DESCRIPTION OF CRISIS-SPECIFIC CHALLENGE

Over 1.9 million school-aged children are displaced in northwest Syria and schools often struggle to absorb IDP students. As a result, it is often a challenge to address students’ psychological trauma and help them catch up if they have missed periods of schooling. One in eight children in Syria have psychosocial needs requiring specialized interventions, and in some areas of Syria, over half of children with mental and physical disabilities do not have their education needs met at all. The barriers preventing Syrian children from accessing quality education are complex and include a wide range of protection and socioeconomic issues extending beyond the education sector. However, high-quality teaching that is sensitive to teachers’ and students’ well-being can still heavily contribute to positive student outcomes (INEE 2013, 29). Integrity Group’s (2019) Research to Improve the Quality of Teaching and Learning Inside Syria in 2019 indicates that while Syrian education staff typically have technical knowledge and are well trained in education, they do not apply evidence-based best practices to their work. This includes effective lesson planning, active and dialectic learning, differentiation, and the use of assessments for learning (Integrity Group 2019). Furthermore, the stressful nature of the teaching profession is amplified in crisis and conflict-affected contexts where teachers often work without professional development support, certification, or compensation (Falk et al. 2019). A 2017 study of the education systems in Syria found that 87% of teachers were being paid irregular stipends from different local providers and INGOs (Assistance Coordination Unit 2017). Another study that looked at teachers’ morale found that teachers’ primary concerns included limited teaching and learning materials, low salaries, insecurity, transportation to and from learning spaces, and limited skills to deal with children’s stress. In the same study, anecdotal evidence suggested that one element of poor teaching practice is poor teacher well-being. Thus, teachers should not always be expected to be performing to standard even if they are supported professionally. These challenges raise the question of how we can better support education staff and improve their well-being and practice to address the needs of all students.

Brief Overview

Manahel is a three-year project funded by the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID) and the European Union that provides access to safe, inclusive, and quality learning opportunities to children in Syria, while strengthening education actors to effectively manage education. In the 2018/2019 academic year, Manahel supported 9,866 school staff that work with 270,177 students in 1,125 primary and secondary formal schools within northwest Syria (opposition-held areas in Idleb and Aleppo provinces). Of these students, 48.8% were female. Manahel’s work in Syria is performed in active coordination with Syrian NGO partners: Bousla Center for Training and Innovation, the Hurras Network, and Orange. As part of the programme’s efforts, Manahel places significant emphasis on teacher well-being, not only for the sake of the teacher, but also due to strong evidence that teachers have a significant impact on student achievement.

Manahel has been improving education staff practices by ensuring that support and supervision mechanisms function effectively for teachers with different educational backgrounds, because teachers in this operating environment have a range of secondary and tertiary educational experience. These supervision mechanisms include strengthening the instructors’ role in follow up1, as well as strengthening the

---

1 Education Instructors are education directorate staff that are assigned the responsibility to supervise, monitor and support 10 schools.
accountability of lead instructors\(^2\), lead teachers, and students to ensure quality feedback mechanisms and continued learning and development.

Manahel has helped to restructure the formal education supervision system to a five-step cascade model (Figure 1) in which lead instructors and instructor support lead teachers\(^3\) and about 2,400 teachers. After an initial capacity assessment at the beginning of each semester, this assessment looks at the supervisee’s attitude, knowledge, and skills specific to his or her role and job description. The results of the assessment identify targets that would be addressed in multiple activities including monthly learning circles, weekly individual meetings with their supervisor, and shadowing and learning observations of other education staff. These activities help to identify areas for professional development, and instructors create tailored support, which is reinforced through continued monitoring during learning circles and meetings to further encourage professional development.

Maintenance of the model requires little support outside of the existing education systems. For instance, this academic year, instructors maintained and generalized the use of supervision tools to staff and schools not supported directly by Manahel. Manahel starting testing the model without NGO coaches, which are the only external technical input, and the initial observation suggests that activities are continuing with the same quality. As a result, we expect that Manahel’s impact will be sustained beyond the project’s three-year intervention.

**EVIDENCE AND OUTCOMES**

Manahel is currently engaging in data collection and evaluation to determine the impact of the supervision and coaching approach on teachers and students in northwest Syria, with results anticipated by November 2019. Data collection includes comparisons of lesson observation and individual supervision, as well as various feedback sessions over different points of time to capture any changes in teachers’ practice as they relate to the clear targets set by their supervisors. Manahel is planning to use Stallings Snapshot to look at a cohort of teachers over time. The data collected will help us identify how teachers are using their instructional time and where they can improve. It will show how effectively teachers are keeping students engaged, how much time teachers are spending on classroom management, and what activities and

---

\(^2\) Lead Instructors are the supervisors of instructors, each 8-10 instructors have 1 supervisor that provide administrative, development and staff care to supervisees.

\(^3\) Lead teachers are school staff who support 10-12 teachers in planning, delivery, and evaluating lessons.
learning materials teachers are using.

In the process of assessing initial data, Manahel and its implementing NGO partners have observed that the utilization of the coaching and supervision model has increased engagement among instructors, lead teachers, and teachers. Interviews with beneficiaries demonstrate positive perceptions of this model among participants.

A teacher in Samman, Aleppo noted:

“The relation between the teachers and instructors was weak and limited, but now it’s a fraternal relationship, continuous and interactive, it gave us a space to discuss and express and encouraged me to point out educational issues and find a solution for them.”

A principal interviewed by Manahel’s NGO partner staff in Aleppo said:

“The level of my teacher is getting better and better because of the communication channel which was created by instructors, and that’s what made our school a renewed factory of expertise. I notified new methods and strategies created by teachers and supervision of instructor on dealing with students the way I am not used to. These strategies have received wide social resonance. In addition, the new supervision methodology has pushed the teacher forward and encouraged him to master his work and love it.”

While a full analysis of this system is pending, these initial qualitative data demonstrate shifts in beneficiary attitudes and a positive relationship between the coaching and supervision model and teacher engagement.

LIMITATIONS, CHALLENGES, AND/OR LESSONS LEARNED

The primary challenge found under Idarah (the predecessor project) to the coaching and supervision intervention was initial resistance by both education directorates and lead instructors to change how they

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning circles. Peer learning networks to assess and promote teacher wellbeing and skill building that enable improved teacher professional development. Structured learning circles are short and repetitive professional development opportunities that allow staff to reflect, share good practices, and acquire new knowledge. They create a community of learning and practice among teachers and other staff, allowing them to share concerns and challenges in a structured setting. Learning circles also provide a cost-effective on-the-job training mechanism that does not disrupt teaching and learning and has become part of the supervisory system and routine. Learning circles will be held once per month.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual supervision sessions. A regular one-on-one session between the lead teacher and teacher, and the instructor and lead teacher. Sessions address all 3 functions of supervision and be held every two weeks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson observation. The quality of lessons is monitored through formal lesson observations conducted by instructors who will be shadowed by lead teachers. Following these observations, the instructors will share specific feedback with teachers to help teachers reflect on and improve their teaching. The lesson observations include three steps: 1) the teacher completes a self-reflection sheet; 2) the instructor conducts the observation; and 3) the instructor and teacher meet to discuss feedback about the lesson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning walks. Ongoing classroom visits by lead teachers intended to gather data about teaching and learning through observation and interaction with students. Learning walks are designed to support the professional learning for teachers focused on their practice in teaching numeracy and literacy and encourage collegial conversations. This form of repetitive learning walks that happens once every month for each teacher has the potential to facilitate powerful teacher reflection, inform educational practice and support improved student learning outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadowing. A lead teacher attends a face-to-face interaction between an instructor and a teacher while conducting a formal lesson observation. The purpose is to meet the lead teachers’ learning and development needs by modelling good practice. After the session, the lead teacher has the opportunity to reflect and ask questions about the quality indicators of a lesson and teacher’s practice. Shadowing will occur at least once per academic year and could increase depending on the learning needs of lead teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity assessment: Each supervisor will conduct capacity assessment to the supervisees once every academic term. Specific objectives are identified, supervisees are supported using the above tools to meet them throughout the term until the next assessment is used to evaluate the progress and set new targets.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
were previously providing training and supervision to teachers. In addition, the supervisors’ preparation for visits and coaching was uneven and unrealistic due to a lack of access to some areas, and the limited number of supervisors to instructors (3:120 in Idleb) further hindered the delivery of coaching support.

To address these issues, Manahel and its partners worked with education staff at all levels to ensure their buy-in throughout the process. Staff had the opportunity to share their concerns and gain an understanding of the benefits of supportive supervision on a professional and personal level. Under the mentorship of qualified and highly motivated NGO coaches, staff were able to customize their individual approach and overcome barriers; and gradually, they were able to see how the new mechanism added value to their work. Manahel also provided structured opportunities for education staff (including those who initially resisted the approach) to reflect on the progress made under the model and increased the supervisor-instructor ratio to 1:12. Manahel collected evidence to compare the quality of work before and after use of the model, including the impact on supervisees and children.

REFERENCES


LINKS
• HNO Syria 2019: https://hno-syria.org/
• UN Sustainable Development Goal 4C: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4
• Guidance Note: Gender Equality In and Through Education: https://inee.org/system/files/resources/INEE_Guidance%20Note%20on%20Gender_2019_ENG.pdf