

Provision of English training in digital enterprise hubs

Mohammad Al Afifi, June 2020



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Foreword

The @Palestine project was born out of the desire to address the needs of unemployed youth across the Occupied Palestinian Territories, particularly in Gaza. Graduate unemployment is reported to be as high as 40 per cent in the West Bank and 60 per cent in Gaza. With limited opportunities in the country and restrictions on trade and travel, an increasing number of youths are looking to find employment through the digital economy as an online freelancer or digital entrepreneur.

Our initial meetings with stakeholders showed us that while there are many institutions and organisations involved in upskilling young people aspiring to find success through the digital economy, English and 21st-century skills remain the main obstacles to success. The British Council hopes that, through @Palestine and the resulting partnerships with local institutions, the gap will grow smaller.

The purpose of this study is to understand what is already being done across the country by digital enterprise hubs, particularly to strengthen or integrate English as part of their support and/or training provision, and to inform the next phase of the project. It is also our hope that this report will serve as a resource to other organisations trying to understand the local landscape of digital enterprise hubs in Palestine. After all, greater co-ordination and less duplication will maximise the impact of the efforts being made by us all.

We were very fortunate to have had Mohammed Al-Afifi work on this report. As a Palestinian from Gaza who has been involved with the sector since it first took off in Palestine, he understood its importance from day one and approached the study with genuine passion. I would also like to thank the entire @Palestine team, including Razan Tamimi, We'am Hamdan, Ismail Badat and Runna Badwan.

I am confident that by connecting the digital economy ecosystem in Palestine with those in the UK and abroad through English, more Palestinian youth will find greater economic empowerment.



Martin Daltry

Director Palestine, British Council

Executive summary

This report was commissioned by the British Council to identify main local digital enterprise hubs (incubators and business support centres) and to explore the role of English in their training and support programmes.

The research used secondary data from published literature and from online resources as well as primary data from structured interviews, focus groups and questionnaires. A total of 26 digital enterprise hubs were included in at least some stages of the data collection.

The findings of the research showed little attention is given to the provision of English language in training, but it is often used at the selection stage for programmes and much of the training material is in English.

The recommended actions have been organised to cover three main training stages.

1. Recommendations for the selection stage.

- Develop an online examination system as a standardised method to measure the level of English for business.
- Develop programmes for those who were not accepted due to their poor English level.

2. Recommendations for the provision of English training.

- Develop or customise specialised English materials for business and freelancing.
- Provide training programmes for the trainers (TOT programmes).
- Develop and record English for business online courses.
- Integrate native English language speakers.
- Design English language training and mentoring programmes based on the developed English for specific purposes materials.

3. Recommendations for the follow-up stage.

- Support the creation of English clubs in different incubators and business centres.
- Establish an online portal with a library of tools and resources for English training.



Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
BBI	Bethlehem Business Incubator
BI	Business Alliance for Services and Investment
BTI	Business and Technology Incubator
ESP	English for specific purposes
GCCI	Gaza Chamber of Commerce and Industry
GGateway	Gaza Gateway
GSG	Gaza Sky Geeks
HSITCE	Hassib Sabbagh Information Technology Center of Excellence
ICT	Information and communications technology
IT	Information technology
IUG	Islamic University of Gaza
KPITIE	Korean Palestinian Center for IT Excellence – AN-Najah National University
MG	Mideast Group for Development and Projects
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PEFE	Palestine Education for Employment
PICTA	Palestinian Information and Communication Technology Association
PICTI	Palestine’s Information and Communications Technology Incubator
PITA	Palestine Information Technology Association
PITP	Palestine India Techno Park
PPU	Palestine Polytechnic University
SWG	Society of Women Graduates
SYFS	Save Youth Future Society
UCAS	University College of Applied Sciences
UCASTI	University College of Applied Sciences Technology Incubator
WEC	Women Entrepreneurship Center
WWB	Work Without Borders

1 Research context

1.1 The ICT sector in Palestine

In the past decade, Palestinians have been leaning towards digital technologies as a source of employment. In 2016, the G20 Digital Economy Task Force (DETF)¹ defined the digital economy as ‘a broad range of economic activities that include using digitized information and knowledge as the key factor of production’. This broad definition also includes ‘the effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) as an important driver of productivity growth and economic structural optimization’.

According to the World Bank (2018), higher education has expanded in Palestine in the past 20 years along with the demand on entrepreneurial and innovative universities, which demonstrates high levels of education among Palestinian youth in entrepreneurship, ICT and start-ups. Internet World Statistics estimated:

There were around three million internet users in Palestine in December 2017 with 60.5 per cent penetration rate. In addition, more than 63 per cent of households had a personal computer in 2014, and around 98 per cent of them had a mobile line.

In 2017, the number of establishments operating in the ICT sector reached 1,008 out of a total of 158,573 economic establishments operating in Palestine, and this sector employed 9,200 workers out of a total of 444,034. Production for this sector represented 8.6 per cent of the total production of all economic sectors in 2016, compared to 3.7 per cent in 2015.²

The growth of the ICT sector can be seen as a response to the unemployment crisis in Palestine. According to the Labour Force Survey conducted by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) in November 2019, the unemployment rate in the Gaza Strip was 45 per cent compared with 13 per cent in the West Bank, while the unemployment rate for men in Palestine was 20 per cent compared with 42 per cent for women. On International Youth Day (12 August 2019),³ the PCBS issued a press release demonstrating the situation for youth in Palestinian society. The rate of unemployment among graduates (18- to 29-year-olds) holding intermediate diploma degrees or higher was 58 per cent per cent during 2018 (40 per cent for men and 73 per cent for women).

According to a study conducted by the Palestine Information Technology Association (PITA, 2008), Palestinian ICT sector employment has the potential to grow in the range of 3–4 per cent annually. This would mean 150–200 new job opportunities in the ICT sector per year.

1. See g20digitalrepo.org/detf/

2. See www.masarat.ps/ar_print.php?id=47a7e6y4696038Y47a7e6

3. See www.pcbs.gov.ps/post.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=3528

1.2 English in the digital economy

The English language is a critical factor for employment in the ICT sector. The ability to use language efficiently is a required skill to be able to work professionally; it affects not only a person's personal growth but also their professional and career growth.⁴ The communication process means sharing ideas within a given context, so, in the world of business, if the sender is not able to convey the message clearly, communication becomes ineffective. The ICT sector mostly targets international clients; therefore, a person is considered employable only if they have the language needed for their field of expertise.

Considered the 'common language' of business,⁵ English is one of the main skills for employability that a person needs to meet the demands of the present business world. Being fully aware of the use of this language not only makes possible the communication process with international clients but also opens multiple doors for different sources of information.⁶

1.3 Digital enterprise hubs in Palestine

There are several types of digital economy providers in Palestine. In the research, the focus is on the providers giving training for entrepreneurs and freelancers in ICT-related fields. These include incubators and accelerators. While accelerators help small start-ups to quickly grow in a short period of time, incubators work with individuals who have an innovative idea to transform that idea into a business or business plan. These can be run by universities, businesses or non-profit organisations. The research also included NGOs and non-profit organisations working in the sector.

Table 1 lists the digital enterprise hubs that were included in the research. Appendix 1 provides more information about them and activities relevant to entrepreneurship and freelancing. They were selected based on level of activity, with inactive organisations not being included. However, it should be acknowledged that the landscape is constantly changing, so there may be active organisations that have not been included.

Funding limitations within the organisations can lead to limitations of services, which is reflected in the limited attention given to English training despite its acknowledged importance. This is explored further in the remaining sections of the report.

4. See www.deccanherald.com/content/249714/importance-english-employment.html

5. See hbr.org/2012/05/global-business-speaks-english

6. See www.pronunciationpro.com/understanding-importance-english-getting-job/

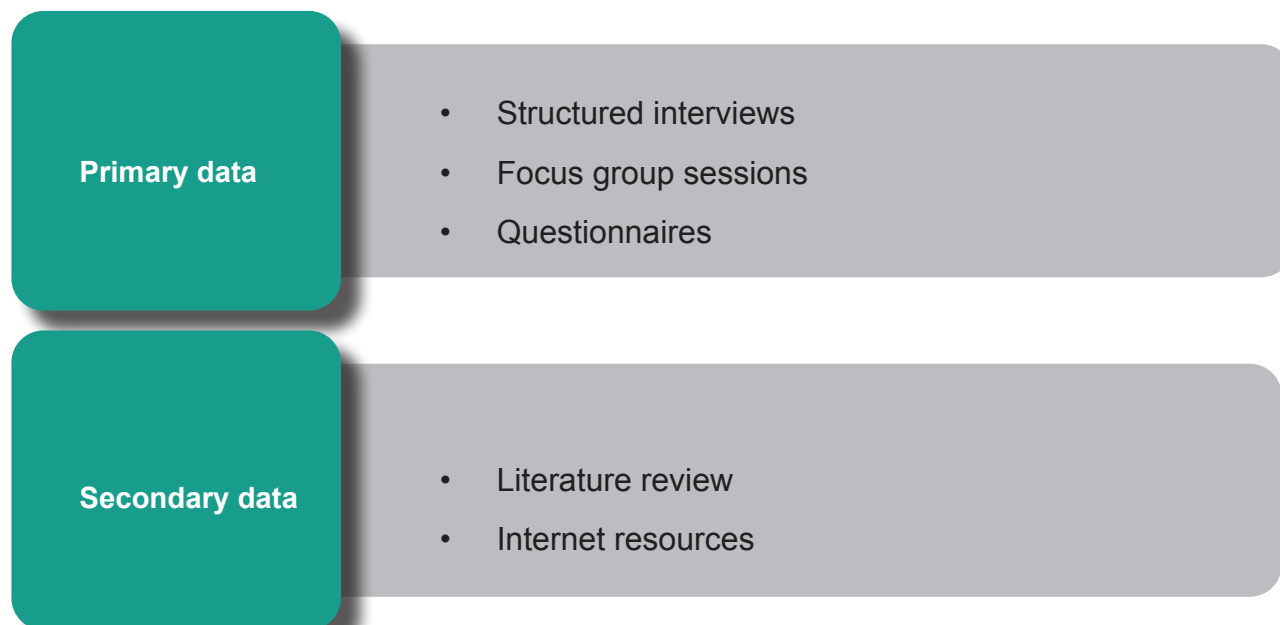
Table 1 Digital enterprise hubs included in the research

Organisation	Type	Location
Business and Technology Incubator	Incubator in university	Gaza
UCAS Technology Incubator	Incubator in university	Gaza
Gaza Sky Geeks	Accelerator	Gaza/West Bank
PICTI – Palestine’s Information and Communications Technology Incubator	Incubator	Gaza/West Bank
Work Without Borders	Remote work (non-profit company)	Gaza
PICTA – Palestinian Information and Communication Technology Association	NGO	Gaza
Gaza Gateway	Non-profit company	Gaza
Business Alliance	Company	West Bank
Palestine India Techno Park	Incubator in university	West Bank
Business Development Incubator – Palestine Polytechnic University	Incubator in university	West Bank
Hassib Sabbagh Information Technology Center of Excellence – Arab American University	Incubator in university	West Bank
Korean Palestinian Center for IT Excellence – AN-Najah National University	Incubator in university	West Bank
Leaders	Accelerator	West Bank
Hebron Business Incubator Center	Incubator	West Bank
Bethlehem Business Incubator	Incubator	West Bank
Business Women Forum – Palestine	Non-profit association	West Bank/Gaza
Birzeit University Innovation and Entrepreneurship Unit	Incubator in university	West Bank
PALTEL Incubator	Incubator	West Bank
Society of Women Graduates	Non-profit association	Gaza
Women Affairs Center	Non-profit association	Gaza
Gaza Chamber of Commerce and Industry – Women Entrepreneurship Center	Business incubator	Gaza
Palestine Education For Employment	Non-profit association	West Bank/Gaza
Sharek Youth Forum	Non-profit association	West Bank
Save Youth Future Society	Non-profit association	Gaza
Mideast Group for Development and Projects	Private company	Gaza
Station J	Business incubator	Jerusalem

2 Methodology

In the research, several data sources were used to formulate the final outputs and recommendations. Two main data collection methods were used to accomplish the study – see Figure 1.

Figure 1 Methods of data collection



1. The primary research data included several qualitative approaches:

- Structured interviews were conducted with institutions relevant to the research objectives (business incubators, digital employment projects, etc.).
- A focus group session was conducted with beneficiaries of incubation and freelancing programmes.
- A questionnaire for the beneficiaries was used to measure several aspects of the incubation/freelancing training programmes.

2. The secondary research data included:

- a review of relevant literature related to English for employability and on the digital economy landscape in Palestine
- data collection from internet resources.

3. To accomplish the research, the following stages were implemented:

- identifying the scope and relevant institutions
- literature review of relevant publications
- data collection from different stakeholders
- analysis and recommendations.

3 Previous studies

In this section, we present four previous studies on the use of English language for online job opportunities, the employment sector in Palestine, and the role of English language for entrepreneurs and business incubators.

3.1 English Language Skills and Job Opportunities, Privileges, Personal Functions and E-Uses as Perceived by Seniors in the Palestinian Universities

This study⁷ explored the role of foreign languages in making available expected job opportunities in Palestinian society, the expected privileges in the workplace associated with it, and the current and future personal uses and current e-uses of foreign languages. The findings show multiple sectors in the local economy demanding these skills led by NGOs, interpretation, translation and teaching the foreign language, privileges at the workplace, multiple personal functions of the foreign language, and many e-uses relating to social media.

3.1 Survey of Employment Institutions and Youth Initiatives Report (2016)

The Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS) produced a report⁸ in 2016 that listed different institutions related to employment and youth initiatives. The report listed the institutions relevant to entrepreneurship and small businesses (governmental, incubation, acceleration, investment funds, funded projects and private sector).

Table 2 shows how the report categorised the 78 relevant institutions.

Table 2 Institution categories

Legal status	Total
International development agencies	6
Local NGOs	39
International NGOs	8
Arabic NGOs	2
Private sector	14
Governmental institutions	3
UN organisations	2
Religious institutions	2
Non-for-profit companies	1
Syndicates/unions	1
Total	78

Note: these institutions are not all relevant to the research topic, but this list was used to identify some of the relevant ones to be included as part of this study.

7. See www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijsell/v4-i2/2.pdf

8. See www.mas.ps/files/server/20161212101632-2.pdf

3.1 Supporting Youth Entrepreneurs – Practical Guide to High Quality Programmes (2014)

This report⁹ was published by the International Youth Foundation with the support of the World Bank. The report addressed the challenges youth in Africa and the Middle East face accessing employment opportunities. It listed several components to determine the success of entrepreneurship programmes, one of which was programme design.

The report stated that the entrepreneurship training should cover a wide range of both basic skills in business and life, and complementary skills. English language for business was listed as one of the needed complementary skills for a successful entrepreneurship programme. Learning English for business is important for the beneficiaries of such programmes because of the need to communicate with international customers and suppliers in the language.

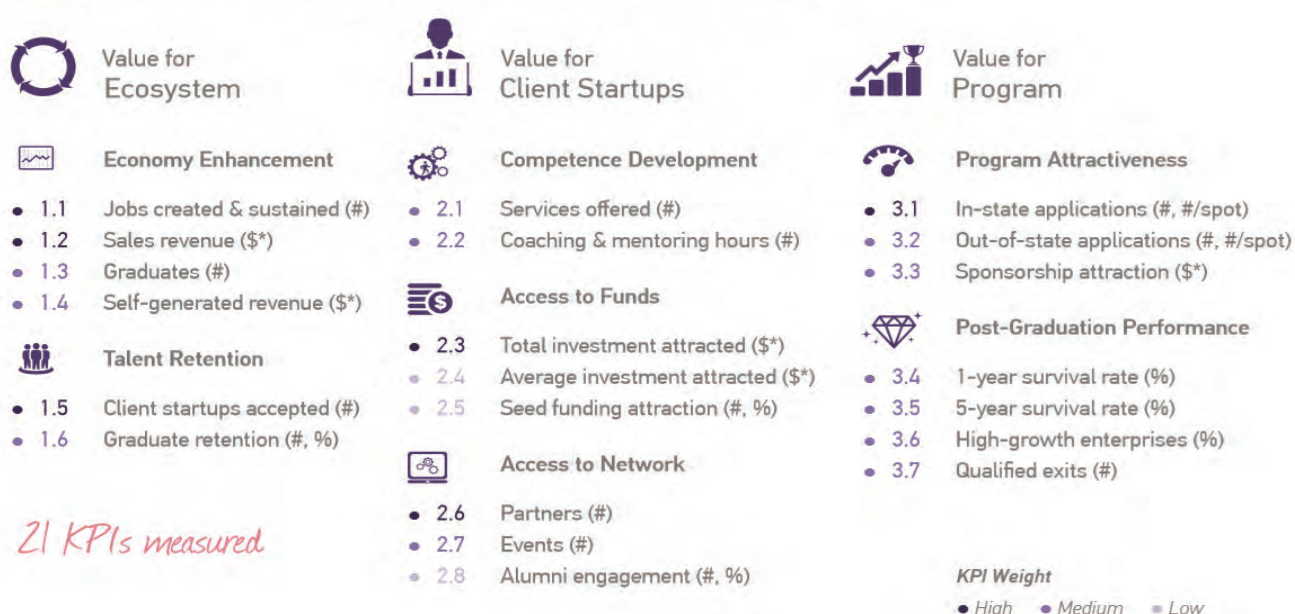
3.1 UBI Global World Rankings of Business Incubators and Accelerators (2019–20)

UBI Global was founded in 2013 in Stockholm, Sweden to identify where all the innovation hubs are located worldwide and to learn and share the factors that make them successful.

The UBI Global World Rankings of Business Incubators and Accelerators 2019–20 report¹⁰ used 21 key performance indicators (KPIs) identified by the research literature. These KPIs form the base of the seven subcategory scores, which in turn form the scores for the three main categories used to calculate the individual programme impact and performance scores (PIPS) for all benchmarked incubators and accelerators – see Figure 2.

Figure 2 KPIs measured by UBI report

BENCHMARK AND RANKING FRAMEWORK



*All fiscal information is converted to and represented in 2018 US dollars

9. See www.iyfnet.org/sites/default/files/library/GPYE-EntreprGuide_AR.pdf

10. See worldincubationsummit.com/rankings

The UBI report states:

The Value for Client Start-up category assesses the number and efficiency of services provided by the programs. Numerous studies have shown that the quantity and quality of services provided are crucial indicators of long-term start-up success. Of equal importance for individual start-ups – as well as the ecosystem in general – is the programme’s function as a facilitator of community and network building. The subcategories Competence Development, Access to Funds, and Access to Network encompass a total of eight KPIs.

4 Main findings

In this section, we present the main findings from the interviews, focus group and questionnaire. Additional details are provided in Appendix 2.

4.1 Interviews with digital economy institutions

We received responses from 17 institutions out of 25, with a response rate of 68 per cent. Based on the analysis of the results, the following findings were recorded.

4.1.1 English language training

Only seven of the institutions (see below) provide separate English training. Some of the institutions mentioned the use of online courses or mobile apps to help their beneficiaries. In some cases, this is done through a contract with a third party.

- University College of Applied Sciences Technology Incubator (UCASTI)
- Gaza Gateway
- Gaza Sky Geeks (GSG)
- Society of Women Graduates (SWG)
- Korean Palestinian Center
- Business and Technology Incubator (BTI)
- Mideast Group for Development and Projects

4.1.2 English language as a selection criterion

Most of the interviewed institutions request a minimum level of English proficiency from the beneficiaries as a prerequisite to be accepted on their programmes. A few mentioned that the constraints are from the programme donors. Other institutions said that these criteria are applicable to some programmes only.

All of the participating institutions in the interviews mentioned that they use the interview as a tool to assess the English level of their beneficiaries. Exams (written or online) are less frequent, and few of them request specific certifications as a proof of English proficiency.

The weight of English language assessment ranges from ten per cent to 60 per cent. Most of the institutions give a range of 20–25 per cent for the English language. Some institutions like GSG provide a score for each of the interviewed graduates, and based on that they continue supporting them in further English language training.

4.1.3 Duration of English training

The English language programmes offered in the seven institutions are either standalone training or part of soft skills training. BTI and UCASTI provide ten- to 20-hour programmes, while the other institutions provide more than 20-hour programmes for English language.

UCASTI, BTI and Gaza Gateway offer their English language courses in two- to four-week periods, while the Korean Palestinian Center, the SWG, GSG and the Mideast Group for Development and Projects provide longer programmes.

Most of these institutions provide the training in sessions of 2–4 hours per day. Gaza Gateway offers the courses as a full day’s training session (5–7 hours per day), while the Korean Palestinian Center provides courses of less than two hours per day.

4.1.4 Focus of English training

All the interviewed institutions providing English training mentioned that they aim to improve productive skills, receptive skills and grammar.

4.1.5 Level of English programmes

The levels and number of levels offered vary by institution. Three institutions provide intermediate level for their English language training. The SWG, the Korean Palestinian Center, GSG and the Mideast Group for Development and Projects provide multiple levels of English language training based on the beneficiaries.

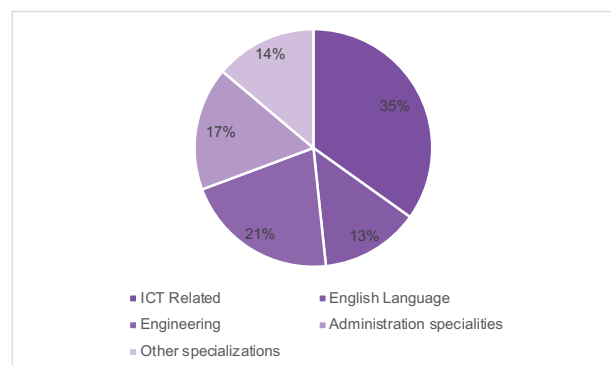
4.2 Beneficiaries questionnaire

An online questionnaire was conducted for the beneficiaries of the incubators and institutions. It received 238 responses from graduates of incubation or freelancing programmes.

4.2.1 Characteristics of the beneficiaries

The majority (90 per cent) of the beneficiaries sampled took part in training programmes in Gaza. This is due to a higher number of programmes in Gaza. Beneficiaries vary in academic background, as can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3 Beneficiaries’ specialisations



Below are more details about the beneficiaries who participated in the questionnaire.

- Women made up 64 per cent of respondents and men 36 per cent.
- Most of the respondents were 23–30 years old (55 per cent); 22 per cent were 18–22 and 23 per cent were over 30.
- 80 per cent have a BSc, 12 per cent have a diploma and eight per cent have a master's.
- 79 per cent received freelancing training, and 18 per cent were enrolled in incubation programmes. Only three per cent were from acceleration programmes.

4.2.2 English language training

The questionnaire confirmed the results of the interviews with the institutions. Sixty-eight per cent of the beneficiaries said that they did not receive separate English training, while 32 per cent did.

They were also asked about training material. Twenty-nine per cent of the beneficiaries received all training materials in English, 33 per cent received some training materials in English, and 38 per cent did not have training material in English.

4.2.3 English on freelancing platforms

Seventy-six per cent of respondents strongly agreed that English is important for their work. To understand their use of English, the beneficiaries were asked what freelancing platforms they use.

- 48 per cent have profiles on English-based platforms (e.g. upwork.com or freelancer.com).
- 38 per cent have accounts on Arabic freelancing portals (such as mostaqi.com and khamsat.com).
- 14 per cent have no accounts on freelancing platforms.

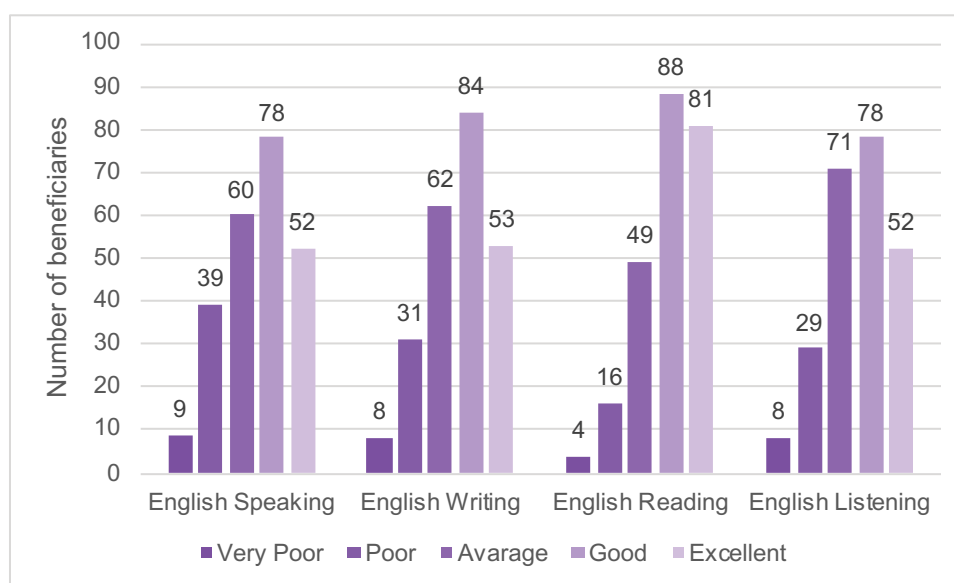
They were also asked about their clients, which platform(s) they used to connect with their clients and what language(s) the clients use. Seventy-seven per cent reported their intention to expand their work by seeking English-speaking clients.

- 31 per cent have clients from English-based platforms.
- 20 per cent have clients from Arabic-based platforms.
- 49 per cent have had no clients from freelancing platforms.
- 46 per cent have Arabic-speaking clients and 54 per cent English-speaking.

4.2.4 Language proficiency

.Beneficiaries were asked to self-assess their English skills. Figure 4 shows the results

Figure 4 Self-assessed language proficiency



4.3 Beneficiaries focus group

A focus group with 16 beneficiaries from different institutions was held to openly discuss the main issues related to their previous experiences, needs and expectations. Below are the main topics raised.

- English training materials and courses are general and not specific to the requirements of freelancing/incubation.
- Online courses and supplementary resources are needed in the training programmes.
- Current assessment of the English level for the training programmes prevents many graduates from benefiting from them.
- The importance of the English language for the graduates to reach international clients.
- Pros and cons of exams versus interviews for English testing.
- Self-learning is not covered properly.
- A recommendation for an English for freelancing course.
- Suitable timing of the English courses compared to technical courses.
- Coaching versus training for English.
- The level of the English training.
- Remarks about the English trainers.

5 Conclusion and perceived needs

There has been a rise in the number of digital enterprise hubs and training programmes as the local ICT sector has grown over the past five years, with a 4.9 per cent growth from 2015 to 2016.¹¹ Given the severe restrictions on trade and travel faced by Palestinians, especially in Gaza, the desire to seek digital opportunities for economic benefit is logical. However, English continues to be a barrier.

There does not seem to be a lack of awareness of the importance for English language skills, as demonstrated by the high percentage (77 per cent) of respondents who want to improve their English. They are also aware of their strengths and weaknesses and believe that stronger English skills can lead to more employment opportunities. Nearly half of the beneficiaries who participated in the questionnaire have not had any clients from freelancing platforms. The reasons for this were not explored, but it does suggest the need for more support and follow-up on completion of the training programmes.

Institutions also acknowledge the need for English communication skills, and most informally test this as part of their selection process. However, funding limitations have prevented most of them from providing dedicated English training to participants, the full integration of English into the programme or the training of trainers. The Palestinian economy is considered to be donor-driven, with spending priorities often dictated by donor organisations. This has trickled down to many of the digital enterprise hubs, whose training plans, priorities and provisions are often shaped and influenced by funding organisations.

There is no shortage of individuals, institutions or organisations involved in training programmes for aspiring digital freelancers or entrepreneurs. However, there needs to be greater co-operation, collaboration and communication between them. Current efforts are disjointed with a great deal of duplication happening.¹² With limited resources, working together could lead to greater impact.

Based on the data collected and the main findings, below are the most significant English-related needs of the digital enterprise hubs in Palestine. Further details are provided in Appendix 3.

11. See www.masarat.ps/ar_print.php?id=47a7e6y4696038Y47a7e6

12. See www.mas.ps/files/server/Digital%20Economy%202018.pdf

5.1 Recommendations for the selection stage

The selection process is an important stage for incubators and business centres; suitable selection criteria and processes can lead to a significant positive impact for freelancing/incubation programmes.

Receiving applications from candidates with better English levels would definitely make our life easier. Having interventions that primarily focus on English would have a good impact on the interventions we implement, as we would receive candidates with better English and, therefore, we can focus more on building the technical capacity.

Mohammed Ferwana, Gaza Gateway

Below are two recommendations for the selection stage.

- Develop an online exam system as a standardised method to measure the level of English specifically related to digital employment.
- Develop bridge programmes for those who were not accepted due to their poor English level.

5.2 Recommendations for the provision of English training

Provision of English during the training programmes is important, but funding limitations can lead to limited English language training. The following recommendations could support the institutions to improve the provision of English language in their programmes.

- Develop or customise specialised English materials for digital employment and freelancing.
- Provide training of trainers.
- Develop and record English for online business courses.
- Interact with native English language speakers.
- Design English language training and mentoring programmes based on the developed English for specific purposes (ESP) materials.

5.3 Recommendations for follow-up stage

- Support the creation of English clubs in different incubators and business centres.
- Establish an online portal with a library of tools and resources for English training.

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Appendix 1: Digital enterprise hubs

Business and Technology Incubator

Since its establishment in 2006, the Business and Technology Incubator (BTI) at the Islamic University of Gaza has been one of the leading business start-up incubators in Palestine. BTI has successfully implemented different programmes supported by local and international partners, achieving impressive results for job creation, start-up incubation and investments.

BTI aims to revitalise entrepreneurship and innovation in Palestine so that Palestinian entrepreneurs and youth can gain sustainable employment by establishing their viable start-up businesses and SMEs. The hope is that this will enhance the local economy, improve Palestinians' quality of life and contribute to the social and economic development of the country.

BTI helps potential entrepreneurs develop their ideas into actual business concepts, reaching the start-up stage. These start-ups are then linked with the local (and international) market to sustain their work and create self-sustainable jobs within the start-ups.

Below are additional details about relevant incubation and freelancing services.

Incubation programme

BTI seeks to empower Palestinian youth by promoting their entrepreneurial ideas and helping them to turn their ideas into viable businesses by offering support services. The targets of this programme are self-motivated individuals who have feasible business ideas with proven prototypes. BTI provides the selected ideas with a wide range of services, including seed funding (\$4,000) for each start-up. Since 2010, BTI has incubated more than 150 start-ups, each enrolled in one of its incubation projects (Mobaderon, BSIS, Riyadh, Spark).

Acceleration programme

This programme aims to empower and support start-up entrepreneurial companies technically and financially to strengthen their position and enlarge their work domain in the market.

In the long term, the programme seeks to contribute to the activation and revival of both the business and information sectors in the Gaza Strip as part of BTI's activities to support the national economy by assisting small businesses and entrepreneurs. More than 30 start-ups in different fields have been nurtured through the financial fund, incubation, training and monitoring for approximately ten months.

BTI provides the selected companies in its acceleration project (SEED1.2) with a financial fund of \$7,000 as a non-refundable direct grant for each project. BTI also provides an overall package for business development through training and consultancy services.

Freelancing programme

This programme aims at creating market and job opportunities for youth in the Gaza Strip. It mainly targets women and young people – the most marginalised and vulnerable groups. By generating long-lasting income, the project improves their economic resilience and that of their communities, increased their contribution to the local economy and, in doing so, contributed to social stabilisation in the region. Income is generated through freelancing contracts from dedicated portals that connect clients and online workers.

The programme provides technical training to graduates to help them improve their skills and empower them to seek employment opportunities on freelance platforms in the local market.

BTI ran two freelancing projects (work online and GO Lance) and is now going to carry out a second work online project after the great success of the first.

University College of Applied Sciences Technology Incubator¹³

The University College of Applied Sciences Technology Incubator (UCASTI) is a leading incubator that works in different business and development sectors. UCASTI was founded in 2011 as a supportive initiative from the University College of Applied Sciences to help reduce unemployment. It has successfully incubated 80 projects and marketed these projects for local and regional markets and stakeholders. UCASTI supports entrepreneurs who have creative and ambitious ideas by providing them with administrative, technical and financial support. The aim is to assist these start-ups to become successful businesses in the market.

Many sectors are supported by UCASTI, with success stories in ICT, FinTech, education, agriculture and many other fields. In the past years, UCASTI has worked to develop its incubation model to increase the success ratio of graduates' start-ups. The model was divided into three levels: the administrative level, incubation process and networking. The model was shared with other Gaza incubators.

In 2020, UCASTI is preparing to move to a new six-storey building. This will be one of the leading innovation hubs in Gaza with much better services offered to the start-ups and entrepreneurs. The new centre will contain a Technology Transfer unit, an Innovation Lab (iLab), dedicated co-working spaces and many other facilities for entrepreneurs and freelancers.

UCASTI targets young entrepreneurs, graduates and students. It has three main programmes that include many projects implemented throughout the years. Details of these programmes are below.

Incubation programme

Entrepreneurs with innovative ideas are incubated and supported to transform their ideas into businesses. UCASTI has supported many start-ups in different sectors through funded programmes that provide many services, including financial, technical and logistic.

13 . See ucasti.ps/

Acceleration programme

Established start-ups are further supported and strengthened to enter, develop, expand and reach international markets through a diversified set of services and support. UCASTI has arranged several networking visits and international training programmes for start-ups in Arabic and European countries. UCASTI also participates in international events such as Start-up Istanbul, where, in 2018, the second-place winner was a Gaza start-up supported by UCASTI.

E-work programme

Graduates and young people are supported by and provided with services that enable them to be independent freelancers and avoid unemployment. In 2017, UCASTI implemented a programme with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and in partnership with Mercy Corps. The programme targeted 80 trainees in ten different technical fields and qualified them for the international freelancing markets. In 2020, UCASTI is launching a new freelancing project with support from the World Bank.

Work Without Borders¹⁴

Work Without Borders (WWB) is a non-profit company registered in Palestine. It is a creative enterprise that seeks to provide work opportunities for Palestinians living in the Palestinian territories through online remote work. The idea of the company is based on offering different services and helping companies employ Palestinian expertise. It is characterised by professional facilities and a healthy work environment. WWB is located in Gaza with a client base mainly in the Arabian Gulf region.

- WWB mainly offers co-working spaces for remote employment opportunities, but it has also launched several projects such as:
- TAQAT, which focused on a remote employment model
- WAMD, which was funded by the Deprived Families Economic Empowerment Programme (DEEP)/UNDP and targeted 200 beneficiaries in digital marketing
- Belgian project, which was funded by Enable (BTC) to train and employ 36 trainees in marketing, Android development and graphic design.

14 . See wwb.ps/

Gaza Gateway¹⁵

GGateway is the first ICT outsourcing social enterprise in Gaza and was founded by a group of entrepreneurs. It began as an initiative in 2013 for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and became an independent well-established enterprise in October 2015.

GGateway has a hybrid business model that works on using education for employment. GGateway contributes to economic growth in Gaza by expanding business opportunities and professional capacity to solve the high unemployment rate among youth, create economic opportunities and institute for outsourcing industry in Gaza. GGateway is accomplishing this by having both business outsourcing work in parallel with many training programmes for capacity building of freelancing and technical skills.

Its innovative business model has well-integrated impact (social) and business arms. GGateway was able to fundraise over \$2 million through multiple donors. Through its social arm, GGateway was able to deliver advanced technical training, employability, career development and talent acquisition programmes for 800 youth and reached another 4,400. GGateway offers free-of-charge training through funding and support from different donors.

Through its business arm, GGateway has a business operation kitchen where outsourcing and freelancing, match-marketing and business services are sold to international clients. GGateway was able to sign more than ten business contracts worth over \$1 million, with clients including UN agencies and a sub-contract with Amazon Kindle. These contracts created more than 150 long-term (over one year) job opportunities and enabled more than 225 youth to be functional remote workers and freelancers.

Eighty-six per cent of GGateway's former employees, according to the GGateway 2015–17 impact survey's results, were able to sustain their source of income after leaving the enterprise due to GGateway interventions. More than 50 per cent of employees are women, and over 70 per cent are refugees. Since 2019 and until 2021, with the support of the World Bank (IPSD: Innovative Private Sector Development), GGateway has been scaling up its capacity to become a regional outsourcing hub.

Business Development Incubator – Palestine Polytechnic University

Palestine Polytechnic University (PPU)¹⁶ created the first university business incubator in Palestine in 2005. This incubator fosters entrepreneurship, enhances learning, internships and job creation for 7,000 potential entrepreneurs, and serves start-up businesses in a facility of approximately 700 square metres. PPU's business incubator facility is operated by the Friends of Fawzi Kawash IT Centre of Excellence, which began in 2005 as an IT business incubation unit and developed into a successful business incubator for ideas of all specialties.

It offers nascent enterprises business mentoring, seed funding, office space, infrastructure

¹⁵ . See ggateway.tech/

¹⁶ . See it.ppu.edu/Business_Incubator_Unit

and internet, and is operated by a dedicated manager. Dozens of training and empowerment programmes and thousands of training hours, mentoring and coaching have been carried out through a network of certified trainers and private sector mentors, as well as incubation and acceleration programmes and access to capital and financing to launch marketable businesses. More than 120 start-ups obtained pre-incubation services in addition to 55 start-ups that were officially launched in the market from various economic sectors with a success rate exceeding 60 per cent of the total, which provided more than 160 jobs – 68 per cent of them for women.

The PPU business incubator has carried out many initiatives that support the local community such as training for marginalised areas in partnership with ActionAid, Global Communities, Mercy Corps, Middle East Partnership Initiative, Palestine Investment Fund, the Palestinian Incubator for Energy, Spark Netherlands, Leaders, Hebron Chamber of Commerce, UNDP/DEEP, Temporary International Presence in Hebron, Taawon, GIZ, Care and many others from the governmental and non-governmental sectors.

Business Alliance for Services and Investment

Business Alliance for Services and Investment (BA)¹⁷ is a business support services provider established in 2009 with headquarters in Ramallah and Al-Bireh, West Bank, Palestine. BA is built to cater to market needs in the areas of:

- ICT by providing the services of new product development and commercialisation, digital services, investment, and start-up support
- business support services, including human resources management, recruitment and headhunting, accounting and financial management, and consulting and business development.

Below are additional details about relevant incubation and freelancing services.

- Commercially, BA was a founder and angel investor at the company Staylinked – one of the first commercial companies to specialise in online freelancing (OFL) in Palestine between 2013 and late 2015. Staylinked succeeded in creating hundreds of micro-jobs and exported services to the US, UK and Gulf.
- BA has conducted OFL boot camp training and mentorship for over 230 professionals in West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem to date.
- BA has invested in, created, hosted, supported and mentored several start-ups, whether directly or as part of another BA-implemented project for another party.
- BA has provided multiple practical-based training sessions in the areas of idea validation and business modelling.

17 . See alliance.ps/

Leaders

Driven by the aspiration of an economically robust and socially just Palestine, Leaders¹⁸ was founded in 2004 in the economic hub of Ramallah. Since then, it has grown as an organisation, both in scope and expertise, to implement dozens of projects. It supports the cutting edge of digital development and entrepreneurship, developing Palestine's first technology park. Several graduates of their Digital Entrepreneurship Program are currently in negotiations with funders for further investments worth over \$500,000.

Though its impact in the sector is significant, Leaders' work is far from limited to the Digital Entrepreneurship Program. Its wide range of projects and network of donor and beneficiary partners in the Socio-economic Program allows Leaders to support economic development, economic self-sufficiency and sustainability, as well as the building of effective advocacy for many marginalised groups in Palestine.

Leaders has grown from a provider of capacity development and training services for young Palestinians to a large and respected organisation focused on private sector development. Leaders has achieved several successes in its Digital Entrepreneurship Program, examples of which are detailed below.

Pipeline development

Leaders created a platform for potential entrepreneurs at three Palestinian universities in the West Bank in collaboration with the universities, their career centres and centres of excellence. One thousand students from different specialisations (business and IT) got the opportunity to obtain first-hand experience and to develop their entrepreneurial skills to better qualify them for the emerging start-up scene.

Leaders Organization, under the B&S Consortium – which includes B&S Europe, Leaders Organization and Spark – launched the Business Start-up Incubator Support programme. The programme aims to enable the creation of start-ups through incubation and enhancement of entrepreneurial skills to make them more competitive and financially sustainable. The programme's geographical segment includes six different localities throughout the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.

The first acceleration programme in Palestine – FastForward Accelerator

FastForward Accelerator was able to make a country-wide impact that led to reshaping the Palestinian economy. They were able to measure this impact through a number of indicators. First, the massive increase in the number of applications, with 25 applications in the first round and 300 by the sixth. Second, the consortium of donors supporting the project has expanded vastly. It was initially led by the Welfare association and currently includes the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the European Union, the Belgian Technical Cooperation, the US Consulate General in Jerusalem, Spark, Mercy Corps and GIZ. Third, new investment funds were established such as Arabreneur, Bader, Ibtikar Fund, Mena-II and PIF. Over \$250 million is now available for investments in start-ups in different stages of development.

18 . See www.leaders.ps/about-us/

Palestinian Information and Communication Technology Association

The Palestinian Information and Communication Technology Association (PICTA)¹⁹ is a not-for-profit specialist professional organisation for all workers and employees in the field of ICT with a mission to ‘promote the proper usage of ICT and its applications to serve the sustainable development goals of the Palestinian community’.

As an umbrella organisation for IT graduates, PICTA works closely with Palestinian universities and collaborates with other institutions (the private sector, government, etc.) to conduct activities relevant to their members. This includes participating in projects that are targeting these graduates and PICTA members. PICTA also works to update the database of graduates in IT fields with rapid assessment of their skills and competences.

PICTA has implemented several projects relevant to freelancing; one of the main programmes was SAWTI. SAWTI (‘my voice’ in Arabic) is an employment generator initiative launched by UNDP’s Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People to develop the skills and capacities of talented young graduates from the Gaza Strip to enter the labour market, both locally and internationally. Trainees first received coaching on how to control their breathing, speaking pace, and modes of narration such as storytelling, news broadcasting, etc. They also received training on how to be part of e-work platforms and market themselves. The initiative not only supported 180 graduates but also made possible the production of 360 audio books for disabled people, older people and people on the go.

Gaza Sky Geeks

Founded in 2011 in partnership with Google and the international NGO Mercy Corps, Gaza Sky Geeks (GSG)²⁰ began by holding the first start-up weekends in Gaza and expanding education about tech entrepreneurship. In 2014, GSG began working with individual start-up founders to grow their businesses outside of Gaza and to develop their own incubation curriculum. In 2014 and 2015, they oversaw the first venture investments into Gazan start-ups.

Today, GSG is the leading co-working space, start-up accelerator and tech education hub in Gaza. It brings online freelancers, outsourcers and start-up founders together under one roof to share ideas, learn, innovate, code and geek out.

GSG offers three main programmes.

19 . See www.picta.ps/

20 . See gazaskygeeks.com/

GeeXelerator

The GeeXelerator is an intensive 16-week pre-seed acceleration programme that aims to help teams build a usable product with only the most essential core features, validate the core product features with users, launch the features online for public use, and scale their product's user base.

Selected teams are expected to make progress towards identifying their target market, building product features that address real users' problems, securing initial users and making a strong business case for the product investors by the end of the programme. Teams will run data-driven experiments to validate or invalidate the practical use of their product's core features with potential customers. They will define and refine their target market and automate processes for scaling the products to reach more people.

Code Academy

The GSG Code Academy is Palestine's first immersive, six-month career accelerating web development boot camp with a flagship campus in Gaza City and second campus in the West Bank city of Hebron. This programme is for anyone truly serious about putting in the time, effort and determination to become a junior web developer ready to work in a tech company. A university degree or previous technical experience is not required. The goal of the Code Academy is to accelerate the growth of globally competitive coding talent in Palestine.

Freelance Academy

The Freelance Academy is comprised of multiple tracks for different cohorts of participants:

Twelve-week freelancing mentorship programme

This track is for young people skilled in areas such as web development, graphic design, translation, social media, mobile development and front-end development to become successful online freelancers through intensive mentorship sessions in topics such as building a competitive online freelancing profile, social media marketing and professional English. During the 12 weeks, participants gather for networking and experience sharing in addition to workshops on trending topics in the field of online freelancing.

Ten-week technical skills training

Running parallel to the freelancing mentorship programme, the training equips semi-skilled youth with market-driven technical skills such as WordPress, front-end development and Android development. The technical topics are chosen based on research and data collected from main freelancing platforms such as Upwork.com, Freelancer.com and PeoplePerHour.com. The research considers which skills would be most useful to enable graduates to start online freelancing.

Freelancing Club

This short programme is run every Saturday by the Freelance Academy programme alumni. Each Freelancing Club participant has two mentorship sessions and joins a Facebook group which allows for further follow-up. Each cohort has between ten and 15 participants.

Palestine's Information and Communications Technology Incubator

Palestine's Information and Communications Technology Incubator (PICTI)²¹ is the first non-profit ICT incubator in Palestine and was founded in 2004. PICTI provides sustainable channelling between start-ups, accelerators, and investors at both the local and international levels, including the Palestinian diaspora.

PICTI is an independent Palestinian organisation headquartered in Ramallah with a branch in Gaza. PICTI provides incubation services and accelerates the professional work of commercial and technological projects. PICTI works freely to provide support and consulting for entrepreneurs and ideas, and to keep them informed on the local and international markets to achieve the chance to create investment opportunities for innovative and unique pilot projects and turn them into the products and services of traders.

Below are additional details about relevant incubation and freelancing services.

- **Cooper8up:** creative and innovative technological start-ups are chosen by the programme to be suitable for development, support and investment.
- **TechLance:** a set of specialised courses and training in all fields are provided for all the community.
- **BITHUB:** one of the biggest co-working spaces in the Gaza Strip, providing 24/7 comfortable working spaces where Palestinians can find work, connect, communicate and learn all day.
- **Connect Gaza:** the largest and best – a maintained database of connections within start-up and tech ecosystems around the world.

Palestine India Techno Park

The Palestine India Techno Park (PITP)²² is a non-profit organisation established in 2016 and a member of the International Association of Science Parks and Areas of Innovation (IASP), a leading global network.

The PITP aims to help knowledge-based enterprises and creative and technology clusters who want to grow and operate successfully locally, regionally and globally by creating a national infrastructure, business environment and culture, and by helping them seed, grow and commercialise business opportunities. The PITP aims to:

- establish a must-have and essential infrastructure to enable growth and clustering in the technology sector by providing commercial offices services geared for innovation and technology companies
- change the brand and image of the technology sector to attract foreign direct investment and integrate with global value chains
- support technology entrepreneurship programmes, launch new technology start-ups and social enterprises, and develop new products
- conduct technology transfer activities that would work on the commercialisation cycles of research and development, whether at universities or in industry, and take them to markets

²¹ . See picti.ps/

²² . See www.technopark.ps/

- bridge the knowledge gap and the gap between private sector and academic study in capacity building, technology and innovation.

The PITP will promote the development of the high-tech industry; strengthen communication between various economic sectors domestically and internationally; boost research projects and investments between technology parks, multinational corporations and development institutions; maintain technology and personnel exchange; and boost the healthy development of high-tech industries in Palestine.

The PITP runs several projects and activities, outlined below.

Creative Cluster Campus Project

This project is run in collaboration with the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Unit at Birzeit University and aims to create jobs and opportunities for entrepreneurship by targeting the Palestinian youth sector. It focuses on various disciplines, including technology, advertising, architecture, arts and crafts, fashion, video and cinema, photography, music, visual and theatre arts, publishing, software, computer games, virtual reality, radio, television, satellite broadcasting, renewable energy, solar-powered vehicles, robots, the Internet of Things, and cloud computing.

The main stakeholders of the Creative Cluster Campus Project include the Kangaroo Program, which aims at developing start-ups with large companies, and Unemployed Youth, which targets young people with innovative ideas and technical competency skills who want to launch new technology-related start-ups in the creative cluster.

ReVaMP (AR/VR) Project

In line with its aim to introduce, support and incubate new technologies in Palestine, the PITP launched a fully integrated programme for the development of virtual, augmented and mixed reality applications: the Developing Augmented Reality/Virtual Reality and Mixed Reality Innovation Lab – Palestine (ReVaMP). This programme started in June 2018 at the IT labs in Birzeit University with an intensive and integrated six-week boot camp to train up to 24 university students, fresh graduates, entrepreneurs and employees from the private sector.

Other PITP activities

- Hack the Goals – hackathon.
- Innovation Water Challenge – hackathon.
- AR/VR boot camp at An Najah National University.
- Design acceleration session in the creative industry.

Hassib Sabbagh Information Technology Center of Excellence

Hassib Sabbagh Information Technology Center of Excellence (HSITCE)²³ is a non-profit organisation that was established with the support of the Palestinian contractor American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA). The original idea behind the centre was to create a high-tech centre that would serve the community and bridge the gap between the university and the local community.

Stemming from the Arab American University's corporate social responsibility to enhance, improve and develop the advancement of the local community and with a generous donation from the late Palestinian engineer Hassib Sabbagh – the co-founder of Consolidated Contractors Company – HSITCE was brought to life at the Arab American University campus in Jenin in 2005.

The centre was founded in co-operation with the Palestinian Information Technology Association, the Patient's Friends Society – Jenin, the Engineers Syndicate – Jenin branch, and ANERA, aiming to contribute to the development of the technological and economic sectors in Palestine, especially in the north of Palestine.

HSITCE offers several activities, services and events relevant to freelancing and entrepreneurship. For example, it:

- embraces projects from different disciplines and ideas
- provides logistical support and attracts funds for entrepreneurial ideas
- runs training in project management, finance and accounting, and ICT
- organises the Hult Prize competition.

Gaza Chamber of Commerce and Industry – Women Entrepreneurship Center

The Gaza Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI)²⁴ was established in 1954. The Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce consists of 13 elected members representing the private sector in core economic sectors: trade, industry, services and agriculture. GCCCI is a prominent founder of the Federation of Palestinian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCIA), the main umbrella organisation for Palestinian chambers.

The Women Entrepreneurship Center (WEC) is a non-profit body operating for the GCCCI and was established in 2015 by a group of distinguished businesswomen in the Gaza Strip. The centre aims to increase the chances of success for women entrepreneurs in various fields of business. To do this, it strengthens administrative and technical capabilities and provides guidance and support to improve the participation of Palestinian women in the development of the Palestinian economy and labour market.

²³ . See www.aaup.edu/Campus-Life/University-Centers/Hassib-Sabbagh-Information-Technology-Center-Excellence-HSITCE

²⁴ . See www.gazacham.ps/en/

The WEC provides the following services:

- training and capacity building based on the needs of WEC members
- guidance and technical support from a team of consultants and specialists
- compilation, analysis and categorisation of economic data, the results of which are then presented to help women entrepreneurs develop business orientations based on economic opportunities
- access to resources – the WEC improves communication between women entrepreneurs and micro-finance institutions to enable access to affordable financing services
- market access – the WEC enables the participation of Palestinian women entrepreneurs in local, regional and international labour markets through involvement in conferences, exhibitions and trade missions to open areas of work and networking with local, regional and international companies.

The Society of Women Graduates

The Society of Women Graduates (SWG)²⁵ is one of the leading NGOs in the Gaza Strip in the field of women empowerment. It has 44 years of experience and is the only representative body for women graduates in the Gaza Strip. Its main focus is to improve quality of life for this double-marginalised category and play an active role in community development.

SWG aims to empower female graduates through capacity-building development programmes, skill rehabilitation, education, awareness raising, job placement and advocacy for women's rights. It does this by creating local, regional and international partnerships and uses a rights-based approach to achieve its vision.

SWG has managed to implement innovative, pioneering and creative events in the field of entrepreneurship through its partnership with Global Entrepreneurship events since 2015. It has also overseen pioneering projects and well-designed interventions in the field of outsourcing and freelancing in partnership with international donors, including:

- Be an Entrepreneur Woman (January 2019) in partnership with the Euro-Mediterranean Center. This initiative provided 30 women graduates in the field of outsourcing and freelancing with on-the-job training and coaching
- Be a Tech Woman (August 2018) in partnership with the Civil Society Program (CSP) at GIZ. This project aimed to build the capacities of 80 women graduates in the Gaza Strip from different professions in outsourcing and freelancing. The graduates were entitled to 100 inclusive training hours and another 50 hours of mentorship. At the end of the project, SWG established the Women Graduates Incubator, the first accessible women-based incubator in the Gaza Strip
- Limitless Advocacy Campaign (August 2018, ongoing) in partnership with the CSP at GIZ. This targets graduates from the Gaza Strip to highlight the importance of freelancing and

²⁵ . See graduates74.net/

outsourcing as a survival strategy for them. In line with that, several activities targeted representatives of active Palestinian universities and officials from relevant ministries; within this campaign, a fact sheet was published on the reality of outsourcing and freelancing in the Gaza Strip. The campaign reached more than 10,000 students, graduates, university representatives and other community members

- e-work and freelancing (September 2017). The SWG has run an advanced capacity building programme and advocacy activities in the field of outsourcing and freelancing for 30 women graduates from different professions.

Korean Palestinian IT Institute of Excellence – AN-Najah National University

The KPITIE Institute²⁶ was established at An-Najah National University in 2005 with funding from the Korean government. It is a mark of excellence in the field of information technology. It includes many labs which can accommodate up to 250 trainees simultaneously and are equipped with the latest modern technology such as smart boards, projectors and the latest computer hardware and accessories needed by the trainees to complete advanced training.

The centre has run several programmes, one of which is the International Green Entrepreneurship Competition. The competition was part of the SwitchMed Project, which focused on establishing eco-friendly businesses and trained a nationwide team of trainers. The training was led by three European experts, Jesus Iglesias, Markel Korman (both from Spain) and Artre Nadkrinisi (Greece). Nadkrinisi led the team across the Middle East. At the end of the training, nine participants were chosen to be ambassadors of green entrepreneurship. They became certified trainers with the project's partners throughout Palestine, helping to spread the programme's message across the country and to encourage people to shift from theory to practice for some more practical solutions in Palestine. It promoted green thinking and establishing green economical projects that develop the Palestinian economy and address environmental problems in an eco-friendly way. The winning project was fully funded, and the next top eight projects were also funded in the range of €1,000 to €5,000.

Bethlehem Business Incubator

The Bethlehem Business Incubator (BBI)²⁷ is part of the BEEADEE project (Building Entrepreneurship Excellence and Developing Economic Enterprises). The BBI is an innovative hub for mentoring and supporting all entrepreneurs with all different business types. The BBI hosts and participates in global entrepreneurship activities such as Angel Hack, Hackathon and Jet in the Ring. The BBI targets the areas of Bethlehem, Hebron and East Jerusalem, while focusing on youth between the ages of 18 and 29 – mostly women (60 per cent).

BEEADEE is a three-year sponsored project by the US Department of State under the Middle

²⁶ . See kpitie.najah.edu/English/

²⁷ . See www.bbi.ps/

East Partnership Initiative and in partnership with Indiana University and Bethlehem University. It is hosted at the Bank of Palestine, Bethlehem Branch.

The BBI also had an incubation programme for ten emerging entrepreneurial projects. During the incubation period, the incubator managed to provide the programme with several services that enabled income generation and job creation in the future. It also provided consulting services, networking opportunities, training programmes, legal services and other important services that would help in developing the incubator's work. These projects were from diverse sectors, including technological services, industry and tourism.

Save Youth Future Society

The Save Youth Future Society (SYFS)²⁸ is a non-profit, independent youth organisation established in 2001 with the goal of developing Palestinian youth capacities and enhancing their participation in society. SYFS has a leading role among youth organisations in the Gaza Strip as it strives to empower young people and strengthen their capacity and skills to lead community mobilisation, awareness raising and advocacy around issues related to their lives, thereby contributing to the development of a democratic Palestinian state.

Below are three core programmes implemented by SYFS.

Obader Project: Male and Female Youth Entrepreneurs Leading the Change

This project was implemented by CARE International and funded by the government of Canada over a four-year period (2018–22), in partnership with SYFS and the Small Enterprise Center Association (SEC). It aimed to promote the empowerment and economic prosperity of both male and female youths of low and middle incomes in South and Central West Bank, including Nablus, and in the Gaza Strip.

Obader sought to improve a supportive environment for the entrepreneurship of youths and to reduce the structural, environmental and social barriers that might hinder their progress in conducting or managing their own economic projects. It also promoted involving youths in the local market and reaping remarkable benefit of the opportunities available to enhance their abilities to face social and economic challenges. The project encouraged female and male youths from existing SMEs in traditional and non-traditional sectors, with innovative and creative ideas, to access services that improve their existing projects, and provided them with the needed funds to create profitable, growing projects that are financially and environmentally sustainable.

28 . See www.syfpa.org/en

Social Change Initiative

This was a training course for entrepreneurship and leadership as part of the wider Obader project in co-operation with Al-Quds Open University. Within this course, students implemented various development initiatives that sought to empower youths in social change. It also managed to integrate them into developmental, economic and social work, and raise societal awareness in the role of initiators in their societies. Youths were made aware of the concept of community entrepreneurship and its significance in finding sustainable solutions for societal problems such as reducing unemployment.

Gaza Vision Programme

This five-year programme was implemented by the Catholic Relief Services and funded by USAID in co-operation with five NGOs, including SYFS. Gaza Vision 2020 aimed at enhancing the ability of the poorest and most marginalised Palestinians to deal with recurrent crises and the pressure of daily life in the Gaza Strip. Thus, it provided appropriate services to improve the livelihood of women, youths and heads of the families, enabling them to acquire practical experience and skills to improve their opportunities of obtaining future permanent jobs. The participants were given the chance to receive temporary, paid training and conduct small, profitable projects. Those with creative ideas who aspired to develop their entrepreneurship skills received training, mentoring and financial support.

Sharek Youth Forum

Sharek Youth Forum²⁹ is an independent, non-partisan Palestinian initiative that tackles development challenges from a unique perspective. Sharek works to develop and empower youths as active participants in civil society, and encourages them to participate in Palestinian political, economic and social affairs. As a nationally and internationally recognised platform, Sharek allows Palestinian youths to come together, develop their ideas and implement projects aimed at community development and policy change. The forum envisions a generation of youths, empowered with the skills and experiences to become not only the foundation but the leaders of Palestine's future democratic society.

The forum's primary philosophy revolves around involving youths as active participants within civil society. The name, Sharek, the Arabic word for 'participate', reflects this fundamental approach to the organisation's work. The forum's main aim is to provide a space for Palestinian youth to meet, develop ideas, think creatively, implement community development projects, and become better organised to meet the needs of the community and to experience participatory group processes within civil society.

The following are core programmes implemented by the Sharek Youth Forum.

29 . See www.sharek.ps/

Innovation and Entrepreneurship Unit

This unit fosters and enables entrepreneurial activities in Birzeit University by creating an open innovation platform for students, faculty and staff to create and work on new ideas and implement initiatives that support the university's innovation environment.

It also runs the Leadership and Active Citizenship programme, which aims to increase students' capacities to meet the rigorous demands of university education, contribute to their development as good and active citizens, and support their education-to-work transition.

In addition, the unit plans and co-ordinates the annual career fair while receiving new students, and improves career service activities, for example by maintaining the student e-recruitment platform.

The main role of the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Unit is to enhance innovation and community leadership, in addition to attracting and incubating aspiring entrepreneurs.

Masari programme

The Masari programme at Birzeit University aimed at training facilitators in order to create a community of leading facilitators. This community should be able to lead the learning journey of the programme while enriching it with practical experiences, knowledge and skills that support the goals of the programme and are related to the different dimensions of learning. The training methodology was designed to provide a chance for everyone interested to experience training and engage in the learning process. It also sought to provide them with skills and knowledge that are related not only to the programme and its stages but also to the enrichment of the trainees' skills, with the aim of helping them in their academic journey or administrative work at university.

Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition

This competition was a funded programme that gave the students a chance to introduce their innovative ideas to the unit. Afterwards, the ideas were all evaluated, and four received a \$25,000 fund. This competition supported innovation and provided students with guidance and support services, enabling them to access the required resources. It also linked them with developers and software engineers who helped them to translate their ideas into realistic applications and projects.

Palestine Education for Employment

Palestine Education for Employment (PEFE)³⁰, established in 2009, is an affiliate of Education for Employment (EFE), EFE Europe and six other NGOs in Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Tunisia, Morocco and Saudi Arabia, as well as a representative office in Dubai. The PEFE network shares a common vision of empowering unemployed university and technical college graduates with the skills and

³⁰ . See www.pefe.ps/

opportunities they need to build careers that ensure a brighter future for them, and satisfy the employment needs of the organisations they are employed in.

PEFE aims to create job opportunities for unemployed youth in Palestine by providing world-class professional and technical training that leads directly to career-building jobs.

PEFE has implemented several activities for freelancing and entrepreneurship in the past years, mainly:

- **IRUSA:** this programme was implemented in co-ordination with the GCCI and involved entrepreneurship training for five groups; two groups were in the idea stage and three groups were developed businesses. It delivered 70 hours of advanced technical training over 11 days, and targeted a total of 136 trainees in 2018–19.
- **C2C:** this involved six groups of entrepreneurship training including 164 trainees in 2019. It delivered 35 hours of advanced technical training in six days.

PEFE has organised several employment programmes in the past year, including the Job Placement and Training Programme, in which two groups received digital marketing and three groups received virtual jobs training.

Mideast Group for Development and Projects

The Mideast Group for Development and Projects (MG)³¹ was established in 2008 as a pioneering company in the field of development investment and local resources development and remote work. MG has prepared several investment forms that can enhance economic recovery and appropriate for crises. MG has a developmental component called the Takween Initiative that combines both local resources and the internet to provide other innovative investment models.

MG has adopted several programmes to support youth, for example:

- **Living E-Work Professional Incubator:** this Palestinian incubator for the private sector is considered one of the most important tools for the development, expansion and sustainability of remote entrepreneurship and small and medium businesses. It provides support to achieve all indicators of sustainability and develop the efficiency of workers in the private sector
- **Professional Incubator for e-Commerce (PIEC):** providing full plans of training and incubation in the fields of digital marketing and e-commerce, PIEC is a quality incubator for professional marketing and effective electronic commerce. It understands the needs and problems of individual workers in the field of marketing and electronic commerce, and uses the ambition of every person working in this field to achieve sustainability and develop its marketing or commercial work via the internet.

31 . See www.mgpal.com/

Station J

Station J³² is a business incubator that works to enhance the innovation ecosystem in Jerusalem by building a collaborative ‘knowledge exchange’ network among Palestinian innovators, entrepreneurs and youth, supporting them to access a dynamic, diverse and vibrant community in the field of entrepreneurship. It aims to achieve economic, social and sustainable impact through Palestinian innovation fuelled by expertise, entrepreneurial talent and new technology from across the globe.

Station J has four main work streams in the fields of incubation and freelancing.

1. **Start-ups Lab:** this aims to enhance Palestinian youth access to skills, resources and markets that reduce gaps in infrastructure and barriers. The work stream offers youth, innovators and entrepreneurs business ideas, initiatives and start-ups through extensive training, coaching and mentoring services that focus identifying and considering diverse and varying needs from every stage of the design to the implementation of the service. It is based on global best practices in business pre-/seed funding, incubation and acceleration, in addition to connections with local and global expertise, linkages, networks and exposure to markets.
2. **Uploading:** this aims to increase the level of knowledge and information among youth, the private sector, researchers and academia. The work stream offers an inclusive learning environment to expose needs, gaps and best practices in the field of entrepreneurship, as well as introducing the community to the latest research findings, technology and expertise from across the globe through a series of community-building events and gatherings. In doing so, it aims to create a new generation of innovators and entrepreneurs and plant the seeds for an innovative ecosystem.
3. **Loading:** with the ever-digitalising world, the ability to react to innovation and labour market needs has emerged as a significant priority for youth. The work stream aims to enable youth transformation and capacity development to help youth better integrate into the labour market as future self-employees, employees or employers.
4. **Co-working space:** Station J provides innovators and entrepreneurs with a much-needed working space so that they can focus on what is most important to their work.

32 . See stationj.ps/

Appendix 2: Details from focus group with beneficiaries

English training materials and courses: the English training materials are general, sometimes relevant to business and not specific to the requirements of freelancing/incubation. More focus is needed to cover the specific terms and topics relevant to the technical specialty for the trainees and to incubation and freelancing.

Online courses and supplemental resources: the training programmes that used extra resources and online tools helped the trainees to have better language exposure. Also, the programmes that involved interactions with English speakers helped with practising the English language and breaking the ice with the language.

Assessment of the English level for the training programmes: most of the beneficiaries mentioned that having English proficiency as a requirement for freelancing/incubation programmes is not fair for many graduates with a low English level. Many of them fail to enter such programmes because of this.

Importance of the English language for graduates: most of the attendees agreed that the English language was important to reach international clients and to be able to self-learn from international online resources.

Exams versus interviews for English testing: some previous programmes required an English test, others required an interview that involved the English language, and others required both. The attendees mentioned that the interview is better to test the actual level of conversation and personality skills. However, there is a problem with interviews due to the limited available time and lack of specific criteria for scoring. Exams, on the other hand, are less stressful and can be computerised to enable the process, but usually test the general information of English and are not relevant to the freelancing/incubation programmes.

Self-learning not covered properly: some of the questioned graduates mentioned that some instructors enabled them to learn by themselves. This was not the case for all the topics, and it was more about the lecturer than a policy or a way of learning.

English for freelancing course: When describing the typical course for English, participants mentioned that the course should be longer than 100 hours to cover the skills of reading, writing and conversation. The course intensity should be three days a week, and the sessions should be three hours a day. The content of the course should be tailored to the needs of the freelancers and entrepreneurs, with specific examples and business cases relevant to the future work of the trainees.

Timing of the English courses: the English training can be implemented at the beginning of the training programme, mixed with the technical courses or at the end of the training. The recommendation was to split the English training into two parts: the first part is the introduction level at the beginning, and the advanced part goes after the technical training.

Coaching versus training: the participants of the focus group suggested that English training can take two forms: training at the beginning, before the technical training, or coaching after the technical training.

Level of the English training: one level of English for all participants is not a suitable option. It is recommended to have several levels based on the assessment of the trainees in each programme.

English trainers: the level of the English trainers, in general, is good, but the participants in the focus group recommended that the training would be better if given by an English trainer who received business training (freelancing and entrepreneurship). The coaching would be better if given by a technical trainer who received advanced English teaching training.

Appendix 3: Recommendations in depth

These recommendations are those of the author of the report, Mohammad Al Afifi, based on the data he collected as part of this review. These do not represent official recommendations by the British Council.

Recommendations for the selection stage

The selection process is an important stage for the incubators and business centres. The right selection criteria and process can have a significant positive impact for the freelancing/incubation programmes. There are two main recommendations for this stage discussed in this section.

- Develop an online exam system as a standardised method to measure the level of English specifically related to digital employment.
- Develop bridge programmes for those who were not accepted due to their poor English level.

Online assessment

An important intervention for institutions in Palestine would be the provision of an online assessment system with certification that can be recognised by different institutions and accredited by an English training provider such as the British Council. English language testing should be tailored to the needs of the online business programmes and not general language testing.

Alenka Tratnik (2008) presents three views of English for specific purposes (ESP) testing:

1. ESP testing being a separate and distinctive part of English language testing among a certain group of people
2. ESP testing being a fundamental and integral part of a broader ESP teaching process, as demonstrated in Figure 5 below
3. ESP testing being an assessment of the benefit of learning.

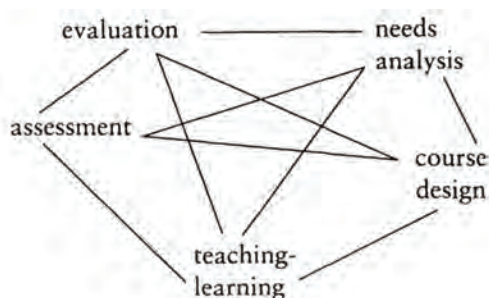


Figure 5 ESP testing as an integral part of ESP teaching

According to Tratnik (2008), successful ESP tests must:

- assess the required skills to ‘perform’ in the language successfully
- measure students’ language ability and knowledge in the field they specialise in
- be related in content, themes and topics to particular disciplines with higher levels of language proficiency
- be designed to address the linguistic demands of the specialty it deals with
- reflect students’ target language use situation
- provide students with tasks that allow them to read, listen to, speak and write in the target language, and evaluate their performance
- have clear and well-defined content and methods.

Tratnik (2008) proposes the following criteria to measure the quality of an ESP test. An ESP test needs to:

- be as authentic as possible
- provide accurate and reliable measures of language ability
- have beneficial effects
- be practical and economical in terms of administration, time, money and personnel.

An ESP testing tool could be developed and made available to institutions for assessment. This would help institutions recognise the proficiency of the beneficiaries, even if they have taken the test at another place.

Bridge programme

Requesting a certain English language level leads to the rejection of many talented graduates. Dedicated English language courses should be provided for those graduates to upskill their level and qualify them to be enrolled in these programmes.

The training programmes should be designed to focus on beginner and intermediate levels, with specific focus on the ESP requirements for freelancing/incubation programmes.

Recommendations for the provision of English training

The provision of English during training programmes is important, but the limitations of the funded programmes can lead to limited English language training. The following recommendations can assist institutions to improve the provision of English language in their programmes.

Specialised English materials for digital employment and freelancing

ESP materials should be provided as standard materials for Palestinian business incubators and institutions. Teaching ESP before freelancing and entrepreneurship training is a fundamental stage that will reduce both time and effort spent afterwards. Throughout this stage, participants' English language needs will be addressed with specific materials relevant to their field of work, which will help them transfer the language they learn into communicative situations.

The material used in the course will be authentic, practical material that equips all participants, no matter how different their fields of interest and levels of attainment, with their basic English language needs. This material will follow the authentic resources materials (ARMS) methodology of natural language use, which focuses on the 'induction of grammatical rules which can be tested against other occurrences in the text and generalised to create new formations'.³³ Thus, the texts taught will be relevant to the subject matter and will focus on the accuracy of language. This approach can also use the cloze technique to simplify learning the language within the needed context.

Applying this within a freelancing/entrepreneurship course will help participants acquire the basic inductive techniques needed for further work. Using the cloze technique will also provide them with enough awareness of how to identify problems in language and solve them.

In an interview with *Business Spotlight* magazine (2019), Evan Frendo – a joint co-ordinator of the business English teachers' organisation IATEFL BESIG – says that effective training needs expertise, so an expert must be consulted. The trainer will then be asked to spend some time getting to know the company to provide better-quality training. The trainer should also have a university degree in language teaching, have some knowledge of the business world, and be fully aware of how the training impact will be evaluated.

Frendo (2019) explained to the *English Language Teachers' Association Berlin-Brandenburg Journal* his three 'spells' for a successful ESP training course.

1. *Requisitorium aestimatio* means needs analysis. ESP teachers should understand what their students need/want to learn by investigating both their current and target situations so that they can bridge this gap; this can be done through questionnaires and placement tests inside the classroom. Outside the classroom, however, the needs analysis could be achieved through triangulation, which means 'speaking to other trainers, reading about what others have done in similar situations, speaking to people who are already working in the target situation, speaking to colleagues and supervisors, and doing language analysis using corpus analysis tools' (Frendo, para. 9).
2. *Incantatorium civitas* means studying the community, both the discourse and the people. Knowing the discourse community of the learners means learning their goals, mechanisms of communication, participation, genre, lexis and expertise. Understanding the target community of practice that the students will be part of helps in acknowledging their shared repertoire – their own developed way of doing things.
3. *Retiacula colloquium* refers to having conversations or networking with professional peers to exchange knowledge and learn from their experiences. This can be done either through direct face-to-face meetings or even online.

33 . Phillips, MK & Shettlesworth, CC (1976) p. 26.

Training programmes for the trainers (TOT programmes)

There are two approaches that could be used for training of trainers separately or in parallel.

1. **Technical training for English trainers:** the training programme could aim to build the capacity of English trainers in technology and business terms. This could focus on entrepreneurship and/or freelancing.
2. **English training for technical trainers:** the training programme should enable the technical trainers to deal with the English language. The selected trainers should have previous experience with freelancing/entrepreneurship and at least an intermediate level of English language.

Interaction with native English language speakers

Native English speakers can be integrated into current and future incubation and freelancing programmes in several ways, for instance by:

- hosting experts and native speakers in exchange visits with Palestinian institutions
- hosting virtual online meetings between groups from the UK and Palestine
- recording online and interactive videos of UK clients simulating real-world business scenarios with Palestinian entrepreneurs/freelancers.

Training and mentoring programme based on the developed ESP materials

Develop English for business methodology based on a combination of training and coaching. The training programme can be implemented as:

- English language training before technical training, offered by English trainers who took part in a TOT programme
- English language coaching after technical training, offered by technical trainers who took part in a TOT programme.

Recommendations for follow-up stage

English clubs

Hubs could allocate a dedicated budget to the creation of English clubs for trainees to practise their language skills. Another approach would be to establish a public English club in a specific location accessible to all beneficiaries.

Online portal with a library of tools and resources for English training

A useful intervention could be provided by establishing an online portal that contains:

- online courses for English language learning
- tools and apps
- online books and references.

