



**SYRIA  
EDUCATION  
PROGRAMME**

**MANAHEL  
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# LEARNING BULLETIN

**This issue focuses on:** the successful development of Arabic language guides for Grade 2 and plans to extend the initiative; support to vulnerable children through needs assessments and referral activities; the adoption of a safeguarding approach by the Education Directorate; and a more efficient stipend payments system to prioritise the well-being of Manahel staff.

The Early Grade Learning Assessment also reveals insights into gender-based disparities, emphasising the ongoing need for targeted interventions and the success of the Continued Professional Development (CPD) approach emphasises the significance of structured training for educators.

## More Arabic language guides planned after Grade 2 success

In 2022, Manahel started developing an Arabic language teacher guide targeting Grade 2 with the aim of generating materials suitable for both experienced and novice teachers, and establishing a template for future materials across various age groups.

Manahel collaborated with education stakeholders and Arabic language experts to develop the draft, then engaged teachers in a piloting phase to collect direct feedback. The peer review process ensured the guide's quality in terms of objectives, cognitive and skill coverage, language skills, instructions, teaching methods, active learning techniques, and lesson time distribution.

Following positive feedback from the Education Directorates (EDs) on the guide, Manahel distributed a digital copy to Grade 2 teachers with the aim of assessing the implemented strategies at the end of the current semester. Manahel now plans comprehensive training sessions for Grade 2 teachers, offering continuous coaching and support for effective guide implementation during the second semester. Collaborating with local and international experts, it aims to extend these efforts by developing similar guides for Grades 1, 3, and 4, leveraging insights from development of the initial guide to ensure ongoing refinement and improvement. This iterative approach aims to equip early-grade teachers with user-friendly materials, enhancing their ability to deliver improved Arabic language instruction in schools.

**LEARNING POINT:** Manahel has gained valuable insights into the development, refinement, and enhancement of user-friendly teaching materials and established a potential model for future resources. The key takeaway is the indispensability of a collective and inclusive approach in crafting a high-value tool that effectively supports teachers. Collaboration with both local and international experts remains crucial for acquiring insights that drive ongoing refinement and improvement efforts.

## New support for 2,200 vulnerable children

Manahel conducted a thorough needs assessment in collaboration with EDs and partners in September 2023. The goal was to identify vulnerabilities among school children engaged in the summer club and to initiate referral and case management activities that support the reintegration of those facing protection concerns. A Child-Functioning Screening (CFS) assessed children's functional abilities and the School Protection Officer developed a referral plan, which emphasised the active involvement of parents and children while maintaining confidentiality.

The referral plan is reviewed regularly to ensure the child's safety throughout the process, prioritising the most vulnerable children, especially those with disabilities or serious medical conditions. The collective efforts of various stakeholders – including the Protection Officer, Protection Instructor, ED, Protection Coach, and Case Management Officer from partner organisations alongside the Manahel team – ensure the safe implementation of the process.

During September and October, 1,334 children were supported, with a further 889 children supported in November. The selection process was guided by key criteria, including: physical and emotional abuse; exploitation; neglect; psychosocial distress; separation from family; unaccompanied status; disabilities; serious medical conditions; domestic violence; and child labour. The services provided to children included transport for children with disabilities, medical services (provision of assistive devices), stationery and school supplies, and clothing and home furniture for children facing child labour or acting as head of families.

**LEARNING POINT:** Case management and referral activities highlight the importance of conducting a comprehensive needs assessment to pinpoint vulnerabilities among school children and provide tailored support, with particular emphasis on the most vulnerable, especially those with disabilities or serious medical conditions. CFS plays a critical role by facilitating a holistic understanding of children's needs and contributing to the formulation of effective referral plans. Additionally, the collaborative involvement of partners is vital for ensuring the secure implementation of this process, while the active participation of parents and children in the plan's development is key for success and for preventing psychological distress.

## Education Directorate adopts safeguarding approach

Manahel has adopted a safeguarding approach based on policy and application of child protection practices designed to promote secure educational environments. The safeguarding approach means that all employees undergo training on the reporting system, commit to a Code of Conduct, and are well-versed in child safeguarding policies. The policy includes the appointment of safeguarding (SG) focal points in schools and within EDs' organisational structure to monitor reports and facilitate appropriate responses to safeguarding cases emphasising adherence to the punishment schedule for consistency and accountability in schools in Northwest (NW) Syria.

To ensure ongoing follow-up, the policy incorporates a post-case monitoring system. This involves re-signing the Code of Conduct and focused discussion sessions with children after closing a safeguarding case. Long-term impact measures include behaviour improvement strategies which promote positive reinforcement, effective classroom management, successful school administration, alternatives to punishment, and community engagement through awareness events and publications like the Child Protection magazine.

Manahel provides a monthly overview that details progress in addressing child safeguarding cases, encompassing investigation outcomes, preventative measures, and disciplinary actions taken for each case.

**LEARNING POINT:** Although Manahel acknowledges the significance of implementing a system-wide policy for safeguarding, it is equally crucial to have a well-organised approach and methodologies for effectively executing the policy. Therefore, Manahel will be advancing this policy to subsequent stages to guarantee its effective implementation in all schools. This will involve disseminating policy information to all relevant stakeholders, formulating an implementation protocol that includes specific steps for execution, monitoring the process to consistently identify areas for improvement, and establishing a feedback loop to facilitate necessary adjustments.

## Early Grade Learning Assessment shows continued improvement

Manahel has conducted the Teacher-led Early Grade Learning Assessment (TEGLA), involving 811 Grade 3 students (482 girls and 329 boys) across 22 schools. To address gender imbalance, a weighting technique was applied to ensure equitable representation. In terms of literacy, the assessment categorised students into non-reader, beginning reader, progressing reader, and proficient reader groups. While 59% demonstrated reading competency, girls outperformed boys, leading to a gender gap. Gender-specific analyses revealed boys' poorer performance in oral reading fluency and comprehension, emphasising the persistent gender gap despite improved literacy scores compared to Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA).

In numeracy, Grade 3 boys excelled but were level with girls by Grade 4. TEGLA also showed girls slightly outperforming boys in high-skills subtasks, like multiplication and word problems, whilst boys marginally outperformed girls in subtraction and addition. The study highlights successful TEGLA administration in summer schools, with improved results compared to EGRA/EGMA 2022, and closure of the gender performance gap. These findings emphasise the importance of ongoing efforts to understand and address gender-based disparities in early-grade learning outcomes.

Among the provinces, disparities in performance are readily apparent. Idleb has been consistently outperforming Aleppo in literacy and numeracy since 2017, with a notable reading deficit in Aleppo due to a higher proportion of non-readers. Idleb students also excel in numeracy subtasks, especially word problems, while Aleppo students face challenges in subtraction and multiplication, indicating a potential lack of numeracy skills development.



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**LEARNING POINT:** There is a critical need for targeted interventions to address performance gaps and ensure equitable learning outcomes for all students. Collaborative efforts with EDs, the use of assessment processes like TEGLA, and engagement with teachers are crucial in identifying and addressing the underlying factors contributing to disparities. They also highlight the necessity of a multifaceted approach and targeted strategies for effective intervention and improvement in educational outcomes.

## Continued Professional Development approach enhances teacher abilities and subject comprehension

Throughout the summer club programme, Manahel continued to support education staff with a methodical approach encompassing stakeholder engagement, competency selection, learning circles, mentorship, ongoing assessment, and continuous support to facilitate teachers' skills enhancement.

During the summer club, 1,427 teachers were assessed in four competences: communication with education stakeholders; using learning outcomes to monitor students' progress; using assessment tools; and understanding and promoting life skills. Deputy headteachers played a crucial role in assessing teachers through classroom observations. Pre- and post-evaluations conducted throughout the club duration revealed a notable 81% average improvement in teachers' capacities, with female staff showing slightly greater gains in all four competencies. Analysis of pre-assessment data indicated varying proficiency levels among teachers, primarily ranging from moderate to low. However, comparison of pre- and post-assessment outcomes highlighted significant progress across the range of teachers' abilities and in teachers' comprehension of the subjects addressed throughout the learning circles. The evidence demonstrates that educators not only acquire knowledge but also understand effective application of their new skills in the classroom.

**LEARNING POINT:** The success of the summer club programme demonstrates that combining stakeholder engagement, targeted competency selection, collaborative learning circles, mentorship, ongoing assessment, and continuous support contributes to significant skill enhancement among educators. The results demonstrate the importance of investing in structured and continuous professional development to enhance educators' abilities and their practical application in the classroom.

## A more efficient E-voucher system to pay stipends

Manahel encountered difficulty in ensuring punctual stipend payments for school staff in the summer club. The bottleneck was largely a consequence of the ED's decision to incorporate new schools into Manahel's list of supported schools during the summer club. This introduced complexities and created the need for additional layers of verification in the payroll development process. It also impacted on the E-voucher system used by Manahel to deliver stipends to its beneficiaries.

To address this issue, and to ensure that school staff received stipends without further delays, Manahel is implementing a time efficient and accurate verification process to adapt and expedite the E-voucher system. The programme and grants teams worked collaboratively to update the E-voucher system with data on new beneficiaries, issue stipend payments, coordinate with different stakeholders, and put forward stipend distribution plans. As a result, Manahel was able to deliver the first round of stipends distribution by October 2023.

By providing predictable stipends payment, Manahel recognises and values the hard work and dedication of school staff. Additionally, financial stability is vital for school staff to focus on their work without distractions. Delays in stipend payments can lead to stress, potentially affecting their performance and, in turn, students' learning outcomes.

**LEARNING POINT:** Manahel's response to difficulties in stipend payments during the summer club highlights the value of developing agile and responsive systems when experiencing unexpected challenges. The implementation of a time efficient verification process and collaboration between teams demonstrated Manahel's ability to adapt swiftly and efficiently. This ensured that school staff received stipends promptly, underscoring the critical role of financial stability in maintaining a focused and dedicated school staff. The experience also highlighted the need to proactively develop contingency plans and streamlined processes to navigate unforeseen obstacles, ensuring the smooth delivery of support services and minimising potential disruptions to staff.

## Well-being activity for teacher and staff

Manahel conducted a staff care activity for 2,004 teachers and staff (60% female), with the aim of improving morale and engagement. The activity included a psychosocial support session followed by a group gathering. A post-implementation survey received 1,352 responses, with 74% expressing satisfaction. However, 10% were dissatisfied, citing concerns such as misalignment between the activity cost and school size (each school received \$50 for the staff activity regardless of the size of the school), a desire to involve families, and a need for recreational activities and team-building exercises. Recommendations included consistent salary disbursement to encourage teacher motivation and ongoing, rather than occasional, mental health support.

**LEARNING POINT:** While a majority expressed satisfaction, the feedback underscores the importance of prioritising consistent salary disbursement and continual mental health support for sustained improvements in teacher motivation and well-being. This serves as a powerful reminder of Manahel's aim to consistently enhance the overall welfare of educators and guides our ongoing efforts in this direction.

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## Plan for next months

- Finalise inception planning for SEP II
- Prepare and implement sample of EGRA/EGMA
- Establishment and refurbishment of new/old Special Education Centres
- Set up technical plans for the academic year school delivery
- Delivering stipends for school staff for October and November



Manahel, which in Arabic means 'fountains' – of hope, of knowledge, and of life –, is the northwest component of the FCDO-funded Syria Education Programme (SEP). Delivered by Chemonics UK, Manahel provides education to primary school-aged children and, since 2018, has benefited over 600,000 children through school, home, and after-school education and by responding to children's psychosocial and protection needs.