

SYRIA EDUCATION PROGRAMME



Syria Education Programme Staff Pay Research: Motivating Factors for Teacher Performance

MAY 2021

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This document has been redacted to protect the individuals involved in the Syria Education Programme. All names of people and locations have either been altered or removed, as has any information that may identify people or locations.

Project Description

The Syria Education Programme (SEP), also known as Manahel, provides access to safe, inclusive, and quality learning opportunities. Across its lifecycle the project will reach half a million primary-school-age children in Syria.

SEP enables teachers, school staff, and education sector leadership to deliver quality education. In response to the ever-changing landscape of conflict and crisis in Syria, SEP invests in and applies research to respond to the educational, psychological, and protection needs of Syria's children.

From the specialised requirements of disabled children to the psychological demands of childhood within conflict, students' needs are as diverse as they are urgent. SEP takes a broad and nuanced approach to the myriad needs of individual children and groups. By broadening educational access, promoting a safe and secure environment, and creating quality learning opportunities, SEP strives to meet children's holistic needs at scale.



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACU - Assistance Coordination Unit

ED - Education Directorate

FCAS - Fragile and conflict-affected states

FCDO - United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

FGD - Focus group discussion

IDPs - Internally displaced persons

MEL - Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

NGO - Non-governmental organisation

NWS - Northwest Syria

USD - United States Dollar



1. Research Purpose

A variety of factors, both encouraging and inhibiting, impact the way teachers engage with education in Northwest Syria (NWS). This research aims to understand the impact of a particular set of factors: staff pay and select Manahel¹ interventions, including teaching training for volunteer and non-volunteer teachers at supported schools. To achieve this goal, this report analyses research findings on the core motivational factors behind teachers' presence at schools, provision of quality lessons, and pursuit of continued professional development. According to the Teacher Motivation Working Group², teacher motivation is the desire, willingness, and commitment to teach to the best of one's ability in order to ensure equitable and quality instruction for all students. Teacher motivation is derived from a range of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that encourage or inhibit teachers in reaching their full potential. These findings focus on the role of the Education Directorate (ED), a key actors in the NWS education space, and potential avenues for them to provide additional support to teachers. It also provides quality data on teacher attitudes towards the current system of monetary compensation – namely, the timing, frequency, and amounts received.

¹The Manahel project is part of the broader Syria Education Programme (SEP)

²Teacher Motivation Working Group Blog <http://www.teachermotivation.org/blog2/about-us/>



2. Research Questions

THIS PART OF THE RESEARCH FOCUSED ON THE FOLLOWING RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- What relative value do teachers assign to different monetary and non-monetary support factors?
- In an ideal world, how do teachers believe the ED could provide additional support?
- In terms of time, amount, and frequency, to what extent does the standard staff pay cover the basic needs of teachers?



3. Background

From the project's outset in 2018 to the time this research was conducted in early 2021, the Syria Education Programme has reached a cumulative 492,274 children (49.4% female) in both formal and informal education spaces in Syria. This success was achieved partly through the support of 15,883 education staff (cumulatively) and volunteer teachers who received staff pay and training provided by Manahel. Data on the profile of teachers in NWS showed that nearly 45% of were female, and the majority were Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Based on previous research, such as the Stipends Paper research conducted in May 2019, there is a strong correlation between the provision of pay to school staff and teacher attendance. Teacher presence in the classroom is closely linked to students' opportunity to learn. [Integrity Global's 2019 report](#) on education in Syria observed that in Syria, "teachers are not available as often as they are needed to support learning and wellbeing"³.

³Research to improve the quality of teaching and learning inside Syria, Integrity Global (January 2019).

4. Research Design

4.1 Methods

To build upon the data from questionnaires within the research and a guidance tool used by enumerators during the data collection process, Manahel leveraged a mixed-method approach. In addition to the questionnaires, this included desk research (literature review), pilot focus group discussions (FGDs), and a survey to collect both qualitative and quantitative data that was triangulated at the final stage of the research.

In January 2021, a literature review was carried out to prepare a list of key factors that could motivate teachers to stay involved in the education process in a variety of contexts. For this preliminary stage, the research relied on the following sources of secondary data regarding teachers' motivation factors:

Teacher Motivation Diagnostic Tool findings from four pilot sites: Developed by the Teacher Motivation Working Group⁴ with support from Save the Children and World Vision, this tool is designed to capture a variety of factors hypothesised to influence and interact with teacher motivation and performance.

- 1. Landscape Review: Teacher Well-being in Low Resource, Crisis and Conflict-affected Settings⁵:** commissioned by the Education Equity Research Initiative, the review builds an understanding of teacher wellbeing in low resource, crisis, and conflict-affected contexts and identifies the individual and contextual factors that may influence wellbeing.
- 2. Teacher motivation: Theoretical Framework, Situation Analysis of Save the Children Country Offices and Recommended Strategies⁶:** This report summarises the results of research into teacher motivation through literature review, interviews with education experts and practitioners, and a survey conducted by Save the Children.

⁴Teacher Motivation Diagnostic Tool Findings from Four Pilot Sites (March 2016)

⁵Landscape Review: Teacher Well-being in Low Resource, Crisis, and Conflict-affected Settings by Education Equity Research Initiative (August 2019)

⁶Teacher Motivation: Theoretical Framework, Situation Analysis of Save the Children Country Offices and Recommended Strategies

3. Herzberg’s hygiene factors⁷: These factors comprise extrinsic elements of the work environment such as company policy, relationships with supervisors, working conditions, relationships with peers and subordinates, salary and benefits, and job security.

4. Previous in-house research data and site visits conducted by Manahel.

In February 2021, a pilot FGD was held with a randomised group of teachers (volunteers and non-volunteers). The main purpose of the FGD was to prepare an initial research draft to identify evidence regarding teachers’ motivating factors. The teachers were asked to validate and extend the list of factors formulated from the initial literature review. In the main FGDs, the teachers were also asked to rank the different motivating factors in relation to each other and explain the rationale behind their choices. Manahel’s field monitors moderated the FGDs. In advance of the FGDs, the field monitors received thorough training to ensure they would be able to list the predetermined factors clearly and impartially and not guide the participants’ choices. The enumerators used a card sorting exercise during the data collection, in which FGD participants were given a set of cards for each theme. For example, for question one, they were given cards with each piece representing a motivational factor — and after explaining each card, the participants were asked to categorise them individually before starting the discussion. Field monitors also collected gender and contract type (volunteer or permanent) information from FGD participants.

The primary data collection took place throughout March 2021, when 19 FGDs were conducted with teachers in Province A and Province B (in Manahel-supported, NGO-supported, and non-supported schools). During the main FGD, the teachers validated the pre-established factors list, ranked motivating factors, explained the reasoning behind the rankings, and added to the list according to their individual concerns and interests. It is worth noting that the predetermined list of factors, drawn from international literature and teachers’ initial review (teachers were allowed to add factors to the predetermined list), largely matched with teachers’ responses, demonstrating an overall consensus during data collection and analysis (see Figure 2, page 8 for further details). For example, “regular staff pay” was mentioned as a high priority in both the list drawn from the literature review and the teachers’ choices. Certain factors the teachers added, like “longevity of contract” and “desire to work with children”, were unique priorities related to the research conducted in Syria.

4.2 Sample Selection of the Qualitative Research and Size

The data was collected in 19 different schools representing most of the geographic areas (subdistricts) targeted by Manahel. Within these schools, 171 teachers and headteachers (59 male and 112 female) and 57 volunteers working in these schools volunteered to take part in the FGDs. Below is a detailed breakdown of the participants of the FGDs by sex and geographic location.

⁷Herzberg’s Two Factors Theory on Work Motivation

Figure 1: Profile of participants taking part in the FGDs

Governorate	Number of Schools	Female total	Male total	Total	Female volunteer	Male volunteer
Province A	15	75	58	133	22	25
Province B	4	37	1	38	10	0
Total	19	112	59	171	32	25

4.3 Research Limitations

The gender imbalance seen above is due to the majority of the primary teachers are female. Manahel field monitors observed that female teachers are usually more eager to participate in discussion groups and other outlets for opinion-sharing or input. The field monitors also observed that older male teachers are generally more reluctant to discuss their working conditions and provide suggestions or ideas, so they did not agree to participate in the focus group discussions. Another limitation to the research is the lack of data on the respondents' living conditions, family sizes, and displacement status, which would provide greater information on potential reasoning behind the teachers' choices and correlation with socioeconomic factors. It would have been culturally inappropriate to ask questions on these topics. Finally, the unpaid volunteer teachers were not separated from the paid teachers in the discussion groups. Therefore, it was not possible to disaggregate the responses based on the type of teacher, which would have been crucial within this research. Manahel conducted a complementary quantitative study that aims to address these gaps by validating and explaining the findings of this initial report.

5. Findings and Analysis

5.1 The Relative Value of Monetary and Non-Monetary Support Factors

Figure 2: The support factors as ranked by the teachers, with regular pay ranking as most important, and full-time job as the least



This section examines the relative value of the different support factors provided and discussed by the teachers. The FGD participants were presented with various monetary and non-monetary support factors. Participants assigned a value to each factor and then explained the rationale behind their choice⁸. At the end of each FGD, the factors were weighted and ranked based on the total score of each discussed factor⁹. The same approach was used whilst combining and analysing the focus group data.

Significantly, most of the participants selected the provision of staff pay as the primary support factor, followed by longevity/consistency of job contracts, and being part of a strong team. Among 171 respondents, 109 teachers (71 females and 38 males) selected

⁸Unpaid teachers were not separated from the paid teachers in the discussions. Although the facilitators noted the status of the teacher while recording their response, we do not have quantifiable data that summarises the responses of the teachers and the unpaid teachers.

⁹The factors were ranked from 1 to 10 depending on the ranking. Amongst 10 discussed factors, the highest ranked factor received 10 points and the lowest factor received one point.

staff pay as their main support factor and 37 respondents (24 females and 13 males) selected staff pay as their second priority. While justifying the importance of staff pay, a few participants stated that it is their main source of income¹⁰.

The Assistance Coordination Unit's (ACU) most recent annual schools report¹¹ found that 82% of teachers across NWS do not have other sources of income. Most teachers mentioned being the heads of large families. They recounted a variety of economic hardships that they encounter on a daily basis due to the dire economic conditions and inflation rates in NWS, and recent experiences of displacement. Participants expressed their strong desire for regular and timely payments, as they heavily depend on these funds. Staff pay is the primary reported need among unpaid teachers and the most important support factor. These teachers do not have other sources of income, and they continue to operate on a volunteer basis in the hopes of being included in future staff pay support activities.

Data from the focus groups revealed that the longevity and consistency of contracts¹² is the second most important support factor. It provides psychological stability in the lives of the teachers and promotes wellbeing, which can have a positive impact on their performance. Participants also mentioned that having consistent and longer-term contracts protect them should they fall ill. Teachers also mentioned that they wished they could be provided with health insurance benefits. This finding was surprising given that health insurance is not available to anyone in NWS.

For the third priority, the majority of teachers selected the importance of being part of a strong team. They explained that strong connections amongst the education team members contribute to continuous improvement efforts and staff commitment to the school and students. Consistent and effective cooperation between the teachers and the management team motivates teachers to perform better and nurtures a healthy competitive attitude. On the other hand, volunteer teachers expressed their concerns with school administrations' strong influence and that they are expected to take on a variety of tasks without any monetary support.

The majority of the volunteer and paid teachers stated that the fourth motivating factor was a strong desire and ambition to educate children and prepare future generations for success. Motivation levels significantly increase when teachers see positive results in children's learning processes directly affected by the conflict. This is followed by the desire to be provided with professional development opportunities available for all teachers, which participants stated helps them learn new and modern teaching techniques.

In terms of the secondary and less impactful support factors, the participants described the recognition of teachers' achievements by the ED as a factor that boosts their self-confidence and gives them assurance that their contributions are being valued by the school management units, the ED, and parents. One female teacher stated, "After receiving [sic] recognition letter from the Education Directorate, I became more enthusiastic towards my job and started to perform better." However, the volunteer teachers mentioned that recognition events do not fulfil this purpose unless they are

¹⁰There is no statistical data here as this was not one of the research questions that the facilitators had to report on separately on the response sheet, but it repeatedly came up by the teachers as one of the leading reasons why the staff pay is very important in their lives.

¹¹ACU Schools in Syria (April 2021).

¹²The longevity of contracts was defined to the participants as having a long-term employment contract with regular staff payment and entitlements.

complemented with staff pay support. Some teachers stated that having a school manager with an engaging attitude who understands the teachers' conditions, works closely with them, and encourages them to perform better is also a key supportive factor. In terms of clear objectives¹³, all teachers (volunteer and non-volunteer) reported being aware of their mission to educate and support vulnerable children. Finally, having a full-time job contract was ranked as the least relevant support factor. It was instead only regarded as necessary for the future career development plans of the teachers.

5.2 The Role that the Education Directorate Could Ideally Assume

To better understand the expectations teachers have of the ED and the roles and responsibilities that the ED needs to assume towards the teachers, FGD participants were provided with a variety of options for roles and services the ED should assume. They were asked to rank them based on relevance during a card sorting exercise.

Participants reported that the most important role that the ED needs to fulfil is securing teachers' jobs and providing salaries, followed by the ED policies that have implications for education staff, such as recruitment procedures and employment agreements. Similar to their ranking of support factors, the teachers reiterated that the uninterrupted provision of salaries provides incentives and psychological stability, encourages the delivery of the expected output, and improves their lives. The participating teachers expressed frustrations with the inactive role of the ED in this regard. They mentioned other supported employees, namely the ED and education assembly staff, who, unlike the teachers, receive "reasonable" monetary support¹⁴.

Teachers want the ED to assume the responsibility of distributing staff pay to the teachers, noting that EDs will likely be present in the longer-term, unlike NGOs who are may only provide shorter-term assistance. Most NGOs expanded their presence and mandate in the region after the war. Therefore, the NGO education staff perceive NGO activities as temporary because of the nature of funding and its sustainability. In contrast, teachers perceive the local authorities' services as longer-term solutions. For example, some participants described the "privatisation" of the education sector as a significant limitation, keeping in mind that many NGOs often support a specific cycle instead of a complete academic year, which eventually create gaps in the education process. To prevent this, the participating teachers hope the ED will create a policy requiring organisations to support any school for a minimum of one year. The teachers also highlighted the importance of having a policy that unifies salaries along with an employment policy that EDs lead via an inclusive consultation process. The participants expressed that schools should not have unpaid teachers delivering the same outputs as other paid teachers. Participants stated that everyone should be equally supported to improve the education process in these schools.

Next, the participants selected the role of the ED in improving working conditions through supportive and non-intrusive supervision. The interviewed teachers highlighted the importance of overcoming nepotism – as many individuals are often

¹³Defined as being aware of one's mission as a teacher and the tasks that need to be performed within the work scope.

¹⁴ED staff do not receive regular pay – it is sporadic – and when they do it is in the range of \$150-\$250 (USD). As such, this is an assumption on the part of FGD participants, rather than a fact.

appointed to key positions due to personal connections – and changing the way the ED communicates with the school staff. The latter could be achieved by greater open appreciation of the teachers’ efforts, recognising their vital role in the education process, as well as using more polite and respectful language when communicating with the school staff. Teachers also asked for the financing policy to be clear and applied across all the entities working in the field of education to minimise the difference in salaries between organisations. Some participants noted that job security, which is defined as providing long-term employment agreements, is the third type of support that the ED must pay particular attention to in order to promote stability in teachers’ lives.

Creating and supporting a culture of respect and dignity for all team members is another support area where EDs could be more active. Many participants highlighted the necessity of respect towards teachers from senior-level staff; communicating with the teachers, actively addressing their complaints, and appreciating their feedback. Manahel plays an active role in nurturing these relations by improving ED staff policies and offering training. In many FDGs, the teachers raised the issue of the lack of schoolbooks, heating, and hygiene kits. The scope of these needs remains large, despite Manahel providing schools with learning materials, hygiene kits and stationery before each academic term and having provided one-off fuel assistance to schools in May 2020. In a recent study¹⁵, it was found that NGO-supported schools are better resourced compared to schools supported by Manahel. For instance, teaching materials are provided in 75% of NGO-supported schools in NWS, and only in 23% of schools supported by Manahel. In some FGDs, the participants mentioned that schools lack modern educational means, such as projectors or similar equipment, essential for upgrading the education sector. In Manahel schools, this will be better addressed in the upcoming academic year as a new teacher’s guide and a teacher’s toolkit. Teaching methods are being revised and will be shared with the teachers. However, there are no discussions on distributing modern educational means to the schools.

Whilst discussing the remaining secondary roles that the ED could assume, the teachers reported that the content of some curricula needs to be upgraded and additional support should be provided for continued learning for teachers. Manahel can support the EDs in updating the teachers’ training content and using the established supervision and coaching mechanisms owned by EDs (implemented by instructors and lead teachers) to provide service training and targeted professional development. Many teachers also highlighted the importance of improving the resilience of teachers, especially those who had experienced displacement, to ensure they will be able to deliver the intended outputs. Some participants highlighted the importance of focusing on the cultural awareness of applicants when appointing new school staff members, as their ability to interact and work with people from diverse backgrounds is a key factor affecting the performance of a given school team. Manahel supports teacher wellbeing through peer learning circles, with one out of four circles focusing on wellbeing. For the upcoming academic year, additional resources will be invested to promote teacher wellbeing via tailoring existing supervision and coaching structures in line with emerging staff needs and an increased focus on fostering communication channels between the EDs and the schools. School representatives will be engaged in the planned delivery units for key components such as teacher training, literacy and numeracy, child safeguarding and other relevant policies.

¹⁵Manahel school mapping snapshot (December 2020).

5.3 Teachers' Attitude with Respect to the Received Monetary Support

THE TIME AND FREQUENCY OF PAYMENTS

All FGD participants, including teachers from Manahel schools, stated that there are delays in distributing staff pay and inconsistency in the dates salaries are received. The majority expressed a wish to receive the payment at the end of each month, as having a set date helps teachers to better organise their lives. The MEL team discussed this finding with the programme and operations teams and followed up again in the following months, confirming the resolution of the issue. In one FGD, the participants reported that all teachers are in debt because the salary they receive doesn't cover their basic needs. Thus, there is a need to have a fixed date for the distribution of staff pay, as it enables them to pay their expenses regularly. Some participants reported embarrassment, psychological pressure, and eventual unwillingness to work stemming from their inability to pay bills along with monthly rent and other costs on time. The delays in paying back those bills, in addition to monthly rent and other important bills, were reported by some participants to cause embarrassment, psychological pressure, and eventually unwillingness to work. Inconsistency in the payment date resulted from operational challenges with the cash transfer companies. However, Manahel's NGO partners recently stated that there has been more consistency in the date of the payments in the last two months.

THE AMOUNT TEACHERS ARE PAID

In most FGDs, the teachers described the received payment of \$120 USD per month as “unsatisfactory” or “not enough” to cover basic needs. In only one FGD did the participants described the received amount as “acceptable”. The participants mentioned that teachers get paid the lowest amount across all the professions supported by NGOs, and the amount received is not enough to cover the needs of those who are the head of average-sized families (families of four members or more), or indeed inflation. One teacher reported that the amount received covers only half of their monthly needs, whilst another participant stressed the need for teachers to have multiple jobs to cover their basic needs, which impacts their performance. It is noteworthy that around one-third of the supported teachers are internally displaced persons (IDPs) who reside in rented apartments, and rents in NWS usually cost around \$100 USD per month. In a study conducted by Reach16 between April and May 2021, 44% of the interviewed IDP communities in NWS cited securing shelter as their first, second, or third priority needs. Amongst the remaining local communities interviewed, 45% cited food as one of their main priority needs. During one focus group, a participant stated that, “A teacher who seeks a better life can quit their job and become a guard at another organisation in order to have a better life as guards receive higher salaries than teachers in NGO supported activities in NWS.”

¹⁶Humanitarian Situation Overview of Syria (HSOS) (May 2021) <https://reach-info.org/syr/hsos/>

FINANCIAL SUPPORT THROUGH THE SUMMER MONTHS

Teachers stressed the need to receive uninterrupted support throughout the year, including in the summer months, so that they have funds to cover their basic needs. In one discussion, the teachers mentioned that they cannot secure a short-term job during the summer breaks that correspond to their background and profession as teachers. Some teachers mentioned their only summer work opportunities are in agriculture and construction, which require an individual to perform very demanding physical tasks. The teachers reported not being qualified to assume these roles.

Manahel-supported teachers receive staff payment only during academic terms. Therefore, they receive support only for seven months per year unless they are assigned additional roles in summer (namely those who the ED assigns to take part in the summer camp). Of a total of 7,370 staff members who were supported in the last academic year, 2,284 will continue receiving support as part of the summer camp activity in 2021. However, the programme should examine other options to support all teachers in the summer. Some teachers stated that those not assigned roles should receive at least 50% of their salary in the summer when they require free time to prepare for the upcoming academic year. The teachers can use this time to learn new skills and improve their knowledge. Moreover, the continuous support encourages the teachers to focus only on their teaching career and not invest time and energy in looking for other jobs, which could eventually lead to them abandoning their career in education.



6. Conclusion & Next Steps

The findings of this research clearly demonstrate the importance of providing of staff pay, followed by longevity and consistency of contracts that guarantee the teachers' psychological wellbeing and motivate them to perform their tasks. Unpaid teachers are actively participating in Manahel's activities, including training, hoping to start receiving staff pay in the future. Education actors, including Manahel, need to continue providing payment to teachers, including the unpaid staff, and consider the current economic trends and inflations rates in NWS. This support needs to continue uninterrupted throughout the calendar year to promote teachers' attendance and maintain their wellbeing. Manahel has worked closely with the FCDO and the education cluster on advocating for teachers' compensation.

Although the professional development plans and the desire to be recognised play secondary roles as compared staff pay, they should also be addressed by education actors to improve teachers' motivation and performance. Manahel's downstream partners should continue providing training to teachers and improving their skills, including new and technologically modern teaching methods, and regularly organise teacher recognition events. School management teams should ensure the teachers are being treated with respect and dignity by the instructors and other senior staff. Manahel offers regular learning sessions to management staff to this end. The teachers also believe that the ED, which has a stronger presence in the region than the NGOs, is not using its mandate to ensure the wellbeing of the school staff mainly due to their inaction in improving the salaries and relationship between the teachers, the school administrations and the ED staff. Therefore, the teachers want the ED to play a more active role in leading support to the education sector in the long term, first by improving their relationship with the schools and the teachers.

This research will be used to bring the voice of teachers in NWS to policymakers and other donors, highlighting actual needs via a clear gap analysis as well as alternatives or suggestions to improve school staff pay to sustain teachers' engagement, attendance, and quality of education. Donors are open to paying more teachers, but they have concerns. Firstly, outside of Manahel, there is no central ledger recording all teachers, what pay they receive, and how often. Secondly, donors lack confidence around how financial risks are managed (e.g., double-pay, ghost payments, delayed or misallocated payments). The objective of future research will be to answer those concerns and, in doing so, to unlock additional funding for teachers' pay.

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