Youth Empowerment Programs in Jordan: Access and Equality

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ABSTRACT

The research question for this study is to investigate the role of youth empowerment programs in providing equitable access for students at public and private schools in Jordan. Given the differences in education cost, quality, and outcomes between public and private schools; students are exposed to different levels of engagement opportunities within school systems. At the same time, the youth population is the engine of Jordan's future growth. Understanding the role of external youth empowerment program providers is important to further education quality and equity.

The research includes six interviews with program providers and survey results from University of Jordan. The research hypothesis is that youth empowerment programs plays a positive role in balancing, if not reducing, the education inequality seen in Jordanian society through external program provision. Upon analysis, the research concludes that although there have been major growths in the number and quality of youth empowerment programs, there are still substantial obstacles and challenges on the policy, financial, and social front that prevents further improving access to youth empowerment programs. The paper analyzes common trends among current organizations and identifies key challenges to focus on in the future. The research contributes not only to the academic literature on youth empowerment programs in Jordan, but highlights three key areas for organizations to focus on in the applied settings.

INTRODUCTION

The researcher is the product of education experimentation. Having experienced multiple education systems, from a Canadian-Chinese program to four years of traditional Chinese secondary education and eventually to an American international school—the education journey culminated in a decision between attending a traditional university or one that takes students to seven countries over four years. With that, she has developed a passion for education and sees herself as an experimenter to improve the education system we inhabit.

The researcher came into Jordan with two summer of research experience in the education space: one focusing on liberal arts education in China, the other investigates vocational training in the United States. Naturally, she hoped to continue research in the education space in Jordan and soon realized the shocking disparities between public and private school education. At the same time, it also became clear the growing number and influence of youth empowerment organizations in Jordan. As such, the researcher merged the two observations and designed the independent research to investigate the role of youth empowerment programs in providing equitable access for students at public and private schools.

The topic is of relevance and significance to Jordanian society because the country (and region at large) is facing growing youth population and an increasingly flat population pyramid. At the same time, the rise in unemployment rate and the lack of foreign financial access hinder the country's development and led to rising dissatisfaction with the administration. While there have been many efforts to empower youths through entrepreneurship and startup incubation, such efforts have been scattered. Generally speaking, private schools and entities enjoy privileged access to resources and funding while public organizations still struggle to face foundational education requirements. The stability of Jordanian society on a youth level is

critical for the stability of Jordan's geopolitical situation. Like the Institute for Security Studies report mentioned, "the youth bulge" can either function as a demographic dividend or demographic bomb (Gaub, Laban, 2015). Albeit the relationship between school systems and external youth program providers is one of many in the education ecosystem, it is important to understand its dynamics as part of the puzzle to economic, societal, and geopolitical stability in the country.

The general parameter of the study focuses on youth empowerment programs in Jordan. Specially, the research relies on interviews and observations with six different organizations, as well as survey results with thirty students from the University of Jordan. While the depth of the research is limited due to the inputs solely from program providers, it touches on a variety of youth empowerment programs and their interconnectedness with the issue of education equality across public and private systems. The expected outcome of the research is to test the hypothesis that youth empowerment program providers play a positive role in ensuring equitable access to students and the research paper concludes with trends for key stakeholders to consider as programs continuously improve access for all students.

Youth empowerment program in this research is defined loosely by programs that provide opportunities for youth to develop skills and become problem solvers and decision makers. Given the context of Jordan and interview results with organizations, the research does not limit the term "youth" by age range but rather allow for interpretation depending the program provider. From a conceptual level, "youth empowerment is different than youth development because development is centered on developing individuals, while empowerment is focused on creating greater community change relies on the development of individual capacity (Ledford, Lucas, 2013)." The concept of youth empowerment, therefore, is closely tied to the demand of

Jordanian society at this stage—to harness the collective intelligence of youth to not only

develop oneself, but the country at large. According to scholars in the field, there are six-

dimensions of youth empowerment: psychological, community, organizational, economic, social

and cultural. The research focuses on economic and social aspect of youth empowerment to

adopt the framework of "creating greater community change" to select, research, and analyze

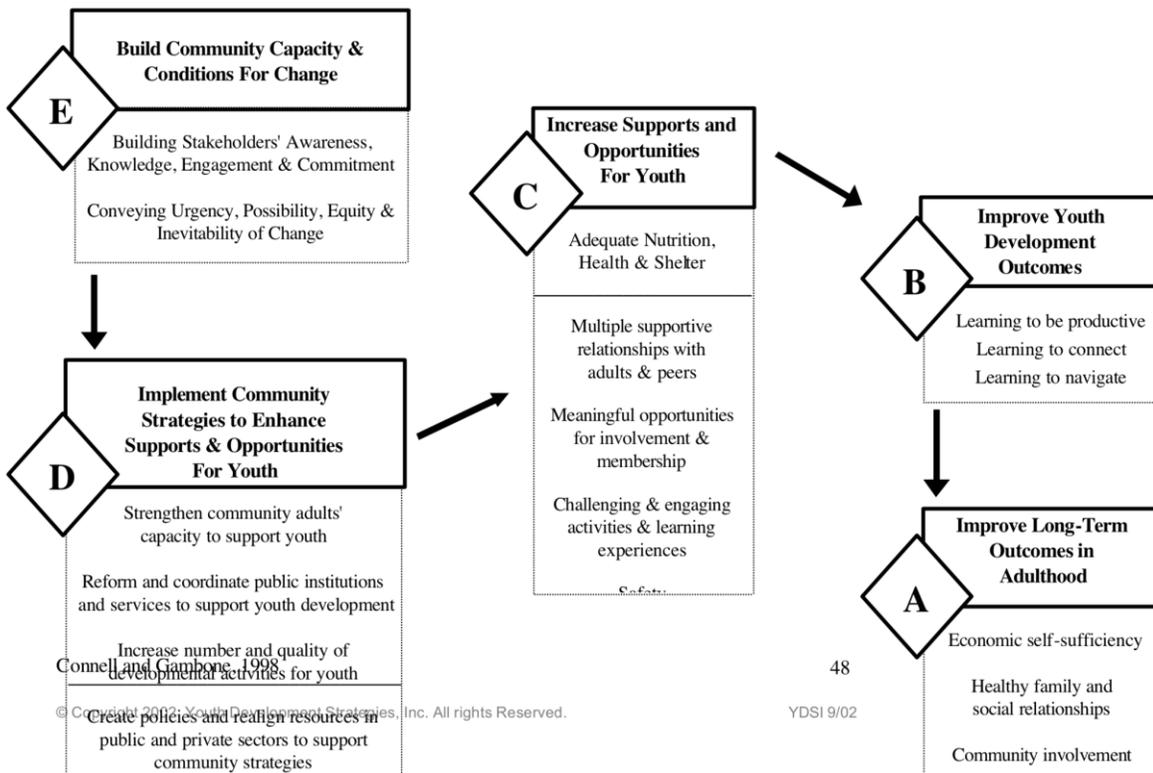youth empowerment programs in Jordan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth empowerment is an umbrella term that provides opportunities for youth to develop skills and become problem solvers and decision makers. The introduction sections touches on the conceptual interpretation of youth empowerment and lists the six-dimensions of the topic: psychological, community, organizational, economic, social and cultural (Edralin, Tibon, Tugas, 2015). At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the interconnected nature of the six-dimensions argued by youth empowerment scholars and their development trends.

Such nature can be traced back to the origin and historical developments of what came to known as youth empowerment programs. Connell and Gambone explore the historic development of youth empowerment programs, citing that historical private investment in youth empowerment programs were aimed at reducing youth addition to drugs and crime rates (Connell, Gambone, 2002). The underlying assumption of these programs was one of public good, that broader investments on youth will reduce long-term negative impact should youth empowerment programs be absent. The early stages of youth empowerment programs (at least in Western countries) illustrate the intersection of all five if not six dimensions. Moreover, the current landscape of youth empowerment programs no longer focus exclusively on "high risk" adolescence or even solely on "prevention programs". Instead, we have seen an expansion of not only the type of youth empowerment programs (e.g. the shift toward gender equity initiatives, entrepreneurship training, intercultural exchanges), but also the stakeholders and providers involved (e.g. NGOs, foreign entities in domestic countries) (Shefiu, 2016). As a result, it is important to keep in mind the relatively static nature of academic theories regarding youth empowerment because of the rapidly changing landscape of not only youth as a community, but the role and integration of empowerment programs in society at large.

Given the focus of this research on community and social aspect of youth empowerment, current frameworks provide a credible starting point for academic investigation. In 2002, Dr. James Connell and Dr. Michelle Gambone introduced a community action framework for youth development (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1
COMMUNITY ACTION FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

E — Build Community Capacity & Conditions For Change

Building Stakeholders' Awareness, Knowledge, Engagement & Commitment

Conveying Urgency, Possibility, Equity & Inevitability of Change

D — Implement Community Strategies to Enhance Supports & Opportunities For Youth

Strengthen community adults' capacity to support youth

Reform and coordinate public institutions and services to support youth development

Increase number and quality of developmental activities for youth

Create policies and realign resources in public and private sectors to support community strategies

C — Increase Supports and Opportunities For Youth

Adequate Nutrition, Health & Shelter

Multiple supportive relationships with adults & peers

Meaningful opportunities for involvement & membership

Challenging & engaging activities & learning experiences

Safety

B — Improve Youth Development Outcomes

Learning to be productive
Learning to connect
Learning to navigate

A — Improve Long-Term Outcomes in Adulthood

Economic self-sufficiency

Healthy family and social relationships

Community involvement

Connell and Gambone, 1998

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The framework seeks to "integrate basic knowledge about youth development and the community conditions" to maximize program potential. In the five-stage framework, Connell and Gambone started with building community building capacity to the end goal of improving long-term adult outcomes for youth. While the localization of the framework needs to be flexible, the flowchart provides a benchmark to contextualize Jordan's youth empowerment programs. As the results findings and results show later, stage D in "strengthen community

adults' capacity to support youth" is critical to create sustainable "input" of mentorship and resources for youth empowerment programs to continue. In the context of Jordan, however, the research outcome would argue the foundational role of stage C to meet the basic needs of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs prior to any stages (Uysal, Aydemir, Genc, 2017). In other words, the framework's application in reality does not necessarily follow a sequential order but rather forms a network of elements that's essential for youth empowerment programs to succeed.

       While the topic of youth empowerment has been widely studied and discussed in the academic and practitioner spaces, Jordanian youth is a complex and nuanced community. In a recent report by Nadine Kreitmeyr on the state of Jordanian youth, she surveyed 1,000 Jordanian youth aged from 18 to 30 and analyzed a series of characteristics (Kreitmeyr, 2018). With 70 percent of the Jordanian society below the age of 30 and youth unemployment rate around 33.4 percent, youth community in Jordan certainly is a diverse and heterogenous group. There are, however, noticeable commonalities. Families and religion are of key importance to Jordanian youth, with 70% of respondents living in the same household with their parents and strengthening religious affiliation (Ibid.). As the findings and results section shows later, strong family connection proves to be an important factor when considering access to youth empowerment programs. With regards to education, one-third of the youth surveyed are currently students with around thirty percent at schools and more than sixty percent at universities (Ibid.). The data shows the rising access to education (albeit lack detailed information on the type of education) and is important as background information as the research focuses on external youth empowerment program providers.

       The difference between public and private schools (which include international schools in this research) is the fundamental baseline of this research. As of 2014, there are 6,355 schools in

Jordan teaching over 1.7 million students and employing almost 84,000 teachers. Among which, around one fourth of Jordanian students attend private schools (Mansur, 2014). The government website emphasizes improving access to education and primary and secondary schools are free and compulsory for all Jordanian children through the age of fifteen and Jordan's literacy more than doubled from 1960s to 1996 (King Hussein Gov). As Mansur argues, the differences between private schools and public schools are significant, saying that "private schools offer a superior type of education (Mansur, 2014)." Logically, private schools also cost significantly more than public schools that are free of charge. In a country where the average monthly salary stands at $637, the monthly tuition at one of the most prestigious private schools in Jordan (i.e. King's Academy) costs up to $5000, almost ten times the average monthly salary. (Azzeh, 2017; King's Academy Website). Mansur dives deeper in his opinion piece and lays out the economic implications behind such numbers. He says, "Public schools in Jordan are what is known to economists as "inferior products", whose consumption falls as income rises, while private schools are "normal products" since their consumption increases as one's income rises (Mansur 2015)." As a result, 35,000 children transferred out from private schools to public schools when economic conditions worsened (Ibid.). The correlation between family income and students' choice of schooling is not surprising, but the issue at hand is the role of external youth empowerment organizations in balancing, if not reducing, the education inequality seen in Jordanian society.

METHODOLOGY

The main interview subjects of the research are different youth empowerment program providers in Jordan as well as surveying 22 students at the University of Jordan about their experience with such programs (if any). Give the many program providers in Jordan, organizations are chosen for interviews based on existing connections and the breadth of representation. Among the six interviewed organizations include a diverse range of program providers from international actors to grass-root initiatives. The Findings & Results section shows a table of interviewed organizations. While all six organizations are headquartered in Amman, some have operations and networks beyond the city and even internationally. All interviews are conducted in person in Amman excluding a phone interview with the British Council due to interviewee's preference. In terms of surveyed population, twenty-two students at the University of Jordan participated in the survey. The survey does not collect any sensitive personal information by design and only took participants on average ten minutes to finish to avoid any opportunity cost.

In addition to interviews, some organizations provide ongoing events, which the researcher attended and observed. Historical public information and annual reports of certain youth empowerment programs are also available online. Having a three dimensional research method (i.e. interview, literature review, and in person attendance) provides a holistic understanding of not just the purpose and structure of their program, but the programs' impact and implementation.

Data collection is dealt with care and sensitivity throughout the research. The initial email or WhatsApp interaction clearly introduces the researchers' intention to interview for academic purposes and clarify any questions participants may have. Interviewees were also presented with

written consent form before any formal interviews and were given the option to end the interview at any given time. The written consent form is designed to protect the identity and integrity of participants with clear options to opt in or opt out from including organization and/or personal names. All data are protected on a secure device with private login to ensure the integrity of data. While there were no major obstacles during the research, the unpredictability of interviewees' schedules prove to be a challenge. Namely, the scheduled interview with Columbia Center in Amman had to be canceled because the interviewee started an extended leave from work during the month of the research.

As the researcher interviews and analyzes my research, her identity as a relatively privileged student came into play. Her education journey itself can be considered as privileged and she constantly needs to be considerate and objective when analyzing programs different from those she has experienced. In other words, while the researcher is wearing the lease of a foreign college-educated student, she needs to consider the impact and role of youth empowerment providers in relation to the student demographics Jordanian organizations seek to serve. She needs to keep in mind that while I'm familiar with the Western notion of what youth empowerment means, she needs to stay sensitive and open minded to local interpretation of what youth empowerment implies.

FINDINGS & RESULTS

Since the findings are contingent upon the six interviewed organizations, it is helpful to first provide an overview of each organization and their work. With consent from all interviewees to use their names and organizational affiliation, the following table lists the six organizations in this research:

Organizations	Person Interviewed	Interviewee Title
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)	Maha Qashou	Program Manager of Youth Empowerment and Human Rights
British Council	Sarah Al Ghazou	Education and Society Projects Manager
INJAZ	Rama Ejailat	
International Youth Ambassadors Foundation (IYAF)	Trad Almasri	Co-founder and President
The Princess Basma Youth Resource Center (PBYRC)	Sujood Azzam	Technical Assistant of leadership and entrepreneurship pillar at JOHUD
Tala Abu-Ghazaleh Confucius Institute	Mamoun Abu Al Sebaa	TAG-Confucius Institute Director

There are diverse representations among the six youth empowerment organizations: FES (with strong German affiliation) and British Council are examples of international stakeholders in the field. INJAZ is symbolic of a transitional organization. It was founded under USAID but transitioned to an independent, nonprofit Jordanian organization after two years ("Overview"). IYAF is a completely grassroots organization started and managed by youths with no official affiliation, whereas PBYRC is officially under Princess Basma's initiatives to promote sustainable human development. The Tala Abu-Ghazalah Confucius Institute is a foreign-language teaching center and an example of local private sectors' partnership with foreign entities. As such, while the sample size is small, the six organizations cover five different types of youth empowerment programs and structures in the country.

Instead of listing the type of programs each organization provide (which are widely available online), the research paper analyzes the current landscape and future potentials through trend-seeking. As such, the following analysis focuses on common areas of successes as well as challenges across organizations instead of listing their individual portfolios. With that being said, the report includes occasional summaries to highlight and contextualize trends.

1. Compound Factors Fuel Differences Between Public and Private School Access

The surveyed result does not accurately reflect the youth demographics but sheds light on important information. All 22 students come from public school systems among whom 50% are from Amman. 36% of the surveyed students answered "yes" to any past experience with youth empowerment programs before college and 63% continued to participate in similar programs in college, while only 21% of those who did not expose to youth empowerment programs started to engage in college. To this end, exposure and familiarity with youth empowerment program prior to college is not only for important for the sole program purposes, they also set a foundation for future engagements. For those who attended youth empowerment programs, 90% only attended one event as a one-time-engagement. Only one student had a continuous program of over one year in language tutoring. The lack of longitudinal involvements prevents organic marketing within the youth community and puts program sustainability at risk. Students respond favorably to programs offered at the university level compared to those in secondary schools. One student commented on the diversity of cultures and nationalities in college events as well as higher rate of participation and more development support. One student noted, however, that programs in universities still lack the practical application of concepts beyond theoretical training stage.

At the same time, all interviewed organizations acknowledged the disproportionate offerings of youth empowerment programs between public and private schools. The reasons are complicated and contingent upon organizations but three common trends stood out. The first reason for the shortage of programs in public school systems is the partnership structure for formal organizations such as the British Council. Established youth empowerment organizations mainly initiate partnerships through existing partners. The internalization of partnerships implies

short term strengthening of internal networks of existing partners but usually takes more time and effort to bring in new partners and organizations.

Secondly, the donors and their interests exert considerable influence on program directions. According to Trad Almasri, the founder of IYAF, private sectors used to target elite schools for youth empowerment programs because of their existing resources, reputation in society as well as the ease for program implementation. Private schools are faster in actualizing programs on the ground because they have more students accustomed to the notion of youth empowerment and are richer in resources compared to public schools. The convenience and expedited channels at private schools appeal to donors' incentive to receive speedy marketing reaction and program outcomes. Almasri gave the example of King's Academy where the school holds its own MUN exclusive to King's students.

Thirdly, the marketing channels for youth empowerment organizations largely depend on their operating structure. Organizations with standard operating procedures such as the British Council and INJAZ rely on partners to market their upcoming event. The additional layer of internal marketing contains information within the ecosystem of existing partners. For self-organized and less formal organizations, interviewees frequently refer to social media and online platforms for major marketing channels. Namely, Facebook and website are the two dominating tools for event marketing. While using social media opens up the event to beyond existing partners, the eco-chamber nature of platforms such as Facebook lead to "social-circle"-dependent marketing. Students are more likely to come across an event post if any of their friends on Facebook responded to the event or they themselves follow the event page. The acumen to look for youth empowerment events on social media again puts private school students at an advantage where they socialize in communities that are more aware of upcoming events.

2. Increasing Emphasis on Public Schools Driven by Public & Private Sector Initiatives

Youth empowerment organizations, however, are shifting the focus to public schools and encouraging private sectors to do the same. IYAF establishes its own open-to-all MUN to bring together students from different backgrounds. The goal is to shift the mindset away from the idea that youth empowerment programs are for those who can afford it and increase access to all students who are interested. The Talal Abu-Ghazalah Confucius Institute is the first private partnership with Chinese government's Confucius institute system with a 50-50 funding structure, and the success of the center in Jordan has inspired more partnerships globally.

British Council also underwent a transition that marks the prior inadequate emphasis on public schools and present efforts to reverse such trend. The Young Arab Voices initiative started in 2011 as a partnership between British Council and Anna Lindh Foundation. The goal of the initiative is to "Empower young people to enhance a culture of dialogue, to contribute to public policy and shape media discourses, and to create a shared understanding with peers across the Mediterranean on how to address issues of common concern to their communities." In 2018, the Young Arab Voices (YAV) officially became the Young Mediterranean Voices (YMV) to expand both globally and regionally. British Council already operates in eight countries in the YAV stage (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia) and is now expanding to include new Mediterranean countries. The global expansion came with a regional expansion plan too. Sarah Al Ghazou from the British Council commented that YAV started in Jordan with private school partnerships due to existing relationships between local British schools and the embassy. With the launch of YMV and looking ahead to future plans, the British Council acknowledges its previous focus on private school programming but has institutionalized the goal to expand focus on target more marginalized communities. According

to Sarah, in 2018, the British Council established partnerships of different levels with 80 schools and trained 100 teachers 30 school leaders. The Council seeks to reach at least 100 schools in 2019 and focus on program inclusion though scaling up schools and company visits. Sarah concluded the interview stating, "We want young people to have access and discuss topics they want across regions."

Programs such as PBYRC positions itself broadly to public and private schools from the beginning but faces increasing resource limitations. Instead of implementing programs externally, PBYRC focuses less on "going out to schools" but adopt " students coming in" model base on its resource centers. The facility-focused nature of PBYRC also opens the challenge of resource limitation. For example, the startup space with computers and other technologies is open to public six days a week but receive uneven number of student visitors depending on school hours. On a Thursday afternoon there are usually 50-70 students in the space around fifty square meters, but on a Sunday there might only be around 20 students. The predicable yet uneven flow of student visitors poses the challenge of resource limitation and the need for organizational flexibility. In response to the challenge, PBYRC introduced a ticket system where

students will receive a ticket (see picture) granting various number of hours in the startup space depending on the day. The ticket system introduces more organization and order to the center but also limits students' ability to work on projects for extended hours.

3. Positive Feedback Loop Within Organizations

Youth Empowerment Organizations not only provide engagements opportunities for youths as students, but also serve as employer platforms that organically attract and retain talents. All six interviewed organizations expressed that students who started as events participants often continue their engagement through volunteer opportunities and some even become full time employer. Maha at FES proudly commented on the success of the signature Young Leaders' Program. She mentioned that all alumni of the Young Leaders' Program are eligible to apply for funding support for youth and human rights related programs anytime after graduation; and three full time employees at FES are alumni of the program.

IYAF also illustrates the internalization of talents and continuous support for alumni. The grassroots youth organizations started in 2016 as an informal weekly gathering at coffee shops. The founders were all MUN participants and found the need to continue discussions about UN Sustainable Development Goals beyond the conferences themselves. After merely three years, IYAF has reached 5,000 people and remains completely student-run. Many of its events and conferences rely on partners and volunteers from previous engagements where students have now become the driver for future empowerment opportunities. For PBYRC, the center has always relied on youth governance and management of its resources. The organization intentionally activate youths to manage its 51 centers around the country that cut down management costs while empowering youth to take on a larger role of organizers. There are 51 committees around the country each led by a committee leader who come together weekly to discuss broader PBYRC plans (see picture above for leader profiles).

To bring the concept of positive feedback loop to a more personal level, the manager of "My Startup" incubator at INJAZ talks about his upbringing. Born and raised in Amman, he has

come to know INJAZ's work since six years old when her older sister started to volunteer with the organization as a teacher. Growing up in the influence of his sister, he went into management consulting but eventually returned to youth programs in Jordan and is now building business incubation curriculum for 7-12 grade students. The ecosystem of youth population and youth empowerment are inherently intertwined and organizations are already seeing the fruits of previous empowerment initiatives. As a result, the youth empowerment program itself can function as hub of long-term opportunities if organizations intentionally introduce retention mechanisms and continuous engagement platforms.

Upon analyzing the current landscape of youth empowerment provision across public and private schools, the following sections will discuss three areas of macro-level challenges youth empowerment organizations face that hinders efforts to equalize access.

1. **The Absence of Governmental Financial and Policy Support**

Across the six organizations interviewed, interviewees have communicated lack of government funding and policy support as one of the key challenges moving forward. The absence of strong government financial backing is understandable given the fiscal realities of the Jordanian regime. But it is important to note the policy stagnation in the conversation of youth empowerment. Organizations featuring startups and entrepreneurship commented extensively on

policy hurdles. INJAZ's My Startup incubator is an example for both fiscal and policy challenges organizations face from the government.

The "My Startup" initiative focuses on one-year program incubation and has seen measurable success. In the first year of the initiative, the program has incubated more than seventy startups, among which include refugee-led startups and more than 40 percent of all incubated startups are women-led (defined by women owning at least 51% of company share). However, the absence of government facilitation in both the financial and policy space is especially urgent in the case of "My Startup". The incubator currently does not have the capacity to provide venture capital investments because there is zero funding support from the government and other financial resources have been devoted to program incubation rather than investment. In fact, the incubator space itself was funded primarily through the Canadian-affiliated incubator DMA.

In the case of policy obstacles, the current legal framework does not support startup environment. There is no special policy that encourages entrepreneurial endeavors, which hinders the success of non-government incubators such as "My Startup". According to the manager of "My Startup", the government does not provide special policy or tax exemption for startups. The social security and tax systems are poignant examples in this regard. For established businesses, 21% of employee salary goes to social security fund for pension purposes, and business owners need to file tax documents every two months. Any violation of the above regulations will lead to more fines and penalties for the company. Policies such as these are major obstacles for entrepreneurs and early stage startups. It also reflects a lack of differentiation between startups and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) on a policy level.

The government, however, is taking steps toward policy reform and started to draft startup-specific policies since December 2018. According to the manager, J-CORE, an organization under the ICT Association of Jordan, is leading the policy design with fifteen lawyers including the interviewee himself. The policy draft is expected to go through parliament in June. But the case of "My Startup" illustrates how policy inertia is slowing down progress. The interviewee mentioned that the government is expected to institutionalize the startup policy in 2020 but the forgone opportunities and entrepreneurial energy are beyond calculation.

Lack of domestic funding has led to more internationally supported organizations, but it also leads to targeted donation that does not suit local needs. For example, according to Dr. Yusuf Mansur, there have been cases where organizations received dozens of computers for classrooms as a form of foreign direct donations when the teachers are not trained to use or teach computers. Lastly, the lack of government funding limits the growth of grassroots organizations such as IYAF, where fundings still come from the founders' own pockets.

2. Regional Coverage and Localization

While four of the six organizations (except IYAF and Confucius Institute) interviewed have presence around the country, resources and programs are largely concentrated in Amman. The limited presence of youth empowerment programs outside of Amman will exacerbate the vicious cycle that further disincentivize youths from returning to their original governorates. The domestic brain drain toward Amman feeds into the urbanization trend that Jordan is struggling with.

The other issue within geographic distribution of youth empowerment programs is the invisible rule of proximity. With limited public transportation options, youths (and adults alike) rely on private cars and/or taxi for daily commute. The location of youth empowerment centers and programs therefore subject themselves to the rule of proximity—serving those who are close by or those with the resources to commute to events. When asked about the program's targeted population, Sujood Azzam from PBRYC commented that the facility-dependent nature of PBRYC's events and resources imply that it can only serve schools and youth communities nearby unless youths outside the area are willing to travel. The center where the interview took place is in an area concentrated with public schools and therefore the PBRYC sees more students from public schools than private schools. PBRYC operates more than 51 centers around the country but the rule of proximity applies to all programs. The implications of traveling and geographic distance to youth empowerment events pose significant and practical challenges to increasing access and equity.

Furthermore, it is not only important to increase availability of youth empowerment programs in governorates, it is more important to localize programs based on local needs. Maha from FES expressed her concern with regard to female attendance in youth empowerment programs when the students come from outside Amman. She mentioned that some families are hesitant about allowing their daughters to travel alone with strangers and sometime staying in a hotel in Amman. Responding and catering to local habits are critical to increase access not only to youths outside of Amman, but also communities that are already underprivileged and under emphasized.

3. The Need to Increase Program Diversity and Inclusion

The term diversity and inclusion has been widely proliferated in academic institutions and workplaces. It is often considered as the "driver of organizational innovation and adaptability" in a rapidly changing world (Jordan, Ewing, 2016). Interviews with the six organizations also revealed a need to increase diversity and inclusion within youth empowerment programs in Jordan. Before we discuss the challenge ahead though, it is important to acknowledge the current program portfolio that the interviewed organizations offer.

The FES's signature Young Leaders Program offers workshops and awareness programs on five themes (i.e. social democracy, communication, leadership, economics, and political participation). The Young Leaders Program rotates through all five themes within any given year of programming. After the first year, half of the selected sixty students will advance to the second phase of the program where they submit project proposals and ideas to carry out themselves (image to the left illustrate a workshop on political systems drew by one of the Young Leader). Previous project examples include a film on human rights with six separate episodes on issues considering labor law, children's rights, etc. Another example includes a panel discussion with twenty human rights defendants in Jordan that culminated in a published report. At INJAZ, the empowerment channel focuses more on scope than selection. INJAZ recruits expert volunteers from private sector to teach weekly classes at public schools around the country. Courses range from business acumen to leadership skills and all students attend the workshop like any other classes within the school curriculum. British Council's flagship event Young Mediterranean Voices enhances regional dialogue and understanding to shape public policy and political discourse. IYAF hosts workshops and MUNs centered around the UN Sustainable Development Goals and entrepreneurship. PBYRC provides professional radio

facilities with student-run radio channel. Confucius Institute offers Chinese culture events and language classes.

As demonstrated above, the existing diversity in program offerings even within the six-interviewed organization is worthy of recognition. From politics to economics, sustainable growth to entrepreneurship, the interviewed organizations demonstrate the growing vibrancy and options in youth empowerment programs. The areas of diversity challenges listed below serve as addition to current success. They focus less on diversity of the "type" of programs but rather the diversity of participants. In other words, this section addresses the issue of access.

There are several points of interests within the need to diversity youth empowerment programs: language, women and refugees, and veteran youths.

Firstly, the interviewed organizations reflect the scope and reach of English-facilitated events and "Westernized" notion of youth empowerment. Take the example of entrepreneurship, INJAZ and PBYRC are the two organizations that have physical startup incubation space. Both spaces are modern-looking fully equipped with computers and other technology support (see image above). It's worth noting the stylistic homogeneity in startup incubator spaces and the interior decor looks like replicates of incubators one would see in the United States. Both spaces adopt minimalistic and open styling that is common to Western designs and lack private spaces or prayer area. While there certainly are transferability in the science of startup space, it is important to observe and analyze best practices in Jordan. Given the relative new introduction of startup spaces in the country, organization shall avoid attributing certain architectural style to entrepreneurial success and instead finding applicable designs from foreign incubator that fit local and regional contexts.

With regard to the English-facilitated events, it is important to recognize that the language of programming largely depends on the "supplier" of information. INJAZ, FES, and PBYRC for example mostly operate in Arabic with Arabic publications and brochures. IYAF, British Council, and Confucius Institute mainly use English. The former mostly operates within local school and communities while the later have more global topics and speakers. It is necessary to have youth empowerment programs in both languages especially as English becomes globally important, but organizations need to recognize the inadvertent barrier English brings to certain parts of the youth community. The Confucius Institute serves an example to this point.

The Confucius Institute currently has around 50 active students under 18 years old and all of whom are from international schools. The institute charges on average 7JD per course hour but financial barriers are not the only hindrance for public school students. All Chinese classes are taught in English instead of Arabic, which requires students to be fluent in English in order to participate in class. Similar situations occur in publicly accessible events offered by IYAF and British Council. Even if empowerment programs are free and open to the public, the language of instruction often functions as a self-selecting filter. Students from public schools are less comfortable with English compared to private and international school students and are therefore more likely to turn away youth empowerment opportunities because of language barriers. In these cases, access and equity in youth empowerment programs are not just issues of financial capabilities, but also a question of information access as early on as the ability to read a Facebook event post in English.

Given the focus on interviews are on public and private school access to youth empowerment programs; there is less focus on distinctive communities within the youth

population. With that being said, the researcher wants to emphasize that diversity and inclusion of youth empowerment programs also need to expand to and target women, refugees, and veteran youths. The research hopes further studies will elaborate programs available to these youth communities.

CONCLUSION

The scope and reach of youth empowerment programs have seen tremendous growth in Jordan. Programs range from political participation and entrepreneurship to running youth radio station and international exchanges, youth empowerment providers across sectors, country-affiliation, and industries have complemented existing national curriculum with options to expand and apply one's learning. Domestic or internationally supported, the rise in youth empowerment programs is in a way responding to the challenge youth faces in the country. But at the same time, they are reflective and proof of the endless potential of youths in the country. IYAF transformed itself from an informal monthly gathering in 2016 to a nationally recognized organization that holds events with the Royal family, UN organizations, Embassies, and more. Created *by* and *for* the youths, organizations such as IYAF are living proof of the positive role youth empowerment organizations can play in Jordanian society.

Concurrently, government and organizations need reexamine the allocation of resources across public and private school students. The question for the future is whether current youth empowerment programs are further stratifying youth population based on social economic status and public and private schools. While the official figures are unclear, Dr. Mansur estimated that current efforts are largely fragmented, reaching less than 5% of the youth population.

As demonstrated by the analysis above, there are significant and complex challenges to expand and equalize program reach, but organizations such as the British Council are taking a more critical lens toward ensuring access and making national reach of youth empowerment programs a stated priority.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

Any topic of the research in separation covers vast and complex issues. From youth empowerment programs, private and public school systems, the intersection of the two reveals limitless opportunities and challenges. This research one peals the surface of the onion and has many limitations. Firstly, the research primarily focus on youth empowerment program providers, hence does not include extensive research on other stakeholders in the issue such as students, teachers, schools, and government entities. Secondly, it is important to recognize the geographic limitation of the research. Since all interviews and program observation occurred in Amman, the research does not seek to generalize the conversation around youth empowerment programs on a national level. Although some interviewed programs have national operations, the conditions in rural areas and governorates are unclear. Thirdly, the demographic focus on youth covers a breadth of population and for research purposes the analysis does not focus on specific

pockets of the population such as women, refugees, veteran youths, etc. It is important to recognize the demographic limitation of the research to acknowledge the need to contextualize youth empowerment programs according to local needs. Lastly, given the limited time and resource of the research, the representativeness of sample data in both surveys and interviews is not ideal. Although they shed light on important trends and observations, the statistics significance of the research needs scrutiny.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

In line with study limitations, there are many areas worthy of further studies. The field of youth empowerment and education systems in general is tied to the history and the future of the Middle East. Understanding and capitalizing on the youth population will shape the coming trajectory of not only Jordan, but the regional in general. To further the study of youth empowerment program's role in the country's education system, researchers can expand the scope of interviews to engage more stakeholders, especially students, to understand the landscape in a more holistic fashion.

Additionally, it is important to expand regionally and broaden the geographic scope of the research to different governorates outside of Amman. Research in this regard can start with organizations that already have national presence (such as PBYRC and British Council) and investigate vertically into each organization's geographic functionalities. Furthermore, the gap

between program provision and implementation is common across industries and sectors. Further

research can follow organizations longitudinally to analyze progression of events through time

and the program outcome. Lastly, given the interconnected nature of regional affairs in the

Middle East, it is worthy to examine regional best practices in youth empowerment programs

and adopt useful frameworks to Jordan.

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British Council	Sarah Al Ghazou	Education and Society Projects Manager
INJAZ	Rama Ejailat	
International Youth Ambassadors Foundation (IYAF)	Trad Almasri	Co-founder and President
The Princess Basma Youth Resource Center (PBYRC)	Sujood Azzam	Technical Assistant of leadership and entrepreneurship pillar at JOHUD

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APPENDICES

<u>Appendix 1: Interview Guide (for program staffs at each youth empowerment programs):</u>

Demographic info:

- What's your name (if willing to share):
- How long have you been working at this organization:

Info about the organization:

- When was this organization established?
- What's the mission of the organization? Why was it established?
- What is the targeted population of the organization?

Info about youth empowerment programs:

- What kind of youth empowerment programs (if any) has the organization hosted in the past?
- Why did the organization begin to offer youth empowerment programs?
- How often do these programs occur?
- What's the targeted population of these programs?
- How does the organization market such events/programs?
- What's the demographics for those who actually attend these programs?
- Has the organization collaborated with other entities in providing programs/recruit participants?
- What are some future plans for the organization in providing youth empowerment programs?

●What are some challenges?
●Are there any programs coming up in the next few weeks? If so, would it be possible for me to attend and observe?

Appendix 2: Survey Questioners in English

Demographic Info:

- How old are you:
- What's your major/program in university:
- Which city are you from:

Pre-college info:

- Which secondary school did you attend:
- What kind of secondary school was it (choose from the following):
    - ○ Public
    - ○ Private
    - ○ International
    - ○ Others (please specify):

Youth Empowerment programs engagements before college:

- Have you attended any youth empowerment programs (e.g. entrepreneurship training, computer science courses, English language training) outside of school before college?
    - ¥ Yes
    - ¥ No
- If so, how many in total:
- If so, what kind of program was it (multiple choice from the following):
    - Entrepreneurship training

- Computer/tech skill workshop
- Foreign language classes
- Competitions (e.g. business, startups, language, etc)
- Finance training
- Health workshops
- Forums and conferences
- Others (please specify): _____

- If you remember, what organizations provided these opportunities: _____
- How did you heard about these programs? _____
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how helpful were these programs in your education? (1=least helpful, 10=most helpful)
- Were these programs a one-time opportunity or continuous engagements? In other words, have you continued to participate in these programs with one organizations over the years?

Youth Empowerment programs engagements during college:
- Have you participated in any youth empowerment programs during college? (Yes or No)
- How do these programs compare to the ones you participated in high school?

Appendix 3: Survey Questioner in Arabic

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أسئلة الاستبيان

المعلومات الديموغرافية

--------------------:كم عمرك

مجالك في الجامعة؟ /ما تخصصك ----------------•

من أي مدينة أنت؟

معلومات ما قبل الكلية؟

ما هي المدرسة الثانوية التي التحقت به؟

اختر من التالي)ما نوع المدرسة الثانوية (•

حكومية

خاصة

الدولية

.------------------ (يرجى التحديد)غيرها

</div>

ارتباطات برامج تمكين الشباب قبل الكلية

• هل حضرت أي من برامج تمكين الشباب خارج المدرسة قبل الكلية؟ (مثل التدريب على تنظيم المشاريع ، ودورات علوم الكمبيوتر ، والتدريب على اللغة الإنجليزية)

نعم

لا

إذا كانت الاجابة نعم، فكم في المجموع ؟

• إذا كانت الاجابة نعم، فما نوع البرنامج الذي حضرته (الاختيار من متعدد مما يلي)

تدريب ريادة الأعمال

التقنية /ورشة مهارات الكمبيوتر

فصول اللغة الأجنبية

المسابقات(مثل الأعمال ، والشركات الناشئة ، واللغة ، إلخ)

التدريب المالي

ورش عمل صحية

المنتديات والمؤتمرات

غيرها(يرجى التحديد)

• إذا كنت تتذكر ، ما هي المنظمات التي وفرت هذه الفرص

• كيف سمعت عن هذه البرامج؟

• على مقياس من 1إلى 10 ما مدى فائدة هذه البرامج في تعليمك؟ (1 = الأقل فائدة ، 10= الأكثر فائدة

هل كانت هذه البرامج فرصة لمرة واحدة أو مستمرة؟ بمعنى آخر ، هل واصلت المشاركة في هذه البرامج مع منظمة واحدة أكثر من سنة؟

برامج تمكين الشباب خلال فترة الجامعة

• هل شاركت في أي من برامج تمكين الشباب في فترة الجامعة؟ (نعم ام لا)

كيف تقارن هذه البرامج بتلك التي شاركت فيها في المدرسة الثانوية؟

Appendix 4: Informed Consent Form

Title: The role of youth empowerment programs in providing access for public and private schools students

Linda Zhang'20, Duke University

School for International Training—Jordan: Geopolitics, International Relations, and the Future of the ME

1. The purpose of this study is to identify the role of youth empowerment programs in providing equitable access for students at public and private schools. Youth empowerment programs are those that provide opportunities for youth to develop skills and become problem solvers and decision makers, such as but not limited to: language learning, computer skills acquisitions, entrepreneurship training. The research seeks to understand the current landscape of youth empowerment program provision and opportunities for growth and collaboration to increase access and quality.

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.

1. **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 policy recommendation to identify growth and collaboration opportunities for youth empowerment programs.

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 Altabini, SIT Jordan Academic Director
Email: raed.altabini@sit.edu