



WORLD BANK GROUP

Building the Evidence on Forced Displacement

*UK Government-UNHCR-World Bank research program 'Building the Evidence on Protracted Forced Displacement: A Multi-Stakeholder Partnership'*

# IMPACT EVALUATION POLICY BRIEF

## Results from the POWER-J Socioemotional Skills Intervention Piloted in Public Schools in Jordan

### Context

Over the past decade, the Jordanian Ministry of Education has made great efforts to improve access to quality education for all children in Jordan. The country is hosting a large Syrian refugee population, including at least 254,000 children and youth of school age (UNHCR 2023). To accommodate them in the public education system, many schools have established double shifts to avoid overcrowded classrooms. Yet, substantial challenges remain in ensuring a conducive learning environment for all children. Evidence suggests that disruptive behavior in the classroom is widespread. For example, 77% of students in the 2019 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in Jordan reported that disorderly behavior happened in most or some of their math lessons. Time spent on classroom management and disciplinary measures significantly impacts teachers' ability to teach and reduces time spent on academic tasks. Students' wellbeing and ability to learn is further hampered by a high prevalence of bullying. Among 15-year-olds participating in the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in Jordan, 38% reported being bullied at least a few times a month, a percentage substantially above the OECD average of 23%. Bullying is particularly affecting refugee students. According to the 2018 National Teacher Survey, 66% of Grade 7-10 teachers in the second shift (which predominantly enrolls Syrian refugee students) reported that bullying posed a challenge, compared to 39% of Jordanian host community teachers.

### Structure of the POWER-J intervention

The POWER-J program consisted of scripted lessons that aimed to promote a positive classroom culture and foster students' growth mindset, emotion regulation, mindfulness, and teamwork. Lessons included personal reflection exercises, mindfulness exercises, group work, and teambuilding activities. The intervention targeted 7<sup>th</sup> grade students in public schools and was implemented by mathematics teachers with support from school counselors during two additional school hours per week in April-June 2022. Students received a workbook specifically designed to accompany the intervention. Teachers and school counselors received 3 days of face-to-face training on the intervention and were provided with a comprehensive teacher guide on the scripted lessons.

### Data and Evaluation Method

The POWER-J pilot was evaluated through a randomized controlled trial (RCT). A total of 178 public schools across Jordan were randomly assigned to 89 treatment and 89 control schools. Data was collected from 3,774 students as well as 356 teachers and counselors within 2 weeks after completion of the intervention in June 2022. Measurement instruments included self-report teacher and student surveys as well as short, illustrated vignettes with hypothetical conflict scenarios to measure students' hostile attribution bias, that is their tendency to interpret other peoples' motives as hostile towards them.

## Key Findings

- **POWER-J succeeded in promoting better classroom participation and behaviors.** Among students who attended POWER-J lessons, most reported a more positive classroom learning environment and improved participation. POWER-J students were 13 percent more likely to report that students in their classrooms participate without fear. Results further suggest that they were more likely to listen to the teachers and behave orderly: the classroom management index saw a 0.26 standard deviation improvement in the student survey. This result was echoed by a large 0.75 standard deviation increase based on teacher reports.
- **POWER-J helped students regulate their emotion and deal with stress.** About 67 percent of POWER-J students reported they can stay in control easily when faced with pressure, compared to 58 percent of students in the control group.
- **POWER-J helped foster a growth mindset among students.** The level of agreement with the statement “I think I have a certain amount of intelligence, and I really can’t change it” differed between treatment and control group. POWER-J students believe (by a statistically significant 0.1 standard deviation) that they can actively develop their intelligence instead of accepting it as given.
- **Some of POWER-J’s positive effects are driven by its strong impact on girls.** When asked about the classroom environment, girls are 12 percent more likely to report they believe that everyone can do well “regardless of their family background or nationality.” Girls also benefited from POWER-J’s positive message on interpersonal relationships. After taking POWER-J classes, girls reported they found it easier to initiate conversations and solve their problems through communication.
- **POWER-J helped reduce hostile attribution bias when students encountered negative situations.** Students were presented with short hypothetical scenarios (for example, “imagine you are sitting in the schoolyard when suddenly a ball hits you”). Students were asked if these situations happened by accident or if they thought other students wanted to harm them on purpose. The results show POWER-J students are significantly less likely (by a 0.13 standard deviation) to interpret other people’s motives as hostile.
- **Refugee children benefited equally from POWER-J’s growth mindset message, and already had a head start in self-awareness.** Refugee students in the control group showed higher levels of self-awareness compared to Jordanian students in the control group, and stronger belief of succeeding regardless of their family background, attenuating POWER-J’s treatment effect in those domains. For the other outcomes, POWER-J had similarly positive impact on both Jordanian and refugee students.

## Policy implications

The results suggests that POWER-J has potential to improve the classroom environment and could benefit students both at school and in their social life. Accommodating POWER-J during regular school hours and integrating it into the existing curriculum would be key for a cost-effective scale-up. The Ministry of Education could also consider rolling out a blended version of POWER-J, building on existing technology platforms and a remote version of the program which was developed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Reference

“Strengthening the Classroom Environment and Students’ Growth Mindset in Jordan: Results from a Randomized Controlled Trial.” *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper Series (forthcoming)*.