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Promoting Inclusion in Jerusalem-East: Pedagogical Trajectories and Methodological Challenges of an International Cooperation Research

Promuovere l'Inclusione a Gerusalemme Est: Traiettorie Pedagogiche e Sfide Metodologiche di una Ricerca di Cooperazione Internazionale

Call

This contribution presents an international cooperation research experience aimed at understanding the role of inclusive education in crisis contexts as a resource to promote the Quality of Life of communities affected by protracted conflict. Within the theoretical framework of Education in Emergency, the contribution illustrates the objectives, target groups, activities, and expected results of a participatory research conducted by University of Macerata (Italy) and Alquds University (Palestine), directed at analysing the resilience strategies realized by Palestinian school communities (teachers, students, families) to maintain the continuity of educational processes and protect the right to education, inclusion and wellbeing in a context of conflict and continuous disruptions of everyday life. By presenting the methodological challenges encountered throughout the research, the article offers relevant pedagogical reflections to deepen the opportunities linked to inclusive education in crisis contexts, highlighting its value in promoting transformative processes to sustain the Quality of Life of school communities.

Keywords: international cooperation; inclusive education; education in emergency; participatory design; Quality of Life

Il presente contributo intende presentare una ricerca di cooperazione internazionale volta ad approfondire il ruolo dell'educazione inclusiva nei contesti di crisi come risorsa per promuovere la Qualità di Vita delle comunità colpite da situazioni di conflitto strutturale. All'interno del framework teorico dell'Education in Emergency, il contributo illustra obiettivi, target, attività e risultati attesi di una ricerca partecipativa condotta dall'Università di Macerat (Italia) e dalla Alquds University (Palestina), volta ad indagare le strategie di resilienza poste in essere dalle comunità scolastiche palestinesi (insegnanti, studenti e famiglie) per mantenere la continuità dei processi educativi e proteggere il diritto all'educazione, l'inclusione e il benessere in un contesto di conflitto e continue interruzioni della vita quotidiana. Illustrando le sfide metodologiche incontrate durante la ricerca, l'articolo offre rilevanti riflessioni pedagogiche per comprendere le opportunità legate all'educazione inclusiva nei contesti di crisi, evidenziando il suo valore nel promuovere processi trasformativi per sostenerne la Qualità di Vita delle comunità scolastiche.

Parole chiave: cooperazione internazionale; educazione inclusiva; education in emergency; progettazione partecipata; Qualità di Vita

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1. Introduction

In today's world, many communities live in the shadow of armed conflicts, political instability, and humanitarian crises. The unsettling events they are exposed to – in the midst of such turmoil and upheaval – not only disrupt everyday life, but threaten the protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms, especially with reference to vulnerable groups (European Commission, 2018; Taddei, 2021). Within such contexts, the right to education is often violated, with schools, students, teachers and families constantly exposed to multiple forms of exclusion and discrimination that challenge the continuity of teaching and learning. Beyond the immediate loss of access to knowledge, these dynamics can compromise children's sense of safety and belonging, depriving them of the opportunity to share and socialise their feelings, threatening the cohesion of the educational community (MacKenzie et al., 2020; Samman, 2020; Miaari & Lee, 2024). As a consequence, in contexts marked by structural violence and insecurity, safeguarding the right to education becomes a crucial condition for sustaining dignity, resilience, and the hope for a better future, preserving the transformative and social value of learning (Canevaro, 2013; Taddei & Pacetti, 2018; Aiello & Giaconi, 2024).

For a long time, in the context of humanitarian crises, international cooperation agencies tended to focus their interventions on psychosocial support and immediate assistance (e.g., distribution of essential goods and supplies), considering educational initiatives part of long-term development projects rather than emergency responses (AICS & RIDS, 2015; Burde et al., 2017; European Commission, 2018). As a consequence, the concepts of emergency, education and inclusion appeared to be incompatible in terms of priorities and sustainability of humanitarian interventions. Over recent decades, however, international cooperation policies started to acknowledge the value of education and inclusion as central dimensions to safeguard communities' rights and wellbeing (AICS & RIDS, 2015; EU, 2018). The growing recognition of education as a crucial resource in times of crisis has reshaped international cooperation policies, fostering approaches that value and protect the continuity of learning as a vital resource and driving force for Quality of Life (Giaconi, 2015; Taddei et al., 2025).

In this challenging scenario, this contribution aims at illustrating the challenges and opportunities related to conducting field educational research in crisis contexts. Specifically, the paper illustrates the context, objectives and methodological implications of a joint research conducted by University of Macerata (Italy) and Al-Quds University (Palestine)¹, focused on promoting inclusion as a resource for equal rights and wellbeing in primary school communities of East Jerusalem territories. The motivation of this research stems from the urgency of crafting pedagogical responses capable of addressing the complexity of conflict-affected contexts, while activating transformative and inclusive processes through participatory and intersectional research strategies. By advancing reflections related to inclusive education in emergency, this contribution highlights the pedagogical value of international cooperation and field educational research as trajectories to promote communities' empowerment, resilience, and Quality of Life (Giaconi, 2015; Taddei et al., 2025) in humanitarian crisis contexts.

2. Theoretical framework of education in emergency

In light of the challenges and opportunities highlighted in the introduction, the reframing of educational agency in emergency contexts highlights its multifaceted relevance for communities' wellbeing. Further into detail, scientific literature highlights how education can offer a sense of continuity and "normality" in everyday life, a safe pace for emotional care and psychological support, as well as an opportunity to create shared meanings out of traumatic events and preserve a constructive vision oriented towards a

¹ The research is part of the EU funded Project ““Including Jerusalem: promoting inclusion as a unifying process for primary school children in fragmented communities of East Jerusalem” (Funding programme: Europeaid 2020).



sustainable and equitable future (Taddei 2021; Pacetti et al., 2024). In this frame of reference, as deepened in previous works (Taddei, 2010; Taddei, 2017; Taddei & Pacetti, 2018; Taddei et al., 2025), Inclusive Education represents a challenging trajectory in emergency contexts. Such challenges arise from the unique complexities that these situations present, considering how an inclusive approach encompasses a multitude of aspects that need to be considered: from accessibility to capacity building, from network sharing to individualisation and personalisation of educational interventions (INEE, 2018; Taddei 2021).

Inclusive education allows children and adolescents to live in safe and welcoming environments, in which the quality of relationships and the sharing of experiences sustains emotional wellbeing also in situations of instability and vulnerability (Pacetti et al., 2024; Taddei et al., 2025). In this direction, a school that promotes inclusion represents a dimension that acknowledges and values personal needs, aspirations and experiences, favouring self development and community belonging (d'Alonzo, 2008; Giaconi et al., 2023; Aiello & Giaconi, 2024). Specifically, in particularly vulnerable situations, scholastic institutions acquire a generative role, becoming spaces in which students, teachers and families can build resilience strategies to face difficulties with awareness and cohesion (Canevaro, 2006; Ianes, 2006; Cottini, 2017). Creating an inclusive school therefore implies an intentional action aimed at removing physical, cultural and social barriers, orienting educational practices towards individual and collective wellbeing, and building transformative learning environments that can promote personal and community empowerment (Adams, 2009; Del Bianco, 2019; Pacetti et al., 2024).

Such considerations recall the pedagogical value of inclusive education in emergency, highlighting the need to deepen the true meanings that educational interventions retain during humanitarian crises. The attention towards education in emergency contexts and its inclusive interpretation has developed over the last twenty years in the field of international cooperation. Throughout this process, a turning point is represented by the *Education for All Movement* (2000) and the creation of the *Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies*, which promoted a collaboration network between international agencies and organisations, putting forth the need to acknowledge education as a central resource in situations of vulnerability and disruption. In this sense, the expression *Education in Emergencies* (EiE) refers to the possibility of guaranteeing inclusive and quality education across the life cycle, also in situations of crisis (INEE, 2018; Taddei 2021). The complexity that characterises EiE, in this direction, is well depicted in situations of protracted emergency and conflict, as that of the Palestinian context, where access to schooling is frequently disrupted and shaped by mechanisms of exclusion and violence, making the development of an inclusive system not only a right, but also an urgent necessity (Burde et al., 2015; Shah et al., 2020; Taddei et al., 2025).

3. The Palestinian educational context: main challenges

The Palestinian educational system is currently facing an exceptionally complex crisis context, characterised by extended political conflict and socio-economic uncertainty (ReliefWeb, 2024a). This environment presents surprising challenges that intensely impact the delivery, quality, and continuity of education across Palestinian territories (UNESCO, 2024). Understanding these challenges is vital for contextualising educational research and developing responsive strategies that address the realities faced by Palestinian students, teachers, and educational institutions (Iriqat, 2025).

Palestinian education faces many criticalities rooted in a complex political reality that significantly plow into educational stability. Regular disruptions to the academic calendar determine school closures and interrupt pedagogical processes, shattering learning continuity and affecting educational planning (ReliefWeb, 2024b). A closer look at the Palestinian context unveils a multitude of barriers generated by this situation of crisis.

In the first place, students and teachers encounter daily difficulties in reaching schools and universities, with journey times often extended by hours due to checkpoint delays and restricted roads. These mobility constraints disproportionately affect rural and marginalized communities, worsening educational inequal-



ties and contributing to increased dropout rates, while also impacting instructional time and educational stability (Bonello, 2024). Secondly, infrastructure shortage and resource lack create constant structural challenges across Palestinian territories. Many schools work in overcrowded conditions with insufficient classrooms, too little facilities, and limited access to modern technologies (Abu-Duhou, 1996; OCHA, 2018). Limitations related to building materials and building permits, particularly in Area C and East Jerusalem, hinder facility expansion (Fobzu, 2023). Moreover, the psychosocial burden on students and educators represents a deep dimension of the educational crisis. Disclosure to violence, loss, home destruction, and prevalent insecurity generate psychological trauma that impedes learning and teaching effectiveness. Students demonstrate symptoms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress, as teachers must manage their own distress while supporting traumatized students, often without adequate training in psychosocial intervention (Marie et al., 2020). Lastly, economic restrictions further bound educational opportunities. Poverty and economic uncertainty force families to prioritize survival over education, leading to increased child labor and school leaving (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024). In this sense, the lack of funding limits the possibility of investing on teachers' formation and school materials, especially when relying on fluctuating international aid (Education Cannot Wait, 2022).

Despite these challenges, the Palestinian educational system has shown remarkable resistance. Institutions have developed innovative coping strategies, including flexible scheduling and community-based initiatives to maintain continuity (Abu-Saada, 2024). However, these adaptive responses cannot fully compensate for systematic constraints, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive, context-sensitive policies and sustained international support to ensure quality education for all Palestinian learners (Iriqat, 2025). It is in accordance with these trajectories that the international cooperation initiative described in this paper takes place, seeking to promote inclusive pedagogical and didactic practices as a means to strengthen social cohesion, foster community wellbeing, and cultivate a future-oriented perspective within the occupied Palestinian territories, as presented in the following paragraphs.

4. The Research: Objectives, Target Groups, Activities, and Expected Results

As anticipated, this paper presents a collaborative research involving the University of Macerata and Al-Quds University, seeking to analyse the sustainability and transformation of educational processes within the Palestinian context amid emergency situations. To this end, the research aims to generate new knowledge on the ways in which Palestinian schools, families, and communities manage crises while adhering to the principles of the right to education, inclusion, and wellbeing through the engagement of multiple stakeholders. Specifically, the research has five key objectives: 1) identifying practices and strategies developed within schools and communities to ensure equal learning opportunities and face challenges; 2) examining how the right to education is interpreted in situations of instability; 3) exploring the meaning and implementation of inclusion, with particular attention to the ways in which diverse learners are supported within this context; 4) assessing how wellbeing is addressed for both students and educators facing psychosocial and academic challenges; 5) determining the core competences teachers require to effectively manage educational processes in times of crisis, thereby contributing to both policy development and capacity-building efforts in the field of education in emergencies.

The research focuses on the Palestinian school environment as a whole, encompassing institutional, pedagogical, and community dimensions of education within crisis contexts. Target groups were defined to capture the full spectrum of educational experiences and perspectives: specifically, the research involves Palestinian school leadership, teaching staff across core subjects and specialised roles, students representing diverse academic levels, genders, and social backgrounds, and their families, which represent a critical dimension for understanding the broader educational ecosystem. Selection criteria were designed to ensure balanced representation, including variability in academic achievement, inclusion of learners with diverse needs, and equitable gender representation.

The research employs a participatory approach (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995) through a mixed-methods

study design (Creswell, 2021), integrating qualitative and quantitative tools to provide a comprehensive understanding of education in crisis contexts. Capacity building workshops were conducted by the University of Macerata team to ensure alignment with Al-Quds University PhD and undergraduate researchers. Workshops specifically concerned research core concepts, objectives and both methodological frameworks and practical aspects of fieldwork, ensuring an alignment between the two teams to effectively implement the research in the Palestinian context. During the workshops (and after), research tools were jointly designed and developed by the Italian and Palestinian research teams following a co-design approach (Steen, 2013). Data collection is currently taking place across 20 Palestinian schools—15 public and 5 private—with ongoing coordination and iterative feedback processes between the two universities to validate the tools and refine research procedures throughout the study. Figure 1 illustrates the steps of the research, while Table 1 illustrates the co-designed research tools for each target group.

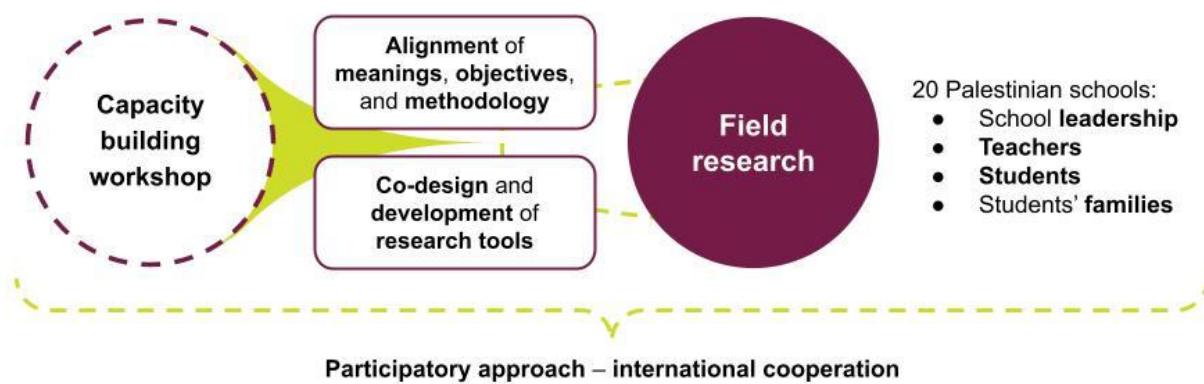


Figure 1 – Steps of the joint research

Target group	Research tools
School leadership and teachers	Focus group (conducted via Zoom); Questionnaire (via Google Forms).
Students	Mixed tool including questionnaire, interview questions, and drawing activities.
Students' families	Semi-structured interview (conducted via Zoom); Questionnaire (via Google Forms).

Table 1 – Research tools

The research is expected to generate evidence-based recommendations for policy and practice, develop a framework for inclusive education and wellbeing in crisis contexts, empower communities to foster positive change, and strengthen the research capacity of emerging scholars. As a result, in addition to documenting challenges, the research seeks to highlight effective practices and support more resilient and equitable educational communities in Palestine. Beyond the production of empirical data, the expected results assume a central transformative value for the educational community involved. Firstly, the research expects to enhance the agency of teachers and families: by being actively involved in the study, participants are not merely beneficiaries but co-constructors of inclusive practices, strengthening their capacity to respond to crises. Secondly, the study aims to define an operational framework for inclusive education in emergencies that provides practical tools immediately applicable to improve the Quality of Life in schools, despite structural restrictions. Finally, the consolidation of the inter-university partnership represents a crucial result in itself: it establishes a sustainable support network capable of generating shared resilience practices and breaking the academic and professional isolation often imposed by the conflict.



4.1 Methodological Approach: field research between difficulties and opportunities

The methodological trajectory of this research was guided by a systematic process shaped through shared reflection and dialogue with experts in their educational capacity. Inception of the study was grounded in an initial team meeting, during which the central idea of the research was articulated and its relevance to the Palestinian educational context was highlighted. This meeting was followed by a structured workshop that served as a platform for in-depth discussions on the concept of blended learning and its implications for Palestinian students, teachers, and educational institutions under the prevailing political and socio-economic conditions.

Building on the outcomes of this workshop, the recognition of the vital importance of advancing the concept of inclusive education within the Palestinian educational context began to take shape. This realization underscored the necessity of addressing inclusion not only as a pedagogical principle but also as a pressing educational priority. In response, a decision was made to undertake and publish scientific research on the subject, leading to the organization of a series of meetings dedicated to defining the central themes of the study and carefully designing the research tools.

At this stage, the research team developed preliminary versions of the data collection tools, carefully designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the study's research questions. These draft tools aimed to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation, balancing measurable indicators with rich, contextual insights. Following their initial construction, the tools underwent a rigorous process of expert review, wherein specialists in education, pedagogy, and research methodology critically evaluated their design, content, and alignment with the study objectives. The feedback provided by these experts was helpful in refining the tools, enhancing their validity, improving clarity and precision, and ensuring that they were culturally and contextually appropriate for the Palestinian educational setting. This iterative process not only strengthened the methodological rigour of the study but also contributed to the reliability and relevance of the data to be collected.

Recognising the importance of institutional collaboration, the research team initiated regular consultations with the Palestinian Ministry of Education. These sessions provided opportunities to present and refine the tools, negotiate strategies for data collection, and discuss mechanisms for ensuring equitable access to diverse sample groups. This engagement was crucial in aligning the research design with national educational priorities and ensuring its feasibility within the constraints imposed by the broader political context.

Following ministerial consultations, the tools underwent a second round of expert validation, with emphasis placed on reliability, cultural appropriateness, and methodological rigor. This iterative cycle of tool development, critique, and refinement not only strengthened the credibility of the research design but also highlighted the dual nature of the process marked simultaneously by structural difficulties and openings for innovation. In sum, the methodological approach reflected a dynamic balance between challenges and opportunities.

The process of validating the research tools and coordinating meetings faced several challenges. Conducting sessions via Zoom, due to the difficulty of in-person meetings, limited direct interaction and engagement. Accessing schools to reach the study sample was also challenging, requiring significant logistical planning and effort. Additionally, the process of tools validation itself demanded considerable time and attention to ensure methodological rigour and contextual appropriateness.

Attention was given to the fact that the schools included in the study sample are located on the outskirts of Jerusalem, which necessitated obtaining special permits for researchers to access them. To address this challenge, the research team adopted a sustainable solution by conducting interviews with parents, teachers, and school principals via Zoom. In parallel, the researchers finalized the development of the research tools and initiated the process of data collection.

Despite the challenges encountered, the research process also illuminated significant opportunities that enriched the study. The research team exhibited strong motivation and deep commitment to the topic under investigation, which translated into sustained engagement and collective ownership of the



process. This enthusiasm was reinforced by a high level of intra-team collaboration, where members effectively pooled their skills and perspectives to address emerging needs. The involvement and expertise of the Ministry of Education staff further strengthened the process by providing both institutional support and valuable professional insights, thereby ensuring greater feasibility and alignment with national educational priorities. In addition, the researchers' professional competence and prior experience played a pivotal role in facilitating adaptive problem-solving, enabling the thoughtful refinement of the research tools, and ultimately contributing to the rigor and credibility of the study.

Beyond these internal strengths, the research process was reinforced by careful attention to ethical and practical considerations. The team ensured informed consent, confidentiality, and respectful engagement with all participants, including teachers, parents, and school administrators. Innovative strategies, such as conducting interviews online, allowed the study to overcome logistical and access challenges while maintaining data quality. Active engagement with stakeholders throughout the process ensured that the research remained responsive to the real needs of schools and communities.

In general, the research served as an opportunity for capacity building, enabling the team to refine research skills and foster reflective practice. In this context, a specific aspect to be highlighted is the generative potential of intercultural dialogue between the Italian and Palestinian research teams. Specifically, international cooperation was grounded beyond organisational aspects, supporting an iterative, participatory process aimed at the continuous renewal and co-construction of pedagogical meanings (Steen, 2013; Taddei et al., 2025). Participatory practices were supported by the creation of an online communication channel for continuous dialogue between teams and a shared online repository for research monitoring. As the teams faced challenges in translating theoretical principles into shared operational trajectories, the solution was found in the reininterpretation of the principles of inclusion in light of the Palestinian context, ensuring the cultural relevance and operational flexibility of methodologies and tools (Taddei et al., 2025). As a result, intercultural dialogue offered unique opportunities for mutual learning and the co-creation of situated knowledge, thereby increasing the study's potential to inform educational policy, improve school practices, and guide future research on inclusive education.

5. Conclusions: lessons learned and perspectives for field educational research in crisis contexts

This paper has provided a critical opportunity to understand the challenges and opportunities inherent in education during crises, highlighting a series of lessons learned that can inform the enhancement of educational policies and strategies within contexts affected by turmoil and upheaval. In this sense, education in times of crisis constitutes a pivotal area of research that deserves special focus, especially in regions experiencing protracted conflict, such as Palestine.

It is worth mentioning that supporting children and meeting their educational needs in times of crisis is a noble humanitarian and educational mission that enhances children's learning and knowledge, as well as their right to education, wellbeing, and a higher Quality of Life (Giaconi, 2015).

Building resilient and adaptable educational communities emerges as a cornerstone for ensuring educational continuity amid unexpected disruptions(UNESCO, 2023). This endeavour requires proactive planning and ongoing professional development for teachers to ensure the sustainability and viability of pedagogical processes. Moreover, the integration of technology in education digital platforms and remote learning initiatives holds substantial potential to mitigate educational disparities during times of crisis (World Bank, 2022).

As shown, intersectoral collaboration among educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, governmental agencies, and local communities is critical in creating safe and sustainable learning environments, enhancing the overall effectiveness of educational responses to crises.

Regarding future paths of educational research in crisis contexts, there is an urgent need to formulate adaptable educational policies that account for the nuances of local context and address evolving chal-



lenges. Such policies should prioritise the development of national frameworks for education emergencies, designed to sustain learning under the most challenging circumstances.

The provision of appropriate services requires that supporting institutions accurately identify and respond to the genuine needs of schools. In this regard, the Ministry of Education places considerable emphasis on fostering educational partnerships that not only enhance the learning process but also promote scientific research and ensure the effective translation of its outcomes into practice within the field.

Furthermore, increased investment in digital education stands out as a key mechanism for ensuring equitable access to educational resources for all learners. Concurrently, sustained training of educational personnel on crisis management protocols will enable the implementation of diverse and effective educational approaches, thus preserving the continuity and quality of education.

It is equally vital to fortify international partnerships and draw upon global experiences in crisis education to devise contextually attuned innovations. Adequate funding allocation remains essential to ensure the continuity of these efforts.

In short, education in crisis requires comprehensive and integrated strategies based on proactive planning, leveraging technology, providing psychosocial support, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Implementing these ideas and recommendations will contribute to building an educational framework resilient enough to withstand and adapt to crises.

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