Exploring Palestinian Culture and its Educational Practices through Hofstede's Lens

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ABSTRACT: *This paper used Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, precisely the dimensions of power distance, individualism/collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance, as a framework to analyze Palestinian culture and educational practices. Though Arab societies do not fully embrace Islamic teachings, religious principles significantly shape cultural beliefs and behaviors. Therefore, analyzing traditional Palestinian proverbs provides insight into entrenched societal values. According to Hofstede's model, Palestine aligns with broader Arab countries, ranking high in power distance and uncertainty avoidance and low in individualism. These cultural tendencies manifest in Palestinian educational norms, such as deference to teachers, collectivist learning environments, and resistance to pedagogical reform. However, technological advances have begun shifting specific dynamics, like teacher-student relationships. This paper argues that educational progress requires leveraging positive collectivist and power distance attributes while utilizing modern learning technologies. Examples from Japan and South Korea demonstrate how Palestinian Education can honor cultural heritage yet develop critical thinking skills. Suggestions include establishing ethics for online learning, integrating global education trends without compromising Palestinian identity, and focusing on cooperative facets of collectivism. Palestinian Education can thrive despite ongoing political challenges with proper community and policy support.*

KEYWORDS: *Palestinian culture, Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Educational practices, Teacher-student dynamics; Educational reform; Modern learning technologies; Power distance.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The cultural dimensions theory initiated and developed by Hofstede is considered the most widespread model in interpreting and understanding cultures and their practices despite shortcomings such as the neglect of technological impact (Usmani, 2022). A holistic analysis of the underlying presuppositions of nations reflected on the surface artifacts and behaviors would help conceptualize and constrain educational practices in the Palestinian culture and contribute to understanding them considerably (Schein, 1992). Following Hofstede's' model, Hofstede classifies the Arab-speaking countries as high on dimensions of power distance (80) and uncertainty avoidance (68) and as low on the individualistic one (38) (Hofstede et al., 2010). As an extension of the broader Arab community, Palestine is consistent with these results despite some changes in recent years due to the technological revolution. This paper analyzes Palestinian society on three aforementioned cultural dimensions to understand people's performance on different levels, Particularly the educational system. In an attempt to present a precise reading of the Palestinian culture, referring to religious proofs from the Quran and Sunna are left intentionally. Despite the significant influence of Islam as a prevalent power in forming the Arabic-speaking countries' cultural beliefs and practices, Arab societies (including Palestine) do not accurately embrace Islam teachings due to the globalization effect and other factors (Al- Shaikh, 2003). Instead, Palestinian traditional proverbs are searched from the Palestinian Proverb Encyclopedia (Sahli, 2002) because they reflect the steadily entrenched traditional values and views in a nation's collective memory and are transferred from generation to generation (Mieder, 2004). Furthermore, addressing recent technological effects on educational practices related to power distance, collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance dimensions is another addition to Hofstede's model.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Palestinian Education operates within a unique cultural and political context. While recent technological advances necessitate educational reform, systemic change is impeded by entrenched cultural tendencies like high power distance, collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance. Tensions arise when trying to modernize teaching methods while honoring Palestinian cultural identity. This paper examines how cultural dimensions manifest in Palestinian Education in order to provide a conceptual basis for meaningful, relevant educational reform.

III.   OBJECTIVES

Based on the foregoing, this paper has two main objectives. First, it utilizes Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory to analyze key aspects of Palestinian culture, specifically power distance, individualism/collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance. Second, it explores how these cultural tendencies manifest in Palestinian educational norms and practices at informal and institutional levels. The goal is to provide a framework for understanding Palestinian Education in its cultural context.

IV.   SIGNIFICANCE

This study is significant because Education is crucial for cultural transmission and societal progress. By examining Palestinian Education through a cultural lens, this paper provides unique theoretical insights that can inform efforts to update pedagogical approaches without compromising heritage. Understanding the cultural underpinnings of established educational norms allows educators to leverage positive cultural attributes while adapting methods and mindsets for 21st-century learning. This paper contributes an essential perspective to scholarship on Palestinian culture and Education.

V.   QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

This study aims to answer the following questions

- How do Hofstede's cultural dimensions of power distance, individualism/collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance characterize Palestinian culture?
- How are these cultural value dimensions reflected in Palestinian educational practices and teacher-student dynamics?
- Can Palestinian Education adopt modern learning approaches and develop critical thinking while still affirming cultural heritage? If so, what strategies and interventions would enable this?

VI.   METHODOLOGY

This paper utilizes a qualitative methodology to explore Palestinian culture and Education through the lens of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory. A qualitative approach enables rich, descriptive analysis of the cultural values and norms that shape educational practices. Abu Hamdi et al. (2021, p.71) stated, "Quantitative and qualitative methods are the engine behind evidence-based outcomes". The paper examines key literature on Arab and Palestinian culture to identify alignments with Hofstede's dimensions of high power distance, collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance. Analysis of traditional Palestinian proverbs provides further insight into deeply rooted cultural beliefs. To understand how these cultural tendencies manifest in Education, the paper synthesizes past scholarship investigating Palestinian educational dynamics, teacher-student relationships, and reform efforts. Comparing the Palestinian case with other collectivist societies informs potential strategies for modernization. The paper incorporates examples from informal interviews with Palestinian educators to illustrate how cultural dimensions permeate classroom norms. This qualitative approach provides a nuanced framework for analyzing Palestinian culture and Education, privileging themes that emerge inductively from data sources. Findings lay the groundwork for tailoring educational reform to the Palestinian cultural context.

VII.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Power Distance

Following Hofstede's' first dimension, "power distance," Arabic-speaking countries show a high-power index indicating that the younger generation is expected to treat their parents and grandparents with great deference and support them financially and emotionally later in their lives, subordinates are reluctant to contradict their boss's work which creates emotional distance between them, and people are generally obedient to hierarchical arrangements in society (Hofstede et al., 2010). As for Palestine, its cultural roots are related strongly religiously and traditionally to the bigger Arab society despite the unique situation of Palestinians due to the Occupation (Pier, n.d). Many common proverbs reflect the importance of respecting the elderly or high status in Palestinian culture, accepting the status quo of social status, and the necessity of having "Ekbeer" to maintain social order.

No. 116	" احترم ابوك لوكان صعلوك"	Respect your father even if he is a wretch.
No. 3439	"غابت السباع و لعبت الضباع "	The lions go, the hyenas play
No. 4738	"زي الغنم بدون راعي"	They are like sheep without a shepherd.
No. 671	" اللي بسمعش من كبيره يا تعثيره"	Whoever doesn't listen to his leader, he will lose.
No. 715	"اللي ملوش كبير يدب حالو في البير"	If you have no leader, throw yourself in the well.
No. 3416	"العين ما بتعلى على الحاجب"	The eye can't be higher than the eyebrow.
No. 445	"اللي بتجوز امي هو عمي"	Whoever marries my mum becomes my father-in-law.

The power distance is also represented in some traditions of peacekeeping in the Palestinian community, and "Alatwa" is a clear example because "the old men" or "Sheikhs" resolutions are binding on all sides regardless of the brutality of the crime.

The educational system in Palestine is inseparable from the wide cultural frame. A study completed by Naqib and Ismail (2020, p. 1404) stated, "The Palestinian educational system has gone through hectic phases characterized by being restricted and governed by occupation starting from the British Mandate up to the Israeli Occupation."

Teachers are respected, and their message is sacred. They are compared to prophets""العلماء ورثة الأنبياء": "Scholars are the heirs of the prophets " and sometimes to the point of being the master who owns the students' lives. "Whoever has taught me one letter, has made me his slave": من علمني حرفا، كنت له عبدا.". This explains the hierarchical formal relationship between the students and their teachers and the overall educational regime based on a teacher-centered approach (Alqarni, 2022). It is also noted that cultural values have manifested themselves in Palestinian Education philosophy. The deference of teachers means they are the ones who own the true answers. They speak, students listen and believe them, then memorize the answers in a rote process away from critical readings, problem-solving skills, active discussions, and questioning of answers' validation (Muhtaseb et al., 2023; Alqarni, 2022).

On the other hand, the development of technology and the spread of social media have affected the outlook toward teaching and reshaped teachers' and teachers'- principals' relationships. In a recent research, Abu Saad and others mention that Palestinian teachers over the age of thirty who live behind the Green Line have shown a lesser power distance than before, and it might be a result of exposure to what they call "Western-oriented Israeli educational and organizational influences" regarded their flexible relationships with their principles and students at schools. They tend to have higher expectations of being included in management decisions and leadership (Abu Saad et al., 2020). Abed al-Hadi et al. (2021, p. 3142) stated "The pressure of the Palestinians in general and university students, in particular, are flying checkpoints, which aimed to dismember the Palestinian homeland and impede the movement of the citizens…"

Other research indicates that the widespread of social media changes the nature of educators-student relationships in Palestine and lessens the gap between them. Teachers could write comments, send feedback, and interact with their students constantly, informally, and almost anytime (Muhtaseb et al., 2023).

Individualism and collectivism
Hofstede defines individualistic societies as those where bonds between individuals are loose. Everyone is expected to nurture his/ her immediate nuclear family. Personal freedom and accomplishments are highly appreciated, unlike collectivist societies that value loyalty and belonging to a group with strong interpersonal and extended family relationships, even at the expense of self-interest. Arab-speaking countries score as low as 38 on the individual index, indicating they are over-average collective societies (Hofstede et al., 2010). Palestinians have a collective memory of burdened heritage of injustice, occupation, and diaspora, strengthening their solidarity and social ties. Palestinians' society is a collectivist-oriented cultural group, and they are a part of the bigger Arab community that shows strong affiliation to the extended family "Hamula" and an ethnic religious element.

Moreover, the long-term Israeli occupation has sharpened the collectivist identity of Palestinians over the years, especially on the national level (Sagy et al., 2001). Society is based on clan and family relations, leading to some practices related to group loyalty and collective awareness, such as group morality, nepotism, and honor killing (Pier, n.d). In the aforementioned "Alatwa," Palestinians mostly prefer to resolve homicide within the clan, extended family, or their wider society of the village or the city. They follow honorable, high-status people's decisions in their "Hamula" apart from the government's legal system, especially in those conflicts within the same family.

Many traditional Palestinian proverbs esteem belongingness to the family and sticking to the group. Blood ties among relatives are particularly highly valued.

No. 2183"الدم عمره ما بصير مي" "	Blood is thicker than water
No. 2186"الدم بيحن""	Blood craves
No. 3489"الغنمة السايبة بوكلها الذيب""	The lonely sheep is eaten by the wolf.
No. 533"اللي بشلح ثيابه ببرد""	Whoever takes off his clothes, feels cold.

Living in a collectivist society, Palestinian students enjoy the safe environment of a popular incubator for solidarity and cooperation. A recent study concluded that students in collective communities show a higher sense of belonging toward their schools because they generally have positive attitudes toward teachers and other students. They make them happier, more satisfied, engaged, and motivated, with remarkable self-efficacy linked to improved academic performance and as a protective factor against self-damaging behaviors such as depression and drug addiction (Cortina et al., 2017). Another study confirmed that collectivist awareness in Palestine is positively associated with trust between teachers and their school principals, which mainly contributes to building cooperation, efficacy, and effective leadership (Abulyada et al., 2023).

On the other hand, research indicates that collectivist societies, which are self-construal and interdependent, show greater tolerance toward the negative educational practices of academic dishonesty or "cheating" (Brodowsky et al., 2019). In their study comparing Bahrain as a collectivist country and New Zealand as an individualistic one on the Hofstede dimension, Marhoon and Wardman relate the tolerance and practice of cheating in Bahrain to underlying communal emotions of prioritizing supporting and helping friends over ethical learning issues and self-autonomy. Students in Bahrain believe that they show solidarity and cooperation with friends and are not committing an illegal act of cheating, so they are willing to endure any risks involved (Marhoon & Wardman, 2018).

In Palestine, even though academic dishonesty is considered a dangerous, unethical act that may result in disqualification or suspension as a consequence (Palestinian Ministry of Education, 2023), some cheating cases are unofficially reported in the General Exam (Tawjihi) and are received with tolerance and understanding from the Palestinian community. A case in point is what happened with "Em Elooz" in 2022. Many questions about the examination arrangements and the honesty policy criteria have been raised. The event caused great embarrassment to the formal educational system and replaced multiple-choice questions with essay questions in the remaining subjects (QudsN, 2022). However, the case didn't end at this point. After her failure due to cheating, "Em Elooz" gained widespread popularity and support from Palestinians on different levels, especially on social media sites, as an innocent, spontaneous girl. This raises controversial questions about whether cheating could be justified in some cases and the validity and accountability of the Tawjihi exam itself. Every year, the students, parents, teachers, and even policymakers are exposed to the phobia-test effect because of its social impact on two sides, the students who don't pass it labeled as failures (social black label), and the "winners" receive gifts, gratitude, and appreciation which turn it into a "business issue" rather "education issue"(Matar, 2017).

Uncertainty Avoidance
According to Hofstede, this dimension depends on how society accepts change, embraces ambiguity, and tolerates uncertainty. Arab-speaking countries score higher than average, with 68. Moreover, the collectivist Arab community's nature intersects with its higher avoidance of uncertainty index as people attempt to control their emotional careful fear of the unknown by "rules are often implicit and rooted in traditions." However, clutching to conventional ideas doesn't mean avoiding the risks like reckless driving (Hofstede et al., 2010). As with the power distance and collectivism, ambiguity resistance is present in the Palestinian culture.

No. 1432 "بنمشي الحيط الحيط و بنقول يا رب السترة"	This is a very common proverb and it means "Walk beside the wall as much as possible, and pray to God to cover you up". It indicates the importance of evading any change or reform.
No. 651 " اللي ما الو خير في عتيقه، ما الو خير في جديده"	"Whoever doesn't maintain the good in the old, doesn't find it in the new ". It shows an appreciation of the customs and traditions.

صاحبَك العتيق، ولا أخوك الجْديد" No. 2862 "	"An old friend is better than a new brother". To value the familiar face over making new acquaintances. This indicates resisting change and refusing renewal.

Those proverbs besides the nature of the collectivist Palestinian society manifest themselves in the educational system at informal and formal levels. Students are not expected to oppose or correct their teachers because it indicates disloyalty to experts who own the right answers (Alqarni, 2010). On the official side, the same fixed mindset still prevails. A 2017 report by UNESCO revealed that the educational system in Palestine is centralized and traditional due to several reasons, such as unified textbooks, unplanned teacher training, routine regulations related to evaluation forms, traditional upgrading procedures, and Israeli violations in Jerusalem regarding curriculum and school infrastructure. Through cooperation among several non-governmental organizations, MOEHE, and UNESCO, a new program was applied to shift from an old-fashioned mindset to innovative reforming practices based on student-centered learning, interactive digital Education, and a new Tawjihi system. Unfortunately, the change is challenged by the rigid Palestinian laws, the resistance to the decentralization approach in the schools, and other practices related to the Israeli occupation that impede reforming attempts (Matar, 2017).

How to establish a culture promoting meaningful, considerate, and relevant learning?

Promoting effective classroom learning or e-learning would not be impossible if Palestinian culture evaluated knowledge and teachers' roles. Many practices related to Palestinian society's collectivist and power-distant nature could enhance the educational process and create an interactive environment that encourages critical thinking and exploration by using digital Education development (Bsharat et al., 2023).

The attempts to update the educational system in Palestine started in 2011. Abbas notes that the authors of the English for Palestine curriculum, especially for 12th and 11th grades, have managed to integrate the global cultural dimensions, notably those that address the new theories and trends in Education with an assertiveness of the Palestinian cultural identities of the students (Abbas, 2011). Appropriate collectivist interventions from the community and school would contribute to developing resilience among Palestinian schoolers (Abualkibash & Lera, 2017). These attempts require focusing on horizontal collectivists' characteristics of cooperation and respecting others and moving away from vertical ones, such as bigotry and blind imitation of the group behavior (Matsumoto et al., 1999).

In addition to establishing a well-defined code of ethics for online learning (Shweiki et al., 2021), developing new "decolonizing" modern technological pedagogies that suit the Arab context is a necessary step forward (Muhtaseb et al., 2023). Palestinians also could learn from other collectivist communities' experiences, such as those of Japan and South Korea. Without denying their national and cultural identity, Palestinian students, teachers, and principals could make a difference despite the current challenges due to the globalized information explosion and Israeli constant attempts to deconstruct national identity and undermine the educational system. With this in mind, despite limited resources under occupation, Palestine has developed a robust curriculum that serves as a model for other nations. This exemplary achievement is just the first step toward fulfilling Palestinian aspirations. Though facing profound challenges, Palestine has laid the groundwork for quality education. This curriculum demonstrates Palestinian creativity and determination to build an educational system that cultivates student potential, even amidst hardship. It embodies the ceaseless hope that inspires Palestinians to persist through adversity in pursuing their dreams (Ismail et al., 2022).

VIII.   CONCLUSION

This qualitative study utilized Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory to analyze key aspects of Palestinian culture and explore their manifestations within educational practices. The analysis found strong alignments with Arab cultural values of high-power distance, collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance based on examining literature, proverbs, and educator insights. These deep-rooted cultural tendencies shape Palestinian educational norms, including teacher-student dynamics, pedagogical approaches, and reform efforts. However, examples from other collectivist societies demonstrate that affirming cultural heritage and national identity can coincide with adapting modern, critical pedagogies. Strategic reforms that leverage positive communal learning environments, establish ethics for digital spaces, and focus on cooperation over conformity can progress Palestinian Education amidst political challenges. This will require community participation and updated policies that guide teachers in integrating global best practices with localized cultural knowledge. Understanding the cultural foundations of Palestinian Education is key to meaningful, sustainable reform.

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