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Stakeholders' Report

Strengthening Youth Opportunities

A pilot impact and process study of empowerment-based non-formal education for out-of-school youth in Amman, Jordan

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

questscope
putting the last, first.

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Acronyms

CBO: community-based organisation
IFE: informal education (the first 8-month cycle of NFE)
MOE: Ministry of Education
NFE: non-formal education
QS: Questscope for Social Development in the Middle East
RCT: randomised controlled trial
VTC: Vocational Training Corporation
YAC: Youth Advisory Council

Executive summary

Purpose: In 2009-10, researchers from the University of Oxford's Centre for Evidence-Based Intervention partnered with the Jordanian non-formal education (NFE) programme, a joint-venture based on a unique Memorandum of Understanding between Questscope for Social Development in the Middle East and the Ministry of Education, to conduct a pilot impact and process study of empowerment-based educational programming for out-of-school youth.

The study responds to a significant need to develop locally relevant evidence for what works and best practices with socially and economically vulnerable youth in Jordan. In this case, 'what works' refers to evidence-based practice for achieving measurable impacts on social or behavioural outcomes of concern. The Jordanian National Council on Family Affairs made an explicit call for such research in 2004[1].

Impacts: The research indicates that NFE is a promising and important initiative for vulnerable Jordanian young people. The study found significant programme impact on one of the measured outcomes after 4 months of programme participation: conduct problems. Positive changes were also observed with social skills, emotional

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[1] NCFA. 2004. Jordan Country Study of Disadvantaged Children, The National Council for Family Affairs, Amman

"If the Arab world is to overcome our challenges, we need to ensure our rising generation of young people is empowered to succeed." - Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah

symptoms, and behavioural difficulties, but these outcomes were not statistically significant. The programme was more effective in changing observed outcomes for younger youth (13-15) than older youth (16-21). Older youth tend to begin with higher social and emotional scores and may benefit from more challenging leadership opportunities, such as roles with supporting and engaging younger youth.

Increased efforts and resources to support high implementation quality and participation at all centres could produce more robust impacts in the future. The data indicates notable differences in attendance and youth perceptions of programme quality between centres. Lower-than-expected attendance rates in general reduced the ability of the intervention to achieve more significant effects on several outcomes.

Centres with higher empowerment ratings by youth also showed more positive impacts on youth outcomes, suggesting an important role of the empowerment process in shaping youth outcomes. Empowerment refers to the extent to which youth are supported and enabled to participate in the programme implementation and decision-making processes that affect them.

Process: The process study shows that youth reported overall high feelings of empowerment and value in the NFE programme. Despite limited resources and heavy workload, facilitators have maintained a generally high-quality programme environment with strong personal commitments to the cause. Nevertheless, there are some differences in the nature of youth involvement and youth feedback between centres, suggesting variations in implementation quality that can be addressed through stronger supports for facilitators.

The facilitator-youth relationship and the NFE training methodology are particularly important to the success of the programme.

The rapid scaling up of the programme without adequate resources for quality assurance has placed strain on facilitators and implementation quality. Both youth and adults involved in NFE gave useful feedback for strengthening implementation.

Implications: The programme is a needed opportunity for many otherwise marginalised youth to earn an important 10th grade alternative certificate and benefit from a positive, youth-centred experience with caring adults. As such, extending the programme to more youth and communities makes sense. The nature of scaling up, however, should carefully focus on investments and solutions to address the challenges for expanding quality and participatory programming highlighted by this study.

Non-formal education in Jordan

Background: The 'youth bulge' is commonly considered one of the most pressing challenges facing the Arab world. Young people aged 15 to 29 make up the largest demographic group in Jordan at 29 percent of the population. Moreover, whilst the official unemployment rate is 14 percent, the youth unemployment remains at 30 percent[2]. According to cohort studies, 24 percent of Jordanian youth that enter first grade do not graduate from twelfth grade[3]. A 2003 national household survey found that the biggest reason youth in Jordan dropped out was because of lack of interest in school, even above financial and family reasons[4]. These issues highlight significant need for strengthening educational and skill-building opportunities for out-of-school youth, particularly in ways that capture young people's interest and inspire their belief in their ability to learn, succeed, and contribute.

Despite challenges, Jordan is recognized as a regional leader in educational reform, including one of the highest rates of public expenditure on education. As such, an innovative non-formal education programme to reintegrate socially and economically marginalised young people is consistent with Jordan's broader pattern of leadership towards investment in youth.

Programme: Questscope non-formal education (NFE) is the product of a unique governmental-non-governmental partnership between Questscope for Social Development in the Middle East (QS) and the Jordan Ministry of Education (MOE). QS NFE serves out-of-school youth typically from low-income communities, ages 13-18 for males and 13-21 for females. The 2-year programme consists of three 8-month education cycles based on participatory learning methodology. The programme emphasises supportive relationships between youth and trained adults and a positive, youth-driven learning environment.

Distribution of NFE/IFE centres across governorates of Jordan

NFE/IFE Centres*
◆ ●
Amman: 17/6
Aqaba: 3/1
Az Zarqa': 9/3
Al Balqa': 1/1
Irbid: 5/2
Jarash: 1/1
Karak: 2/2
Madaba: 2/1

*NFE indicates school-based centre and IFE indicates CBO-based centre

NFE and IFE (informal education) operate in 40 schools and 17 community-based organisations spanning 8 governorates in Jordan and has enrolled over 7,000 youth since 2004. Graduates receive a 10th-grade alternative certificate that enables them to participate in vocational training and receive government business loans. Educationally, the 1st cycle corresponds with academic content in grades 1-4, the 2nd cycle with grades 5-7, and the 3rd cycle with grades 8-10. The first cycle (IFE) is particularly important for building youths' trust, confidence and enthusiasm for learning. 'Facilitators' in NFE working with youth are select MOE teachers given up to 85 hours of special youth development and educational training and additional supports by QS to integrate the participatory methodology.

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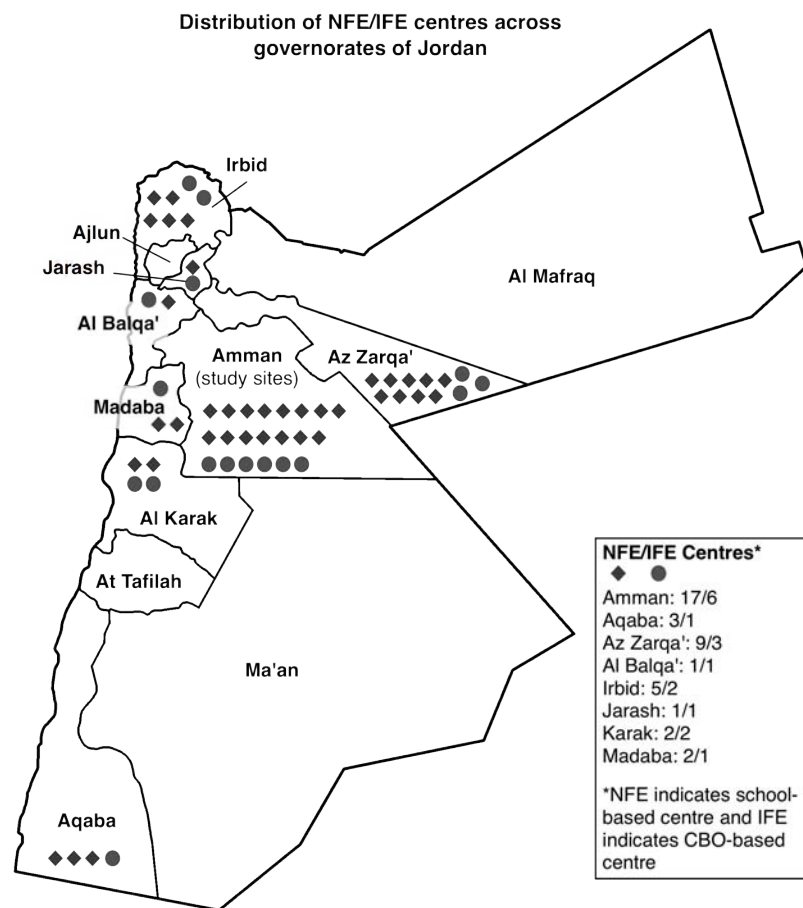
[2] Kanaan T, Hanania M. 2009. The Disconnect between Education, Job Growth, and Employment in Jordan. In Generation in Waiting: The Unfulfilled Promise of Young People in the Middle East, ed. N Dhillon, T Yousef, pp. 142-65. Washington, D.C.: Brooking Institution Press
[3] NCFA. 2004. Jordan Country Study of Disadvantaged Children, The National Council for Family Affairs, Amman
[4] Nimeh, Z., & Bauchmuller, R. (2010). "Out of School: A look at deprived children in Jordan". Paper presented at the Poverty Reduction, Equity and Growth Network (PEGNet) annual conference.

Youth empowerment and NFE

Increasingly, programmes and policies globally promote involvement of young people in the processes that affect their lives and communities. Much has been written to suggest that youth feel more engaged and invested in educational and social programmes that treat them as valuable partners in planning and implementation rather than passive recipients of services.
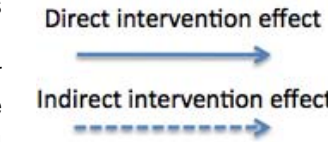
Youth empowerment programmes take many forms. At a basic level, common ingredients include regular involvement of youth in programme decision-making, skill-building opportunities, supportive adults, and a positive peer environment based on democratic group principles.

Basic Theory of Change Diagram for QS NFE

Direct intervention effect →

Indirect intervention effect ----→

INPUTS
Participatory involvement | Trained adult support
Asset-building activities | Prosocial environment

Non-Formal Education

PRIMARY OUTCOMES
Self-efficacy | Social skills
Social supports | Improved behavior
Learning enthusiasm | Academic competencies

DISTAL OUTCOMES
Economic wellbeing | Civic engagement
Contributions to improved family, school, community, and society level indicators

Youth empowerment is an on-going process that builds mutual trust and respect between youth and adults by which both recognise the other as an equal and important partner. Whilst 'youth development' programmes focus broadly on youths' strengths, youth empowerment specifically does so by, in part, supporting and involving young people in shared decision-making and leadership processes. When youth are involved in decision-making, a programme may have more opportunities for youth to make meaningful connections, and the programme is more likely to relate to youth interests.

This is what makes QS NFE's participatory education model different from traditional education. NFE is considered firstly a 'social' activity. Adult facilitators and youth are both considered co-learners and co-teachers. The youth are intended to drive learning topics, activities, and group expectations with adults helping to build youths' confidence and skills to contribute. The theory of change suggests that youth who practice and develop such attitudes and skills in the programme eventually transfer them to other aspects of life, including work, family, and society. This approach reflects the Jordan government's National Youth Strategy, which prioritises higher youth participation in education and communities.

An Oxford University review[5] shows that very few high-quality impact studies have examined the link between programming based on youth involvement in decision-making and better youth outcomes. This makes this pilot study with this NFE model especially unique and important for better understanding youth participation and what works for vulnerable young people.
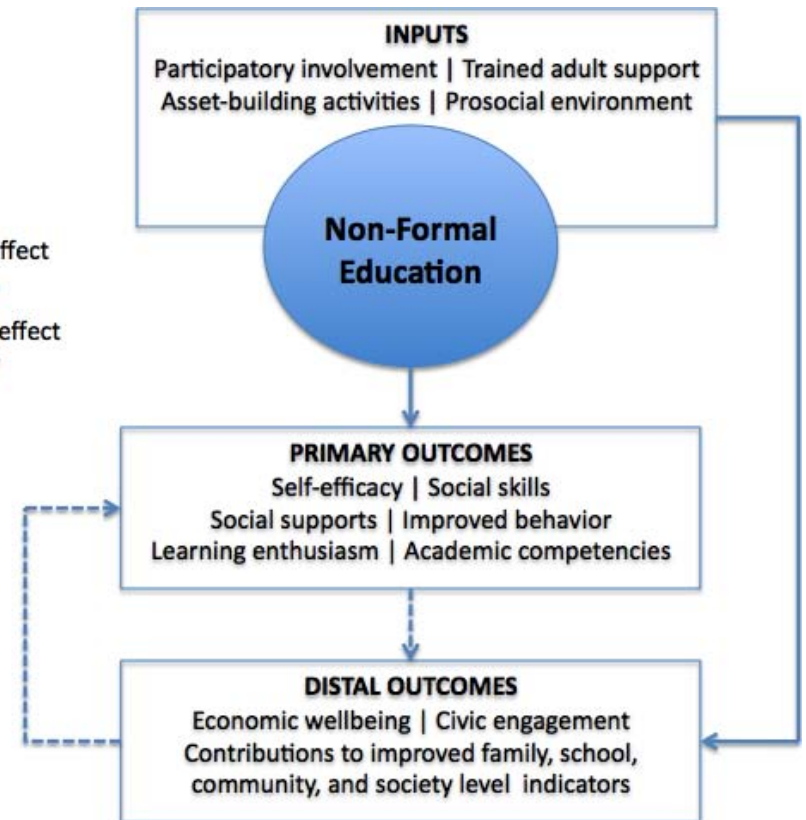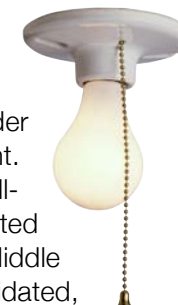
> *"The best thing about the programme methodology is that it depends on learning through participation, learning through dialogue."* - Facilitator

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[5] Morton, M. & Montgomery, P. (2010). Youth Empowerment Programs for Improving Self-Efficacy and Self-Esteem of Adolescents. Campbell Systematic Reviews. (Protocol published, full review currently waiting publication)

Impact study methods

Design: The pilot study used a randomised controlled trial (RCT) design. When feasible, this is the most unbiased kind of impact evaluation design because it compares two equal groups of youth – one that participates in the intervention and one that does not. This enables the study to determine changes in youth outcomes that are *caused by NFE* and not something else (e.g., getting older, the economy, or other community changes).

Some interventions *protect* youth from natural declines in outcomes rather than cause gains in outcomes; unlike studies without credible comparison groups, RCTs can detect such protective effects. Additionally, this kind of impact study assesses outcomes for a whole group of youth exposed to the programme, not just those who had the best experiences.

RCTs have been used internationally to develop some of the best evidence on what works for social and community projects. As a *pilot* evaluation, this is intended as a relatively small study to assess the feasibility of the design in local context and to gauge short-term impacts on youth to help inform further programme development and perhaps larger impact evaluation in the future.

Data on youth outcomes was collected before entering NFE (pretest) and again 4 months after enrolment (posttest). Youth who were randomly assigned to the wait-list comparison group had data collected at the same time periods and entered NFE after the 4-month posttest. During the 4-month period, comparison youth were offered a basic biweekly recreational club coordinated by trained QS volunteers that did not utilise NFE's participatory education methodology.

> ### Study Sample
>
> N = 127 Jordanian youth
> 67 QS NFE | 60 Comparison
> Mean age: 15.9
> Working: 53%
>
> 6 NFE Centres in low-income communities in Amman with high child labour concentrations
>
> Centres: 4 male & 2 female

Although short-term, previous studies, including QS's mentoring evaluation, have shown significant effects in 4 months or less. Moreover, important norms and behaviours are generally established early in the life of a group; thus, shorter-term outcomes can be important indicators for longer-term results.

In order to account for the possibility of longer-term changes in outcomes, further follow-ups to check youth progress at 16 and 24 months without a comparison group are also planned.

An innovative audiovisual laptop-based survey was used to follow outcomes with low-literacy youth. This technology could support other future evaluation efforts with low-literacy populations in Jordan.

Outcome measures: Several outcomes were chosen through a series of conversations between QS staff, NFE facilitators, and Oxford University researchers about the programme's theory of change and the broader literature on youth empowerment. Measures were identified from well-reputed and internationally validated instruments. Nevertheless, the Middle East generally lacks well-validated, indigenous measures of outcomes associated with youth development; this could be an important undertaking for future research.

Outcome measures included:

General Self-Efficacy Scale (primary outcome): Assesses beliefs in one's ability to meet challenges and demands across a wide range of situations (Schwarzer & Jerusalem 1995)

Social Skills Questionnaire: Measures a range of social skill areas including cooperation, self-control, initiative, communication, and expression (Spence 2003)

Social Support Appraisals Scale: Assesses quality of supports from friends and family (Dubow & Ullman 1989)

Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire: Behavioural screening that assesses psychological difficulties in peer problems, conduct problems, emotional symptoms, and hyperactivity as well as prosocial strengths (Goodman 1997)

Other adult connectedness: Brief scale indicating how much youth believe neighbourhood adults care about them (Blum & Ireland 2004)

Key programme effects

This section summarises key findings of the impact study. Due to successful randomisation, there were no significant differences on outcome measures or demographic variables between the NFE and comparison groups at baseline (pretest).

The results showed a significant difference (*p*=.02) of medium effect size between groups at posttest for <u>conduct problems</u>, indicating a positive programme effect.

Empowerment factor: Notably, when considering only the effect of the male centre with the highest empowerment scores according to youth feedback (a measure of implementation quality), the following most significant results were found when comparing NFE and waitlist groups:

- Improvement in <u>prosocial behaviour</u> (*p*=.06 & medium effect size)
- Improvement in <u>overall difficulties</u> (*p*=.12 & medium effect size)
- Improvement in <u>hyperactivity/attention</u> problems (*p*=.17 & small effect size)

These results are particularly impressive considering the small sample size when analysing a single centre (n=36; 19 NFE, 17 comparison). This evidence suggests that if implementation of the QS methodology can be raised for all centres, general outcomes will improve as well.

Differences between groups at 4-month posttest on Conduct Problems
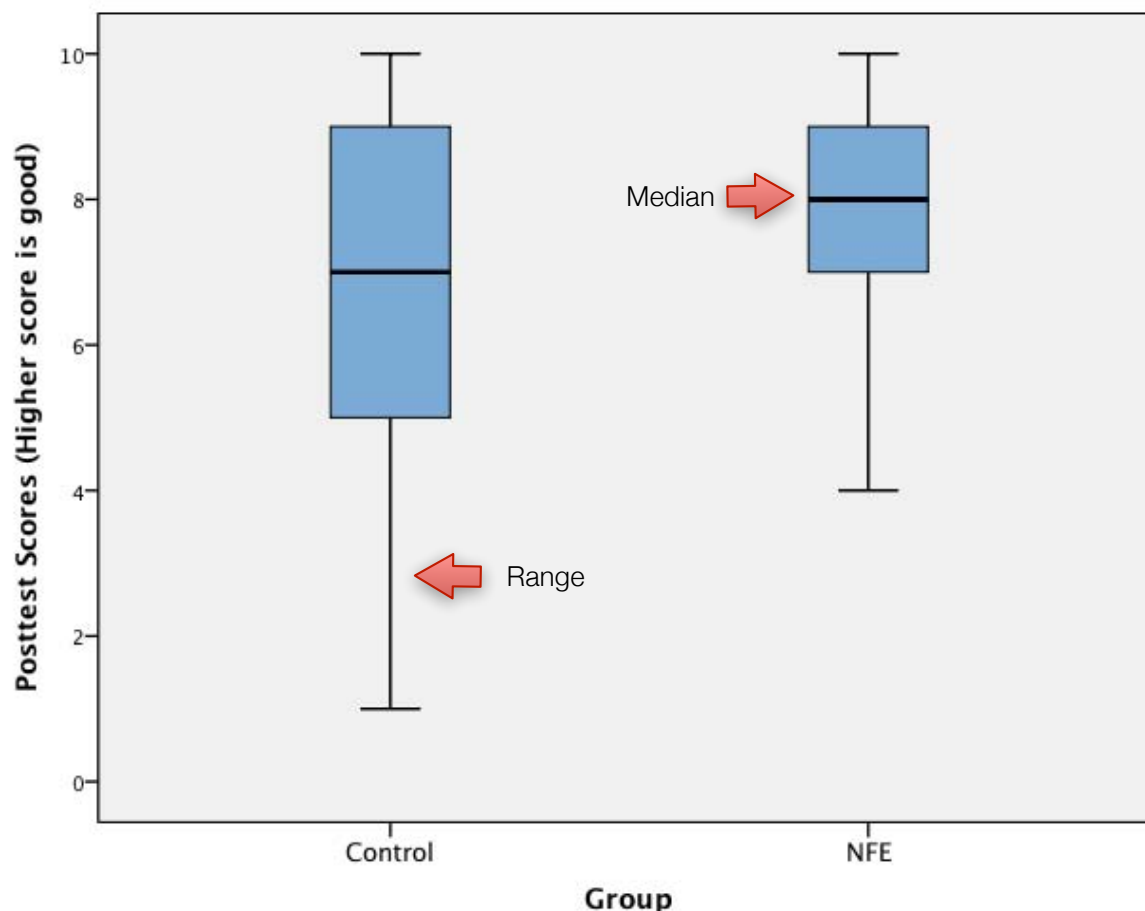
The illustration above shows that youth in NFE improved in conduct problem scores significantly more than the control group after 4 months. The dark middle line shows the median (or middle) score for the group. The upper and lower lines show the range. We can see that the middle score for NFE group was higher (better) for conduct problems, and the group that was not in NFE had youth with much lower scores.

7

General overview of short-term outcomes

One of the measured outcomes showed a significant programme effect at 4 months: improvement in conduct problems. By providing youth with a positive alternative to the streets and fostering prosocial values and relationships, the programme appears to reduce youths' antisocial behaviour (e.g., cheating, fighting, and poor temperament).

Previous research has found conduct problems in adolescence to predict a range of adjustment problems, for example with peer and family relations, self-esteem, substance abuse, and unemployment. By improving conduct problems, NFE could be forming an important basis for resilience into adulthood.

The study observed small positive changes with emotional symptoms, social skills, overall difficulties, and self-efficacy but these outcomes were not statistically significant. These results are encouraging, but low significance indicates more can be done so that more youth in the programme experience positive change.

No noticeable effects were seen for the overall sample on peer problems or social supports of peers or families by the 4-month posttest. Experiences with peers varied between youth and centres; more could be done to facilitate positive peer interactions at all centres in the initial months of involvement. Family supports

may take longer to develop, but improved resources for parent outreach could help.

It is notable that significant effects were shown with conduct problems at 4 months even when other outcomes (including the primary outcome – self-efficacy) had not yet shown significant change. Whilst the present study seems to reinforce the notion that focusing on young people's strengths is an effective way to address some problems, it does not support the idea that measureable changes in strengths necessarily *precede* changes in problems.

The lack of significant short-term effects on more strength-based measures such as self-efficacy and social skills may indicate that more can be done in the first programming cycle to ensure that young people have regular opportunities through participatory and prosocial activities to develop important strengths through engaging experiences.

Qualitative insights: The boxes give examples of youth quotes from qualitative interviews that could help explain impact study results. 'Impact indicators' (blue boxes) give clues into positive changes whereas 'challenge indicators' (white boxes) give clues as to why certain outcomes did not show more positive change.

▫
"My family does not care…one day he is here, and the next day he travels; they do not ask. I do not feel that they care." – **family supports**, challenge indicator

▫
"Sometimes the facilitators make the youth embarrassed and lose faith in achieving their ambitions when they tell them they'll send them to the first level." **self-efficacy**, challenge indicator

"I used to lose my temper because my younger brother could read, and I did not know how to read. (Laughs) But I started reading and writing!" – **conduct**, impact indicator

"I used to get in trouble. After I came here, I started staying away from trouble." – **conduct**, impact indicator

"Before I didn't know how to talk to people. Now I know how to be a man and will speak up most of the time." – **social skills**, impact indicator

"Now it is better and there is a future!... I am confident that I'm going to push forward." – **self-efficacy**, impact indicator

"We are like brothers here. It wasn't like this before NFE. Most of the people I knew before were older. My relationships with kids outside the centre are very different." – **peer supports & peer problem**s, impact indicator

▫
"I haven't gone to the facilitators for personal advice. I don't want to put my burden on people." – **social skills**, challenge indicator

▫
"Sometimes my colleagues bother me... They tease me and things like that." – **peer problems**, challenge indicator

How do particular factors influence outcomes results?

Closer analysis of the impact study data gives important insights about the potential roles of attendance, implementation of the NFE methodology, and age group in programme outcomes for youth.

Attendance: 52 percent of study youth averaged less than 2 days NFE attendance per week over 4 months. This means most youth received less than the minimum expected programme exposure, which probably contributed to smaller effects.

On the majority of the measures, youth with higher attendance experienced more improvement than youth with lower attendance. As shown in the plot, youth with high attendance showed especially greater improvement in social support of peers than those with low attendance (*p*<.07).

This may highlight the importance of establishing friendships and positive peer group environments very early in the programme cycle for youth to stay involved. The plot shows the difference in change from pretest to posttest between youth who attended more and less than 2 days per week on average.

Implementation: Centres where youth reported the environment and facilitators to be more supportive and empowering also had better impact on outcomes. This indicates that the level of implementation quality of QS NFE methodology does make a difference for youth outcomes.

Higher youth feelings of empowerment was particularly associated with positive changes in prosocial behaviour (*p*=.06). This level of significance is impressive given the reduction of sample size at the analysis of a single centre. This suggests that effects are reasonably strong when implementation of the methodology is high. On the other hand, lower implementation was associated with modest *negative* change in youth connectedness to adults (*p*=.09).

More effort and resources to strengthen and maintain quality of programming across centres can improve overall youth impacts.

Age: Most of the programme effects were due to positive changes among 13-15 year-olds. 16-21 year-olds showed generally little change, but they also started with higher social and behavioural scores. Differences in outcomes between age groups were particularly robust for overall difficulties (combined conduct problems, emotional symptoms, hyperactivity, and peer problems; *p*=.04) and social skills (*p*=.09).

The age range of NFE participants—13 to 21—is fairly broad and captures more than one developmental stage. Previous studies, for example, indicate that early adolescents respond more sensitively to peer group influences and activities whereas older adolescents have reported an especially keen desire for more intimate supportive relationships and involvement in programme/class leadership and decision-making.

Continued development of NFE might include further attention to approaches specific to youth at different developmental stages.

Gender: The sample for this pilot study did not include enough females to statistically analyse differences in outcomes between genders. Gender issues are explored in the qualitative process study. Given that past research has shown girls to respond differently than boys to some interventions, future impact evaluation should include enough girls to assess relationships between gender and outcomes.

Attendance & Peer Social Supports Outcome
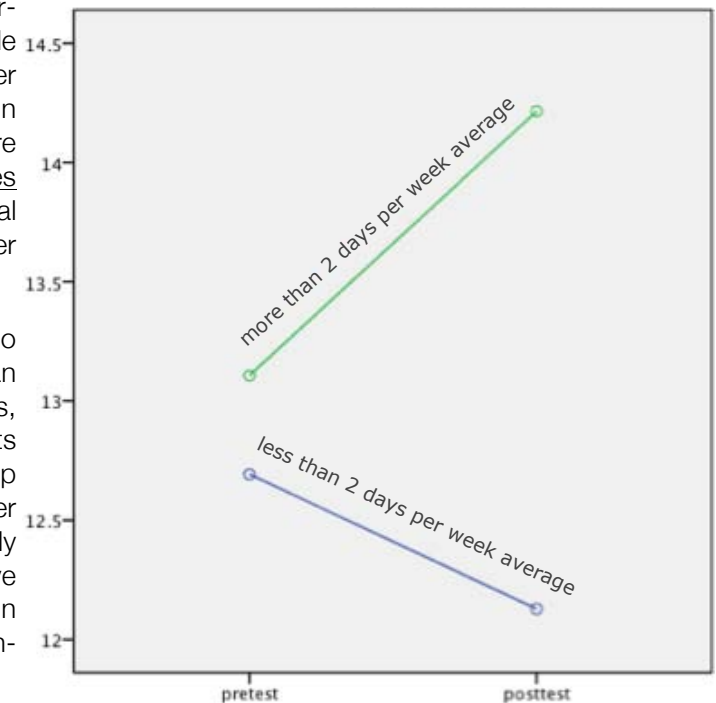
What are the strengths and challenges in implementation?

Methods: The process study included both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods included semi-structured interviews with youth as well as adults involved directly and indirectly with programme implementation. Quantitative methods involved youth ratings on a 34-item Learner Empowerment Survey[6] at each of the 6 NFE centres (4 male and 2 female) in the impact study. The survey measured youths' feelings of meaningfulness, impact, and competence in the programme.

Empowerment survey results: Youth reported generally high feelings of empowerment in QS NFE—the average survey score was 80.5%. However, some centres performed better than others. Centre averages ranged from 62.5% to 87.6% (see graph). These differences appeared to influence the study's outcomes.

The two items with the highest positive responses include: 'My participation is important to the success of the group in the class' (94.9%) and 'I actively take part in the tasks required of the group in the class' (93.9%). The two items with the lowest positive responses include: 'The facilitators who are working with us believe that they must control how I do my tasks for the group' (47.5%, reverse-scored) and 'The facilitators who are working with us feel that they are always right' (50.5%, reverse-scored). This suggests that although most youth feel engaged, more can be done to promote youth-adult partnerships in the implementation of the programme methodology.

"We did not use to play tennis here. I asked them if we could play tennis; immediately, they gave us a tennis course and we started playing tennis. Something simple, immediately…" – youth (male)

Empowerment Survey Results by NFE Centers
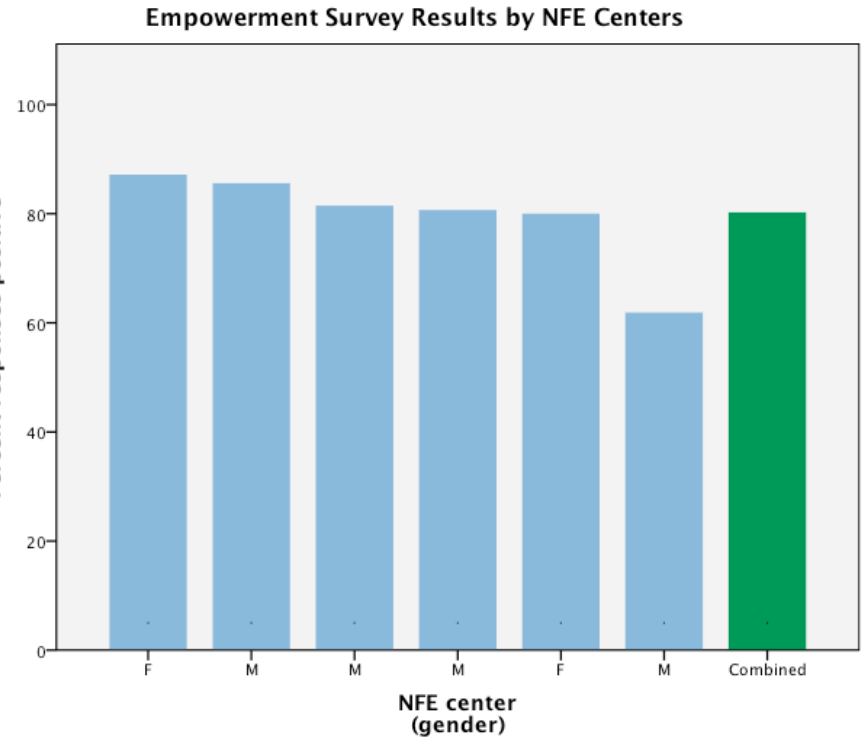
[6] Adapted from Fymier AB, Shulman GM, Houser M. 1996. The development of the learner empowerment measure. *Communication Education* 43:181-99

Qualitative research lessons

Empowerment: Quantitative and qualitative data shows that youth generally feel that NFE has a high degree of flexibility and that the adults regularly seek out and integrate youth voice into programme decision-making, especially concerning day-to-day activities and learning subjects. This is a core feature of the participatory education methodology.

On the other hand, whilst most youth felt listened to, feedback indicated that there was relatively less empowerment through more active forms, such as formal leadership roles, youth-led group projects, or structured youth participation in longer-term programme planning.

Whilst some facilitators suggested that the youth were not yet ready for or interested in these forms of participation, other facilitators believed it was vital for the programme to work towards extending these forms of participation. Facilitators at one centre, for example, said they would like support in developing a youth parliament within the centre by which youth-led decision-making about how the programme is run is more structured. Other facilitators suggested having formal rotating leadership positions for youth in the programme.

Youth-adult relationships: The nature of the facilitator-youth relationship is clearly important for shaping the youths' experience in NFE. 7 out of 12 facilitators

and 8 out of 16 youth described the relationship as a friendship or family-like bond.

> *"I mean, our relationship with the facilitators is a normal relationship, not like a teacher-student relationship. No, like brothers…like friends, that's what our relationship is like."* – youth (male)

Not all youth, however, were able to establish strong connections with facilitators in the first months. Youth were asked to describe what they felt were characteristics of great facilitators. A summary of some of the most prominent attributes is included in the box below.

Attributes of great facilitators according to youths

★ listening to *all* youth voices
★ making each youth feel valuable
★ coming to youths' level as a friend
★ not picking 'favourites' (treating some youth better than others)
★ patience with youths' learning paces
★ ensuring lots of engaging, structured activities

Recruitment and attendance: Recruitment and attendance is clearly a challenge for NFE. Facilitators are already working long hours leaving little remaining

time for active recruitment, and due to work and family pressures the target youth have many competing demands on their time.

Family demands and marriage were particularly important obstacles females recruited into the programme. Males were more often prevented by paid work – at some male centres as much as 85% of youth reported working at baseline. As such, female facilitators often discussed the need to build stronger relationships and awareness with families whereas male facilitators agreed but focused also on community relationships with local employers for improving recruitment.

One male centre was able to meet 100% of its recruitment goal. A strong teamwork dynamic among facilitators and close cooperation with local institutions (e.g., businesses, mosques, CBOs, and community leaders—e.g., *Mokhtars*) appeared to contribute to an effective recruitment strategy in this centre.

Whilst QS has a community-based strategy to facilitate recruitment, Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA), this method has not been implemented as widely as QS intends; a renewed focus could help with outreach.

Many youth and facilitators also suggested increased day-trips and fun activities as tools to increase recruitment and attendance.

Facilitator development: The transformation of facilitators' methodology and paradigm from traditional education is a core aspect of NFE's theory of change. The QS NFE model bases facilitator development on a training curriculum on youth development and participatory education (fully implemented, this includes three levels and approximately 85 hours of training) and ongoing professional support from QS and the MOE.

Many facilitators spoke very favourably of the training subjects and the participatory, youth-centred methodology that they gained through it. Several facilitators even indicated that they have improved their teaching in formal education classes by integrating the NFE methodology to better engage students.

Problematically, however, most facilitators that have started with the programme over at least the last two years have only received abbreviated versions of the full training curriculum, and long-standing facilitators have not received substantial refreshment or ongoing coaching.

Additionally, most of the training that is currently received takes place in off-site locations. The evidence-base on teacher development indicates that the most effective teacher training involves ongoing coaching and support that is directly connected to the teachers' day-to-day experiences and is at least partially conducted in the teachers' context.

The NFE facilitator development model does include more applied, in-context training in later stages of the curriculum, but limited time and resources for quality development in the context of rapidly expanding numbers of centres and participants has meant that these levels of training have not been adequately implemented.

The majority of facilitators expressed a strong desire for increased professional development opportunities, including a return to the full implementation of the NFE training curriculum, increased collaborative interaction with technical and support staff, opportunities to attend outside conferences and professional workshops, and more organised activities designed to enable facilitators from different centres to interact and share ideas, challenges, and best practices with each other.

> *"This generation is good. They have a good seed, but how to make it grow and develop... here we need the educational and practical methods. We need the right scientific methods. Without them, nothing will work out."* – Facilitator

Scaling up: In the span of six years, the NFE programme transitioned from a relatively small, organic initiative based out of a few CBOs to a programme at national scale with thousands of youth enrolled.

In part, this is an encouraging success for innovative governmental-non-governmental cooperation and reaching unprecedented numbers of out-of-school youth in Jordan. At the same time, the experience offers

important lessons into the challenges with maintaining high levels of implementation quality whilst taking empowerment-based programmes to scale.

Significant funder investments have been made in expanding the programme outreach with formal expectations placed primarily on quantity of youth served (outputs) rather than impacts on youth changes (outcomes) or the processes intended to support those outcomes. QS has noted challenges to maintaining the level of intimacy, communication, and professional development with facilitators that it aspires to, as limited staff capacity has been stretched over a growing programme scope. Facilitator interviews indicated that staff turnover has compounded this challenge.

Increased funder investment in quality mechanisms and increased focus by QS and the MOE on staff and facilitator development and clarification of essential programme components appear to be key priorities for further programme growth.

> *"I would like to do more things for facilitators so that they can become better and better at helping kids. In other words, as a professional, eventually you're not so motivated by money as you are by, 'Can I develop? Can I learn something new? Can I improve myself? Because I know if I improve myself I can improve what I do with my job.' That was what I had in mind, but it will take resources to reach."*
> *- Questscope International Director*

Ideas from the field

One of the simplest lessons that came out of the process study was that the youth and facilitators have important suggestions and thoughtful ideas that can help shape the future of NFE programming. This section summarises recommendation themes that arose from the qualitative interviews.

Additionally, CBO representatives were also brimming with constructive ideas. Because CBOs are embedded in the communities with long-standing local reputations, interviewees believed that CBOs could play a more prominent role in recruiting youth, building family support, and helping young people transition back into education during the first programming cycle.

Facilitator Recommendations

(In order of prevalence)

1. Increased resources for trips and activities – especially to promote higher recruitment and attendance

2. Improved communication and feedback systems with Questscope

3. More opportunities for facilitators from different centres to exchange with and learn from each other

4. Increased facilitator stipends to better match the demands of the job

5. Increased professional development

6. Provide support for Jordanian youth transportation on an equitable basis with non-Jordanians

7. Increased opportunity for youth voice in the overall programme (e.g., support for youth councils or 'parliaments' in centres)

8. Reduced administrative burdens and urgent demands on facilitators

9. Resources for recruitment (e.g., attractive brochures, official ID tags, radio adverts)

10. Upgraded equipment (e.g., provide projectors and install cabinets for youth belongings)

Youth Recommendations

(In order of prevalence)

1. Increased amount and diversity of extracurricular activities (e.g., arts, music, & sports)

2. More camps and trips (day-trips are preferred by girls, as they are often not permitted to participate in overnight camps)

3. Improved support and formal pathways to formal education for youth who wish to pursue higher education after NFE

4. Increased opportunities to participate in programme decision-making and leadership roles

5. Provision of transportation support for Jordanians

6. Upgraded physical spaces (e.g., cabinets and safer play areas)

7. Make the camps more age-appropriate (e.g., less singing and control, more recreational flexibility and youth leadership)

8. Making time for each youth; focusing less on 'the numbers'

9. Give private lessons and/or make the curriculum stronger for individual youth who desire more academic challenge

Youth-driven NFE research: the Youth Advisory Council

What is the YAC? Youth are not just subjects of research, but they can also be partners and leaders of research. As part of this project, the first NFE Youth Advisory Council (YAC) was established to increase leadership opportunities for out-of-school youth and ensure greater youth voice at all levels of the NFE programme with QS and the MOE.

A pilot YAC of 17 young leaders was selected from the six NFE centres participating in the impact and process study. Youth were identified from the third (last) programming cycle or recent graduates of NFE. YAC youth participated in a series of trainings on leadership and basic research skills facilitated by Questscope staff and volunteers with support from Oxford University. Groups within the YAC were then assigned a volunteer partner and together identified their own research questions and methods

based on the topics they felt were interesting and important for out-of-school youth and/or NFE. This formed the basis for miniature youth-led research projects that are currently underway.

YAC small group projects:

The five groups selected the following topics and target populations for research:

• Dropping out of school (NFE students)
• NFE Educational Methodologies (NFE students)
• NFE Educational Tools (NFE students)
• NFE Students' Attendance (NFE students)
• NFE Students' Future (QS staff or partners)

The small group participatory research projects fit well into NFE's participatory methodology that stresses young people's development of 'critical consciousness.' In other words, through leading and engaging in research on issues that matter to them, youth become more aware of the factors that influence their environment and the ways that they can contribute to positive social change.

Additionally, out-of-school youth bring their own perspective and unique knowledge of the issues facing youth like them. Therefore, the YAC was created in recognition of the important expertise that

young people have to offer to the future of the programme.

The staff, volunteers, and youth involved in the YAC will present a report early in 2011 to share challenges faced in the first pilot YAC experience as well as benefits and recommendations for improving and potentially expanding the model to include more youth in the NFE programme. Facilitators suggested that the YAC could serve as a valuable mechanism for maintaining on-going relationships as well as educational and leadership development opportunities for youth beyond NFE.

The impact and process study highlighted a need for more active empowerment components for NFE participants to be challenged and supported in meaningful opportunities to lead and contribute. The YAC may constitute one of several ways to address that need.

Often, higher levels of youth participation internationally are reserved for more educated and otherwise advantaged groups of young people. With the commitments of leading public and private institutions like the MOE and QS, initiatives like the YAC could provide an important platform for less advantaged youth populations to contribute to the processes that affect their communities and country.

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Recommendations

General recommendations are provided here, largely drawing from feedback from multiple stakeholder groups in the process study. Some recommendations may not be feasible or even the best answers. They are intended, however, to at least support collaboration and attention to key issues that can help drive the future success of the programme for changing the lives of out-of-school youth.

1. Improved manualisation – Given the promise of this NFE model, QS, the MOE, and other partners could collaborate to invest in further 'manualising' the programme model, theory of change, best practices, and key ingredients for continued expansion and refinement. Written manuals/guidelines should clarify the essential components that should be standardised across the programme and those that are better left flexible for adaptation. Every centre should have a copy of the programme's theory of change and youth, staff, and facilitators should have opportunities to help refine it over time.

2. Facilitator development – Increase the level of resources for training (both foundational and follow-up) and on-site technical assistance provided to all facilitators. This can increase high-quality implementation across sites and encourage more robust impacts on youth.

3. Communities of practice – There is a clear desire for facilitators, CBOs, and QS staff to

"We could gain from more interactions with other facilitators. They may have more experience; maybe we know something they do not know. We learn a lot from their experience, and they gain from ours." - Facilitator

have more opportunities to communicate and collaborate to solve shared problems. Investment in and coordination of regular activities that bring stakeholders together, perhaps in smaller subgroups, could help increase morale and improve the sharing of innovations and best practices.

4. Engaging activities – With constant attention to youth preferences, increase the frequency of educational trips and the range of extracurricular activities. Youth have many different interests, including music, art, sport, and vocation. Further activities to respond to these interests can boost recruitment and attendance whilst strengthening the meaningfulness of the experience for all participants.

5. Investment in quality – In contrast to

common development aid tendencies towards focuses on 'number targets,' implementing organisations and funders should work together to ensure adequate investment in the components that underlie the theory of change (e.g., training, professional development, manualisation, capacity-building, and other vital support functions).

6. On-going evaluation and feedback systems – Further develop and systematically implement instruments like empowerment surveys and facilitator feedback mechanisms to support tracking and adjustment of implementation quality over time.

7. Youth participation – This NFE model is unique in that it practices empowerment-based methodology with marginalised youth, whereas many programs focus participatory efforts on more educated and advantaged populations. Still, facilitators and youth suggested practical ways in which youth could be engaged through more structured and active forms of participation—e.g., youth parliaments, group youth-adult partnership projects for the community, rotating youth leadership roles, and opportunities for older youth to mentor and facilitate projects with younger youth. More experimentation with these levels of youth empowerment could provide more dynamic opportunities for participants to develop self-efficacy and social competencies.

Conclusions

The pilot study indicates that NFE is a promising and important initiative for vulnerable Jordanian young people, but it also highlights room for improvement.

The study shows a significant programme impact of medium effect size on conduct problems, an important predictor of adjustment into adulthood. The impact study also revealed encouraging, though non-significant, changes in other social and emotional outcomes, particularly for younger adolescents (13-15), youth with higher levels of attendance, and centres that were rated by youth as more empowering.

Other key outcomes were not substantially changed across the sample, including self-efficacy and social supports of peers and families. Changes to young people's self-efficacy – their belief in their ability to perform tasks and overcome challenges – may require further attention to leadership and participatory activities that challenge and enable young people to develop mastery experiences. Regular positive feedback and attention from supportive adults can also constitute important aspects of self-efficacy development.

Changes in peer supports and peer problems were very mixed in the study. Many youth reported improvements in peer supports and described their NFE peer groups as friends and family in qualitative interviews; yet, about as many youth either showed no or negative change on peer support measures. Moreover, attendance and positive or negative changes in peer support appeared to be related.

Previous research suggests that norms are established very early in the life of a group. As such, it may be an important focus for NFE development to help provide facilitators with the training and the activity resources to foster positive peer group norms and connectedness early in the first programming cycle.

> "This programme is my main goal. It is the most important thing in my life, because there is no other way to get me to where I want except the programme. How can I explain it to you? The only thing in my life that will take me to where I want to go is the programme. My only hope is the programme."
> – youth (female)

This paper reflects a small pilot study reporting relatively short-term (4-month) outcomes. It is possible that different results could be seen with a larger sample or longer follow-up periods. On the other hand, short-term analysis reveals important outcomes and challenges that take place early in the programme and can affect long-term results.

Youth reported generally high feelings of empowerment and value in the NFE programme, but there are differences between centres suggesting variations in implementation quality. The facilitator-youth relationship and the NFE training methodology are particularly important to the success of the programme. The rapid scaling up of the programme without adequate resources for quality assurance has placed strain on facilitators and programme quality.

In times of great social needs and limited economic resources to meet those needs, it is increasingly important for programmes and policies to credibly demonstrate *impacts* and provide better evidence for best practices that can lead to continuously improved programming for vulnerable populations.

The most useful kind of evidence for what works in achieving impacts on youth in Jordan and the region will come from development of quantity and quality of impact evaluation *inside* the region. No single study design is right for every situation. The best methods to use are carefully chosen to match a group's particular research question(s) and context.

Especially when conducted with mixed-methods research to address different questions, impact and process evaluation can serve as vital and complementary tools to help programmes strengthen their efforts and share knowledge with funders, policy-makers, and practitioners addressing similar problems.

Acknowledgements

"I hope the programme expands. We hope there will be no dropouts. We hope enrolment will increase because there is plenty of room for this programme to succeed. I honestly hope that, God willing, this programme will treat the problem of school dropouts." – MOE Director of Non-Formal Education

"In the end, whatever happens, I thank Questscope and the Ministry because they saved a good number of children in this population. They saved them from being lost by educating them. And a special thanks to Questscope and the Ministry because they did not forget this category of children." - Facilitator

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