



CEMOFPSC ROUND TABLE: "An education of quality in the conflict area, as a way of improving peace and integration"



Interview made by CEMOFPS

28 April 2011

RIZEK SLEIBI

Dean of the Faculty of Education of the Bethlehem University.

We distinguish three different levels we would like to know your opinion about.

- As the Dean and representative of an University,

1. What do you think the role of Universities should be in order to change the Education System in Palestine?

I think it is doing within two tracks, the first one is related to serving local communities within education, I mean by that, different means and ways, like our outreach project.

We are working with local schools to develop their program of education in quality through different kinds of activities and at the same time I do think that the experience of our outreach programs and the feedback from the field, will help to improve our own university programs. It is taking place because, being very close to our local communities and the schools; we are able to learn on a daily basis what are their immediate needs for future development.

We could also meet with our graduates in local communities, institutions and schools and from there we can reinforce the feedback of these institutions with the quality of our own graduates and that will help, like a circle.

We will receive our students from local schools and then after further years at school they will be our students at our University and then after the graduation they will go back to their local community to work as our graduates and then their feedback will help us to improve our own program and at the same time we will



CEMOFPSC ROUND TABLE: “An education of quality in the conflict area, as a way of improving peace and integration”

try to meet their own development and needs as much as we can within our own capacity staff and so on.

Therefore we try to keep the contact with local communities and schools within the framework of different activities because we also depend on local schools, for example, in order to give to our own students the chance to practice what they are learning so we benefit twice, first from our students and then the schools and local communities benefit from the activities that our University have planned and carried out to help them in a certain area according to their requests for development and needs.

As a result, it is impossible to separate the University from the ground.

- As an expert in the field of Education,

2. What are the main needs and challenges of the Education System in Palestine? (Trying to summarise).

I could list a lot of points here I'll try to summarize according to the most importance needs.

First of all I do believe the university, any one, could improve the quality of their education, providing graduates within specific standards. These standards are needed from local communities in terms of qualities, skills, and knowledge, in order to really match with the needs of the local communities, like a circle also.

But it is not a matter only of supplying their demands; I do believe they have to meet and to address the immediate needs of the local communities but not being away and separated. Therefore, research and feedback are needed and that will help in two ways to modify and to create new programs that perhaps can meet the demands and from the other side satisfy the local communities needs.

At the same time I think the universities can be leaders for change especially in the sector of innovation in education, the whole sector of education.

I also believe our university, the Bethlehem University is a leader in this field because we involve the local communities, we involve the Ministry, the local NGOs and institutions that are interested in education and we lead the way in for more quality and for satisfying even more the local community development and needs either in the schools or other sectors, such as local institution or NGO.



CEMOFPSC ROUND TABLE: “An education of quality in the conflict area, as a way of improving peace and integration”

And within this framework we play the role for innovation, they are a lot of advocacy for more innovations, for more equity in education and democracy issues, and so on, within our different activities and at the same time we like to assist local institutions and their own struggle, in achieving better education because when they realize the issues or problems also they refer to us for consultation and feedback in order to facilitate as much as we can their field work. By this way we create a kind of partnership between our university and local community, and both are *hand by hand* trying to face the challenges in terms of achieving better education.

Of course I do believe the university perhaps lacks a program in special education. We realize that in the country, they do not have such a kind of program in local universities and that is much needed, therefore our plan is to have an academic program by the year 2014, and in this way to address the community demand.

This university program will address the highest priority in the education sector through adjusting our programs or creating new programs to satisfy the educational needs. At the same time we have ongoing activities aiming to maintain the communications between all parties and at the same time to provide opportunities for educators, providers, teachers, students for more education and for more learning. We facilitated these activities according to their schedule and their ability because they work at schools and we organize the session according to their availability.

- As a teacher (professor) knowing very well the reality of this Sector, and in deep contact with the students,

3. We would like to know your personal view on the difficulties the students are finding? What are their expectations?

How can it be bridged the gap between Education and Unemployment for young Palestinians?

For the moment we do not have the needed information from the local communities and higher institutions and there is not enough communication between the two parties that would enable the highest institutions to address the needs according to their level, I mean by that, mostly the universities are providing their programs, and sometimes there is a duplication between one university and another.

A major status for agriculture, medicine and different other areas is needed.



CEMOFPSC ROUND TABLE: “An education of quality in the conflict area, as a way of improving peace and integration”

It is not really enough distributed between the universities and at the same time there is a lot of similar programs and most of the programs are centred toward humanities, for many reasons, because they are less expensive compared with chemistry, sciences, agriculture, pharmacy, dentistry, etc...therefore I think there is a need for cooperation between the whole higher institutions to try to reorganize their programs of study according to the market demand and according to the needs, or questions or demands from the local communities for new programs.

There is a lot of major subjects that do not exist back home and our students have to travel abroad to be specialized in these areas, therefore the second point is that the market is not able to sustain or to maintain more graduates in certain fields in this kind of situation.

I do believe in changing major studies, perhaps holding the acceptance for certain majors, for certain time, to try to equal the number of graduates according to the number of needed jobs in a way or another, and to try to rehabilitate the previous graduates in certain majors and to see what we can do to bring them for further training or further courses they might have in order to be able to be flexible in their jobs opportunities.

I can give an example of that considering finance and marketing, students graduated from finance with a little help, can go to marketing major, because it is close to each other, so by this we provide rehabilitation for previous graduates without a job, providing them with more opportunities for future jobs.

But still the problem is there; I think that there is not only one major, a lot of majors should be taken to make sure that this problem should be controlled in a way through a certain time.

The system is pumping a lot of graduates to the field that are not needed, not anymore, and it needs to rehabilitate previous graduates for more skills for major studies that could be similar to theirs and to give them the opportunities in different fields, perhaps that might help, still the problem is there.