
Views of Youth Non-Formal Education in the West Bank and Gaza

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View from Ramallah; credit Rawan Nassrallah



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Overview

Over half of Palestinians are dissatisfied with the educational system in the West Bank and Gaza. In addition, a survey conducted by the Arab Barometer reveals they are worried about the ability to provide their children with a good education.¹ This worry, coupled with the concerns Palestinians have about the current formal education system, provides a unique potential opening for youth non-formal education programs to fill some of the gap.

However, in order to meet the needs of Palestinians, non-formal education programs must first address the issue of accessibility. Certain barriers, both physical and nonphysical prevent access to these programs. Currently, participation rates in non-formal education programs are relatively low and with the majority of these education programs organized by private institutions, it is not surprising that cost is one of the most pronounced barriers Palestinians face.

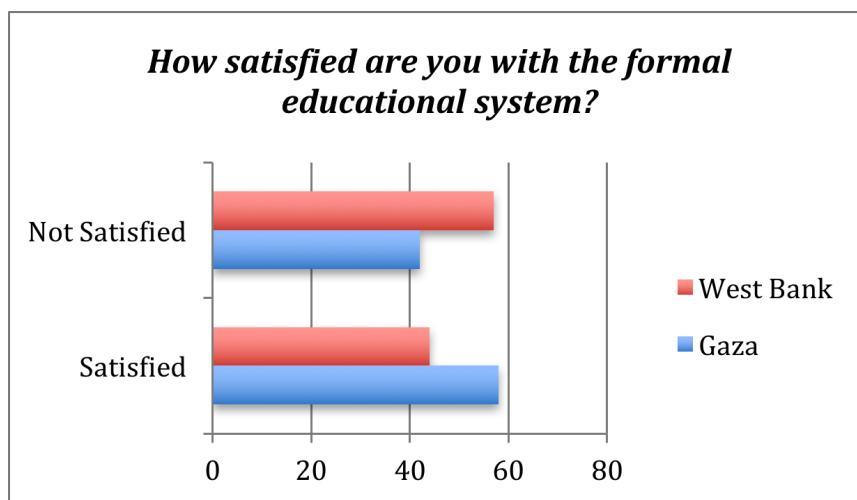
In terms of content, the types of programs most valued differs between residents of Gaza and the West Bank. In the West Bank a focus on critical thinking and analytical skills would be welcomed by the population, as respondents express a preference for curricula that develop these skills. To some extent West Bankers would also welcome a program that promotes social skills and emotional intelligence. In contrast, Gazans prefer more traditional educational styles, with Palestinians in Gaza favoring a system that places greater emphasis on memorization compared with the West Bank. However, across all regions, Palestinians are open to attending non-formal education programs, especially those that develop skills for the labor market or allow them to obtain a certificate or qualification. Promotion of NFE programs should target potential students on by highlighting the potential benefits of their curriculum on their future job prospects.

Views on Government and the Education System

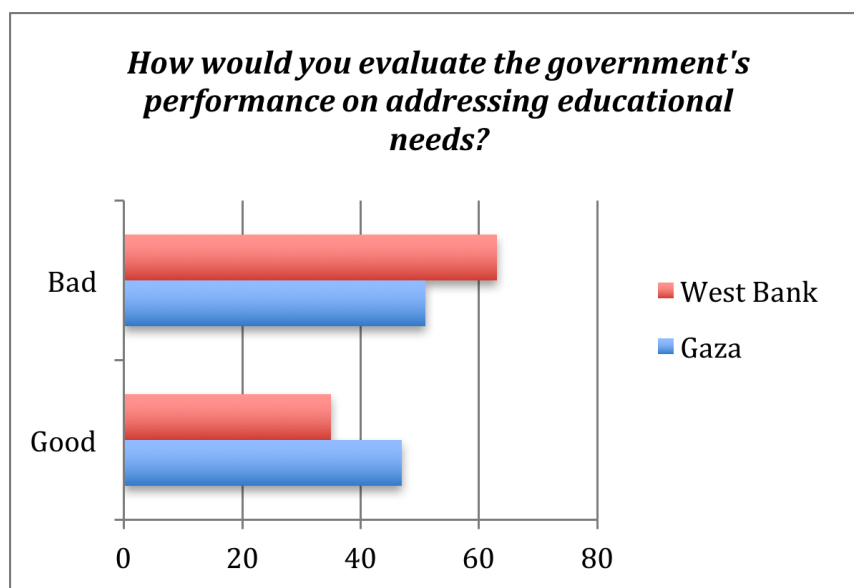
Overall, Palestinian public opinion is divided about the state of the formal education system, with half saying they are satisfied and half saying they are not (49 percent satisfied, 51 percent dissatisfied). Though there is no difference across income brackets, views differ slightly by levels of education. Those who report having only a basic education or less are somewhat less satisfied with the formal education than their more educated counterparts (44 percent satisfied versus 49 percent satisfied). By comparison, Palestinians' satisfaction with the government's provision of health care services is roughly the same, with half (51 percent) of respondents being satisfied or very satisfied. When broken down in terms of

¹ Arab Barometer data. 2016. "West Bank and Gaza. Wave 4." Available at <http://www.arabbarometer.org>.

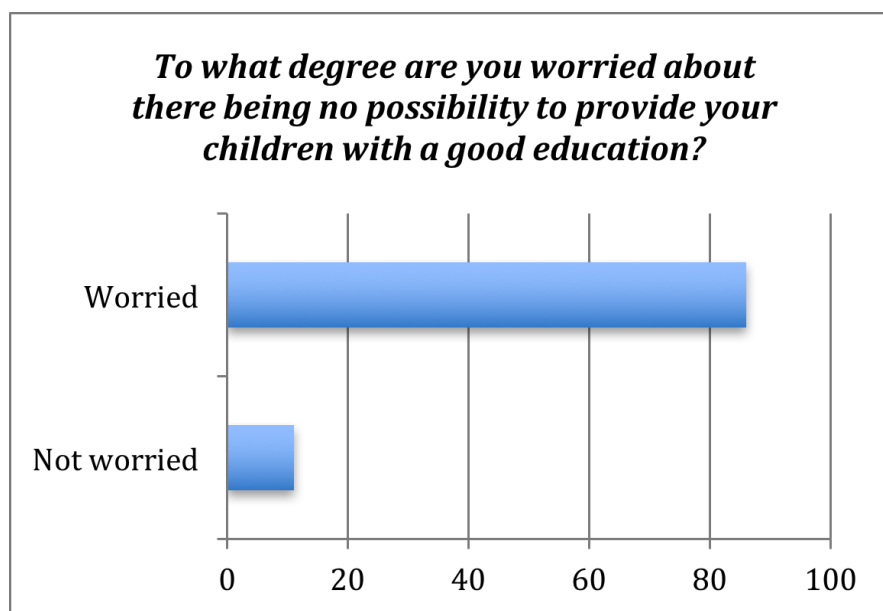
region, Gazans are more satisfied with the education system than are residents of the West Bank (58 percent vs. 44 percent). Of note, when compared to views of the health care system, fewer Gazans are satisfied compared to those living in the West Bank (37 percent versus 47 percent), suggesting that citizens of the West Bank are not more critical of the government across all areas. By extension, the results indicate that the West Bank government must take steps to improve the quality of education in the territory.



Although their rating of current government-provided services is evenly divided, only a minority of Palestinians (39 percent) says the government is doing a good or very good job addressing educational needs. Respondents from the West Bank are relatively less satisfied (63 percent dissatisfied) than those from Gaza (51 percent dissatisfied). By comparison, over three-quarters of Palestinians rate the government's attempts to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor as bad or very bad (78 percent), and over three-fifths say the government is doing badly or very badly managing the economy (66 percent). Thus, ratings of the government's performance on addressing educational needs is relatively similar to perceptions across a range of other issues.

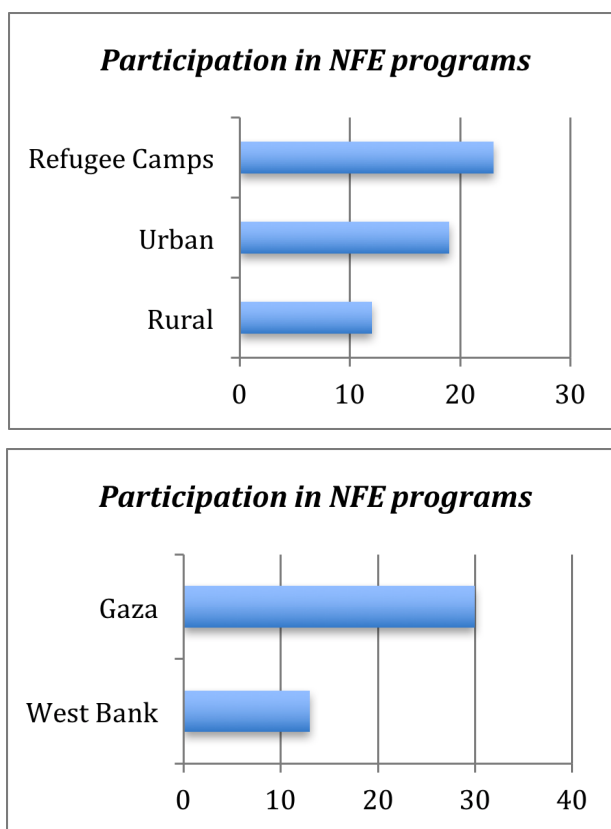


In terms of concerns about the possibility to provide children a good education, the vast majority of respondents in the West Bank and Gaza say they are worried or very worried (86 percent). We see a difference based on income level, as those earning less than 3000 NIS, which is roughly the median income, are somewhat more worried than those earning more than this threshold (88 percent vs. 83 percent). Further, those who say their income covers all their expenses and allows them to save are less concerned than those who say they face significant difficulties in meeting their basic needs (81 percent vs. 88 percent). However, there are no demographic differences in views based on education level, religiosity or region. In fact, higher educated (secondary and above) and lower educated (basic and below) Palestinians have the same level of concern about the ability to provide children with a good education (86 percent concerned or very concerned, each).



Attitudes toward Non-Formal Education and Reasons for Attending

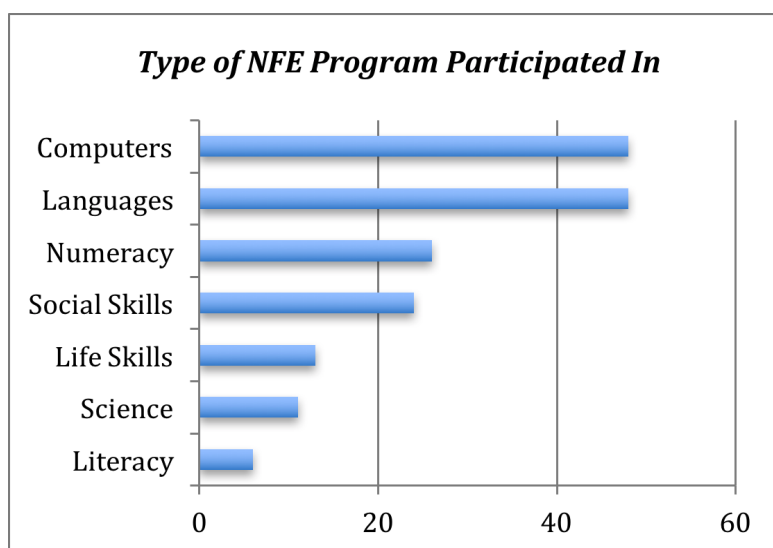
A fifth (19 percent) of respondents in the West Bank and Gaza have participated, or have had a family member participate, in non-formal education programs. Participation levels differ depending on whether the respondents are urban-dwellers, from rural areas or living in refugee camps. Families living in rural areas are the least likely to include a participant (12 percent). Meanwhile, families from urban areas are more likely to include a participant (19 percent), while those from refugee camps are about twice as likely (23 percent) as those from a rural area.



There are also important differences in rates of participation by region. Gazans are more than twice as likely to live in a household with a participant in youth NFE programs compared to those from the West Bank (30 percent vs. 13 percent). Though religiosity and income have no significant effect on participation rates by household, level of education does. Those who come from households where the respondent is more educated are more likely to have participated compared with those who are less educated. While over a fifth of those with a secondary education or above have either participated themselves or have had a family member participate (22 percent), only 12 percent of those with a basic level of education or less say the same. This differential rate of participation may be linked, among other things, to the quality of education in Gaza which is ruled by Hamas and is under an economic blockade. Many parents may feel the need to find other opportunities for their children to provide them with better educational opportunities.

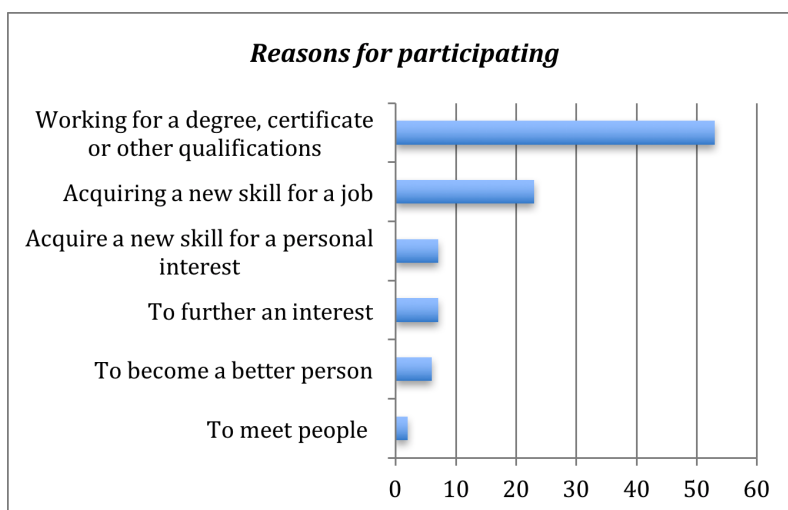
Overall, among those households with a participant in youth non-formal education programs, more than three-fifths say the program was organized by a private institution organized (64 percent) compared with 32 percent who say it was run by an international agency or a non-governmental organization. When disaggregated by region, those in Gaza are more likely to have participated in a program organized by an NGO than those in the West Bank (39 percent vs. 25 percent). Generally, however, private institutions operate the majority of programs in which respondents from both regions participate (57 percent in Gaza, 72 percent in the West Bank).

Among respondents who participated themselves, the majority attended a program focused on computers or languages (48 percent, each), followed by numeracy (26 percent) and social skills (24 percent). Fewer participated in a program teaching life skills (13 percent), science (11 percent) or literacy (6 percent). Among respondents who have a family member who participated in a youth NFE program, the trend is similar with the majority participating in programs teaching languages (55 percent) followed by computers (40 percent), numeracy (38 percent), social skills (21 percent), life skills (20 percent) or science (18 percent). Again, rates of participation are lower in programs emphasizing literacy (3 percent).²



Though motives for participating in non-formal education programs vary, respondents primarily cite reasons pertaining to acquiring job-related skills. For instance, while over half of respondents say working for a degree, certificate or other qualification is the most important reason (53 percent), and 23 percent say it would be to acquire a new skill for a job, far fewer respondents cite reasons related to personal development or self-growth. Overall, fewer than one-in-ten respondents say that the most important reason for participating is to acquire a new skill for a personal interest (7 percent), to further an interest (7 percent), to become a better person (6 percent) or to meet people (2 percent).

² The table below presents the combined findings for all households, including those who participated themselves and those who had a family member who participated. The total sums to more than 100 percent as respondents could pick more than one type of program.



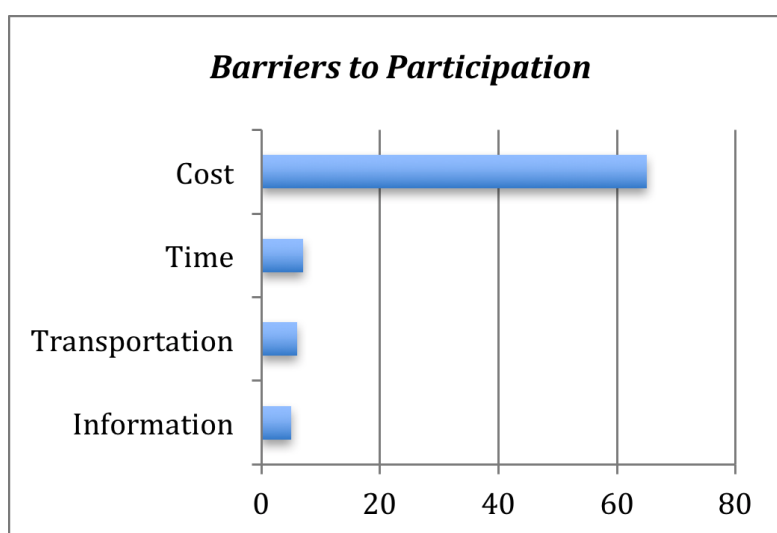
A similar trend is visible when examining the second most important reason to participate. A plurality says working for a degree, certificate or other qualifications is the second most important reason (29 percent), followed by acquiring a new skill for a job (25 percent). Fewer cite furthering an interest (14 percent), acquiring a new skill for a personal interest (12 percent), becoming a better person (10 percent) or meeting new people (5 percent).

Though we find no demographic differences based on income, religiosity or education levels, there are slight regional differences depending on whether the respondent is from Gaza or the West Bank. Residents of the West Bank have slightly different preferences than those from Gaza. For instance, those in Gaza prefer programs that help them work toward a degree or certificate at higher rates than those in the West Bank (43 percent vs. 32 percent). Nearly a fifth of respondents in the West Bank say reasons like meeting new people, making themselves a better person or furthering an interest are the most important reason to participate, however fewer than a tenth of Gazans say the same (18 percent vs. 8 percent).

Educational programs outside the formal curriculum have a positive reputation. Among those who either participated themselves or have a family member who participated, 91 percent say they are satisfied or very satisfied with the experience. Among those who did not participate themselves and did not have a family member who did, perceptions are more mixed. Though the majority view youth NFE programs positively (68 percent), over one-fifth have a negative view (23 percent) and 9 percent say they either did not know or declined to answer the question. In addition, Gazans have a more positive view of the programs (78 percent) than do those in the West Bank (69 percent), likely reflecting, in part, the higher rate of participation in such programs in Gaza.

Barriers to Attending Non-Formal Education Programs

The relatively low rate of participation in non-formal education programs, despite their positive reputation, can in part be explained by the barriers, both physical and cultural, that exist for those who want to participate. By far the most pronounced barrier is cost. Roughly two-thirds of respondents (65 percent) cite cost as the biggest barrier, followed by lack of time, transportation and information (7 percent, 6 percent, 5 percent, respectively) at much lower rates. By income, we see a significant difference in responses. While those who say they face significant difficulties meeting their needs each month overwhelmingly cite cost as the biggest barrier (71 percent), fewer than half of those who say their income allows them to not only meet their needs but also to save cite cost as the biggest barrier (47 percent). Thus, the cost of programs, unsurprisingly, is a much greater barrier for poorer families.

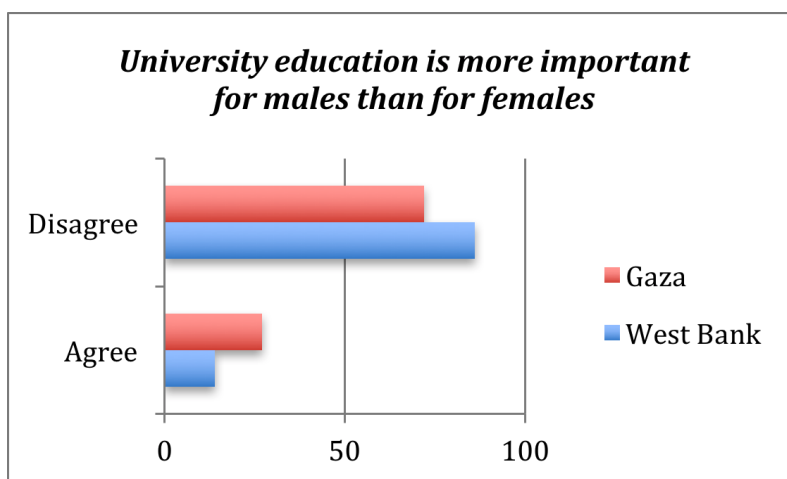


When asked about the second biggest barrier to participation, responses are more varied than for the first. A fifth of respondents say a lack of transportation proves to be the second biggest barrier, followed by 17 percent who say a lack of time, family disapproval (10 percent), cost (9 percent) or lack of information (8 percent). Importantly, four percent cite cultural barriers and three percent cite a previous negative experience as the second biggest barriers. Additionally, although only one percent of respondents cite the environment as the primary barrier, around six percent cite it as the second biggest barrier.

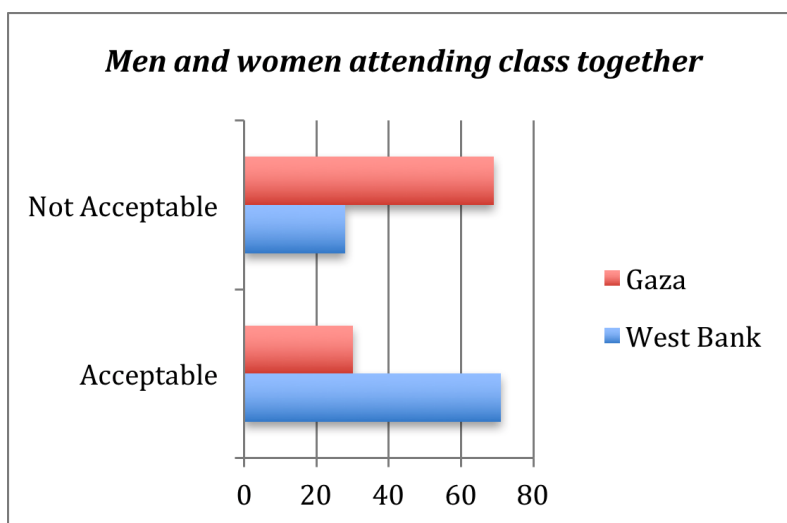
Beyond physical barriers, some respondents may also face cultural barriers. Though the vast majority of respondents disagree or strongly disagree that university education is more important for males than for females (81 percent), responses are more evenly divided with regards to whether it is acceptable in Islam for male and female students to

attend classes together. A little over two-fifths say it is *not* acceptable (42 percent), compared to 57 percent who say it is acceptable.

When examined by religiosity we see a difference between those who are either not religious or somewhat religious, and those who self-identify as religious. Three-fifths of Palestinians who say they are not religious or somewhat religious say it is acceptable in Islam for males and females to attend classes together compared to 52 percent of those who are religious. Again, on the question about university education and whether it is more important for males or females, we see a difference based on religiosity. Interestingly, of those who self-identify as not religious, 28 percent agree or strongly agree that university education is more important for males than for females. By comparison, 19 percent of those who are religious and 16 percent of those who are somewhat religious say the same.



A significant difference is clear when comparing the responses of those in the West Bank with those in Gaza. Gazans tend to support a more traditional view - nearly seven-in-ten say they do not think it is acceptable for men and women to attend classes together (69 percent), while 28 percent of those in the West Bank say the same. Gazans are also more likely to consider university education more important for men than for women than their counterparts in the West Bank (27 percent versus 14 percent). These different views may limit the ability of some, particularly women, to participate in NFE programs, especially in Gaza.



Views of Education

Overall, residents of both the West Bank and Gaza prefer an education system emphasizing critical and analytical thinking, though residents of the West Bank prefer this at higher rates than those in Gaza. However, the two populations are more divided in terms of favoring a curriculum that places primary importance on the development of emotional and social skills as opposed to solely scientific skills.

The majority of Palestinians favor teaching students to think about how to answer the question instead of emphasizing that they simply give the correct answer (70 percent versus 29 percent), which represents an important skill related to critical thinking. Respondents also showed a clear preference for encouraging students to think for themselves even when it goes against what the teacher is saying (71 percent) rather than to accept the answer offered by the teacher because it is the best answer (27 percent). In terms of examinations, there is greater support among Palestinians for tests that demonstrate how well a student has made their own sense of what has been taught in class (79 percent), as opposed to just demonstrating how well they have memorized what has been taught (19 percent). Thus, there is broad popular support for a curriculum that emphasizes critical thinking skills.

Support for teaching emotional intelligence is less strong in the West Bank and Gaza. For instance, just over half of Palestinians prefer a system that teaches students, in addition to scientific skills, how to recognize and express their own emotions and respond to others' emotions in addition to scientific skills (52 percent). Meanwhile, 46 percent say the education system should focus primarily on developing the scientific skills of pupils and students. When asked whether the education system should place primary importance on learning social skills such as the ability to understand the perspectives and feelings of


		West Bank	Gaza	Total
1	Statement 1: The education system should focus primarily on developing the scientific skills of pupils and students	41%	56%	46%
	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	57%	42%	52%
2	Statement 1: Giving the correct answer to a question remains the most important goal for pupils and students	22%	44%	29%
	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	77%	55%	70%
3	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.	21%	38%	27%
	Statement 2: A good education system is one that encourages students to think for themselves even when it	77%	59%	71%

	goes against what the teacher is saying.			
4	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.	13%	31%	19%
	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.	85%	68%	79%
5	Statement 1: The education system should place primary importance on academic achievement and certificates recognizing completion.	31%	51%	38%
	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.	68%	49%	61%

others, or if it should place primary importance on academic achievement and certificates, 61 percent prefer the former while 38 percent prefer the latter.

Notably, there is no difference in views by gender. Men and women hold the same views at similar rates for all questions about the kind of education system they would like to see in the West Bank and Gaza. Both overall and when disaggregated by demographic differences, Palestinians prefer education systems that focus on critical thinking and emotional intelligence, in contrast with the more traditional view that education systems should emphasize rote memorization.

However, we see a significant difference in response by region. Those in Gaza are less likely to prefer a system that promotes critical thinking and emotional intelligence than their counterparts in the West Bank. While the majority of respondents in the West Bank prefer




an educational system that teaches students how to recognize and express their own emotions (57 percent), those in Gaza prefer that the education system focus primarily on developing the scientific skills of students (56 percent). Many Gazans also prefer an emphasis on academic achievement and certificates recognizing completion (51 percent), as opposed to those in the West Bank who prefer placing primary importance on learning social skills like the ability to understand the feelings and perspectives of others (68 percent).

With regards to critical thinking skills, respondents in the West Bank have a much stronger preference for an education system emphasizing these skills than do their Gazan counterparts. Residents of the West Bank overwhelmingly prefer that students learn to think about how to answer the question as opposed to simply reaching the correct answer (77 percent). Those in Gaza, however, are more evenly divided with 55 percent preferring this style of education, and 44 percent preferring an emphasis on giving the correct answer. This same trend is found for the question about whether a good education system is one that encourages students to think for themselves, even when it goes against what the teacher is saying (77 percent of those in West Bank agree vs. 59 percent in Gaza). Finally, when asked about examinations, 85 percent of those in the West Bank prefer that students demonstrate how well they have made their own sense of what has been taught in class, compared to 68 percent of Gazans who say the same.

Conclusion

Although a majority of Palestinians live in households where no one has participated in a youth non-formal education program in the last five years, the reputation of NFE programs as well as the educational preferences and desired skills of Palestinians show that such programs would have an appeal it made more widely available. These attitudes suggest that such programs could play an important role in increasing the quality of education in the West Bank and Gaza, especially given many Palestinians' dissatisfaction with the state of the existing educational system. However, there remain many barriers to the success of such programs for Palestinians, including both physical and cultural.

Increasing the success of non-formal education programs in the West Bank and Gaza requires making such programs more affordable and developing programs that increase students' practical skills, like languages and computers, which would aid in employment. Palestinians are also open to programs that focus on developing skills in critical thinking and emotional intelligence, although there would likely be greater acceptance of such programs in the West Bank compared with Gaza. Additionally, for Gazans, cultural barriers, like an emphasis on education for males as opposed to females, are much more pronounced than in the West Bank, suggesting that some parents may prevent their



children from attending a program that includes both boys and girls in the same classroom.

The most viable path to realizing the benefits from NFE programs is likely to be found in combining clearly marketable skills such as languages or computers with lessons in critical thinking and emotional intelligence. Although both skills are critical to employment, programs that provide a more tangible skill as well as a certificate are likely to be the most popular and to, in turn, best address the needs of ordinary citizens.