Basic education in Lebanon: Rapid Education and Risk Analysis and Social Inclusion Analysis (RERA+SI)

17 August 2021

This material is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).
The contents are the responsibility of QITABI 2 and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

Table of Contents

Acronyms

CERD	Centre for Educational Research and Development[1]
DOPS	*Direction d'Orientation Pédagogique et Scolaire*
INEE	International Network of Education in Emergencies
INGO	International non-governmental organizations
LBP	Lebanese Pound (currency)
LU-FP	Lebanese University, Faculty of Pedagogy
MEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
PITB	Pre-service and In-service Training Bureau

Acknowledgement

This report was technically developed by QITABI 2 research consultant, Dr. Bassel Akar, Associate Professor of Education.

[1] Also referred to as CRDP (*Centre de Recherche et de Développement Pédagogiques*).

Executive Summary (English)

This *Basic Education in Lebanon: Rapid Education and Risk Assessment and Social Inclusion Analysis (RERA+SIA)* provides an evidence-informed, good-enough analysis of the challenges and opportunities in ensuring that all children in basic education (grades one to six) in Lebanon fulfil their right to quality education through formal schooling. Since October 2019, Lebanon continues to face challenges through political uprisings, a collapsed economy with its currency devalued over 90% and more than half the population below the poverty line. The RERA+SI examines the longstanding and even new risks posed in basic education in Lebanon. Through a comprehensive desk review of published research and policy documents and qualitative data collection through interviews, this snapshot analysis provides new knowledge on (1) the wider contextual risks to education, (2) groups affected by those risks, (3) the current resilience and coping strategies that various groups practice, that can provide opportunities to build community resilience; and (4) the potential opportunities of addressing risks, building self-reliance and promoting collective and sustainable solutions leveraging local culture and norms.

Desk review

The desk review comprises three sections. The first examines **official policy** as published by the MEHE and CERD. Relevant literature includes the main aims of the national curriculum for cycles one and two, decrees relevant to curricular reform and five key national education strategies since the most recent, 1997 national curriculum. These national education strategy documents are the following: (1) National Education Strategy; (2) Quality Education for Growth; (3) Teaching and Learning in the Digital Age; (4) National education plan to integrate people with special needs and (5) Reaching All Children with Education (RACE I & II). The second section reviews **academic and grey literature** in English and Arabic that is evidence-informed and within the research scope of basic education in Lebanon. The third section presents **selected risks and challenges** that have emerged from the literature review that affect the availability of access to and quality of basic education in Lebanon. The presentation of the desk review not only identifies the many risk factors that affect basic education in Lebanon but also clarifies how basic education is affected

by these risks and demonstrates the ways in which these risks intersect and exacerbate each other.

Among the number of themes in education policy and practice emerging from the desk review, we highlight three that can inform further investigations into how the recent compounded crises increase the vulnerabilities of the education sector and its stakeholders, especially children. **Curriculum, pedagogy and the professionalization of school-based practitioners** are inter-related dimensions of education in a democratic political system, reflected in Lebanon's education policies. However, studies suggest a more centralized system of practice. For example, curriculum development processes involve mostly, if not only, decisionmakers at the CERD and MEHE. This positions teachers as primarily deliverers of curricular content, which puts far more emphasis on substance than critical pedagogies for knowledge co-construction. The literature also shows increasing **direct threats to the vulnerability of children**. With the worsening economic crisis and necessity to access online learning spaces, children from low to middle-income and refugee and displaced families have become increasingly vulnerable to poverty, inaccessible schooling online and violence or neglect at home. Moreover, many children are further at risk of gender-based violence and dropping out of school when parents turn to marrying their young daughters or expecting their young sons to take on full-time, paid work. In addition, children with special educational needs and disabilities are further marginalized because learning support is apparently unavailable. Thirdly, the literature brings to question the **governance of education strategies, policies and studies**. The MEHE and CERD have produced a number of strategy documents that address the various dimensions of the education sector. However, reports on progress and development of these strategies are largely unavailable online. Moreover, they also appear to solely rely on quantitative indicators of success, which can overlook testimonials of change that are critical for transformative change.

Primary data collection

Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with key informants from three main education sector groups: international non-governmental organizations, government

agencies and school-based practitioners. Within the government sector, participants from the MEHE were coaches from the DOPS (n = 3) and directors of units (n = 3) and from the CERD included directors (n = 3) and academic specialists (n = 4). The teachers (n = 33) and principals (n = 5) came from five public schools, one from each governorate: Mount Lebanon, Beirut, Nabatieh, North Lebanon and Baalbek-Hermel. All five also host the second shift for Syrian displaced children; however, all participants worked only in the regular, day shift. Unstructured conversations were administered with only a few of the teachers to learn about work and home, revealing relevant issues that were not initially considered. Questions were designed to cover four domains: (1) literacy and numeracy, (2) teacher education, (3) government policy and research and (4) response to crises. Responses were probed further with questions on approaches towards social and emotional learning, vulnerable children, transitions from kindergarten to first grade and responses during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic school closures and economic collapse.

Findings by INEE Minimum Standards

Foundational Standards

Coordination among the offices at the government level, especially MEHE and CERD, appears to be either minimal or instable. Those from the two agencies, however, have reported degrees of progress in coordination and joint work. Communication channels between directorates, administrative units and school-based practitioners appear to be unilateral, top-down. Principals and teachers have virtually little or no opportunity to feed into evidence-informed decision-making at the government level. Even when participating in implementing projects and programs funded by international and local NGOs, teachers and principals are often positioned as recipients of resources developed at a higher level for them to implement in school. Parents were often described as agents who provide (e.g. parents giving their phones to their children to use) or prevent (e.g. fathers withdrawing their daughters from school) access to school and learning. Most teachers explained how parents are instrumental to their children's learning during crisis situations by following up on their work at home, explaining the concepts and giving feedback.

Teachers expressed hope in parents to teach their children some of the basic competencies they have missed over the past two years.

Access and Learning Environment

The MEHE has apparently been rather swift in ensuring that Lebanese children leaving private schools (mainly subsidized) have a desk in public schools. However, children struggle to access resources and experiences afterwards. Only children with advanced digital devices (e.g. smartphones/laptops, sufficient RAM and memory), electricity (access to generator and government power) **and** connectivity (affordable and reliable WIFI) can access synchronous learning activities. Pay terms and conditions for contractual teachers resulted in strikes, leaving children without provisions of learning for at least 6 weeks in 2021. The two aforementioned points have also affected Syrian displaced children, leaving them with virtually no access to online learning since March 2020. Children in younger years – especially in cycles 1 and 2 – have last priority in family to access the shared device among siblings. Also, cycles 1 and 2 seem to be given no priority when online learning resources were produced for the official exam years, grades 9 and 12. Based on teachers' testimonies, girls appear to be at most risk of leaving school, even though their registration figures seem to surpass males towards the end of cycle 2 and up to secondary school. Indeed, statistical figures suggest that males are at greater risk of dropping out in cycles 3 and 4.

Teaching and Learning

an out-of-date curriculum, the dominant pedagogical culture and published learning and teaching resources that do not promote approaches to effective learning were identified as core structural and cultural challenges. Within a highly-centralized system of curricular reform, teachers are largely seen as deliverers of knowledge with virtually no role in curriculum development. Training and professional development opportunities were also limited. The default approaches to teaching and learning literacy and numeracy have focused primarily on mastery through repetition and practice, giving very little room for disciplinary knowledge and effective learning online. Parents too have reinforced the emphasis on achievement and

submitting correct answers to teachers. Formative assessment was valued by many teachers as a practice to monitor children's learning, but was reportedly lost during online learning. Children have lost nearly two years of schooling, but have been promoted up the grade levels. Teachers are concerned about how children are going to learn the basic competencies needed to excel in the new grade level.

Teachers and Other Education Personnel

While adapting to the crises over the past two years, teachers have communicated different expressions of burnout. The majority of teachers in basic education are women. Mostly women have expressed grievance over managing between the household and teaching, writing lesson plans, marking and schedules for online training sessions on using the online platforms that many teachers have missed. The majority of teachers in Lebanon are on contractual terms. They do not benefit from social services and receive salaries every six months or so. Contractual teachers experienced the suspension of their salaries when schools closed owing to the pandemic and the devaluation of their salaries owing to the economic crisis. Teachers in the second shift for Syrian displaced children have not been paid since March 2020. Cycles 1 and 2 are lower stake stages of basic education and, so, teachers in basic education receive different or lesser support than those in grades 9 and 12.

Education Policy

According to interviews with key informants from the MEHE and CERD, several government directorates, units and departments face challenges in inter-ministerial coordination. MEHE and the Ministry of Telecommunications failed at attempts to coordinate in providing connectivity to teachers and children. The directorates, units, and departments at MEHE and CERD struggle with power dynamics and little coordination. Responses to crises appear strictly top-down, exclusive and delayed. The MEHE presented a draft back to school plan in July 2020 and a draft distant learning strategy shared in April 2021.

Conclusions

The RERA+SI identifies five risk sources and suggests approaches to address these risks.

Risk source 1. Lost learning

Children, especially Syrian displaced children and nearly half the children from low-income families who missed all or most classes, have lost nearly two years of schooling, but have been promoted across the grade levels. They will have missed much of the basic competencies necessary to learn the grade-level curriculum they have been promoted into. The children in cycle 1, especially, will also have missed critical social and emotional learning experiences through typical social and learning struggles and growths at school. Teachers will struggle between returning to basics and teaching the curriculum.

Risk source 2: Post-trauma stress among children and parents

Children returning to school will have experienced two years of instability and possible forms of direct violence or social injustice at home, in the community or at work. Parents are likely to experience a form of burnout and may not be in an emotional state needed to support their children.

Risk source 3: Exclusion and marginalization of teachers

Learning and teaching resources for classrooms are mostly developed by non-teachers. This positions teachers as recipients, threatening the sustainability of new approaches. Initiatives to enhance teacher professionalization (e.g. in-service, professional development) do not include written qualification awards. Education development strategies do not address long-standing employment terms and conditions, including contracts, benefits, payment schedules and well-being, particularly regarding burnout for women who manage domestic and work responsibilities simultaneously as a result of gender-based violence at home.

Risk source 4: Exclusion of vulnerable children in learning

Basic education-age children are more neglected than children in cycles 3 and 4, at school and at home. Children with refugee legal status are even more marginalized, namely refugees. Children in school adopt surface approaches to learning through recitation and reproduction exercises enforced at home and in the classroom. Children risk not gaining the disciplinary knowledge critical for mastering conceptual understandings and directing collaborative, dialogic and critical pedagogies.

Risk source 5: Fragility of education governance structures

While official-based stakeholders are critical for the sustainability of education development and aid interventions, the involvement of school-based stakeholders across all intervention stages are also fundamental to sustaining initiatives. Also, reporting on tracks and results of previous strategies and development work is largely inaccessible or unavailable. Research reporting at MEHE and CERD are limited to factsheets.

الملخص التنفيذي

يقدّم هذا البحث بعنوان "التعليم الأساسي في لبنان: التعليم السريع، تقييم المخاطر وتحليل مستوى الشموليّة الاجتماعية"، تحليلًا مدعومًا بالأدلة عن التحديات والفرص بهدف ضمان حقّ حصول جميع الأطفال في مرحلة التعليم الأساسي (الصفوف من الأول إلى السادس) في لبنان على التعليم الجيد من خلال التعليم النظامي. أمّا لبنان، فيواصل مواجهة التحديات منذ تشرين الأول ٢٠١٩، منذ بدء الانتفاضة السياسية التي أدّت إلى الانهيار الاقتصادي والمالي، إذ انخفضت قيمة العملة الوطنية بنسبة تزيد عن ٩٠ في المائة، وأصبح أكثر من نصف السكان تحت خط الفقر. في هذا السياق، ينظر هذا البحث في المخاطر الطويلة الأمد وتلك المستجدّة التي يواجهها التعليم الأساسي في لبنان.

من خلال مراجعة شاملة للأبحاث المنشورة ولوثائق السياسات العامة، وجمع البيانات النوعية نتيجة للمقابلات التي أجريناها، يوفّر هذا التحليل السريع معارف جديدة حول (١) المخاطر السياقية الأوسع التي يوجهها قطاع التعليم؛ (٢) المجموعات المتأثرة بهذه المخاطر؛ (٣) القدرة على الصمود واستراتيجيات المواجهة التي تنتهجها المجموعات المختلفة، والتي يمكن أن توفّر فرصًا لبناء قدرة المجتمع على الصمود؛ و(٤) الفرص المحتملة لمواجهة المخاطر وبناء الاعتماد على الذات وتعزيز الحلول الجماعية والمستدامة التي تعتمد على الثقافة والدراية المحلية.

الاستعراض المكتبي

يتألف الاستعراض المكتبي من ثلاثة أقسام: يبحث الأول في **السياسات الرسمية** كما نشرتها وزارة التربية والتعليم العالي والمركز التربوي للبحوث والإنماء. وتشمل الأدبيات ذات الصلة الأهداف الرئيسية للمنهج الوطني للحلقتين الأولى والثانية، والمراسيم والقرارات الرسمية ذات الصلة بتحديث المناهج الدراسية، وخمس استراتيجيات تعليمية وطنية رئيسيّة منذ المنهج الوطني الأخير الصادر عام ١٩٩٧. وتضمّ هذه الوثائق استراتيجيات التعليم الوطنية الآتية: (١) استراتيجية التربية الوطنية؛ (٢) توفير التعليم الجيّد من أجل تحقيق النمو؛ (٣) التعليم والتعلّم في العصر الرقمي؛ (٤) الخطة التربوية الوطنية لإدماج الأشخاص ذوي الاحتياجات التعليمية الخاصة؛ و(٥) إيصال الحقّ بالتعليم إلى جميع الأطفال (**RACE I & 2**).

يستعرض القسم الثاني **الأدبيات الأكاديمية والمنشورات غير الرسميّة** باللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية، المدعومة بالأدلة والتي يصبّ نطاق بحثها في التعليم الأساسي في لبنان. ويعرض القسم الثالث **مخاطر وتحدّيات مختارة** برزت خلال مراجعة الأدبيات، والتي

تؤثر على توفّر التعليم الأساسي وجودته والحصول عليه في لبنان. ولا يحدد الاستعراض المكتبي عوامل الخطر العديدة التي تؤثر على التعليم الأساسي في لبنان فحسب، بل يوضح أيضًا كيف يتأثر التعليم الأساسي بهذه المخاطر ويشير إلى تقاطع هذه المخاطر وتفاقمها.

من بين عدد من المواضيع المرتبطة بسياسات وممارسات التعليم، التي انبثقت عن الاستعراض المكتبي، نسلّط الضوء على ثلاثة يمكن أن نسترشد بها للتعمق في بحثنا ولنحاول أن نفهم كيف تؤدي الأزمات المعقّدة، مع التركيز على الأزمة الأخيرة، إلى تفاقم نقاط الضعف على مستوى قطاع التعليم وأصحاب المصلحة، وخاصة الأطفال. وتعتبر المناهج التربوية والأساليب التعليمية وإضفاء الطابع المهني على الممارسين في المدارس أبعادًا تربوية مترابطة في نظام سياسي ديمقراطي، تنعكس في السياسات التربوية في لبنان.

غير أنّ الدراسات تشير إلى وجود نظام ممارسة مركزيّ لا بل آحادي. فالمعنيّون الأوّلون، إن لم يكن الوحيدون، في تطوير المناهج الدراسية مثلاً، هم صانعو القرار في المركز التربوي للبحوث والإنماء ووزارة التربية والتعليم العالي. ونتيجة لذلك، يصبح المعلّمون مجرّد مقدّمين لمحتوى المناهج الدراسية، ما يعلّق اهتمامًا أكبر على مضمون المادة بدلاً من التركيز على طرق التدريس النقدية لبناء المعرفة التشاركية. إضافة إلى ذلك، تُظهر الأدبيات **زيادة تعرّض الأطفال للخطر**؛ فمع تفاقم الأزمة الاقتصادية، أصبح أطفال الأسر من ذوي الدخل المنخفض إلى المتوسط واللاجئين والنازحين أكثر عرضة للفقر والعنف المنزلي أو الإهمال، وغير قادرين على الوصول إلى التعليم عبر الإنترنت.

إضافة إلى ذلك، يتعرّض العديد من الأطفال لخطر العنف القائم على النوع الاجتماعي والتسرب من المدرسة، وخاصة عندما يعمد الأهل إلى تزويج بناتهم القاصرات أو يتوقعون أن يعمل أبناؤهم القصّر بدوام كامل لقاء أجر. من ناحية أخرى، يتعرّض الأطفال ذوو الاحتياجات التعليمية الخاصة والإعاقات لمزيد من التهميش نظرًا لعدم توافر الدعم التعليمي لهم. ثالثًا، تثير الأدبيّات التساؤل حول **حوكمة الاستراتيجيات التربوية وسياساتها ودراساتها**. فقد أنتجت وزارة التربية والتعليم العالي والمركز التربوي للبحوث والإنماء عددًا من الوثائق الإستراتيجية التي تتناول الأبعاد المختلفة لقطاع التربية. غير أنّ التقارير حول التقدّم المحرز

على مستوى هذه الاستراتيجيات وتطويرها غير متاحة إجمالاً على الإنترنت. كما يبدو أنها تعتمد فقط على المؤشرات الكميّة للنجاح، والتي يمكن أن تتغاضى عن شهادات التغيير التي تعتبر أساسيّة لتحقيق التحوّل.

جمع البيانات الأوّلية

تمّ جمع البيانات الأوليّة من خلال مقابلات شبه منهجيّة أجريت مع مقدّمي المعلومات الرئيسيين من ثلاث مجموعات رئيسية في القطاع التربوي: المنظمات غير الحكومية الدولية والوكالات الحكومية والممارسين في المدارس. على مستوى القطاع الحكومي، ضمّ المشاركون من وزارة التربية والتعليم العالي مرشدين من مديرية الإرشاد والتوجيه (عدد ٣)، ومدراء الوحدات (عدد ٣)؛ ومن المركز التربوي للبحوث والإنماء، مدراء (عدد ٣) وأكاديميين متخصصين (عدد ٤). وأتى المعلّمون (عدد ٣٣) والمدراء (عدد ٥) من خمس مدارس رسميّة، واحدة من كلّ محافظة: جبل لبنان وبيروت والنبطية وشمال لبنان وبعلبك – الهرمل. وهذه المدارس تستضيف الدوام المسائي للأطفال النازحين السوريين، غير أنّ المشاركين يعملّون فقط في دوام قبل الظهر.

قابلنا بعض المدرّسين فقط وطرحنا عليهم أسئلة حول عملهم وحياتهم الأسريّة، ما كشف لنا عن قضايا ذات صلة لم ننظر فيها في البداية. أمّا الأسئلة فصمّمناها لتغطية أربعة مجالات: (١) الإلمام بالقراءة والكتابة والحساب، (٢) تعليم المدرّسين، (٣) السياسة الحكومية والبحوث، (٤) الاستجابة للأزمات. ثمّ تعمّقنا في الأجوبة بطرح أسئلة إضافية حول المقاربات المتّبعة تجاه التعلّم الاجتماعي والعاطفي والأطفال المعرّضين للخطر والانتقال من روضة الأطفال إلى الصف الأول والاستجابة خلال الأزمات، مثل جائحة كوفيد–١٩ وإغلاق المدارس والانهيار الاقتصادي.

نتائج الحدّ الأدنى من معايير التعليم: الشبكة المشتركة لوكالات التعليم في حالات الطوارئ

المعايير الأساسية

يبدو أن التنسيق بين المديريات والوحدات الإدارية في القطاع العام، وخاصة وزارة التربية والتعليم العالي والمركز التربوي للبحوث والإنماء، إما محدود أو غير ممنهج ومع ذلك، فقد أفاد ممثلو المؤسستين عن إحراز تقدّم في عملية التنسيق والعمل المشترك مؤخرًا. كما يبدو أن قنوات الاتصال بين المديريات والوحدات الإدارية والممارسين في المدارس أحادية الجانب، ومن أعلى إلى أسفل؛ فالمدراء والمعلّمون لا يتمتّعون إلا بفرصة ضئيلة أو معدومة تقريبًا لإثراء عملية صنع القرار المستنيرة بالأدلة في القطاع العام. وحتى عندما يشاركون في تنفيذ المشاريع والبرامج المدعومة من قبل المنظمات غير الحكومية الدولية والمحلية، غالبًا ما

يتمّ اعتبارهم كمتلقّين للموارد التي طوّرت على مستوى أعلى لينفّذوها في المدرسة. أمّا الأهل فيوصفون عادةً بأنهم المسؤولون الذين يوفّرون لأولادهم (مثلاً، هواتفهم لأطفالهم لاستخدامها) أو يمنعونهم (مثلاً، يسحبون بناتهم من المدرسة) من الوصول إلى المدرسة والحصول على التعلّم. وأوضح معظم المعلمين كيف أنّ الأهل يلعبون دورًا حاسما في تعلّم أولادهم خلال الأزمات من خلال متابعة عملهم في المنزل، وشرح المفاهيم وإبداء الآراء. وأعرب المعلمون عن أملهم في أن يقوم الأهل بتعليم أولادهم بعض الكفاءات الأساسية التي فوّتوها خلال العامين الماضيين.

إمكانية الحصول على التعليم والبيئة التعلميّة

يبدو أن وزارة التربية والتعليم العالي كانت سريعة إلى حدّ ما في ضمان حصول الأطفال اللبنانيين الذين يتركون المدارس الخاصة (خصوصاً شبه المجانية) على مقعد في المدارس الرسمية. غير أن الأطفال يعانون للحصول على الموارد والخبرات بعد ذلك. فاؤلئك فقط الذين لديهم أجهزة رقمية متقدمة (مثل الهواتف الذكية / أجهزة الكمبيوتر المحمولة، وذاكرة الوصول العشوائي RAM والذاكرة)، والكهرباء (المولدات والطاقة من شركة كهرباء لبنان)، والاتصالات (شبكة انترنت WIFI مقبولة التكلفة وموثوقة)، يمكنهم متابعة الصفوف على الانترنت بصورة متزامنة. من ناحية أخرى، أدّت أحكام وشروط تسديد رواتب الأساتذة المتعاقدين إلى إضرابات عدّة، ما ترك الأطفال من دون تعلم لمدة ٦ أسابيع على الأقل عام ٢٠٢١. وقد أثرت النقطتان المذكورتان أعلاه أيضًا على الأطفال السوريين النازحين، ما تركهم بلا إمكانية الوصول تقريبًا إلى التعلّم عبر الإنترنت منذ مارس ٢٠٢٠.

إضافة إلى ذلك، الأطفال الصغار، خاصة في الحلقتين الأولى والثانية، هم آخر من لديهم إمكانية الوصول إلى الجهاز المشترك بين أشقائهم. ويبدو أيضًا أن الحلقتين الأولى والثانية لا تُعطَيان أيّ أولوية عند إنتاج موارد التعلّم عبر الإنترنت، فالتركيز ينصبّ إجمالاً على صفوف الامتحانات الرسمية، أي الصفين ٩ و ١٢. وبناءً على شهادات المعلمين، يبدو أن الفتيات هنّ الأكثر عرضة لخطر ترك المدرسة، على الرغم من أن أعداد المسجّلات تفوق أعداد الذكور المسجّلين في نهاية المرحلة الثانية وحتى المرحلة الثانوية. كما تشير الإحصاءات إلى أن الذكور أكثر عرضة للتسرب في المرحلتين الثالثة والرابعة.

التعليم والتعلّم

إنّ المناهج القديمة والثقافة التربوية السائدة وموارد التعلّم والتعليم المتاحة التي لا تعزز مناهج التعلّم الفّعال، كلّها عوامل تشكّل تحدّيات هيكلية وثقافية أساسية. وفي نظام إصلاح المناهج الذي يتّسم بدرجة عالية من المركزيّة، يقتصر دور المعلمين إلى حدّ

كبير على نقل المعرفة، إذ يتمّ إقصاءهم عن تطوير المناهج الدراسية. إلى ذلك، كانت فرص التدريب والتطوير المهني للأساتذة محدودة. أمّا المناهج الافتراضية لتعليم وتعلّم مهارات الكتابة والقراءة والحساب فركّزت في المقام الأول على التعلّم من خلال التكرار والممارسة، ما يعطي مساحة محدودة جدًا للمعرفة الاستكشافية والتعلّم الفعال عبر الإنترنت.

أمّا الأهل فركّزوا على نتائج أولادهم وعلى تقديمهم الإجابات الصحيحة للمعلمين. واعتبر العديد من المعلّمين التقييم التكويني بمثابة ممارسة لمراقبة تعلّم الأطفال، غير أنّهم لم يطبّقوه خلال التعلّم عبر الإنترنت. إلى ذلك، فقد الأطفال حوالي عامين من الدراسة، ومع ذلك تمّ ترفيعهم إلى المستوى الأعلى. لذلك، يشعر المعلمون بالقلق إذ يتساءلون كيف سيتمكن الأطفال من اكتساب الكفاءات الأساسية اللازمة للتميّز في مستوى الصف الجديد.

المعلّمون وسائر العاملين في التعليم

خلال مرحلة التكيّف مع الأزمات على مدار العامين الماضيين، عبّر المعلمون بطرق مختلفة عن شعورهم بالإرهاق. وتجدر الإشارة إلى أن معظم المعلمين في مرحلة التعليم الأساسي هم من النساء اللواتي أعربن عن صعوبة التوفيق بين الأسرة والتعليم، ووضع خطط الدروس العلامات والجداول الزمنية للدورات التدريبية عبر الإنترنت حول استخدام المنصات عبر الإنترنت، والتي غاب عنها العديد من المعلمين. من ناحية أخرى، إن معظم المعلمين في لبنان متعاقدون وبالتالي لا يستفيدون من تغطية الضمان الاجتماعي أو أي مزايا أخرى، وهم يتقاضون رواتبهم كلّ ستة أشهر تقريبًا. وقد عانوا أيضًا من تعليق رواتبهم عندما أغلقت المدارس بسبب جائحة كورونا ومن انخفاض قيمتها بسبب الأزمة الاقتصادية.

أما معلمو الدوام الثاني لأطفال النازحين السوريين، فلم يتلقوا رواتبهم منذ آذار/ مارس ٢٠٢٠. والمعلمون في مرحلة التعليم الأساسي يتلقون دعمًا مختلفًا أو أقلّ من معلّمي الصفين التاسع والثاني عشر.

سياسة التعليم

بناءً على المقابلات التي أجريناها مع مقدّمي المعلومات الرئيسيين من وزارة التربية والتعليم العالي والمركز التربوي للبحوث والإنماء، تبيّن لنا أنّ العديد من المديريات والوحدات والدوئر الحكومية تواجه تحديات في التنسيق بين الوزارات. في الواقع إن محاولات وزارة التربية والتعليم العالي للتنسيق مع وزارة الاتصالات بهدف توفير الاتصال للمدرسين والأطفال، باءت بالفشل. إضافة إلى ذلك، تواجه المديريات، والوحدات، والدوائر في وزارة التربية والمركز التربوي للبحوث والإنماء مشكلة تداخل المسؤوليات

وغياب التنسيق. أمّا الاستجابة للأزمات فتبدو فقط من أعلى إلى أسفل، وحصريّة ومتأخرة؛ فقد قدمت وزارة التربية والتعليم العالي مسودة خطة العودة إلى المدرسة في تموز/يوليو ٢٠٢٠ ومسودة استراتيجية التعلّم عن بُعد في نيسان/ أبريل ٢٠٢١.

الاستنتاجات

تحدد دراسة التعليم الأساسي في لبنان: التعليم السريع، تقييم المخاطر وتحليل مستوى الشموليّة الاجتماعية، خمسة مصادر للمخاطر وتقترح طرقًا لمعالجتها.

المصدر الأول للخطر. ضياع فرص التعلّم

الأطفال، وخاصة الأطفال النازحون السوريون وحوالي نصف أطفال الأسر ذات الدخل المنخفض الذين لم يلتحقوا بصفوفهم لمدّة طويلة، فقدوا عامين من الدراسة تقريبًا، ومع ذلك رُفّعوا إلى مستوى الصف الأعلى. تاليًا، سيكونون قد خسروا الكثير من الكفاءات الأساسية اللازمة لتعلّم المناهج الدراسية في مستوى الصف الذي رُفّعوا إليه. وسيكون الأطفال في المرحلة الأولى تحديدًا قد خسروا أيضًا تجارب التعلّم الاجتماعية والعاطفية الأساسيّة التي يكتسبونها عادة من من خلال تحديات التعلّم والنمو الاجتماعي والتعليمي النموذجي في المدرسة. لذلك سيعاني الأساتذة من حالة ضياع بين العودة إلى المفاهيم الأساسية أو تدريس المنهج الدراسي الحالي.

المصدر الثاني للخطر: ضغوط ما بعد الصدمة على الأطفال والأهل

سيكون الأطفال العائدون إلى المدرسة قد عانوا من عدم الاستقرار لمدّة عامين ومن أشكال محتملة من العنف المباشر أو الظلم في المنزل أو في المجتمع أو في العمل. ومن المرجّح أن يعاني الأهل أيضًا من الإرهاق، وقد لا يكونون في حالة عاطفية مناسبة تمكّنهم من دعم أطفالهم.

المصدر الثالث للخطر: استبعاد وتهميش المعلمين

غالبًا ما يتم تطوير موارد التعلّم والتدريب على يد غير المعلّمين. وهذا ما يجعل من المعلمين مجرّد متلقين، ما يهدد استدامة المقاربات الجديدة. من ناحية أخرى، لا تتضمن مبادرات تعزيز احتراف المعلم (مثل التطوير المهني أثناء الخدمة) شهادات تأهيل مكتوبة. ولا تتناول استراتيجيات تطوير التعليم أحكام وشروط التوظيف على المدى الطويل، بما في ذلك العقود والمزايا وجداول

الدفع ورفاه المعلّمين، ولاسيما فيما يتعلق بالإرهاق بالنسبة للنساء اللواتي يتولّين مسؤوليات المنزل والعمل في الوقت عينه، نتيجة للتمييز القائم على النوع الاجتماعي في المنزل.

المصدر الرابع للخطر: استبعاد الأطفال الضعفاء من التعلّم

يتعرّض الأطفال في سن التعليم الأساسي، في المدرسة والمنزل، للإهمال أكثر من أترابهم في الحلقتين الثالثة والرابعة. والأطفال اللاجئون هم أكثر تهميشًا. ويتبع الأطفال في المدرسة مقاربات سطحية للتعلّم من خلال تسميع الدروس ونقل التمارين في الصف وإعادتها في المنزل. ونتيجة لذلك، يُخشى ألا يكتسب الأطفال المعارف الضرورية لإدراك المفاهيم النظرية واتّباع الأساليب التربوية التعاونية والحوارية والنقدية.

المصدر الخامس للخطر: هشاشة هياكل حوكمة التعليم

في حين أن أصحاب المصلحة الرسميون يؤدّون دورًا حيويًّا في تطوير التعليم والقيام بالتدخلات اللازمة للمساعدة بصورة مستدامة، إلا أنّ مشاركة أصحاب المصلحة في المدرسة في جميع مراحل التدخل أمرٌ أساسيٌّ أيضًا لاستدامة المبادرات. كما أن رفع التقارير عن مسار ونتائج الاستراتيجيات السابقة وأعمال التطوير غير ممكن أو غير متاح في معظم الأوقات. وتقتصر اصدار التقاريرالقدرات البحثية في وزارة التربية والتعليم العالي والمركز التربوي للبحوث والإنماء على صحائف الوقائع (factsheets).

Introduction

Over the past two academic years (2019/20 and 2020/21), Lebanon has spiraled through an unprecedented turmoil of compounded crises. The series of recent shocks and stressors, namely October 2019 political uprisings, COVID-19 pandemic, economic collapse, Beirut port explosion have either amplified existing threats to children's rights to education or given rise to new risks and challenges. This *Basic Education in Lebanon: Rapid Education and Risk Assessment and Social Inclusion Analysis (RERA+SIA)* provides an evidence-informed, good-enough analysis of the struggles and opportunities in ensuring that all children in basic education (grades one to six) in Lebanon fulfil their right to receive quality education through formal schooling.

The scope and methods of this analysis draw on key approaches outlined in two toolkits. The Rapid Education and Risk Assessment Toolkit suggests a methodology of data collection and analysis that provides a "good enough" snapshot of existing factors that threaten the resiliency and vulnerability of teaching, community engagement, access and curricular materials (see figure 1). The second toolkit – Transforming Agency, Access and Power (TAAP) – provides a social inclusion dimension to examining the policies and provisions of those at risk of marginalization and exclusion and designing inclusive methods of data collection and dissemination (see figure 2). In analysing the findings, we draw on the five domains outlined in the INEE (2010) *Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response and Recovery*: (1) Foundational standards, (2) Access and learning environment, (3) Teaching and learning, (4) Teachers and other education personnel, and (5) Education policy.

Figure 1. RERA Conceptual framework

Figure 2. TAAP Project Management Cycle

Data was gathered during two main phases. First, we carried out a desk review on policy documents and published research in English and Arabic on the status, challenges and developments of basic education in Lebanon. For the subsequent phase, we carried out a series of semi-structured interviews with key informants from civil society (e.g. local NGOs, USAID Mission Education staff), government agencies (MEHE and CERD) and schools (e.g. parents, principals, teachers, children). Due to nation-wide lockdown for the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were carried out online. The methodology design was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Notre Dame University – Louaize.

The report opens with a brief of the recent crises in Lebanon, their impact on education and a basic structure of the national education system. A desk review follows outlining key policies for basic education and inclusion and relevant findings from academic publications. The review helps identify initial risk factors that could also be further explored during interviews. We then conducted semi-structured interviews with 33 teachers and 5 principals across 5 public schools,

13 representatives from MEHE-GDE and CERD and 4 INGO workers in education.[2] In addition to findings that revealed long-term and short-term risks, some current practices, mostly at school-level suggest potential pathways of impact.

[2] A sixth principal was contacted but not interviewed because the school did not meet the sample criteria of providing cycles 1 and 2.

Country context

Crises' impact on education

Lebanon, a republic since 1926, independent from the French mandate in 1943 and comprising 18 official sects has a long history of various destructive expressions of conflict. For over half a century, people in Lebanon have experienced protracted armed conflict, including a civil war (1975-1990), Israeli war on Lebanon (2006) and battles between the Lebanese army and militias in Palestinian refugee camps. According to the Corruption Perception Index, Lebanon ranks 137 with Kenya, Liberia and Russia out of 179 countries. Also, underrepresented groups are subject to structural violence through certain government laws that discriminate against women, refugees and domestic workers. Most recently, a series of crises unfolded starting with the anti-corruption protests that erupted on 17 October 2019 calling for the resignation and prosecution of all government officials. Only months after, the economy started its downward spiral with the crash of the LBP and breakdown of the banking sector. Simultaneously in February 2020, the COVID-19 global pandemic spread through Lebanon prompting nationwide lockdown. Only six months later, on 4 August 2020, the unregulated storage of chemicals including ammonium nitrate led to the explosion of the Beirut port leaving at least 207 dead and over 300,000 displaced. In 2021, the economy continues to collapse with the Lebanese pound losing 85% of its value in the black market, increasing shortages of fuel and pharmaceuticals and more than half the population crossing over poverty lines.

The compounded crises of shocks and stressors over the past two years have had direct and indirect impacts on education, particularly availability and accessibility of schooling (see figure 3 for outline of selected crises). During October and November 2019, protestors of the revolution closed roads with burning tires, concrete blockades and deserted cars and trucks forcing schools to close for days on end. Only a few months later when the global pandemic severely hit Lebanon, the MEHE called for schools to close starting March 2020. Teachers and families jumped to find digital solutions to learning and teaching online. In response to the public's panic over the annual official exams for Basic Education (Brevet, after grade 9) and secondary education (Baccalaureate

II, after grade 12), the Council of Ministers approved a blanket promotion to all students in Lebanon, including exemption from the official exams (Decision 1, 19/5/2020 and Decision 3, 21/5/2020). The rapid devaluation of the LBP led to teachers claiming injustice in how the MEHE was managing payments funded by donor agencies, which resulted in contractual teachers striking for up to six weeks in January and February 2021 and, for those teaching Syrian displaced children in the second shift public schools, not receiving payments for over one year. Part of this study investigates how the crises have affected the education sector, particularly for basic education, and what risk factors have these crises exacerbated or helped transform into constructive opportunities for aid and development.

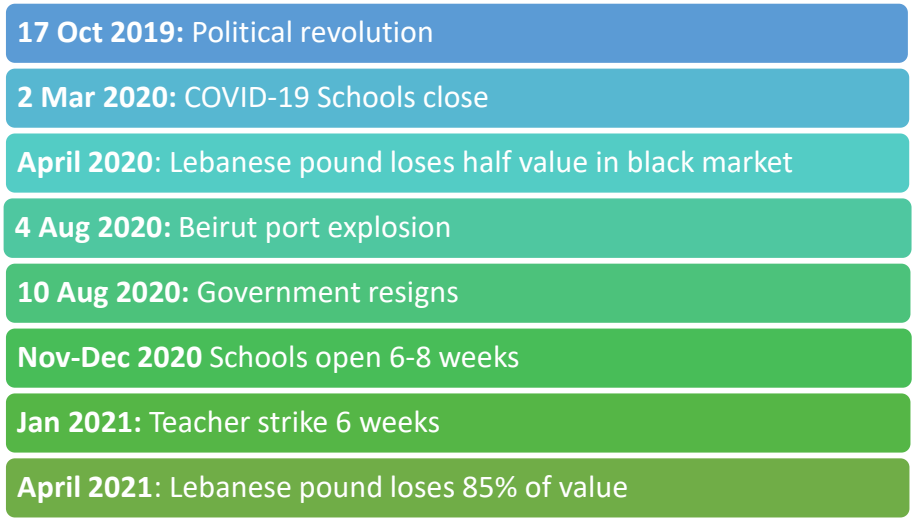

Figure 3. Timeline of selected crises over past two years

The massive explosion in Beirut damaged or destroyed 178 public and private schools in the city (UNOCHA, 2020). This includes 91 public schools catering to 28,000 students and 3,000 teachers, of which are 32 second-shift schools that cater to 16,068 Syrian displaced students. Among the 70 affected private schools, two are UNRWA schools for 42,500 students and 4,600 teachers (MEHE, 2020). These figures are slightly lower than those provided by the UN which placed the

total number of damaged education institutions at 178 (UNOCHA, 2020).[3] In addition to the physical damage, school-age children have also been displaced as their homes were badly damaged and many students, their families and teachers suffer from post-traumatic stress. This is likely to negatively affect attendance at school and undermine learning and teaching capabilities (MEHE, 2020), adding to the strains on the education sector and making it less likely that schools will be able to physically welcome students in time for the 2021/22 school year.

Overview of the education system in Lebanon

The education sector in Lebanon is governed by the MEHE, with the exception of the Ministry of Public Health regulating all nurseries for children under 3 years of age. MEHE has jurisdiction to regulate public and private schools, formal and non-formal and grade levels from kindergarten to higher education. The Directorate of General Education (DGE) is one of three directorates at MEHE; it regulates all schooling affairs from kindergarten to grade 12. Under this directorate is the *Direction d'Orientation Pédagogique et Scolaire* (DOPS), a department of coaches who visit teachers once or twice a year to observe classroom teaching, provide feedback, see if they have any questions and check the syllabus they put together for the school year. The math section at DOPS, for example, has 36 math coaches to support math teachers across Lebanon. The DGE also houses the Project Management Unit (PMU), the office that manages all education provisions for Syrian displaced children. Under the governance of MEHE but functions as an autonomous agency is the Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD). CERD is responsible for all curriculum development, publication of learning and teaching resources and teacher education. CERD was mandated under Decree No. 2356 (10 December 1971) to provide initial and continuous teacher education through *Dar el Mu'alimīn*. However, in 2002, the MEHE decreed that all teachers required a university degree and, thus, CERD only provides continuous teacher education while the Lebanese University awards the necessary written qualification

[3] The difference in figures is likely that the MEHE did not include non-formal schools or early childhood centres that were not registered with the government in its count.

through pre-service teacher education. Like DOPS is to MEHE, the Pre- and In-service Training Bureau (PITB) is to CERD providing teachers with wide curriculum of workshops to attend. The DOPS and PITB have strict mandates that limit their interactions with teachers. For example, classroom observations fall within the jurisdiction of DOPS; hence PITB trainers cannot enter classrooms. Vice versa, DOPS coaches are not authorized to organize teacher training workshops.

The Lebanese national education program comprises four cycles of formal schooling (see table 1). The first three cycles are considered "basic education" that are free and compulsory. basic education makes up the first two cycles, or grades one to six. Each cycle has three grade levels. Basic education is compulsory up until the age of 15, followed by a government exam for the *Brevet*. Graduates of basic education can then choose to continue their education at the Technical and Vocational Educational Training or secondary school through cycle 4. After secondary school, they sit for another official exam for the Baccalauréat Libanais; also referred to as the *Terminale* and recognized as the Lebanese General Secondary Certificate.[4]

[4] See description of the Lebanese education system published by MEHE at http://www.higher-edu.gov.lb/arabic/guides/other-guides/educ_sys.pdf.

Table 1. Stages and years of study in Lebanese school system

Stages	Cycles	Years		Official exams
Kindergarten		3		
Basic education	I	3	Basic education	
	II	3		
Intermediate	III	3		Brevet
Secondary	IV	3		Baccalauréat Libanais (or the Lebanese General Secondary Certificate)

Source: Ministry of Education (1997).

Formal education in Lebanon is provided through public schools and what CERD considers as the private sector: private fee-paying schools, private subsidized schools and UNRWA schools. Tuition in subsidized schools is partly covered by the MEHE. According to CERD (2020), 1,069,826 children are registered in formal education, with nearly a third in the public sector. This low figure quite likely reflects the public's confidence in public schooling, which is largely underfunded (Shuayb, 2016).[5] The private sector is highly variegated, encompassing elite schools that offer students foreign accreditations to low cost private schools that teach the Lebanese curricula. Private schools also operate with different funding structures. Whereas some schools rely on student fees, others receive partial financial aid from religious or political organizations and provide substantial scholarships or fee waivers for students. All schools must teach the Lebanese curriculum, even if they also offer foreign accreditation options.

Table 2 shows the distribution of the student population across the cycles and school sector, noting the percentage of females per cycle per type of school. Subsidized private schools cater for only basic education, with the exception of 76 students in cycle 3. While the figures show a steady decrease in student population over the grade levels, they also suggest two gender-related trends relevant to children in basic education. An increase in females in the third and

[5] Data compiled by UNESCO shows that government expenditure on education in 2013 (the last year for which data was available) accounts for just 8.6 percent of overall government expenditure. This compares to a global average of just over 14 percent.

fourth cycles suggest that male students are probably more vulnerable to dropping out of school after basic education. Also, the significantly disproportionately high number of males over females in the "General Sciences" and "Arts and Humanities" tracks in cycle 4 suggests a schooling culture that genders professions that basic school children are likely to be subject to.

Table 2. Population of students per cycle and school type with percentage of females (F)

		Public	Subsidized	Fee-paying	UNRWA
Kindergarten		57,250 (49% F)	24,839 (48% F)	130,310 (48% F)	0
Cycle 1		74,459 (48% F)	58,700 (48% F)	128,137 (48% F)	10,676 (50% F)
Cycle 2		74,476 (50% F)	49,826 (48% F)	109,463 (48% F)	11,355 (50% F)
Cycle 3		72,208 (57% F)	76 (42% F)	123,205 (49% F)	9,526 (54% F)
	Gr 10	23,792 (60% F)	0	22,769 (50% F)	1,431 (62% F)
	Gr 11 Sci	11,576 (59% F)	0	18,116 (50% F)	739 (67% F)
	Gr 11 Arts	8,089 (68% F)	0	3,954 (54% F)	747 (64% F)
Cycle 4	Gr 12 A&H	1,441 (83% F)	0	796 (62% F)	17 (35.3% F)
	Gr 12 S&E	10,155 (61% F)	0	8,081 (51% F)	1,039 (61% F)
	Gr 12 GSc	2,372 (38% F)	0	4,005 (36% F)	0
	Gr 12 LSc	6,485 (65% F)	0	9,232 (58% F)	484 (67% F)
Total		342,303	133,441	558,068	36,014
Percentage		32%	12.5%	52.2%	3.3%

Source: CERD (2020).

Note: For Cycle 4, "Sci" is Sciences, "A&H" is Arts and Humanities, "S&E" is Sociology and Economics, "GSc" is General Sciences and "LSc" is Life Sciences.

The teacher workforce is a complex dimension of the education sector in Lebanon. According to CERD (2020), less than a quarter of the teachers have written qualifications to teach that are recognized by the MEHE. The procurement of teachers has largely been shaped by a culture of sectarian-based governance where confessional identity has taken precedence over merit or qualifications (El-Amine, 2004). Historically, *Dar al Mu'alimēn* at the CERD was a department once authorized to provide pre-service teacher education. Since 2012, they stopped awarding teaching qualifications. As part of the PITB at CERD, it now provides continuous professional development through teacher workshops. Pre-service teacher education is now under the

mandate of the College of Education at the Lebanese University. The Lebanese University provides teaching diplomas only for basic education (or cycles 1 and 2). Those who teach in cycles 3 and 4 need at least a *License* (or Bachelor's degree) in the subject area. Moreover, school teachers are either tenured (*maleik*) or short-term contract (*ta'aqud*) that pays per teaching hour. Teachers under the latter do not benefit from social security, including medical and summer term salaries. Nearly 20 years ago, the MEHE turned to *ta'aqud* as a solution for hiring teachers under a restrictive government budget. However, since the 2014/15 academic year, the MEHE switched from *ta'aqud* contracting to another short-term, school-based contracting mechanism, *musta'ān bihem*. Over half the 40,796 teachers in public schools are on some form of short-term contract.

Formal schooling for refugees: A brief note

Lebanon has also long been a country of in and out migration, with important implications for education provisions and outcomes. Large numbers of Lebanese were internally displaced during the country's civil war, most of whom have not received restitution for their losses and many of whom live in heavily urbanized areas of south Beirut with comparatively low access to public services, including schools (The migration network, n.d.). Lebanon also hosts large numbers of refugees and displaced including Syrians, Palestinians, Iraqis and Sudanese. For diverse historical reasons Palestinians generally attend schools operated by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) or private schools. Although UNRWA schools fall outside the scope of this review it is relevant to note that these schools align with the Lebanese education system and teach the Lebanese curriculum. Thus, several of the issues we describe in this section, related to curriculum and assessment processes are also likely to apply to Palestinian refugees in the country.

Syrian displaced, as well as other less numerous refugee/displaced populations are officially able to attend public schools through a double shift system which was formalized in 2014 and is funded by foreign donors and UN agencies (see Watkins & Zyck, 2014). Under this system a single

school operates two school days in one: a morning shift that caters primarily to Lebanese students and an afternoon shift which is dedicated to Syrian students. The double shift system has been hailed as a “bold initiative” and lauded as a success that has prevented the emergence of a “lost generation” of refugee children and youth (Brown, 2016). However, studies that examine the education experiences of Syrian displaced have revealed a more complicated picture on the ground.

Desk review

This extended literature review forms part of the RERA+SIA. The purpose of the review is to identify the varied risks and challenges that affect the basic education sector in Lebanon. The review focuses on formal education provided by the MEHE. According to the latest MEHE data, public education accounts for approximately 32 percent of Lebanese students enrolled in formal schooling (CERD, 2019). However, this figure does not include the large number of Syrian displaced children who attend public schools through a double shift system introduced in 2014 to respond to the large number of out of school Syrian displaced (Kelcey & Chatila, 2020; Watkins & Zyck, 2014).[6] Non-formal education, privately provided basic education and schools operated by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine refugees are not included in this review.

Methodology of desk review

Academic literature was identified through the Google Scholar search engine and the ERIC online database that provides access to scholarly journals focused on education. The online database Shamaa was also used to access literature published in Arabic. Academic articles were complemented by grey literature in the form of policy reports. For this literature we carried out targeted searches of government agency websites: specifically, the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) and its Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD), which publishes statistical summaries on access to education and learning outcomes. We also identified and examined situation reports authored by international and local NGOs, multi-lateral organizations (including the World Bank and UN agencies) think tanks and research institutes within Lebanon. We focused on documents authored between 2010 to 2020. In 2010, the Education Sector Development Plan (2010-2015) was the first national education reform plan approved by the Council of Ministers since the 1994 post-civil war education reform. This time frame therefore allows us to account for longstanding risks and challenges facing basic

[6] The second shift is funded by international donor agencies.

education in Lebanon as well as the period since 2014 when the influx of Syrian displaced into Lebanon was at its peak since 2011, which significantly impacted the education sector.

Our review identifies and discusses a multiplicity of risk factors facing the basic education sector. Lebanon currently faces a trifecta of intersecting economic, political and health crises. Reflecting this, the risks facing the education sector are varied and include those related to historical conflicts within Lebanon and in neighbouring Syria, which have resulted in the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of school-age children. Risks also include politically motivated legal-bureaucratic barriers around access to education and education sector reform, human-made disasters (such as the massive explosion that occurred in Beirut in August 2020), health crises (most notably the Covid-19 pandemic), and the growing impoverishment and food insecurity facing large numbers of Lebanese and migrants in the country. To the extent that literature is available we also considered how natural disasters and community and familial violence affect basic education. We pay particular attention to the ways in which these risk factors intersect with different forms of marginalization among learners in Lebanon, including but not limited to differences related to the gender, nationality, geographical location and socio-economic status of learners.

The desk review comprises three sections. The first examines **official policy** as published by the MEHE, including the CERD. Relevant literature includes a summary of the main aims of the national curriculum for cycles one and two, decrees most relevant to curricular reform and five key national education strategies since the most recent, 1997 national curriculum. The second section reviews **academic and grey literature** in English and Arabic that is evidence-informed and within the research scope of basic education in Lebanon. The third section presents **selected risks and challenges** that have emerged from the literature review that affect the availability of, access to and quality of basic education in Lebanon. The presentation of the desk review not only identifies the many risk factors that affect basic education in Lebanon but also clarifies how basic

education is affected by these risks and demonstrates the ways in which these risks intersect and exacerbate each other.

Key education policies on education cycles 1 and 2

General curricular aims of cycles 1 & 2

The current national curriculum was published in 1997 as a result of the 1994 Education Development Plan, the main education reform initiative after the 1975-1990 civil war. History education was the only curricular program that was not reformed because of political gridlock in interpreting and selecting historical accounts. The introduction to the 1997 national curriculum sets out general aims for pre-school, basic education and secondary education. Below are the seven general aims of basic education (cycles one and two), translated from Arabic (Ministry of Education and Higher Education [Lebanon], 1997, p. 5):

a- Providing the basic amount of knowledge and skills necessary for the integration of children into a civil society, proportional to the characteristics of growth at this age, in a way that allows the child to participate effectively in the learning process;
b- Providing the child with basic language communication skills, including understanding, reading, and written and verbal expression, while stimulating a drive to read;
c- Providing the child with basic scientific and mathematical skills and with knowledge, environmental and health principles, and simple scientific terms necessary to understand some of what is happening around them and to continue studying later on;
d- Developing the child's artistic, sports, motor and aesthetic capabilities;
e- Enhancing the child's self-confidence, independence, and practicing civic behavior and collaborative work inside and outside school;
f- Providing the child with a set of knowledge, skills and values related to his society in terms of geographical, historical, cultural and demographic aspects. This includes immediate surroundings, Lebanon, the Arab world and some features of the world and the universe in order to develop a sense of place, time and identity;
g- Providing the child with positive values towards knowledge, work, the environment, progress, ethics, civilization and the other, whether this other is an individual or group.

The curricular aims of the subsequent, intermediate stage include greater engagement with public life, exploring areas of interest to choose a profession for the future and introducing the learner to using technology for learning and everyday functions. The aims of basic education

suggest a holistic approach to child development, emphasizing lifelong learning and identifying oneself as a cosmopolitan citizen. Moreover, the holistic approach is further strengthened with attention given to self-confidence, independence and collaboration. This enables deeper explorations into how social and emotional competencies are more explicitly defined and how teachers facilitate social and emotional learning through formal and non-formal education in this conflict-affected context.

On November 2, 2012, MEHE issued Decree 8931 outlining a reform for cycle 1. Building on the 1997 cycle 1 curriculum, the reform outline puts emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, exercising rights and responsibilities and embracing diversity. The decree also highlights a social-constructivist understanding of learning, a pedagogical process driven by students and a pragmatist philosophy of education by drawing on topical, everyday issues. The large portion of the decree describes assessment criteria to measure children's accuracy and expression of knowledge acquisition. The assessment appears summative in nature without mention of formative forms like feedback and self-reflection. One of the five suggested criteria allows for creative self-expression by recognizing how "unique or innovative" the student's work is. Surprisingly, the only mention found on the reformed cycle 1 curriculum appeared in Burns (2011), noting that the new program was piloted in 60 private and public schools in 2010-2011 and 100 schools the following year.

Education national strategies

Subsequent to the production of the 1997 national curriculum, five key national education strategic documents have emerged – (1) National Education Strategy; (2) Quality Education for Growth; (3) Teaching and Learning in the Digital Age; (4) National education plan to integrate people with special needs and (5) Reaching All Children with Education (RACE I & II).

1. National Education Strategy (NES). In 2006, the MEHE and World Bank commissioned the Lebanese Association for Educational Studies (LAES) to produce a vision document for education

reform, which was presented as the National Education Strategy (NES) (LAES, 2007). The document extensively lists policy and practice recommendations including stronger enforcement of law no. 686 (16/3/1998) mandating all children ages 12 and under to attend basic education. The NES also refers to some empirical evidence of more males than females at risk of dropping out of school by the end of basic education and more females in the public sector than males. However, no evidence suggesting causes or further descriptions were available.

2. Quality Education for Growth. In April 2010, the Council of Ministers approved the *Quality Education for Growth* as a national strategy for education reform that included a five-year Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP). Among the aims of the strategy include support for children with disabilities and gifted children. Implementation was set out in the ESDP that outlined ten priority areas for education development to be completed by 2015. These ten priorities were extended from the five-point NES (see table 3). International agencies like the World Bank and the EU financed selected ESDP programs. However, reports documenting activities and outcomes of the ESDP programs were not publicly available to include in this review. Nevertheless, we were able to access the World Bank authored report for the "Second Education Development Project" that was launched in November 2012 via a loan of 40 million USD (and closed December 2016). The first of its two primary objectives was to "improve teaching quality and the learning environment in general education and in preschools" with mostly quantitative-based key indicators including percentages of teachers trained and provisions of new materials and infrastructure (World Bank, 2019). Due to political instability and the influx of Syrian displaced children, 11 indicators were dropped, 8 were modified and 4 new indicators added (ibid). While the report presents initiatives undertaken by MEHE and school principals in 441 schools, there is virtually no evidence of how students and teachers organized and carried out the activities for, for example, a newly developed "culture of data-driven decision-making for school improvement" (ibid, p. 20).

Table 3. Priorities of education development endorsed by the Council of Ministers[7]

NES (2007)		**ESDP (2010-2015)**	
1.	Education available on the basis of equal opportunity	1.	Early childhood education
		2.	Improving retention and achievement
		3.	Development of infrastructure
2.	Quality education that contributes to building a knowledge society	4.	Professionalization of the teaching workforce
		5.	Modernization of school management
		6.	Achievement assessment and curriculum development
3.	Education that contributes to social integration	7.	Citizenship education
4.	Education that contributes to economic development	8.	ICT in Education
		9.	National qualification framework
5.	Governance of education	10.	Institutional development

3. Teaching and Learning in the Digital Age: Lebanon's National Educational Technology Strategic Plan. In 2012, the USAID-funded D-RASATI program to reform schools and enhance teacher education published a strategy document specifically targeting digital technology in education: *Teaching and Learning in the Digital Age: Lebanon's National Educational Technology Strategic Plan* (NETSP). The strategic plan document refers to a wider "Lebanon's Education Reform Strategy and Action Plan" launched in 2011 also under D-RASATI, which appears inaccessible online. It does, however, present alignment with the ESDP priorities, including fostering lifelong learning and wider use of technology for learning (MEHE, 2012). The 10 key activities, 6 main goals and 17 action plans for supporting the use of digital tools for learning include teacher professional development on using technology for learning and ensuring that all students and teachers have access to and effectively use technology tools for learning. The NETSP includes an operational framework for "learning" but refers to Piaget's staged development that is a narrow and outdated understanding of child development (Walsh, 2005) and to Bloom's taxonomy that

[7] The *National Education Strategy* and *ESDP* can be found on the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education website: http://www.mehe.gov.lb/Templates/Internal.aspx?PostingId=20

is long critiqued for its weak linearity (Furst, 1981). Implementation was mostly planned to take place during 2012 and 2013. No reports were available on the progress or outcomes of the planned activities. Burns (2011) reports in the NETSP accompanying desk review that initiatives in Lebanon to integrate digital technology into schooling mostly lack coordination, follow-up and measures of impact and evaluation.

4. National education plan to integrate people with special needs. Particular reform initiatives were drawn to specifically support children with special educational needs. The MEHE and CERD (2012) produced the *National education plan to integrate people with special needs*. The plan comprises ten main aims that include widening access, diversifying approaches to learning and building professional capacities. They propose an implementation timeline of 18 months. The CERD later established in 2014 "The Center of Educational and Support Services for People with Special Educational Needs" to provide free support to children from 3 to 18 years old in public and subsidized private schools. However, data on the number of children living with disabilities in Lebanon and their access to quality education opportunities is lacking (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Moreover, several studies have highlighted the gap between MEHE policies which seek to promote inclusion and the implementation of these policies (Kiwan, 2021; Khochen and Radford 2012).

5. Reaching All Children with Education (RACE I and RACE II): After the breakout of war in Syria in 2011, an unprecedented influx of nearly half a million forcibly displaced children migrated from Syria into Lebanon. In 2013, the MEHE with support from international agencies produced an education roadmap to guide international and national efforts of aid and development. The first strategy titled "Reaching All Children with Education" (RACE I) was launched in 2014 and covered the period 2014 to 2016 (MEHE, 2014). It was followed by "Reaching All Children with Education II" (RACE II) which runs from 2017 to 2021 (MEHE, 2016). They aim to ensure that all children – with special emphasis on supporting the most vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian – have equal access to school and quality learning and teaching. RACE I and RACE II effectively replaced the

previous National Education Strategy which began in 2010 and was supposed to run until 2015 (MEHE, 2010). In other words, the onset of the crisis suspended the implementation and further development of existing policy orientation which had been oriented toward education content and quality. Instead policies were superceded with a narrower focus on rapidly expanding access for new arrivals (Kelcey & Chatila, 2020).

The focus of RACE II expanded somewhat to concerns about quality however, the primary strategy remained that of expanding access to education for Syrian displaced through a second-shift school schedule in the afternoon in selected public schools. In parallel a non-formal education strategy titled the National Policy for Alternative Education Pathways was developed by the MEHE in cooperation with UNESCO (MEHE, 2019). This strategy seeks to standardize and centralise the response through the public education system and requires that non-formal programs serve as bridges to the formal system that help displaced and Lebanese students to access and persist within the formal education system (MEHE, 2019). The number of public schools providing second-shift schooling rose from 88 schools in 2013/14 to 313 schools in 2016/17. Moreover for 2016/17, nearly 40% of forcibly Syrian displaced children were enrolled in public schools, with 65% of them in the second-shift. Data on the implementation of RACE I and II has been collected by the PMU and UN agencies and is often only available in ad hoc or aggregated form. Moreover, indicators of success in RACE I and RACE II are mostly, if not all, based on quantitative values such as increased percentages of stakeholders participating in development activities and decreased numbers of cases of violence and neglect. Also included under the auspices of RACE II is a large Accelerated Learning Program (ALP). The ALP is designed to allow children aged 7-24 who have missed two years or more of schooling to catch up with the Lebanese educational system (USAID, 2020).

Evidence-informed research

This section presents academic research published in English and Arabic on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in basic education in Lebanon. Among the literature published in Arabic and

found on the Shamaa online database, 38 out of the 40 studies are graduate or post-graduate dissertations at the Lebanese University. The review of evidence-informed research on basic education in Lebanon draws mostly on literature published in English. Although the desk review does not intend to evaluate the quality of research carried out, the quality of most basic education research in Lebanon falls short of clear justifications of the issues examined and robust data collection methods.

Curriculum design and development

The processes of curricular reform and development can support the general aims of education for fostering a democratic and inclusive school. Participation from school-based stakeholders like students, teachers, principals and parents can extend beyond consultations that solicit feedback and visions. Having autonomy to experiment, develop new approaches and critically review within public discourse circles generates a democratic school culture while evolving curricular aims, concepts and resources (Kelly, 2009; Priestley, Biesta, Philippou, & Robinson, 2016). Attempts led by CERD to reform curricula have not only appeared rather stagnant considering the last national curriculum reform took place in 1997, but mostly remain exclusive to subject coordinators at CERD with virtually no open consultation channels with teachers. BouJaoude and Ghaith (2006) point out that one limitation to the 1997 national curriculum was that students and teachers were not even consulted. The history education curriculum stands out as program whose reform is strongly guarded by political actors attempting to find consensus on a narrative for Lebanon's diverse and sensitive histories. History education failed all post-civil war curricular reform attempts. The stalemate of history education reform in Lebanon is mostly attributed to the search for a single narrative among historians and politicians (Frayha, 2004; van Ommering, 2015), an approach to history education reflecting authoritarian political ideologies (Seixas, 2000).

The design of the national curriculum raises concern when objectives focus almost entirely on the acquisition of content information. Studies on the Lebanese national curriculum and

classroom pedagogies suggest an overemphasis on substantive knowledge with little or no direction to learning disciplinary approaches to knowledge construction of the subject matters. Substantive knowledge comprises the content, facts, principles and theories that, as Counsell (2011) argues, should be combined with disciplinary knowledge to learn the methods of critical pedagogies to answer enquiries. The seven-volume critical analysis of the national curriculum published by the LAES (2003) reveals a dominant substantive approach to curricular content. While the Lebanese science curriculum puts emphasis on various aspects of scientific literacy, it disregards how science knowledge is produced (Boujaoude, 2002). A similar absence of disciplinary approaches is found in history and civic education (Akar, 2016b) and mathematics (Henningsen & Zebian, 2003 cited in Chahine, 2013). The nearly sole emphasis on substantive knowledge and absence of disciplinary approaches to knowledge co-construction could be significant factors explaining how Lebanon is among the lowest scoring countries in the world in international assessments like PISA and TIMSS (OECD, 2015, 2018). Moreover, the culture of acquiring substantive content knowledge prevailed also in the PISA Lebanon country report published by CERD that attributed the low scores to information missing in the national curriculum for children to learn (CERD, 2018).

Teaching and approaches to learning

Teachers not having a written qualification to teach is common in low to middle income countries affected by conflict (World Bank, 2005). In Lebanon, the CERD reports that less than 23% of teachers have a written qualification recognized by the MEHE with only 10% having completed a teaching diploma (CERD, 2019). Initiatives to provide continuous teacher education have, by and large, employed a delivery model of professional development. Their theory of change appears to assume that teachers will adopt new approaches to learning, teaching and assessment when shown how and use resources produced for them; teachers' immediate and gradual dismissals of approaches and resources demonstrate an unsustainable nature of teacher professional development design in Lebanon (Akar, 2020a). Moreover, continuous teacher education through professional development workshops have little input from teachers in the conceptualization

phase, have little or no follow-up and are largely perceived by teachers as important for early career professionals (Nabhani & Bahous, 2010).

Approaches to learning in oppressive societies largely resemble a model of "banking" information into children's minds (Freire, 1970). Many if not most education systems in conflict-affected areas disempower children from making informed decisions and living in diversity and thereby upholding principles of human rights and democracy. Approaches to effective learning, however, support the development of complex cognitive functions. When children notice how they learn, review approaches that they consider worked and did not work and then think about how to address difficulties in their learning, they become empowered through meta-learning and take responsibility and action of their own learning (Watkins, Carnell, Lodge, Wagner, & Whalley, 2001). Another concept is self-determination theory where children who are given autonomy (which happens when teachers are autonomous themselves) and are able to ascribe purpose to the learning activity, they generate a more sustainable intrinsic nature of motivation that supersedes external motivators (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). In conflict-affected areas where education systems construct children as uncritical recipients of knowledge, teachers rely almost entirely on extrinsic motivators like rewards and punishments to shape what children learn, which we observe in research on classroom learning in Lebanon.

Approaches to pedagogy are largely determined by how teachers understand the construction of knowledge, translate the curriculum and use assessment to support learning. The 1997 national curriculum defines the topics, concepts and applications to learn (LAES, 2003), but the disciplines of knowledge construction are barely visible within a dominant approach of knowledge transference. In math education in Lebanon, an intervention demonstrated how children in grade five developed multimodal skills to solve math problems, a far more cognitively complex approach than the monomodal traditions of learning math through recall, repetition and altering symbols (Chahine, 2013). Also, language teaching and learning has emerged as a critical dimension to schooling in a tri-lingual curriculum and as a challenge to children affected

by war-related trauma. One concern of a multilingual education system is the practice of code-switching in the classroom. Code-switching in language classes where more than one language (Arabic, English, French) are used either in the same sentence or discussion is common in Lebanese schools but delay the mastery of a language (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1999). Learning science, especially in basic public schools, is still mostly reduced to receiving information published by a textbook or presented by a teacher with virtually no opportunity to critically question and design an inquiry (Abd-El-Khalick et al., 2004). Disempowering pedagogies by soliciting "correct" answers and discouraging open dialogues were also documented in kindergartens (Abu El-Haj, Kaloustian, Bonet, & Chatila, 2018) and civic and history education classrooms (Akar, 2016a, 2020b).

Private and public education sectors have directed large-scale initiatives in digitizing administrative and pedagogical dimensions to schooling. We must bear in mind, however, that while technology can enrich the learning experience by providing access to resources and different platforms to learn, Norbert Pachler from the Institute of Education in London maintains that no research has yet to show that digital tools in education *enhance* learning. In Lebanon, the use of digital technology to improve schooling administration, classroom management and learning experiences appear to rely on the alignment of reformed school infrastructure with teacher professional development on models of learning and using technology. In other words, the operations of digital technology in schools are dependent on the (1) teachers' qualifications (written and experiential) and autonomy to innovate and (2) available infrastructure for electricity, Internet and maintenance. Studies on technology like digital citizenship show that public schools may have the hardware, but lack access to the Internet (Ghosn-Chelala 2019).

It is also worth noting that many teachers who teach in the second shift are hired on a contract basis, meaning they are paid per the number of classes they teach. The qualification requirements for these teachers are lower than for teachers in the first shift. Nor do they benefit

from professional development opportunities. However, we identified no research that examines the implications of this professional environment on teaching practices and outcomes.

Inequity and crisis

This section presents information on the inequities facing learners in Lebanon. These inequities are structural; they are historically rooted and reflect issues of education governance. Moreover, the inequities have been caused or exacerbated by external shocks and stressors to the education system; for example, the arrival of large numbers of displaced from Syria to Lebanon since 2012 or the more recent impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. First, we describe the overarching context and policy environment. Second, we provide evidence of the ways in which this has generated and exacerbated inequalities between different groups of learners. Third, we present information on the various policies and programs that have been designed and implemented to manage and mitigate these inequalities.

Governance of the national education system

The World Bank notes that the "The institutional framework [of the Lebanese MEHE] dates to the 1950s and lacks the basic public finance management (PFM) functions of a modern administration." (World Bank, 2017, p.59). In practical terms for example the MEHE does not have units specifically designated to manage strategic planning, performance management, monitoring and evaluation and internal audits. It also heavily depends on temporary advisors and temporary human resources who may lack dedicated training to carry out the functions tasked to them. Of note, teachers are tasked with responsibilities that go far beyond teaching (such as accounting) and the education directorates are increasingly relying on contractual teachers to address capacity gaps (World Bank, 2017). The availability and accessibility of reliable data are other significant concerns. Although a monitoring information system exists, it has not been institutionalized through policies or clearly defined roles that delineate the responsibilities of the different units related to data collection and use (World Bank, 2017).

The Syrian displaced crisis has shed further light on underlying governance problems. Studies have documented minimal collaboration between public, private, NGO and INGO actors regarding the education of displaced Syrian (Shuayb et al., 2014) as well as poor coordination across different government ministries (El Ghali et al., 2016). Although the initiation of the RACE I strategy in 2014 was intended to make education available and accessible to Syrian displaced children and improve the education sector, considerable confusion remains on the part of school level actors regarding how to implement policies and the level of authority that they have over policy implementation (Kelcey & Chatila, 2020). Competition around decision-making and confusion around policy response is quite common in large-scale, international responses to displaced crises (Buckner, Spencer & Cha, 2017). Such administrative struggles maintain a disconnect between education policy and practice and potentially undermine transparency and accountability in educational governance. Transparency International has described corruption as endemic in Lebanon (Courson, 2020). In recent months, allegations of corruption have been levelled against the MEHE's handling of donor funds that were earmarked to support the education of displaced children (e.g. Dhaybi, 2020). While these allegations have yet to be fully investigated, they point to the need for systemic reform and much greater accountability to students and their families.

Conflicts affecting vulnerable children and their right to receive education

Access and inclusion

Access to basic education (measured by enrolment rates) for Lebanese children is high in Lebanon. However, continuity of education beyond basic levels is lower for poorer families (World Bank, 2017). There are also important gender related inequalities. Although there is overall gender parity in enrolment between Lebanese males and females, Lebanese women are unable to pass on their citizenship to their children which creates inter-generational barriers to accessing education. Conversely, girls tend to stay in education for longer than boys and girls out-perform boys (World Bank, 2017). Data from 2016 reveal that although only 15 percent of

students had to repeat a class during the basic public education cycle, boys were more likely to repeat than girls.

Rates of Syrian displaced children enrolled in formal education are especially low. Officially, displaced children have access to Lebanese public schools through the second shift system which is heavily subsidized by UN agencies and foreign donors. This is intended to ensure that displaced children receive an education that is accredited by the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education. However, 58 percent of registered school age Syrian displaced children in the country continue to lack access to formal education (UNHCR, 2019a). Over the last ten years reports and studies issued by NGOs, the UN, think tanks and academics have documented the numerous barriers that displaced students' face in accessing quality education opportunities in Lebanon. These barriers include the impacts of poverty which prevent families from meeting the nonfee costs of schools and have forced many school aged children into child labour. Additional barriers include a proliferation of bureaucratic shifts which obfuscates enrollment processes (Kelcey & Chatila, 2020). Displaced students also face considerable barriers to learning, including discrimination and violence by teachers and other students, inaccessible schools that require expensive transportation, and struggles learning the host community's language of instruction (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2019; Mendenhall et al., 2017; Shuayb et al., 2014).

The national education system continues to fall short of ensuring that all schools in Lebanon are inclusive for students with disabilities and special learning needs (Wehbi, 2006). Lebanese law guarantees people with disabilities equal opportunities to educational provision in a mainstream setting. However, schools are not legally obliged to accept students with disabilities or special needs or adapt to their particular needs. The result is a significant disconnect between official policy and the practices implemented at the school level. Khochen and Radford (2011) found that while many teachers expressed generally positive attitudes regarding the importance of including students with disabilities in mainstream basic schools, they had reservations about including

students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. There was also a lack of teacher training on this issue and a lack of specialist teachers to support inclusion (ibid, 2012). Similar experiences were reported in second-shift public schools where principals were unprepared but found themselves attending to Syrian displaced children's emotional and academic struggles that were uncommon among Lebanese students in the day shift (Mahfouz, El-Mehtar, Osman, & Kotok, 2020).

Learning performance outcomes

The results of Lebanese students in the 2015 and 2018 PISA tests for reading, mathematics and science were much lower than the OECD averages for these subjects. Whereas Lebanese students from public and private sectors scored on average 353 points for reading, the OECD average was 487 (OECD, 2018a, p. 1). Indeed, Lebanon ranked in bottom pool of seven countries in both these years. The OECD's analysis of the Lebanese data identified socio-economic status as a reliable predictor of test results.

Knowledge of in-country performance outcomes is somewhat limited. One apparently under-addressed concern is the population of marginalized Lebanese and migrants who are at high risk of drop-out and failure (Shuayb, 2016; Kawar and Tzannatos, 2013). Of the students who do remain in school and complete the official exams, girls outperform boys in the Brevet and Secondary exams (cited in USAID, 2020, p. v). In spite of this, labour market participation and returns to education are much lower for females than males which suggests deeper structural barriers to entering the labour force for females (World Bank, 2017).

With the exception of Palestinians who attend schools operated by UNRWA, the CERD does not report disaggregated learning outcomes by student nationality. Thus, it is not possible to compare the results of Syrians who attend the second shift in public schools with their Lebanese counterparts. The most recent PISA tests do, however, offer some indication of learning outcomes by migrant status. In these tests, students with an immigrant background (6 percent

of the sample) scored lower on average than their Lebanese peers, even after accounting for socio-economic differences between the two groups (OECD, 2018a, p. 6).

Child safety and protection

The MEHE with support from UNICEF declared a child protection policy to enforce a zero-violence climate across all schools in Lebanon. This policy framework emerged as an intermediary response to the Lebanese Penal Code article 186 that legitimizes corporal punishment for disciplinary purposes. Corporal punishment was officially outlawed in public schools in 1974; however, until 2014, Lebanon's penal code exempted teachers from liability for inflicting "culturally accepted" levels of physical pain on children in the name of discipline (Human Rights Watch, 2019, p. 3). Although this exemption was subsequently removed through an amendment of article 186, Lebanon still lacks legislation that criminalizes corporal punishment against students. Indeed, violence against students by teachers and school principals remains widespread especially among younger socially vulnerable children (Human Rights Watch, 2019). In addition to violating basic child protection outcomes, corporal punishment and violence are a known cause of student drop-out.

Policy and programmatic responses

Comprehensive education reforms were promised by the Government of Lebanon in the post-war period (1994) and again in 2010 (Shuayb, 2016). The 1994 Education Reform Plan resulted in new education policy frameworks, including the 1997 national curriculum. Over the last 20 years however, reforms attempts have struggled to materialize owing to entrenched political differences rooted within the country's difficult histories and compromising implications for the present. The result is an outdated education system that reproduces the status quo and fails to address the needs of the most marginalized Lebanese and migrant children and entrenches socio-economic disparities and life chances (Tzannatos, 2017). There is also a tendency to manage attempts at reforms and change through the creation of temporary committees, rather than through the fundamental restructuring that is needed to bring about educational transformation.

Crisis response: Displaced

The MEHE has committed to a dedicated education response to the influx of over half a million school-age Syrian displaced children in Lebanon. Initially led by multi-lateral agencies and NGOs, the MEHE has asserted notably more influence over this response since 2013. Today, a hybrid response exists whereby Syrian displaced children are officially accommodated within Lebanese public schools through a second shift, where they are taught by Lebanese teachers. The majority of funding for this response comes in the form of external aid from international donors channelled through multi-lateral agencies, notably UNICEF and UNHCR. Moreover, the double-shift scheme nominally reflects the global policy to include Syrian displaced children within host state education systems (UNHCR, 2012; UNHCR, 2019b): an approach that is at odds with Lebanon's refusal to consider long-term settlement options for the displaced.

The two sequential "national" strategies – RACE I and RACE II – have guided this response. RACE I and RACE II are largely focused on creating and expanding access to education, with RACE II including more provisions related to the quality of education than its predecessor. RACE I did support an initial rapid expansion of access to education for Syrian students, although data on enrollment rates shows that these gains were unevenly experienced across Lebanon's different regions. Whereas enrollment rates of 93 percent were recorded in Beirut, corresponding numbers in the Bekaa were just 15 percent (Jalbout, 2015, p. 11). Furthermore, while ensuring increased access to education for displaced students was undoubtedly a pressing and important issue (e.g. Watkins & Zyck, 2014) the parallel need for improving the quality of public education through longer term investments and strategies related to curriculum reform, student-centred pedagogies and strengthened educational governance were not addressed (e.g. Jalbout, 2015). In other words, the humanitarian dimensions of education policy and practice over the last ten years have largely bypassed the need to address the underlying structural problems facing the Lebanese education system (e.g. Kelcey & Chatila, 2019).

Crisis response: pandemic and explosion

As in many other parts of the world, the response to the Covid-19 pandemic involved a nationwide lockdown. Schools were closed from March 2020 for the remainder of the 2020/21 academic year. The high stakes Brevet and Baccalaureate exams were also cancelled. Policy reports and anecdotal media on the topic suggest that the prolonged school closures owing to political unrest and the Covid-19 pandemic are only exacerbating pressures on families who already struggle financially and must now manage distance learning solutions for their children (Inter-Agency coordination Lebanon, 2020). In particular, virtual learning is prohibitively expensive for many Lebanese and migrant families because of the cost of information communications technology (e.g. hardware and Internet connection), the country's irregular electricity supply and the high cost of private generators. In a recent online survey with teachers in Lebanon, 46% experience power cuts between 3 to 12 hours per day, 71% use WiFi and over half reported they taught themselves how to use devices and online learning platforms (Abu Moghli & Shuayb, 2020).

In the aftermath of the Beirut explosion, the MEHE conducted a physical needs assessment to ascertain the number of damaged schools and the extent of the damage. Field visits were made to affected public schools to inspect the damage and identify repair needs and the MEHE reached out to private schools to gather information on their needs. These efforts were conducted under the auspices of the "Beirut Blast Response Committee" which was established to oversee and coordinate the response with international and local partners. Costs of damage, excluding damaged equipment, are estimated at 22.5 million USD of which 7.5 million is needed for public schools (MEHE, 2020).

Two overarching objectives guide the response. The first is to restore access to education services by undertaking urgent repair works of the affected school facilities. The second objective is to ensure the readiness of public schools to recover and continue to provide education services. Three phases of activities are planned to achieve these goals. Physical repairs of schools were

due to be undertaken in August, beginning with the most at risk and damaged buildings. Further school rehabilitations are planned for September and October. These rehabilitations will include ensuring school connectivity and readiness for in-school and distance learning approaches. Psychosocial support will also begin in September and continue until November (MEHE, 2020).

Selected emerging themes for further investigation

The literature revealed a number of issues that indicated risks and opportunities to supporting a sustainable and quality basic education in Lebanon. In general, the studies, policies and initiatives appear to view cycles one and two as lower-stake stages in child development and education. The desk review also revealed limited access to and availability of information on progress of education aid and reform initiatives. Finally, the overarching essentialist philosophy of education that puts first and foremost emphasis on knowledge acquisition undermines the national aims of education for inclusion, active participation and upholding principles of human rights and democracy.

Governance of education strategies, policies and studies

Reports on commissioned studies and outcomes of education sector development work (e.g. ESDP) are scarcely found online. We also found that national education strategies appeared to rely almost solely on quantitative indicators of success like improvement of scores in rating scales and numbers of teacher participation, student retention and student enrolment. Such measures are convenient for international agencies reporting to the main donor sources. However, they reinforce a culture of development that overlooks the humanization of change, such as Lebanese teachers' emotional responses to professional development that can impeded or sustain change (Karami-Akkary, Mahfouz, & Mansour, 2019). Also, governance practices of transparency and equal opportunities are still vague but critical to ensuring the availability of quality education.

Curriculum, pedagogy and the professionalization of school-based practitioners

Curriculum, pedagogy and the professionalization of school-based practitioners are inter-related dimensions of education in a democratic political system, reflected in Lebanon's education

policies. Sustainable curricular reform and transformations in pedagogy occur when teachers use their autonomy and research skills to innovate learning activities and produce resources (Fullan, 2001; Stenhouse, 1975). The literature, however, suggests a more centralized system of practice. Within the education workforce, some school-based practitioners (e.g. teachers, principals) have been selected and employed on criteria other than written qualifications in teaching or school leadership (e.g. El-Amine, 2004). Furthermore, curriculum development processes involve mostly, if not only, decisionmakers at the CERD and MEHE. This positions teachers as primarily deliverers of curricular content, which puts far more emphasis on substance than critical pedagogies for knowledge co-construction. The desk review also showed that contemporary conceptual frameworks of learning, knowledge construction, assessment, child development and curriculum emerged in studies published either in universities or by researchers who have received their training in higher education institutions in North America or Western Europe.

Direct threats to vulnerability of children

Prior to the start of the October 17 revolution, the education system was already struggling to ensure children's rights to accessing education. With the worsening economic crisis and necessity to access online learning spaces, children from low to middle-income and refugee/ displaced families have become increasingly vulnerable to poverty, inaccessible schooling online and violence or neglect at home. Moreover, many children are further at risk of gender-based violence and dropping out of school when parents turn to marrying their young daughters or expecting their young sons to take on full-time, paid work. In addition, children with special educational needs and disabilities are further marginalized under compounded crises and distant learning because they have even more limited access to supplemental learning support. There is little reference to these populations of young children over the past decade. Field investigations were necessary to identify potential assets and sources of resilience within the system to minimize, at least, the factors that threaten their right to receive education.

Methodology of primary data collection

In gathering primary data, we interviewed key informants from the education sector. We resorted to only qualitative methods of inquiry. Interviews provided more reliable findings and inclusive participation than close-ended questionnaires considering limited mobility and strict reliance on online communication during the pandemic lockdown. The interviews also allowed for in-depth inquiry into specific interventions and recent events that published literature has either only started to examine or overlooked. The study design was approved by the IRB at Notre Dame University – Louaize.

Sample set

Key informants were selected from three main education sector groups: international non-governmental organizations, government agencies and school-based practitioners. Table 6 lists those interviewed for this study. Within the government sector, participants from the MEHE were coaches from the DOPS (n = 3) and directors of units (n = 3) and from the CERD included directors (n = 3) and academic specialists (n = 4). The teachers and principals came from five public schools, one from each governorate: Mount Lebanon, Beirut, Nabatieh, North Lebanon and Baalbek-Hermel. All five also host the second shift for Syrian displaced children; however, all participants worked only in the regular, day shift.

Table 6. Sample set of key informants interviewed

Sample group	Total	Females
INGO	4	4
Gov MEHE	6	4
Gov CERD	7	5
Principals	5	4
Teachers Math	10	9
Teachers Arabic	11	11
Teachers French	4	4

Teachers English	8	8

Data collection instruments and procedures

While most of the key informants participated in semi-structured interviews, unstructured conversations were administered with only a few of the teachers to learn about work and home, revealing relevant issues that were not initially considered. Questions were designed to cover four domains: (1) literacy and numeracy, (2) teacher education, (3) government policy and research and (4) response to crises. Responses were probed further with questions on approaches towards social and emotional learning, vulnerable children, transitions from kindergarten to first grade and responses during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic school closures and economic collapse (see table 7). Some informants were able to speak to only three of the four themes; teachers and principals, for example, did not discuss government policy and research. Interviews ran for 60 to 80 minutes per participant. With the exception of a director at CERD, all interviews took place either online or over the phone when the Internet connection was poor.

Table 7. Conversation prompts for key informant interviews

Theme	Conversation prompts
Literacy and Numeracy	*What curricula/pedagogies have been most successful? Challenging?* *What new directions are in place? Who is developing them?*
Teacher education	*What pre-service and in-service teacher education has been available?* *What are the main challenges teachers faced during the recent crises?* *What responses did teachers take during the crises that were helpful?*
Government policy & research	*What strategies have been recently developed and how?* *What studies or reports have been carried out related to basic education?* *How have the recent crises amplified or introduced risks to the education sector?* *How has the MEHE responded to the crises over the past two years?*
Crises	*Who has been made more vulnerable as a result of the recent crises?* *What responses do you feel have worked?*

What are some of the main challenges to the responses and crises?
What are some responses that you would like to see develop?

Data analysis first required that all interview notes or transcriptions were typed and included demographic information and subheadings of conversation prompts. The subheading titles were derived from the question themes (see table 7 above). While these provided *a priori* codes, or an outline of themes already defined by the questions, we also identified emergent codes for unexpected themes (Stemler, 2001), such as teacher well-being. As part of the RERA objective of producing a "good enough" analysis within a limited timeframe, themes were coded directly in the findings report during the process of key informant interviews and first readings of each interview document (see Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Creswell, 2012).

Limitations

Carrying out the RERA+SI took place during a time where crises were increasingly limiting mobility, communication and wellbeing. Interviews with two key informants holding senior positions at the MEHE who replied positively to meet for an interview had cancelled appointments and were unable to reschedule. Given the high-pressure context in Lebanon – economically, socially, psycho-socially and physically – at the time of data collection, the well-being of both researchers and respondents was under significant strain. Some interviews ran for only a short period of time because the respondent expressed too much fatigue to either continue or reflect on their experiences. Other respondents, especially teachers, extended far beyond the scheduled interview time to share their personal grievances, which also served as key findings. The research team members in Lebanon, particularly those managing young children at home, had to stretch the timelines given that schools were closed for over 14 months since the pandemic had started. Consequently, work time was limited to when children were asleep during early hours or late evenings and when working-partners, family and neighbors were able to care for the children.

Findings from primary data collection

In this section we present our findings for each theme, as well as the sub-themes that emerged from the interview data. In the subsequent analysis section, we examine the relationship between the findings and the INEE Minimum Standards.

Curriculum and pedagogy for literacy, numeracy and SEL

Arabic is the main language of instruction in the national curriculum. Each school chooses one of the two second languages: English and French. Students or schools can choose any of the three languages for the science and math official exams. However, in very rare cases do students or schools opt for these in Arabic; even among Syrian displaced children for whom a second language has been identified as a significant barrier to education. The findings below first present issues and approaches related to learning Arabic and math and socio-emotional development.

Complexities of a multi-lingual literacy program

Arabic stands out as a curricular program that faces many complexities in designing and facilitating a learning experience that will help children master the language native to Lebanon. Sociocultural factors emerged as threats to Arabic as a high-stakes language art. The teachers remind us that the Arabic language should be seen as two languages: the spoken dialect and the written form, also known as fus-ha. Fus-ha is often quite foreign to many children because daily exposure to the formal written form is limited to literature and news broadcasts on television. The Arabic language is also seen as a study of low-returns. A DOPS coach reported that students "have lost the motivation" to learn Arabic and ask, "What will this information produce? If I become an engineer, will I write a report in Arabic? Our answer is 'no'."

Other challenges to Arabic instruction related to the structural problems within the education system, notably "an old curriculum, old texts and old books" (DOPS2). The same informant highlighted that the curriculum relies too heavily on fostering sentiments or a unifying identity through the Arabic language, which are not sustainable in this age of globalization. Arabic teachers also found the curriculum problematic despite the topics that children seemed to enjoy. One Arabic teacher observed that the 3-4 pages of readings in grade 3 are too much and that 2 pages suffice. For the younger years, a grade 1 Arabic teacher found the progression of letters logical, but the books do not seem appealing to the children because they have very few images. Some teachers, however, reported turning to more participatory activities where children engage

in activities that allow them to discover what letters they are going to learn that day and explore connecting sounds for reading. However, one teacher explained that she could not facilitate these activities online and, so, had to resort to traditional methods of repetitive reading and writing words and sentences.

A DOPS coach found that many Arabic teachers resist trying new pedagogies; “although we worked together 3 to 4 years in schools, they don’t have the desire to develop themselves” (DOPS2). The drive to continue learning as a teacher is critical because, as he argued, teachers either have a degree in Arabic literature or graduated from a Teachers College without experience and do not necessarily have pedagogical knowledge. A DOPS coach added that the selection of teachers overlooked capacities to teach and develop oneself professionally; in some cases, Arabic teachers were selected only after demonstrating a degree of master in Arabic.

The English and French teachers shared similar concerns with learning a second language. While they spoke more about the logistics of facilitating lessons, assigning homework and trying to follow-up with students who irregularly attended, they reflected a little more than the Arabic teachers on conceptual understandings of language learning. A French teacher distinguished between language reception and language expression, arguing that children must first learn to understand, speak and read before they learn to write or respond to a text. An English teacher for cycle 2 gave examples of how she transformed her classroom at several levels. First, she tries to make sure “the students talk more than I talk” and, second, she engages them in group work like jigsaw activities that require turning desks around to create groups of four. She felt advantaged that her students have a fair mastery of English because “they went to private schools before”. Many of the teachers expressed concern over grade promotions. Students may get by grades 3 and 4 without mastering the basics of English or French, but they suffer and struggle at cognitive and emotional levels by the time they reach grade 6.

Discussions with key informants from an INGO on second-language learning also highlighted issues of access to learning online, but put more emphasis on using established language education frameworks such as the balanced literacy-based approached that emerged from the *National Reading Panel on Literacy Learning* (2000). There appears to be a significant distinction between concerns arising from practice (e.g. teachers focusing on access and activities they considered successful) and policy (e.g. INGO program developers drawing mostly on conceptual frameworks to develop new approaches).

Learning and teaching math

Math teacher qualifications

According to the DOPS math coordinator, most of the teachers in cycles 1 and 2 are not specialized to teach math. Many are also unfamiliar "with the ways of teaching". Out of the 10 math teachers, only one reported having a written qualification to teach math. The DOPS math coordinator believes this "takes away their ability to delve deep into each subject". Reflecting back on the teachers she has worked with who have Teaching Diplomas, this DOPS coach argued that they graduated many years ago and "their teaching is very old style" (which can be understood as a heavy reliance on rote memorization). Moreover, contractual teachers, who make up over half the teacher workforce, are hired based on minimal qualifications that do not include holding a teaching diploma.

Difficulties comprehending math classes that are taught in English

Informants highlighted limitations and struggles of teaching and learning in English and French. Specifically, they noted that facilitating student-centered problem-solving approaches using a second language was very difficult for their students. The DOPS math coordinator believes that teachers avoid problem solving because they teach math in either English or French and they try to avoid using text for children to read and analyze; some teachers even "treat word problems like riddles and leave them…for only the brightest students". Some teachers explained that they teach their students key words to look out for when deciding on the function to use (i.e. addition,

subtraction). Many other teachers present in the second language but then explain in Arabic. One math teacher puts a star near their name if they use English in the math class or a sad face if they do not; “it really motivated them”.

Very few teachers and a math education specialist from CERD argue that learning math should initially take place through one’s native language, citing studies from George Nahhas and Murad Jurdak. Others including a DOPS coach, however, maintain that teachers have a responsibility to explain math using the foreign language to “familiarize the students with the terms for the word problems” without necessarily mastering the language. The DOPS coach warns that if the language issues are not addressed in the first two cycles, “the student reaches cycles 3 and 4 with an accumulation of problems with language and the language in these cycles is harder and more complicated.” Hence, at DOPS, “we are helping them by sharing strategies to math problem solving” and have also “sent a request to CERD to provide trainings in problem solving for teachers in cycle 1 and 2.”

Approaches to learning and teaching math

The math teachers’ testimonies of learning and teaching math presented an array of activities and understandings of learning math. One DOPS coordinator reported that the majority of math classes in the first two cycles “are still applying traditional teaching”. Informants from CERD and DOPS also reported observing that teachers in cycles 1 and 2 give little attention to problem solving. Discussions with teachers revealed that children, especially in cycle 2, struggle with problem solving because by the time they reach these grade levels, their command of French or English has not progressed. Reportedly, children mostly learn math by solving formulas and have little exposure to solving problems presented in text. At a more conceptual level, learning puts too much emphasis on procedures to solve equations than on understanding how functions like addition and multiplication work (CERD).

Teachers and DOPS coaches reported working with limited resources. Most teachers said they use math books by publishers other than the CERD because they have more exercises and clearer

explanations of concepts. Teachers and a DOPS coach observed that too many students are in the same public school classroom. The DOPS coach believes this "does not help the teachers nurture the student's different abilities". A math teacher expressed regret for "not working in a private school" despite her family and academic advisor pushing her to work in the private sector. She explained the burdens of finding resources, "If the school doesn't have ink, then I photocopy elsewhere. The school can't get me materials, so I buy it myself. It's a public school."

Math teachers finding ways for impact

Recognizing the challenges, teachers described strategies they developed for better teaching math. One teacher turned to role play by having a store in the classroom and using it to act out word problems because "the children like to act". She would even turn to the physical education teacher to help out with some of the activities. A DOPS coordinator recalled a few teachers whom she considered quite exceptional. She noticed that children interact more with each other and more activities are facilitated in classrooms closer to cities, probably because rural areas have fewer teachers with qualifications to teach. Some observations from the coach included:

Instead of just explaining the set of points that are equidistant from a certain point in a circle, the teacher demonstrated this theory by using a string and by holding a point in the middle of the string had a student go around in a circle and make the circle using their feet.

Another example is, after a teacher explains the Pythagoras Theorem or the Thales Theorem they take the students to the playground to apply it to the height of a building or how to assess the height of a building without going up and measuring it.

One math teacher also spoke about the digital smart board that an organization donated to the classroom. Using it in class appeared to mostly motivate children, "The children are amazed at what can be done on: activities, games, etc. it is fun."

Social and emotional learning

Social and emotional learning through pedagogy

Testimonies from teachers suggested practices that consider social and emotional learning of children and contexts that suggest threats to well-being of children and teachers. Teachers have found how some learning experiences, such as collaboration and peer formative assessment, can support self-confidence and learner responsibility. “The class votes for a class supporter to sit near students who may need more support. I like to do this because it helps them feel more responsible; they get to help each other when they see others sitting by themselves” (Math teacher). However, some teachers reportedly avoided promoting peer support in the classroom, seemingly because they did not know how to manage small group work. As one teacher explained:

> I don’t like to work in pairs or small groups. I feel that there is some injustice in this because there are going to be some students who won’t benefit. There is going to always be someone who is dominant or bullied especially by how they dress, whether they are Lebanese, Kurdish or Syrian. Small groups are tiring.

Classroom learning experiences can also foster leadership and respect for diversity. However, when the learning activities published in the resources do not inquire about children’s views or explanations, “this will yield a dictator” (CERD). Indeed, “If the teacher and student have different ways [of solving a problem], the teacher doesn’t say it’s different; they say it’s wrong and you’ll get low grades if you don’t do it” (CERD).

Pastoral care in the classroom

A few teachers often spoke of the importance of providing pastoral care. Indeed, they viewed their role as far more than providing academic guidance. As a math teacher explained:

> I don’t just teach math and leave. If a child has a problem at home, they share it; because I opened this opportunity for them. One Lebanese child in grade 4 was always seen as active, but he’s always punished: outside the classroom standing against a wall (by the supervisor). I used to ask supervisor to let him back in the class. One day, going home, I

saw him walking to the school in the rain. I asked more about him and learned that his parents are separated and found that he loves math. We met with the parents and I told the supervisor never to kick him out again. He excelled in math afterwards. He left the school. after 2 years, he returned.

A teacher in the second-shift for Syrian displaced children who also gave math lessons in a non-formal education program reported how essential it was to notice children who may be struggling with personal or domestic issues. He found that children who showed signs of distraction or concern were able to engage more in the learning activities when he (1) acknowledged that they appear pre-occupied with personal concerns, (2) promised to make time after class to discuss them and (3) inquired about the concerns after class. He also found that active and dynamic communication with parents, especially fathers, was critical. A father pulled two of his daughters out of the school he was teaching in. He persistently visited the home to discuss this with the father. After several failed attempts, the father returned the daughters to school.

Social and emotional struggles

Children and teachers have suffered significantly over the past two years, raising the criticality of incorporating SEL within classroom learning and the overall school climate. Prior to the recent crises, a large number of children were already "dropping out [of public school] because they just hated school" (Child clinical psychologist). The recent shocks of the port blast and economic collapse have introduced further layers of trauma in their lives. In addition to home confinement of the pandemic's school closure, children emotionally struggled watching their parents navigate and manage the losses caused by the economic collapse and COVID-19 (Child clinical psychologist). SEL at school should not only address traumas, but consistently build the children's self-concept as a human being living in dignity. Children need to feel they have mastered or learned something new by the end of each day at school; if they do not, we risk "losing them" (Child clinical psychologist).

Teachers and burnout

All teachers interviewed shared their grievances over managing their teaching and responsibilities at home. Only one male teacher was interviewed and he expressed a great deal of stress over finding a stable income. His contract is *ta'aqud* and receives a salary every six to eight months. He relies mostly on his family's farmland to sell the harvest. Female teachers, on the other hand, who have one child or more felt that the only time they rest is when they sleep. One teacher claimed she sleeps an average of four hours per night. In addition to preparing the lessons and responding to WhatsApp messages as late as midnight, they also manage the meals, laundry and helping their children do their homework. One teacher whose three boys are in higher education, extended the interview time to an hour and a half venting out her fatigue and frustrations. Many of the teachers interviewed, if not most, expressed signs of burnout. Clearly, teachers and other caregivers like parents require a healthier state of well-being to provide children with nurturing SEL experiences.

Teacher professional development

Initial teacher education as exclusive and limited

In spite of the clear need for teachers to engage in sharing and learning pedagogical knowledge, very few teachers expressed need for this alongside the few opportunities available, especially during the past two years of crises. Starting with initial teacher education, only those teachers who live near one of the two branches of the Lebanese University Faculty of Pedagogy (LU-FP) are able to attain a qualification to teach. The two branches are located in Beirut. Teachers living outside the capital who studied at the Lebanese University in their area only had the opportunity to study a discipline (e.g. Sociology) but without a teaching qualification. Moreover, the LU-FP teacher education program offers teaching qualifications for three levels of schooling: kindergarten, cycle 1 and cycle 2. For cycles 3 and 4, teachers with a Bachelor's Degree in the area of specialization are regarded as qualified to teach that discipline. Five of the teachers interviewed had only the Lebanese General Secondary Certificate.

Continuous teacher education

Coordinators at DOPS and PITB called for more support from senior policymakers to either motivate or require teachers to actively participate in the professional development activities that they facilitate. At DOPS, "a major challenge we face is that teachers do not follow the feedback that we provide"; teachers can choose not to abide by them because "we don't have a mandated authority" (DOPS). The PITB director also seeks endorsement from the MEHE that, she believes, would raise the legitimacy of CERD-led training workshops and, thus, motivate teachers to attend. Indeed, some teachers have openly questioned the trainings, especially those nearing retirement, "I've reached this age and I'm still going to go to a training and learn new things?" (DOPS).

Teachers reported that professional development activities provided by the school have been the most relevant and useful. They described mixed experiences with the workshops by CERD and coaches by DOPS. The majority of teachers found the workshops quite redundant, covering concepts without direct reflections on daily practice. The methodology also seemed to rely quite heavily on communicating concepts and approaches to teachers with little input from them on classroom experiences. A CERD trainer confirmed this, also critical of teacher initial and continuous education pedagogy,

> Trainers lined up teachers in rows and said we need to foster active learning. Trainers say that we need to talk more, but do not allow teachers to talk. University professors say we need to engage students but we do not have time to practice this now in university.

With the DOPS coaches, many teachers appreciated the commitment and enthusiasm in observing and giving feedback. However, other teachers had different experiences where the coach would visit the class and leave a report with the principal. Teachers normally reported one or two visits per year, but one teacher found the one visit in her ten years an indication that "they give cycles 3 and 4 priority over cycles 1 and 2". As an informant from CERD argued, "Coaching in

Lebanon is more of monitoring than coaching." Furthermore, coaches and trainers expressed further frustrations in the absence of inter-agency coordination between PITB and DOPS, which is instrumental to effective teacher education.

Government policy and research

One of the main issues that overshadowed support to teachers, was the policy to hire a large number of teachers on contractual agreements rather than as tenured public servants. Also, at the level of policy, many interviewees reflected on the progress and limitations regarding interagency or interdepartmental coordination.

Administration of contractual agreements with teachers

Out of the 31 teachers interviewed (n=30 females), only 5 were *maleik*, or tenured. The others worked under contractual agreements that remunerate teachers per teaching hour. More than half the teachers are *ta'aqud* – a contractual agreement between them and the MEHE – with some contracted over 20 years ago. Since the 2014/15 academic year, the MEHE put a halt to *ta'aqud* contracting. They replaced this with a contract called *musta'an bihem*, a provision whereby MEHE interviews and assigns teachers to a school but payments come from either a donor agency or the school operational fund[8]. Less than half the teachers interviewed were *musta'an bihem*.

Teachers under *ta'aqud* and *musta'an bihem* expressed degrees of injustice in their work status, mainly benefits, pay schedules, assigned hours and public perception. Unlike tenured teachers, they are not entitled to social security like public healthcare and a pension. They used to receive their salaries every two months, but over the past year, payments have been made every six or seven months. While *ta'aqud* teachers were last paid on 9 March 2021 (Teachers Day), those *musta'an bihem* were last paid in August 2020 and were reportedly told "we may not get paid

[8] See Governance section for explanation of "school operational fund".

because the donor groups have not paid." While the female teachers explained that they rely on either their husband's or parents' income, the only male teacher (*musta'an bihem*) relied on selling produce from his father's farm because his wife manages the domestic work. Teachers in the second shift for Syrian displaced children are also *ta'aqud* and were last paid in March 2020. Some of these teachers explained that they borrow money to cover their monthly expenses and use their biannual pay cheques to repay the lenders.

The school sets their assigned teaching hours for the year. If they miss a teaching hour, they cannot invoice the MEHE for that hour. However, the 2020-21 school year started on 6 November instead of September and the MEHE announced it will not compensate the hours lost. The contractual teachers protested arguing that the change in schedule was external, or out of their hands. In addition to the late start of the school year, the minister also announced that teaching hours will be reduced "saying that it's for the parents" to relieve them from managing online learning (French teacher). So, the day after the Christmas holiday on 7 January, the contractual teachers went on strike, which lasted four weeks for some and 6 weeks for others. Teachers returned saying they felt guilty leaving the children alone. The minister said that the MEHE will now count the hours missed during school closure and make up the hours lost from the strike, but by teaching in the afternoons and on the weekends; teachers said this was quite unrealistic and taxing on their well-being.

Contractual teachers also appear to suffer from negative public perception. We have a "poor image" because many believe that we "got our posts through connections" and "are not trained to teach" (Math teacher). A DOPS coach also noted,

> To have a contract means that a person has finished Terminale and that's it. The contract is also renewed but not due to the teacher's competence, let's be realistic, we are in Lebanon. The contract is renewed based on how connected/supported the teacher is.

From the sample of teachers, four of the contractual teachers had only their secondary school certificate while one of the five tenured teachers had a secondary school certificate (Baccalaureate II). The indicator of only completing secondary school to build a negative image of contractual teachers was also found among tenured teachers. Some contractual teachers expressed grievance over their public image and defended it by arguing they are university graduates, committed to the children and even pay for materials from their own pocket.

School and teacher management through Regional Educational Centers

The director of the Primary Education Directorate based at the MEHE described the work of the Regional Education Center (REC) found at each of the eight governorates. The REC reports directly to the Directorate of Education and works closely with its Basic Education Directorate. Through the educational centers, the directorates help ensure provisions of equipment, maintenance, transfer of teachers and financial issues. The Basic Education Directorate also helps the REC manage teacher recruitment and training and problems that schools face. Some of the most pressing issues that the REC reportedly manages include:

- Payment conditions and schedules of contractual teachers
- Annual school closures from strikes or crisis
- Approaches to classroom learning and teaching

Underlying stressors prior to the recent crises that continue to challenge reform initiatives include a stagnated curriculum reform process, access to continuous teacher professional development and incorporating digital technology in classrooms and learning. Neither teachers nor principals mentioned the REC during the interviews.

DOPS and PITB for teacher professional development

The PITB at CERD and DOPS at MEHE are the primary agencies for providing continuous teacher professional development. The CERD and MEHE have developed their own information

management systems to help teachers track their professional development. At CERD, the Training Management System gives teachers opportunities to select and register for workshops, provide feedback and keep record of workshops attended. For DOPS, the MEHE developed the Visit Information Management System. However, the informants at MEHE and CERD reported that, because of poor coordination, the programs are written in different computer languages and, thus, cannot be integrated. Indeed, informants from MEHE and CERD openly shared concerns about, what one DOPS coordinator described as, "a lack of coordination between the CERD [PITB] and DOPS", even though "we are supposed to be one unit [of two departments] that complete each other".

Coordinators from PITB and DOPS expressed two other concerns over the governance structure and coordination. One, the coaches and trainers are different individuals and information is rarely shared. DOPS coaches are largely unaware of the training teachers receive from CERD and, so, they provide teachers with feedback based only on observations and the coach's pedagogical knowledge. The PITB trainers are unable to provide individual follow-ups based on the training provided because this falls within the DOPS mandate. Two, coordination is exercised, but at a minimum. DOPS provides the PITB with information on teachers, but only as general observations. A CERD coordinator explained that "there is no tracking per teacher [from DOPS]"; instead, those at DOPS would say, "In Lebanon, the teachers need to learn [for example] classroom management". Ideally, as a DOPS coordinator expressed, the cycle begins when DOPS coaches have access to understanding the needs of the teachers and communicate these needs to the CERD and, on the basis of these needs, the CERD should conduct trainings; "but this unfortunately does not happen."

Producing, accessing and sharing information

Coordinators at MEHE and CERD expressed commitments to ensuring that development work is informed by evidence. Some of the office directors at MEHE and CERD pointed to the research bureau at CERD as the official unit that gathers information. The research bureau publishes an

annual bulletin presenting statistical data on the demographics of students, teachers and schools. Other units, namely the PMU, also share information using factsheets. However, a senior MEHE director hoped for CERD to produce more data other than the annual bulletins. Frustrated at the lack of information of the status of children and access to learning during the recent crises, "**I'm** launching a survey at schools" (emphasis by informant).

Some of the senior-level coordinators and directors were unaware of certain strategies and policies related to their work. For example, a coordinator at CERD had learned during the interview that the cycle 1 curriculum reform was mandated by an official decree. At MEHE, a senior director had not even heard of the back to school plan that the Director General presented in July.

Managing school operating costs

Principals briefly explained how school finances are managed between the school and the MEHE. While the MEHE issues all salary payments, the school receives an annual operations budget. For each child, the school receives a sum of 240,000 LBP; 90,000 LBP for the Parents Council and 150,000 LBP for school operating costs. Operation costs include stationary, maintenance, fuel for generators, electricity bills, ink cartridges, cleaning staff, computers and any other daily expenses. For the second-shift, schools receive 240,000 LBP per child but the money is added to the entire school's running costs, morning and afternoon shifts. According to a principal, the school is not permitted to have a Parent Council for the second-shift. For the regular morning shift, only some public schools appear to have established a Parents Council.

Administration of the funds have added to the stressors of the school. The principals interviewed reported that the MEHE has not transferred money for neither the 2019/20 nor 2020/21 scholastic years. Only partial payment has been made for 2018/19. Principals rely on these funds to purchase schoolbooks, especially for the newly registered students who transferred from private schools because of the economic collapse. Some principals also use money from the

Parents Council fund to pay teachers under a contractual agreement. One principal received approval to transfer money from the school fund to the Parents Council fund to ensure that the *musta'ān bihem* teachers get paid.

Responding to crises

The education sector was hit with the economic collapse "like Chernobyl" (MEHE) and the pandemic that "was a big shock on education that no one was expecting" (DOPS). Some at MEHE and CERD were pleased with the efforts made in a short period of time, particularly with using technology after so many years of speculation in using technology to learn. Some believe that the few success stories demonstrate the feasibility of effective online learning. Interviews with teachers and informants from MEHE and CERD also revealed shortcomings in the responses and response capacity of the education sector.

Risk assessment and management

Mostly, individuals from CERD and the MEHE reflected on approaches to preparing for and managing crises. They consistently described responses as "patchwork", or short-term, immediate responses to crisis situations as they erupted. According to one DOPS staff "there was no such thing as risk management, we floundered a lot and we tried to hold each other's hands and pave our way in the dark by ourselves". Two individuals at the MEHE reported on how leadership had not prepared a contingency plan for school closure and have taken quite some time to prepare a learning strategy – whether distant learning or return to learning. Indeed, these strategies have been drafted, but are under development as they call for funds necessary to implement.

Children and parents vulnerable to crises

As the economy collapsed and pandemic lockdown took effect, many parents of children in private schools stopped paying tuition fees. Anecdotal testimonies suggested that parents either could no longer afford the fees or felt they were not getting value for money for an online

education. In Lebanon, the private sector (fee-paying, subsidized, UNRWA[9]) schools over two-thirds of the one million children in formal education (CERD, 2020). The Director of the Private Education Department at MEHE expressed concern over the children in subsidized schools and *madāres el ifrādiyye* (schools owned by individuals or an association). The 376 subsidized schools only provide cycles 1 and 2 and cater for 135,000 of the 700,000 children not in public schools. The MEHE pays one million LBP for each student per year. Children in these schools are from low-income families and, following the crises, "are now the poorest". Some of the *madāres el ifrādiyye* are at risk of closing because "parents are getting poorer" and no longer able to pay tuition fees like one million LBP. For example, one association has seven schools that have lost 30% of their students who "have gone either to public schools or are on the streets" (MEHE). Hence, at least a quarter of the children in the private sector are more vulnerable than before to poverty and, consequently, access to online learning. Overall there was a feeling that the shift to distance learning would mean that "weak students became weaker" (DOPS).

Parents are the primary deciding factor of children going to school (Child clinical psychologist). This becomes more critical among the most vulnerable of communities, such as refugees/ displaced who may feel either disenfranchised or find better opportunities for survival by marrying their young daughters or pushing their children into paid work. Parents also suffer from mental illness, most commonly post-trauma stress disorder among refugee/ displaced parents (Child clinical psychologist). Some teachers were able to report incidents of domestic violence that they associated with parents managing the worsening economic situation.

Ministerial decisions

During the 2019/20 academic year the MEHE took a number of decisive decisions to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic. These included a:

[9] The MEHE classifies UNRWA as private. However, they are free and not subject to MEHE policies to private schools. We, therefore, question this classification.

- Circular 15 (17/03/2020): For public and private schools outlining guidance on the key methods public schools should use for distance learning during school closure
- Circular 35 (16/6/2020): Public school administrators to continue administrative work after the end of the 2019/20 academic year during the summer term.
- Decision No. 132 (7/9/2020): To open schools for a hybrid organization of classroom teaching between online and in-class attendance
- Ministerial Decision 85 (22 July 2020): A blanket promotion and official exams exemption for all students in the 2019/20 academic year

In preparing a safe return to school, the MEHE with support from UNICEF and the Red Cross published awareness pamphlets, produced awareness videos and provided sanitizing equipment to schools. At the academic level, the MEHE and CERD reduced the national curriculum schedule for 2020/21 by half and developed a hybrid plan to learning online and in the classroom; however, this ran for only six to eight weeks starting first of November until the winter holiday. For the hybrid system, all classes were divided into 2 groups – group A and group B. This was implemented for classes with more than 18 students. During one week, Group A would attend four days of classes and Group B would receive one day of online instruction. The groups would alternate every week. However, the second shift did not split classes. To ensure that the curriculum is covered, the CERD reduced the 32-week curricular program to 14 weeks with one week allocated for assessment. This was announced as an official decision by the minister.

Recognizing the limited access to Internet across the country and cost implications for reliable connection, the MEHE and other groups attempted to negotiate with the Ministry of Telecommunications for free access to Internet for online schooling. A principal recalled these conversations and how they had failed.

Teachers' limited access to digital technology

Teachers from one of the five public schools felt more prepared because of the previous work with digital tools at school. Nevertheless, their students remained at risk of missing the entire school year because of limited access to technology. Informants regularly highlighted three components of technology that determined modes of online learning: electricity, internet and devices. Some families cannot afford generator fees and rely on the government power grid that provides them with electricity for 4 to 10 hours a day, depending on the region. Access to reliable internet and devices have determined who uses what digital platform and when. The MEHE extended its subscription to Microsoft so that all teachers can revert to Microsoft Teams as a contingent classroom. However, teachers quickly found that the application itself was exclusive to users with digital devices, affordable internet and large bandwidth. Student and teacher users of Microsoft Teams are identified mostly in cycles 3 and 4. More children in secondary schools have their own smartphones. One public school teacher claimed she was able to afford subscribing to 20GB of mobile internet data per month, a quota she needed for Microsoft Teams that consumed about 1GB per hour of instruction. Internet services provided at home are widely reported as unreliable, so teachers and students rely heavily on mobile internet data.

As schools closed in March 2019, teachers and children for cycles 1 and 2 sought the most reliable and available means of distant learning and teaching: WhatsApp. The MEHE had pushed for the use Microsoft Team and prepared with UNICEF a comprehensive training program for teachers. Teachers, however, reported that they were invited to Microsoft Teams training in January 2020 and most did not attend. Some teachers reported participating in school-based training for distant learning that took place much earlier and through either the school's information technology teacher or the support of a well-resourced private school. These trainings reportedly showed teachers to use other online platforms like Zoom or Google Meets.

In the first two cycles, children are far less likely to have their own technological devices. So, an estimated 80% of teachers in cycles 1 and 2 have resorted to WhatsApp instead of Microsoft Teams (DOPS). Through WhatsApp, less data is consumed and asynchronous teaching and learning is possible because of limited access to digital devices. For example, widespread anecdotes from teachers portray children waiting for their fathers to come home after work to use their phone to see what their teachers assigned. WhatsApp is also easier to use for the majority of parents, children and teachers who "aren't familiar with digital technology", especially parents who "know nothing about these things" (DOPS).

Children in cycles 1 and 2 who do have access to devices are still likely to miss out on guided and challenging learning experiences. While WhatsApp is still foreign to many parents and children, children who do use the platform are doing so without the immediate guidance of the teacher; and many parents are unable to support their children's learning (DOPS). Coaches explained that online is a very difficult platform for teachers to give immediate feedback and learning support. Children who were also receiving special or counseling support at school have lost this now because of the limited access to electricity, internet and devices (DOPS).

Learning, teaching and assessment

Teachers mostly reflected on the learning and teaching practices during the 2020/21 academic year. Most explained they spent the first few weeks of 2020/21 going over material that had not been covered in 2019/20.

Pedagogy

Teachers struggled to adapt their pedagogical approaches to the distance format. Most of the teachers testified that online learning further reinforced traditional methods of reciting or recalling information from the book and drills that require writing or solving math equations. For the majority of teachers, the teaching routine is as follows:

1. Teacher prepares the lesson: Records a short 5 to 8-minute videos demonstrating or explaining; finds links to videos or images that may be useful.
2. Teacher posts the explanation, extra links and assignment. In some cases, teachers use Google Meets or Microsoft Teams to give a live lesson and then post the explanation, extra links and assignment. Children in cycle 1 are more likely to learn via WhatsApp while children in cycle 2 are a little more likely to learn synchronously on either Google Meets or Microsoft Teams.
3. Students prepare the assignment and send back to the teacher that evening as an image on WhatsApp.
4. Parents communicate with teachers, calling for help, even as late as 11pm
    - Some incidents of students submitting work with parent's handwriting
    - Only a small number of students (e.g. 5) are asked to work on the assignment so that the teacher is able to manage marking and give feedback.
5. Teacher corrects work submitted and sends back to student.

Assessment

Assessments posed an additional challenge. One interviewee from DOPS claimed that online assessments have been "unfair" because of suspected cheating by students who are "bringing a teacher to their homes and have them sit with the student during the exams" (DOPS1). Many teachers also expressed concern that assessment "is not accurate because many of their parents are doing their work". The teachers observed that learning online has compromised approaches to formative assessment that they used to rely on in the classroom, including asking questions, observing students' work and allowing students to work together and check each other's work.

Attendance

Classes rarely used live video. Parental engagement was also reported to be low, even when using WhatsApp. One math teacher noted that between 40 and 60 percent of his students attended his grade four classes. The rate of attendance and participation varies, but teachers consistently

reported an average of 50-60% attendance and fewer students participate. Nearly all teachers explained that children were most likely absent because:

1. their device (i.e. phone, tablet) broke at home
2. younger children must wait for their older sibling to use the device, as they are given priority
3. children without Internet at home often search for an Internet connection from a neighbor but sometime are sometimes unsuccessful.

These are only some reasons of absenteeism that teachers learned from parents.

Teachers, too, were at risk of absenteeism. One teacher seemed embarrassed to explain that her laptop charger was broken and had to wait for the government to lift the lockdown so that the repair shop would open. She waited at least one month.

Supporting teachers

Initiatives to prepare teachers to facilitate classroom learning online took place in several forms. The MEHE facilitated online training sessions to use Microsoft Teams, but the teachers reported that either (a) they were not interested because they found WhatsApp much more user-friendly, (b) training sessions were not reportedly offered until March 2021 or (c) their school had already organized workshops on online learning.

Also among the initial responses to school closures from DOPS was to continue supporting teachers but focusing more on how to use technology and delivering content. Coaches from DOPS expressed some frustration that in cycles 1 and 2 teachers were using WhatsApp instead of Microsoft Teams. Coaches felt that the latter was a better-equipped platform with its board for written explanations, PowerPoint presentations, session recording options, homework assignments and assessments. During the meetings with teachers, DOPS coaches reportedly encourage teachers to use Microsoft Teams to teach and use WhatsApp groups to answer students' questions "on the basis that days and times for questions are defined so that teachers

maintain their privacy" (DOPS 1). Some suggested to open two WhatsApp groups with the students: on one, only the teacher is allowed to send messages; on the second, students can send their homework. That way students could solve small practice problems and then photograph them and send them to the class group. Some DOPS coaches have set up WhatsApp groups with teachers to introduce them to Microsoft Teams, "but there will always be those teachers that will say, 'No, I don't know' and…adamant they don't want to work on Teams, then ok, so be it." Many of these teachers are close to retirement and most, if not all, are contractual teachers.

When encouraging teachers to use Microsoft Teams, DOPS coaches said they can use the platform to highlight explanations on the platform's whiteboard, video recording the session, using a PowerPoint presentation and call the students by their names to ensure they participate by asking questions and following the lesson (DOPS). Coaches have also encouraged teachers to convert materials to PDF – whether written during the session or produced for the session – to post on the page of the class. Some also encourage teachers to upload the recorded video for students who were not able to attend because of electricity or internet issues. To minimize or eliminate cheating, DOPS coaches advise teachers to write tests that comprise multiple choice questions that can be shuffled around and that require little time to complete. They also advised teachers not to give homework that would require more than half an hour of work. A DOPS coach asked teachers "not to give grades in this emotionally bad and draining period."

WhatsApp still posed as a risk for teachers. Threats to privacy online made teachers and coaches vulnerable to hackers and reporting. Some coaches' and teachers' phone numbers, for example, circulated around teachers and students. In some cases, "students sabotaged teachers by reporting them to WhatsApp and causing them to lose their number". Also, when coaches share their number or join a WhatsApp group, "they contact us at all times as if the coach is available 24/7" (DOPS1).

Findings by INEE Minimum Standards

In this section we draw on the INEE Minimum Standards to analyze the findings above. The INEE Minimum Standards provides a comprehensive framework for interpreting the RERA+SI findings and identifying risks within and linkages between different domains and standards. We discuss briefly the four thematic findings of the RERA+SI across the five domains of the INEE Minimum Standards: Foundational Standards (domain one), Access and Learning Environment (domain two), Teaching and Learning (domain three), Teachers and other education personnel (domain four), and Education Policy (domain five).

Domain one: Foundational Standards

This domain overarches across all activities related to the education sector identifying how different education stakeholders within the community participate in decision-making processes and access resources. It also includes the levels of coordination among actors and approaches to inclusive school evaluations and strategy development. From this study, coordination among the offices at the government level appears to be either minimal or instable. A new president was appointed at the CERD in summer 2019 and, since then, those from the MEHE and the CERD have reported degrees of progress in coordination and joint work between the two agencies. However, representatives within the MEHE and CERD showed expressions of surprise when we inquired about initiatives reported within the same agency.

Communication channels between directorates, administrative units, and school-based practitioners appear to be unilateral, top-down. Principals and teachers have virtually little or no opportunity to feed into evidence-informed decision-making at the government level. Even when participating in implementing projects and programs funded by international and local NGOs, teachers and principals are often positioned as recipients of resources developed at a higher level for them to implement in school.

Parents were also described as either marginalized, withdrawn or sometimes counterproductive when reflecting on ensuring a quality education for the children. The informants at government and school-based levels described parents as agents who provide (e.g. parents giving their phones to their children to use) or prevent (e.g. fathers withdrawing their daughters from school) access to school and learning. Most teachers explained how parents are instrumental to their children's learning during crisis situations by following up on their work at home, explaining the concepts and giving feedback. Teachers expressed hope in parents to teach their children some of the basic competencies they have missed over the past two years. However, most parents of these low-income communities appear to focus mostly on outcomes and, so, their support has been mostly in the form of completing their children's homework.

Domain two: Access and Learning Environment

Under this domain, we reflect on equal access to educational opportunities and how safety, psycho-social well-being and protection are supported through learning environments and school facilities.

The MEHE has apparently been rather swift in ensuring that Lebanese children leaving private schools (mainly subsidized) have a desk in public schools. However, children struggle to access resources and experiences afterwards. Only children with advanced digital devices (e.g. smartphones/laptops, sufficient RAM and memory), electricity (access to generator and government power) **and** connectivity (affordable and reliable WIFI) can access synchronous learning activities. Pay terms and conditions for contractual teachers resulted in strikes leaving children without provisions of learning for at least 6 weeks in 2021. The two aforementioned points have affected Syrian displaced children, leaving them with virtually no access to online learning since March 2020. Children in younger years – especially in cycles 1 and 2 – have last priority in family to access the shared device among siblings. Also, cycles 1 and 2 seem to be given no priority when online learning resources were produced for the official exam years – grades 9 and 12 – and made available online. Based on teachers' testimonies, girls appear to be at most

risk of leaving school, even though their registration figures seem to surpass males towards the end of cycle 2 and up to secondary school. Indeed, statistical figures suggest that males are at greater risk of dropping out in cycles 3 and 4.

Child protection policies include Penal Code article 186 that forbids the use of corporal punishment at school, but neither forbids it at home nor criminalizes corporal punishment (e.g. teachers convicted of a crime). Moreover, violence at schools, including corporal punishment and verbal abuse are still found through studies carried out by INGOs. Responses to children's trauma from the August 4 explosion, pandemic and other direct and indirect crises mostly came from civil society organizations. There was no evidence of guidelines that safeguard children from online bullying. Moreover, emphasis is put almost entirely on learning with virtually no mention of psychosocial support provided via online platforms. While some reported that school counselling services were halted, the DOPS at MEHE apparently has a hotline number and email that is in service and providing counselling support to children and teachers. Teachers' testimonies suggest that teachers' relationships with parents and time allocated for parochial care are initiatives that teachers take and have played a pivotal role in keeping children – especially girls – in school.

an out-of-date curriculum, the dominant pedagogical culture and published learning and teaching resources that do not promote approaches to effective learning (e.g. collaboration, active learning, learner-driven learning, meta-learning [Watkins, Carnell & Lodge, 2007]) were identified as core structural and cultural challenges. Within a highly-centralized system of curricular reform, teachers are largely seen as deliverers of knowledge with virtually no role in curriculum development.

Training and professional development opportunities were also limited. If DOPS and PITB engaged in closer coordination, their complementary provisions for continuous teacher professional development can more effectively support teachers. Of note, teachers' qualifications are dependent on their geographical location (in-service qualifications are only available to those living in Beirut) and the MEHE closed the Teaching Diploma program at *Dar el Moualimin* (CERD) and now only offers in-service teaching.

Instruction and learning processes were another important theme to emerge from the interviews. The default approaches to teaching and learning literacy and numeracy have focused primarily on mastery through repetition and practice, giving very little room for disciplinary knowledge. Parents too have reinforced the emphasis on achievement and submitting correct answers to teachers. Moreover, teachers often relied heavily on rote learning approaches and reportedly struggled to adapt their pedagogical approaches to distance learning platforms. Assessment of learning outcomes relies mostly on summative methods, especially during online learning. Formative assessment was valued by many teachers as a practice to monitor children's learning, but was reportedly lost during online learning.

Children have lost nearly two years of schooling, but have been promoted up the grade levels. Teachers are very concerned about how these children are going to learn the necessary competencies or knowledge needed to excel in the new grade level.

Domain four: Teachers and other education personnel

The RERA+SI findings suggested that a teaching qualification is not compulsory for contract teachers; but only for tenured, and even then, it is not fully applied. Teachers also struggled with a lack of resources in schools, in some cases supplementing school supplies with their own income. Also related to conditions of work, contractual teachers experienced the suspension of their salaries when schools closed owing to the pandemic and the devaluation of their salaries

owing to the economic crisis. While adapting to the crises over the past two years, teachers have communicated different expressions of burnout.

The majority of teachers in basic education are women. Mostly women have expressed grievance over managing between teaching and the household. A few informal self-reports from women teachers suggest that their work in homemaking has compromised their well-being and, consequently, their commitment to professional development activities (e.g. teachers not attending workshops on Saturdays). At home, some described their responsibilities to include managing their children at home, which includes cooking, feeding, entertaining, ensuring they attend online classes and complete homework. Such responsibilities are typical of those defined by socially-constructed gender roles for women. In addition, as teachers, they also manage teaching, writing lesson plans, marking and schedules for online training sessions on using the online platforms that many teachers have missed.

The majority of teachers in Lebanon are on contractual terms. They do not benefit from social services and receive salaries every six months or so. Teachers in the second shift for Syrian displaced children have not been paid since March 2020. Complications in contractual terms are rooted in complex mechanisms of governing funds and managing currency exchanges during the crash of the Lebanese pound. Furthermore, cycles 1 and 2 are lower stake stages of basic education and, so, teachers in basic education receive different or lesser support than those in grades 9 and 12. Teachers still have very little input as “makers” and mostly seen at deliverers.

The principals expressed their positivity and recognition of school progress by mostly highlighting increases of student numbers over the years. They also shared their struggles with managing teachers’ grievances of not receiving salaries and students not attending online learning activities. Principals also reported long-standing difficulties in operating the school (e.g. paper, ink, cleaning, diesel, electricity) without the essential funds that the MEHE and Ministry of Finance have not been able to provide. Their efforts to respond to the financial crises at school

have been temporary resolutions (e.g. drawing money from another budget, seeking donations from INGOs) to ensure that the school's teachers are paid and materials are acquired. Principals expressed a strong commitment towards their teachers' professional development, which can be further realized with the closer coordination of the DOPS and PITB existing support and supervisions practices.

Domain five: Education Policy

According to interviews with key informants from the MEHE and CERD, several government agencies face challenges in inter-ministerial coordination. MEHE and the Ministry of Telecommunications failed at attempts to coordinate in providing connectivity to teachers and children. The directorates, units, and departments at MEHE and CERD struggle with power dynamics and little coordination. Responses to crises appear strictly top-down, exclusive and delayed. The back-to-school plan was presented in July 2020 as a PowerPoint presentation. Its full draft is still in progress. MEHE also drafted a distant learning strategy shared in April 2021 as draft in progress.

Conclusions

The RERA+SI highlights a wide range of risk factors that threaten the provisions of a quality, sustainable and inclusive basic education in Lebanon. Below, we present five risk sources, outlined key concerns and proposed action and research measures.

Risk source 1. Lost learning

Concerns

Children, especially Syrian displaced children and nearly half the children from low-income families who missed most of the classes, have lost nearly two years of schooling, but have been promoted across the grade levels. They will have missed much of the basic competencies necessary to learn the grade-level curriculum they have been promoted into. The children in cycle

1, especially, will also have missed critical social and emotional learning experiences through typical social and learning struggles and growths at school. Teachers will struggle between returning to basics and teaching the curriculum.

Possible measures

Action 1. Organize national conference on Return to Learning to invite teachers and parents to share practices and, with CERD, facilitate workshops on restructuring the curriculum with more deeper spiraling to master missed basics.

Action 2. Encourage and support schools to create guides for parents on how to support their children learn basic concepts missed over the past two years.

Research 1. Search for and study individual teachers who are innovating activities that are supporting children in remedial learning while also covering the curriculum.

Research 2. Design and carry out a school-closure impact study that examines the consequences of school absence on learning (e.g. loss of learning) and wellbeing.

Risk source 2: Post-trauma stress among children and parents

Concerns

Children returning to school will have experienced two years of instability and possible forms of direct violence or social injustice at home, in the community or at work. Parents are likely to experience a form of burnout and may not be in an emotional state needed to support their children.

Possible measures

Action 1. Learn from initiatives like the UNDP Violence Free Schools initiative that has to date supported over 50 public schools in fostering and sustaining a nonviolent school environment.

Action 2. Explore how civil society be mobilized to provide psychosocial support to parents and their families.

Action 3. Develop and disseminate a national SEL framework that the formal and nonformal education sectors can incorporate into children's activities and teacher education programs.

Research 1. Gather new information from hard-to-reach sample groups of children who have left school permanently during COVID-19 school closures.
Research 2. Learn from clinical child psychologists how families have been affected from the recent crises and build an evidence-base to support teachers develop SEL activities inside the classroom.

Risk source 3: Exclusion and marginalization of teachers

Concerns

Learning and teaching resources for classrooms are mostly developed by program developers and consultants at [I]NGOs and coordinators at CERD who draw on conceptual frameworks and other published resources. Rarely are teachers engaged as resource- or curriculum-makers whom, themselves, develop the resources as part of their classroom learning and teaching activities. This positions teachers as recipients, threatening the sustainability of new approaches. Initiatives led by the MEHE, CERD and [I]NGOs to enhance teacher professionalization by providing training programs do not include opportunities for teachers to also gain written qualifications, such as a Teaching Diploma. Education development strategies do not address long-standing employment terms and conditions, including contracts, benefits, payment schedules and well-being, particularly regarding burnout for women who manage domestic and work responsibilities simultaneously as a result of gender-based violence at home.

Possible measures

Action 1. Facilitate long-term, periodic workshops to teachers in order to empower them as researchers and develop materials and activities inside their classroom and share experiences.
Action 2. Encourage donor agencies and other MEHE partners to use the INEE Minimum Standards as a reference point when providing feedback on education sector development plans.

Action 3. Collaborate with a higher education institution (e.g. Lebanese University) to enhance professional development activities so that teachers receive credit towards a teaching diploma.

Research 1. Engage teachers and support personnel such as DOPS coaches and PITB trainers as co-researchers of learning to directly inform curriculum and pedagogy development inside their classroom and with peer teachers. Partner education researchers with teachers so that teachers receive support in documenting and disseminating quality research.
Research 2. Document current practices of teacher education and professional development. What are the work dynamics between DOPS coaches and teachers? Are these principles of practice exercised in reality? Are they seen as important by teachers? What is missing?

Risk source 4: Exclusion of vulnerable children in learning

Concerns

Basic education-age children are more neglected than children in cycles 3 and 4, at school and at home. Children with displaced legal status are even more marginalized, namely displaced. Children in school adopt surface approaches to learning through recitation and reproduction exercises enforced at home and in the classroom. Children risk not gaining the disciplinary knowledge critical for mastering conceptual understandings and directing collaborative, dialogic and critical pedagogies.

Possible measures

Action 1. Schools to develop school-based policy and school committees including parent and children representatives to review cases and climate of learning and growth at school and home.
Action 2. Engage with inter-agency coordinator groups and civil society organizations on solutions to empowering parents from vulnerable communities as educators at home.

Research 1. Researchers and selected high-impact teachers focus on developing disciplinary approaches to learning Arabic, a second language and math.

Research 2. Carry out a longitudinal study and experimental design that tracks children's progress when parents are provided with caregiver education to support their children's education at home.

Risk source 5: Fragility of education governance structures

Concerns

While official-based stakeholders are critical for the sustainability of education development and aid interventions, the involvement of school-based stakeholders across all intervention stages are also fundamental to sustaining initiatives. Also, reporting on tracks and results of previous strategies and development work is largely inaccessible or unavailable. Research capacities at MEHE and CERD are limited to factsheets.

Possible measures

Action 1. Create and advance working relationships and research strategies between government and civil society research centers (e.g. CERD and LAES).

Action 2. Engage school-based practitioners as active partners with CERD and MEHE offices.

Research 1. Carry out conflict analysis and political economy of education analysis in Lebanon during development and aid.

References

Abd-El-Khalick, F., Boujaoude, S., Duschl, R., Lederman, N. G., Mamlok-Naaman, R., Hofstein, A., et al. (2004). Inquiry in science education: International perspectives. *Science education, 88*(3), 397-419.

Abu El-Haj, T. R., Kaloustian, G., Bonet, S. W., & Chatila, S. (2018). Fifi the Punishing Cat and other civic lessons from a Lebanese public kindergarten school. *Journal on Education in Emergencies, 4*(1), 13-44. doi: doi.org/10.17609/xnpr-ce74

Abu Moghli, M., & Shuayb, M. (2020). *Education under COVID-19 lockdown: Reflections from teachers, students & parents*.

Akar, B. (2016a). Dialogic pedagogies in educational settings for active citizenship, social cohesion and peacebuilding in Lebanon. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice, 11*(1), 44-62. doi: 10.1177/1746197915626081

Akar, B. (2016b). Learning active citizenship: conflicts between students' conceptualisations of citizenship and classroom learning experiences in Lebanon. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 37*(2), 288-312. doi: 10.1080/01425692.2014.916603

Akar, B. (2020a). Citizenship education in conflict-affected areas and nation-states: empowering teachers for sustainable reform. *Intercultural Education*, 1-14. doi: 10.1080/14675986.2020.1794123

Akar, B. (2020b). Hijacking and rescuing history education in Lebanon. *Public History Weekly, 8*(6). Retrieved from https://public-history-weekly.degruyter.com/8-2020-6/history-education-lebanon/. doi:dx.doi.org/10.1515/phw-2020-16549

Boujaoude, S. (2002). Balance of scientific literacy themes in science curricula: The case of Lebanon. *International Journal of Science Education, 24*(2), 139-156. doi: 10.1080/09500690110066494

BouJaoude, S., & Ghaith, G. (2006). Educational reform at a time of change: The case of Lebanon. In J. Ernest & D. Treagust (Eds.), *Education reform in societies in transition: International perspectives* (pp. 193-210). Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Burns, M. (2011). Technology teaching and learning: Research, experience & global lessons learned. Beirut: Education Development Center.

CERD. (2018). *PISA 2015 national report*. Retrieved from http://www.crdp.org/pdf/uploads/PISA_Report_18-1.pdf.

CERD. (2019). *Statistical Bulletin: Academic year 2018-2019*. Retrieved from http://crdp.org/files/201908300826465.pdf.

CERD. (2020). Statistical Bulleting: Academic year 2019-2020. Retrieved from https://www.crdp.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/202008281054095_0.pdf.

Chahine, I. C. (2013). The impact of using multiple modalities on students' acquisition of fractional knowledge: An international study in embodied mathematics across semiotic cultures. *The Journal of Mathematical Behavior, 32*(3), 434-449. doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmathb.2013.04.004

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in education*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Counsell, C. (2011). Disciplinary knowledge for all, the secondary history curriculum and history teachers' achievement. *The Curriculum Journal, 22*(2), 201-225.

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

El-Amine, A. (2004). Educational reform: Nine principles and five issues. In N. Salam (Ed.), *Options for Lebanon* (pp. 209-254). London: Centre for Lebanese Studies and I.B. Tauris.

Frayha, N. (2004). Developing Curriculum as a Means to Bridging National Divisions in Lebanon. In S. Tawil & A. Harley (Eds.), *Education, Conflict and Social Cohesion* (pp. 159-205). Geneva: UNESCO International Bureau of Education.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: The Continuum Publishing Company.

Fullan, M. (2001). *The new meaning of educational change* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Furst, E. J. (1981). Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives for the Cognitive Domain: Philosophical and Educational Issues. *Review of Educational Research, 51*(4), 441-453. doi: 10.3102/00346543051004441

Ghosn-Chelala , M. (2019). Exploring sustainable learning and practice of digital citizenship: Education and place-based challenges. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice, 14*(1), 40-56. doi: 10.1177/1746197918759155

Henningsen, M., & Zebian, S. (2003). High-level thinking, reasoning, and communication in Lebanese elementary mathematics classrooms: A preliminary technical report on the Fall 2002–2003 Classroom Observations of the Mathematics instructional Reform for All in Lebanon (MARAL Project). Beirut: American University of Beirut.

Human Rights Watch. (2019). *"I Don't Want My Child to Be Beaten": Corporal Punishment in Lebanon's Schools*. Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/05/13/i-dont-want-my-child-be-beaten/corporal-punishment-lebanons-schools.

INEE. (2010). *Minimum standards for education: Preparedness, response, recovery* (Second ed.). New York: International Network for Education in Emergencies.

Karami-Akkary, R., Mahfouz, J., & Mansour, S. (2019). Sustaining school-based improvement: considering emotional responses to change. *Journal of Educational Administration, 57*(1), 50-67. doi: 10.1108/JEA-01-2018-0022

Kelly, A. V. (2009). *The Curriculum: Theory and Practice*. London: SAGE.

Khochen, M., & Radford, J. (2011). Attitudes of teachers and headteachers towards inclusion in Lebanon. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 16*(2), 139-153.

LAES. (2003). *Evaluation of the new curriculum in Lebanon* (Vol. 2). Beirut: LAES.

LAES. (2007). National Education Strategy in Lebanon: Vision document. Beirut: Lebanese Association for Educational Studies.

Mahfouz, J., El-Mehtar, N., Osman, E., & Kotok, S. (2020). Challenges and agency: principals responding to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanese public schools. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 23*(1), 24-40. doi: 10.1080/13603124.2019.1613570

MEHE. (2012). *Teaching and Learning in the Digital Age: Lebanon's National Educational Technology Strategic Plan*. Beirut: Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

MEHE, & CERD. (2012). *The national education plan to integrate people with special needs [Al-khotta al-wataniya al-tarbawiya li-damj "dhūwī al-su'ūbāt al-ta'allumiyya"]*. Beirut: MEHE & CERD Retrieved from https://www.crdp.org/files/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B7%D8%A9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9%20%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%85%D8%AC%20%D8%B0%D9%88%D9%8A%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AA%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B5%D8%A9.pdf.

Ministry of Education. (1997). *The Programmes of General Education and their Aims*. Beirut.

Ministry of Education and Higher Education [Lebanon]. (1997). *Curricula of general education and their aims*. Beirut: Center for Educational Research and Develpment.

Nabhani, M., & Bahous, R. (2010). Lebanese teachers' views on 'continuing professional development'. *Teacher Development, 14*(2), 207-224. doi: 10.1080/13664530.2010.494502

Niemiec, C. P., & Ryan, R. M. (2009). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the classroom: Applying self-determination theory to educational practice. *School Field, 7*(2), 133-144. doi: 10.1177/1477878509104318

OECD. (2015). *PISA 2015: Results in focus*. Retrieved from https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-2015-results-in-focus.pdf.

OECD. (2018). *PISA 2018 Results: Combined executive summaries* (Vol. I, II & III). Retrieved from https://www.oecd.org/pisa/Combined_Executive_Summaries_PISA_2018.pdf.

Priestley, M., Biesta, G., Philippou, S., & Robinson, S. (2016). The teacher and the curriculum: Exploring teacher agency. In D. Wyse, L. Hayward & J. Pandya (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment* (pp. 187-201). London: SAGE.

Seixas, P. (2000). Schweigen! die Kinder! or, Does postmodern history have a place in the schools? In P. N. Stearns, P. C. Seixas & S. S. Wineburg (Eds.), *Knowing, teaching, and learning history: National and international perspectives* (pp. 19-37). New York, NY: New York University Press.

Shaaban, K., & Ghaith, G. (1999). Lebanon's language-in-education policies: From bilingualism to trilingualism. *Language Problems and Language Planning, 23*(1), 1-16. doi: https://doi.org/10.1075/lplp.23.1.01leb

Stemler, S. (2001). An overview of content analysis. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation, 7*(17). Retrieved from http://PAREonline.net/getvn.asp?v=7&n=17.

Stenhouse, L. (1975). *An introduction to curriculum research and development*. London: Heinemann.

van Ommering, E. (2015). Formal history education in Lebanon: Crossroads of past conflicts and prospects for peace. *International Journal of Educational Development, 41*, 200-207. doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2014.06.009

Walsh, D. (2005). Developmental theory and early childhood education: Necessary but not sufficient. In N. Yelland (Ed.), *Critical issues in early childhood education* (pp. 40-48). Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Watkins, C., Carnell, E., Lodge, C., Wagner, P., & Whalley, C. (2001). Learning about learning enhances performance. *NSIN Research Matters*(13), 1-8.

World Bank. (2005). *Reshaping the future: Education and postconflict reconstruction*. Washington, DC: World Bank Publications.

World Bank. (2019). *Implementation completion and results report*. World Bank. Retrieved from http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/326901556572856739/text/Lebanon-Second-Education-Development-Project.txt

THANK YOU

USAID-funded program, managed by World Learning Inc.
Quality Instruction Towards Access and Basic *Education* Improvement (QITABI 2): 2nd floor, Azar Building (ID Design bldg), Sin El Fil, Lebanon, Tel: +961-1-511552/3