Syria Education Programme Research Brief: Distance Learning

SEPTEMBER 2020

Disclaimer

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

AEP   Alternative education plan

ASER   Annual Status of Education Report

IEP   Individual education plan

OOSC   Out of school children

PD   Professional development

PSS   Psychosocial support

SIMS   School Information Monitoring System

Background

Schools in northwest Syria closed in mid-March in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Manahel responded swiftly and had a substantial online learning presence within a few weeks. Manahel already had significant non-formal education experience through the project's support for learners displaced by conflict. This meant Manahel had contact details for thousands of teachers and parents, allowing the project to expand its existing digital presence, primarily through WhatsApp and the internet, to reach tens of thousands of children.

Online-only education has been the dominant modality since April, covering two school periods:

1. The second semester of the school year from April to May.
2. The Manahel summer camp from June to August.

The table below outlines Manahel's response over these periods.

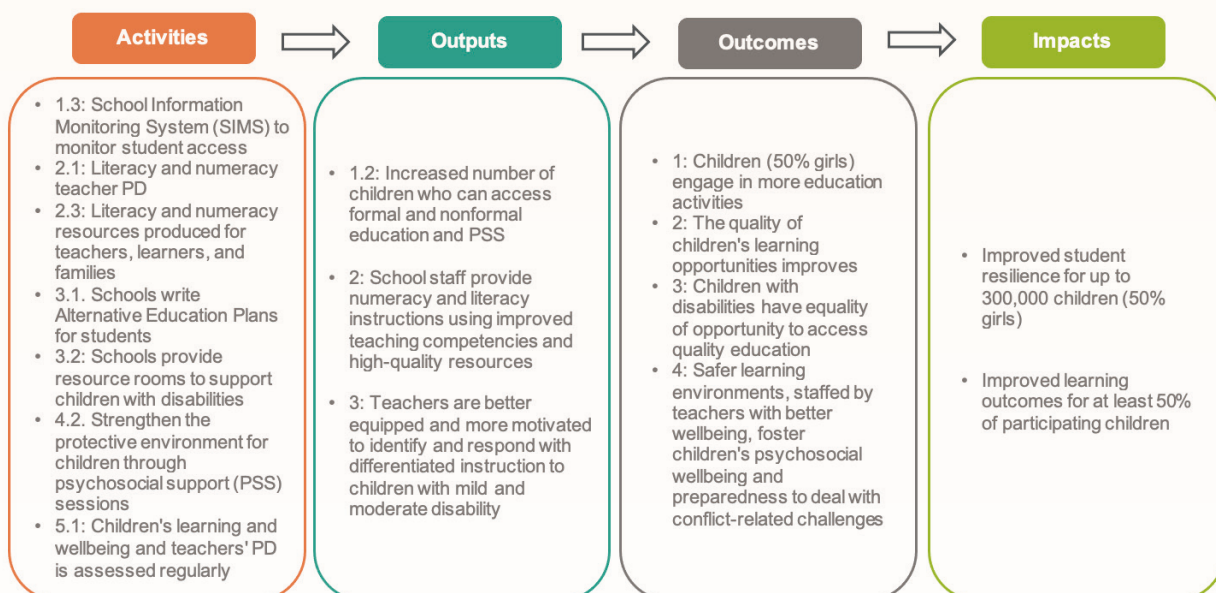| April	May	June	July	August	September
Distance learning (semester two)		Distance learning (summer camp)			Schools partially re-opening
WhatsApp & Manahel pilot website		WhatsApp & Manahel.org			Research conducted

Research Purpose and Questions

Manahel undertook this research to understand the degree to which the project's approach has been reaching girls and boys and helping them learn. Now is a good opportunity to pause and reflect on the successes and challenges associated with distance learning as schools are re-opening and following a blended learning approach. We hope that findings from this research will provide insights into good practices for this transition to blended learning. The research aims to answer the following questions:

- What proportion of learners in Manahel-supported schools access distance-learning materials?

- Since distance learning began in April, what progress have students made in their learning?

Research Design

Figure 1, below, locates this research within Manahel's Theory of Change. It highlights several of the activities, outputs, and outcomes that this research brief discusses. Manahel's outcomes are intended to help learners become more resilient, which is conceptualised using UNESCO's (2013) definition: 'the ability of [a student] exposed to a threat to resist, absorb, adapt and recover from its effects in a timely and effective manner.' Therefore, this research brief considers psychosocial support and child safeguarding efforts in addition to Manahel's literacy and numeracy support to parents and teachers.

Figure 1. Components of Manahel's Theory of Change relevant to this research

Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
• 1.3: School Information Monitoring System (SIMS) to monitor student access • 2.1: Literacy and numeracy teacher PD • 2.3: Literacy and numeracy resources produced for teachers, learners, and families • 3.1: Schools write Alternative Education Plans for students • 3.2: Schools provide resource rooms to support children with disabilities • 4.2. Strengthen the protective environment for children through psychosocial support (PSS) sessions • 5.1: Children's learning and wellbeing and teachers' PD is assessed regularly	• 1.2: Increased number of children who can access formal and nonformal education and PSS • 2: School staff provide numeracy and literacy instructions using improved teaching competencies and high-quality resources • 3: Teachers are better equipped and more motivated to identify and respond with differentiated instruction to children with mild and moderate disability	• 1: Children (50% girls) engage in more education activities • 2: The quality of children's learning opportunities improves • 3: Children with disabilities have equality of opportunity to access quality education • 4: Safer learning environments, staffed by teachers with better wellbeing, foster children's psychosocial wellbeing and preparedness to deal with conflict-related challenges	• Improved student resilience for up to 300,000 children (50% girls) • Improved learning outcomes for at least 50% of participating children

METHODOLOGY

This research synthesises desk-based research and qualitative interviews. It draws on global literature to critically engage with key aspects of effective distance learning and summarises important findings and data from internal Manahel literature. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff responsible for distance learning.

Findings and Analysis

Elements of Manahel's Distance Learning Model

By the end of September, Manahel had established **3,951 WhatsApp and YouTube channels** to reach **4,611 teachers** (48% female) and **74,792 children** (51.4% female). Manahel has created and shared 222 WhatsApp video tutorials and audio guides for parents and caregivers. Manahel teachers support parents to scaffold their children's learning and submit their children's work to teachers via WhatsApp to receive feedback.

To speed up the preparation of the distance learning materials, Manahel tasked partners with developing weekly curriculum plans and lessons for each grade with technical support from Manahel. This allowed Manahel to maximise the participation of teachers, instructors, and school staff and promote best practices for remote teaching.

Manahel publishes a weekly plan with a clear scope and sequence of lessons from grades 1 to 4 along with specific learning objectives. This is pushed to WhatsApp groups and can be accessed via Manahel.org.

Manahel.org also provides a suggested daily routine for parents so that they can structure their children's day. Each week, students receive five reading lessons, three maths lessons, two science lessons, and two English language lessons. Parents receive the lesson plans early in the week so they can review the curriculum material and then scaffold their child's learning through the website and WhatsApp groups.

As schools re-open and shift to blended learning models, Manahel staff will continue to develop and provide lesson plans for students, their families, and their teachers.

> " As of the end of August, 53.8% of Manahel students (52.0% of boys and 55.7% of girls) were in WhatsApp groups. "

WhatsApp Groups

In February 2020, numerous schools were shut down due to an increase in conflict. Manahel adapted its programme to provide students with support through distance learning tools, especially WhatsApp. Through 600 WhatsApp groups, Manahel teachers provided ongoing support to parents throughout the week. These WhatsApp groups have continued operating and have expanded during the COVID-19 period. The groups serve as communication lines for teachers to send families student worksheets and other teaching and learning activities. The groups also act as feedback loops between teachers and students, facilitated by parents.

As of the end of August, 53.8% of Manahel students (52.0% boys and 55.7% girls) were in WhatsApp groups. This represents a four-percentage point increase since May when 49.8% of students were accessing WhatsApp. That figure grew by about 14% by the end of September. However, there are significant differences in access by partners/geographies: data from partner 1 shows the highest uptake, with 78.8% of Manahel students (82.11% males and 75.4% females) accessing WhatsApp. We do not know why there is nearly a 7% difference between boys and girls uptake and are following up with partner 1 to investigate further.

According to interviews with Manahel staff, differing uptake seen by different partners has to do with their unique operating contexts. In the case of partner 1, a staff member remarked, *"people in this area have access to the internet and have devices to interact with the distance learning. And the culture of this area, some of them are more educated, so they want to educate their children more than other areas."* There are fewer schools within the area where partner 1 operates. Therefore, *"they were probably able to focus more [of their] resources."* Infrastructure and socioeconomic status inevitably play a role in shaping student access to distance learning materials. All interviewed staff identified a lack of infrastructure or access to smart devices as one of the major challenges that Manahel currently faces. There are three scenarios in which students may not have access to the e-learning tools like WhatsApp:

- When internet or infrastructure is simply unreliable;

- when families only have one device shared across multiple children or—more likely—the parent who must use it for work;

- when students and their families simply do not have access to any devices or internet and are thus not connected to the Manahel programme.

During the school break, Manahel worked to improve student access to WhatsApp. Manahel staff conducted a needs assessment and procured internet cards for those households in need, particularly those in camp settings. In addition, partner 3 facilitated an access campaign through its district-level protection committees to target those children who have not joined WhatsApp groups. Manahel's reach – of over 50% of Manahel students previously supported in-person – is in line with regional percentages identified by UNICEF. A Manahel staff member touched on the difficulties with access to help contextualise the 50% figure:

"We're not only talking about COVID-19 here, but also it's a crisis area where you have over 1 million children who are displaced and over 1.5 million students who are in need of education in our operating area. So, being able to continue in these circumstances is a success."

As schools have returned, access to the internet for distance education is no longer as limiting a factor for learning. Children are still learning through a blended approach, but they can access print materials more easily when they are in school. However, learning hours remains a concern. In a recent survey of parents, only 43% said children were studying for one hour or more a day. About 20% of parents said they were not using the literacy and numeracy booklets. The factors influencing this include:

• Parents' ability to support their child (which is influenced by the time they have available and their own level of education);

• the number of children at home and their access to resources (including phones, which make for more interactive study than printed materials);

• Parents' and children's motivation levels may have dropped. In a recent BBC report[1], Syrians expressed a sense of exhaustion dealing with the ongoing conflict and the rising number of COVID-19 cases.

Manahel is also aware that children living in temporary/camp settings are still engaging in education less than their peers in more permanent living situations. Again, there are multiple factors at play, including socioeconomic factors; people who choose or have to live in these settings are typically the most vulnerable.

Manahel has adapted its programming to act on these findings. For example, Manahel has asked teachers to engage more with learners, telephoning them when they see that they are not completing homework and encouraging them and their parents about the importance of schoolwork and staying in education. Manahel was vocal in support of the safe re-opening of schools. We have seen a surge in registration — even more than before COVID-19. The availability of sufficient space in schools is an issue, with some classes having 70 children and education split into three shifts of two hours of learning each. Manahel is providing more booklets that can be used for distance learning to children most in need and, as the companion research piece on equity describes, following up with teacher engagement by telephone and in person when learners come into school.

Manahel.org

Figure 2: A screenshot of the website

Manahel launched its distance learning platform in June 2020 after two months of trialling a pilot site. The website was developed by Manahel teachers and coaches. It provides audited resources for teachers and caregivers, acting as a digital resource library for Arabic, mathematics, and science. In addition, it serves as a communication channel and a way to seek support or collaborate with other Manahel students. Since the website was launched, it has been visited by more than 9,800 unique users who accessed more than 31,385 sessions.

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[1] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-middle-east-54697587

Manahel staff began recording both cumulative user numbers and weekly incremental changes on 15 August. Figure 3 below shows these figures over a four-week period from mid-August to early September. According to Manahel staff, the increase in the number of visitors during mid-August may be partly attributed to efforts made by individual partners. For example, partner 2 took the initiative to develop a video tutorial explaining how to use the Manahel website, making access easier for the communities they serve. The decrease in access towards the end of August and into September may be due to the end of the virtual summer camp. These classes ended on 15 August in Province A and 25 August in Province B. The number of users is expected to increase with the new school year.

Figure 3: Access to Manahel website over 4-week period
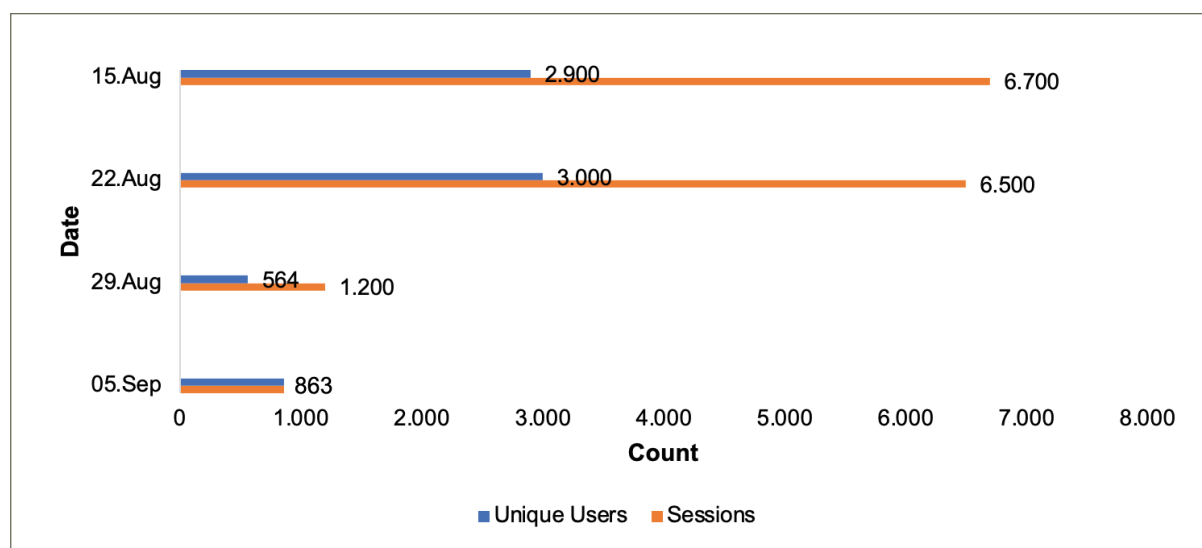
A 'session' is defined as a user logging onto the website and all the activity that they undertake while viewing the site. A user might come back to the site multiple times in a week; each user's internet connection has a unique IP address which Manahel can use to gain a fairly accurate impression of whether a session is associated with a new or returning user. For example, we know that in the week beginning 15 August there were 2,900 unique users accessing the site an average of two times. If users were parents, they might have been accessing materials for one or more children in one or both of those sessions. The average session duration over the 15 June – 25 September period was four minutes and 18 seconds. That is sufficient to, for example, log on, find and download the weekly session guide and associated activities, and look at other resources on the site. Over that period, Manahel received 9,800 (51% female) unique users engaging in 31,385 sessions.

Manahel.org is an easily accessible platform for teachers, caregivers, and students to access quality learning activities aligned to the Manahel scope and sequence curriculum and learning objectives. Moreover, it serves as an important communication network for all beneficiaries to collaborate and receive support from Manahel experts. At the beginning of each week, the website sends out a message to parents listing the lessons for that week. By streamlining messages from the website, parents can quickly find and access the information they need for the week without becoming bogged down by the multitude of messages sent through the alternative communication channel, WhatsApp groups.

Manahel.org was designed to be easily accessible via both a computer and a telephone. The vast majority (97.6%) of users access the website using a telephone.

The website is an important contributor to student learning. There are four core principles of the website that work to maximise learning:

1. **Access:** the website serves as a resource library for students to easily access diverse teaching and learning materials that are aligned with the Manahel curriculum.

2. **Quality:** all resources on the website are audited to ensure quality content.

3. **Scalability:** the website expands Manahel's reach beyond the communities where it operates.

4. **Sustainability:** the website enables access to educational materials outside the scope and schedule of Manahel programming.

The website will contribute to Manahel's sustainability. According to one staff member,

"When the project finishes, anyone from any place can reach this website and can teach their children. Any teacher [who] wants more resources can access this website, download worksheets or videos, or listen to more explanations about a topic. We expand the Manahel effect so that many people inside Syria, and [even some] in Turkey, access the website and teach their children."

Student Learning

This research brief is being released concurrently with a brief on equity of learning outcomes. That brief discusses a continuous learning assessment dataset. Manahel has been tracking student learning progress since the start of the 2019/2020 academic year. Since then, four assessments have been conducted in each literacy and numeracy.

The data from these assessments suggest that student learning has continued to progress despite school closures and the turn to distance learning models. For example, Figures 4 and 5 below indicate that the mean literacy and numeracy levels, respectively, have continued to increase. In these graphs, assessments at timepoints two and three were both conducted while distance learning measures were already in place in April and September, respectively. Given Manahel continued working in the same areas through these periods, this data does not raise concerns regarding student learning and progress.

Student numeracy scores started increasing at a higher rate after timepoint 1 (January). This could reflect the relative stability and decrease in violence after the January/February increase in conflict. It is somewhat surprising to see a continued increase in attainment during the COVID-19 shut-down, given the reduced learning hours that the vast majority of children experienced. There are various possible explanations. As noted in the equity research brief, this masks variation in sub-groups, some of which have shown learning loss. Some learners have continued to make considerable progress – in some cases because they had access to private schools (which may have stayed open), to mobile telephones, or to parental and sibling support. Manahel also recognises that assessments were likely to have been less reliable during distance learning, with less in-person assessment, no lead teacher verification of results, and more reliance on using observation-based weekly tracking data. Despite being cautious regarding the data, we see these results as very promising.

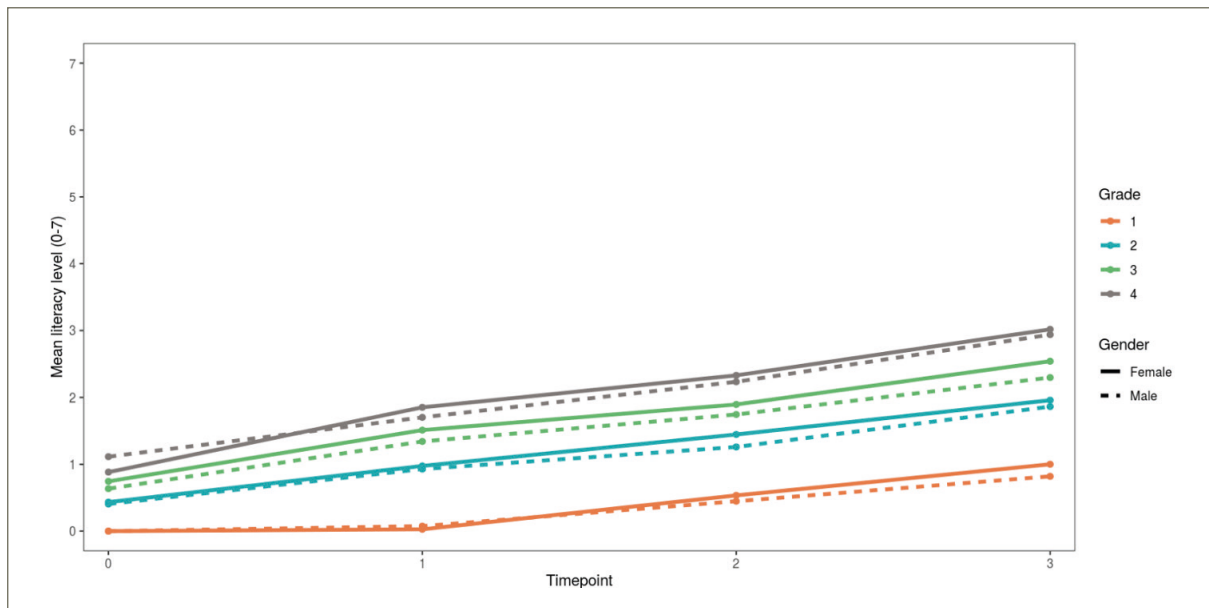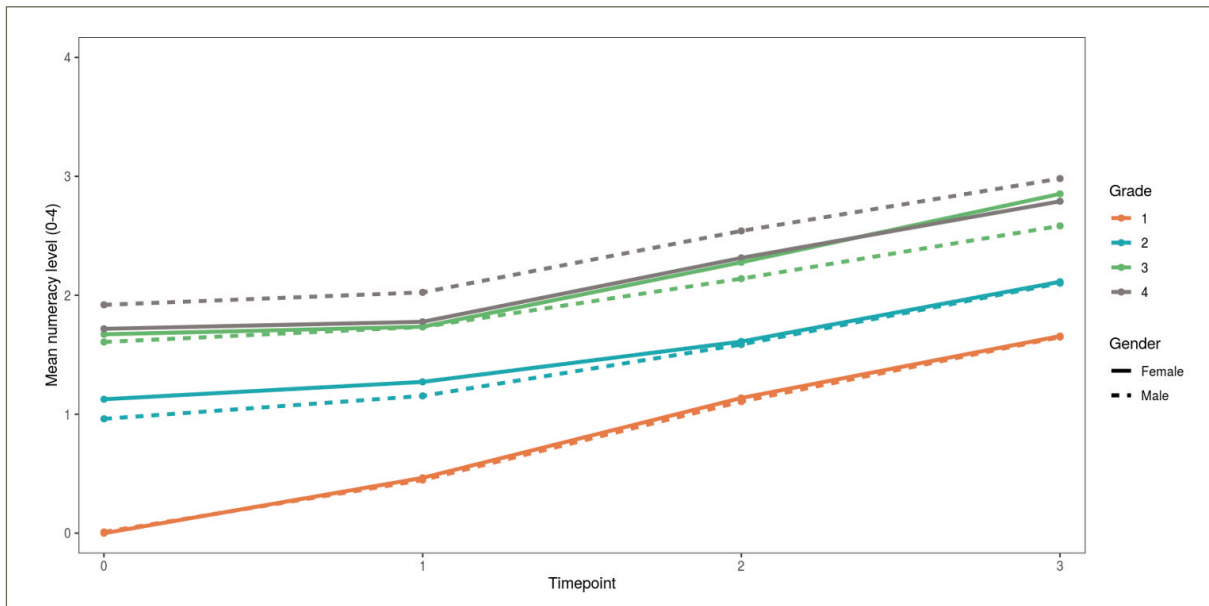*Figure 4: Literacy learning progress based on gender and grade*

Figure 5: Numeracy learning progress based on gender and grade

However, when looking at the data disaggregated by location, we see significant differences across Province A and Province B. Figure 6 below depicts student learning progress in numeracy, based on grade and location. After the assessment conducted at timepoint two (April 2020), the data shows that Province B students in Grades 3 and 4 showed less progress overall in numeracy. There are several factors to consider. The most obvious is that face-to-face learning stopped in March, and distance learning started. Another is expected levels of progress: the jump between levels (based on ASER levels) is quite large. The Grade 3 and 4 students might not be focusing on more complex subtraction (Level 3) or multiplication (Level 4) problems. We can also see grade- and location-specific variance. This is discussed in greater detail in the equity research and has led to Manahel providing additional support to girls and boys in Province B at Grades 3 & 4.

The learning assessment data suggests that older students in Province B may be at a disadvantage compared to their peers. When disaggregated by gender, no disparities were found, suggesting that both boys and girls in these grades in Province B are more vulnerable post-April.

Figure 6: Numeracy learning progress of all children based on grade and governorate
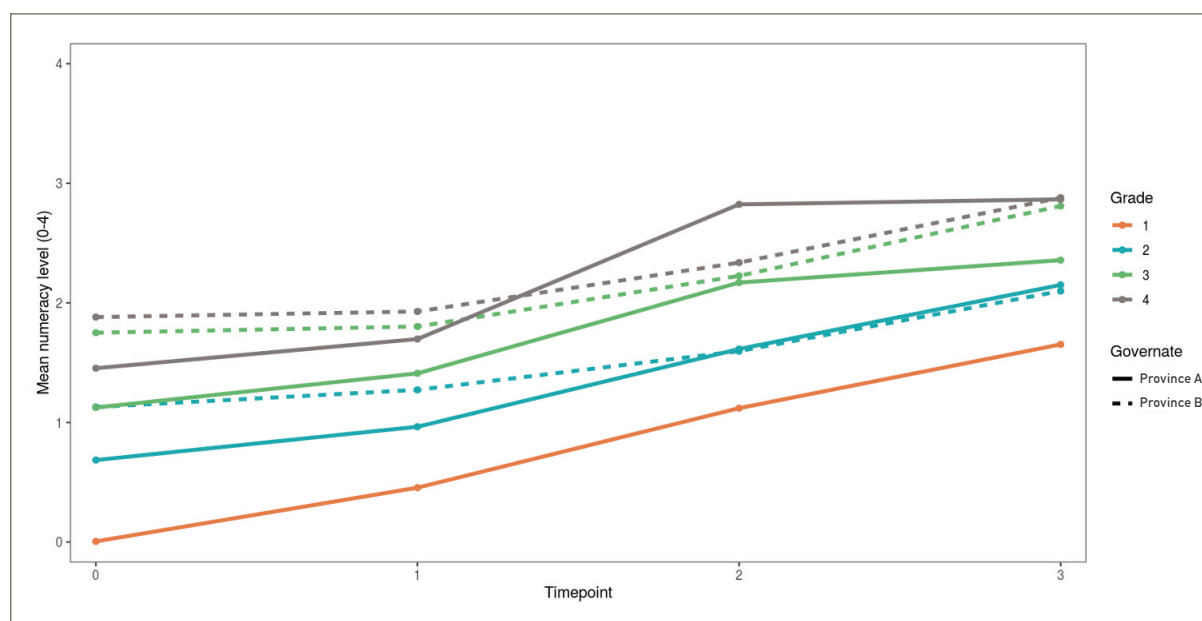
Interviews with Manahel staff point to several possible explanations for these learning discrepancies. Since the pandemic reached Manahel communities, in-person evaluations are less common. Instead, assessments are conducted using diverse strategies, including voice or video calls, student homework, written remote exams, and in-person exams. This could lead to reliability issues. It is also important to note the impact of student learning on skills development. As one staff member noted,

"If we assume the reliability is okay, I think we are looking at basic skills that require practise and learning time at home is something that we don't know much about. And those skills, it's not like when you acquire them you have them, specifically at that age group. You need to practice so that you can master the skills."

Literacy and Numeracy Teacher Professional Development

Since the start of COVID-19, Manahel has also moved its teacher professional development (TPD) efforts to virtual platforms. For example, to continue with learning circles, teachers receive videos produced by Manahel on a range of distance teaching topics, focussing on three competencies from the Teacher Competency Framework:

- The teacher regularly communicates with parents, guardians, and other actors in the field of education to promote a safe and effective work environment.

- The teacher understands the necessity of their mental health as an influencing factor in the students' mental health and practices strategies that maintain mental health, such as techniques of self-awareness, conflict resolution, and stress management.

- The teacher records and uses the learning outcomes to monitor student progress to achieve meeting/lesson goals and uses these goals to address student needs and design teaching practices.

Having watched these videos, the teachers engage in an online collaborative discussion facilitated by an expert teacher who enhances understanding of the subject and responds to queries. According to teacher feedback surveys facilitated in late August, teachers reported that the learning circle videos were too long. In response, Manahel staff adjusted their approach and ensured new videos covering training topics did not exceed 15 minutes. In addition, teachers are using an online Facebook group as a place to share ideas and exchange information. These are important online communities for teachers to collaborate and improve their teaching.

Manahel is launching an online supervision and coaching module to support instructors and lead teachers in carrying out supervision using online platforms. During the summer camp, Manahel used a needs assessment to identify the three competencies that teachers wanted to cover in the learning circles: effective teacher-parent communication, self-care, and differentiated instruction. Each teacher has a Teacher Development Plan. Manahel staff used these plans to track teachers' progress, and pre- and post-assessments indicate that the number of teachers who achieved proficiency in the three competencies increased from 71% to 77%. The development of new skills ultimately impacts student learning. For example, enhancing the communication process between parents and teachers will positively affect students' performance. From coaches' informal feedback, we know that teachers felt their ability to engage parents was helped by this professional development. However, they also noted that not seeing parents in person made communication more difficult overall. In some cases, the WhatsApp groups were already in use before the COVID-19 pandemic, so some teachers already had some experience communicating with parents that way.

Psychosocial Support Activities for use by Teachers and Caregivers

Psychosocial support (PSS) is a critical component of student cognitive and socioemotional development. As part of its conflict-sensitive approach, Manahel continues to offer PSS to its beneficiaries through distance learning materials, including videos and activities that caregivers can access through the Manahel website. The PSS team evaluates every PSS activity before sharing it with teachers and caregivers to ensure that it is appropriate for vulnerable groups, including girls and students with disabilities. In late August, Manahel staff facilitated a survey to collect data on beneficiary and stakeholder feedback regarding these PSS activities. Overall, approximately 32,814 students and 32,814 caregivers, as well as 195 Manahel librarians, participated in the survey. Figure 7 provides the results of this survey based on a three-point scale of satisfied, neutral, or unsatisfied.

Overall, the majority of beneficiaries and stakeholders reported being satisfied with the PSS activities. They liked that activities were simple and that children enjoyed them, particularly activities involving movement (dancing and yoga) and drawing. They appreciated not requiring additional resources. They also appreciated that videos were culturally appropriate. For example, children in the yoga videos were clearly from Syria and were dressed appropriately.

Figure 7: Beneficiary and stakeholder feedback regarding PSS activities
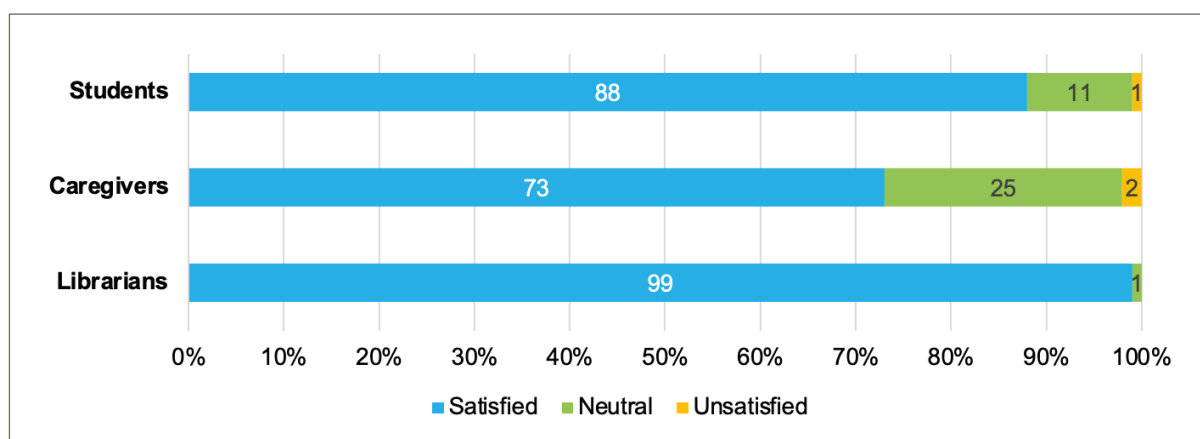
However, feedback from caregivers indicates two key challenges: (1) poor internet connection; and (2) lack of time to support children due to other responsibilities, such as long work hours. These factors may explain why 25% of caregivers felt 'neutral' towards the PSS activities. These findings link back to the same challenges previously identified by Manahel staff: the lack of connectivity and access to devices or parents' inability to support their children due to economic pressures and the need to work. In addition to the mainstream PSS activities, the child protection committee identifies children who need individualised support and refers them to case management services. These services for Manahel's most vulnerable students have continued through COVID-19 through a mix of phone calls and face-to-face visits. As schools re-open and move to blended learning models, Manahel plans to continue identifying children's needs and refer them to the appropriate services to support their socioemotional development.

Under the current circumstances, Manahel faces challenges in the area of PSS. All staff identified the need to speak directly with students to better understand their socioemotional needs and child protection issues. In a distance learning model, all communication goes through parents to reach students. As one specialist noted,

"when the schools re-open, what improves even partially is the identification, because then we get to speak to the child directly, and that's the biggest challenge during COVID-19: all interactions with the child are filtered through parents, except for group activities, but again it's the parents that have the phone. So, if a child has a vulnerability related to the behaviour of parents, then this is where it's very challenging during COVID-19. They can't tell us whether there's a safeguarding issue."

This is a difficult challenge to overcome. However, the Manahel staff are currently doing what they can to facilitate direct communication with students. They have organised back-to-school campaigns, inviting students to register for class. They have also conducted house visits and provided various communication channels through WhatsApp and the website. Further, they continue to identify, support, and track the progress of those students in need.

Alternative Education Plans for Students with Disabilities

To support students with minor to moderate cognitive and physical disabilities, Manahel teachers create alternative education plans (AEPs). For learners with more severe disabilities, teachers develop Individual Education Plans, IEPs. Currently, 89 students (55 boys, 34 girls) have IEPs. Manahel schools offer Resource Centres that provide extra resources for these learners and have continued to distribute these resources during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, there are 17 special education teachers (10 males, seven females) who are trained to attend to students with special education needs. One of Manahel's staff described how COVID-19 affected Manahel's special education efforts:

"Usually, we have a response intervention approach established in schools when they are open. So, as a child, you have the teaching and learning in the mainstream classroom, and if you are falling behind in literacy and numeracy, or you have multiple disabilities, you will receive additional support from the Lead Teacher, a more qualified teacher, individually or in small groups. That bit was taken away from children during COVID. So, they continued to engage in mainstream lessons through WhatsApp and other means, but they did not have that individualised support. For children with severe disabilities, you have an Individual Education Plan, an IEP. We did not stop, during COVID, the face-to-face support because it is very difficult to offer them the same quality of services online. What was missed are the children in the middle: those who really need that additional support to catch up with others but whose case is not severe enough to have face-to-face support or case management. That's the bit in terms of implementation that we are missing."

As schools start to re-open, Manahel staff are taking several measures to address the needs of students with disabilities, including adapting literacy materials to support a broader range of learning styles and offering blended learning opportunities, including face-to-face time with the Lead Teacher. A Manahel technical expert noted:

"We noticed when the child is not performing, that also linked to their motivation, and their engagement, and other things, and the support from their family. So, [WhatsApp Groups] worked to some extent, but [they were] not as successful as we used to see with the regular support sessions for those students in the school. So, now we have the same assumptions again that if the teachers gets to see those children, and meet their parents, the Lead Teacher [who says], 'I will be doing additional support for you in the form of five hours per week, either in face-to-face if you come or online, that can help in strengthening that process for them."

Robustness and Limitations of this Research

The quantitative and qualitative data discussed above outline Manahel's activities to promote access to distance learning materials. Manahel has less data on how students and parents use these resources. The interaction between conflict and COVID-19 makes it difficult to see the degree to which COVID-19 has affected learning outcomes. There was a reduction in conflict for the first months of the pandemic, which could have had a positive effect on learning outcomes that counteracted the negative impact of COVID-19. This might explain the relatively modest drops in learning outcomes seen in the continuous assessment data.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Short Answers to the Research Questions

- Just over 50% of the learners in the schools Manahel supports are accessing distance learning materials – but we do not know enough about how they are using them.

- Students accessing distance learning resources are, in general, continuing to make progress in their learning since April, when distance learning began. This generality masks some trends. For example, Grade 3 and 4 children in Province B are experiencing more significant learning loss. It also does not report on the 'hidden' students who are not engaging in distance learning and on whom we, therefore, cannot report.

Next Steps

UNICEF suggests that school re-opening plans should consider six key dimensions: policy, financing, safe operations, learning, reaching the most marginalised, and wellbeing and protection (UNICEF, 2020b). The following recommendations align with this approach.

FOCUS RESOURCES ON THE MOST VULNERABLE STUDENTS

The most vulnerable students are those students without access to teaching and learning materials. Although just over half of Manahel learners are accessing WhatsApp, this is very much aligned with trends in the region. According to a UNICEF (2020a) report in the Middle East and North Africa, fewer than 60% of learners access distance learning materials and curricula. While Manahel is making a significant positive impact in its areas of operation, more effort and resources should now be focused on the more vulnerable. As the findings in this research suggest, the most vulnerable are those students who cannot access the Manahel learning material as a result of not having an internet connection. Manahel should continue its efforts to locate and track these students through communication trees, face-to-face visits, or community surveys and to understand their resource needs (e.g., access to telephones).

'Tracking' includes engaging with students to understand the barriers that are preventing them from attending school or using distance learning resources. For example, as noted above, parents' and children's motivation for education has fallen during this period. Safeguarding officers and class teachers now spend more time repeatedly calling learners and parents to encourage them that it is still worthwhile for children to take part in school and to challenge perceptions that distance education is not useful.

A further discussion of focusing resources on the most vulnerable students may be found in the equity research brief, along with details of how Manahel is adapting interventions to provide more support to learners in Grades 3 and 4 in Province B.

COLLECT DATA ON HOW DISTANCE LEARNING MATERIALS ARE BEING USED

If Manahel wants to track the causal pathways of its Theory of Change, it is important to develop a better understanding of how students are engaging with their teaching and learning resources, such as WhatsApp and the website, and how this engagement impacts student learning outcomes. First, Manahel staff can collect survey data examining how frequently students are studying at home, how often they use the website, or how often they communicate with their teachers through WhatsApp. Then, ideally, this data would be disaggregated and compared to student learning outcomes. This may help identify the impact that Manahel and its resources are having on student learning. It would also help identify those learners who are not engaging as much in distance or blended learning models, therefore helping to identify the most vulnerable students.

IN THIS NEW SEMESTER, ADAPT INTERVENTIONS TO SUPPORT THOSE WHO HAVE NOT RETURNED TO SCHOOL

Manahel previously suggested working with out-of-school children (OOSC) through a case management process but pivoted away from the idea when the conflict increased at the start of the year and instead invested time in school safety when COVID-19 closed schools. The evidence in this research brief supports a return to a case management process. This semester, Manahel will use the information around engagement with distance learning and return to schools to identify OOSC and support them to return.

SHARE THIS LEARNING

This brief should be shared with Manahel partners to inform future distance learning work and increase awareness of Manahel.org and its resources.

The Syria Education Programme is funded by UK aid from the UK government.