning platforms in teaching (such as Moodle). 247 IUG staff members took part in these training sessions during the project. AEU facilities were especially important during the corona pandemic in 2020 when all IUG courses were taught online.



Studio classroom opening ceremony at IUG, 31.7.2018



Studio classroom opening ceremony at IUG, 31.7.2018



Numerous events to promote culture of pedagogical development and to engage stakeholders

The project organised numerous public events at IUG to promote the pedagogical training programme and increase the project's visibility.

- Two Opening ceremonies of the Academic Excellence Unit and its facilities, 28.2.2018 and 31.7.2018
- Two workshops in which TOT trainees shared their experiences from Finland, 29.9.2018 and 28.10.2018
- TOT certificate awarding ceremony, 26.2.2019
- Opening event of the new training programme, 29.7.2019
- Two International symposiums at IUG, 19.3.2019 and 3.3.2020.



The first International Symposium at IUG, 19.3.2019



The second International Symposium at IUG, 3.3.2020

Two international symposiums that were organised at IUG gathered around 150 attendees including training participants, IUG students and staff, representatives of other education institutions in the Gaza Strip, and representatives of the Palestinian education authorities. International speakers and TAU team joined via video-conference connection.

The first symposium was themed "New Teaching Approaches in Higher Education" and the second was themed "Perspectives on excellence in teaching and learning in higher education".

The project's symposiums and other public events at IUG raised the attention to the issues of pedagogical approaches in higher education and their importance for improving the quality of education throughout the Palestinian higher education institutions.



Workshop at IUG on experiences from Finland, 28.10.2018

The project-related research was presented in six conferences: Adult Education Conference 2018 in Finland, EAIR 2018 in Hungary, ECER 2018 in Italy, FERA Conference on Education 2018 in Finland, Pedaforum 2019 in Finland, CHER 2019 in Germany.



FinPal presentation in the CHER conference, 29.8.2019



New collaborations between higher education institutions supporting pedagogical development of Palestinian academics

Palestinian higher education institutions established new forms of collaboration during the project to facilitate pedagogical development of their teaching staff. During the launching of its pedagogical programme “Teaching Excellence in Higher Education”, IUG invited all higher education institutions operating in the Gaza Strip to recommend 1-2 representatives of their teaching staff to participate in the IUG’s training. Representatives of all higher education institutions in the Gaza Strip participated in the new pedagogical training programme in 2019 & 2020. 80% of the training participants were IUG staff while 20% came from other 7 universities and colleges in the Gaza Strip. Through their Academic Affairs units, all 7 higher education institutions in the Gaza Strip have expressed their commitment to this new pedagogical cooperation with IUG ensuring its continuation after the project has ended.

IUG’s Academic Excellence Unit will continue to support pedagogical development of Palestinian academics through its training programme, public lectures and workshops related to enhancement of academic teaching.



Training sessions at IUG, 3.8.2019



Training sessions at IUG, 3.8.2019



Training sessions at IUG, 3.8.2019



Training sessions at IUG, 3.8.2019

IUG and TAU have expanded their cooperation beyond the duration of the eTraining FinPal project. TAU, IUG and Birzeit University (West Bank, Palestinian Territories) established a staff and student mobility scheme through the Erasmus+ ICM instrument strengthening their research and teaching collaborations. The mobility agreement enables staff and student exchange between Palestinian HEIs and TAU supporting the internationalisation efforts of all three partners. Furthermore, IUG and TAU researchers have collaborated with scholars from European and Palestinian universities and prepared 3 new cooperation proposals submitted to Finnish and European funding bodies.

Impact from the perspective of the university teachers



"I have become more self-conscious and more aware that there are always pedagogical ways to make my teaching job at university more interactive and more interesting."

TOT participant 1, programme feedback Feb 2019

"Interaction with colleagues from different disciplines in addition to the discussion and peer feedback were the things that helped me most in learning during the training."

AEU's training participant 1, programme feedback Dec 2019

"The positive atmosphere that prevailed in the training as well as talking about the experiences of others were really inspiring."

AEU's training participant 2, programme feedback Dec 2019

"The training was timely as I had a desire to learn about pedagogy and to develop my own teaching."

AEU's training participant 3, programme feedback Dec 2019

"In the past we considered that we have one person – a teacher who is going to deliver the information to the student. But after the FinPal project, the most important experience I got is – we have other side; the other side is student and the student is the core of teaching."

TOT participant 2, Individual interview, Apr 2020

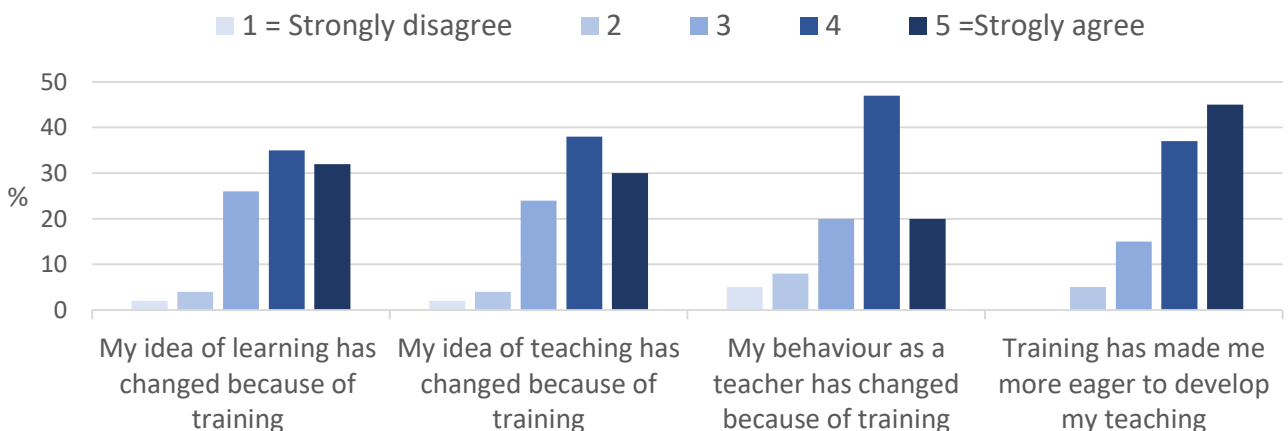
"I believed in the students' roles before, but with FinPal, I acquired [...] even more comprehensive perspectives. [...] Now I believe in the students' role more than ever before."

TOT participant 3, Individual interview, Apr 2020

"One of the very strong points I had was that we actually received the FinPal pedagogical training as distance training. [...] This made me understand the meaning of distance education, how I can get involved with remote learning, and how I can do a complete, comprehensive plan for each course based on distance learning, how to communicate with the students and engage them in the educational process."

TOT participant 4, Individual interview, Apr 2020

Participants in the AEU's training programme report changes in their pedagogical conceptions and teaching practices (questionnaire data from April 2020).



Impact from the perspective of the students

127 Palestinian university teachers (IUG and non-IUG staff) enhanced their skills to use modern teaching approaches. Proportionally, at least 12000 students (IUG and non-IUG students) received education of higher quality during the project. Open questions in the Student Engagement questionnaire implemented in February 2020 provide insight into the perspectives of the IUG students.

Q32: Have you noticed any changes in the way your teachers teach in the past year?

"There is a change in the way of teaching and relying on the students to analyse and reach the conclusions themselves."

IUG student 1



"Usage of the technological tools, participation and teamwork more than ever. One of my teachers joined a training on innovation and smart learning and he puts what he have learnt in practice during our course."

IUG student 2

"There is an evolution in the teaching methods, which have become dependent on the students' performance of some tasks. This would increase their diligence and enhance their self-confidence. Examples of such tasks are: preparing for the lecture, discussion, and activating the role of practice instead of receiving the lecture."

IUG student 3

"One of the teachers is trying to apply what they learned in a training course they are currently attending. The teacher uses different teaching methods such as the method of debate, role-playing and acting... etc."

IUG student 4

"More engagement in the lectures, positive attitudes towards e-learning and active learning more than before."

IUG student 5

"Reaching the information through problem solving and inquiry approaches."

IUG student 6

"More relying on students' participation and providing them with the opportunity to express their opinion, even if it is wrong. This helped in disseminating reassurance and strengthening the student's self-confidence through the continuous reinforcement."

IUG student 7

"Using new teaching techniques. Using social networking sites. Using strategies that stimulate the student to exert effort for learning and reaching conclusions - not to be just information receiver."

IUG student 8

"E-learning has become an integral part of our current life, therefore I have noticed a tremendous development in the way of learning and teaching methods at university. [...] Doing so has helped us to be in the virtual classroom and the teacher in front of me on computer screens. This method is helpful especially for us, as besieged Palestinians, under the current circumstances which sometimes force us to suspend studying face-to face at university."

IUG student 9

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Further information:

[Website of the eTraining FinPal project](#)

[Website of the Academic Excellence Unit](#)

[Opening ceremony of the AEU's computer classroom at IUG on 28.2.2018](#) (video)

[Opening ceremony of the AEU's studio classroom at IUG on 31.7.2018](#) (video)

[Training of Trainers certificate awarding ceremony at IUG on 26.2.2019](#) (video)

[Summary of the project's major achievements between March 2017 and July 2019](#) (video)

[AEU's training programme "Teaching Excellence in Higher Education"](#) (video)

