



منتدى الاستراتيجيات الأردني  
JORDAN STRATEGY FORUM

## Education and Adaptation to the Effects of COVID-19 in Jordan: How to Minimize the Repercussions of The Virus on the Education Gap

July 2021



**#Policy\_Brief**



## 1. Introduction

No one should underestimate the importance of school education. Going to school helps students in learning skills, gaining knowledge, developing talent, and making friends. In addition, one cannot get enrolled into a university without completing school education. Education drives economic growth and development, prosperity, and competitiveness.

- A. “Economic studies have shown a positive relationship between education and economic growth; particularly those that take into account the quality of education” (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank).
- B. Investment in human capital is “an asset rather than a liability” if they are to succeed in the unfolding Fourth Industrial Revolution (World Economic Forum / WEF).

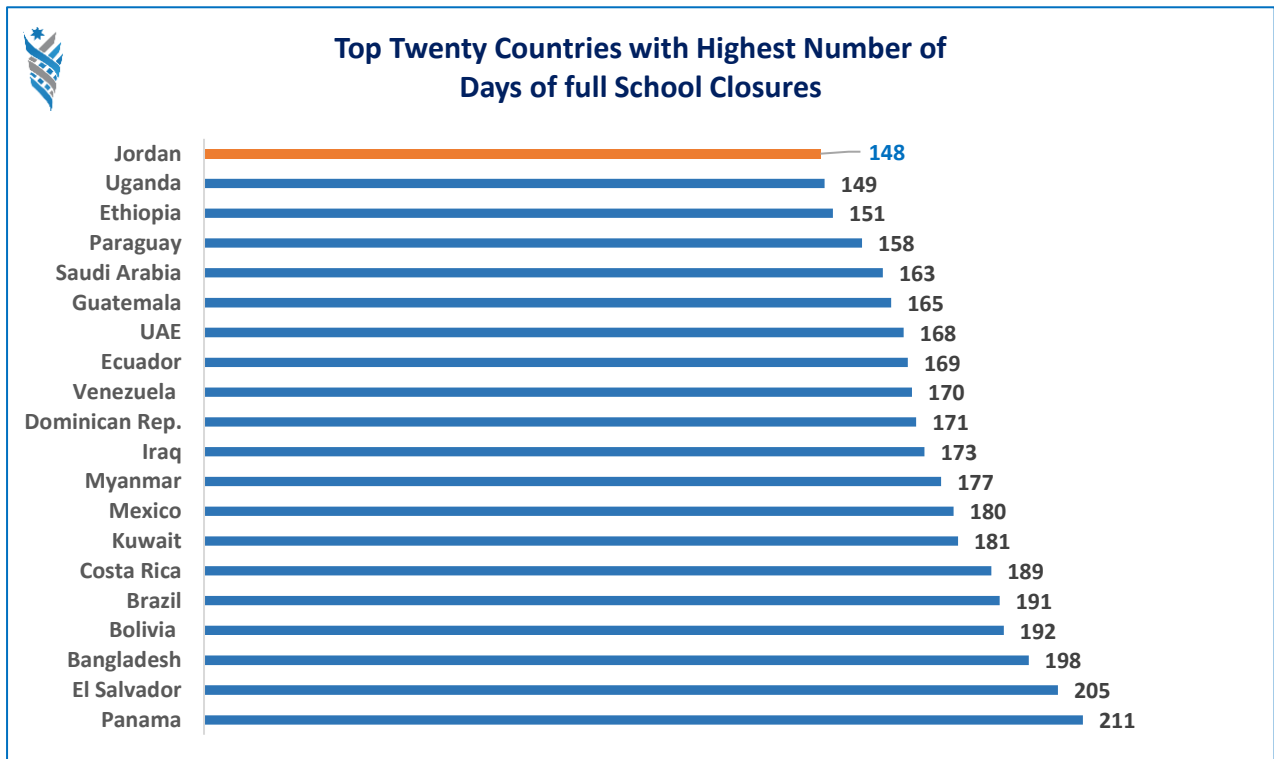
COVID-19 has caused the largest disruption of school (and university) education in history. The United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) estimated that “by late March 2020, more than 190 countries had shut schools in order to slow the spread of COVID-19, disrupting the schooling of approximately 1.6 billion students” (Office of Research / Working Paper 2020-13).

Despite best efforts to adapt to the new teaching environment (i.e. on-line, television), the emerging evidence shows that school closures have resulted in learning losses.

- a) “In the most pessimistic scenario, COVID-19-related school closures could increase the learning poverty rate in the low- and middle-income countries by 10 percentage points, from 53% to 63%. In the most pessimistic scenario, COVID-19 school closures might increase the learning deprivation gap by approximately 2.5 percentage points in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and Latin America” (Learning Poverty Measures and Simulations / World Bank / October 2020).
- b) The results of a survey of teachers in Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Japan, the UK, and the USA between late October and early November of 2020 are revealing (McKinsey & Company / Teacher Survey: Learning Loss is Global - and Significant / March 2021) are revealing.
  - 1. In Japan, United States, France, and United Kingdom, only 2%, 5%, 10%, and 16% percent of teachers respectively “felt that online classes were comparable to learning in person”.
  - 2. “Teachers who taught at public schools gave remote learning an average score of 4.8 (out of 10), while their peers in private schools, which often have better access to learning tools, averaged a rating of 6.2”.
  - 3. “Teachers in high-poverty schools found virtual classes to be especially ineffective, bolstering concerns that the pandemic has exacerbated educational inequalities”.

Relative to the above-mentioned observations, it is interesting to note that UNICEF maintains a database, which reports, among others, the total number of days of full school closure across the globe.

During the period March 2020 and February 2021, Panama witnessed the highest number of days (211) of full school closure. With 148 days, Jordan ranked 20<sup>th</sup> across the globe in full school closure.



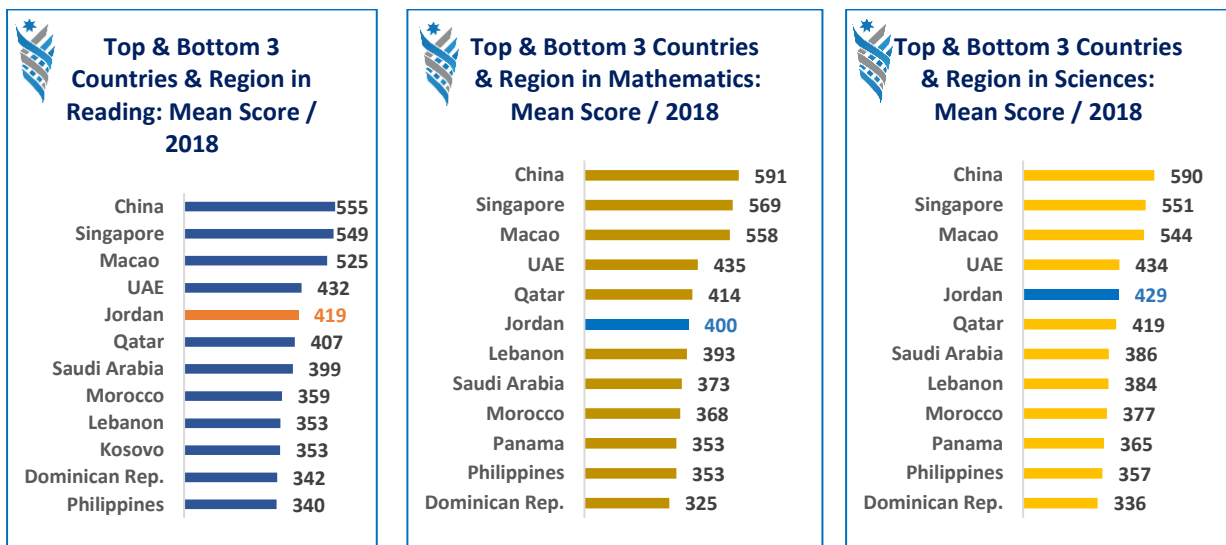
## 2. Some Observations

The fact that schools in Jordan have been fully closed since March 2021 implies that by the start of the academic year 2021/22, school students will have lost more than most countries in the world, in direct face-to-face education.

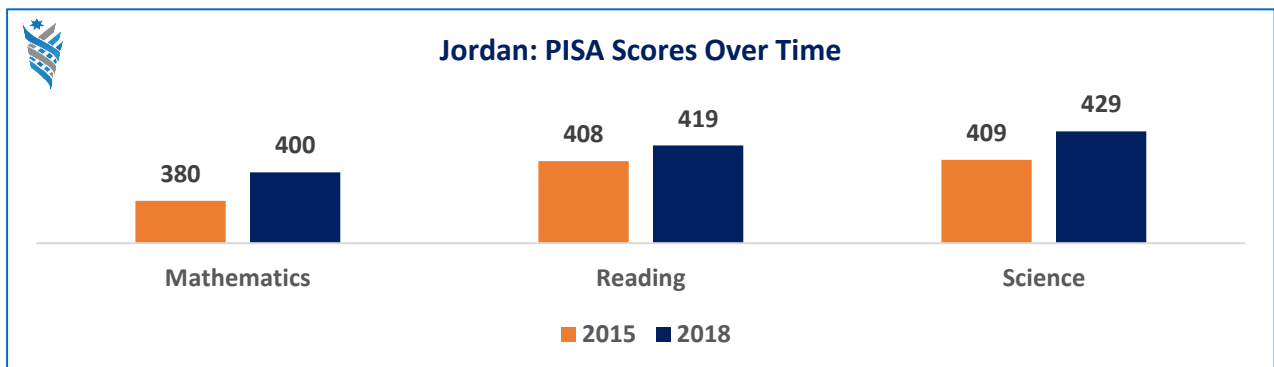
Jordanian stakeholders (public and private) should look at the quality of education in the academic year 2021/22 as an urgent matter. Indeed, this responsibility should not be underestimated if one considers few more additional observations regarding school education in the country.

1. The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) assesses the proficiency of 15-year-old students in reading, mathematics, and science. Based on the assessment of 78 countries (2018), we outline where how Jordanian 15-year old students performed.
  - A. In reading literacy, Jordan's score is 419 points. It is way lower than in China (555). The OECD average is equal to 487 points.
  - B. In mathematics, Jordan's score is 400 points. It is way lower than in China (591). The OECD average is equal to 489 points.
  - C. In science, Jordan's score is 429 points. It is way lower than in China (590). The OECD average is equal to 489 points.

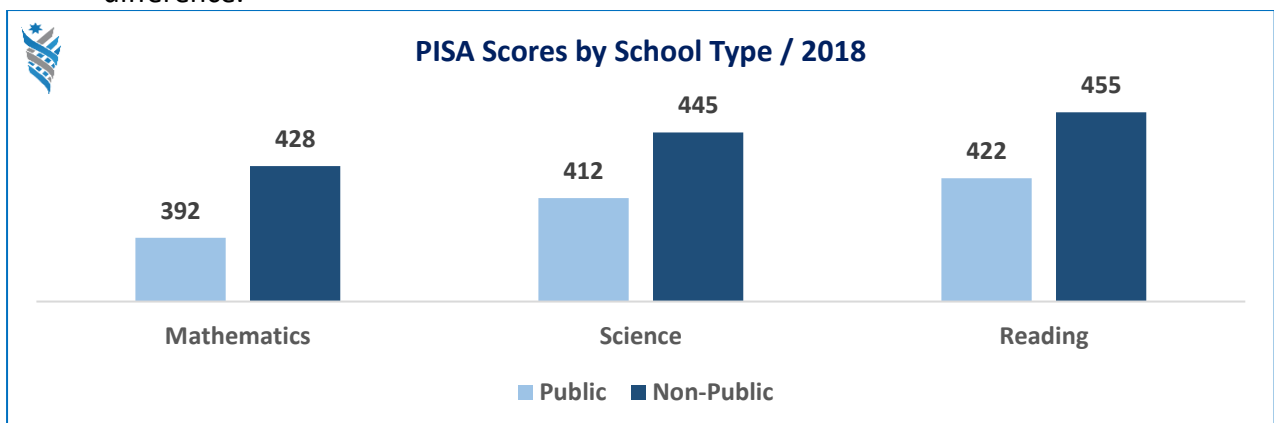
D. Relative to the participating Arab countries, the performance of Jordanian 15-year old students is satisfactory in reading, mathematics, and science.



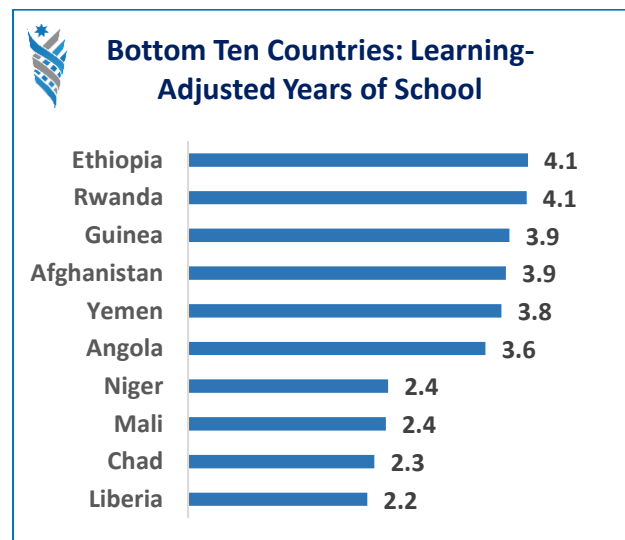
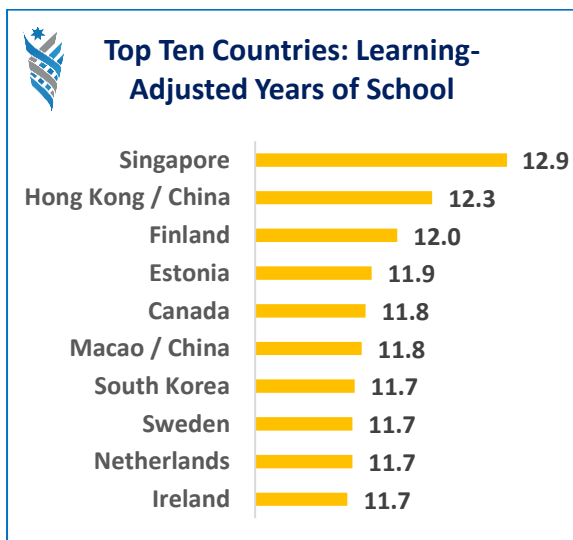
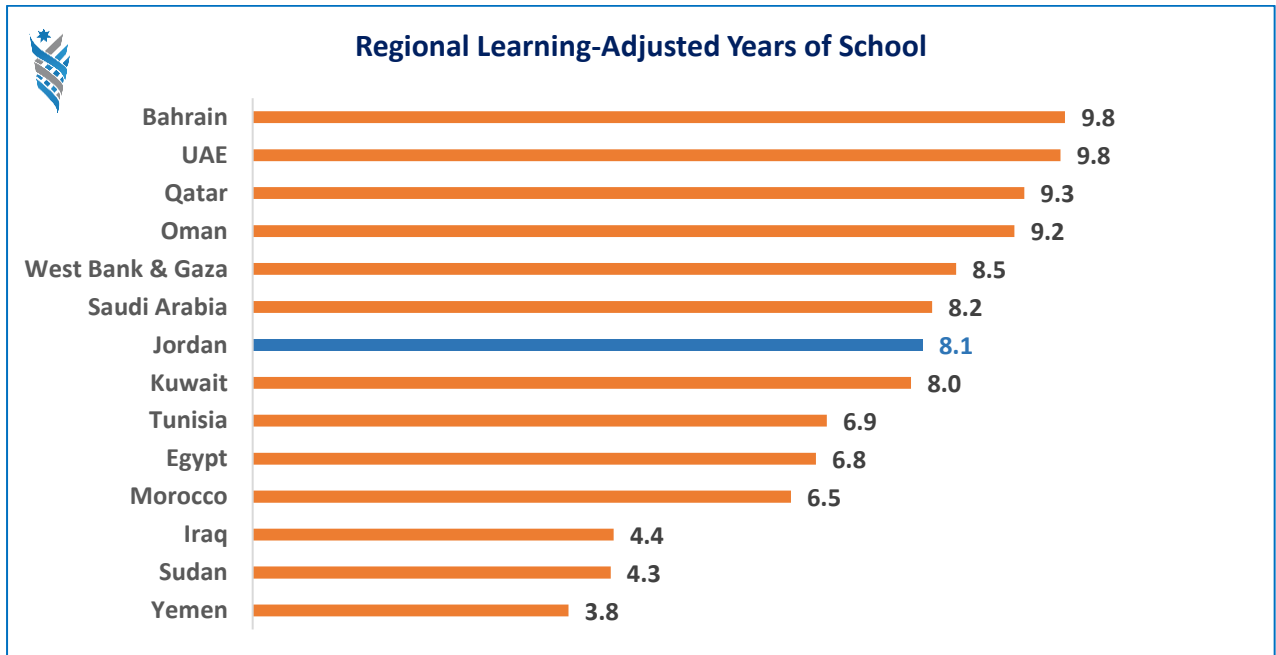
E. The last two PISA rounds show that Jordanian students have improved in all three subjects. It would be unfortunate to allow COVID-19 to reverse this positive improvement.



F. The scores of students who attend public schools are lower than those who attend non-public schools in all three subjects. It would be sad to allow COVID-19 to widen this difference.

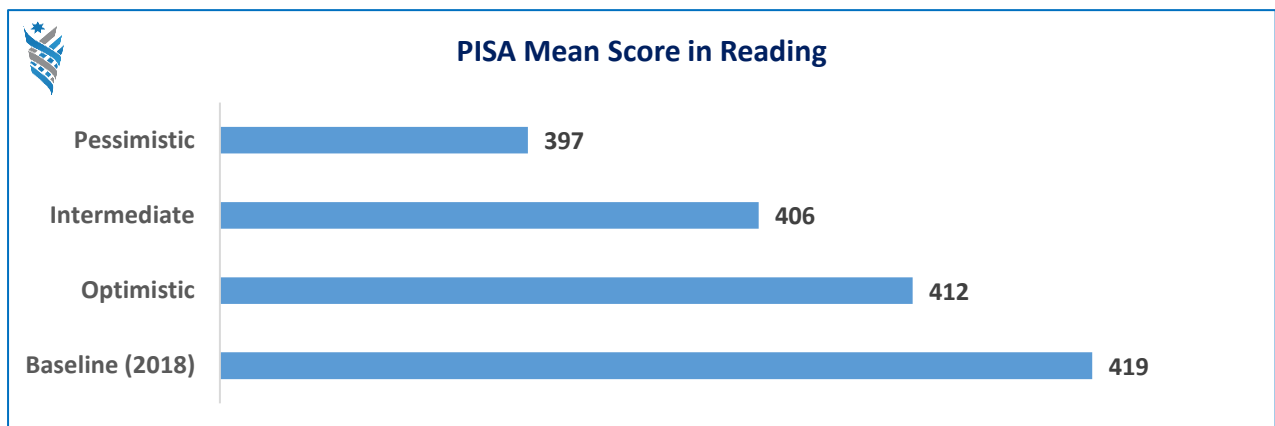


- The learning-adjusted years of schooling (LAYS) are “based on the number of years of schooling a child is expected to receive and adjusts for the quality of schooling received based on results from international student assessments”. Based on 2020 World Bank’s data, it is unfortunate to note that Jordan ranks below many Arab countries. In actual fact, while Jordanians students attend 12 school years, their effective learning is equivalent to 8.1 years only. In Singapore, this measure is equal to 12.9 years.



- In a recently published report (Education Expenditure, Enrolment Dynamics and the Impact of COVID-19 on Learning in Jordan / 28 April 2021), researchers at the World Bank simulated the potential impact of COVID-19 on learning outcomes in Jordan. Their results clearly illustrate the magnitude of the education sector challenge.

- A. “The pandemic may reduce LAYS in Jordan by an estimated 0.4-0.9 years”.
- B. COVID-19 threatens to undo years of hard-earned progress in improving children’s learning, as evidenced by the simulated impact on PISA reading scores. In the optimistic scenario, COVID-19 will erase almost the entire progress made by Jordan between PISA 2015 and PISA 2018’.



- C. “Learning losses of students affected by the COVID-19 pandemic will translate into losses in future earnings. For Jordanian students, average future annual earnings may fall by as much as 8 percent”.

### 3. In a Nutshell

Hopefully, the world will be free from COVID-19 before the start of the 2021 / 2022 academic year. Assuming that this is the case, all relevant stakeholders must admit that the pandemic has set back learning for almost all students, whose performance is already relatively low in the PISA assessment.

It is imperative to compensate the learning loss of students who attend public and private schools alike. Within this context, a myriad of policy options are available and these include assessing learning loss and monitor progress when children return to school, adjusting the school calendar, introducing remedial programs, adjusting the scope of contents to be covered, introducing accelerated learning programs, recruiting new teachers, increasing class time, and others.