

Murdering Minds: Israel's Systematic Targeting of Palestinian Scholars and Its Impact on Palestinian Higher Education: A Case Study of IUG

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ABSTRACT

Since October 2023, Israel's intensified military campaign in Gaza has extended beyond physical destruction to the deliberate targeting of Palestinian intellectual life. Education, serving as both a means of development and a form of national resistance, faces an existential threat as the assassination of scholars directly undermines resilience and post-war reconstruction. This study examines how the killing of academics disrupts mentorship and the intergenerational transfer of knowledge among postgraduate students at the Islamic University of Gaza (IUG). It also assesses IUG's institutional responses amid widespread infrastructure collapse and ongoing genocide. Using a qualitative case study approach grounded in Pierre Bourdieu's theory of academic capital (1986), the research draws on semi-structured interviews with three professors and three Master's students from the Linguistics, Islamic Studies, and Geography faculties. Findings reveal a collapse in supervision capacity, ruptured knowledge transmission, and loss of disciplinary depth, especially in specialized fields like the Islamic Creed. Beyond documenting these impacts, the study theorizes the destruction of a people's capacity to imagine and build a collective future as intellectual erasure. As a critical contribution, this paper introduces "mindocide"—the deliberate targeting and killing of scholars as epistemic warfare, and coins three additional terms: Palestiniacide (systematic targeting of Palestinians), futuricide (the killing of future possibilities), and humanitycide (the destruction of human dignity and collective humanity). By framing higher education as both a target and a tool of resistance, this study sheds light on the academic dimensions of genocidal violence in Gaza.

Keywords: Higher education in Palestine; Mindocide; Resilience; War Crimes; Palestiniacide

INTRODUCTION

The Israeli strategy of targeting and killing Palestinian scholars represents a calculated assault not only on individuals but also on the intellectual and educational foundations of Palestinian society. (Doménguez, 2024). This aggression is embedded within the broader framework of colonial violence and racial oppression that Palestinians have endured since the Nakba of 1948, marked by mass displacement, occupation, and apartheid. Across Gaza, the West Bank, East

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Jerusalem, and within Israel itself, Palestinians face systemic discrimination and military aggression, which severely impact their right to education and national self-determination (Butler, 2006). While Israel has long sought to weaken Palestinian academic life, the ongoing genocide in Gaza, which began in October 2023, marks an alarming escalation in the destruction of Gaza's educational infrastructure and academic institutions. These killings represent a devastating climax in the long-standing policy of "murdering the minds" of Palestine, targeting intellectuals to suppress critical thought, sever intergenerational knowledge transmission, and destabilize the foundations of higher education (Rabaia & Habash, 2024). These acts are not incidental casualties of war; they are a deliberate, systematic effort to erase Palestinian intellectual and cultural resilience. Therefore, education has become not only a form of survival but also a tool for resistance, providing the intellectual foundation necessary to challenge oppression and advocate for justice (Hasan, 2024).

The consequences of the Israeli campaign are far-reaching. Universities such as the Islamic University of Gaza have suffered immense damage from airstrikes, with faculty members across a range of disciplines, Islamic Studies, Engineering, Medicine, and Social Sciences, being systematically targeted. This decimation of academic capital has crippled postgraduate education and research, leaving students without mentors, disrupting academic continuity, and undermining the infrastructure that supports Palestinian national identity (Rabaia & Habash, 2024). Beyond Gaza, Palestinians living in Israel and East Jerusalem also face discriminatory policies that restrict access to education and resources, reinforcing an apartheid framework that undermines Palestinian education across all contexts. In this way, educational suppression is not limited to those in Gaza under bombardment, but affects Palestinians throughout the broader region (Hamdan, 2023). Despite these unprecedented challenges, Palestinian universities continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience. In the face of ongoing destruction and adversity, innovative strategies have been adopted to ensure the continuity of education (Hasan, 2024). Makeshift solutions, including emergency teaching methods and online learning platforms, have emerged as temporary substitutes for traditional classrooms, allowing students to continue their studies despite the collapse of infrastructure and essential services such as electricity and internet access (UNESCO, 2024).

This resilience highlights the vital role of education in Palestinian resistance. The struggle to maintain educational continuity amid overwhelming obstacles underscores the collective strength of Palestinian students, educators, and institutions (Quneis & Rafidi, 2023). This study seeks to explore the profound impact of the targeted killing of scholars on Palestinian higher education. Focusing specifically on the devastating effects of the genocidal war that erupted in 2023, the study examines how the systematic targeting of educators has disrupted the academic environment, undermined the quality of education, and halted the transmission of knowledge in one of the most academically vibrant regions in the Middle East. The toll of these attacks, compounded by the ongoing siege and destruction, has created an educational crisis that threatens the future of Palestinian higher education.

Problem Statement

The ongoing Israeli assault on Gaza since October 2023 has inflicted unprecedented devastation on Palestinian society, with the academic sector—particularly higher education—bearing the brunt of the impact. A particularly alarming aspect of this crisis is the deliberate targeting and killing of university professors and scholars, especially those affiliated with the Islamic University of Gaza (IUG). These individuals were not only educators but also key figures in mentorship, research, and the preservation of national intellectual identity. The loss of such intellectual capital has profoundly disrupted the academic ecosystem, undermining the quality of education, severing mentorship networks, and jeopardizing the stability of Palestinian universities. Education in Palestinian society is not merely a means of personal development; it is a cornerstone of national identity, resilience, and intellectual autonomy. Palestinian universities, especially IUG, have historically been vital centers of intellectual resistance, playing a central role in cultivating the next generation of leaders, activists, and critical thinkers. The targeted assassination of scholars represents a severe blow to the intellectual foundation of Palestinian society, stripping away essential resources for both immediate educational needs and long-term national development. This loss not only hampers the ability of universities to continue their academic missions but also threatens the broader social, economic, and political fabric, which relies heavily on a well-educated population to drive post-war reconstruction and ongoing resistance to occupation.

Despite the gravity of this crisis, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to understanding the full impact of the targeted killing of academics on higher education in Gaza. There remains a critical gap in our knowledge of how Palestinian universities, particularly IUG, are responding to this depletion of intellectual capital and what strategies are being employed to sustain educational continuity amid widespread genocide, infrastructure collapse, and profound psychological trauma. Addressing this gap is crucial; without it, the long-term consequences for academic development, national resilience, and the future of post-war reconstruction efforts risk being severely overlooked. This study aims to fill that gap by investigating the extent of academic disruption caused by the loss of scholars, assessing the institutional responses employed to adapt to this crisis, and evaluating the broader implications of intellectual erasure as a tactic of war and colonization. Through this exploration, the study will underscore the urgent need for both local and global support to preserve and rebuild Palestinian higher education as a vital pillar of national resistance and intellectual sovereignty.

Objectives:

1. To examine how the assassination of scholars disrupts mentorship structures and intergenerational knowledge transfer postgraduate students in Islamic University.
2. To evaluate the institutional responses of Islamic University to mitigate the loss of its academic staff amid infrastructure collapse and genocide.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Genocide in Gaza: A Struggle for Survival Amidst Destruction

Since October 7, 2023, Israel has waged an unprecedented and brutal war on the Gaza Strip, resulting in multiple humanitarian catastrophes among civilians (Alsemeiri, Elsemeiri, Carroll, & Aljamal, 2024). As of March 24, 2025, more than 150 scholars, academics, university professors, and researchers have been executed, and over 800 teachers and educational staff have been killed by Israeli forces. In addition, at least 12,900 students have been killed, while 785,000 students have been deprived of their right to education due to the systematic targeting and destruction of schools and universities. Approximately 359 educational institutions, including schools and universities, have been partially or destroyed during the ongoing assault (Government, Media, Office, 2025).

The broader civilian toll has been staggering. Over 54,636 people have been killed, and more than 128,650 have been injured, alongside at least 18,700 detainees, many of whom remain forcibly disappeared or missing under the rubble. Around 2 million people representing over 85% of Gaza's total population have been forcibly displaced. Furthermore, more than 173,311 buildings, including homes, hospitals, health centers, and critical infrastructure, have been either totally or partially damaged or destroyed (PCBS, 2025). Hunger, famine, and the spread of diseases have become daily realities for the besieged population, while environmental toxication threatens to inflict long-term, possibly irreversible, devastation on Gaza's ecosystem. Essential services from healthcare to higher education have been crippled, if not completely obliterated (Iriqat, et al., 2025)

Importantly, these atrocities unfold against the backdrop of long-standing, systemic hardship. Even before the latest escalation, the two-decades-long blockade had already caused severe shortages of basic commodities and essential life-supporting services. In 2018, the United Nations warned that Gaza was rapidly approaching the threshold of becoming 'unlivable' (UN, 2018). Today, the compounded destruction — the mass killing of civilians, the decimation of residential areas, the collapse of healthcare and education systems, and the environmental devastation — reflects not merely the consequences of war, but a systematic attempt to erase Palestinian life in Gaza (The Guardian, 2024). In the face of relentless violence, survivors are trapped in a vicious cycle of death, displacement, hunger, and the ever-looming threat of complete annihilation. Their struggle to survive amidst destruction stands as a stark testament to the ongoing genocide in Gaza (Dader, et al., 2024).

Palestinian Higher Education: Knowledge as a Philosophy of Resistance

The trajectory of higher education in the Gaza Strip cannot be understood in isolation from the broader historical and political upheavals that have defined the Palestinian experience. For decades, Palestinians have lived under conditions of occupation, displacement, and statelessness—realities that have deeply shaped their relationship with education. Within this context, knowledge has evolved not merely as a vehicle for individual advancement but as a collective philosophy of resistance. Education has become both a tool of survival and a powerful assertion of identity, dignity, and continuity in the face of systematic erasure (Quneis & Rafidi, 2023). Jebril (2018), observes, that Palestinians view education as more than a

pathway to socio-economic mobility; it is also a means of psychological resilience and a form of resistance. Jebril (2024) reinforces this view, noting that education functions as a political act—an act of defiance against occupation and blockade. The enduring commitment of students and academic staff in Gaza to pursue higher education, despite some of the harshest conditions in the world, is a testament to this philosophy of resistance.

Gaza's educational journey could be situated within its long and turbulent history. Over the centuries, Gaza has experienced a succession of foreign dominations: Ottoman rule (1516–1917), British colonial control under the Mandate (1917–1948), Egyptian administration (1948–1967), and Israeli occupation from 1967 to the present. During each period, education was often co-opted as a tool for exerting control over the Palestinian population (Jebril, 2024). However, Palestinians consistently resisted these efforts by investing in education as a counter-hegemonic force. Before the establishment of local universities, many Gazan students relied on scholarships to study abroad. Over time, however, increasing Israeli restrictions and shifting regional geopolitics made this path less viable. In response, Palestinians founded their own institutions, most notably the Islamic University of Gaza in 1978—an initiative launched under occupation, with the university's first classes held in tents. The post-Oslo period saw the establishment of the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education in 1994 and an expansion of the higher education sector (Milton, Elkahlout, & Barakat, 2023).

Eduicide: The Systematic Assault on Palestinian Universities

The term Eduicide—a portmanteau of “education” and “genocide”—has emerged as a powerful analytical framework for understanding the calculated obliteration of Gaza's educational infrastructure. This concept encapsulates the deliberate targeting of schools, universities, libraries, and cultural institutions in conflict zones, aiming not only at physical destruction but also at erasing a people's identity, memory, and capacity for future development (Alousi, 2022). The notion was sharpened further by Professor Karma Nabulsi, who coined Scholasticide to describe the systematic murder of educational life, blending the Latin “schola” (school) with “cide” (killing) to highlight the war crimes embedded in the annihilation of learning spaces (Hajir & Qato, 2025). Recent scholarly work has drawn urgent attention to how Israel's war on Gaza represents a multidimensional campaign of destruction military, cultural, and epistemic against Palestinian society. According to Giroux (2025), Israel's brutal assault is not confined to the physical targeting of civilians. Rather, it constitutes a structural and ideological war on dissent, critical thought, and knowledge production. This form of warfare, he argues, aligns with broader authoritarian trends globally, including assaults on intellectual freedom in the United States. The bombing of educational institutions thus serves a dual function: erasing Palestinian narratives and deterring any future intellectual resistance.

Domínguez (2024) emphasizes that we are witnessing the first genocide broadcast in real-time by its victims yet astonishingly rationalized by Israel under the guise of legal warfare. She frames this as a manifestation of de-civilianization, whereby Israel systematically dehumanizes Palestinians by destroying the civic infrastructure including education that underpins any civil society. According to UN data, 90% of Gaza's schools have been destroyed, and all 12 universities have either been bombed, severely damaged, or rendered inoperable (UN, 2024).

Desai (2024) highlights that approximately 90,000 university and school students have had their education interrupted many forcibly displaced as Gaza becomes increasingly uninhabitable. This is not merely collateral damage; it reflects a strategy of intellectual extermination, designed to cripple Palestinian capacity for resilience and recovery.

Desai further documents the extensive destruction of cultural institutions—libraries, publishing houses, archives, cultural centers, and even cemeteries—arguing that Israel’s campaign is not only against physical bodies but against Palestinian memory, scholarship, and identity. El-Affendi (2024) echoes Giroux’s assertion, emphasizing that the genocide in Gaza is evidenced not only by mass killings but also by the deliberate erasure of its intellectual and civic life. Moreover, Hussein, Wong, & Bright (2024) provide a broader historical lens, tracing the long-standing Israeli siege as a key driver of educational collapse. Restrictions on student mobility, destruction of infrastructure, and psychological trauma have compounded to produce a deeply fragmented and endangered educational system (Alsemeiri, Carroll, & Aljamal, 2025).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative case study approach centered on the Islamic University of Gaza to investigate the impact of scholar assassinations on higher education, with a focus on Master’s studies. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s (1986) Academic Capital Theory, the research explores how the loss of key scholars disrupts institutional knowledge, teaching quality, supervision, and academic continuity. Participants were purposively selected to include three active scholars from the faculties of English and Linguistics, Islamic Studies, and Geography. These scholars were chosen for their current engagement with the university, familiarity with its procedures, and their involvement in the institution’s response to the ongoing genocide. Alongside them, three Master’s students from the same faculties were selected to reflect diverse supervision challenges arising from the crisis, such as losing a supervisor, lack of contact, or inability to secure a replacement due to faculty shortages. Data collection occurred between April and May 2025 through semi-structured interviews conducted via email, providing a safe platform for participants amid ongoing military attacks and infrastructure damage. Two tailored interview guides with open-ended WH questions elicited rich, detailed accounts of participants’ lived experiences. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. Responses were manually coded, and recurring themes and patterns were identified across both scholars’ and students’ narratives. To ensure participant safety and confidentiality, especially given the sensitive context, Master’s students were anonymized and referred to as Participants 1, 2, and 3. Ethical considerations were rigorously observed: all participants provided informed consent, participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained. This methodological approach allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the profound and ongoing impact of scholar assassinations on academic life at the Islamic University of Gaza, offering critical insights into the wider destruction of Palestinian higher education under genocide conditions.

FINDINGS

Professors’ Testimonies on the Resilience of Higher Education in Gaza

The following data analysis is based on in-depth interviews with three professors from different academic departments at the Islamic University of Gaza: Linguistics, Geography, and Islamic Creed. These interviews provide a comprehensive overview of the multifaceted challenges faced by faculty and students amid ongoing conflict, infrastructural devastation, and the tragic

loss of academic staff due to targeted attacks. The analysis synthesizes their experiences in terms of the impact on academic functions, teaching and supervision difficulties, communication methods, coping strategies, and the long-term effects on higher education in Gaza. Table 1 below summarizes the key thematic findings derived from the interviews.

TABLE 1: Key Thematic Findings from Professors' Testimonies

Aspect	Linguistics Department	Geography Department	Islamic Creed Department
1. Faculty Losses	Lost 2 senior professors; increased workload on remaining staff	Lost 3 senior professors; multiple faculty taking extra courses	Lost 1 senior professor; significant mentorship gap
2. Teaching Modality	Shifted fully to remote teaching via Moodle and WhatsApp	Remote teaching with asynchronous materials, WhatsApp groups	Fully remote teaching, mostly asynchronous, WhatsApp used
3. Communication Tools	WhatsApp groups, email; unstable internet connectivity	WhatsApp, Moodle; frequent power outages disrupting classes	WhatsApp groups primary tool; poor connectivity and power outages
4. Supervision Challenges	Difficulties monitoring graduate students' progress	Limited face-to-face interaction; supervision mostly online	Graduate supervision impacted by faculty loss and connectivity problems
5. Increased Workload	6. Doubled teaching hours and supervision duties	7. Tripled supervision responsibilities	8. Significant increase in teaching and mentoring duties
6. Infrastructure Challenges	Frequent electricity outages; unstable internet access	University buildings damaged; unreliable infrastructure	Severe power cuts; destroyed classrooms and offices
7. Psychological Impact	Concern about students' motivation and mental health	Students and staff emotionally strained due to conflict	Trauma and loss deeply affect students and faculty
8. Adaptation Strategies	Flexible scheduling; use of simplified assignments	Volunteer support; community solidarity	Simplified assignments; flexible deadlines; peer support
9. Long-term Academic Effects	Threat to academic continuity and research productivity	Risk of erosion of academic leadership and memory	Loss of institutional knowledge; threat to department sustainability
10. Needs & Recommendations	Restore infrastructure; increase international support	Mental health services; academic scholarships	Rebuild facilities; establish partnerships; psychological aid

The analysis of these three interviews highlights the profound and multifaceted impact that war and targeted killings have had on academic life at the Islamic University. Across all three departments—Linguistics, Geography, and Islamic Creed—the loss of senior faculty has been devastating, creating significant gaps in teaching capacity, research mentorship, and leadership. These losses have forced remaining faculty members to take on dramatically increased workloads, often doubling or tripling their teaching and supervision duties. This strain is compounded by severe infrastructure challenges, including frequent electricity outages, unstable internet connections, and physical damage to university buildings. All departments have shifted fully to remote teaching, primarily using asynchronous methods supplemented by WhatsApp communication. While these adaptations have ensured some continuity of education, they fall short of replacing the dynamic and interactive nature of in-person learning. Professors report considerable difficulties in effectively supervising graduate students and maintaining the quality of instruction amid these constraints. Additionally, students' psychological well-being has been deeply affected by the ongoing conflict and losses within the academic community, adding another layer of complexity to the educational challenges. The interviewed professors describe numerous adaptation strategies, such as flexible scheduling to cope with erratic electricity supply, simplifying assignments to reduce student burden, and relying on community and volunteer support networks to sustain academic activities. However, they all express concern about the long-term consequences of these disruptions, warning that continued loss of faculty and damage to infrastructure could erode academic leadership, institutional memory, and overall research productivity. To address these urgent challenges, the professors unanimously call for comprehensive support measures. These include restoring reliable electricity and internet infrastructure, providing mental health services for students and staff, establishing scholarships to assist displaced or struggling students, and fostering international academic partnerships to bring resources and advocacy. Such support is crucial to not only rebuild physical facilities but also to preserve the intellectual and cultural resilience that these departments embody. Despite the immense difficulties, the faculty members interviewed demonstrate a remarkable commitment to their mission. They view education as a vital form of resistance and hope amid conflict, emphasizing the critical role universities play in sustaining knowledge, identity, and future possibilities. Their perseverance highlights the resilience of Gaza's academic community, underscoring the need for sustained global solidarity to protect and support education in conflict zones.

Master's Students' Testimonies on the Resilience of Higher Education in Gaza

Building on the perspectives of faculty members, this section delves into the lived experiences of Master's students at the Islamic University of Gaza. Through in-depth interviews, these students recount the profound academic, emotional, and logistical challenges they have faced amid war, displacement, and infrastructural collapse. Their testimonies offer critical insight into how resilience takes shape at the student level—revealing both the daily struggles of pursuing graduate education under siege and the unwavering determination to continue learning against all odds. The following tables highlight key themes that emerged from their

accounts, including academic disruption, digital adaptation, psychological impact, and hope for the future, see Table 2.

TABLE 2 Key Themes of Student Perspectives on Academic Challenges and Coping Mechanisms

Theme	Participant Responses	Representative Quotes	Interview References
Loss of Professors / Supervisors	Emotional and academic disruption due to loss or absence of mentors and supervisors, affecting research continuity and guidance.	"The loss... had a profound impact on my work."	Interviews 1, 3
Infrastructure Collapse	Widespread destruction of university infrastructure (buildings, electricity, internet, library access), severely limiting academic activities.	"No electricity, no stable internet."	Interviews 1, 2, 3
Communication Barriers	Difficulties maintaining contact with supervisors and academic networks, causing delays and isolation.	"Communication breakdown."	Interviews 2, 3
Change in Research Focus	Forced adaptation of research topics toward war-related issues, reflecting survival strategy and resistance.	"Changed my thesis focus to analyze massacres in Gaza."	Interviews 1, 3
Psychological Impact	Emotional and mental toll including stress, anxiety, loss of motivation, and fatigue affecting productivity.	"I feel overwhelmed and discouraged."	Interviews 1, 2, 3
Alternative Learning Strategies	Adaptive behaviors like peer groups, remote supervisors, and self-study to overcome academic obstacles.	"Formed study groups, found new supervisors abroad."	Interviews 1
Lack of Remote Academic Support	Scarcity or ineffectiveness of online academic assistance due to infrastructure damage and security concerns.	"No remote academic support currently."	Interviews 2, 3
Urgent Needs	Requests for safe spaces, reliable electricity and internet, and psychological support to cope with trauma.	"Need face-to-face guidance and reliable internet."	Interview 3

Table 2 presents a comprehensive thematic analysis derived from interviews with Palestinian master's students, offering insight into the multifaceted academic challenges caused by the ongoing war. The table captures both structural and psychological dimensions of disruption, while also highlighting adaptive responses and urgent needs as articulated by the participants. The loss of professors and supervisors emerged as a critical theme, underscoring the emotional and intellectual void created by the

death or displacement of senior academics. This loss severely disrupted research continuity, mentorship, and academic progress. In parallel, infrastructure collapse, marked by the destruction of university buildings, electricity shortages, and unstable internet, created an environment where basic academic engagement became nearly impossible. Participants also identified communication barriers as a significant impediment. The breakdown in contact with academic networks, including supervisors and institutional channels, led to delays, missed feedback, and increased feelings of academic isolation. In response to the altered realities of war, many students reported a change in research focus, shifting their theses and projects to address conflict-related themes. This shift reflects not only an act of academic resilience but also a means of contextualizing their scholarship within their lived experiences. The psychological impact of war was a recurring theme, with students describing heightened stress, emotional exhaustion, and loss of motivation. These psychological burdens have compounded academic challenges, affecting concentration, productivity, and long-term educational aspirations. Despite this, students demonstrated adaptability through alternative learning strategies, such as forming peer groups, engaging with remote supervisors abroad, and relying on self-study. However, these efforts were often undermined by a lack of remote academic support, with many participants citing the ineffectiveness or absence of institutional assistance due to damaged infrastructure and safety concerns. Finally, the theme of urgent needs reflects the participants' calls for immediate intervention. Students emphasized the necessity of safe, equipped learning environments, reliable access to electricity and internet, direct academic mentorship, and mental health support to cope with trauma and ensure educational continuity. Overall, Table 1 offers a focused and evidence-based depiction of how war has reshaped the academic realities of Gaza's postgraduate students. It captures the devastating impact of violence on educational infrastructure and intellectual development, while also foregrounding the agency, resilience, and pressing needs of students striving to continue their academic journeys amidst crisis.

The following table summarizes the key findings from the Master's students' interviews, highlighting the major challenges they face and the strategies they employ to persist in their academic pursuits amid conflict. It reflects the profound disruptions to supervision, infrastructure, and mental health, alongside their adaptive responses and urgent needs see Table 3.

TABLE 3: Summary of Key Findings

Category	Findings
Supervisory and Research Disruption	Loss of supervisors and mentors has led to halted or derailed research trajectories, forcing many master students to abandon or restart academic work.
Destruction of Physical Infrastructure	Damage to university buildings, electricity cuts, and unstable internet access severely limit engagement with academic resources.
Supervisory Communication Breakdown	Disrupted communication with academic mentors leads to missed feedback cycles, delays, and growing academic isolation.
Adaptation and Academic Agency	Despite overwhelming challenges, students formed peer support systems, engaged remote supervisors, and redirected research toward conflict-relevant topics.
Psychological Impact	Persistent stress, trauma, and emotional exhaustion undermine academic focus and mental well-being.
Deficiency in Institutional Academic Support	Institutional efforts to provide remote academic support are minimal or absent due to war-related destruction and targeted attacks on educators.

Immediate and Structural Needs	Participants call for protected academic spaces, dependable electricity and internet, in-person supervision, and integrated psychological services to support recovery and educational resilience.
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Table 3 presents the core themes that emerged from the data, structured into analytical categories that collectively capture the lived academic and psychological realities of Palestinian Master's students under conditions of war and genocide. Each category reflects interrelated challenges that extend beyond isolated experiences, revealing systemic patterns of disruption and resilience. The first category, Academic Disruption, represents one of the most severe consequences of the conflict: the severance of academic mentorship. The sudden loss of supervisors and research advisors not only brings academic work to a standstill but often forces students to abandon or completely redesign their projects. This academic instability significantly hinders scholarly progression and undermines the continuity of graduate-level education. Physical Infrastructure refers to the destruction of essential academic facilities and services. The demolition of university buildings, frequent electricity blackouts, laboratories, libraries, and unreliable internet connectivity create a hostile environment for teaching, research, and learning. These structural barriers also limit access to global academic networks and resources, thereby isolating students from broader scholarly engagement. The Communication category addresses the breakdown in academic interaction between students and faculty members. Disrupted communication channels lead to missed academic deadlines, limited feedback on research progress, and increased detachment from academic communities. This disconnection exacerbates the sense of academic isolation and further undermines students' motivation and productivity. Amid these challenges, Adaptation and Resilience emerge as a vital theme. Despite overwhelming obstacles, students demonstrate remarkable resourcefulness by forming peer support networks, modifying research topics to fit the current context, and pursuing remote supervision when available. This reflects a strong determination to maintain academic continuity and intellectual engagement despite the circumstances.

The Psychological Toll highlights the emotional and mental health burden associated with protracted conflict. Participants report chronic stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion, which make sustained academic focus increasingly difficult. These psychological strains not only affect individuals but also weaken the overall academic environment within institutions under siege. Institutional Support is identified as critically lacking. Due to infrastructure damage and administrative paralysis, universities are largely unable to provide consistent academic or psychological support. The absence of coordinated efforts for remote learning or mental health services reveals a broader institutional fragility in the face of ongoing genocide. Finally, the Urgent Needs category consolidates the immediate priorities expressed by students. These include the creation of safe and equipped academic spaces, access to mentorship, and trauma-informed mental health services. These are not supplementary supports but essential requirements for academic survival and continuity under conditions of war. In sum, Table 2 serves not only as a summary of findings but as a diagnostic framework that exposes how interlocking layers of physical destruction, institutional breakdown, emotional trauma, and academic disruption threaten the viability of higher education in conflict zones. At the same time, it points to clear areas for urgent intervention and long-term recovery.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a deliberate and organized pattern in the targeting of Palestinian Scholars by the Israeli military. These acts are not random or accidental; they reflect a calculated strategy aimed at erasing the intellectual and cultural foundations of Palestinian society. Over 150 university professors and more than 800 academics have been killed in recent Israeli attacks, many alongside their families. The Islamic University of Gaza, one of the most important academic institutions in the region, has suffered extensive human and material losses. Despite efforts by the remaining academic community to continue education, the damage inflicted has had long-lasting and severe consequences for the entire educational system. This evidence can lead us to the concept of mindocide, a term that combines “mind” and “genocide.” Mindocide refers to the systematic targeting and elimination of a society’s academic and intellectual leaders. Unlike traditional definitions of genocide, which focus on the physical destruction of a people, mindocide focuses on their cognitive and cultural annihilation. Its goal is not only to silence individuals but to destroy the ideas, knowledge, memory, and leadership they represent. It is a form of warfare that seeks to eliminate people’s capacity to think, teach, create, and lead.

This phenomenon is not without historical precedent. Under the Khmer Rouge (1975–1979), intellectuals in Cambodia were systematically eliminated in a campaign to “purify” the country (Kiernan, 2002). Similarly, Operation Tannenberg in Nazi-occupied Poland targeted over 30,000 members of the intelligentsia to preempt organized resistance (Gross, 2001). In the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, the killing of Tutsi intellectuals further erased future leadership and societal memory (Mamdani, 2020). In each of these cases, the targeting of intellectuals was essential to eliminating not only present opposition but also the capacity for long-term recovery.

Additionally, the evidence points to the destruction of the tools necessary for rebuilding. This can lead us to the concept of futuricide, which describes the deliberate erasure of a society’s ability to envision, plan, or achieve a collective future. By eliminating educators, researchers, and cultural figures, futuricide ensures that the damage will continue across generations. It prevents recovery and development by attacking those who guide, mentor, and inspire future progress. Moreover, these patterns reflect a broader phenomenon. The systematic assault on Palestinian life, history, identity, and institutions can lead us to the concept of Palestiniacide. This term captures the ongoing attempt to eliminate Palestinian existence not just physically, but politically, culturally, and intellectually. Palestiniacide includes acts of violence, forced displacement, institutional destruction, and the suppression of language, heritage, and national narrative.

Most critically, Palestiniacide does not remain isolated. It poses a global risk. The normalization of such policies and the failure of international institutions to intervene can lead us to what this study refers to as Humanitycide. Humanitycide is the destruction of shared human values such as justice, dignity, accountability, and the right to life. It represents the collapse of moral and legal systems that protect all people. If the world continues to ignore or excuse the ongoing atrocities in Palestine, it risks losing the very foundations of human rights and international law. Together, these emerging concepts—mindocide, futuricide,

Palestiniacide, and Humanitycide—provide a powerful framework for understanding how modern violence extends beyond the battlefield. It targets the mind, the future, the identity, and the moral conscience of humanity. What is happening to Palestinian higher education is not only a local tragedy but a global warning. The erasure of intellectual life in Gaza threatens not just one people, but the ideals that bind all people to a shared sense of justice and hope.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals a cruel and systematic assault on the Palestinian intellectual and academic community, representing one of the most severe attacks a nation can face. Despite global awareness and scrutiny, these acts continue to violate fundamental human rights and international laws. Israel's ongoing campaign reflects a resurgence of brutal ideologies rooted in imperialism, colonialism, racism, and capitalism, deliberately aimed at erasing Palestinian cultural and academic identity and fracturing the bonds of shared humanity. The research highlights how the targeted killings and destruction at the Islamic University of Gaza have profoundly disrupted higher education, leading to what can be described as mindocide, the destruction of intellectual capital, and futuricide, the erasure of a society's ability to envision and build its future. These acts are part of a broader process of Palestiniacide, which threatens Palestinian existence politically, culturally, and intellectually. Moreover, this systematic destruction poses a global threat to universal human values, a phenomenon this study refers to as Humanitycide. The findings underscore the urgent need for coordinated international intervention to protect academic freedom, support the recovery of educational institutions, and uphold justice. Such action is essential to restore dignity, preserve knowledge, and foster hope for oppressed populations worldwide.

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