

# The TVET Challenge in Palestine



By Mazen Hashweh

**A**s Palestinian unemployment rates are high, especially among youth and university graduates, and poverty is hitting large segments of society, many – including government and policy makers – are turning their attention to the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system, hoping that it could provide solutions. But what can well-planned and -operated TVET realistically achieve? This article examines the current TVET system in Palestine and dives deeper into the roadmap for its development, tackling the system's expansion, unification, efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, equity, and sustainability.

The TVET system in Palestine is quite small and, unfortunately, still fragmented. In the year 2018/2019, there existed around 300 TVET institutions: 243 vocational training centers (VTCs); 39 vocational secondary schools (VSSs), including vocational units in academic schools; and 30 technical colleges (TCs). Seventy-one thousand students and trainees were enrolled in these TVET institutions, 21 percent in VTCs, 7 percent in VSSs, and 72 percent in TCs. Females made up about one-third (33 percent) of the total number of students (42 percent in VTCs, 20 percent in VSSs, and 32 percent in TCs).<sup>1</sup> Thus, in 2018, vocational education students reached only 2.3 percent<sup>2</sup> of the total secondary school students, which is very low, compared to 30 to 50 percent in many developed countries. The Ministry of Labor is responsible for the vocational training that is provided at VTCs to produce mainly skilled workers; the Ministry of Education is responsible for vocational education provided at VSSs to produce vocational workers, and the Ministry of Higher Education is responsible for technical education, provided at TCCs to produce technicians. The Ministry of Social Development also runs a few vocational rehabilitation centers that cater to underprivileged and disabled

youth. In addition, UNRWA and a wide range of nongovernmental and for-profit organizations run over 200 VTCs.

Drawing up a roadmap for TVET development, the Palestinian government has worked on expanding the system capacity: With the participation of all stakeholders, it developed an initial strategy for the system in the year 1998 and updated it with a comprehensive TVET Strategy in 2010, aiming to develop a unified, efficient, effective, relevant, equitable, and sustainable TVET system.

To expand the system, attempts were made not only to enlarge its intake capacity but also to increase demand for this type of education among students who might want

the vocationalization of secondary education through the establishment of vocational units in academic schools, and the introduction of cooperative and work-based modalities of training.

To increase the number of applicants, vocational and career guidance and counseling was offered, the TVET system was promoted and marketed (which would have been more effective if it had been based on training outcomes collected through systematic tracing of the employment and earnings of graduates), and efforts were made to ensure system permeability. Students are now allowed movement up and across both the TVET system and the education system as a



Photo courtesy of Irada Center, Gaza.

to join the system. The intake capacity was increased through the establishment of new TVET institutions, the introduction of new specializations, longer and more varied utilization of TVET facilities,

whole, thus combating the image that TVET is a closed path, which in the past discouraged many from embarking upon it. In addition, the government has decided to set up multipurpose TVET institutions,

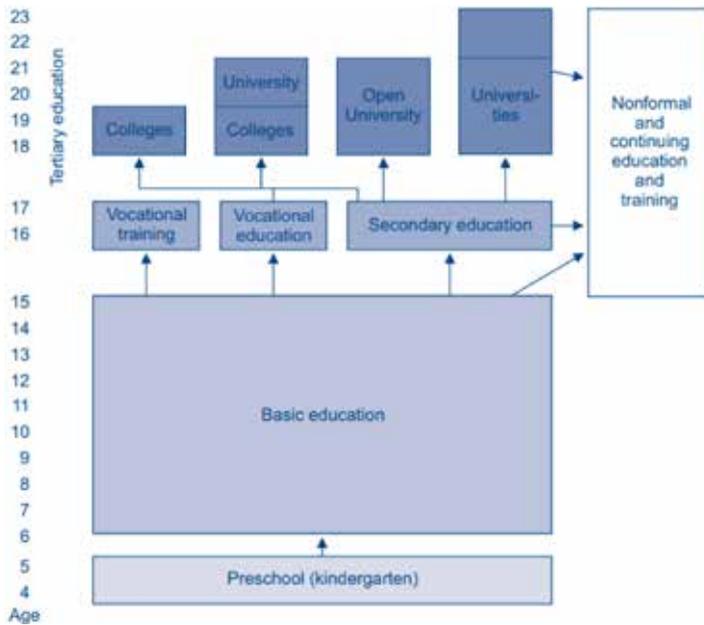


Figure 1: The current Palestinian education system. Hashweh, M. (2006). Human Resources Development and its Links to the Labour Market in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. European Training Foundation.

where various levels of TVET are offered in a single institution in order to enhance efficiency. Furthermore, the capacity was expanded by enabling these institutions to offer their training not only in the mornings but also in the afternoons and evenings to allow for adult training.

Thus, the number of TVET institutions (VTCs, VSSs, and TCs) has increased, and the number of trainees and students annually graduating from the system has increased as well. Yet, this increase has not been reflected proportionally as an increase in the percentage of TVET students in a specific age group. Statistics show that the percentage of vocational-education students out of the total secondary-level students was 6.1 percent in 2010, 1.9 percent in 2014, and 2.3 percent in 2018.<sup>iii</sup>

Some words of caution and advice are needed here: Setting up TVET institutions such as centers, schools, and colleges is quite expensive. Workshops, labs, equipment, machinery, simulators, and other requirements are costly and must be upgraded regularly to keep up with the fast-changing technology. This makes the investment and upgrading cost of TVET institutions quite high and thus limits the possibility of expanding the system's capacity on a large scale. Indeed, efforts to expand TVET capacity face major limitations. They aim to tackle this challenge through cooperative modalities of training, such as work-based learning, apprenticeships, dual studies, and other forms of cooperative training modalities. But the majority of economic establishments in Palestine are micro and small enterprises with a

limited capacity to accept and train students. In addition, the informal sector constitutes a good portion of the economy, and it is extremely difficult, if ever possible, to train within this sector.

The vocationalization of secondary schools faces major limitations as well. A landmark study found that while graduates of diversified secondary education fared no better in the labor market than graduates of academic secondary schools, diversified secondary education was much more expensive per student. Therefore, the cost-benefit ratio was lower for diversified than for academic secondary schools. Most vocationalization variants are more costly per student and class period than mainstream general education subjects. Moreover, the enrollment in some types of vocational courses tends to be strongly gender-biased. Culturally, the concerned skills are identified with one gender only. For example, domestic science and secretarial skills tend to be popular with girls, and industrial arts skills with boys. Furthermore, vocationalization is difficult to implement. It requires specially

**To improve TVET training, quality assurance systems were installed and an Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission was set up at the technical and higher education level.**

trained instructors, preferably with actual work experience in the types of skills they teach, and its administration involves the coordination of complicated inputs. And finally, the time spent on training vocational skills can detract from the teaching of basic academic skills – that are urgently in need of improvement, also for labor market purposes.<sup>iv</sup>

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that vocationalization is advantageous and even essential in various career paths. The use

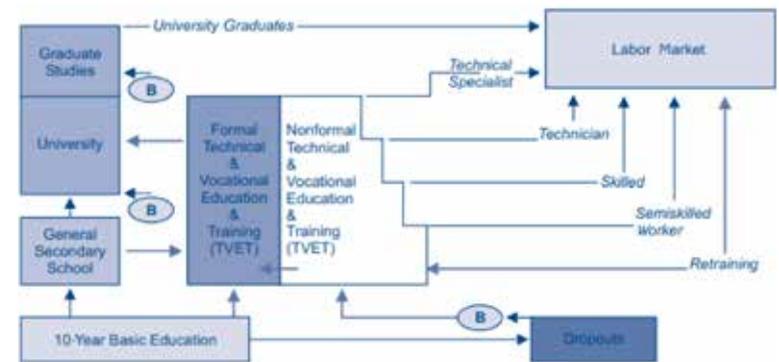


Figure 2: The Palestinian TVET system as planned in the government's TVET strategy. Hashweh, M. (2006). Human Resources Development and its Links to the Labour Market in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. European Training Foundation.

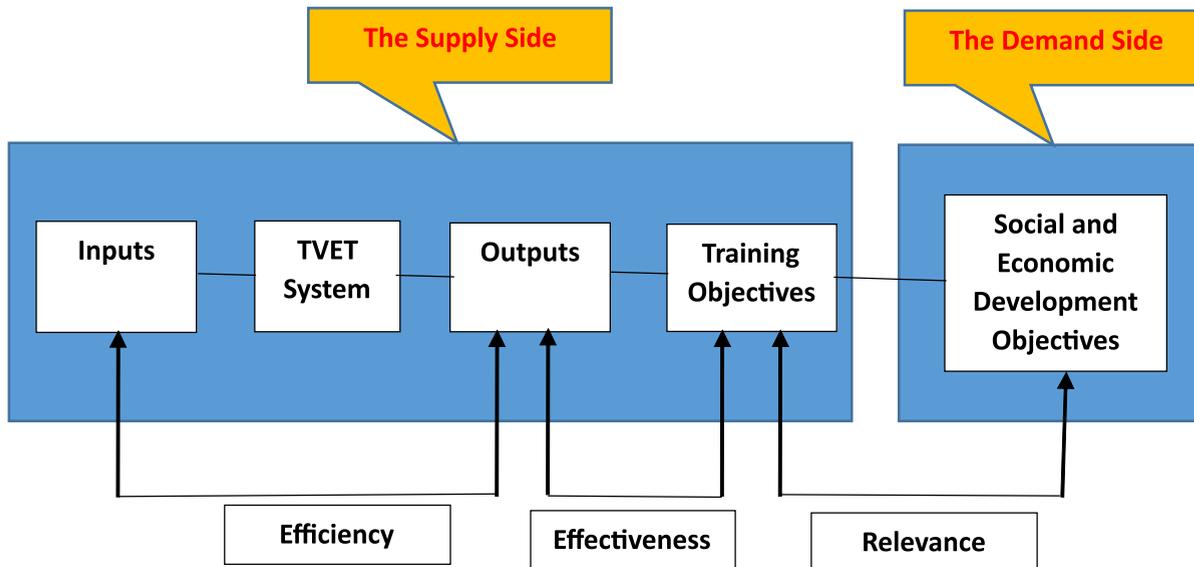


Figure 3: The attributes of the TVET Policy Analysis Framework. Fluitman, F. (1994). Training in Transition - Review of Issues and Options in Vocational Education and Training in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

of computers, for example, is applicable across a variety of occupations and offers benefits across many fields and within general education as well. Likewise, low-cost programs that are not gender-specific, such as agriculture, accounting, and business studies, can equip graduates with skills that are needed to support a living. Equally beneficial to students is the teaching of entrepreneurship that has become an integral part of formal education and training, thus constituting a variant on vocationalization. On a different note, transforming TVET institutions into multipurpose training institutions requires special regulations and special funding, which are currently not present.

As the Palestinian government is attempting to decrease the fragmentation of TVET, it has resorted to various interventions at the system governance level.

A Higher Council on TVET was established to provide a platform for coordination, information exchange, and macro policy planning. In February 2021, a law was issued that established the Palestinian National TVET Commission (NTC). As the central political body for TVET, the NTC acts directly under the Prime Minister's Office (cabinet) and will be responsible for planning, monitoring, and following up on the TVET system. Over a transition period of one year, it has formally assumed its responsibilities from the three ministries that previously had been responsible for TVET (the ministries of education, higher education, and labor). The NTC also brought together the different stakeholders and all TVET institutions, involving the private sector and coordinating donor interventions. Furthermore, the new law calls for the establishment of a TVET fund that is to be financed

by the government and donors as well as income generated from fees collected for training, service provision, production, the licensing of TVET institutions, and program accreditation.

Literature<sup>9</sup> shows that the models of TVET provision vary from country to country and depend on the country's philosophy, vision, and policy. One study indicates that TVET systems worldwide can be categorized into three distinct models: the liberal market TVET model, the state-regulated bureaucratic TVET model, and the dual systems TVET model. Under the state-regulated bureaucratic model – the model chosen by the Palestinian government – TVET is defined, provided, and financed by the national education system. Here, the provision and development of TVET is the sole responsibility of the national government that ensures that workers are sufficiently trained and qualified, and determines and

Equity and sustainability are of great concern in TVET. We must evaluate whether the Palestinian system provides fair and just opportunities for all and whether it is sustainable and contributes to a sustainable society.

regulates all TVET policies. To decrease system fragmentation and ensure clear and defined outputs, a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was created. It records in a formal way the credits assigned to each level of learning achievement and ensures that the skills and knowledge that have been learned are recognized throughout the country.

It is essential that further efforts to improve the TVET sector heed certain principles and reservations: Unification decreases fragmentation but may also decrease diversity. Political will and incentives are key to the success of any TVET system reform, and its programs must reflect the demands of a country's industry and economy. But centralizing all functions related to setting strategic directions and planning, training delivery, and oversight in one body, such as the NTC, might create conflicts of interest that could jeopardize the system's integrity and effective operation. To build ownership and



Photo courtesy of Irada Center, Gaza.

enhance system relevance, the private sector must be represented adequately in the TVET governing structure. In a positive development in this direction, the private sector is now represented in the NTC board – even though so far, its representation is rather cosmetic, as it is represented by only one member on a board of eight members.

The efficiency of TVET institutions refers to the ability to accomplish something, producing outputs or results with the least waste of time and effort, whereas the effectiveness of TVET institutions is very much linked to their quality that is reflected in the extent to which the training outputs align with the declared training objectives. To enhance efficiency in Palestine, various measures have been implemented by TVET providers to provide training sessions at different levels and for various target groups. Thus, facility utilization times have been extended in many institutions while, simultaneously, short(er) training programs are offered as well. Standards and structures have been set up to assure the high quality of programs, and modern

competency-based curricula have been developed for around 28 specializations. These curricula utilize complex task methodologies to identify competencies and then translate them into “learning situations” that allow for instilling higher cognitive skills and problem solving techniques. Standards have been developed for trainers, and an extensive program has been designed and implemented to qualify TVET trainers and instructors technically and pedagogically.

As many TVET institutions, especially the nongovernmental ones that have more administrative and financial flexibility, are providing various levels of training over expanded periods of the day, the NQF must be further developed to ensure an equal level of skills and knowledge upon graduation across the country. In this context, we must also articulate and assess prior learning systems, which will affect the possibility of standardizing and formally recognizing the quality of workers who are already engaged in the labor market. The utilization of TVET institutions in summers and in the afternoons to provide

training for various age groups at different levels requires a high degree of administrative and financial autonomy, which is still lacking. Using information or communication technology such as social media to increase outreach is possible but has serious limitations in TVET, as opposed to academic education. It is not advisable to have both a heavy input and output/outcome orientation in TVET system governance. If qualifications are to be set via the NQF, then it should be left to TVET institutions to use the curricula they find most appropriate to have their graduates achieve the set qualification standards

Relevance refers to the extent to which training objectives correspond to the objectives, needs, and priorities beyond the training system, notably economic growth and enhanced welfare. We are training today to meet the needs of tomorrow. But who knows tomorrow’s needs? How can we ensure that we are imparting the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are relevant for the businesses, industry, and others sectors of the future? Do businesses and industries themselves truly know what their future needs will be? And if yes, can they articulate them well?

The Palestinian government and the various TVET providers have worked intensively on enhancing the relevance of training offerings. Thus, they have developed new competency-based curricula, opened up new specializations, and set up platforms and mechanisms to facilitate the participation of employers and industry in defining desired outcomes and skill levels. They have furthermore designed and implemented cooperative modalities of training, such as training within



**While TVET training by itself does not create employment, strengthening TVET is an important strategy to contribute to an equitable, inclusive, and sustainable economy and society.**

industry (TWI), work-based learning (WBL), apprenticeship, dual studies, and more. In all these modalities, a good portion of the training takes place in the labor market. It has been widely encouraged to recruit trainers from businesses and industries, even on a part-time basis. The transition of graduates to the labor market has been supported by providing entrepreneurial training programs and subsidized internships. The key qualifications that are demanded by employers have been instilled into the training, such as communication skills, computer literacy, team work, punctuality, and other skills. And the provision of short-term continuing vocational education and training (CVET) has been expanded, so that TVET graduates and other adults in the labor market have the chance to further train and/or retrain in their chosen field. As a result, the TVET system is definitely more demand-driven and relevant, and this has manifested in high employment rates of system graduates.

However, the system is still too slow to respond fast to emerging training needs. The limited and distorted Palestinian labor market requires

flexible and responsive training systems. Among other interventions, the heads of TVET institutions should have the authority to open or close training programs based on clearly defined criteria. To increase relevance, it should be possible to modularize curricula and design the offered training in ways that include broad training at the start, followed by shorter-term narrowed training to give flexibility and allow graduates to tailor their training according to the labor market needs – even though this might lead to a decrease in efficiency.

The good news is that TVET institutions are better spread and serve both the urban and rural populations, and there is also a good presence inside Palestinian refugee camps such as Qalandia, Aqabat Jaber, Al-Arroub, Rafah, and elsewhere. The percentage of females in TVET institutions has increased, although they enroll in a limited number of specializations, particularly at the VSS level. But few rehabilitation centers cater for the disabled, whether physically or mentally, and they are run by the Ministry of Social Development and other charitable organizations. Many more such centers and programs are needed to cater for the large numbers of persons with disabilities who constitute around 2.1 percent of the population. As the TVET fund stipulated by the new law contributes to sustainability by ensuring that the TVET system's funding sources are diversified, it is another positive development that private-sector institutions are increasingly getting involved and support TVET activities at the individual and the umbrella levels through chambers and federations. And last but not the least, environmental concerns

through the gradual integration of green economy into the TVET strategy are being considered along with economic development.

For the future development of TVET in Palestine, we must link the funding of TVET institutions to their performance. TVET institutions that excel – for example, by demonstrating that a high percentage of their graduates find employment – should be incentivized and provided with additional support and funding. Moreover, clear regulations must be set to allow all public TVET institutions to retain income that has been generated from service provision and production to be used for development purposes at their own discretion. Intangible incentives in the form of praise and recognition and monetary rewards such as tax deductions need to be provided to private-sector establishments that actively support TVET.

Contrary to what many may believe, training by itself does not create employment! However, adequately prepared TVET graduates may compete much better than other graduates for existing employment opportunities. Employment is created through investment, the creation of a conducive legal environment, political stability, economic growth, and the control over borders.

The benefits of TVET take various forms and arise at different points in time, either during or (much) after the course or training. Individuals enjoy benefits through improved earnings, employment chances, mobility, working conditions, and job satisfaction as well as the capacity for lifelong learning. Employers' benefits arise mainly because their apprentices' productivity increases.

It is in the final interest of employers to have an adequately trained labor force. The state yields net benefits both in terms of social rents (both individual and public costs plus positive externalities from increased productivity due to better education) and in fiscal terms (education expenses versus an increase in tax income from the higher earnings of better educated individuals).

While it is not easy to plan and manage TVET, when planned, run, and managed well, TVET can improve productivity and contribute to sustained growth and competitiveness by equipping young people with the skills required to enter the labor market and enabling those in employment to upskill and be as productive as possible in the changing world of work. TVET can benefit individuals and society by ensuring inclusive and equitable lifelong learning for all, contribute to the sustainability of societies, and enhance human-centered development that considers the rights of future generations as well as the needs of the present.

The Palestinian TVET system has grown and definitely become less fragmented and more efficient, effective, relevant, equitable, and sustainable. Maybe this has not taken place as fast and not to

scale as one would have wished, yet no major mistakes have been committed in its growth path, and it has only improved over the years, providing more opportunities, hope, and a better future for Palestinian youth.

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<sup>i</sup> "Torino Process 2018–2020–Palestine," European Training Foundation (ETF), available at [https://openspace.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2020-11/TRPreport\\_2020\\_Palestine\\_EN.pdf](https://openspace.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2020-11/TRPreport_2020_Palestine_EN.pdf).

<sup>ii</sup> "Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training in Palestine," ETF, 2020, available at [https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-01/quality\\_assurance\\_in\\_vet\\_palestine.pdf](https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-01/quality_assurance_in_vet_palestine.pdf).

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> "Good Practice in Technical and Vocational Education and Training," Asian Development Bank, 2009, available at <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/28624/good-practice-education-training.pdf>.

<sup>v</sup> "TVET Models, Structures and Policy Reform: Evidence from The Europe and Eurasia Region," USAID, 2014, available at [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/pa00jzsw.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pa00jzsw.pdf).