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Putting data to work for Jordan's schools



Whenever Farooz Nu'eimat, a trainer at the Ministry of Education, meets with school staff to talk about the use of data in their schools, she is met with the same frustrations: they have been collecting and reporting data for years, but they've never known how to use it, where it goes or why it even matters.

With the introduction of Data Use for Decision Making, a joint initiative by Jordan's Ministry of Education and the USAID-funded Education Reform Support Program (ERSP), Jordan's educators now have access to data reports that are useful in decision making in schools across the country.

"Some teachers thought that data went to outer space," says Nu'eimat. "Now we can actually see it, and we know that it's being used."

A new emphasis on accessible data

Providing school leaders with useful, comparative information is fundamental to incorporating data into the decision making process. Without useful data reports, school staff are left wondering – and making uninformed decisions.

Nu'eimat – a teacher herself – admits that most teachers saw collecting and reporting data as burdensome and time consuming. At her school in Deir Alla, she used to report data like attendance rates, and student achievement, but she never really understood why. Her supervisors and principal would then make decisions without rigorously consulting the data she had provided.

When she learned that a new feature of the database would allow school staff to generate reports based on the data she collected, Nu'eimat had a clear understanding of its purpose– for the first time in her many years of teaching. And she noticed that these reports were being used to help school leaders and Ministry personnel be efficient and accurate in their decisions about resource allocation and new initiatives at her school.

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A Data Use for Decision Making training workshop.

Now teachers are consulted and included in decisions that directly affect them: resources, class size and special initiatives like drop-out prevention.

“We have incentive to enter accurate data because it serves us,” she says. “No longer do we see data as wasted time, but in the long run, it will make our jobs easier.”

Embracing widespread changes

Dr. Mohammad Abu Ghazleh, the head of the Planning Directorate at the Ministry of Education in Jordan, has a vision for his Directorate and for the entire education system in Jordan. It is centered on the habitual use of data by all levels of staff.

“We are at the beginning of a new culture,” says Abu Ghazleh. “We are not there yet, but we are building a culture of people using data to make decisions.”

One of Abu Ghazleh’s first steps in teaching his staff the importance of using data was refusing to take action unless a situation is reported with support from accurate data. With this requirement, school officials could no longer make rash decisions based on assumptions, nor could they ignore raw data only because they were unable to generate easy-to-follow reports.

Now when presented with an issue, staff are required to present a full report using the data to support the decisions they are recommending. The two must go hand-in-hand.

Training school officials

ERSP alongside the Ministry have rolled out workshops across the Kingdom to train principals and school staff on the new uses of data, how to generate reports and how to analyze the data and from this to determine priority areas for interventions.

One of the tools developed to help staff interpret data is the decision tree model. Participants are asked to make two trees: a “current situation” tree and a “goal” tree. Using data from their schools, they define the problem, identify the causes of the problem and then note the impact that problem is having on their school. Once the tree is filled out, the staff create a “goal” tree to brainstorm strategies or methods to reach an appropriate solution based on the data.

Principals always had data on student achievement and discipline rates; now they can run reports that show them these rates by gender or by grade. Senior-level Field Directorate staff can now compare teacher and student absenteeism rates in one school against the average rates for the entire Directorate; FD officials can also compare the rate in that one Field Directorate to the national average.

The data is at the staff’s disposal, and these training sessions illustrated techniques to make the data work for them.

Visible impacts

Now that school staff and leaders are able to generate analyzable reports from raw data, they are able to base decisions on the data, determine areas of real need for school improvement and recommend informed tailored interventions. Principals and other educators can now more easily take action that is supported by accurate and analyzable data.

This allows educators to better understand what factors are causing a problem and what decisions to make to correct that problem. This new kind of functionality is activating a culture of accountability among school officials and teachers.

“If teacher absenteeism is the problem,” Nu’eimat explains, “the system will now generate a pop-up warning when a teacher is not showing up for school.”

Over time, data is also used for tracking purposes. Monitoring the schools’ indicators for achievement also helps educators reflect on the remedial actions they put in place. They examine the data again following the intervention to see whether positive change resulted for that school.

There has been a transformative shift in the mindset of educational personnel as a result of having this user-friendly data at their fingertips.

Nu’eimat describes the transformation as moving from a “dark room into a flood of light.” She explains, “Data is no longer just a number, but it is a reflection of performance and sheds light on the situation of the school and how well we are doing. School teams can now accurately devise their own remedial plans to solve problems and prevent challenges in the future.”

For Abu Ghazleh and his Directorate, he has high hopes for this initiative. “I want it to become a habit,” he says. “We are not just dealing with numbers for the sake of numbers. It is for decisions. That is my vision.”

This is the beginning of a change in culture regarding data use and decision making in Jordan’s education sector.



Data Use for Decision Making training participant showing enthusiasm for her new skills.



DU trainer explaining the information shown in the database.



One participant’s plan for his school’s role in solving an identified problem.