



**SYRIA  
EDUCATION  
PROGRAMME**

# MANAHEL AUGUST 2023

# LEARNING BULLETIN

**This issue focuses on:** Summer club programme activities designed to prepare students for the academic year; the first results from the implementation of the Teacher-led Early Grade Learning Assessment (TEGLA); the Learning Lab organised by Manahel; and learning circles designed to improve teachers' abilities to assess student learning.

Some activities planned for August to introduce school staff to psychosocial support (PSS) in response to recommendations from Third Party Monitoring did not take place owing to external factors and will now happen in October.

## Summer club benefits 160,000 students

This year, Manahel and the Education Directorate (ED) agreed to work together to support 293 schools through the summer programme. During August, the programme focused on providing quality education services such as professional development for early grade teachers, literacy and numeracy programmes and protection activities, including psychosocial support (PSS). Upper grade schools were also indirectly aided through financial support for staff. This decision stemmed from the ED's preference for providing comprehensive rather than partial school support. The programme was able to expand its focus after obtaining financial support to target upper grade as well as early grade teachers. This extensive approach had a significant impact, benefiting approximately 60,000 students, including 51,000 students from grades 1 to 4 (51% female). Over the course of the month, these students participated in 20 literacy and 12 numeracy classes, as well as four PSS and four reading sessions each.



**LEARNING POINT:** Advanced planning and coordination are crucial for future summer programmes, particularly in the selection of supported schools, to avoid situations where fund allocations from various donor entities overlap. Other donors are generally more inclined to support secondary and high schools within their scope. The goal would be to encourage them to prioritise secondary and high schools for their funding, allowing Manahel to focus its resources mainly on early grade schools (in alignment with its mission). Such strategic coordination would optimise resource allocation across different educational levels, ensuring that the needs of all schools are adequately addressed.

## Teacher-led assessment data shows learning progress

In August, Manahel conducted an analysis of data obtained from the implementation of the Teacher-led Early Grade Learning Assessment (TEGLA) across six schools, involving a total of 235 Grade 3 students—including 133 females and 102 males. The outcome of this evaluation were consistent with the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and the Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) results, demonstrating that female students outperformed their male counterparts in reading, while male students excelled in mathematics. Additionally, the data showed an identical 16% rate of zero scores in literacy across both genders.

To deepen the analysis, Manahel led a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) involving 19 teachers and lead teachers - four of whom were male. The insights gained, along with reflections gathered from the post-test meetings, supported the introduction of several revisions to the TEGLA implementation. These included:

Updating the literacy and numeracy assessments.

Incorporating multiplication exercises.

Adding dictation tasks.

Modifying question settings for specific assessments to cater to both individual and group testing scenarios.

Revising and finalising protocols for test administration.

In response to these findings, Manahel updated the TEGLA toolkit and identified 22 schools for TEGLA implementation during the summer programme. The selection criteria for the schools prioritised those with special education centres as they are expected to receive continued support throughout the academic year, thus ensuring sustainable programme delivery and facilitating longitudinal data comparison. These selected schools will serve as the baseline for Manahel's ongoing TEGLA research and evaluation.

**LEARNING POINT:** It is essential for teachers to participate in learning circles centered on testing techniques and administration in order to ensure appropriate, fair and accurate evaluation of student performance. Skilful test administration reduces anxiety, bias, and errors, allowing the test to accurately reflect students' abilities and knowledge. Proper management also safeguards test integrity and enables educators to utilise test results for instructional planning.

## Learning Lab: Discussing the impact and improvement of learning assessments in NW Syria

A Learning Lab took place in the last week of August 2023 to share the annual early grade reading and mathematics assessment results for 2022 and understand comparisons with previous years. Manahel, with support from School to School International (STS), undertook these assessments in a sample of schools they support in Northwest (NW) Syria. This is part of a time-lapse series of four annual learning assessments that have been taking place since 2019.

The Learning Lab event allowed Manahel to present the apparent impact of the Syria Education Programme (SEP) on students' achievement. It also allowed Manahel to present the limitations of the sample-based, externally assessed EGRA and EGMA and created a platform for presenting the TEGLA assessment results which Manahel trialed during the summer.

Using a combination of methods, the event allowed participants to engage in live discussions about learning assessment strategies and tools, the importance of group work to examine the essential characteristics of an effective learning assessment, as well as reflections on the gaps that we are still encountering and the extent to which these gaps truly reflect student learning. The outcomes of these discussions were later presented in Manahel's EGRA/EGMA assessment and continuous assessment presentation. The discussion led naturally to approaches such as TEGLA which is seen as addressing most of the concerns shared because:

- 1 It is locally administered and so adaptable to under-resourced contexts.
- 2 It allows for immediate feedback as teachers can quickly evaluate students' needs and adapt their teaching methods accordingly.
- 3 It is context-specific as it allows discussion among educators to update the evaluation.
- 4 It implies lower costs because it doesn't require extensive external resources or personnel, making it a cost-effective option where funding may be scarce.

**LEARNING POINT:** It is important to employ a single, standardised assessment tool across all NGOs to ensure data consistency, promote efficient resource allocation, and foster collaborative efforts. This unified approach enhances system-level planning, elevates accountability, and allows for targeted interventions to address educational gaps. It also boosts donor confidence by demonstrating a coherent and effective strategy for improving educational outcomes.

Additionally, the active engagement of various actors in the learning assessment discussions served as a compelling indicator of the necessity for ongoing technical dialogue in the future, with a specific focus on addressing critical educational priorities in Northwest Syria.

## Learning circles to enhance teachers' abilities to use assessments tools

The Manahel team worked closely with others to prioritise enhancement of teachers' assessment tool proficiency as part of its wider commitment to TEGLA and learning assessment processes.

During August, the team focused on promoting the competency: "The teacher uses a variety of continuous and summative assessment tools to frequently check for understanding (quiz, test, drama, drawing, student discussion, projects, presentations, etc.), within the pedagogy thematic area, specifically the learning circle on 'Improving Educational Outcomes by Monitoring Student Progress and Developing Education Plans'." Manahel organised a learning circle to enhance this competency and engaged 1,587 teachers (40% female) in 136 schools. In parallel, the team trained 131 headteachers (47% female) on their role in promoting self-evaluation/assessment processes for school staff in order to enhance professional development, foster accountability, and enable data-driven strategies, contributing in this way to improving student outcomes and school effectiveness.

**LEARNING POINT:** Manahel identified certain discrepancies in the delivery of training and learning circles, particularly for new schools participating in the summer programme. In response, the team formulated a streamlined guide to enhance essential training competencies, with a special focus on learning circles and the professional development of headteachers. Developed

in consultation with downstream partners, the curriculum incorporated their feedback and recommendations. The training session was recorded and distributed along with the guide. These were disseminated to EDs for further distribution among educational and administrative staff. Additionally, the presentation was posted on the Facebook group "Ideas Bank".

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## Forthcoming teacher training sessions

Manahel had scheduled a training teachers' session on literacy and numeracy for August. However, it was decided to postpone the event after teacher feedback indicated a need to first update the curriculum and materials.

Although the delay represented a setback, it is also an opportunity to provide teachers with updated and quality content. Specifically, concerns were raised about the length of some levels, which appeared to cause disengagement among students. In response, Manahel initiated discussions with stakeholders to address these issues. The modification process is comprehensive, encompassing updates to the curriculum, assessment tools, and teaching guides. Additionally, new activities are being incorporated into the educational materials to foster student progress and provide more effective support for teachers.

**LEARNING POINT:** Rather than viewing this as a setback, the deferral of the training session was recognised as an opportunity to enhance what had been originally planned. This situation highlighted the capacity and willingness of the Manahel team to address concerns. It also highlighted the importance of being responsive to, and adapting to, the needs of different stakeholders and demonstrated that all activities need to be periodically reviewed to assess the need for continuous improvement and to update the materials or the content to be delivered.



## Parent support groups to address education barriers

In 2021, Manahel embarked on a mission to tackle the educational barriers faced by children struggling with severe emotional distress, fear, and anxiety disorders and, as part of this, helped set up parental support groups so parents were fully equipped to play their part.

The primary goal of the support groups was to cultivate confidence and empower communities to take action in support of mental well-being and inclusive education. Over time, these support groups grew and helped to shape local attitudes, enable access to vital resources and prioritise the inclusion of all children.

Parents involved have come together to form the Association of Caregivers of Children with Disabilities. Formation of the group, the first of its kind in the country, is a landmark event within the Syrian context and the association now stands as a key player in the education decision-making processes. Its efforts not only ensure a brighter future for children with special needs but also symbolise the power of community-driven initiatives.

[Click here](#) to watch the video prepared by the team to celebrate World Humanitarian Day and recognise the work of Manahel and the Association of Caregivers of Children with Disabilities.

## Activities for September

Finalise the Safeguarding policy for education sector.

Initiate conversations with relevant stakeholders on the Terms of Reference for the protection committees.

Finalise the summer club learning circles on protection and education.

Complete the teacher guide for Grade 2 and disseminate it to schools in preparation for the training in the first semester of the academic year.

Design the updated literacy and numeracy materials and prepare for training.

Start planning with EDs the selection of schools to support during academic year.

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 580,000 children through school, home, and after-school education and by responding to children's psychosocial and protection needs.