

Research partnership brings mindfulness/yoga practices to schools in Middle East

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Palestinian children participating in the Transformative Life Skills (TLS) program. Findings indicate significant and meaningful effects on student school engagement, emotion regulation, mental health, and precursors to violence in high-risk, inner-city communities. Credit: Penn State

Palestinian educators, health professionals, social workers and refugee service providers recently received training in [Transformative Life Skills](#)

[\(TLS\)](#)—a social-emotional learning program that aims to reduce students' stress and promote social-emotional health and physical wellness through mindfulness and yoga training—from a team of trainers and researchers from Penn State, the University of California at San Francisco (UCSF) and the Oakland-based nonprofit Niroga Institute.

Transformative Life Skills (TLS)—which involves training in yoga postures, breathing techniques and centering meditation—has been shown to help [students](#) to focus, to regulate their emotions and to enhance their resilience in the face of severe stress and trauma.

For the past year, university researchers have partnered with yoga instructors from the Niroga Institute to support the implementation of TLS in Palestinian government and refugee camp schools across the West Bank.

"The results have been remarkable," said Maha El-Sheikh, a mental health professional with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). "Students, parents and teachers consistently report that TLS has improved the students' focus and concentration, enhanced classroom climate and improved interactions at home between children and their parents and families."

Positive feedback to educators and administrators at the UNRWA led to plans to substantially expand the TLS program in schools across the West Bank. With grant funding from the Give Back Yoga Foundation, a team of trainers and researchers recently conducted a series of TLS trainings for over 200 educators, [health professionals](#), [social workers](#) and refugee [service providers](#) throughout the West Bank. According to reports, several participants already have begun to teach TLS in their schools. Team members plan to follow up with trainees throughout the year, while independent researchers assess program efficacy and evaluate program outcomes.

"Our experimental findings on TLS's effectiveness with at-risk populations in the United States have been very promising," said Jennifer Frank, research assistant professor in the Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center at Penn State and co-developer of the TLS program. "We are finding significant and meaningful effects on measures of student engagement in school, emotion regulation, [mental health](#) and precursors to violence among students in high-risk inner-city communities. We are excited by the opportunity to partner with the UNRWA to begin to explore whether these effects generalize to a more diverse international population of students and teachers."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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