

POLICY BRIEF:

ERICC Research Agenda for Lebanon

The Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis (ERICC) Research Programme Consortium is a global research and learning partnership that strives to transform education policy and practice in conflict and protracted crisis around the world – ultimately to help improve holistic outcomes for children – through building a global hub for a rigorous, context-relevant and actionable evidence base.

ERICC seeks to identify the most effective approaches for improving access, quality, and continuity of education to support sustainable and coherent education systems and holistic learning and development of children in conflict and crisis. ERICC aims to bridge research, practice, and policy with accessible and actionable knowledge – at local, national, regional and global levels – through co-construction of research and collaborative partnerships.

ERICC is led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) with Academic Lead IOE, UCL’s Faculty of Education and Society, and expert partners include Centre for Lebanese Studies, Common Heritage Foundation, Forcier Consulting, ODI, Osman Consulting, Oxford Policy Management and Queen Rania Foundation. During ERICC’s inception period, NYU-TIES provided research leadership, developed the original ERICC Conceptual Framework and contributed to early research agenda development. ERICC is supported by UK Aid.

Countries in focus include Bangladesh (Cox’s Bazar), Jordan, Lebanon, Myanmar, Nigeria, South Sudan and Syria.

Disclaimer

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Executive summary

Lebanon is characterised by deepening inequalities and multidimensional crises. Since 2019, the Port of Beirut explosion, which together have led to soaring poverty levels among its Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian population. Lebanon's education system was already struggling to provide adequate services, and within this context the sector has fallen into an even deeper crisis.

The Centre for Lebanese Studies has formulated a research agenda for education in the context of conflict and protracted crises in Lebanon. This brief draws on a working paper (Brun et al. 2024) that reviews existing evidence and knowledge on the education sector in Lebanon, plus consultations with key stakeholders. It summarises the conditions in the education system, the methodology used to formulate the research agenda, and eight priority themes that the Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis (ERICC) team will focus on in the Lebanese context. These themes are:

1. Governance and financial management
2. Teachers
3. Crisis monitoring
4. The private sector
5. Non-formal education
6. Vocational education
7. Knowledge production
8. The ongoing crisis in southern Lebanon.

A. Lebanon: An education system in crisis

The World Bank (2021) ranked Lebanon's financial crisis that began in 2019 as among the most severe global crises since the mid-nineteenth century. The country's economic situation was then worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Port of Beirut explosion, which together drove Lebanon into unprecedented debt and soaring poverty for its Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese residents. The education system in Lebanon was already struggling to offer adequate education before 2019, and these multidimensional challenges have driven the sector into an even deeper crisis.

Lebanon hosts the highest number of refugees per capita globally. An estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees reside in Lebanon, with approximately 815,000 registered with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) (UNHCR 2024). Additionally, more than 489,000 Palestinian refugees are registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), though fewer than 250,000 reside in Lebanon, alongside around 31,400 Palestinian Syrians (UNRWA 2024).

The education system in Lebanon reflects the country's complex societal issues, which are influenced by colonialism, sectarianism, conflict and crises. Reforms since the 1980s, shaped by the civil war, the Taef Agreement of 1989, the Syrian refugee crisis, and the ongoing financial crisis, have deeply impacted education. The education system is divided between Lebanese nationals and Syrians who attend different 'shifts' in public schools. There are also divides between public and private sectors; and between different types of private schools, including those run by religious non-profits. Meanwhile, UNRWA runs separate schools for Palestinian refugees, who have limited access to other educational institutions.

The compounded crises in Lebanon have severely impacted teachers. With the currency losing over 95% of its value, teachers' salaries have become insufficient, which has led to strikes. International funding has also declined, pushing the education system to the brink of collapse. From 2019 to 2023, students received only 270 days of in-person teaching in total, instead of the typical 600 (Pushparatnam et al, 2023). Public school students have been affected to a greater extent than private school students, as the former have faced ongoing disruptions and strikes. Additionally, around 383,000 Syrian children are out-of-school (MEHE 2021).

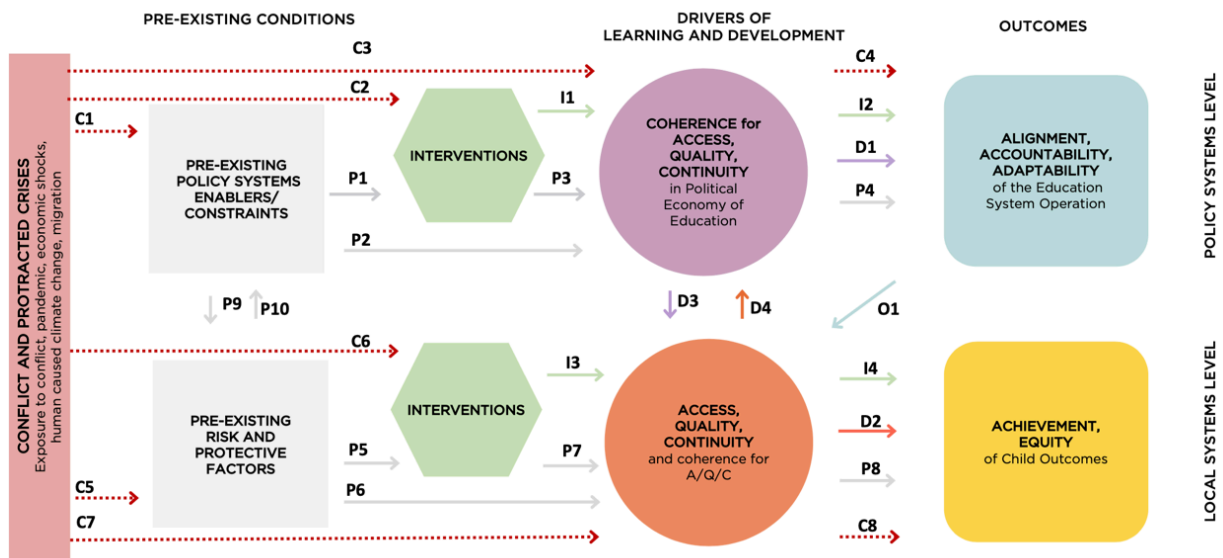
According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), tensions have risen between the Lebanese government and the international community over Syrian refugee-hosting and education strategies (USAID 2022). In 2021, the international community supported a new five-year education plan with three pillars: access, quality and systems strengthening. This plan focuses on vulnerable groups rather than nationals and refugees, which is where emphasis was placed in the two previous plans (Ministry of Education and Higher Education 2014 & 2016). The new plan has gained unanimous support in the education sector (USAID 2022).

B. Identifying the need for research: the country scan

In this context of multidimensional crises, research is needed in most spheres of the education system and beyond. Research and education have a long tradition in Lebanon and there are some ties between university research, particularly through the Lebanese University, and the education sector. However, the academic discourse primarily concerns teacher training and more technically oriented research to strengthen teaching practice and learning, rather than systemic change.

The onset of the Syrian refugee crisis and the resulting influx of humanitarian actors has brought about a trend for additional data collection for humanitarian interventions. This has involved a larger body of international research and substantial data collection by both humanitarian and development actors. More international researchers have also been attracted to Lebanon to conduct research on education for refugees. These stakeholders have often brought with them more extractive practices, which have influenced power dynamics and conditions for both locally based and international researchers (Sukarieh and Tannock 2019; Shuayb and Brun 2021). The ERICC project has developed a conceptual framework (see Figure 1) to identify and explain education processes that affect children's outcomes in conflict and protracted crisis settings (Kim et al. 2022). This framework provides an organising tool for the different themes within the education system. It has been applied to the Lebanese context to understand pre-existing conditions, the drivers and outcomes of education at micro and macro scales, and the pathways and potential interventions to bring about change.

Figure 1. ERICC Conceptual Framework (Source: Kim et al., 2022: 8)



To formulate a research agenda for education in Lebanon we first conducted a country scan to capture existing evidence and knowledge on the sector. Using the ERICC conceptual framework, we mapped stakeholders and major education aid projects, systematised existing evidence from four studies by [the Centre for Lebanese Studies](#), and conducted a new literature search on refugee education in Lebanon. We also conducted stakeholder interviews with civil society organisations, government servants, and aid actors.

Following the ERICC framework, we organised our analysis under the four themes summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Themes covered in the ERICC Lebanon evidence review

Themes			
1. Pre-existing and persistent challenges	2. Drivers (access, quality and continuity)	3. Interventions	4. Outcomes at policy and local systems level
Pre-/Post-2011	Access and continuity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participation by level - Regional inequality - Gender inequalities - Children living with disability - Palestinian refugees - Syrian refugees - Language 	Interventions at policy Level	Adaptability
Compounded crises			Accountability
Language policies			Alignment
Curriculum			
Finance, budgets and costs of education	Factors and conditions for quality education: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School building and facilities - Classroom crowding - Teaching faculty - Teaching days - Social and emotional learning 	Evaluations and analyses of interventions at local systems level	Academic Social and emotional learning Physical (infrastructure)

Our general observation on knowledge and evidence in the education sector is that research has relied on quantitative and descriptive studies, with a recent shift towards qualitative methods focused on academic outcomes. However, this shift has often neglected broader socioeconomic impacts and experiences. There is a significant gap in intersectional studies on the experiences of different groups, including nationals and refugees, which are essential to understand diverse educational challenges. Additionally, research methods are typically non-participatory, lacking stakeholder involvement that could enhance insights. Data systems show critical shortcomings, such as an absence of detailed financial information that distinguishes between refugees and nationals, and limited data on disabilities. A reliance on alternative resources underscores the need for integrated data collection to fully capture educational experiences in Lebanon.

1. Pre-existing conditions (macro): Governance and accountability

There is a limited body of research that specifically addresses how education is governed in Lebanon. This gap signifies a pressing need for further studies aimed at enhancing the mechanisms of accountability within the sector, including gaining deeper understanding of the role of different stakeholders. More research is also needed around the role of the existing

curriculum that has been in place from 1997 and attempts to finalise a new curriculum; around language policies; and around finance, budgets and the cost of education. Finally, greater emphasis is needed on the relationship between the public and private education sectors. There is currently a dearth of knowledge on the diverse private sector, including on the working conditions, rights and professional support available to teachers in private institutions, as well as on financing of this sector.

2. Pre-existing conditions (micro/meso): Parents and communities

Parental and community engagement in the educational process is critical for positive outcomes, yet there are notable gaps in research concerning the roles of these stakeholders. This is particularly true in relation to Lebanon's diverse context involving nationals and refugees. Few studies exist on how parents – both nationals and refugees – support their children's learning, for example. Understanding this dynamic is essential for developing strategies that leverage parental involvement to enhance educational outcomes, reduce dropout rates and increase student retention. Research in this area could provide valuable insights into the unique challenges and opportunities faced by different groups within the educational system, which in turn could lead to targeted interventions that support both parents and children in achieving better educational results.

3. Drivers: Access to education

The focus on access to education within Lebanon, particularly for refugee children, is predominantly framed within a humanitarian discourse. This approach has led to a distinct separation in research methodologies and objectives between nationals and refugees, and this has created divergent paths in how educational needs and outcomes are addressed and understood. For example, research on refugees predominantly concentrates on addressing immediate needs, such as basic access to schools and learning materials. While critical, this focus often neglects the exploration of the long-term outcomes vital for the sustained well-being and integration of refugees into society, such as employment opportunities and the quality of education received. The lack of attention to these long-term perspectives restricts the ability of educational programmes to be truly transformative for the refugee population, potentially limiting their prospects and contributions to their host community.

4. Drivers: Continuity and quality of education

There is a critical need for research that will identify the underlying causes of high dropout rates among Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian children. Understanding these factors is crucial to develop programmes that can significantly reduce dropout rates and promote sustained engagement in education. Research is needed to explore how economic factors are affecting teachers, especially in specific subjects and regions, which can then inform policy adjustments and support mechanisms for educators. Another significant concern is the number of out-of-school children. It is essential to conduct studies that track and analyse the reasons behind non-enrolment, which will inform the design of strategies to re-engage these children in the educational system. Moreover, there is scarce research on the effectiveness of summer school programmes and various remedial and accelerated learning programmes, including non-formal education. It is crucial that these initiatives are evaluated, in order to understand their impact and efficacy in improving student outcomes and addressing learning gaps.

5. Interventions and outcomes: Programme evaluations

Most evaluations are conducted on a small scale. This approach restricts the breadth and depth of insights that can be gathered, as there is no overarching evaluation of education programmes at scale. Larger evaluations are crucial to assess aspects of implementation, impact and the interrelationships among various components of the educational system – and the absence of such evaluations in Lebanon means that systemic issues or successes may go unnoticed. This potentially hinders the development, refinement and targeting of effective educational strategies and policies.

C. National consultations

To complement the country scan, we held consultations with 37 stakeholders from mid-February to early March 2024. Stakeholders included representatives from national and international civil society, unions, political parties, international organisations, donors, academia, and government. Initially, three consultations were held with different stakeholder groups. This was followed by a fourth meeting where we brought everyone together to present a proposed research agenda and discuss the outcomes of the consultations. Due to ongoing hostilities in southern Lebanon and for convenience, these consultations were conducted online and recorded for note-taking purposes.

During the consultations, we presented the results from our country scan, including the evidence review summarised above. We also sought advice on key research themes. Participants emphasised the need to build on existing data, address data processing challenges and improve data alignment. They noted that research should connect micro, meso and macro levels for actionable insights, and that efforts should consider both crisis and development aspects simultaneously.

Participants highlighted the importance of focusing on a few in-depth studies rather than broad, surface-level research. They also stressed the need to anticipate future trends in the education sector, particularly potential aid reductions. Discussions on methodology emphasised the need for appropriate, consolidated and innovative approaches.

The consultations underscored the importance of realistic and concrete research outcomes and suggested ongoing involvement of the consulted group.

D. A research agenda for Lebanon

The country scan and stakeholder consultations resulted in the formulation of eight broad themes (see Table 2) that ERICC will prioritise in future research. These themes were later confirmed during the fourth stakeholder consultation.

Table 2. ERICC research agenda for Lebanon

Overall research theme	Details/breakdown of theme
Governance and financial management	Structure of governance and the roles of different actors; Transparency and accountability; Governance at different levels and relationship between levels; Financing of education, role of large-scale aid programmes; Data systems, Curriculum development and reform
Teachers	Knowledge/Capacity building; Welfare; Work conditions (including salaries); Mapping of workforce
Crisis monitoring	Access; Loss of Learning; Children who stop attending school; Continuity; Out-of-school children; Learning poverty
Private sector	Governance and finance of private sector; Teachers' conditions and potential for organising; Teachers' welfare; Teachers' knowledge
Non-formal education	Transition from non-formal to formal; Social and emotional learning; Connection to labour market
Vocational education	Current state of formal vocational training; Relationship between public vocational training and the diversity of other providers; Vocational training and relevance for labour market
Knowledge production	Who commissions and funds studies (whose interests shape the research agenda)? Who conducts the research? How is knowledge used today? What are weaknesses in the current knowledge system on education in Lebanon?
Ongoing crisis in Southern Lebanon	What are the current needs for education responding to the crisis on Lebanon's southern border? (to be discussed with the helpdesk)

1. Cross-cutting themes

Some themes are considered cross-cutting, specifically those aimed at maintaining a holistic approach to the research process. For example, we found few studies on the role of parents (both nationals and refugees) in supporting children's learning. Greater emphasis on the role of parents and local communities – including local ownership of education reform – is important in every study we plan to conduct. This is underlined by existing research showing parental involvement in educational attainment and outcomes (Shuayb et al., 2021), particularly to reduce dropout rates among refugee children.

We also found scant intersectional research exploring how social differences like gender and disability impact educational inequality. Equity and inclusion are underexplored, and more

emphasis is needed on the role of the community, residential location and environment in promoting educational equity. Research should always consider the interaction between different contextual levels to provide a comprehensive understanding of educational themes, and consequently our planned research will strive to always consider these factors.

2. Themes not covered

Certain core themes, like foundational skills and mental health, were also highlighted in our stakeholder consultations. While these themes are not excluded from our work, other organisations and initiatives – such as the Quality Instruction Towards Access and Basic Education (QITABI) project – are already conducting significant research in these areas in collaboration with Lebanon’s Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD). QITABI works specifically on social and emotional learning, an area we aim to complement rather than duplicate. Additionally, ongoing studies and initiatives on school principals and school improvement plans further highlight the need for collaboration and resource optimisation in research on the education sector.

E. Next steps

While not exhaustive, the research agenda presented here is ambitious. We will not be able to conduct research on all of these themes under the umbrella of the ERICC project. As such, we discussed with stakeholders the initial priorities for research. Three themes were mentioned repeatedly: governance and policy-making; the situation and role of teachers; and crisis monitoring. The Lebanon team will focus on these specific themes in the next phase. In the meantime, we are reaching out to all potential partners in-country and hope to formulate collaborative research that can strengthen the knowledge base on education in Lebanon.

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