

Local Governance Practices of TVET Institutes in Palestine

Abstract

There are concerted national and international efforts to strengthen civil society and build local governance in order to enhance, develop and increase the efficacy, responsiveness and inclusivity of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutes in Palestine. Hence, the Ministry of Labour (MoL) has established Local Employment and TVET councils (LET) in all areas of the West Bank in Palestine. The MoL has stated that the main goal of the LET councils is to support TVET and employment through strengthening cooperation between local TVET stakeholders and TVET providers. However, this empowerment and strengthening of the LET council members' cooperation has proven to be one of a number of challenges hindering its role of enhancing the quality of TVET provision.

This article takes a practice-based approach by examining the role of the local governorate and LET councils in Palestine in their contributions towards local governance for TVET development. It also examines how cooperation among TVET institutions over the years of TVET educational reform has failed or succeeded in advancing systematic development of governance, as well as identifying causative factors and potential remedial (or enhancement) measures. This article argues that, to strengthen the efficacy of LET council governance, these councils should have their own independent legal and organisational structure, and their own financial status. This would enable LET councils to take advantage of the potential of all stakeholders and to ensure organised and committed TVET institutional efforts. Furthermore, the article discusses what lessons it can learn from the experiences of other countries to develop and enhance good governance practices.

Keywords: *Governance in TVET, Local Governance, Local Employment and TVET Councils (LET).*

1 Introduction

Governance in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has been one of the primary obstacles to structure, development and enhancement in Palestine, demonstrating its current inefficacy (European Training Foundation 2020). Since 1996, there have been discussions on adopting a new governance model to ensure coordination of all TVET programmes and interventions in Palestine. The proposed structure for TVET strategy includes representation from relevant stakeholders, including government policymakers, employers, employees, public and private training providers, civil society, and development partners (GIZ 2010).

Only since TVET reform in Palestine in 2010 has the participation of all stakeholders in the governance approach to strive for a unified system been taken into consideration (European

Training Foundation 2017). The strategy clearly stated that a governance model should be adopted to ensure the harmonisation of all TVET programmes and interventions (GIZ 2010). The structure will include all relevant stakeholders, as well as an increased focus on the private sector, developing ongoing long-term relationships with the private sector and the local community through programmes and projects for TVET students as part of their Work-Based Learning (WBL) activities (Samara 2016). This is to enable the TVET system to strengthen the confidence of all current stakeholders and obtain further support, ultimately resulting in the enhanced quality of TVET programmes. The programmes themselves are intended to train participants in skills that match and respond to the ongoing demands of an ever-evolving labour market. As a result, a national TVET strategy was developed with a governance structure including representatives from the diversified stakeholders with two main managing bodies: the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Ministry of Labour (MoL). This led to the establishment of the Higher Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training in 2005. The council comprised 16 representatives from both private and public TVET institutions. The higher council aimed at increasing cooperation among the stakeholders (Hashweh 2022). Despite initial signs of progress, this cooperation proved to be ineffective and was unable to achieve the desired goals. Essentially, there was still a significant lack of human and financial resources, compounded by the absence of unified leadership. Furthermore, the fragile political situation in Palestine served to further fragment the TVET system by hindering members from their responsibilities and roles in the council structure (European Training Foundation 2014). Thus, the nature of the conflict in Palestine requires a specific governance model and intervention to be effective (Justino 2017). Adopting a local governance model for improving local capacity and local cooperation has been seen as a pathway to developing and enhancing TVET governance in Palestine.

With the national governance structure proving ineffectual, alternative solutions, initiatives and tools were piloted at the local level combining both top-down and bottom-up approaches (European Training Foundation 2014). Some local actors started to play a crucial role in taking the lead to develop local governance more than any other TVET providers or representatives on the top national level. A bottom-up approach to developing local governance gives ownership and freedom to local governments, leaders and actors that could lead to real transformation in governance structure (Jacko 2012). The primary leading local institutes are the governorate and the local office of the Ministry of Labour.

The governorates of the Palestinian National Authority are the administrative divisions of the Palestinian Territories. The governorate office acts as the umbrella for all the institutes in the city and is responsible for the vast majority of public services including education, agriculture and industry. Its responsibilities also extend to maintaining public security, order and the protection of public freedoms and rights of citizens (GIZ 2010).

In 2009, the MoL established LET councils in three areas of the West Bank in Palestine. The main purpose of these LET councils is to initiate and facilitate the development and implementation of measures to respond to the demand for skills in the labour market. The principle strategy for these measures involved improving the quality of TVET provisions by

enhancing and strengthening local TVET stakeholders' cooperation. Cooperation between LET councils and TVET is demonstrated by developing labour market tools to strengthen the connection between TVET supply and labour market demand. Ensuring the participation of all TVET stakeholders, including local communities and civil society organisations (European Training Foundation 2017), supports and promotes the TVET policy-making process and implementation thereof. Subsequently, the LET council serves as an interlocutor between the local and national TVET institutes in Palestine.

LET Councils also work as a provider of labour market services and as an initiative to unify efforts, expertise and resources of all kinds to strengthen labour market governance and develop active labour market policies and programmes, ensuring stronger linkages and more efficient alignment between supply and demand sides (UNESCO-UNEVOC 2012). Currently, LET councils have been working as part of the local government in every city in Palestine. To provide some perspective, the work of the LET Council could be compared to that of the German Employment Agency – *Die Agentur für Arbeit* which is considered the largest service provider for German labour, offering direct assistance to job seekers, including consultation and unemployment benefits, whilst also researching and developing relevant policies and programmes to respond to the needs of the labour market (Antoni & Schmucker 2019).

LET councils were first introduced in 2009 with the intention of changing the culture of business on a local level in all cities to create a cumulative national impact. Changing norms and behaviours towards stronger social cooperation can yield better results for local communities through local governance development (Justino 2017). Nevertheless, they were unable to implement any programmes or projects until 2013. Since then, however, LET councils have been an efficient tool to enhance TVET governance at both the local and national levels. Initially, all LET councils consisted of salaried employees from the Ministry of Education or Labour. This was beneficial at first, as no further funds were required to keep the LET council operating. In fact, this proved to be a critical factor in its survival. Moreover, LET councils suffered from a lack of resources and were dependent on donors to fund TVET projects (European Training Foundation 2017). This meant that, from their inception, LET councils lacked financial independence and were entirely dependent on the various ministries and donors.

In essence, LET councils are an initiative to popularise the importance of vocational training in order to combat unemployment. They have been an important tool for change, raising awareness of the importance of TVET in finding new opportunities in light of the high rate of unemployment in Palestinian society. Unemployment rates have been especially high among graduates from Palestinian universities (Sayre 2017). Initially understood as being attributable to a lack of suitable job opportunities, the phenomenon was due rather to a lack of skills and knowledge to meet local market needs. Such local initiatives are important for local people, local businesses and all local TVET stakeholders. Nonetheless, cultural factors have played a crucial role in the successful transformation of LET council governance structure, regardless of the political and institutional situation in the country (Perryman & Perryman

2017). There is an increasingly widespread acceptance of the role of social and private stakeholders in TVET and their cooperation on different approaches.

2 Establishing the LET Councils as a tool for TVET governance development

Since the Palestinian Authority assumed control of the West Bank in 1996, and despite all the efforts to develop the Palestinian economy, especially the private sector, the ongoing Israeli occupation of the West Bank continues to hold back economic development in Palestine. This is largely reflected in extensive poverty and the high rate of unemployment (Hilal 2019). Naturally, this has also affected the role of the private sector in public-private partnerships and the efficient participation of TVET stakeholders in any forms of cooperation to structure and develop national TVET governance. In 2009, in an attempt to solve these ongoing issues, an initiative from the MoL established 12 Local Employment and Training (LET) councils in all areas of the West Bank-Palestine (European Training Foundation 2014). In addition to their goal of responding to the needs of the labour market, LET councils enhance and regulate the local cooperation between institutions and other relevant stakeholders. Simply put, the LET Council works as an instrument to bridge the gap between the market supply and demand, working primarily to coordinate governmental and non-governmental efforts to ensure organised institutional efforts to achieve the objectives of the council. Meanwhile, on a local level, it helps employers and industries to prioritise workforce development through their participation in the LET council in their city.

LET councils have been not working effectively, nor performing their responsibilities to achieve their goals, in light of several challenges (European Training Foundation 2017). Besides the political situation, there have been many other obstacles to developing TVET governance in Palestine. Above all, the TVET system in Palestine remains a highly fragmented system. Strategies have been developed, but have yet to be applied - especially in relation to coordination and governance (GIZ 2010).

LET council activities and the level of cooperation among their stakeholders vary from one city to another. This depends on many factors and elements including the city population, the size and the involvement of the private sector in their activities. Other factors include the power of the leadership culture of the city institutes and their capacity to lead and achieve advanced cooperation with all stakeholders, and the level of their commitment to achieving the LET council goals and efficacy (Samara 2021).

3 LET Council structure

The Ministry of Labour is the main leading body for LET councils in Palestine. There are other stakeholders (who are also members of the LET council) consisting of both governmental and non-governmental organisations, as well as individual experts, trainers, academics and researchers. Every LET council has members who are permanently assigned to

the Ministry of Labour (MoL), the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Ministry of National Economy (MoNE).

According to the Ministry of Labour (Ministry of Labour 2013), every LET council has the same structure in every city as follows:

1. The governorate who acts as the head of the LET council
2. The LET council coordinator who is also the Head of Employment in the Ministry of Labour
3. The executive board consists of five members of different stakeholder interests. Two of these members are from the MoE and the MoL as permanent members and the others could be from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry or women representatives.
4. The General Assembly of the Council consists of members of local institutes and organisations in the city. In some cities, like Hebron, the general assembly consists of around 80 local organisations and institutes. These members include but are not limited to:
 - Government institutions in the city such as local universities, schools, colleges, ministries, etc.
 - Continuing Education departments
 - Municipal and village councils
 - Local development agencies
 - Women's institutes
 - Chamber of Commerce and Industry
 - Trade unions
 - Employers' associations
 - Labour unions
 - Public and private TVET institutions
 - Small and medium enterprises
 - Individual researchers, experts, academics or trainers
 - Local banks
 - Donors
 - Implementing agencies
 - The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)
5. The General Assembly of the Council also consists of an evaluation committee for professional counsel and technical support. These committees have members of different professions, academics, researchers, and experts whose work is to examine, choose, recommend, prioritise and evaluate projects for the donors. Evaluation happens according to the quality and demands of the local market. Committee members meet to assess projects, bound by confidentiality to ensure that the work of the LET council remains objective and professional. These committees do not work

with the LET council on a permanent basis. They work temporarily upon request and committees are subject to change. The members of these committees demonstrate responsibility and commitment to work with the LET council and are mostly engaged on a voluntary basis to provide counsel and other professional support.

4 LET councils good governance practices

Good governance should have certain criteria to meet the needs of society while making the best use of available resources. Some of these characteristics are, but are not limited to, responsiveness, efficient participation, transparency, equity and inclusiveness (Bekele & Ago 2020). When good governance is achieved and practised, it brings an increased quality of life to people and the community (Jindal 2014). The elements of TVET governance also meet the required UNESCO strategy priorities which were defined in UNESCO strategy for TVET for 2022-2030. The three priority areas are: fostering youth employment and entrepreneurship, promoting equity and gender equality, and facilitating the transition to green economies and sustainable societies (UNESCO 2021). Accordingly, LET councils in Palestine have been working earnestly and investing all available resources to develop good governance practices that can bring the best results to all TVET stakeholders, members and to the community as well.

4.1 Promoting equity and gender equality

One notable characteristic of LET councils is their commitment to gender equality and empowering the female population. They do not exclude women as main participants in training or any project organised by the councils. In fact, women are one of the main target beneficiary groups for LET councils who provide professional career advice and resources, notably in typically male-dominated fields such as car mechanics and electronic maintenance. For a long time, these professions were limited to men only. Moreover, within the structure of the LET council itself, women are included in leadership positions.

LET councils in Palestine also target other marginalised groups with free support and training. These groups include widowed women who are the only breadwinners of their households, as well as people with disabilities. The LET council works with these groups to enhance their skills and knowledge with the aim of integrating them into their communities or workplaces.

4.2 Facilitating the transition to green economies and sustainable societies

LET councils work towards designing and implementing programmes with the express goal of obtaining more funding from donors. A notable example is green economy projects such as solar energy, smart buildings or composting. To achieve this, LET councils work closely with the Ministry of Agriculture, Secondary Vocational Schools, and the agricultural colleges in the local university.

4.3 Good governance is responsive

Each LET council in every city works to serve the needs of the local TVET shareholders, workforce, and university graduates to meet the demand of the local market and enhance the local private sector. Thus, the LET council is responsive to both supply and demand as it seeks to bridge the gap between them while reducing unemployment.

LET councils work continuously to address the challenges that TVET institutes and graduates are facing and make efforts to provide training that equips graduates with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet the rapidly changing demands of the market. It is also responsive to the TVET institutes and stakeholders by working to provide certain support for programmes and projects that are necessary to meet market demand. LET councils were able to achieve this precisely because they work locally and can adapt to supply and demand in each local market. They can identify specific challenges and local needs, then work actively to address them. Each council consists of local stakeholders and members who keep abreast of the local market, thus playing a crucial role in the ability of the LET councils to be responsive to the local needs of their communities (Bardhan 2002). This is why local governance through LET council is vital to develop the local economy, responding to local needs.

In short, LET council members come from local organisations or institutes, and have extensive knowledge and information about the nature of the local market, business and demand. They can therefore define projects and training programmes that serve local demand according to the needs that vary from one city to another for different reasons. For example, an LET council is also responsive in terms of including marginalised groups in each city, such as women, villagers and people with disabilities. LET councils do not deprive these groups of opportunities to enhance their professional skills and knowledge. Instead, they empower them to be included in their communities and to have financial independence and income by providing them with vocational training and subsequent job opportunities or self-employed projects as entrepreneurs.

Any project should fulfil certain criteria, such as the potential for sustainability. The target group partners must be one partner from the private sector and one from the government sector. Funds are not given to individual organisations without these conditions being met, ensuring that many stakeholders come together and share their resources, possibilities and different perspectives to guarantee project sustainability. This allows everyone to provide their input and work together to achieve the goals (Winther-Schmidt & Shrestha 2020).

In every city, the LET council serves to provide unique training opportunities for its young people. For example, the LET council in Tulkarm city is active in providing regular training for youth and university students. The council has a strong and broad social network with competent international researchers and experts who are invited regularly to present their research and international experience in TVET, sharing updates and success stories about TVET in other countries. For example, how other countries have dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic, how it has affected the youth and TVET system and the labour market. This provides new perspectives for youth and raises their awareness of important skills and

knowledge that they should acquire and improve for their personal and professional life in response to changing times.

4.4 Good governance is effective and efficient

LET councils are currently striving for high participation, inclusivity and responsiveness. All these aspects are considered crucial for effective governance. They try to implement decisions and follow processes that make the best use of the available resources to ensure the best possible results. LET councils hold regular meetings and follow-up meetings with all members and stakeholders to keep them informed about all council updates and activities.

All the reports and updates go to the Director General of employment in the MoL after providing local perspectives and recommendations of local members. Through the LET council, local TVET institutions can be involved in policymaking (GIZ 2010). To achieve this overall goal, the LET council in each city aims at enhancing local TVET governance and providing a platform for local institutional leaders of all kinds in the local community to have a role and to reflect on what they see as critical issues and opportunities related to TVET development. Local institutional leaders are the key agents of change and influence on TVET policymaking. LET councils work to enhance the role of local institutional leaders to bridge the gap between institutions and policymakers and thus impact policymaking.

4.5 Good governance is participatory

As we see from the LET council structure, it requires active participation as it includes members, individuals, and leaders from all local institutes, providing an opportunity for anyone affected by or interested in a decision to take part in the process of decision-making. Participation can manifest itself as follows:

- The LET Council provides interested parties with any required information
- The Council asks for their perspectives, participation and needs
- They then offer the opportunity to provide recommendations of any member or stakeholders
- They include them as part of the decision-making process

In general, LET councils have been effective in ensuring the voice of each participating member. Everyone is consulted in policymaking and implementation with the idea that everyone belongs and is working for the same goal.

One notable example of LET council participation can be seen in the conditions they impose on proposals on the acceptance for funds. LET councils will refuse any proposal for any project unless the programme proposal has at least three partners to implement it. The partners must be from both the public and private sectors, as well as including other groups such as women or youth. This is an efficient way to include different groups' participation, perspectives, and inclusion in the TVET system. Most importantly, it allows all to share and benefit from human resources and other resources that all partners have. This can guarantee

success and sustainability for the project, as partners share their resources continuously over a longer period of time.

Moreover, LET councils have taken advantage of emerging communication tools, namely social media. Every LET council now has its own Facebook page where they share job and training opportunities and provide updates concerning the supply and demand of the labour market, in addition to the council's regular meetings with its members and other city council members. These opportunities all stem from stakeholders and members, not only from the governor's office. The LET councils encourage all members to be active on their respective social media platforms, share posts, and opportunities and interact through encouraging feedback or perspectives to enhance their work.

LET Councils conduct regular meetings with universities, continuing education departments, alumni affairs units and employment units in universities. The meetings aim to discuss the role of continuing education programmes in Palestinian universities in promoting social responsibility, as well as discussing the most significant obstacles facing these centres, and the future of continuing education and its impact on the local and international community concerning TVET and TVET programmes.

5 Conclusion and outlook

LET councils are not a goal in themselves, but rather a means to reach a goal through participation and cooperation between TVET stakeholders. Consequently, the greatest dependency for the success of LET is the level of awareness, specifically of employers and workers together, of the importance of carrying out their duties in compliance with regulations and laws and in communicating and updating accurate data and information with the Ministry of Labour, whether as employers, workers or as job seekers. The correct data plus accurate and responsible information provided by employers, workers and job seekers to the employment offices deployed in all governorates, will be the right reference and act as a sound and valid basis for enabling decision-makers and policymakers to organise, prepare and train human resources, enabling them to enter the labour market in a competitive, efficient and harmonious manner. Thus, good governance in LET council demands higher standards of performance from all stakeholders and members (Rasul et al. 2015).

In LET councils, all members are working under the same banner, for the same goal, and yet efforts are scattered. Governance is a system and a process, not a single activity and therefore the successful implementation of good governance strategy requires a systematic approach that incorporates strategic planning, risk management and performance management to unify efforts in a professional manner and to emphasise quality assurance (European Training Foundation 2014). Accordingly,

1. The LET council should be an independent body with its own administrative, organisational and financial status to strengthen members' commitment. This also

includes defining institutions and stakeholders' clear responsibilities to improve governance and avoid corruption (Beath et al. 2013).

2. LET councils need to develop their policies and strategies according to the rapid change that is affecting the labour market. This depends on the mutual understanding and constant work of the council members together to be able to work towards and achieve LET council goals.
3. LET councils have extensive databases and increasingly larger target segments and groups, but the economic foundations in the country are weaker and do not support the LET councils' mission to the extent that they should. Therefore, LET councils are in urgent need of regulating, systematically collecting, analysing and categorising data. This needs professionals, experts and researchers to work on this, to enable LET councils to understand the local needs of both employers and employees and their perspectives, then work accordingly.
4. Existing committees still need to be developed more professionally and effectively, with independent and specialised committees clearly defined according to their responsibilities as required by LET councils. For example, the council needs a studies and research committee, a project-specified committee to conduct professional research, studies, surveys and feasibility studies. This will enable LET councils to invest in and benefit more from the available human resources and capacities.
5. There are still some stakeholders missing from the main LET council structure. These actors are TVET school students, TVET graduates and teachers. They must increase their participation in the council activities and provide their own input and perspectives to develop the LET council's role in supporting TVET institutes. In this case, a focused group of TVET graduates and current students can be created and integrated.
6. A Facebook page is insufficient on its own, as it does not guarantee that posts actually reach the target group (especially if they do not have Facebook). Other social media initiatives and platforms could be more effective.
7. Online and digitalisation services should be developed to enable everyone to stay in touch with all members and stakeholders and to access necessary data about labour market updates and other programmes offered by the LET council. These are services become even more important when there are contact restrictions in place, as was the case during the COVID-19 crisis. For example, in Germany, as part of their Strategy 2025, Germany's Federal Employment Agency wanted people to be able to access their advisory services from home and initiated a "close to customers" mission.

8. It is also crucial to take into consideration that the response is timely, otherwise, it will hinder the good governance of the LET council and will not bring immediate support and solutions to the local communities (Bekele & Ago 2020).

Despite slow progress, LET councils strive to demonstrate efficiency, participation, inclusion and responsiveness. The issue has been identified, but the question now to be considered going forward is how LET councils can develop and enhance the commitment and cooperation of stakeholders practically.

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