
Views of Non-Formal Education among Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

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Syrian refugee children in northern Lebanon; credit DFID



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Overview

The fourth wave of Arab Barometer surveys in Lebanon conducted interviews with 300 Syrian refugees living amongst the general population.¹ Despite a relatively small number of interviews, these data provide a meaningful look into what barriers this community faces and how much use they are able to make of non-formal education programs. Though refugees have similar reasons for attending informal education programs as do the Lebanese as a whole, the questions asked in the survey also show that Syrian refugees are more traditional in both their cultural and educational preferences.² As a result, although similar types of programs could be targeted to benefit both communities, it is important to tailor programs specifically to address the needs of the refugee population.

Youth Education Programs

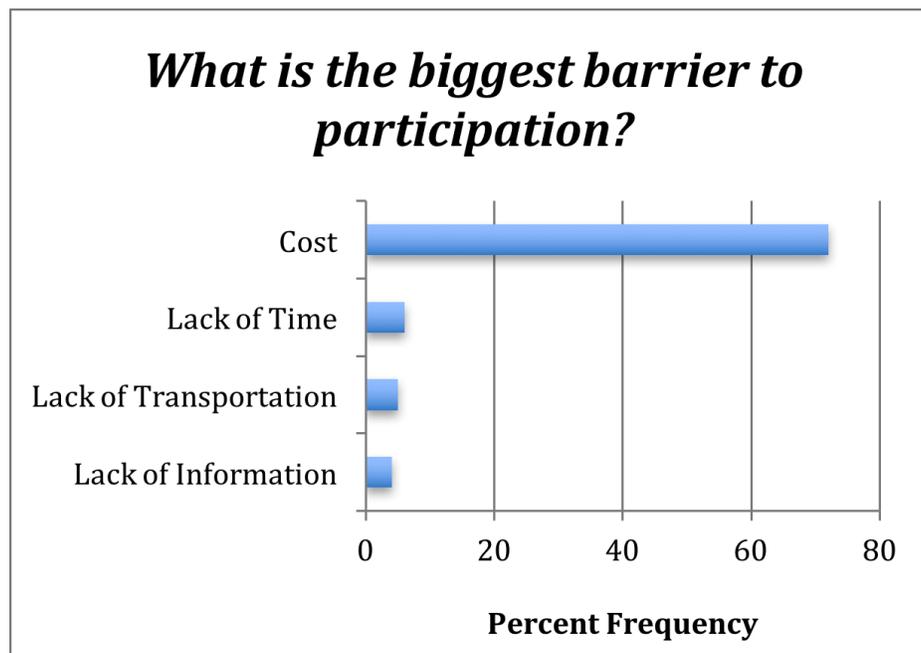
Participation in youth non-formal education (NFE) programs by Syrian refugees living in Lebanon is very low. Roughly 2 percent (5 total respondents) report living in a household with a member who has participated in an educational program outside the formal curriculum in the last five years. Though it is difficult to discern much from such a small sample size, among those who participated in NFE the rates of satisfaction are high. Four out of the five who live in families with a member who participated say they are satisfied or very satisfied with the NFE programs in the country, while the response of the fifth respondent is “don’t know”. Among those who live in a family that has not had a member participate in such a program, views of NFE programs is generally positive, with 54 percent saying they think positively of education programs outside the formal curriculum, just 12 percent saying they have negative perceptions, and the remaining 35 percent saying they do not know or refusing to answer the question. Notably, all five of those who either participated themselves or had a family member participate said a private institution organized the program rather than an international agency or a non-governmental organization. Additionally, all five of the respondents who either participated themselves or had a family member participate were involved in NFE programs teaching languages.

¹ Arab Barometer data. 2016. “Jordan. Wave 4.” Available at <http://www.arabbarometer.org>. The sample did not include Syrians living in refugee camps.

² For more details about attitudes of Lebanese citizens, see “Views of Youth Non-Formal Education in Lebanon.” Available at <http://www.arabbarometer.org>

Barriers to Youth Education Programs

When asked about the biggest barriers to participating in NFE programs, by far the largest barrier for Syrian refugees living in Lebanon is their cost (72 percent). Meanwhile, far fewer cite lack of time, transportation or information about such programs (6 percent, 5 percent, 4 percent respectively). When asked about the second greatest barrier, Syrian refugees in Lebanon primarily cite lack of transportation (33 percent), lack of information (14 percent), lack of time (11 percent), lack of access (8 percent), safety concerns (6 percent) and family disapproval (5 percent). Thus, both cost and limited availability of such programs appear to be the greatest challenges for this population taking part in non-formal education opportunities.



Syrian refugees emphasize many of the same reasons to participate in NFE programs as Lebanese do. Nearly half said working for a degree or certificate is the most important reason (46 percent), followed by working for other qualifications (19 percent) or acquiring new skills for a job (14 percent). Thus, Syrian refugees in Lebanon overwhelmingly stress reasons relating to jobs and employment as opposed to those linked with self-development such as furthering an interest (9 percent), acquiring a new skill for a personal interest (4 percent), meeting people (3 percent) or becoming a better person (2 percent). Additionally, when asked about the second most important reason to participate, practical and job-related reasons continue to overshadow reasons related to personal development, although to a lesser extent. Overall, nearly a third cite acquiring a new skill for a job (32 percent) followed by working for other qualifications (18 percent) as the

second most important reason. However, roughly 15 percent emphasize the importance of acquiring a new skill for a personal interest, followed by making oneself a better person (13 percent), furthering an interest (11 percent), or meeting people (7 percent). Notably, when disaggregated by income there is no significant difference in what respondents say is the largest and second largest barrier to participation.



Views on Education

Syrian refugees living in Lebanon are relatively open to educational systems that promote the development of emotional skills in addition to learning about scientific knowledge. While 56 percent prefer an educational system that emphasizes both skills, 40 percent say a curriculum should only focus on scientific knowledge. The same divisions are seen in preferences for an educational system with an emphasis on learning skills like understanding the feelings and perspectives of others as opposed to a more traditional educational system that stresses academic achievement; while 55 percent prefer the former, 43 percent prefer the latter.

Demand is greater among Syrian refugees for an education that promotes critical thinking. For example, nearly three-quarters of Syrian refugees in Lebanon say it is more important that students learn to think about how to answer a question, rather than simply being able to give the correct answer (74 percent vs. 23 percent). Meanwhile, more than three-quarters believe that a good educational system is one that encourages students to think for themselves even when it goes against what the teacher is saying as opposed to a system that encourages students to just accept the answer offered by the teacher as there

		Strongly Agree or Agree
5A	Statement 1: The education system should focus primarily on developing the scientific skills of pupils and students	40%
	Statement 2: Just as there are courses to teach scientific skills there must be courses to teach students how to recognize and express their own emotions and respond to others' emotions	56%
5B	Statement 1: Giving the correct answer to a question remains the most important goal for pupils and students	23%
	Statement 2: It is not important for pupils and students to always reach the correct answer. What is most important is that they learn to think about how to answer the question	74%
5C	Statement 1: A good education system is one that encourages the student to accept the answer offered by the teacher because it is the best answer, there is no need for alternatives.	20%
	Statement 2: A good education system is one that encourages students to think for themselves even when it goes against what the teacher is saying.	78%
5D	Statement 1: Examinations that allow students to demonstrate how well they have memorized what has been taught in class are the best test of learning.	21%

	Statement 2: Examinations that allow students to demonstrate how well they have made their own sense of what has been taught in class are the best test of learning.	77%
5E	Statement 1: The education system should place primary importance on academic achievement and certificates recognizing completion.	43%
	Statement 2: The education system should place primary importance on learning social skills such as the ability to understand the perspectives and feelings of others.	55%

is no need for alternatives (78 percent vs. 20 percent). Similarly, with regards to examinations, more than three-quarters of respondents prefer tests that allow students to demonstrate how well they have made their own sense of what has been taught in class instead of showing how well they have memorized what was taught (77 percent vs. 21 percent).

Overall, Syrian refugees in Lebanon favor, much like the Lebanese general population, a focus on the development of analytical skills as opposed to rote memorization. However, in terms of emotional skills and scientific skills, Syrian respondents are more evenly divided in their beliefs about the best type of curriculum compared with Lebanese citizens.

Examining the differences between male and female Syrian refugees in Lebanon and the educational systems they prefer yields some significant differences. Men prefer an emphasis on critical thinking skills at higher rates than do women. For instance, while 83 percent of men think a good education system is one that encourages students to think for themselves even when it goes against what the teacher is saying, only 73 percent of women say the same. A similar difference is seen between men and women with regards to examinations. While more than a quarter of women (26 percent) prefer exams that allow students to demonstrate how well they have memorized what has been taught in class, just 16 percent of men say the same. However, there is no significant difference in the response rate between men and women about whether it is most important that students reach the correct answer compared with learning how to think about solving the problem (74 percent of women and 75 percent of men agree, respectively).

Notably, women prefer, though by a relatively small margin, an emphasis on the development of emotional skills in addition to scientific skills at higher rates than do men.

For example, men are evenly split when asked if they have a preference between an education system placing primary importance on academic achievement and certificates recognizing completion versus one placing an emphasis on learning social skills such as the ability to understand the perspectives and feelings of others (49 percent each). However, women more clearly favored an education system emphasizing the development of social skills (61 percent) over one that only promotes academic achievement (37 percent). Meanwhile, no significant differences are found between the percent of women (58 percent) and men (55 percent) who say that there should be courses to teach students how to recognize and express their own emotions and respond to others.

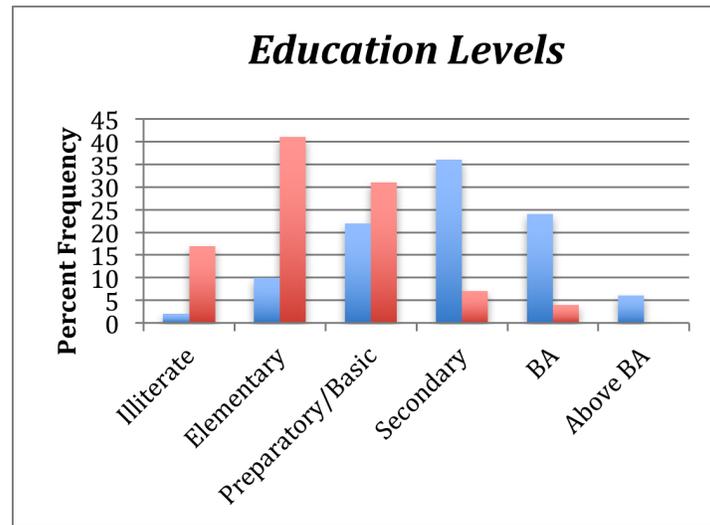
Beliefs and Social Attitudes

In addition to barriers like cost and transportation, social beliefs and attitudes, especially about women, might be a barrier to participation in NFE programs. Overwhelmingly, Syrian refugees in Lebanon have relatively open views about women and education. The vast majority (81 percent) of respondents say it is acceptable in Islam for male and female university students to attend class together. However, nearly a fifth disagree. When disaggregated by religiosity there is a clear difference in respondents' answers to this question. While 93 percent of those who consider themselves not religious say it is okay in Islam for men and women to attend classes together, just 78 percent of those who self-identify as somewhat religious and 79 percent of those who say they are religious say the same.

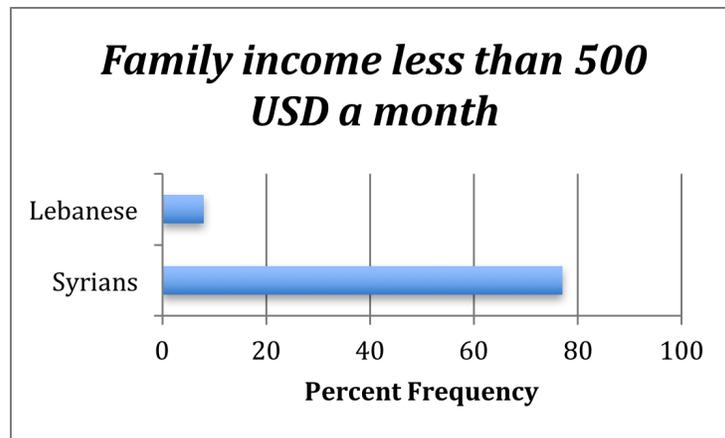
A similar trend is found when examining the question that asks if university education is more important for males than it is for females. Overall, more than three-quarters (77 percent) of Syrian refugees disagree or strongly disagree with this sentiment while over one fifth (23 percent) agree or strongly agree. Again, when broken down by level of religiosity we see that those who self-identify as religious or somewhat religious have more conservative views on this question (78 percent and 72 percent disagree, respectively), as opposed to those who say they are not religious (80 percent). Overall, these findings suggest that Syrian refugees would be open to NFE programs targeting both boys and girls.

General Demographics

Compared to Lebanese, Syrian refugees are on average younger (mean age of 34 vs. opposed to 40). In terms of education, Syrian refugees in Lebanon have much lower levels of education. For example, while only 2 percent of Lebanese are illiterate, nearly 17 percent of Syrian refugees are. Further, while only 10 percent of Lebanese have just an elementary level education, nearly 41 percent of Syrian respondents say the same. Lebanese citizens

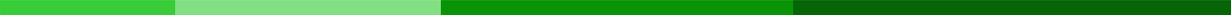


are also significantly more likely to have graduated from college compared with Syrian refugees. Around three-in-ten Lebanese have at least a BA degree while only 4 percent of Syrians say the same. Again, not surprisingly, Syrian refugees in Lebanon report significantly lower incomes than does the general Lebanese population. Among Syrians, over three-quarters report household earnings of less than 500 USD per month (77 percent), compared to just 8 percent of Lebanese.



Conclusion

Though Syrians living in Lebanon have a different demographic profile than their Lebanese counterparts, their views toward education are generally similar. Syrian refugees prefer a focus on critical thinking skills in the educational system, though they are more evenly divided than the Lebanese are with regards to the development of emotional skills and scientific skills in such programs.



In addition, the small number of Syrian refugees who live in families where someone participated in youth non-formal education programs are primarily satisfied. Additionally, Syrians, regardless of whether they or a family member participated or not, cite the same reasons for enrolling in these programs as do the Lebanese. Further, as we see with Lebanese, cost is a huge barrier to participation for Syrians, followed by lack of time, transportation and information at lower rates.

An educational program catering to Syrian refugees in Lebanon would need to account for these barriers, as well as the types of skills they hope to gain, which are primarily related to obtaining employment. This emphasis on practical skills as well as the development of analytical and critical thinking skills is clearly very important for Syrians, as it is for the Lebanese population as well.