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AN EXAMINATION OF PERCEPTION GAPS IN EDUCATIONAL ACCESS FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES IN AMMAN

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SIT JORDAN: GEOPOLITICS, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, AND THE FUTURE OF THE MIDDLE EAST

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the underlying reasons of educational access gaps of Syrian students in host communities in Amman, Jordan and the effectiveness of the Government of Jordan and international organizations in addressing these gaps. Through interviews, surveys, and a literature review, the researcher explores current perceptions of educational access, gender-based access gaps, and barriers to education at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. This research draws on the concepts of supply and demand and cost/benefit analysis to analyze why so many Syrian students do not attend school. The researcher hypothesizes that perceptions of access and barriers diverge as students get older. The study's significance is related to a growing "Lost Generation" of uneducated Syrian students, which increases risk of exploitation and is believed to pose a security challenge to Jordan. Interviews and surveys were completed with employees of major international organizations working in the education sector in Jordan, research experts focusing on refugee education, Syrian college students, and parents of Syrian students from all educational levels. The findings confirmed the hypothesis in that while policies targeting primary education have generally succeeded in enrolling more Syrian students, policies targeting secondary and university education are generally ineffective at addressing the root cause of the problem, i.e. a lack of advancement to justify educational costs. The researcher concludes that the Ministry of Education and international aid organizations must holistically consider education for refugees utilizing a cost-benefit analysis and focus on creating tangible post-graduation incentives for emphasizing education within families.

KEYWORDS: Education, Refugees, Syrian crisis

Terms

GOJ – Government of Jordan

UN – United Nations

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNHRC – United Nations Human Rights Council

UNICEF – United Nations International Children's Fund

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

IPI – International Peace Institute

MOE – Ministry of Education

MOHE – Ministry of Higher Education

JRP – Jordan Response Plan

CSS – Center for Strategic Studies

NFE – Non-Formal Education

Introduction

Robust education has long been a cornerstone to the Jordanian strategy for success. Jordan's transition into a modern state despite its poverty of natural resources depended almost entirely on the usage of education as a modernization tool. Today, Jordan aims to become a knowledge-based economy, and its series of education reforms has boosted literacy rates and basic education enrollment ("Education", 2018).

But Jordan is now facing a crisis in education due to an influx of refugees. With the Syrian crisis roiling into its seventh year, Jordan is now home to almost 20% of the Syrian refugees spread across the region. While UNHCR places this number at 685,197 registered refugees (Ferris & Kirisci, 2016), the GOJ estimates that more than 1.5 million Syrians are living both inside and outside refugee camps all over Jordan (Malkawi, 2015). Such an influx of Syrian refugees has put enormous pressure on the country's educational resources. With schools now open to students of all nationalities, Jordan has enrolled over 130,000 Syrian refugee students in 2017, but 34% of school-age refugee children are still unenrolled (R. Carsten, personal communication, April 27, 2018). Through my research, I hope to explore the exact reasons for this enrollment gap and whether possible solutions take these reasons into account.

My interest in this topic stems from my experience in and passion for equity of educational access. As a college consultant for low-income students in the United States, I have seen the challenges that face underrepresented students in the American education system as well as the economic consequences that accompany a lack of adequate education. This, along with my policy coursework and my specific classes in education policy reform, has inspired me to explore the concept of educational access for underrepresented groups from a Jordanian perspective, driving my interest in education for Syrian refugees.

This topic is incredibly relevant to Jordan for humanitarian, security, and economic reasons. First, education is guaranteed to all human beings by Article 26 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948). As such, any barriers to primary, secondary, and higher education access are violations of international law. In order for Jordan to maintain its standing in the international community and accept funding for refugee intake in good faith, it must make additional efforts to integrate Syrian refugee children into its educational system. Secondly, a lack of access to education and, by extension, the full workforce, also breeds discontent and sparks antagonism, increasing the likelihood of radicalization and creating a risk of protests in-country ("Effects of Poverty on Society, Health, Children and Violence", 2011). Finally, there has been a growing body of research that suggests that including Syrians in the workforce will expand Jordan's economy (Kelberer, 2017). Denying students access to education, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels, creates a drag on the Jordanian economy and exacerbates a pool of cheap labor, hurting Jordanian workers and increasing risks of exploitation and abuse in the workplace.

Research Topic and Parameters

My research topic focuses on perceptions of key stakeholders and Syrian students on access, gender, and educational barriers faced by Syrian students at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Specifically, I am interested in the following two questions:

1. Is there a difference in current perceptions of Syrian refugee access to primary, secondary, and tertiary education between stakeholders and Syrians themselves?
2. Is there a difference in current perceptions of possible barriers to Syrian refugee pursuit of primary, secondary, and tertiary education between stakeholders and Syrians themselves?

Hypotheses and Scope

My research is primarily based on interviews, surveys, and a literature review. At the outset, I hypothesized the following:

1. Stakeholders and Syrians similarly perceive insufficiency of primary educational access for Syrian refugee students.
2. Stakeholders and Syrians similarly perceive insufficiency of secondary educational access for Syrian students.
3. Stakeholders and Syrians similarly perceive insufficiency of higher educational access for Syrian students.
4. Perceptions of insufficiency of educational access will increase with age for both Syrians and stakeholders.
5. Stakeholder and Syrian perceptions of barriers to attending primary school will not match.
6. Stakeholder and Syrian perceptions of barriers to attending secondary school will not match.
7. Stakeholder and Syrian perceptions of barriers to attending university will not match.
8. The difference in these perceptions will become more prominent proportional to the level of education. In other words, stakeholders and Syrians will perceive radically different challenges at the higher education level, less so at the secondary level, and least so at the primary level.

The scope of my research is particularly important for the current state of educational efforts by key stakeholders because it focuses more on the 15-24 age group that should be enrolled in secondary and tertiary education. As is common in most international refugee crises, educational efforts by stakeholders such as the Government of Jordan, the UN, and international NGOs have focused predominantly on the 6-18 age group (El-Ghali & Al-Hawamdeh, 2017), increasing funding and enrollment efforts for primary and, to some extent, secondary education in Jordan. However, not much research has been done into students in the secondary and tertiary age groups, which has led to my hypothesis that the gap between perceptions of educational access and barriers widens as a student gets older.

Additionally, my research population is limited to Syrian refugees living in host communities in Amman. I could not access Syrian refugee camps such as Za'atari due to guidelines from SIT and Johns Hopkins University. Additionally, cost constraints and increased security after the US bombings in Syria in April 2018 limited my access to other governorates. Furthermore, my literature review revealed much

more recent research focusing on Syrian refugees in camps throughout Jordan. I hope that my project

will add to the slightly smaller body of research on refugees living in host communities in Amman.

Theoretical Framework

Overall, I am basing my research on three major economic theories: cost-benefit analysis, human

capital theory, and the law of supply and demand. The law of supply and demand generally applies in

which a) there are multiple buyers and sellers for a good or service, and b) the cost and quantity of said

service changes depending on demand (the amount that buyers desire) and supply (the amount that

sellers provide) (Kirzner, 2000). In this context, as theorized by Mona Christophersen, supply is mostly

comprised of capacity and availability of education for Syrian refugees; in other words, supply is

determined almost entirely by the GOJ, the UN, international NGOs, and other stakeholders (2015).

Demand is a little more complex. Many researchers and policy officials argue that factors for

demand include physical access to schools, economic considerations such as whether a family can afford

to send their child to school, access to the labor market for the head of household, and so on

(Christophersen, 2015; Culbertson et al., 2016).

Currently, demand is outpacing supply, resulting in overcrowded schools and lower enrollment

among Syrians (Christophersen, 2015). General research has led many organizations to theorize that

barriers to access are most prevalent at the primary level, while older students drop out of school for

economic reasons rather than barriers to education.

However, Christophersen also theorized that parents will send their children to school if the

opportunity outweighs the barriers. This is where cost-benefit analysis comes in. I argue that if the

benefits provided by education outweighs the costs of obtaining the education, students will stay in

school. This leads into human capital theory, which argues that the costs of education serve as an

investment for future economic benefits (Tan, 2014). Through my research, I argue that an overlooked

aspect of demand is a perception among Syrians that education does not result in future economic benefits, which eliminates the rationality behind investing in and bearing the cost of education. I hypothesize, then, that the underlying reason for Syrian students leaving the school system is mostly the lack of significant benefits to outweigh the costs of pursuing an education.

<div align="center">*Terms*</div>

Primary education is defined in the Jordanian context and includes grades 1-10 - generally, an age group between 5 and 16 years of age.

Secondary education is again defined in the Jordanian context and includes the two years before *Tawjihi*, the national placement exam. During these two years, students can pursue an academic track (preparation for the *Tawjihi*) or a vocational track (resulting in a certificate for a particular trade).

Higher education, or tertiary education, is defined as enrollment in an institution of higher learning. In the Jordanian context, this includes four-year public and private institutions and community colleges.

Syrians, as used in interview and survey populations, are defined as Syrian nationals living in Amman. Stakeholders are defined as individuals affiliated with NGOs, international organizations, schools, and research bodies with previously published work in Syrian refugee education in Jordan.

The Government of Jordan is defined as the relevant education ministries working to expand educational access for Syrian refugees in Amman. For primary and secondary education, this includes the Ministry of Education. For higher education, this includes the Ministry of Higher Education.

Syrian refugees are defined as Syrian nationals who are living in host communities (outside camps) in Amman. Because of the length of my research period, cost and transportation constraints, and my inability to visit Syrian refugee camps, I chose to limit my research to this population.

Access is defined as the ability to attend school. Barriers to access include legal restrictions, financial hardships, distance, teacher shortages, and other factors that would prevent children from physically coming to school. Based on my theoretical framework, barriers to access could manifest as supply-side (problems created by the school itself or MOE) or demand-side (barriers due to individual families themselves).

Formal education is defined as education regulated by the MOE and MOHE that consists of primary, secondary, and post-secondary education.

Non-formal education, in the Jordanian context, is defined as education for all students outside formal schools. NFE is often targeted towards a) youth who are too old to attend formal education and b) students who need remedial help to compensate for missed schooling and rejoin the formal education system.

Informal education, in the Jordanian context, describe all programs that are not formal or NFE.

Tawjihi is the nationally-administered standardized test in Jordan whose results determine the institutions that students can apply for and the fields that they can pursue. The exam is taken after a secondary-school academic track and students can take the exam multiple times.

The three-year rule is a policy in place within the Ministry of Education that states that no student can enroll in Jordanian public schools if they have been out of school for three years or more.

Literature Review

Education System in Jordan

Jordanian education is split into three levels: primary, secondary, and tertiary. Primary school is compulsory for all Jordanian children and covers education through the 10th grade (ages 6 to 16). Following that, students attend secondary school for two years and can pursue an academic track

(preparation for the *Tawjihi*) or a vocational track (which results in a certificate). After secondary

school, depending on their *Tawjihi* scores, students can pursue higher education at public or private

institutions, for two or four years (Christophersen, 2015).

<div align="center">

Syrian Refugees in Jordan

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The beginning of the Syrian crisis saw hundreds of thousands cross the border into Jordan,

Lebanon, Egypt, and Turkey. At first, Jordan welcomed these refugees, believing that the conflict would

be short-lived, that they would arrive in limited numbers and that they would soon return to Syria.

Jordan was known to have an "open-door" border policy, with little restriction on who could cross into

the country (Ferris et al., 2016).

Since then, the Syrian conflict has dragged on for seven years and shows no signs of abating.

Many Syrian refugees living in Jordan express no desire to return to Syria; the Arab Youth Survey found

that more than 50% of Syrian youth surveyed in three Jordanian camps were unlikely to return

permanently to their home country ("A Voice For Young Syrian Refugees", 2017). Because of this, in

recent years Jordan's "open-door" policy has become a "not-so-open-door" policy in practice. Jordan

succeeded limiting the flow of refugees into the countryby creating an informal "safe zone" in South

Syria to keep as many Syrians in Syria is possible (Ferris et al., 2016).

A 2016 report showed that the registered refugee population in Jordan has remained mostly

stable since 2014, with around 630,000 refugees of all nationalities registered with UNHCR (Ferris et

al., 2016). However, while UNHCR numbers have remained constant, Jordan is said to be hosting

almost 1.4 million refugees today both inside and outside camps. 80% of these refugees now live in host

communities (Christophersen, 2015). On average, they are younger than Jordanians, with 73% of

Syrians in host communities under the age of 30 (Stave & Hillesund, 2015), adding to a burgeoning

youth population in Jordan and exacerbating employment and educational challenges.

Refugees in Jordan Under the Law

Jordan lacks a legal framework pertaining to refugee rights. Article 21 of the Jordanian Constitution prohibits the extradition of "political refugees." Law No. 24 of 1973 on Residence and Foreigners' Affairs requires those seeking political asylum report to a police station within 48 hours of their arrival, and specifies no sanctions against illegally entered asylum seekers. However, the definition of political asylum is itself not clearly defined in the Constitution. Law No. 24 allows the Minister of the Interior to determine deportation on a case-by-case basis and does not clearly identify conditions for asylum eligibility.

Under international law, refugee rights in Jordan are far from concrete. A 1998 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the GOJ and UNHCR also requires UNHCR to find a resettlement country for any asylum seekers remaining in country for six months ("Refugee Law and Policy: Jordan", 2016). Jordan is not a signatory to the UN 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees, meaning that Syrians are considered "guests" rather than "refugees." This affords them no legal protection or rights to residency, employment, public education, or health care ("Refugee Law and Policy: Jordan", 2016). Despite this, Jordan has opened public services such as education and health to all refugees living in the country.

Syrian Refugees, Country Challenges, and Jordanian Public Opinion

While Jordan initially welcomed refugees into the country with open arms, the population bulge has exacerbated social and economic problems within Jordan.

Economically, while the presence of Syrian refugees has led to an increase in economic activity for host countries, Syrian refugees in Jordan present an economic burden due to the fact that they do not pay taxes or make social contributions and their inability to work. There has also been a spike in cheap

labor, child labor (spurred by a desire to avoid detention or deportation), child marriage, and prostitution due to poverty and the inability to find lucrative employment (Ferris et al., 2016).

Socially, Jordan has seen an uptick in conflicts between Jordanians and Syrians due to several factors. First, the population spike has increased competition for public services like healthcare and education. Simultaneously, public opinion of Syrians has sharply declined (Ferris et al., 2016). A UNHRC commission of inquiry shows that an increased Syrian presence in Jordan has led many Jordanians to fear for their safety, despite low crime rates. The perception that Syrians will commit crimes also leads to a strong association between Syrians and terrorism (Ferris et al., 2016). Relatedly, a survey conducted by the Center for Strategic Studies in September 2017 showed that 73% of Jordanians believe that Syrians living outside camps threaten Jordanian security. Additionally, 89% said that the economy had been hurt by the refugee influx, and 94% said that the government had been strained to a medium or large extent (Shteiwi, 2017). This may be partly due to Jordan's complicated history with refugees; some theorize that the presence of Syrian refugees in Jordan reminds Jordanians of the influx of Palestinians, which led to violent uprisings in 1971 and created an enormous imprint on the national identity of the small Jordanian population (Ferris et al., 2016). More generally, research shows that all host publics resist the idea that refugees will become permanent, which probably also contributes to public opinion on Jordanian refugee policy (Ferris et al., 2016).

Why is public opinion important? The GOJ has long shown that its desire to avoid public discontent will often take precedence in a country whose way of life has survived for so long amidst the conflict of the Middle East. The February 2011 protests resulted in widespread reforms and the firing of the entire Cabinet in a monarchial effort to keep the peace in the streets (al-Khalidi, 2011). Regarding refugee policy specifically, Jordan has recently scaled back health services for refugees due to cost

considerations and public opinion (Ferris et al., 2016). Widespread opinion that the influx of refugees

has hurt public education in Jordan could pose a danger to the current policy of open schools.

Response to Syrian Refugee Crisis: General and Education-Specific

The refugee response in Jordan has involved collaboration between international donors, UN

agencies, NGOs at home and abroad, refugees, Jordanian communities, and the GOJ – the Office of the

Prime Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Interior, and Ministry of Planning and

International Cooperation. On educational matters, coordination has also involved the Ministry of

Education and the Ministry of Higher Education.

In 2013, Jordan established the National Resilience Plan, a three-year response plan designed to

expand and develop programs to mitigate the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan. The Education sector aims

to provide access to quality education through formal, non-formal, and informal opportunities (Shteiwi,

Walsh, & Klassen, 2014).

In 2014, the GOJ established the Jordan Response Platform to the Syrian Crisis (JRP) as the

main framework and strategy document for refugee response. This body partnered with 11 task forces in

2015 to undertake a vulnerability assessment to prepare for JRP 2016-2018. The plan has two pillars,

resilience and refugees, and is intended to support both Syrian refugees and Jordanian host communities

and institutions ("Jordan Response Plan", 2015). Simultaneously, UNICEF partnered with several NGOs

on the "No Lost Generation" initiative, which aimed to increase enrollment, attendance, remedial

resources, and access, while also providing a protective environment within schools and broadening

opportunities by teaching life skills and providing vocational training ("No Lost Generation", 2015).

To combat overcrowding issues, Jordan has implemented a double-shift system in 209 Jordanian

public schools to accommodate more students in schools. They have also trained over 5,000 teachers,

facilitators, counselors, and school staff in psychosocial support and life skills, implemented non-formal

and informal education systems to target students who have been out of school for longer than three years for over 77,000 students ("Jordan Response Plan", 2017), hired about 8,900 new teachers, and provided prefabricated classrooms for 28 schools (Christophersen, 2015). Through these efforts, they were able to enroll over 126,000 students in Jordanian public schools for the 2016-17 school year. Despite this, over 75,000 Syrian children are out of school, and many who attend do so part time (Barbalet, Hagen-Zanker & Mansour-Ille, 2018).

In 2016, in response to the low funding and inadequate progress garnered by previous response plans, representatives from a wide varieties and international organizations gathered in London to reevaluate and better respond to the Syrian crisis. King Abdullah of Jordan, World Bank President Jim Kim, and then British Prime Minister David Cameron agreed on the basic principles of the Jordan Compact in 2015 at the UN General Assembly, and the plan was eventually announced at the London Conference in February 2016. The plan brought together the humanitarian and development sectors to create a more effective response to a crisis that by then was widely acknowledged to be protracted in nature, focusing on creating a clear plan for donors and strengthening systems building (Barbelet et al., 2018). 2016 also saw Jordan opening public educational access to all children in the country, rather than just Jordanians. The Compact was revised in September at the 71st UN General Assembly, resulting in the JRP 2017-2019. This plan aimed to create more learning spaces, include remedial classes for students who have missed large chunks of school, provide access to certified alternative education opportunities, and provide teachers with professional development opportunities. JRP also hoped to expand access to universities and community colleges ("Jordan Response Plan", 2016).

At the next revision of the JRP in 2017, stakeholders identified several elements of progress. An information system was made operational, 3,485 were enrolled in post-basic and technical opportunities, and 2,548 students were "provided with accredited tertiary education" (p. 19) through national

universities, although it is not clear if this means admission was granted or students enrolled. JRP 2018-2020 aims to now focus on quality and on combating the challenges facing Syrian students, some of which are caused by the implementation and expansion of the double-shift system ("Jordan Response Plan", 2017).

Definition of Access

Several researchers have developed definitions of access over the years. In a report for UNICEF conducted by the RAND Corporation, researchers theorized that understanding of the determinants of access were essential to the successful implementation of emergency educational response. These researchers base their evaluation on the determinants of access – location, characteristics of educational provision, and family and individual student factors (Culbertson et al., 2016). Mona Christophersen, meanwhile, discusses access in a supply-demand context, where access is determined both by supply of education from the GOJ and the international community and demand from individual families (2015).

Christophersen's framework certainly has flaws; for example, financial restrictions could either be a supply-side barrier (since the GOJ is failing to help Syrians overcome them) or a demand-side barrier (the ability to pay these costs is based on an individual household's economic situation). Ultimately, however, I based my research on Christophersen's framework simply because it was more comprehensive. A supply-demand framework not only takes into account all possible determinants of educational access but also provides an easier framework to pinpoint the exact source of any particular access barrier.

Barriers Facing Syrian Students

A number of different organizational bodies have conducted research over the years into specific challenges and barriers facing Syrian refugees. Perhaps the most comprehensive study was done in 2015 by Mona Christophersen at IPI. Christophersen identified economic barriers, educational divides,

regulatory obstacles, social tension, and competing priorities as the five main barriers to education for

Syrian refugees and outlined them in a supply-demand context (2015).

The most research has been done into barriers facing primary school students (Christophersen

2015). The JRP 2018-2020 stated that response should target lack of documentation, distance to schools,

lack of recognition of prior learning, increasing financial vulnerabilities, school violence, child labor,

child marriage, poor learning environments, insufficient, underqualified or undertrained teachers, and

outdated curricula to decrease the risk of dropouts (2017). Generally, however, organizations have

historically focused on quantity of students enrolled rather than quality of education. Therefore,

initiatives have targeted teacher and space shortages, credit equivalency, and documentation issues over

school environments and curricular differences (Christophersen, 2015; UNICEF, 2015; Ahmadzadeh,

Corabatir, Hashem, Al Husseini, & Wahby, 2014).

Due to what was believed to be the short timeframe of the conflicts, research and initiatives were

generally targeted towards primary education rather than secondary or higher education. However,

research generally identifies child marriage, child labor, costs for schooling, and household financial

hardships for keeping students out of secondary school (Culbertson & Constant, 2015). For higher

education, recent research almost unanimously names high tuition fees as the reason why Syrian

students do not attend university, with UNESCO calling for lower fees and more scholarships to

encourage higher education enrollment (El-Ghali et al., 2017). In other words, if examined through

Christophersen's supply-demand framework, barriers facing secondary and higher education fall largely

within demand, with no challenges qualifying as supply-side.

My research aims to add some depth to this analysis, particularly with regards to access for

secondary and higher education. I argue that there is a supply element to barriers facing secondary and

higher education, but that these supply-side barriers manifest themselves in closed access to the labor

market. According to human capital theory, an individual bears educational costs in society because of an expectation of future benefits – in this case, access to better-paying jobs.

While Jordan vowed in 2016 to provide work permits to more Syrians, these permits are expensive and hard to acquire. A large percentage of working-age Syrians choose to bypass the permit requirement, preferring to work in the informal economy at the risk of detention and deportation rather than pay and wait for a work permit. Furthermore, the permits only allow Syrians to work in vocational professions – construction, agriculture, manufacturing, and so on – that don't require a college degree (International Labor Organization, 2017). Due to public opinion and a spiking unemployment rate, the GOJ is reluctant to open up skilled labor positions to Syrians at the expense of the economic well-being of their own citizens. Therefore, employment opportunities for Syrians in Jordan are limited.

Because of this, the human capital theory provides no benefit for the investment of education, providing a disincentive for Syrian students to spend on secondary and higher education – and, in some cases, primary education. Without an expectation of future benefits, there is no reason for Syrians to undertake the costs of education.

Education has been linked with labor market access for Syrian refugees twice, both times by Mona Christophersen with IPI. In the first report, she explored Jordan's response to the Syrian refugee education crisis and mentioned the need for expanding access to the labor market as a way to increase educational enrollment. She speaks about this expansion in the context of heads of household, advocating for providing families with money or securing work permits for breadwinners to allow children to attend school. But she also specifies that these work permits should allow Syrians to work in industries without competition from Jordanians – mostly vocational professions like construction and agriculture (2015). In the second report, she discusses the need for holistic responses to the labor market to accommodate youth ages 15-24, arguing that "without a plan for transitioning to the labor market,

education is for nothing" (p. 17). However, there is no evidence suggesting that she is advocating for an expansion of work permits beyond vocational professions.

While I base my theory on Christophersen's supply-demand analysis and her connection between education and the labor market, I disagree with her limitation to vocational permits. Today, Jordan has expanded vocational work permits for Syrians albeit with logistical and financial inconveniences, (International Labor Organization, 2017), but that has not corresponded to a rise in enrollment at the secondary and higher education levels. Since these professions do not require higher education, I hypothesize that researchers will not see a corresponding rise in interest or enrollment for secondary or higher education, since students could get the same informal jobs without attending these schools. The only way for Syrians to consider secondary and higher education is if there is a clear future economic benefit, which will not occur unless Jordan opens work permits to professions that require a college degree. Thus, I argue that the closure of the labor market is an additional reason why Syrian students increasingly choose not to pursue education as they become older.

Methodology

My research aims to identify perceptions of stakeholders within the education sector – research experts, NGO workers, employees of international organizations and governments, teachers, and school officials – and compare them with perceptions of Syrians themselves. My comparison focused on 1) current perceptions of Syrian refugee educational access at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, and 2) current perceptions of the barriers for Syrian students at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. I interviewed 20 individuals and surveyed 21 Syrian students and adults over the age of 18. Finally, I conducted a literature review (above) that included research into current and former policies regarding refugee education in Jordan.

To evaluate perceptions on Syrian refugee access to primary, secondary, and higher education, I conducted 21 surveys where I asked respondents to rate their agreement with statements asserting sufficient and equal access to primary, secondary, and higher education for Syrian students. I also asked 11 interviewees whether they believed that access for Syrian refugees was sufficient and equal to Jordanian access at each level.

To evaluate perceptions on barriers facing Syrian students, I asked short-answer questions at the end of my multiple-choice survey asking respondents to list up to three main reasons why students would not attend school at each of the three levels. I also asked this open-ended question in interviews, where interviewees were able to elaborate on their answers.

For my literature review, I utilized search engines and university databases such as JSTOR. I also searched on the websites of major aid organizations such as UNHCR, UNICEF, UNESCO, Save the Children, Relief International, and Questscope for recent data and reports.

For my interviews, my recruitment strategy depended largely on the category of interview I was trying to secure. For research experts, I contacted professionals who had given lectures as part of our thematic seminar and searched through the websites of major think tanks and NGOs in Jordan to find relevant researchers. I also utilized connections from Dr. Raed Al-Tabini at SIT Jordan and Dr. Amal Malkawi at the University of Jordan.

For officials at major NGOs and agencies, I mostly utilized connections from other American friends in Amman as well as Dr. Raed Al-Tabini and Dr. Malkawi. I also called and emailed the offices of major agencies to see if I could secure any interviews with officials there.

For teachers at Jordanian public schools, I primarily utilized connections from Dr. Raed Al-Tabini. Through him, I was able to secure interviews with three English teachers from the afternoon

shift who work with many Syrian refugee students. I was able to also interview the UNICEF facilitator at the girls and boys schools.

For Syrian parents and students, I primarily utilized connections through SIT with a scholarship and informal education agency in Amman and a refugee charity in East Amman. These populations made up my survey sample as well.

The locations for participant recruitment, particularly with the surveys, depended heavily on connections through SIT and various other connections. Due to a very short research period, I was unable to follow up on more difficult-to-secure interviews with, for example, UNESCO, UNHRC, and the Ministry of Education.

Planning Methods for Research

Generally, my methods fell into three categories: protecting the identity and integrity of my participants, maintaining the integrity of my data, and preventing any misinterpretation of my data. The methods differed slightly between interviews and surveys. Overall, 20 interviews were conducted and 21 individuals were surveyed.

For interviews, I obtained an informed consent from every one of my interviewees. This informed consent detailed the interviewee's rights and gave the interviewee the option of refusing to allow me to use their name, position, and organizational affiliation in the final study. It also notified the interviewee that he or she could refuse to answer any question or terminate the interview at any time for any reason. Even if people allowed me to use their name, position, and organizational affiliation, I kept the interviews mostly anonymous unless using the position and organization contributed significantly to my results. Interviews were also conducted at the discretion of the participants, who were free to select locations where they would feel most comfortable.

For surveys, informed consent was included at the top of my survey so participants understood that filling out the survey served as consent for data usage. The survey asked for no identifying information beyond simple demographic information.

To maintain the integrity of my data, I kept my main questions standardized from interview to interview. I also conducted interviews with researchers and stakeholders separately from interviews with Syrians, to make sure that their responses and perspectives were not influenced by the perspectives of actual students. For interviews with Syrians, I generally conducted them in groups of 2s and 3s, mostly for logistical reasons but also to observe disagreements in experiences and areas where they generally agreed. I kept the notes of all these interviews secured in my personal notebook and on my personal computer. The surveys were translated into Arabic by a professional, and answers were all multiple choice (with the exception of the last six short answer questions that were again translated by a professional). The results of these surveys were not shown to anyone but were instead immediately inputted into an Excel spreadsheet and saved to my hard drive.

To prevent misinterpretations of data, I asked several follow-up questions during interviews to ensure that I was correctly interpreting answers. For interviews conducted in Arabic, I used a translator to make sure that questions and answers were clear to both myself and my interviewees. I also discussed the results of both the interviews and the surveys with my advisor to ensure that my analysis was reasonable and logical.

<center>*Ethical Considerations*</center>

I believe that my ISP carried cultural and ethical considerations due to the fact that it is examining Syrian refugees, individuals who are disadvantaged in the education system and reportedly already face discrimination and bullying in their schools. To overcome these challenges, I did not interview or survey these students and individuals in schools, but rather in public spaces and community

centers. I alerted my subjects and interviewees to the exact nature of my project since it doesn't need

any form of covert interviewing. I believe that this, combined with the informed consent and choices in

locations, overcomes these ethical challenges.

<u>*Change in Research*</u>

During the course of my research, my focus changed slightly. Originally, I was hoping to focus

entirely on perceptions of gender-related gaps in educational access for Syrian refugees in Amman at the

primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, both from stakeholders and Syrians. As I conducted my research,

however, I become much more interested in awareness of the underlying barriers to educational access

at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels.

Although the focus of my research changed during this time, my research design ensured that my

questions between the two topics were not significantly different. I simply relied much more on

interview and survey questions that focused on the current state of educational access and the reasons for

dropouts at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels and slightly adjusted by data analysis and

discussion. Since there was no real change to my research design, the quality of my data remained

mostly the same simply because the data itself remained the same; however, the scope of my analysis

changed, as did the strength of my findings, and both of these changes were positive.

<u>*Obstacles Faced*</u>

Throughout the research period, I faced some obstacles in the data collection process.

First, due to a shortened time frame and bureaucratic oversight, scheduling interviews with UN

or GOJ officials proved to be difficult. Despite many phone calls, I was unable to secure interviews with

officials from the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Higher Education. I was likewise unable to

meet officials at UNESCO or UNHCR simply because I did not have a connection there. For agency

views and awareness, I relied mostly on published reports and newspaper articles publicly available online.

Second, I was unable to garner a significantly large sample size of Syrian refugees for my surveys. This was partly because the Internal Review Board at Johns Hopkins University prevented me from speaking to or surveying anyone under the age of 18, and partly because of my limited connections to Syrian refugees living around Amman. I was able to garner a sample size of 21 Syrians for my survey, and was also able to interview 11 Syrian students and parents from the places I did manage to contact.

Third, the term "access" seemed to have different definitions to different groups of people. Given my background as an American and my previous experience dealing with educational access in the United States, I understood access to include all formal and informal barriers to educational access, as did the stakeholders that I interviewed. However, Syrians tended to answer access questions affirmatively but detail financial hardships in other parts of the interview. However, I was able to ask appropriate follow-up questions, and my survey questions addressed several aspects of access to education that still allowed me to gather strong data.

Findings/Results

Question 1: Is there a difference in perception of current Syrian refugee access to primary, secondary, and higher education between Syrians and stakeholders?

To answer this question, I employed the use of surveys and interviews with Syrians and stakeholders. 28 survey questions asked participants to record their level of agreement with statements regarding the rights and current state of access to primary, secondary, and higher education.
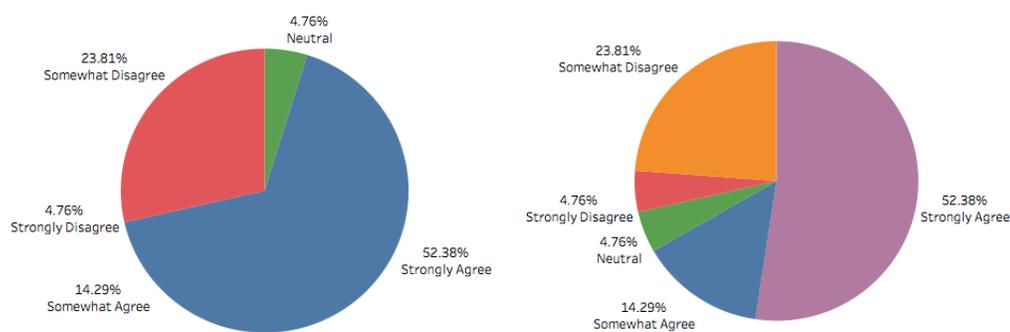
Primary Education Access: Sufficiency

At the primary level, the results of the survey showed well over half of respondents agreeing with the statement that Syrian refugee students have sufficient access to primary education in Jordan. 66% strongly or somewhat agreed and 27% strongly or somewhat disagreed, with about 5% remaining neutral. 52% strongly agreed and 5% strongly disagreed.

Every interviewee also emphatically agreed that Syrian students currently enjoy sufficient access to primary education in Jordan. Both Syrians and stakeholders from major organizations involved in the education sector were equally emphatic in the widespread availability of primary education in Jordan. The stakeholders also all mentioned that access to primary school has increased in the last three years thanks to the efforts of international organizations and the Government of Jordan in implementing double shift systems, hiring more teachers, and building more schools.

The short-answer portion of the survey revealed that safety, psychosocial concerns, and the afternoon shift were the most commonly cited reasons that Syrian students did not attend primary school.

Figure 1: Syrian students currently enjoy sufficient access to primary education in Jordan.

Primary Education Access: Equality

When asked if Syrian and Jordanian students enjoyed equal access to primary education, 67% strongly or somewhat agreed, but with only 43% strongly agreeing. 24% strongly or somewhat disagreed, with 5% strongly disagreeing.

Interviewees were split. Stakeholders and researchers overwhelmingly held the opinion that Syrians and Jordanians had equal access to primary school education, though several justified this viewpoint by stating that the quality of that education was declining for both. Teachers of Syrian students and Syrian respondents, however, indicated some disagreement, citing a huge difference in educational quality in the double shift system and difficulties faced by students who have been out of school for more than three years. Teachers also stated that Syrian students often face more challenges in attending and excelling in school than do Jordanian students, and that afternoon shifts faced higher teacher shortages due to their timings and the personal responsibilities of teachers in the morning shifts.

The short-answer portion of the survey revealed that the afternoon shifts were a commonly cited reason for students not going to school due to poor quality and transportation safety issues later in the day. Respondents listed psychosocial reasons as barriers to education which, when supplemented by interviews, seemed to be the result of poorly prepared teachers and a lack of counseling support within schools.

Figure 2: Syrian and Jordanian students currently enjoy equal access to primary education in Jordan.
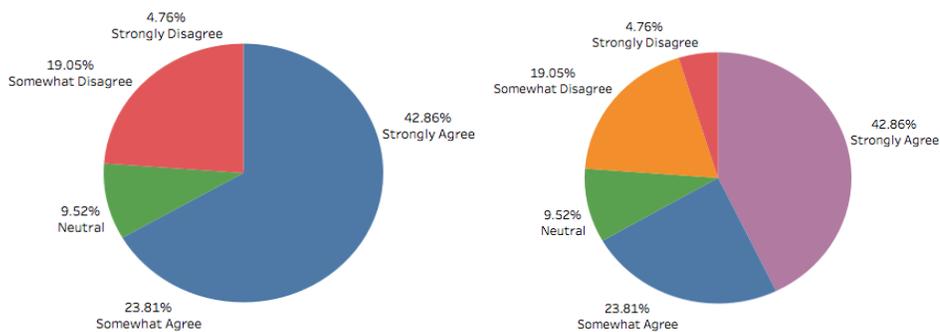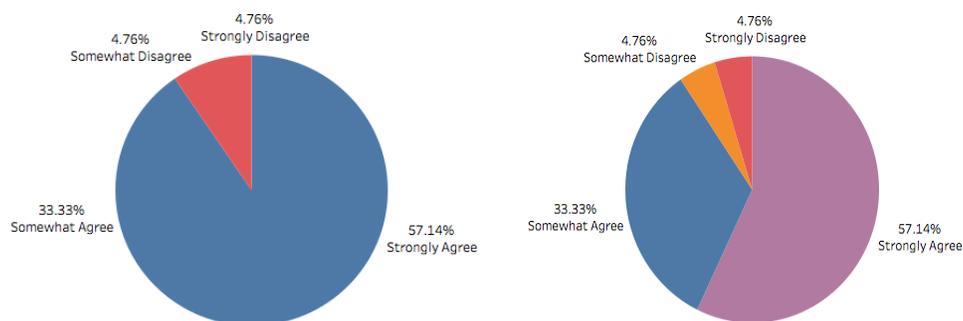
Secondary Education Access: Sufficiency

A surprisingly large number of survey respondents indicated agreement that Syrian students enjoyed sufficient access to education. 90% of respondents agreed, with 57% strongly agreeing. 10% disagreed, with 5% strongly disagreeing.

Stakeholder interviewees unanimously agreed that Syrian students had sufficient access to secondary education, with some pointing out that this access has increased significantly in the past three years thanks to the response plan put in place by the UN, GOJ, and international NGOs. Syrians were split in their responses. Some agreed that access is sufficient for the most part, but also mentioned higher registration fees for secondary school. Many interviewees discussed child marriage and child labor, but did not seem to associate their own relatives and friends with this concept.

The short-answer portion of the survey cited higher fees, conflicts between Syrian and Jordanian students, and poor treatment within the education system as reasons that Syrians do not go to secondary school. However, when these were brought up in the interviews, participants clarified that these challenges were not unique to Syrian students alone. Two respondents also mentioned the lack of college access as a reason why some Syrian students drop out at the secondary level.

Figure 3: Syrian students currently enjoy sufficient access to secondary education in Jordan.


Secondary Education Access: Equality

When asked if Syrian and Jordanian students currently enjoyed equal access to secondary education, 61% agreed, with 29% strongly agreeing. 24% disagreed, with 14% strongly disagreeing.

Interviewees were split between stakeholders and Syrians. For the most part, stakeholders responded that Syrians had equal access to secondary education, though once again several interviewees pointed out that while access was equal, quality was declining for every student. Teachers of Syrian students and almost all Syrian interviewees stated that secondary school brought higher fees for registration, books, and transportation. These answers were also accompanied by the quality of classes, curricular and language challenges, and the three-year enrollment rule.

On the short-answer portion of the survey, many respondents stated that Syrian students were not treated equally to Jordanian students, both through inequality present in the double shift system and through treatment within the classes itself. Two respondents cited psychosocial reasons which again seemed to result from unprepared teachers and inadequate counseling resources.

Figure 4: Syrian and Jordanian students enjoy equal access to secondary education.
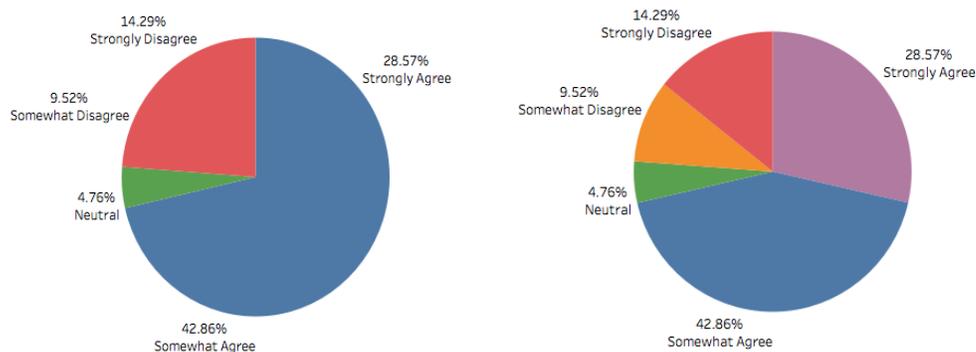
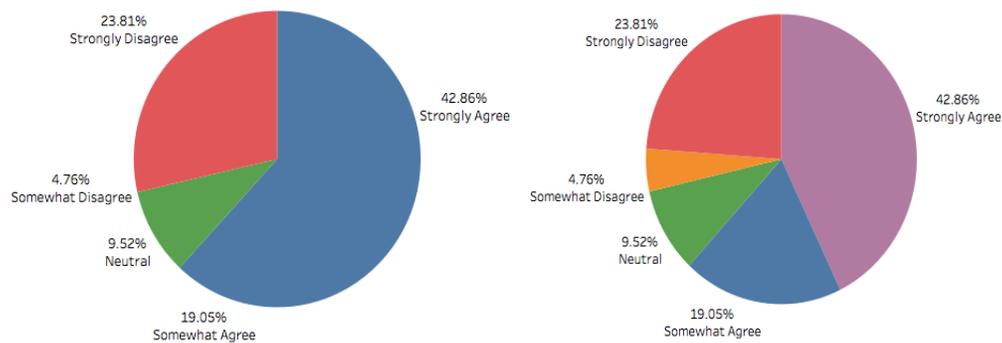*Higher Education Access: Sufficiency*

When asked if Syrian students enjoyed sufficient access to higher education, 62% agreed, with 43% strongly agreeing. 28% disagreed, with 24% strongly disagreeing.

Here, answers were again split. Stakeholders were divided in whether Syrians had equal access. Some emphasized that Jordan has opened registration to all nationalities, but others discussed the

practical, logistical problems such as fees, credit equivalency, and so on. There were also a few

stakeholder interviewees who felt like they did not have enough knowledge to answer the question.

Syrians were also divided, with some also pointing out open registration, but others focusing on high

fees. However, almost every Syrian pointed to high international student fees as the biggest barrier to

higher education for students in Syria.

Figure 5: Syrian students enjoy sufficient access to higher education.

Higher Education Access: Equality

When asked if Syrian and Jordanian students enjoyed equal access to higher education, 72%

agreed, but only 19% strongly agreed. 24% disagreed, with 24% strongly disagreeing.

Interview responses from stakeholders were again divided, with some not answering the question

and some saying that inequality of access comes from communities themselves. Syrians were far more

emphatic in their opinions that higher education was not at all as easily accessible to Syrians as it was to

Jordanians. Although they acknowledged that college was expensive for every student, they pointed out

that as international students Syrians often paid over five times the rate of Jordanians per credit hour.

Scholarships are limited, and Syrians can often not afford to pay such rates.

Figure 6: Syrian and Jordanian students enjoy equal access to higher education.
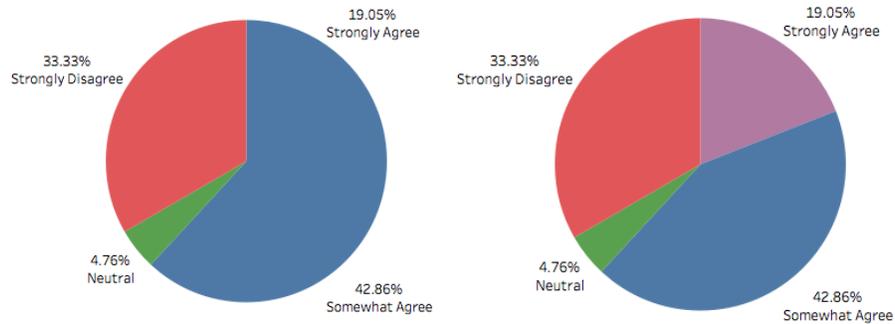
Question 2: Is there a difference in perception between stakeholders and Syrians for why Syrian students may not attend school at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels?

To answer this question, I relied on a short-answer section of my survey that asked respondents to list possible reasons that students do not go to primary, secondary, and higher education. I also relied on interviews with both Syrians and stakeholders to talk about reasons that Syrian students do not attend school. Finally, I relied on reports from major stakeholders like UNICEF, UNESCO, UNHCR, Relief International, and the Ministry of Education that listed reasons for non-enrollment for Syrian students to supplement the stakeholder interviews that I was able to conduct.

Primary Education: Enrollment Challenges

When asked about reasons that Syrian students do not go to primary school, stakeholders overwhelmingly listed child marriage and child labor as taking precedence over education. Several stakeholders also mentioned an overarching cultural lack of emphasis on education for Syrians, particularly for girls. One stakeholder explicitly stated that Syrian girls were often married off earlier to prevent scandalous behavior, and argued that Syrians originally did not place a lot of importance in education, even in Syria. Another stakeholder agreed that child marriage was cultural, but also discussed the lack of marriage registration and prevalence of informal marriages that often strips young brides of

their rights. Another stakeholder also cited child marriage, but clarified that research in this area has been very fragmented and that the reasons for this phenomenon were not entirely clear.

When asked about reasons that Syrian students do not go to primary school, three survey respondents listed child marriage, but significantly more respondents discussed fear for their children, money shortages, lack of documentation, lack of parental awareness, poor educational quality and environment, and psychosocial concerns. Interviews further revealed that while early marriage was a reason for dropping out, it often served as a backup for education; in other words, if girls don't succeed in school, they can get married instead. These answers were corroborated by online reports from UN agencies, NGOs, and researchers, which discussed overcrowding, transportation fees, safety, child labor and child marriage, the three-year rule, social tensions, and competing priorities for families.

When asked about the cultural role of education in Syria, answers were mixed. Syrian parents stated that Syrian culture placed a high premium on knowledge, but education was dependent on natural ability and the availability of other options. In general, the Syrian parents interviewed believed that education is important, but less so for girls because they got married. Syrian college students tended to disagree, with several saying that education was equally important and emphasized for both boys and girls. Others stated that education was important, but the importance differed from family to family, and from student to student.

Secondary Education: Enrollment Challenges

When asked about reasons why Syrian students do not attend secondary school, stakeholders again overwhelmingly cited child marriage and child labor, explaining that the financial situations of families forces children - especially boys ages 15-18 - to work to support the family. Stakeholders further explained that child marriage also often serves as a financial escape, easing the burden on the girl's family and making sure that she is provided for. Other stakeholders cited cultural reasons

underlying labor and marriage, stating that boys were expected to start working at 16 and girls were preferred to be married by 18.

Syrian interviewees and survey respondents tended to disagree with this viewpoint, stating that generally education in Syria is important and that a high premium is placed on knowledge. Jordanian interview respondents with personal ties to Syrians also discussed the importance of education in Syria and the necessity of educating Syrian youth in order to rebuild Syria after the war. Several survey respondents listed child marriage as a reason why girls didn't pursue secondary education, and a significant number listed a need to work as a reason why boys don't pursue secondary education. However, these reasons were almost always accompanied by higher book, transportation, and registration fees that are required by Jordanian secondary education. Furthermore, several interviewees and a few survey respondents listed low access to college and the labor market as reasons for discontinuing their pursuit of education in Jordan at the secondary level.

A literature review of reports from stakeholder organizations equated reasons for dropping out of secondary school with reasons for primary school dropouts – overcrowding, financial barriers, child labor and child marriage, the three-year rule, social tensions, and competing priorities for families. However, many reports also discussed the lack of focus on students past the age of 16.

Higher Education: Enrollment Challenges

When asked about the reasons why Syrian students do not pursue higher education, every stakeholder cited high fees and insufficient financial resources. Two stakeholders also cited culture, in that Arab culture and particularly Syrian culture prevents women from working or leaving their families to study abroad. One of those stakeholders emphasized that while higher education should be guaranteed for Syrian students, it should focus more on vocational training rather than traditional higher education.

A third stakeholder discussed the difficulty in transferring over credits and certificates, a point backed up by a UNESCO report on tertiary education for Syrians.

In the short-answer portion of the survey, Syrian respondents also overwhelmingly listed high fees as the main obstacle to university, with several also naming a lack of parental awareness and early marriage. However, interviews with Syrians revealed that although high fees were a problem, they would still try to pay them if there was a benefit from a university degree. Every Syrian interviewee listed the lack of, or difficulty obtaining, work permits and closure of the labor market as the main reason why Syrians did not pursue higher education, stating that the quality of jobs that Syrians could take after graduation did not differ based on level of education. Pursuing degrees abroad was an option, but border laws in Jordan prevent Syrian students from returning to Jordan once they leave. Culturally, this slightly disadvantages girls more than boys, but generally is infeasible unless the family has plenty of money. Therefore, as stated by every Syrian interviewee, there really was no point in pursuing higher education if the student's goal was to work in Jordan.

Discussion

As discussed above, one of the main challenges for my research was the definition of access, which differed from individual to individual. For the purposes of this discussion, access is defined as all formal and informal barriers to educational access – not only legal barriers to enrollment, but also financial constraints, documentation requirements, and logistical challenges. Although survey and interview respondents discussed equality of educational quality between Jordanians and Syrians, I characterized this concept as relating to quality, rather than access. While still relevant for future initiatives concerning refugee education and while still somewhat discussed below, I did not include data on equality of educational quality to determine whether Syrians could equally access education. I

did, however, analyze data from surveys and interviews relating to equality of access between Syrians and Jordanians.

Due to the interrelated nature of my three research questions, my discussion is divided into primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Each section has a discussion of data related to educational access and specific challenges facing Syrian students at each level.

Primary Education

66% of Syrian survey participants and 100% of interview respondents – both Syrians and stakeholders – agreed that Syrian students currently enjoy sufficient access to primary education, with many stakeholders pointing to GOJ's work in building new schools, hiring teachers, and waiving fees for students. These percentages not only reflect a significant match between perceptions of the two groups, but also reflect a perception of widespread availability of primary education for Syrian refugees both from Syrians and stakeholders.

Reports from stakeholder organizations also show that stakeholders are generally aware of the main reasons that keep Syrian primary students out of school – a lack of psychosocial support in schools, safety and distance from school, and the three-year rule – and have focused initiatives and policy changes to address these challenges. But while GOJ and other stakeholders have succeeded in enrolling a significant number of Syrians in primary education, their double-shift-based, quantity-focused approach seems to fundamentally impede quality of education. This is evident through the widespread criticisms of the double-shift systems from both Syrians and stakeholders, many of whom discussed declining quality but, more relevantly, safety challenges and teacher shortages stemming from later classes. This was also corroborated by the 100% rate of Syrian interviewees stating that Syrian students faced greater challenges than Jordanian students.

In general, based on the data above, though Syrians and stakeholders differ in their opinions about equality of educational access and quality between Syrians and Jordanians, both perceive challenges in primary educational access. Stakeholders generally feel that educational access is equal and improving significantly. Syrians generally held the opinion that while more Syrians can now go to school, the quality is not equal to Jordanian education. Furthermore, the challenges that Syrians are believed to face in primary educational access matched across stakeholder and Syrian interviews, survey responses, and literature review.

<p style="text-align:center"><u>Secondary Education</u></p>

90% of survey respondents agreed that Syrian students enjoyed sufficient access to higher education, and 100% of stakeholder interviewees agreed with this assessment. 84% of Syrian interviewees also agreed, although many discussed challenges to educational access including registration fees, higher transportation costs, and more materials to buy. None of the stakeholders mentioned these challenges, with many stating that costs for secondary education have been waived for Syrian students. The literature review does mention transportation and book costs, but does not differentiate between these costs for primary versus secondary students.

Furthermore, while 57% of respondents strongly agreed that Syrian students enjoyed sufficient access to secondary education, only 29% strongly agreed that Syrian and Jordanian students enjoyed equal access to secondary education. This reflects the fact that either Syrians face specific challenges that Jordanian students do not face, or that the challenges that face both Syrian and Jordanian students disproportionately disadvantage Syrian students. Again, similar to primary education interviews, stakeholders did not mention this difference but instead stated that Jordanian and Syrian students faced the same overarching problem of declining quality of education.

The researcher concludes that based on this data, there is some difference in perception of secondary access based on differing perceptions of financial costs of secondary school. Syrian respondents saw costs increasing, while stakeholders seemed unaware of these increases.

For the most part, perceptions of the barriers facing students at the secondary level mirror primary school answers – safety, transportation, and so on. From this point, however, perceptions of educational challenges and reasons for dropouts diverged. In addition to differing perspectives in financial costs, stakeholder interviewees overwhelmingly cited cultural and economic reasons to explain the percentage of students dropping out of secondary school. However, when citing economic reasons, stakeholders often stated that Syrian boys drop out of school because of a need to earn money and provide for their families.

Syrian interviewees, on the other hand, offered a much more nuanced view of the problem. Every Syrian interviewee stated that the main reason for not sending their students to secondary school was expenses and, in some cases, safety. This seems to indicate that the reason that some Syrian students leave school is not simply because they need to work to earn money, but rather because they can't afford the fees and begin working instead. Two survey respondents and several interviewees also stated that the inability to attend college also contributed to a high drop-out rate at the secondary level, since much of secondary education in Jordan is devoted to a vocational certificate or to preparation for the *Tawjihi* and university admission. Taken together, these results seem to indicate a more nuanced reason for secondary dropouts – that many Syrian students find it more economical to work or get married rather than burden themselves and their families with added costs for secondary school for no perceived benefit. This perception was not present in the literature review or any stakeholder interviews, indicating a possible divergence of perception as to the underlying reasons for secondary school drop-outs. I concluded that the perceptions of these barriers differed somewhat between stakeholders and Syrians.

Higher Education

62% of survey respondents agreed that Syrians enjoyed equal access to higher education, with 43% strongly agreeing. However, stakeholder interviewees were split in their perception of the sufficiency of this access, as were Syrians. Despite these answers, 100% of both groups mentioned fees as a barrier to access, which is one of the barriers to access defined in the literature review. Furthermore, only 19% of survey respondents strongly agreed that Jordanians and Syrians could equally access higher education, and several stakeholders and Syrians answered negatively as well. Based on this, the researcher concludes that both Syrians and stakeholders perceive high barriers to higher educational access.

100% of stakeholder interviewees who chose to discuss barriers to higher education for Syrian students listed high fees and limited scholarships as the main reasons why Syrians do not pursue higher education. This is corroborated by reports from UNESCO, the only UN agency with a higher education mandate, which also list fees as the reason for the low presence of Syrians in Jordanian universities. However, 100% of interviews with Syrians list the lack of access to the labor market as the main reason why Syrians do not pursue higher education.

Only one of the stakeholders made a connection between labor market access and pursuit of higher education. This stakeholder stated that the necessity of higher educational access depended on country policies and access to the labor market, as a closed labor market but expanded access to higher education would create a mere illusion of educational access. However, the stakeholder did not list a closed labor market as a reason for why Syrians may not pursue higher education, indicating that while one stakeholder interviewee was aware of a link between education and labor market access, not one stakeholder was aware of this being a reason for not pursuing higher education. Reports by IPI have also identified a link between labor markets and education, as early as 2015. The fact that there exists only

one report in this researcher's data that discusses this link undermines the claim that stakeholders are aware of this link as a reason to not pursue higher education. Therefore, perceptions of barriers to higher education was significantly divergent between stakeholders and Syrians.

<p align="center">*Barriers Increasing Over Time*</p>

Overall, my research showed that perceptions of barriers to educational access increased proportionally to the level of education. In other words, while stakeholders and Syrians alike perceived some barriers to primary education, a higher percentage of both groups perceived more barriers to secondary education, and even more perceived still higher barriers to higher education.

My research also showed the largest divergence in perceptions in the higher education field, followed by secondary education and finally by primary education. While survey respondents, interviewees, and reports discussed the same reasons for primary school non-enrollment, Syrian and stakeholder perceptions of these reasons diverged for secondary school and even more for higher education.

<p align="center">*Reliability of Data*</p>

In general, I found that interviews were generally more reliable than results from surveys. Oftentimes, participants would answer a question on the survey one way but the same question differently in an interview setting. Therefore, some of the results were contradictory, casting doubt on the reliability of the survey.

This contradiction might be explained by a fear on the part of Syrians that they would face retaliation for putting into writing about educational challenges in Jordan. Many respondents wrote their phone numbers and names along with requests for money to help with rent, although I did not ask for any identifying information. Syrians might not have wanted to be critical on a paper with identifying information. Additionally, Jordanian culture tends to place a high premium on word of mouth, and many

Syrians and Jordanians alike distrust official forms or putting anything into writing at all. Syrians in particular could be wary of damaging their current status and livelihood.

Furthermore, surveys were sometimes handed out to a group of people at once, rather than to each person alone. Although everyone received their own surveys, this setup resulted in several participants completing the survey together, resulting in some surveys yielding exactly the same results (verbatim). This could have also swayed my results, perhaps stifling differing viewpoints. Some survey respondents were also children of other survey respondents, and in taking the survey in the same room as their parents may have felt pressure to not voice more controversial opinions. This could particularly hold true if the parent was hesitant to criticize the GOJ or international organizations.

Due to my difficulty in securing Syrians for surveys and interviews, the background of my interviewees and survey participants could also have skewed the data. There was a sharp age divide between parents between the age of 30 and 60 and college students between 18 and 24. Adult interviewees tended to base their responses on their own children's experiences and were hesitant to make general statements about educational access; if their own children were able to access education, they were very unlikely to discuss others' experiences. Additionally, as another Jordanian interviewee stated, Syrians were often hesitant to openly criticize the GOJ due to fear of retaliation. This could have also led to some Syrian interviewees sugarcoating their answers, although almost every interviewee was, to my mind, at least reasonably critical of the overall educational effort present in Jordan.

One major point of seeming contradiction in my research was the fact that while high percentages of Syrian survey and interview respondents answered affirmatively when asked if Syrian students had access to primary, secondary, and tertiary education, interviews later revealed several barriers that would normally be defined as "access barriers" by international community – fees, documentation, and so on. This led me to believe that the survey results may not have been altogether

accurate in reflecting respondents' opinions regarding educational access, simply because they may not have been defining access in the same way as the researcher or the international community. Since I was able to ask more follow-up questions in interviews, I found those results to be much more reliable in determining perceptions of access.

Conclusion

While stakeholders and Syrians shared the same perceptions regarding primary education, they both perceived that access was sufficient for Syrian students, only partly confirming Hypothesis 1. Stakeholders and Syrians generally perceived less access to secondary education than primary education, but still perceived sufficient access, only partly confirming Hypothesis 2. Finally, stakeholders and Syrians both perceived insufficient access to higher education, confirming Hypothesis 3. Perceptions of insufficiency for both Syrians and stakeholders increased with the age of the student, with higher education students perceived as least sufficient, followed by secondary and primary, confirming Hypothesis 4.

Stakeholder and Syrian perceptions of challenges facing primary education students closely aligned, with many of the challenges listed by stakeholders matching survey and interview responses for Syrians, confirming Hypothesis 5. However, Syrians mentioned that the quality of the education they were accessing was not equal to education accessed by Jordanians. Stakeholder and Syrian perceptions of challenges facing secondary education somewhat aligned, but stakeholders failed to mention the underlying lack of job market access and higher fees as possible reasons for Syrians not attending secondary school, somewhat confirming Hypothesis 6. Stakeholder and Syrian perceptions of challenges facing higher education aligned in the awareness that costs were often too high for Syrians, but stakeholders largely failed to acknowledge that a lack of job market access resulted in many Syrian students refusing to undertake the high costs of higher education, confirming Hypothesis 7. The greatest

perception divergence occurred in higher education, followed by secondary and primary, confirming

Hypothesis 8.

My findings fit well into my theoretical framework that argues for a human capital theory-based,

cost-benefit analysis of education. While students are young, it makes sense for parents to send them to

school to at least gain a basic education. While child labor still exists, it is far less prevalent than labor

for older children. However, when students reach an age where they are able to get married or start

working or – sometimes 14 or 15 – parents seem to analyze family options based on costs and benefits.

At this point, education begins costing more, stretching already taut financial resources. Parents then

consider education in a human capital theoretical framework, evaluating if paying for education will

result in higher economic benefits in the future. Since the labor market is closed, more students start

dropping out of primary and secondary school and do not pursue higher education due to the fact that

their education will not allow them to acquire better-paying jobs. My findings back Christophersen's

theory of a need to address education in the context of other avenues to economic mobility for Syrians.

It is important to note that while my interviews revealed these results, there are likely still

families whose need for an income trumps the importance of education. Child labor at the primary level

is likely still motivated by the need to make a living, particularly in families without an adult male.

However, the fact that 100% of Syrians listed a closed labor market as a reason for not pursuing higher

and, to some extent, secondary education indicates that at least for some, the lack of a return on

educational investment results in many students choosing not to pursue an education at all.

As more research emerges on Syrian refugee education, particularly with regards to higher

education, stakeholders might find relevant the connection between labor market access and enrollment

rates. Opening the labor market may result in enrollment spikes in education – particularly secondary

and higher education – but already-overstretched public schools may not be able to incorporate that. The

GOJ must carefully evaluate their options and decide if education for Syrian refugees is important enough to open up the labor market and allow Syrians to begin contributing to the country that so generously took them in.

Limitations

- *Time.* Due to the structure of the ISP period, I had three weeks to conduct my surveys and interviews, complete a literature review and analyze my data. This lack of time led to a survey sample size that was smaller than I desired. I also was unable to secure some interviews with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education, UN agencies, and international NGOs.

- *Unclear definition of access.* As discussed, many interviewees and survey respondents seemed to have a different definition of "educational access" than I did. This may have undermined the reliability of the survey results, and as a result I placed much more emphasis on my interviews.

- *Syrian distrust and survey reliability.* As discussed, Syrian distrust of forms and paper information and wariness of criticizing the GOJ may have skewed my survey data slightly.

- *Survey size and participants.* Due to the above restrictions, my survey size was only 21 and was sharply divided among parents and college students. This indicates that the survey data is only somewhat reliable and that further studies are needed to confirm these results.

- *Personal experiences.* A lot of my college-age survey participants and a few of my interview participants were college students who had not experienced more than two years in the Jordanian education system. Therefore, their perceptions of educational access and barriers – particularly for primary education – may not be entirely reliable.

- *Data gathering.* Data on current enrollment of Syrian refugee students was limited not only by bureaucratic permission frameworks but also by the fact that many Syrian refugees are not registered. Therefore, obtaining reliable data on enrollment statistics proved to be very difficult.

- *Survey locations.* Oftentimes, surveys were conducted in classrooms and during work hours. This may have led to some unreliability in survey data due to a possible desire to leave early or simply finish the survey.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Further research is of course needed to confirm the results of my study. The size of my survey sample and interview pool requires more interviews and surveys with both stakeholders and Syrians to confirm my results.

My research somewhat discussed the feasibility of work permits for Syrian refugees. Further research is needed into the advantages and disadvantages of opening up the labor market for Syrians. Still further research is needed to learn about how an open labor market would affect attitudes towards education among Syrian refugees, both inside and outside camps.

More research is also needed into whether the cost-benefit analysis employed by Syrian refugees is also employed by Jordanians whose children are out of school. Do families make the same choices in deciding whether to send their children to school, and how do the differences in the two situations manifest themselves in these decisions? Such research would be helpful in determining the value of higher education in Jordan as a whole.

Further research could also focus on the relationships between cost-benefits with the labor market and family demographics. Do the results found in this study hold true for all Syrians, or especially for Syrians with an adult breadwinner? How does family income influence these results?

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Appendices

Interview Questions

Note: These are the standard questions that I asked every interviewee. Follow-up questions depending on completeness of answers and occupation of the interviewee were also asked.

1. Do you believe that Syrian students has a right to education? How many years do you believe that they should receive, and who should provide this education (the Jordanian government, NGOs, foreign donors)?
2. Do you believe that Syrian students are able to access primary education? Secondary education?
3. Do you believe that Syrian girls and boys enjoy equal access to primary and secondary education based on gender?
4. What do you think are the most common reasons that Syrian boys do not attend school?
5. What do you think are the most common reasons that Syrian girls do not attend school?
6. What policies can Jordan implement to encourage students to pursue primary and secondary education?
7. Do you believe that higher education is essential for students like your child?
8. Do you believe that Syrian children are able to sufficiently access higher education?
9. What do you think are the most common reasons that Syrians do not pursue higher education?
10. What do you think girls pursue after graduating high school? Boys?
11. What policies can Jordan implement to encourage students to pursue higher education?

Survey Questions

Note: The first 22 questions were multiple choice, instructing participants to rate their agreement with these statements. A) Strongly Agree b) Somewhat Agree c) Neither Agree nor Disagree d) Somewhat Disagree e) Strongly Disagree. The last six questions were short-answer. Surveys were translated into Arabic.

Please indicate your level of agreement to the following statements by circling the answer that most closely matches your own.

1. Syrian refugee students have a fundamental right to primary education.
2. Syrian refugee students have a fundamental right to secondary education.
3. Syrian refugee students have a fundamental right to higher education.
4. Syrian refugee girls and boys have an equal right to education.
5. Syrian refugee students and Jordanian students have an equal right to education.
6. Syrian refugee students have a fundamental right to education that is provided by the Jordanian government.
7. The Jordanian government should be solely responsible for providing education to Syrian refugees (without help from NGOs, foreign or domestic donors, international organizations such as the UN, foreign aid).
8. The Jordanian government should be solely responsible for providing primary education to Syrian refugee students.
9. The Jordanian government should be solely responsible for providing secondary education to Syrian refugee students.
10. The Jordanian government should be solely responsible for providing higher education to Syrian refugee students.
11. Syrian refugee students currently enjoy sufficient access to primary education.

12. Syrian refugee students currently enjoy equal access to primary education as their Jordanian counterparts.
13. Syrian refugee students currently enjoy sufficient access to secondary education.
14. Syrian refugee students currently enjoy equal access to secondary education as their Jordanian counterparts.
15. Syrian refugee students currently enjoy sufficient access to higher education.
16. Syrian refugee students currently enjoy equal access to higher education as their Jordanian counterparts.
17. Syrian boys currently enjoy equal access to primary education as Syrian girls.
18. Syrian boys currently enjoy equal access to secondary education as Syrian girls.
19. Syrian boys currently enjoy equal access to higher education as Syrian girls.
20. The Ministry of Education in Jordan has implemented policies to encourage and facilitate **primary** school enrollment and attendance for Syrian refugee students.
21. The Ministry of Education in Jordan has implemented policies to encourage and facilitate **secondary** school enrollment and attendance for Syrian refugee students.
22. The Ministry of Education in Jordan has implemented policies to encourage and facilitate **university** enrollment and attendance for Syrian refugee students.
23. In the space below, please list (in order) the three main reasons why you think Syrian refugee boys do not attend primary school. Include reasons for consistent absences and reasons for lack of attendance.
24. In the space below, please list (in order) the three main reasons why you think Syrian refugee girls do not attend primary school. Include reasons for consistent absences and reasons for lack of attendance.
25. In the space below, please list (in order) the three main reasons why you think Syrian refugee boys do not attend secondary school. Include reasons for consistent absences and reasons for lack of attendance.
26. In the space below, please list (in order) the three main reasons why you think Syrian refugee girls do not attend secondary school. Include reasons for consistent absences and reasons for lack of attendance.
27. In the space below, please list (in order) the three main reasons why you think Syrian refugee boys do not attend university. Include reasons for consistent absences and reasons for lack of attendance.
28. In the space below, please list (in order) the three main reasons why you think Syrian refugee girls do not attend university. Include reasons for consistent absences and reasons for lack of attendance.

Informed Consent Form

SIT Study Abroad
a program of World Learning

AN EXAMINATION OF PERCEPTION GAPS IN EDUCATIONAL ACCESS FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES IN AMMAN
Your Name/Homeschool: School for International Training—Jordan: Modernization and Social Change

The purpose of this study is to examine perception gaps to educational access for Syrian refugees at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels in Jordan. I hope to discover the relationship between common challenges facing refugee students and the Jordanian policies that address these challenges.

1. **Rights Notice**
   If at any time, you feel that you are at risk or exposed to unreasonable harm, you may terminate and stop the interview. Please take some time to carefully read the statements provided below.
   a. *Privacy* - all information you present in this interview may be recorded and safeguarded. If you do not want the information recorded, you need to let the interviewer know.
   b. *Anonymity* - all names in this study will be kept anonymous unless the participant chooses otherwise.
   c. *Confidentiality* - all names will remain completely confidential and fully protected by the interviewer. By signing below, you give the interviewer full responsibility to uphold this contract and its contents. The interviewer will also sign a copy of this contract and give it to the participant.

2. **Instructions:**
   Please read the following statements carefully and mark your preferences where indicated. Signing below indicates your agreement with all statements and your voluntary participation in the study. Signing below while failing to mark a preference where indicated will be interpreted as an affirmative preference. Please ask the researcher if you have any questions regarding this consent form.
   I am aware that this interview is conducted by an independent undergraduate researcher with the goal of producing a descriptive case study on *gender-based gaps in educational access for Syrian refugees.*

   I am aware that the information I provide is for research purposes only. I understand that my responses will be confidential and that my name will not be associated with any results of this study.
   I am aware that I have the right to full anonymity upon request, and that upon request the researcher will omit all identifying information from both notes and drafts.
   I am aware that I have the right to refuse to answer any question and to terminate my participation at any time, and that the researcher will answer any questions I have about the study.
   I am aware of and take full responsibility for any risk, physical, psychological, legal, or social, associated with participation in this study.
   I am aware that I will not receive monetary compensation for participation in this study, but a copy of the final study will be made available to me upon request.

   I [do / do not] give the researcher permission to use my name and position in the final study.
   I [do / do not] give the researcher permission to use my organizational affiliation in the final study.
   I [do / do not] give the researcher permission to use data collected in this interview in a later study.

Date: **Participant's Signature:**
_____   _____

                                                                     Participant's Printed Name:
                                                                     _____

                                                                     Researcher's Signature:
                                                                     _____

Thank you for participating!
Questions, comments, complaints, and requests for the final written study can be directed to:
Dr. Raed al-Tabini, SIT Jordan Academic Director
Telephone (962) 0780077799
Email: raed.altabini@sit.edu