
Views of Youth Non-Formal Education in Lebanon

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Mountains in Lebanon; credit marviikad



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Overview

In general, Lebanese are pleased with the formal education system, especially in comparison to other government services. However, despite relative satisfaction with education in the country, many are nonetheless concerned about the ability to provide their children with a good education. If non-formal education programs are to help assuage these fears and meet the needs of Lebanese citizens, the Arab Barometer survey reveals it is important that they include an emphasis on critical thinking and analytical skills as a part of their basic curricula, as the public strongly desires programs that teach such skills as opposed to rote memorization.¹

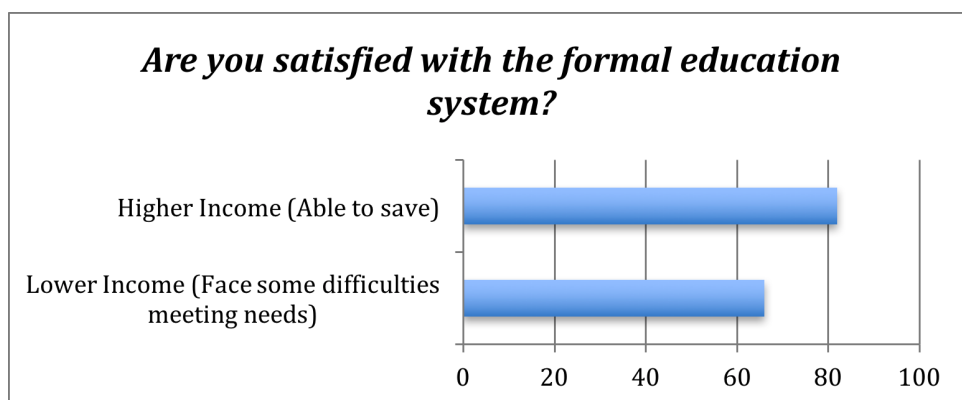
In addition, to ensure participation across all demographics in these programs certain barriers need to be addressed. Considering that private institutions organize most of the current education programs that fall outside the formal curriculum, it is not surprising that cost is one of the biggest barriers ordinary Lebanese face in participating. Additionally, Lebanese cite access to transportation as a significant challenge, suggesting that increasing the number of such programs and their distribution across the country could substantially increase the rate of participation.

Additionally, enrollment is likely to increase if youth non-formal education programs focus on developing skills for the labor market or helping students obtain a certificate or qualification, as these are the primary motivations Lebanese cite for attending such programs. Meanwhile, other interests related to self-growth, though still present, tend to be less pronounced.

Views on Government and the Education System

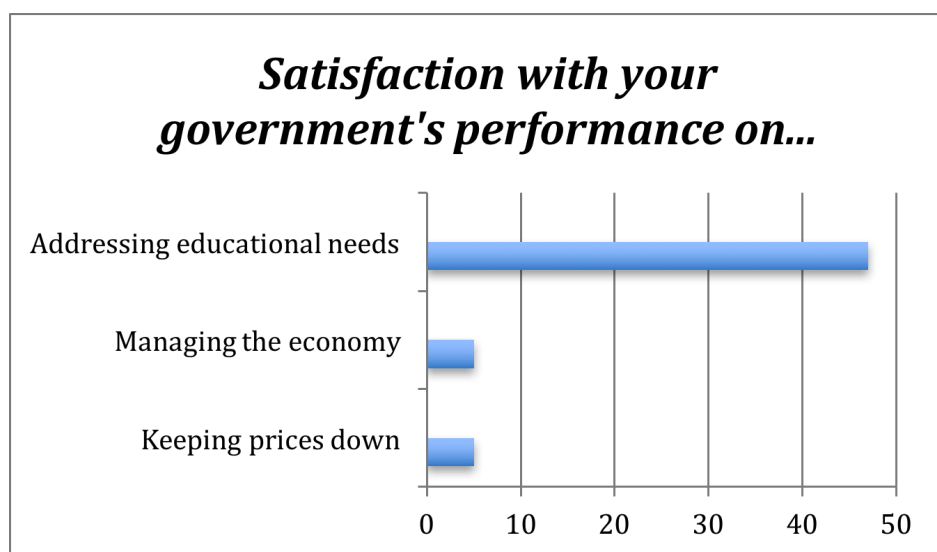
Overall, Lebanese citizens are relatively satisfied with the formal education system, with three-quarters (76 percent) holding positive views. However, wealthier and poorer Lebanese differ in their perceptions of the quality of education. While eight-in-ten (82 percent) of those who say their income level is sufficient to meet their needs or to allow them to save money each month are satisfied, only two-thirds (66 percent) of those who face financial difficulties meeting their basic needs say the same.

¹ Arab Barometer data. 2016. "Lebanon. Wave 4." Available at <http://www.arabbarometer.org>.



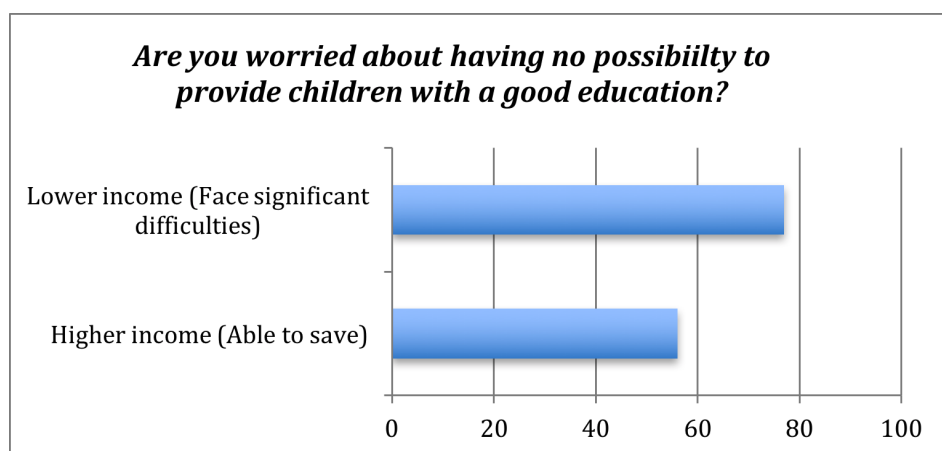
Despite the overall satisfaction with the formal education system, fewer than half of Lebanese respondents rate the government's efforts to address educational needs positively (47 percent). While there is no significant difference based on level of income, those with a basic education are slightly less satisfied with the government's efforts in this regard than their higher educated counterparts (43 percent vs. 48 percent).

The government is doing a better job addressing educational needs than it is other key priorities, at least in the eyes of the Lebanese public. Nearly half (47 percent) rate government performance on managing the education system as good or very good compared to fewer than one-in-ten who say the same about managing the economy or keeping prices down (5 percent, each).



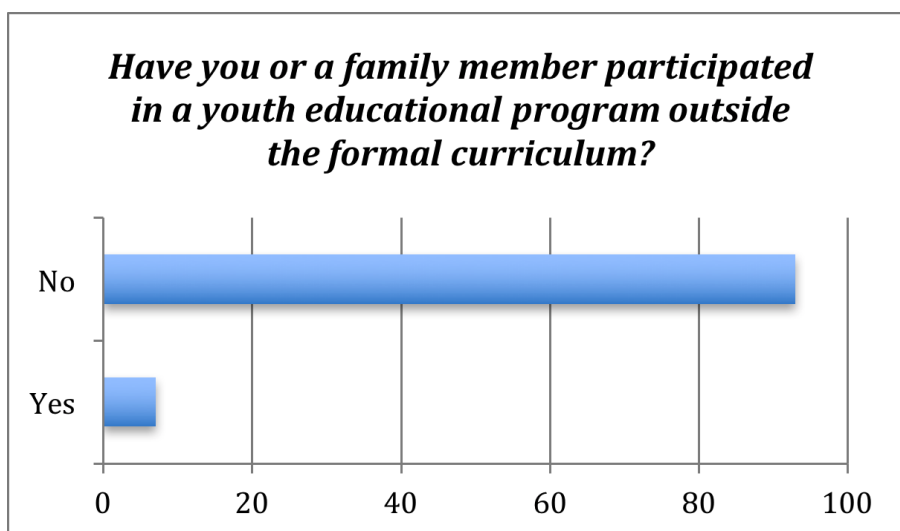
Meanwhile, roughly three-in-ten rate the government's performance in improving basic health care services positively (31 percent). Yet, despite general satisfaction with the education system, most Lebanese (72 percent) still worry that there is no possibility to provide children with a good education. However, there are stark differences by financial security for this question. Among those who say they are able to save money each month,

56 percent are worried or very worried about the possibility to provide children with a good education. In comparison, among those whose face significant difficulties in covering their basic needs, 77 percent are worried or very worried about providing children with a quality education. Likely, this difference is the result of better off Lebanese having access to a number of educational opportunities, including private schools, that are sufficient to meet the needs of their children while those without such resources cannot do the same.



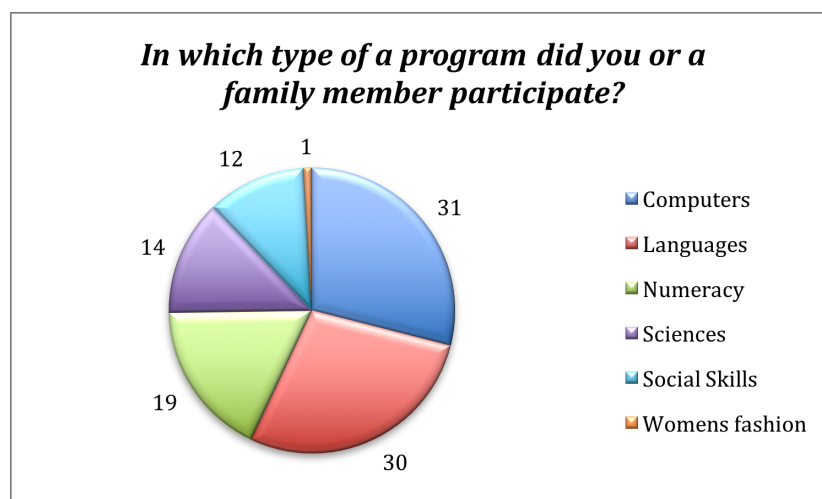
Attitudes toward Non-Formal Education and Reasons for Attending

Few respondents (7 percent) say either they themselves or a family member have participated in a youth educational program outside the formal system in the past five years. Among those who did, the vast majority (91 percent) say that a family member participated in the program. Notably, there are no clear socio-economic differences in participation, as members from more and less educated families, wealthier and poorer families, and men and women were about as likely to have reported participation.



However, 69 percent of those who have attended a program say a private institution organized it, compared with only 11 percent that were organized by NGOs or other agencies.

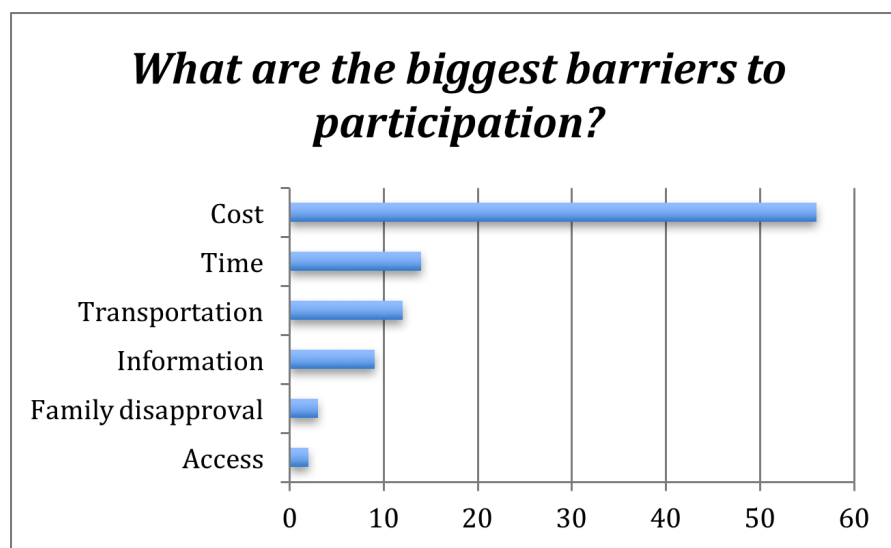
Of those who participated themselves, the most common type of program was one focusing on languages (53 percent), followed by computers (27 percent), sciences and numeracy (each 13 percent). Among those whose family members participated, 32 percent report the program was one focusing on computers, followed by languages (26 percent), numeracy (20 percent), social skills (15 percent), sciences (14 percent), and life skills (12 percent).²



Barriers to Attending Non-Formal Education Programs

Over half of respondents (56 percent) cite cost as the biggest barrier to participation, followed by lack of time (14 percent), transportation (12 percent) or lack of information (9 percent). However, when asked about the second biggest factor, responses are more varied. Overall, a larger percentage says lack of time (21 percent), lack of transportation (18 percent) and lack of information (16 percent) are the second biggest barriers, followed by only 7 percent listing the cost of the program.

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.



Some of the differences in perceived barriers are linked to demographic differences among Lebanese. For example, perhaps surprisingly, cost is a less commonly cited barrier for rural Lebanese than it is for urban Lebanese (49 percent vs. 58 percent). However, understandably, transportation is a more significant barrier for rural Lebanese compared to those living in urban areas (18 percent vs. 9 percent). Further, less educated Lebanese, meaning those with less than a high school education, cite cost as the biggest barrier at a higher rate than their more educated counterparts, those having at least a high school education (70 percent vs. 54 percent). Additionally, those Lebanese who said they face significant financial difficulties in meeting their basic needs cite cost as the biggest barrier at a higher rate than those who say their needs are met and they are able to save (70 percent vs. 48 percent).

There appear to be few cultural limitations or barriers with regards to promoting non-formal education. The overwhelming majority of Lebanese say it is acceptable for male and female students to attend class together (93 percent). There are no major differences in this view based on level of religiosity, though Muslims and Christians responded slightly differently. While 90 percent of Muslims believe this is acceptable, 97 percent of Christians say the same. Again, the majority of respondents disagree or strongly disagree that university education is more important for males than for females (92 percent), suggesting that considerations related to gender are less likely to drive the acceptability of participation in a non-formal educational program.

Views of Education

Lebanese citizens generally hold positive attitudes toward educational programs that promote skills in critical thinking and emotional intelligence. When asked questions about

		Strongly Agree or Agree
5A	Statement 1: The education system should focus primarily on developing the scientific skills of pupils and students	36%
	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	63%
5B	Statement 1: Giving the correct answer to a question remains the most important goal for pupils and students	19%
	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	80%
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.	17%
	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.	83%
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.	15%

	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.	84%
5E	Statement 1: The education system should place primary importance on academic achievement and certificates recognizing completion.	42%
	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.	56%

the kind of educational system they would like to see in the country, Lebanese prefer one that places primary importance on learning social skills, such as the ability to understand the feelings of others, than one that places primary importance on academic achievement and certificates that recognize completion (56 percent vs. 42 percent). Respondents also prefer an education system that not only teaches scientific skills but also teaches students how to recognize and express their own emotions, as opposed to a system that only focuses on the former skill (63 percent vs. 36 percent).

Although most Lebanese are supportive of teaching skills in emotional intelligence, there is even greater support for a system that promotes the importance of critical thinking. Fully eight-in-ten say that the most important goal in education is not giving the correct answer; rather what is most important is learning to think about how to answer the question (80 percent). Meanwhile, only 17 percent of Lebanese say that a good education system encourages the student to accept the answer offered by the teacher because it is the best answer, compared to 83 percent who believe students should be encouraged to think for themselves even when it goes against what the teacher is saying. Moreover, while roughly 15 percent prefer examinations that allow students to demonstrate how well they have memorized what has been taught in class, the overwhelming majority (84 percent) prefer examinations that allow students to demonstrate how well they have made their own sense of what has been taught.

Though it is clear that overall Lebanese prefer a system that emphasizes critical thinking and teaches emotional skills, there are some subtle demographic differences, primarily along gender lines. While men and women are equally likely to believe in the importance of teaching emotional skills in addition to traditional scientific skills (63 percent vs. 62 percent), men are slightly more likely to prefer an education system that emphasizes rote

memorization over critical thinking. For instance, 21 percent of men say that giving the correct answer to a question remains the most important goal for students, compared to 17 percent of women who say the same. Additionally, slightly more men than women prefer a system that encourages the student to simply accept the answer offered by the teacher as it is the best answer (19 percent vs. 14 percent). Finally, we see that men have a preference for examinations that allow students to demonstrate how well they have memorized what has been taught in class at higher rates than women do (17 percent vs. 12 percent). Despite these minor demographic differences, the overall trend remains the same – Lebanese, on the whole, prefer education systems that focus on critical thinking and emotional intelligence, a contrast with the more traditional view that education systems should emphasize rote memorization.

Conclusion

Though few Lebanese participate in education programs outside the formal curriculum, their concerns and worries show that there is indeed a place in the system for such programs. NFE programs have a positive reputation, including among both Lebanese who have had a family member participate in such a program and those who have not. While Lebanese are open to this form of education, it is clear that programs that provide learners with what they perceive as tangible benefits with increasing their competitiveness for employment opportunities are the most likely to be valued by the public. Efforts to promote curricula teaching critical thinking and emotional intelligence should be clearly linked to the importance both skills represent to employers. Beyond recruitment, it is clear that efforts should be made to minimize the cost and to consider barriers to access for students, particularly in rural areas, as these are the primary barriers to allowing more students to take part in non-formal education programs.