Research to improve the quality of teaching and learning inside Syria

Final Report

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Acknowledgement

The nature of the Syrian conflict means that the mass majority of people who made this study possible cannot be named as it could put their and their families' security at risk. In recognition of the inability to name most key contributors to this study, the team has decided it most appropriate to name no one. Rather, the Integrity team acknowledges and expresses deep appreciation and respect for the thousands of Syrian children, teachers, parents/caregivers, school administrators, Local Council members, (International) Non-governmental Organisation ((I)NGO) staff members, and education authority representatives who opened the doors to their schools, classrooms, and homes for this study.

Recognising that the study could not reach a truly randomised sample due to both operational and security challenges, the team is pleased to have reached as representative and non-biased a sample as possible given the referenced challenges. The team recognises the millions of Syrians in non-Government of Syria (GoS)-held areas whose own voices were not directly captured by the study, but whose sentiments were hopefully captured through those of their neighbours.

The team further acknowledges the 12 enumerators who tirelessly collected hundreds of thousands of data points, and who were the true eyes and ears of the project on the ground in contexts of ongoing instability. The team remains inspired by their ongoing resilience and commitment to helping strengthen the Syrian education sector.

The team also thanks the hundreds of unnamed respondents outside of Syria who helped frame this study with careful consideration for the implications of shifting geopolitical interests, and without losing sight of both humanitarian principles and the standards to which we hold ourselves in Education in Crisis and Conflict (EiCC) programming.

Finally, Integrity is most grateful to the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), the funder of this study, for its thoughtful foresight to allocate resources to such a comparatively in-depth and unique look at a critically under researched part of EICC.

This report has been written by Integrity.

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Acronyms

ACU	Assistance Coordination Unit
ALP	Accelerated Learning Programme
EiCC	Education in Crisis and Conflict
EiE	Education in Emergency
EMIS	Education Management Information System
FCAS	Fragile and Conflict-Affected States
GoS	Government of Syria
KII	Key Informant Interview
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
(I)NGO	(International) Non-Governmental Organisation
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
KII	Key Informant Interview
MoE	Ministry of Education
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
PYD	Democratic Union Party
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SIG	Syrian Interim Government
SLP	Self-Learning Programme
YPG	People's Protection Unit
ZoC	Zone of Control

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1 Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

This report[1] is an in-depth review of the learning environment for Grade 2 and Grade 3 children in areas of Syria not controlled by the Government of Syria (GoS). It examines teacher practice and behaviour, the nature of the learning environment, and their effects on child learning and wellbeing. It is aimed at Education in Crisis and Conflict (EiCC) donors, policymakers, researchers, and implementors, and particularly those with interest in Syria. The report seeks to provide theoretically informed and policy-relevant insights on suggested investments in improving learning for children in such contexts, namely by adjusting the nature of their learning environments, and in particular, by improving the quality of teaching.

This study represents the first wide-scale analysis since the start of the Syrian conflict of how teacher practice and learning spaces influence child learning and wellbeing in Syria. The success of the study came from finding a balance between rigour in its framing and flexibility in its delivery. Too often, studies rely on secondary data and presume that because primary data collection in conflict-affected contexts is difficult, it needs to be overly simplified or avoided all together. As a result, studies from these contexts often represent a biased perspective. By creating theoretical and methodological frameworks for the design of the study, influenced both by critical literature as well as real-time context analysis, the study team was able to balance strict parameters for ethical data collection practices with the changing operating environment. The voices that influenced the study's findings were thus representative of education sector actors, meaning that the preponderance of data came from teachers, children, and parents/caregivers. The result is an ethically sound, deeply granular dataset.

The foreign assistance "marketplace" is characterised in part by dwindling funds and increasing calls for accountability. Too often, studies rely on secondary data and presume that because primary data collection in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States (FCAS) is difficult, it needs to be overly simplified or avoided altogether. As a result, studies from these contexts often represent a biased perspective. However, resources and methods exist that can enable evidence-based policy development, even in active conflicts. This study is an example of how to balance limited resources and high ethical expectations to secure data from the most reliable sources: the end users of assistance funds.

As with any study taking place in a conflict-affected area, insecurity and shifting Zones of Control (ZoC) impacted the study's design and implementation. Despite the breadth of coverage and awareness among various (armed) state and non-state groups of the study, all approached respondents consented to participating, none received threats, and no safeguarding concerns were lodged. Sociocultural challenges limited direct discussion about some sensitive topics, and triangulation was used to help reduce respondent bias as much as possible. While true random sampling was not possible, and the study team relied on snowball, time location, and targeted sampling, the study was able to show how close the end sample came to being representative and unbiased.

Using a process of stakeholder mapping, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), a thorough literature review, and workshops, the team developed a theoretical framework. This framework guided the

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[1] This report is accompanied by a compendium that enables the reader to explore the study and findings in-depth, based on particular interest area. The compendium covers all elements summarised in this report over nearly 150 pages of graphics and detailed analysis.

development of the data collection methodology and tools that enabled eight weeks of classroom and community-level research. This research was carried out by 12 enumerators across three governorates with some of the highest concentrations of people in need, including the internally displaced, in Syria. These were exclusively non-GoS-held areas, including Idleb governorate, the western area of Aleppo governorate, the northwest countryside of Aleppo governorate, and People's Protection Unit (YPG)/Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)-held regions of Raqqa and Aleppo governorates. Ongoing context reviews and concurrent triangulation allowed for real-time analysis of both the safety of the operating context and the data coming in from the field.

The value of the study is not in its broad-brush findings, which found that few aspects of formal, non-formal, or informal learning experiences for children support either their learning or their wellbeing. What is most impactful about the study is its careful alignment of *the evidence about what works in EiCC to support learning and wellbeing* to *the degree to which such attitudes, practices, and policies occur, at a granular level*.

The study was able to assess granularity through strata including teacher and student gender, classroom geolocation, teacher background, student grade level and topic, and other identifying features of key stakeholders and learning spaces.

With such information to hand, policy makers will be able to develop programme scopes for Syria that call for specific investments by geography, specific skill development area, and stakeholder type. Implementing partners can then take this guidance and develop bespoke interventions tailored even to the school level. The broader EiCC community can benefit in at least two ways: a) contextualising the methods used to undertake such linear and granular assessments; and b) testing the recommended investment areas in other FCAS contexts.

1.2   Research Questions[2]

The study aimed to assess the qualitative aspects of learning environments and teaching practices and behaviours within it. This required a data collection toolkit to be designed with careful consideration for conflict sensitivity. Thirty-two relevant existing tools and related sources were used to identify 339 questions asked amongst nearly 6,000 informants. These questions were organised under the following four areas:

1. What teaching practices and behaviours are in use across different areas of Syria?

2. What elements of the school environment support wellbeing?

3. What correlations existed amongst teaching practice, learning outcomes, and child wellbeing. The team aimed to co-analyse existing datasets on child learning and wellbeing together with the study's new dataset on teaching practices and behaviours.

4. What examples of best practice or low-cost adaptations existed in Syria or could be adapted from other EiCC programmes for the Syrian education system?

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[2] The original TOR called for the analysis of learning and wellbeing among children. The Desk Review and KIIs conducted during the inception phase revealed that there was sufficient recent evidence on both topics. As such, additional primary data on literacy and numeracy rates and indicators of wellbeing was not necessary under this study.

1.3   Findings

The evidence about the type of education that children need in FCAS is clear. According to the literature, safe, flexible, and community-based learning opportunities, social and emotional learning support, literacy and numeracy skill development, support for teacher professional and wellbeing, and partnership between schools and homes in support of learning and wellbeing are amongst the most critical activities to provide in such contexts.

This study's findings suggest that very few elements of these standards for adequate support to learning and wellbeing for children in FCAS are in place in Syria.

1.3.1   Poor basic teaching practices

Enumerators observed few examples of teacher practices that meet global standards for child-centred, inclusive pedagogy. The majority of teaching behaviours and practices cannot be characterised as conflict-sensitive. Male teachers performed more poorly than female teachers, and teachers in Aleppo performed more poorly than their colleagues in Idleb.

Positive Findings	Negative Findings
	Limited use of effective lesson planning
	Poor opportunities for active, dialectic learning
	Poor differentiation
	Limited use and/or understanding of formative assessment

1.3.2   Learning environments that can impede learning and wellbeing

The findings of the study suggest that the environmental factors that can support conflict-sensitive teaching, child learning, and child wellbeing are, for the most part, not in place in Syria.

Positive Findings	Negative Findings
A mostly common curriculum	Limited opportunity to learn
More localised schools were preferred	Inaccessible learning spaces
Teacher performance assessments	Limited opportunities for play
	Infrequent displays of children's work

Positive Findings	Negative Findings
	Improving safety of learning spaces, but still significant concerns
	Poor partnerships between learning space personnel and parents/caregivers
	Limited use of Alternative Learning Programmes (ALPs)
	Poor teacher morale
	Limited peer support networks for teachers
	Increased teacher absences since the start of the conflict
	Limited teacher screening
	Limited formal complaints systems
	Reliance on ineffective one-off teacher training

1.3.3 Teacher practices that contribute to poor literacy, numeracy, and wellbeing

1.3.3.1 Hindered literacy and numeracy skill development opportunities

Teachers in the study area appear to have good self-efficacy rates, but appear to be under-skilled, under-supported, and under-resourced to provide appropriate and effective opportunities for conflict-affected children to learn how to read and do maths.

Positive Findings	Negative Findings
Teachers, especially male teachers, have high self-efficacy rates	Positive self-efficacy does not translate into positive practice[3]

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[3] On the topics of literacy and numeracy, when contrasting relatively sound practice with poor reading and maths outcomes, it is critical to consider other factors that could negatively affect levels of literacy and numeracy. These include the relatively weak state of children's wellbeing, the lack of teaching and learning materials in support of reading and maths, and relatively limited engagement from parents/caregivers in support of literacy and numeracy in the home.

1.3.3.2   Poor support for social and emotional wellbeing, and behaviours that negatively affect it

While under observation, teachers appeared to model sound practices that relate to support for social and emotional wellbeing. However, consistent reports from children about concerning corporal punishment and verbal abuse suggest that they are standard practices for many teachers when not under observation.

Positive Findings	Negative Findings
Seventy-two percent of teachers were observed to support a sense of self-control through rule setting and routines, and 68% were found to use praise and positive feedback often.	Forty-one percent of children reported that "some" or "all" teachers or school personnel hit children, 64% stated that they shouted at or threatened children.

1.4   Recommendations

This study was designed to focus on the most granular aspects of the education system that support teacher practice, child learning, and child wellbeing. It also builds on evidence that says improving teacher quality is one of, if not the most important, investments in education. The following section summarises the key recommendations to this end.

- **Invest in improved teacher support:**
  - o Invest in continuous teacher professional development to support improved learning and wellbeing. This investment is particularly valuable to improve the teaching practices of male teachers.
    - ▪ Teachers would particularly benefit from attitudinal and behaviour change regarding positive discipline, inclusive education, and partnerships with parents/caregivers.
    - ▪ Teachers would particularly benefit from knowledge and skill development regarding differentiation and other forms of inclusive pedagogy (especially for displaced children), teaching maths, teaching reading, positive discipline, and formative assessment.

- **Invest in school administrator support:**
  - o School administrators need to be supported to establish teacher wellbeing and learning systems to enable improved teacher professional development. This change includes creating peer learning networks and using performance management to assess and promote wellbeing and skill building.
  - o School administrators also need support working with parents/caregivers more effectively, namely to establish integration programmes for displaced and local populations and to create and sustain Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and School Management Committees.

- **Invest in parents/caregiver support:**
  - Parents/caregivers need assistance to become more active as partners in their children's learning and wellbeing. Priority investments should include: preparing them for the outcomes of formative assessment processes; help them understand the positive correlations between learning and wellbeing; and introducing simple, practical tasks that they can do to support learning and wellbeing.
- **Require programme design methodologies that better involve teachers, school administrators, and education authorities.**
- **Invest in further studies that support teacher development, particularly:**
  a. Review teacher wellbeing levels and needs, and their correlation to learning and wellbeing outcomes amongst children.
  b. Directly assess teacher knowledge rather than using observations of and opinions about teacher knowledge.
  c. Practices that better rapidly engage and support (potential) educators/teachers given the lack of a formal teacher education/professional development process in the existing systems.
  d. Assess the effectiveness of teacher professional development (comparing on what people are trained with how it transfers to classroom practice).

2 Limitations

As with most research undertaken in areas of conflict, the security situation presented the most significant number of challenges to the design and implementation of this study. The study team elevated the safety and security of enumerators and respondents as the top priority during the primary data collection process. As a result, only the remaining areas of Syria not under GoS control could be accessed safely. Gathering data as close to the actual processes of teaching and learning was another top priority. This goal was possible in non-GoS-held areas of Northwest Syria, but was more challenging due to education authorities' directives in both the Turkish-controlled Euphrates Shield and the YPG/SDF-controlled areas of Northeast Syria. As a result, granularity of data varied by ZoC.

The scope of the research envisioned by DFID in its original terms of reference was incredibly thoughtful and in-depth. The time available to undertake the research and the resources available for it, however, limited the breadth of the study regarding topics and feasible respondent reach. For example, relevant topics such as the connection between teacher wellbeing and teacher practice were not explored, nor was the topic of teacher remuneration, in part because of resource limitations but also in consideration of other studies underway or planned by other actors. The study team made every effort to triangulate data, but it is important to note that sociocultural sensitivities and some limitations in the research design meant that the psychometric aspects of the data collection toolkit design were imperfect. This challenge related to sensitive questions on topics such as abuse and sources of fear.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research phases

The research took place in four phases, as detailed below.

Phase I: An inception phase (May-June 2018): During the first phase of the research, the team sought to establish a thorough understanding of all possible stakeholders' interests and seek their engagement. This stakeholder mapping involved outreach to approximately 350 respondents with global, regional, and/or Syria-specific perspectives on the research topic and included policymakers, academics, and implementors. The inception phase also included a literature review of more than 150 relevant pieces of literature in Arabic and English, from Syria-specific project reports to assessments from other FCAS contexts on Education in Emergency (EiE) best practice. Interested stakeholders, firewalled from each other depending on their affiliations and/or geographic remits, participated in workshops to assess the team's progress on framing the design of the study and to enable the team to source the most granular real-time information possible from field-facing actors.

Phase II: A methodological design phase (July-August 2018): During the second phase of the research, the team fleshed out the methodology for primary data collection, informed by security analysis and projections, desk research, and stakeholder guidance. Basic ethical considerations, seen through a context-specific lens, were the highest priority. These considerations moved beyond the principles of Do No Harm and towards thoughtful and iterative sampling and informed consent practices (Mackenzie, C. et al., 2007) and consideration of both individual and community consent efforts (Gostin, L. 1991). A data collection toolkit influenced by 32 tools related to the study topics was developed, comprising 339 questions for a wide range of education sector respondents at the field level.

Phase III: A primary data collection phase (September-early November 2018): Using this methodological framework, eight weeks of data collection took place resulting in nearly 6,000 records sourced across three governorates, from approximately 300 schools. The establishment of clear red lines for what types of behaviours by enumerators, facilitating agents, and respondents the study team would not tolerate and under which conditions data collection would stop helped ensure that conditions were feasible for ongoing research. The use of *hawala* networks, offline data collection tools, low bandwidth communication protocol, and trusted networks provided efficient means for secure movement, data collection, and data aggregation.

Eight weeks of data collection took place resulting in:

Nearly **6,000 Records**

sourced across **3 Governorates**

from approximately **300 Schools**
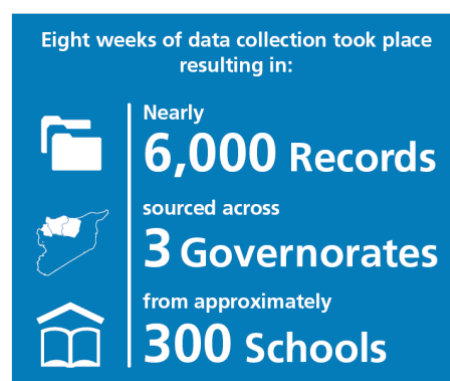
Phase IV: A data analysis and report writing phase (November-December 2018): Relying on the concurrent triangulation that took place during the third phase, this phase enabled the study team to analyse the quantitative and qualitative data in-depth and against the theoretical framework established at the outset of the study. The new dataset established under this study was combined with data from learning and wellbeing studies undertaken by other actors and analysed together.

3.2 Ongoing context analysis and contingency planning

The team undertook detailed access and data collection analyses and developed contingency plans and mitigation strategies from there. As frontlines continued to change, accessibility barriers and shifting affiliations could impact the viability of collecting meaningful data. As such, each data collection activity requiring field work was assessed in detail to ensure safety.

3.3 Sampling

The study sought to reach as representative a sample as possible in the data collection phase. The team confirmed during the first participatory workshop that it would be difficult, due to the security

situation, to do random sampling. As such, the study used the following types of sampling methods, which are best practices to collect information in hard-to-reach populations (Education Equity Research Initiative, 2018): snowball sampling, time location sampling, and targeted sampling. Furthermore, the Senior Researcher and Field Coordinator selected a sample of communities using a series of filters, including but not limited to community type, education setting, and education service provider.

3.4 Data collection toolkit

The toolkit was developed to reach education authorities, Local Council members, (international) non-governmental organisations (INGO) representatives, school administrators, teachers, parents/caregivers, and Grade 2 and 3 children. It was influenced heavily by the literature review and resulting theoretical framework. It included the following methods: surveys; KIIs; group interviews; and observations.

3.5 Data analysis

The data analysis was designed to use concurrent triangulation, meaning that all data collected each week was cleaned and coded in real time with oversight from the Team Lead and Programme Director. In total, 2,525 records were collected, which represented approximately 242,707 cells of data that were cleaned, coded, and analysed.

4 Framing the Research

4.1 Theoretical Framework

A sound theoretical framework was a critical tool to inform the design of the study and to serve as a reference during the data analysis. The framework was informed by the literature review that took place during the inception phase. As a result, the study team established the framework with the following key considerations in mind: i) the political economy of agenda setting; ii) the changing nature of humanitarian finance; iii) the increasingly protracted nature of conflict and how this is affecting humanitarian interventions; and iv) how crisis and conflict affect teachers and children.

The power dynamics of the proxy war in Syria, and the role of the political economy of agenda making amongst various state and non-state actors, profoundly influenced the study. This reality included both practical and operational aspects of data collection, as well as how the education sector was operating at the start of the study in early 2018 and how that might change by the release of the study in 2019. Relatedly, the study considered the changing nature of humanitarian finance and how complications resulting from these changes affect education service delivery and teaching and learning environments in Syria.

The study team also considered the increasingly protracted nature of conflict and the effect this has on education sector stakeholders, as well as how EiCC finance and related interventions are or are not shifting to address these issues. For example, it considered how a more substantial proportion of humanitarian finance for education is still allocated for infrastructure and access issues, when the evidence shows a higher return on investing in the quality of education, even in protracted conflict.

The theoretical framework was also heavily influenced by the research on very detailed aspects of teaching and learning during conflict. It considered: i) the role of conflict on lowering the quality of education available to children; ii) the likelihood that more vulnerable populations would become even worse off as a result of conflict; iii) that learning spaces become targets for armed actors; iv)

the preponderance of support for children at the primary level and the significant challenges that face older children in conflict; and v) that teachers in EiCC are not well supported to deal with the new challenges they face, both as teachers and as victims of the conflict.

4.2   Research Questions

Question 1. What teaching practices and behaviours are in use across different areas of Syria?

DFID's latest education policy, *Get Children Learning,* published in 2018, references its focus on improving the quality of teaching at least six times. There is a plethora of evidence it cites regarding how critical teaching is to promote learning.[4] There is also a dearth of evidence about teaching practice in Syria. As such, teaching practices and behaviours was the primary area of focus of the study. While certification of teacher training is used commonly as an indicator of teacher capacity, this research focussed more on teacher skill and experience.

The sub-questions included:

1.   How teaching practice influenced academic skill development, as well as socioemotional and related life skills development.
2.   To what degree teaching and learning were conflict-sensitive.
3.   What equity dimensions of education provision exist in Syrian learning spaces (i.e. to what extent is the classroom environment and teaching inclusive, including for children with disabilities? Is learning support differentiated?)

Question 2. What elements are in place in the learning environment that support wellbeing?

The study looked at topics such as the existence of creative arts and play therapies,[5] the existence of and training on codes of conduct, the presence of psychosocial support (PSS) policies and practices, specific support programmes and referrals for the most vulnerable, and parental and caregiver support in the learning space.

Question 3: What associations exist between teaching behaviours and education outcomes focusing on academic learning and socio-emotional wellbeing?

While there is some existing evidence in the Syrian context about poor learning outcomes and reduced levels of wellbeing, this research sought to determine what is, or is not, happening in teaching practice to support improved outcomes and skill development.

Question 4: Are there examples of best-practices or low-cost adaptations that could be translated to other parts of the education system and/or is there evidence of that known best practices could be feasible in the context?

The following areas of inquiry were used as lenses to analyse both existing and possible best practice in Syria: a) the use of information and communication technology (ICT) as a teaching and learning

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[4] Including UNESCO's 2014 Global Education Monitoring report, *Teaching and Learning: Achieving Quality for All* and the World Bank's 2018 piece *Learning to Realize Education's Promise.*
[5] Play-based learning and unstructured play, as well as opportunities for artistic expression, are well-supported elements of a healthy learning environment with a strong evidence base (see Golinkoff, Hirsh-Pasek & Singer, 2006; Elkind, 2008; and Barblett, 2010).

tool; b) continuous teacher professional development; c) tools and practices used to support psychosocial and socio-emotional wellbeing; d) the role of ALPs in supporting learning improvements; and e) opportunities presented by community-based education.[6]

4.3 Status of education and wellbeing in non-GoS-held Syria at the start of the study

As with any study, it was critical for this research to build on existing data for it to be of real value to stakeholders. As such, the profile of the education sector is summarised here as the basis for understanding of the study, which purposefully delved deeply into the most granular levels of teaching and learning possible.

By 2014, Syria's ranking in the education index of the United Nations Human Development Index dropped from 124 to 168 out of 187 countries (UNDP, 2014). A simple indicator to elucidate the seriousness of this decline is the nature of gross enrolment rates in Syria pre- and post-crisis: the gross enrolment rate in Syria prior to the crisis was 106% (UNICEF, 2015a) whereas as of 2017, it was down to at least 70% (Save the Children, 2017). At this stage in the crisis, significantly fractured ZoC in Syria meant that there were multiple curricula in use across the country. These variations ranged from the GoS' relatively strong curriculum, to derivatives of it used by a number of armed and non-state groups, to religious curriculum put forward by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (UNICEF, 2015b; American Institutes for Research, CfBT Education Trust and Save the Children, 2015).

the gross enrolment rate in Syria prior to the crisis was 106%; as of 2013, it was down to 78.6%

Pre-conflict
106%

2013 onwards
78.6%
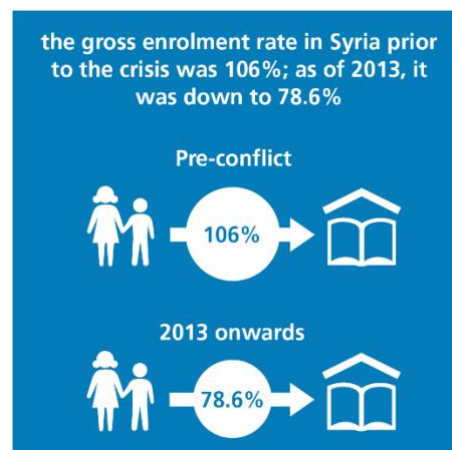
By 2015, more than 20% of the teaching population was gone (Save the Children, 2015b). Mizunoya (2015) estimated that the Syria economy had forever lost USD10.7 billion as a result of the then-burgeoning "lost generation" of children and the failing education system. The American Institutes for Research, CfBT Education Trust and Save the Children helped illustrate that figure by computing that children in Syria who only completed primary school as of 2015 (a growing number at that stage) would earn 32% less in their first jobs than their counterparts who had also completed secondary school (2015). In other words, the fear of the lost generation was becoming apparent, as an increasing number of Syrian children were facing a future far worse than generations before them.

While teacher training was available, mainly in the form of short courses provided by (I)NGOs, Mizunoya and West (2016) found that there was poor learning on the part of teachers. This result was likely a combination of the method of training (longer-term training and mentoring and coaching are more effective), the stress under which both trainers and teachers were operating, and likely operational and/or material issues such as insecurity and resource limitations.

By 2017, at least 33% of schools had been destroyed in Syria (Briggs, 2017). The exact nature of the equity of both education spaces and the teaching practices taking place within them was mostly unknown before this study. Accessibility issues were known to be likely but only based on anecdote. Studies undertaken in 2017 by the Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU) and Orange, and released in mid-2018, suggested that the safety of learning spaces was improving as were their functionality,

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[6] Also referred to as "low-cost private learning spaces" or "affordable non-state learning spaces."

though still at concerning level (74% of assessed learning spaces were deemed safe, and 19% of learning spaces were deemed to be non-functioning).

The study identified the primary service providers as the GoS, the Syrian Interim Government (SIG), the YPG/SDF-affiliated authorities, the Turkish government, UNRWA, and (I)NGOs. The status of learning in non-GoS-held areas was found to be incredibly poor through a series of assessments undertaken in 2017 and 2018 by no less than four (I)NGOs. People in Need summarised the dire status of literacy and numeracy rates from their 2018 report as follows: over 60% of children in Grade 3 and above are not reaching literacy competencies expected of children at a Grade 2 level; and above Grade 2, only 1-9% of children in each grade could recognise numbers between 0-9.

The wellbeing of children, while improving as the conflict continues and ZoC appear to become more stable, is still poor. In Save the Children's report on the mental health and wellbeing of children in Syria (2017), 80% of parents/caregivers saw aggressive behaviours amongst their children. The DFID-funded Idarah project, in its war stressors' assessment of the same year, found that 80% of the children they assessed said they were anxious, worried, and/or stressed. By its 2018 reports on schools in Syria, the ACU (2018b) found that 15% of the children they assessed stated they had concentration problems and 11% said they were nervous. The DFID-funded Manahel project's assessment of wellbeing in 2018 found that roughly 41% of children were in the abnormal to borderline range on a wellbeing scale influenced by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. At their highest rates of stress, primary school age children (age 5-10) in Syria are still at least three to four percentage points above their UK colleagues. Girls were more likely to be in the abnormal to borderline wellbeing range than boys, at 23% and 18% respectively, of the total population assessed.

5   Data Collection

5.1   Security profile of the primary data collection area

To effectively and safely conduct data collection inside Syria, the team maintained accurate, up-to-date analysis informed by a variety of perspectives related to the conflict dynamics and trends in the areas of data collection. In summary, there was relative calm in Northwest Syria, thanks in large part to the Sochi Agreement of September 2018. The GoS retook most of Southern Syria, and its presence made data collection impossible in the areas of Dar'a and Quneitra governorates. Turkish oversight of the Euphrates Shield area continued during the study, allowing stability for data collection though it was limited by stringent limitations on-site access. While Northeast Syria was tense during the period of the study, it was calm, and thus data collection was feasible, though limited, due to stringent oversight from the governing authorities.

5.2   Profile of the data collection sites of the study

By the end of June 2018, the GoS controlled most of the territory in Syria. Despite the ultimate goal of assessing education services across all of Syria, the geographic scope for Phase III of the study, the primary data collection, was restricted due to political, conflict, and security factors. It is critical to understand the geographic concentrations of the people in need figures for Syria to appreciate the geographic targeting of the study (OCHA, 2017)

- GoS-controlled areas: 7.8 million people in need (63%).
- Non-GoS-controlled areas: 5.35 million (41%). Of which, the areas covered by the study include 3.97 million (30% of the total population in need figure, and 74% of the people in need figure of accessible areas of the study).

Forty-nine percent of the 2018 people in need figure were in the education sector (6.1 million school-age children and 300,000 teaching personnel) (OCHA, 2018).

Furthermore, during the first half of 2018, the distribution of the people in acute need figure, according to the UN, increased in Aleppo and Idleb from 382,695 in January 2018 to 437,747 in May 2018 (OCHA, 2018). Following on these trends, of the 68 confirmed attacks on schools and education personnel during the first half of 2018, the majority occurred in Idlib, Rural Damascus, Aleppo, and Dar'a, and the vast majority of the 30 unconfirmed attacks took place in Idleb (OCHA, 2018).

Finally, through a lens of internally displaced persons (IDPs), 60% are in Idleb and Aleppo (OCHA, 2018).

Therefore, the following areas where the focus for primary data collection: non-GoS-held areas, including Idleb governorate and western Aleppo, the northwest countryside of Aleppo area, and SDF-held areas in Raqqa and Aleppo governorates. More specifically, the team collected data in the following locations:

- **Non-GoS-held Idleb and Aleppo:** All locations were accessible.

- **YPG/SDF-held areas:** Access to education facilities varied according to local political dynamics. For example, the GoS divides administrative oversight with the SDF in al-Hasakeh and Quamishli districts, which restricted access to formal education facilities in these areas. However, access to education facilities in Menbij, Ain al Arab (Kobani), and Ar-Raqqa remained possible. Thus, data collection in these areas focussed on formal and informal education facilities in Menbij and Ain al Arab (Aleppo governorate) and Ar-Raqqa city (Ar-Raqqa governate).

- **The Euphrates Shield area:** Due to strict Turkish oversight, access to education facilities in the Northwest Aleppo countryside was more difficult than in other non-GoS-held areas. As such, the team conducted light-touch research, including KIIs and group interviews, with support from the Stabilisation Committee.
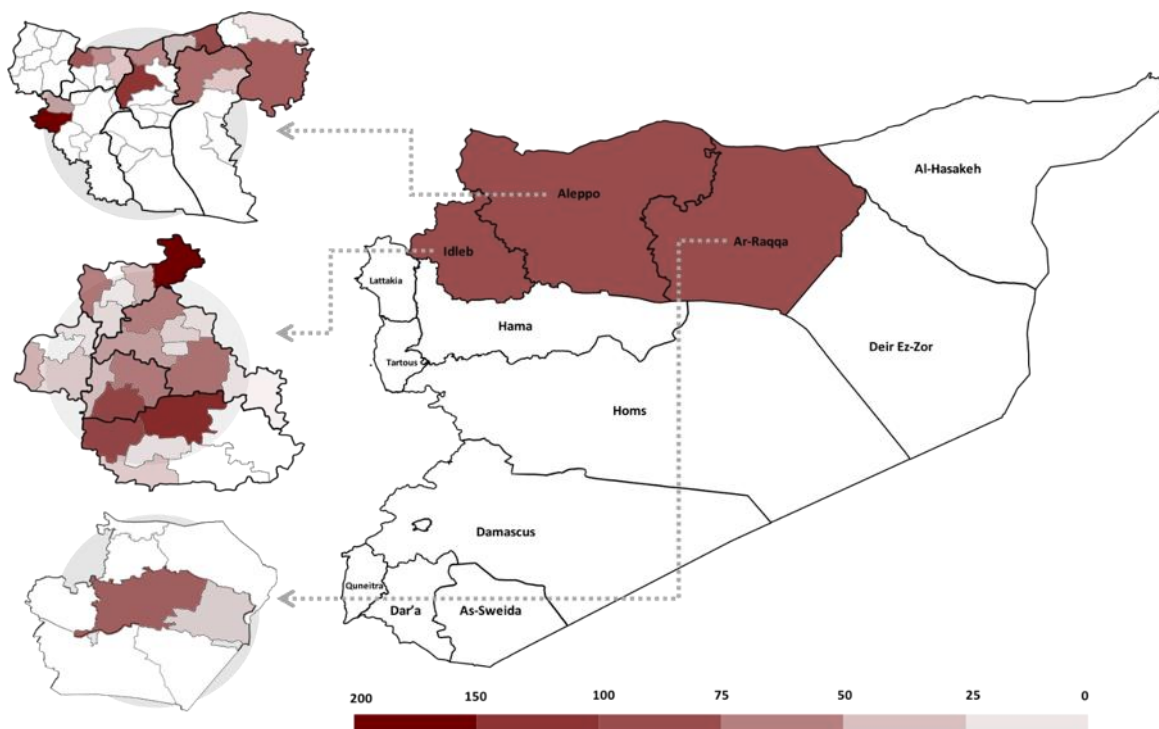
The majority of the data was collected in Idleb governorate and/or in non-GoS-held northwest Syria: 48% percent of the data was collected in Idlib, and 61% was collected in areas in the Northwest held by non-GoS actors. Fifty-seven percent of the data was collected in rural areas.[7] Data were collected from 294 schools, of which 98% were public, and the majority were mixed-gender. Classroom observations took place in 281 classrooms, 50% in Grade 2 and 50% in Grade 3. Fifty-nine percent were Arabic classes, and the remaining 41% were maths classes.

5.3   Profile of study respondents

In total, the study team spoke with 5,580 respondents. Approximately 50% of respondents were women, and 30% were internally displaced.[8]

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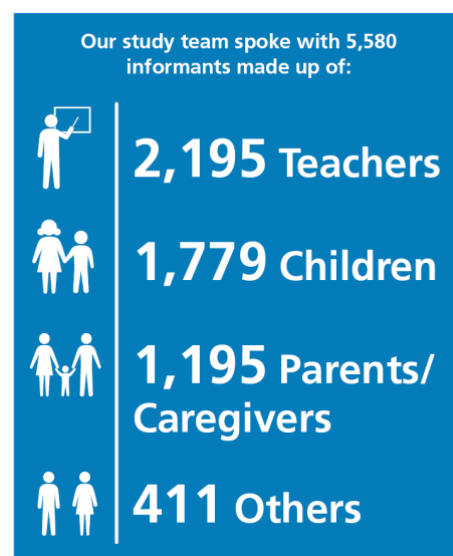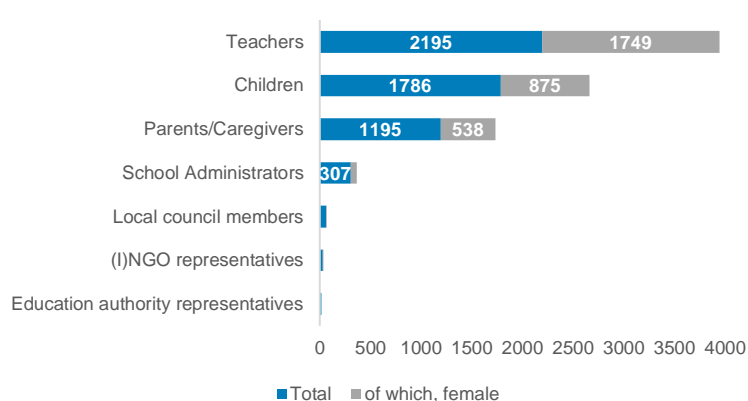
[7] No consistent trends were found in how the community type in which data was gathered may have influenced the data findings. For more information, please see the Compendium to the Final Report which details for each sub-question the findings for each community type.

[8] Qualitative data from numerous informant groups referenced displaced children as the most marginalised population with frequency. The evidence supports this suggestion. While this study did not collect data regarding the morale of displaced versus host populations, literature and anecdotal evidence from this study suggests that the wellbeing of displaced populations tends to be lower than that of host populations Hassan, Ventevogel, Jefee-Bahloul, Barkil-Oteo, & Kirmayer, 2016; Quosh, Eloul, & Ajlani, 2013).

Category	Total	Of which, internally displaced
Teachers	2195	859
Children	1786	518
Parents/Caregivers	1195	347
School Administrators	307	
Local council members		
(I)NGO representatives		
Education authority representatives		

■ Total ■ Of which, internally displaced
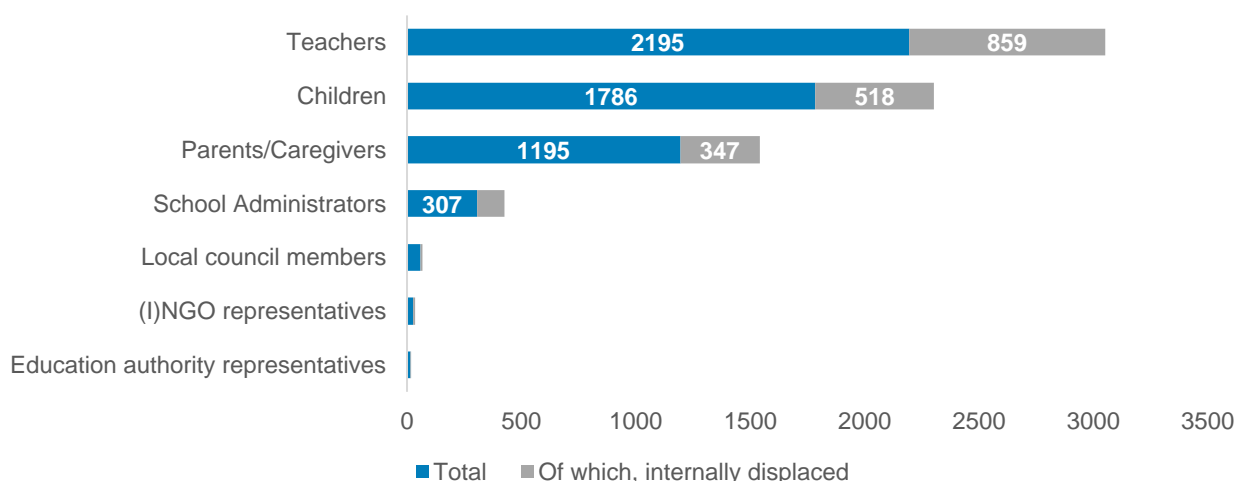
5.3.1 Teachers

Of these informants, 2,195 were teachers. The study team focused heavily on understanding the profiles of teachers, considering that the focus of the study was on them and their teaching. Female teachers were in the majority, at 71%, and 28% of all Grade 2 and Grade 3 teachers were internally displaced. Only 32% of teachers had teaching certificates, unsurprisingly since 43% of teachers had only one to three years of teaching experience and thus were unlikely to have access to formal training institutes as a result of the conflict. The majority of teachers were regularly employed (72%).

Respondents expressed a mixture of motivations for teaching, with many naturally stating the intrinsic nature of their interest in the profession, such as wanting to fill the gaps left by teachers who had sought refuge outside of Syria. A fair amount understandably noted extrinsic motivations, such as the need for a salary in an economy devastated by the conflict. Of the 33% of teachers who had taught before and during the conflict, the majority (82%) said that their teaching practices had changed since the start of the conflict. Children's stress was the primary cause (83%), followed by lack of resources (79%), and their stress (66%).
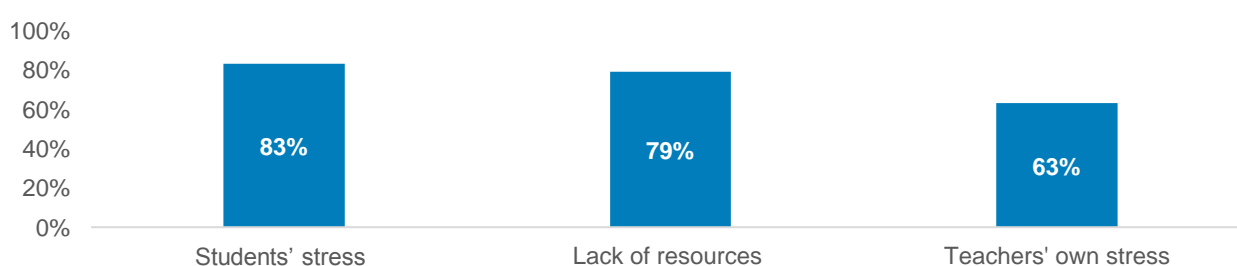
This study did not undertake an in-depth review of teacher wellbeing, but it did look at morale. In Aleppo, for example, 40% of school administrators found teacher morale to be low. Teachers' primary concerns appear to be limited teaching and learning materials, low salaries, insecurity, transportation to and from learning spaces, and limited skills to deal with children's stress. Anecdotal evidence suggests that one element of poor teacher practice is poor teacher wellbeing, and thus teachers cannot be expected to be functioning to standard even if they were better supported.

Teachers consistently identified high rates of self-efficacy regarding their abilities to promote equity, reading, maths, and wellbeing. For example, 82% of teachers said they felt confident that they could reach all children with their teaching. More specifically, 96% and 86% of teachers "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they could teach reading and maths, respectively, to all children.

However, these same teachers consistently showed weak performance under enumerator observation. For example, only 60% provided opportunities for language manipulation, and only 59% of teachers used multiple teaching techniques to support children in reading comprehension. In maths classes, only 61% of teachers were observed to provide support for the establishment of number sense or practising of multiples.

In all but a few cases, male teachers underperformed in comparison with their female counterparts. For example, female teachers were observed to "often" or "always 'move around the room to monitor child behaviour and interactions 74% of the time, versus male teachers at 55% of the time. Female teachers were observed to appropriately allocate time to class activities better than male teachers (92% compared to 81%). Similarly, teachers in Aleppo consistently underperformed in comparison with their colleagues in Idleb. For example, children in Idleb were much more likely to ask questions "often" or "always" (49%) than those in Aleppo (31%). Ninety-four percent of teachers in Idleb were observed to "often" or "always" check for student understanding, compared to 82% in Aleppo.

5.3.2   Other informants

A total of 1,779 Grade 2 and 3 children served as respondents for the study. The team was able to reach a roughly representative sample: 51% were boys, and 49% were girls. Twenty-nine percent of the children were internally displaced. Boys were more likely to be internally displaced than were girls: 58% of the displaced children were male, and 42% were female.

A total of 1,195 parents and/or caregivers participated in the study as respondents. Slightly more were male (55%) than were female (45%), possibly representative of sociocultural norms about males representing communities. Like the child respondents, 29% of parents/caregivers were internally displaced.

Fifteen education authority representatives in Idleb and Aleppo served as respondents for the study. All were men, and only 13% were displaced, noting that those in Idleb were more likely to be internally displaced (25%) than those in Aleppo (11%) or Ar-Raqqa (3%). Sixty-seven percent of them held university degrees.

Sixty Local Council representatives were interviewed as part of the study. Only two of them were female, and 15% were displaced. Sixty-four percent of the respondents had a university degree.

Twenty-seven representatives from 17 (I)NGOs were interviewed as part of the study. Sixty-five percent of these (I)NGOs were Syrian. The majority of representatives were male (89%) and had university degrees (93%). Thirty percent were displaced.

Three hundred and seven school administrators were interviewed for the study. The majority of them were male (83%) and were certified teachers (96%). More than 38% of them were internally displaced.

6 Findings

6.1 Profile of (I)NGO service providers

At the start of this study, a UNICEF-supported in-depth assessment of education service providers was underway, and while DFID's original terms of reference included a component to assess the nature of education service provider work, it was agreed that such an undertaking would be duplicative. As such, a simple perceptions survey was designed to capture broad stakeholder feedback on how (I)NGOs were viewed concerning their implementation of education programmes. In summary, it appears that (I)NGOs had more positive perspectives on the quality of their work than other stakeholders did. For example, they thought they were working more collaboratively with local partners than education authority representatives thought. They also, perhaps unsurprisingly, believed that the quality of their work was higher than other respondents thought (I)NGO work was.

6.2 Profile of standard education sector indicators, policies, and practices

Enrolment rates: Enrolment rates were difficult to obtain from education authorities, who did not appear to understand how to calculate them. When asked to provide figures to illustrate the net and gross enrolment rates for both male and female primary school children, only 14% of education authority respondents in Idleb and 66% in Aleppo appeared to understand the difference between the two types of measurement. Regarding enrolment figures for Grade 2 and 3 at the school level, 50% were boys, and 50% were girls.

Elements of the opportunity to learn: The opportunity to learn, as defined and measured by Gillies & Quijada (2008), identifies a series of key elements of the teaching and learning environment that need to be in place to provide children with even a chance to learn while in learning spaces. These include the proximity of the learning space to concentrations of people, the number of hours a learning space should be open a year, and on what topics teachers should focus. There appear to be significant barriers to the opportunity to learn in Syria. One of the most critical findings from this study was how little time was allocated to learning in the schools assessed: the average primary school child in non-GoS-held areas is only getting 66% of the absolute minimum number of hours required for them to have the opportunity to learn.

Student attendance rates: Attendance rates in the areas assessed were relatively good for a conflict-affected context, at roughly 93% for Grade 2 and 3 boys and 92% for girls.

The school year: The majority of school authorities start their school year in early/mid-September and end it between mid-May and mid-June. This timeframe amounts to roughly seven to eight months that learning spaces are in session, adjusted to six to seven months considering holidays. This appears to be an appropriate amount of time for a school to be open.

Hours in school and hours allocated to learning: Across Aleppo, Ar-Raqqa, and Idleb, the average number of shifts per school was 1.5. This indicator suggests it is unlikely that children in these areas of Syria are getting sufficient time allocated to learning. The average appears to be 3.3 hours per child per day. According to the Opportunity to Learn index, a child needs to be exposed to instructional time between at least 850-1,000 hours per year (Gillies & Quijada, 2008). The average calculated for the children in the areas studied was 560 hours. This finding reveals that the average child is only getting approximately 66% of the minimum time required for learning. This finding is significant in light of the low levels of learning identified through earlier studies.
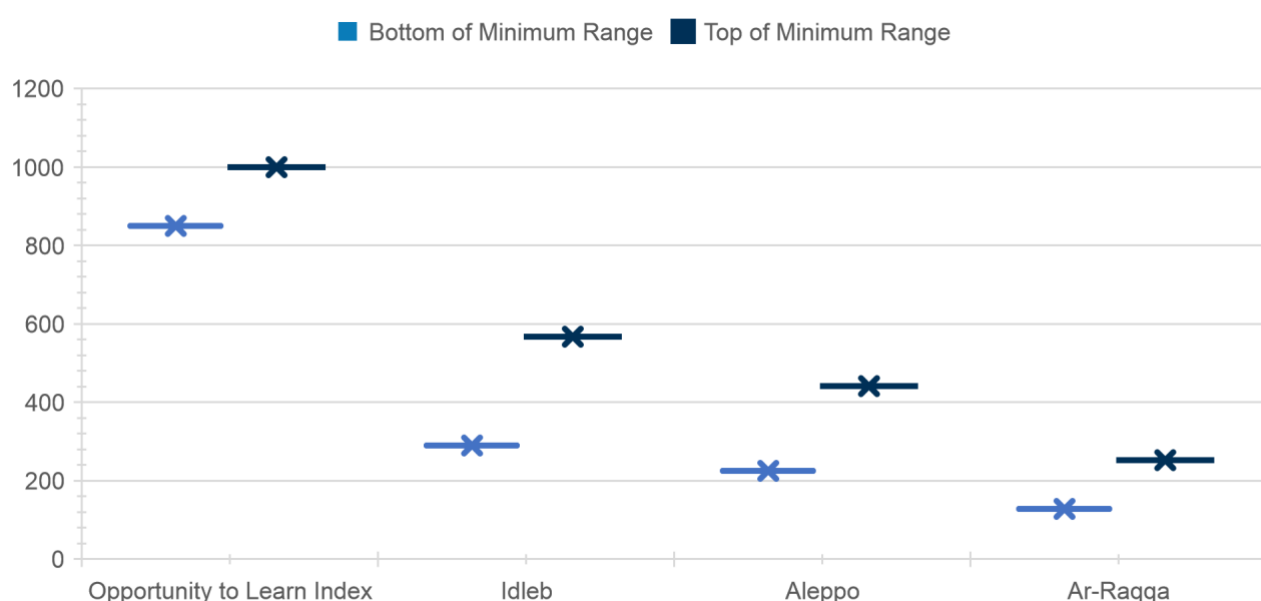
Teacher absence and coverage: Unsurprisingly, the conflict has had a negative impact on teachers' absences, with 31% of teachers who taught before the conflict saying that there were more absences during the conflict than before. The increase in the percentage of teacher absences suggests that teachers are not available as often as they are needed to support learning and wellbeing. This change means that one of the critical elements of the opportunity to learn is missing for many Syrian children. When a teacher is absent, the most common practice is to use substitute teachers (73% of respondents), followed by combining classes (33% of respondents).

Curriculum: One hundred percent of education authorities in Idleb and Aleppo are using the SIG's curriculum, itself a derivative of the GoS curriculum. In Ar-Raqqa, both the Kurdish Self Administration curriculum and the GoS curriculum are used. This reality is helpful in terms of providing a common curricular framework within which to analyse cross-Syria learning outcomes. It also provides benefits for children who might be forced to migrate multiple times across ZoC, and/or for consideration of the ease of absorption of teachers and children into GoS-held spaces again. The fact that most children in Syria are using variations of the same core curriculum,[9] which itself is

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[9] According to KIIs with education authority representatives.

relatively sound (considering the circumstances under which it was developed and revised), is a positive aspect of an otherwise fractured and under-resourced education sector.

Curricular content: The majority of parents/caregivers (77%) and children (99%) felt that what they were learning in school was of value to them. Parents/caregivers in Aleppo, female parents/caregivers, and those with children in private schools were most likely to be positive about the learning content. Children in camps appeared to feel less sure about the value of their learning (93%), but not significantly so.

Child to teacher ratio: The child to teacher ratio is reasonable and much lower than the international standard of 40:1 (INEE, 2010). Education authorities noted that the average across Idleb and Aleppo was 38:1. School administrators provided slightly lower ratios, with an average of 26:1. However, these figures are higher than what the ratios were before the crisis, which was 25:1 in 2002, the most recent pre-conflict data available (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018c), and thus represent increased challenges for teachers.

Summative assessment:[10] Education authorities require exams at the Grade 2 and Grade 3 levels, and the majority take place on a semester basis. School administrators and teachers reported that they used both formative[11] and summative assessment in their schools. They had significantly different perspectives, however, on how frequently summative assessment was used as the primary form of assessments: 37% of school administrators said it was used exclusively, whereas only 1% of teachers did. While it would be preferable to have a stronger focus on formative assessments and a decreasing focus on summative assessments (especially as an exclusive tool for child assessment), these findings are understandable. The traditional use of summative assessments, as well as the overall effect of the conflict on teacher professional development and systems strengthening, suggest that the pre-conflict inertia on the topic of assessment would continue. Anecdotal comments from school administrators and teachers suggest that neither cohort are clear on what appropriate formative assessment is, highlighting a need for skill-building on the concept, as well as the practice.

Certification: Opportunities for widely certified education, and thus future upward mobility through secondary and tertiary education, are limited for conflict-affected Syrian children to those who can safely participate in the GoS system. While the SIG and YPG/SDF-affiliated authorities also issue certifications for their systems, they are not widely recognised, and parents have expressed disinterest in them.

Language of instruction: In 100% of the spaces covered under the study, the language of instruction was Arabic. While not explicitly tested, the team understands that Arabic is also the mother tongue of the majority of the child and teacher population in which the assessments were carried out. Ninety-six percent of children stated that all children in the class understand the language the teachers are using.

Teacher training: Training appears to be frequently available via (I)NGOs and through the education authorities with the support of (I)NGOs and private sector service providers. At least three-quarters of teachers had received training within the six months before the study. Training was more

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[10] Summative assessment is the practice of using infrequent, often high stakes, examinations of student learning over a long period.
[11] Formative assessment is the practice of frequent, informal assessments of student learning using multiple forms of assessment that recognise multiple intelligences.

accessible for, or better accessed by female teachers. The nature of the topics covered appears to be relevant and appropriate. The efficacy of the training, however, is of concern considering both the practices observed by teachers as well as the learning outcomes of children. Traditional uses of short-term or "one-off" teacher training, which is the commonly used methodology (Mizunoya & West, 2016), are not providing teachers with learning opportunities that are appropriate for adult learners. Furthermore, limited rates of supervision and little to no mentoring appear to contribute to inadequate levels of support to teachers, and especially fail those new to the profession, and those suffering from the effects of the conflict themselves.

Teacher screening: The study did not find any consistent approaches to screening teachers to ensure that they are not rights violators, specifically concerning children. Education authorities and school administrators were more likely to note that screening was done than teachers were. The limited use of teacher screening (only 42% of teachers said that it was common) and the poor documentation of teacher codes of conduct (60% of teachers said such written codes were standard), or accountability to them, is also concerning regarding protecting and promoting children's wellbeing. As a result, it is possible that teachers may have been involved with activities (or have attitudes) not conducive to supporting wellbeing and learning in the classroom.

Teacher performance assessments: The use of performance assessments by school administrators appeared to be relatively sound, with 77% of school administrators saying they used such tools. This finding suggests that there are structures and processes in place, at least theoretically, to enable teachers to receive feedback on their performance, and for such assessments to facilitate career progression. This practice, when done appropriately, can provide invaluable and timely opportunities to hold teachers accountable to standards and develop professional development strategies for them. In line with the research around motivation, such practices can contribute to senses of autonomy, mastery, and purpose, which are critical to people working in cognitive (rather than manual) labour markets (Ariely, Gneezy, Loewenstein, & Mazar, 2005; Pink, 2011). However, the appropriateness use of such assessments is unknown. Male school administrators, those with university degrees, school administrators with teaching certificates, and displaced school administrators were the most likely to use these practices.

Teacher self-efficacy regarding equitable teaching practices: Eighty-eight percent of teachers felt that they had the skills to recognise and support the individual needs of all children, including those with disabilities. This response likely speaks to self-efficacy and self-esteem more than actual skill level, considering reports and observations suggesting equitable teaching practices are not in place, as detailed later in the report.

Risks faced by teachers in learning spaces: When parents/caregivers were asked what risks they thought teachers faced at school, the most significant concerns were that learning spaces were vulnerable to attack (45%) and that there were unsanitary conditions that could lead to health concerns (43%). Such concerns appear reasonable for the context. When asked to mention any other risks, the most frequent was kidnapping or military conscription. When teachers were asked if children ever threatened to hurt them, 80% said that this never happened. Those who did experience such threats noted that it was often by the sons of men in the military and armed groups.

Teacher supervision, mentoring, and coaching: The majority of comments from school administrators and teachers on this topic focussed on the disconnect between the existence of supervisory visits and the actual mentoring services provided, which were deemed to be low. In other words, it appears as though supervision exists, but that mentoring as part of it is limited.

6.3 Nature of the school environment in support of wellbeing

The safety of learning spaces for children: Learning spaces appear to be safer spaces for children in Syria after many years of being known targets for both state and non-state armed actors. Between 2011 and 2015, more than 50% of the attacks on learning spaces globally were happening in Syria (Kiernan, 2015). The ACU (2018) measured the functionality of schools between 2016 and 2018 and found that the percentage of non-functional schools decreased from 48% in 2016 to 19% in 2018. The majority of respondents noted that learning spaces are usually safe. Education authorities portrayed the majority (87%) of learning spaces in Idlib and Aleppo as not being used for purposes other than education. Parents/caregivers supported this finding, with 76% stating that learning spaces were "never" used for purposes other than education. Ninety-six percent of children said they felt safe at school. Girls appeared to feel slightly safer than boys did. Some children explained that they were happier in their school this year compared to last year because it felt more secure, had been renovated, or had more supplies. That said, qualitative references to the types of fears respondents faced, or perceived school-goers to face, were significant. This finding suggests that some normalisation of insecurity has likely occurred over the period of the conflict.

Children's perceptions of their safety and fears in learning spaces: Ninety-six percent of children said they felt safe at school. Girls appeared to feel slightly safer than boys did. Further supporting these findings, confirmational questions were asked about how well children felt in school. Sixty percent of children said that they felt "very good" in school, and 32% said they felt "good." However, it is essential to consider the possible normalisation by children of the types of stresses they are facing, considering that most, if not all, of the children who participated in the study, have only ever known conflict. In other words, while many might say they feel safe, it is likely that they feel safer than they have in the past, considering in particular that the study happened during an unprecedented period of stability in the areas assessed. While most children expressed a sense of safety and positivity about being in learning spaces, the study team also

99% of all children expressed fear of a specific threat, the most common of which included:

32% — Verbal and/or physical abuse from teachers

24% — Airstrikes

asked more specific questions to identify if there were any specific fears while at school. Ninety-nine percent of all children expressed fear of at least one of these threats,[12] and the prevalence of teacher verbal (64%) and physical abuse (41%) was unfortunately mentioned frequently. Internally displaced boys in Aleppo had the most significant concern about teacher abuse (49%). Within Aleppo, the majority of those boys were in areas controlled by the YPG/SDF. Internally displaced children in Idleb were more concerned about airstrikes than their local counterparts, whereas the concerns were roughly the same in Aleppo.

Parent/caregiver perceptions of children's safety and fears in learning spaces: Parents/caregivers felt that both girls and boys were "often" or "always" safe in learning spaces (96% and 95%, respectively). Parents/caregivers also suggested that boys were greater targets for verbal and/or corporal abuse by teachers, and especially male teachers, in learning spaces. A few parents/caregivers mentioned specific incidents of kidnapping as a concern for boys. Again, the

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[12] Teacher abuse, school administrator abuse, airstrikes, fire, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), bullying, and the presence of armed groups.

normalisation of insecurity in such contexts is vital to remember when reviewing these findings from parents/caregiver.

School administrator perspectives on children's safety in learning spaces: Sixty-seven percent of education authority representatives stated that they had never heard of incidents of girls being unsafe in learning spaces. There were greater concerns amongst respondents in camps and in Idlib, where the nature of the conflict was more intense than in the other areas covered under the study.

Peer to peer abuse amongst children: The data suggest that incidents of verbal discord, abuse, and/or physical violence amongst children happen in learning spaces. While figures are difficult to ascertain, it appears that up to 30% of respondents witness such issues of concern. These types of incidents are indicators of issues around child wellbeing. They are detrimental to child wellbeing and foster lower levels of safety in the learning space.

Displays of children work: Roughly 50% of teacher and enumerator respondents said that displays of children works were common. Such findings suggest that children are not often provided with opportunities to see their efforts displayed as a source of pride within the school community, which can be a demotivating factor.

Timetables: Like class rules and codes of conduct, timetables help provide a sense of control for children (and school personnel), and facilitate a sense of order in the school space. Such practices, however, were not found to be common in the assessed learning spaces, 28% of enumerators noted that a timetable and/or student schedule was clear and visible to children "76-100%" of the time.

Opportunities for recreation: Play, both structured and unstructured, has been found to have great value in emotional regulation and stress reduction for children (Moser & Martinsen, 2010). Unfortunately, the study found resources to support such activities to be lacking in the assessed learning spaces, a finding further supported by recent studies by the ACU (2018) and Orange (2018). Only 31% of teachers reported that there were "often" or "always" recreational resources or equipment (hula hoops, footballs, etc.) available in the play area.[13] However, most noted that the existence of such resources was limited and of poor quality, and thus insufficient. Furthermore, 96% of teachers said that when resources were available, children did not have access to them, or only had access to them during break time.

6.4 Policies, infrastructure, and community resources to support equity in learning spaces

Accessibility of learning spaces for children with special needs: The accessibility of learning spaces for children with special needs appeared to be mixed, depending on respondent perspective. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, due to socio-cultural norms, limited resources, and limited understanding of the types of modifications helpful for various types of disabilities, most learning spaces are not well designed for children with special needs. The study team did not observe significant differences amongst ZoC or types of communities. Learning spaces were found to be accessible to all children 59% of the time. Accessibility for children in camps was the highest (71%), and it was the lowest in urban areas (37%).

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[13] The ACU's report on learning spaces in Syria (2018) found that only 12% of learning spaces provided such resources.

Interestingly, 61% of public learning spaces were found to be accessible, compared to only 25% of private learning spaces (noting that the sample size of private schools in this study was small). Only 10% of enumerators found that latrines were accessible to children with special needs "76-100%" of the time. Furthermore, the limited screening of children for special needs (only 56% of school administrators said this sometimes done) also suggests that children who can access learning spaces are not getting the support they need within them. Limited to no peer networks, a lack of specialists trained in psychosocial support, and limited agencies to whom to refer children mean that, in these spaces, children are without help.

Codes of conduct and their operationalisation: Codes of conduct are helpful tools for fostering a shared understanding of expectations of behaviours amongst school personnel, and provide references when assessing behaviours and holding personnel accountable. Learning spaces in Idleb were more likely to have such codes than learning spaces in other regions. Regarding operationalising the concepts included in codes of conduct, however, practices such as training, documentation, and accountability appeared to be minimal.

Complaints systems: Complaints systems are an accountability tool in institutions such as learning spaces, and are especially helpful for children, who might not have other resources or soft skills for dealing with their concerns. Complaints systems appear to be limited (only 51% of school administrators said they existed), and children appear to have limited awareness of such systems (39% of children said they were aware of a complaints system available to them). Furthermore, complaints systems appear to be inaccessible to children with special needs (at least 59% of student administrators said such children could not access these systems). These findings suggest that there is little standard setting and accountability for appropriate practices in learning spaces, and thus numerous opportunities for improper teacher practice. While formal complaints systems appeared to be limited, there were informal means of reporting concerns in school spaces with which children felt comfortable. Children in Ar-Raqqa, however, appear to have limited information about how to handle their concerns, with only 16% saying they knew how to do so. Learning spaces in Idleb appear to have more formalised systems, according to 67% of school administrator respondents. School administrators who were themselves displaced appeared to be more likely to establish complaints systems than their local counterparts.

Screening practices and referral services available for children with special needs: Both the availability of services to which children can be referred for specialist support outside of the school and the practice of screening for needs and making referrals appeared to be minimal. Such practices were more common in Idleb than in other governorates.

Peer support networks: Peer support networks[14] have been shown to be valuable resources for mentoring and other forms of support for all age groups (Gensemer, 2000; Karcher, 2005; and Thompson & Smith, 2011). However, peer networks for children did not appear to be common in the assessed learning spaces. For example, in Ar-Raqqa, 60% of school administrators stated that such support systems existed less than 50% of the time. The limited availability of peer support networks for teachers, particularly in a context where limited resources and toxic stress are negatively impacting teacher morale and learning, is concerning. This concern is especially relevant considering

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[14] Peer support networks can take many forms and be formal or informal, with a purpose of bringing together colleagues and/or classmates to support learning, motivation, practice, and wellbeing.

that such models have been shown to be particularly appropriate in FCAS contexts in supporting improved teacher quality, motivation, and thus children's learning.

Parental/caregiver involvement in children's learning and wellbeing: There is a strong evidence base that parental/caregiver involvement in children's learning is important (Xu & Gulosino, 2006; Moser & Martinsen, 2010; Harris & Goodall, 2008; and Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). However, there appeared to be a disconnect between teachers and parents/caregivers regarding how each cohort saw parent/caregiver roles in support of learning and wellbeing. Fourteen percent of teachers said that parents/caregivers were not supporting children at all. Only 38% said that they thought parents/caregivers helped children with homework, whereas 69% of parents/caregivers said they did. Teachers mentioned that parents were invited infrequently to schools. Fifty percent of school administrators surveyed for the ACU's 2018 report on learning spaces in Syria stated that they did not hold regular meetings with parents, suggesting that such structures are not commonplace in Syria. Poor relationships between the school and home on the learning and wellbeing continuum leave gaps in support for child learning and wellbeing.
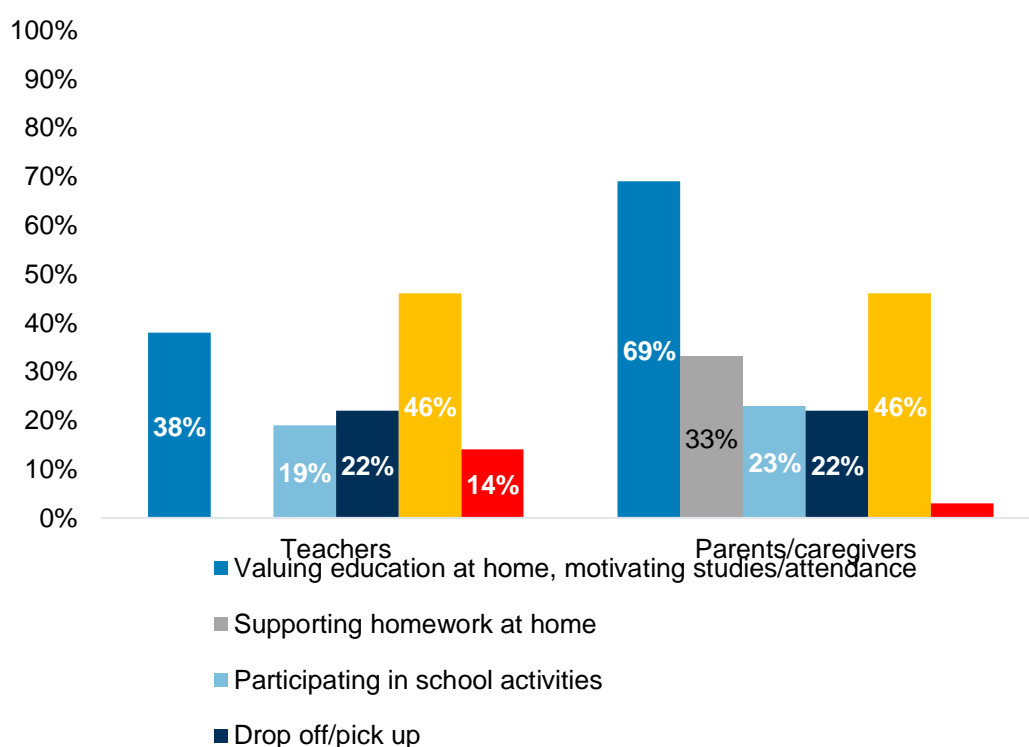
Alternative Learning Programmes: Despite the availability of and sound use by many in the (I)NGO sector of the Self-Learning Programmes (SLP), other forms of ALPs do not appear to be prevalent or well understood in Syria. (I)NGO representatives stated that such activities were already happening at a rate higher than did their education authority counterparts (15% and 7%, respectively), but at relatively low rates overall. This finding is particularly concerning considering that it is precisely in these types of contexts that ALP are most appropriate, given that they are designed to promote accessible learning for marginalised children who have been out of school or are inconsistently in school.

6.5   Teacher practices and behaviours: child-centred and experiential pedagogy

Classroom management: Data from enumerators and teachers suggest that at least two-thirds of teachers are using practices that aim to ensure calm and order in the classroom and that teachers

feel confident in their abilities to maintain their composure when disrupted while teaching. These findings relate to practices such as behaviour monitoring, positive discipline, and a sense of self-efficacy. However, when constructing the likely profile of classroom management, the influence of enumerators' presence in classrooms on these behaviours must be considered, as child reports of teacher abuse were common.

Subject matter expertise: Study data showed relatively high rates of observed[15] subject matter expertise with relatively low learning outcomes data,[16] suggesting that teachers' ability to deliver content was more of an issue than their comprehension of the content. As such, there appeared to be a few disconnects:

- Teachers' subject matter skill levels appear to be higher than teachers' abilities to foster learning through effective pedagogical practices; and/or

- Teachers may be able to deliver academic content appropriately, but learning is limited amongst children due to issues ranging from poor parental/caregiver support to limited teaching and learning materials to their wellbeing issues.

Lesson planning: Most teachers and many school administrators interviewed for the study noted that lesson planning was a common practice. For example, 91% of teachers reported that they "often" or "always" prepared lessons plans. Most teachers stated that they practised their lessons before implementing them. Male teachers were more likely than their female colleagues to make these statements, and teachers in Idleb were more likely to do so than their colleagues in Aleppo and Ar-Raqqa. However, enumerators observed female teachers to do a better job, compared to their male colleagues, in how well they allocated time to specific activities in the lessons. This finding suggests a relatively strong operational practice for most teachers and a strong technical skill, at least for most female teachers, in thoughtfulness with lesson planning.

However, it appeared that the value placed on joint lesson planning with colleagues was not very high. Sixty-seven percent of school administrators noted that teachers in their learning spaces were often willing to collaborate when developing lesson plans, but stated that willingness and practical cooperation were not correlated. This finding suggests that many teachers continue to bear the full weight of planning individually. They thus lose out on opportunities to improve their work through collaboration and the consideration of different perspectives. Female teachers appeared more open to joint lesson planning than their male colleagues. The teacher's guide was deemed to be the most useful material when developing lesson plans.

Experiential learning activities: The sense of self-efficacy amongst teachers about the ability to lead experiential learning activities appeared to be higher than the actual incidence of such activities. Eighty-five percent of teachers "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they could motivate their children to participate in innovative activities. However, despite these assertions and beliefs, only 38% of teachers stated that they "often" or "always" saw their teaching colleagues use

only **38%** of teachers stated that they "often" or "always" saw their teaching colleagues use participatory methodologies in their classrooms.
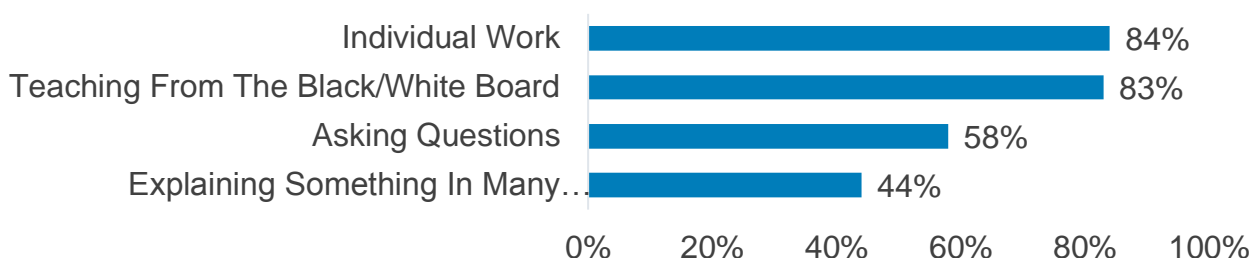
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[15] It is important to note that this finding is based only on observations, and not on subject knowledge assessments.

[16] Reviewed in the sections on literacy and numeracy levels, found here and here.

participatory methodologies in their classrooms, suggesting that such practices are not standard.

Teachers' reliance on "chalk and talk" methods perpetuates poor learning outcomes because, in part, it fails to address the multiple intelligences of children. For example, enumerators observed that while 51% of teachers "often" or "always" created different opportunities for children to express themselves and share thoughts and opinions, they were almost just as likely only to do this "sometimes" or "never" (49%). Board-led teaching is also a problematic method to rely on when dealing with young and often energetic children in crowded classrooms (an average of roughly 38 children to one teacher student in classrooms designed for 30 children). Furthermore, there is limited availability of teaching and learning materials (the highest observations of materials availability and use were at 59% of classrooms in urban areas). These are challenges over which teachers have limited control, and can likely only be addressed sustainably through significant infusions of funding. Teacher openness to participatory methods (85% said they could carry out innovative teaching practices), like their openness to but hesitance about peer lesson planning, could be leveraged to help them reach more children with greater ease. This openness is again a resource on which to build future support for teachers. At present, however, their hesitance (or perhaps their lack of skills) means that children who have different learning needs are not developing skills that they could with more differentiated and experiential learning opportunities.

Children were asked how common the following teaching practices were, signalling that the majority of practices are "chalk and talk" oriented. Feedback from school administrators also suggested that they more commonly observed methods of rote instruction than more engaging and experiential methods of teaching and learning.

Teaching Practice	Percentage
Individual Work	84%
Teaching From The Black/White Board	83%
Asking Questions	58%
Explaining Something In Many…	44%

Formative assessment: The study used a series of indicators to assess the frequency with which teachers continually assessed child learning. It appears that: i) teachers go through the motions of checking for understanding and asking children to explain their work, and ii) teachers state that they modify their practice either in real time or through later reflection. However, observations by enumerators suggest that the quality of their efforts to assess and help elevate child understanding was not high. Children's low levels of learning, as well as their qualitative comments (often saying they have to ask teachers to repeat explanations many times), suggest that teachers are not as likely as they say they are to track children's' learning and modify their teaching practices accordingly. Teachers reported that while they made a note of the issues that their children struggled with, they were not likely to return to these topics if they felt that the children were struggling. These statements suggest a problematic behaviour regarding child follow-up and support on difficult topics, and one could extrapolate that their abilities to differentiate in the classroom are poor.

61%	**51%**	**40%**
Idleb	Aleppo	Ar-Raqqa

It appears teachers were not likely to support metacognition in their students, by asking them to explain how they reached their answers. When they did, female teachers were more likely to do so than males, and teachers in Idleb were more likely to do so than those in Aleppo. Observations of teachers' practice in helping children understand wrong answers were better. Enumerators' observations of these types of practices and children's reports on them were not well correlated, with children reporting more positive interactions with teachers than were observed by enumerators. This disconnect is reminiscent of how children reported that they understood lessons, but their qualitative comments suggested they struggled with learning.

6.6   Teacher practice and behaviour: in support of equitable learning opportunities

The following section explores how equity in learning relates to teacher knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and practices in the classroom. In short, the study found that while teachers have positive self-perceptions about their capacities to support all learners, their practices did not necessarily translate into positive, equity-supporting environments for learning.

Knowledge: Most teachers stated that they felt they had the skills to reach "most" children who needed extra support in their classroom. Female teachers were likely to feel more confident about their skills than their male colleagues, and teachers in Ar-Raqqa and Idleb were more likely to feel this confidence than their colleagues in Aleppo. Interestingly, there was a bell curve finding when comparing teacher statements to their years of experience. Those with four to five years of experience were the most likely to identify higher percentages of children with needs they could not address (24%), and teachers with less than four years and more than six years of experience identified lower percentages. This finding suggests that newer teachers and those with the most experience felt better prepared to handle children with special needs.

Attitudes and beliefs: Teacher attitudes about inclusive and equitable education were positive when measured by a number of indicators, including their beliefs in the concept of education for all and the inherent potential amongst all children to learn.

Self-efficacy: Teacher self-efficacy appeared to be strong when it came to their abilities to reach all children regardless of need, creating differentiated lessons plans, and specifically helping promote literacy and numeracy amongst children with special needs. There were mostly insignificant differences when data were analysed by geography or by teacher gender, except that teachers in Ar-Raqqa, and especially male teachers, appeared to feel more confident in their ability to reach all children than their colleagues.

Behaviours: Despite the positive attitudes, beliefs, and strong senses of self-efficacy concerning equitable teaching practices, it does not appear that teachers equitably in their classrooms. For example, only 56% of teachers said they kept track of students' different learning needs. Many teachers stated that they were unlikely to continue to work with children who appear to be struggling significantly. Such behaviours show a concerning lack of both knowledge and commitment to helping

children persevere. Introducing proper differentiation practices to teachers and ensuring that they can distinguish between discrimination and differentiation is possible.
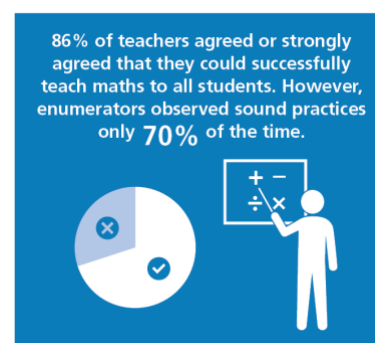
6.7   Teacher practices and behaviours: in support of literacy

Enumerators were asked to look for a few common teaching practices that support literacy; namely teachers' appropriate uses of developmentally suitable mother tongue language phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, opportunities for language manipulation, teachers' use of and support for children's use of tracking, and opportunities to practice reading comprehension.

Again, self-efficacy for teachers was high: 96% "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they could successfully teach reading to all children. However, classroom observations found that their practices in support of reading skill development likely needed improvement to see better literacy-related learning outcomes, with only 71% using sound practices. While teachers appeared to go through the motions of appropriate practice, the quality of that practice is in question, considering the poor literacy levels of children in these areas.

6.8   Teacher practices and behaviours: in support of numeracy

Self-efficacy amongst teachers concerning their abilities to teach maths was also high, but slightly lower than how they rated themselves for literacy: 86% percent of teachers "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they could successfully teach maths to all children. However, enumerators observed sound practices only 70% of the time, suggesting again that teachers have more confidence in their abilities to teach maths than their actual abilities. In all but one practice area, female teachers were observed to use good practices approximately 5% more of the time than male teachers.

86% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they could successfully teach maths to all students. However, enumerators observed sound practices only 70% of the time.

6.9   Teacher practices and behaviours: in support of wellbeing

Teachers expressed a strong sense of self-efficacy in their ability to support the wellbeing of children. Again, however, they were observed using practices that support wellbeing less frequently than might be expected considering their high levels of confidence on the topic. There were also vast differences in the way teachers supported wellbeing across the various strata of the study, from how male and female teachers behaved in the classroom to how practices were observed in geographic areas, types of communities, grades, and subjects. For example, on the topic of fostering a sense of control, female teachers were more likely to establish class rules (74%) than were male teachers (65%). Teachers in Idleb were far more likely to undertake this practice than were their colleagues in Aleppo (84% and 52%, respectively). Regarding fostering a sense of belonging, children in Ar-Raqqa were more likely to participate in the co-creation of rules than children in other governorates (100% in Ar-Raqqa versus 54% in Idleb and 16% in Aleppo). Concerning modelling pro-social behaviours, female teachers were observed to use positive words and praise children significantly more often (82%) than male teachers (66%).

Eighty-eight percent of teachers "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they could exert a positive influence on both the personal and academic development of their students. There were more positive self-perceptions amongst male teachers than female teachers, except in Idleb.

Teachers appeared to do an excellent job of setting clear expectations about child behaviour. Such a practice is not unusual in contexts in which more authoritarian and didactic methods of

communication, decision making, and classroom management are common, as is the case of Syria. Opportunities for children to participate in framing the rules of their environment were unsurprisingly low. Teachers also appeared to do a good job using routines in the classroom. Such a practice is to be expected in a context of traditional rote learning practices.

Good practice around the use of positive words and praise was slightly lower than the practices that relate to classroom and lesson structure. Seventy-two percent of teachers were observed to support a sense of self-control through rule setting and routines, and 68% were found to use praise and positive feedback often.

However, it is essential to consider this finding in relation to children's reports of the frequency of teacher abuse, particularly verbal abuse. While many teachers can model sound practices in support of child wellbeing when under observation, behaviour change is needed to ensure they more frequently choose positive discipline over abusive alternatives. In other words, teachers were likely displaying better behaviour when they were being observed by enumerators than they otherwise would be. Unfortunately, 41% of children reported that "some" or "all" teachers or school personnel hit children, 64% stated that they shouted at or threatened children. This finding is particularly concerning in light of the absence of active supervision, mentoring, and/or accountability systems (only 39% of children said they were aware of a complaints system available to them), which suggests that these practices could continue unabated.

This finding is perhaps one of the more concerning findings of the study: if teachers' choosing to abuse of students *when not under observation* is considered a symptom of underlying concerns, then that underlying concern is at once both poor teacher wellbeing and weak accountability systems to address poor decisions.

6.10 Correlative analysis amongst teaching practices and behaviours, child learning, and child wellbeing

The literature shows that teachers who have strong intrinsic motivation, are reasonably remunerated, are appropriately trained and supported, and are socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively well are likely to be good teachers. It further demonstrates that good teachers are one of, if not the most, important factor influencing child learning and wellbeing. This study sought to review a few of these critical elements of teacher quality through the analysis of data about teaching practices and behaviours in line with known standards for quality teaching.

Teachers in FCAS contexts are subject to multiple sources of pressure that can cause (toxic) stress. Emotionally exhausted teachers can work without dedication, develop hostile relationships with students, and turn to punitive disciplinary practices. A study on teachers in Aceh, Indonesia (Cardozo, M. & Shah, R. 2016) highlights how they were "fruit caught between two stones;" struggling to manage the impacts of the civil war on their own lives while trying to provide effective education for their students. The findings from this study about teaching practices and behaviours show a preponderance of poor practices that not only likely fail to alleviate issues around children's wellbeing and learning challenges, but might contribute to their worsening. The most striking example is that more children (32%) were concerned about teacher abuse than they were about airstrikes (24%). Recognising the correlation between learning and wellbeing, the study finds that teachers are struggling to support both, and might be negatively affecting at least the latter.

In summary, teachers in the study area appeared to be under-skilled, under-supported, and under-resourced. While many teachers have good intentions and positive perspectives of their work, they need practical assistance in developing their abilities to foster more participatory and differentiated

means of supporting literacy, numeracy, and improved wellbeing. Furthermore, while many can model sound practices in support of child wellbeing when under observation, behaviour change is needed to ensure they more frequently choose positive discipline over abusive alternatives.

6.11 EiCC best practices in Syria

The study identified the following as positive aspects of the education systems:

- A mostly common curriculum;
- The use of teacher performance assessments;
- High teacher self-efficacy rates;
- Modelling by teachers, when under observation, of good practices that support child social and emotional wellbeing.

However, when assessing practice through seven lenses of EiCC best practice identified from the literature review, *no* examples of sound practice in alignment with these practices were identified. Respondents were then asked to identify the feasibility of activities through these seven lenses. The summary of their responses follows.

6.12 UNRWA education practices

The quality of UNRWA's EiCC programming is perceived to be quite high. While noting that average cost for primary level education in Syria under UNRWA programmes is at least twice that of the (I)NGOs surveyed, the feasibility of the following elements of some of UNRWA's standard EiCC practices was assessed. In summary:

- There appears to be some feasibility around improving the use of formative assessment in classrooms, but it will require significant capacity building at the school level;

- (I)NGO representatives believe that their delivery of digital content is feasible in the context; and

- The establishment of Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) appears to be feasible.

6.13 ICT as teaching and learning tools

Overall, respondents were open, thoughtful, realistic, and equitable in their opinions on the use of ICT as teaching and learning tools. For example, there generally appeared to be a positive and enabling environment concerning respondent perspectives on the topic of ICT and gender. Namely, most saw equitable access by boys, girls, males and female as important.

While not currently happening with much frequency, respondents "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that using SMS to help better link parents/caregivers to children's learning and wellbeing status and other learning space-related activities was a good idea.

Most respondents also agreed that the use of tablets as a supplementary learning tool for helping marginalised children, and particularly those with special needs, was appropriate. Furthermore, there appeared to also be an enabling environment for the use of tablets as remedial and/or supplementary tools when used by teachers, and not when put in the hands of children.

6.14 Teacher professional development

Respondents were open to changing how teacher professional development is handled in Syria. These changes include:

- Better involving teachers and supervisors in the design of mixed methods (head) teacher training programmes and curriculum;

- Aligning these programmes with certification schemes for (head) teachers;

- Better supporting (head) teacher trainers;

- Strengthening existing mentoring and coaching programmes, in part by establishing heterogeneous peer learning circles; and

- Exploring the enhanced use of distance methods for connecting (head) teachers both to learning content as well as to each other and their mentors using ICT.

6.15 Integrating psychosocial support and social-emotional learning in classrooms

From amongst numerous pieces of literature resources, the following good intervention practices were noted and used to assess the existence of or feasibility of implementation in Syria:

- The use of artistic forms of expressions to support wellbeing;

- The value of play in support of wellbeing;

- The use of mass/social media as a medium for delivering wellbeing related content;

- The establishment of socioemotional skill development programmes;

- The use of specialised home visits to support wellbeing; and

- The involvement of parents/caregivers and community members in support of wellbeing.

Overall, respondents were positive about integrating wellbeing-related activities with traditional cognitive skill development methods. (I)NGO informants tended to be more likely to state that such methods were already being used, if only minimally, than were their school administrator colleagues. The latter were more likely to mention concerns about actualising new wellbeing-related activities, even if they did support them in concept.

6.16 Accelerated and other alternative learning programmes

Respondents were asked to share their opinions about the appropriateness of ALP and how acceptable they are or could be. The overall finding was that those responsible or potentially responsible for ALP were supportive of it and found it to be feasible in the context. Again, (I)NGO representatives were more likely to state that such services existed, suggesting that where they do they are not well known amongst education authorities and school administrators. In other words, it appears that the use of ALP, such as the SLP, is not widespread in Syria, despite the context being one in which they could be most effective.

6.17 Community-based education

Some pieces of evidence about the value of community-based education were explored with respondents, such as their role in better serving marginalised communities and better engaging parents/caregivers as learning partners. The study found that when children lived near their schools,

they felt safer, and when they had longer distances to travel, they expressed concerns for their safety. Teacher respondents expressed the same concern. Adult respondents suggested that they were mostly open to the idea of better localisation of learning spaces, though parents/caregivers, and perhaps some (I)NGO representatives, appeared to need further convincing of the strong evidence that supports the efficacy of community-based education.[17] Overall, while there are some cases in Syria in which schools are better localised in communities, this does not appear to happen by design.

7 Conclusions

7.1 Correlative analysis: teaching, learning, and wellbeing

Intrinsically motivated, reasonably remunerated, appropriately trained and supported people who are socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively well are likely to be good teachers. The literature further tells us that good teachers are one of, if not the most, important factor influencing child learning and wellbeing. This study sought to review a few of these critical elements of teacher quality through the analysis of data about teaching practices and behaviours in line with known standards for quality teaching. The study findings identify *a preponderance of poor practices that not only likely fail to alleviate issues around children's wellbeing and learning challenges but might contribute to their worsening.* This finding is of particular concern in relation to:

- The prevalence of statements from children about teacher abuse;
- The prevalence of peer abuse amongst children; and
- The criticality of being literate and numerate at the Grade 3 level before moving to upper primary school.

The following sections highlight a few of the particular areas of concerns identified through this study concerning how poor teaching practices and behaviours contribute to or fail to, alleviate issues with learning and wellbeing. Suggestions for how to address these issues are explored in the recommendations section.

The frequency with which teachers identified high rates of self-efficacy about their abilities to promote equity, reading, maths, and wellbeing, in contrast to their weaker performance during observation is problematic. *This finding is particularly concerning in light of the absence of strong supervision, mentoring, and/or accountability systems, which suggests that these practices can continue unabated.*

Despite children's reports of teacher abuse, *the ability of teachers under observation to model sound practices such as patiently and positively redirecting negative child behaviours and using positive discipline, is a capacity on which to build*. This finding suggests that teachers know, when it comes to supporting children's wellbeing, what practices are and are not appropriate.

Most teachers showed appropriate practices related to supporting literacy. That said, at least 25% of them need additional support. The fact that literacy-related activities are taking place in

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[17] As detailed particularly well by Burde (2010, 2013, and 2015)

language classes and not in specific reading classes is another topic outside the purview of this study, but one that requires consideration.

More teachers, at least 30% of those observed, need to be better supported in developing skills and practices that support numeracy. Numeracy has taken a back seat to literacy in many classrooms, including those supported by the EiCC community, but the tide is changing and more resources are likely to be better available in the near-term.

On the topics of literacy and numeracy, *when contrasting relatively sound practice with poor reading and maths outcomes, it is critical to consider other factors that can negatively affect levels of literacy and numeracy. These include the relatively weak state of children's wellbeing, the lack of teaching and learning materials in support of reading and maths, and relatively limited engagement from parents/caregivers in support of literacy and numeracy in the home.*

The increased percentage of teacher absences identified in the study in contrast to pre-conflict absences suggests that *teachers are not available as often as they are needed to support learning and wellbeing.* This finding means that one of the critical elements of the opportunity to learn is missing for many Syrian children.

Teachers appear to be familiar with lesson planning and use it to a fair extent. However, the quality of that lesson planning and the value of working with peers to help improve them as well as reduce the burden on individual teachers could be improved.

Relatedly, *the limited availability of peer support networks for teachers, particularly in a context where limited resources and toxic stress are negatively impacting teacher morale and learning, is concerning.* This concern is especially relevant considering that *such models have been shown to be particularly appropriate in FCAS in supporting improved teacher quality, motivation, and thus children's learning.*

As noted earlier, this study did not undertake an in-depth review of teacher wellbeing, but *anecdotal evidence suggests that one element of poor teacher practice is poor teacher wellbeing, and thus teachers cannot be expected to be functioning to standard even if they were better supported.* While *many teachers have good intentions and positive perspectives* about their work, *they need practical assistance in developing their abilities to foster more participatory and differentiated means of supporting literacy, numeracy, and improved wellbeing*. Furthermore, while many can model sound practices in support of child wellbeing when under observation, *behaviour change is needed to ensure they more frequently choose positive discipline over abusive alternatives.*

Teachers' *reliance on "chalk and talk" methods perpetuates poor learning outcomes because, in part, it fails to address the multiple intelligences of children*. It is also a problematic method to rely on when dealing with young and often energetic children in crowded classrooms. The limited availability of teaching and learning materials and crowded classrooms are challenges over which teachers have limited control, and can likely only be addressed sustainably through significant infusions of funding.

The *limited ability of teachers to accurately differentiate in their classrooms, as well as their apparent lack of willingness to continue to work with children who appear to be struggling significantly, shows a concerning lack of both knowledge and commitment to helping*

children persevere. Introducing proper differentiation practices to teachers and ensuring that they can distinguish between discrimination and differentiation is possible.

Teacher openness to participatory methods, like their openness to but hesitance about peer lesson planning, could be leveraged to help them reach more children with greater ease. This openness is again a resource on which to build future support for teachers. At present, however, their hesitance (or perhaps their lack of skills) means that children who have different learning needs are not developing skills they could with more differentiated and experiential learning opportunities.

On a related topic, the prevalence of the use of summative assessment, and the misunderstanding of how to appropriately undertake formative assessment means that *most teachers are not adequately tracking the learning of their students, and thus are not able to identify issues in real time to address issues before they become problems.*

In summary, *teachers in the study area appear to be under-skilled, under-supported, and under-resourced to provide appropriate and effective opportunities for conflict-affected children to learn and improve their wellbeing.* The *preponderance of teaching behaviours and practices cannot be characterised as conflict-sensitive.*

7.2 Correlative analysis: the nature of the learning environment and its surroundings and their impact on teaching, child learning, and child wellbeing

The study was also designed in recognition of how critical the nature of the learning environment is in affecting teaching, child learning, and child wellbeing. These factors include the profile of school policies and practices, as well as the external environment (such as safety concerns and parental/caregiver involvement). The study's findings suggest that *the environmental factors that can support conflict-sensitive teaching, child learning, and child wellbeing are, for the most part, not in place in Syria.*

One of the most critical findings from this study was how little time was allocated to learning in the schools assessed: the average primary school child in non-GoS-held areas of Syria is only getting *66% of the absolute minimum number of hours required for them to have the opportunity to learn.*

The rates of perceived inaccessibility of learning spaces confirm that *equitable access to education is limited in Syria*. Furthermore, the *limited screening of children for special needs also suggests that children who can access learning spaces are not getting the support they need within them. Limited to no peer networks and a lack of specialists trained in psychosocial support mean that in these spaces, children are left without support.* The study team recognises that the limited availability of specialist resources available to support children in schools, as well as the limited number of agencies available to accept referrals, is a significant part of this challenge.

While the evidence suggests that learning spaces are getting safer, *children and parents/caregivers still expressed notable levels of concern about their safety in such spaces, particularly concerning airstrikes and teacher abuse.* Even if strong teacher practices and behaviours in support of wellbeing were in place, or if stronger accountability measures existed to address teacher abuse issues, *the environment in which children are going to school is not conducive to learning or wellbeing.* This finding is particularly concerning in light of the toxic stress that many education sector stakeholders have been under since the start of the conflict, as evidenced by study wellbeing levels and anecdotal evidence about teacher wellbeing.

The fact that most schools are not posting timetables and class rules, or involving children in the co-creation of such rules, also contributes to **an environment in which children might not feel senses of control and belonging in the school space, which are foundational elements of child wellbeing.**

The evidence tells us that play and recreation improve psychosocial wellbeing in conflict-affected contexts. The study's finding of the **limited availability of play spaces or recreational materials adds to the poor support for child wellbeing in the context.**

Relatedly, the **limited use of school space to frequently display children works**, especially considering the positive impact on **children** that such displays can have, further shows that even **simple practices in support of child motivation and wellbeing are not being undertaken.**

The **limited use of teacher screening and the poor documentation of teacher codes of conduct-or accountability to them-is also concerning with respect to protecting and promoting children's wellbeing.** Furthermore**, the limited formalisation of complaints systems, as well as lack of awareness of such systems and their inaccessibility to children with special needs, is concerning.** These findings suggest that **there is little standard setting and accountability for appropriate practices in learning spaces, and thus numerous opportunities for improper teacher practice**.

Traditional uses of **short-term or "one-off" teacher training are not providing teachers with learning opportunities that are appropriate for adult learners**. Furthermore**, limited rates of supervision and little to no mentoring appear to contribute to inadequate levels of professional development support for teachers,** and especially fails those new to the profession and suffering from the effects of the conflict themselves.

The difference in opinions amongst teachers and parent/caregivers about the purpose and value of parental/caregiver involvement in learning and wellbeing practices is not surprising. **Poor relationships between the school and home on the learning and wellbeing continuum leave gaps in support for child learning and child wellbeing that could be filled with improved attitudes and cooperation.**

The **limited availability of specialist support services for children who have particularly challenging needs means that there are likely no alternatives for children who require additional support**. This finding means that equitable education is in limited supply in Syria.

The fact that most **children in Syria are using variations of the same core curriculum,[18] which itself is relatively sound (considering the circumstances under which it was developed and revised), is a positive aspect of an otherwise fractured and under-resourced education sector.** Regardless of how ZoC are allocated in the future, most teachers and most children would be "singing from the same song sheet" if or when reintegration of education services under one service provider occurs and/or if and when children and teachers migrate amongst different education systems in Syria. For children, this reality enables easier reintegration into school systems, and for teachers, it allows them to implement lesson planning for new cohorts without having to face widely different curricular standards and pacing.

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[18] According to KIIs with education authority representatives.

The apparent prevalence of the use of teacher performance assessments is another strong element of the current education systems, enabling a practice that, when done appropriately, *can provide invaluable and timely opportunities to hold teachers accountable to standards and to develop professional development strategies for them.* In line with the research around motivation, such practices can contribute to senses of autonomy, mastery, and purpose, which are critical to people working in cognitive (rather than manual) labour markets (Ariely, Gneezy, Loewenstein, & Mazar, 2005; Pink, 2011).

In summary*, the following factors contribute to an environment that is not conducive to child learning or to improving child wellbeing: a) the nature of the learning environment, influenced by the policies and practices that help to frame it; b) the chronic instability in which education sector stakeholders find themselves; and c) a poor partnership between teachers and administrators in the school and parents/caregivers in the home and community wellbeing*.

7.3 Practice in light of GoS' MoE standards

It is likely that the GoS will continue to recover increasing numbers of schools as it expands its ZoC. While this study was limited by the team's inability to collect primary data within the GoS' ZoC, the data that it was able to secure is essential to consider.

This study finds that *the environments for teaching and learning in GoS-held and non-GoS-held spaces might not be as disparate as expected*. References from parties familiar with schooling in GoS spaces noted issues with overcrowding and wellbeing, as did those in non-GoS-held areas.

The curriculum being used across these spaces is mostly the same, though notably the most political aspects of the curricula, which have to do with history and concepts of civic duty and nationalism, are entirely different. However, the fundamental subjects are mostly the same. Given the preponderance of (I)NGO support to the education sector in non-GoS-held areas, one might have expected teachers in these areas to have been exposed to more teacher training that could elevate their skills in child-centred and experiential pedagogical practices. While it is possible they have been trained in such topics, the findings suggest that *teachers in non-GoS-held areas are not performing well in the classroom to advance practices such as positive discipline, formative assessment, and differentiation*. As such, while they may have a slight advantage in skill development on these topics compared to their GoS colleagues due to their exposure to training, there does not appear to be much of one.

Further consideration must be made for the possibility that rote styles of education,[19] which according to anecdotal evidence is more common in GoS classrooms and Syria historically, might remain the *modus operandi* in GoS schools going forward. Without going into much detail, it is the very nature of the "banking" style of education that educational philosophers such as Dewey, Piaget, Freire, and Montessori railed against as tools for oppression, arguing that such styles of education foster memorisation rather than critical thinking skills.

7.4 Implications for other FCAS Contexts

The *methodologies used to carry out the study, and in particular the theoretical, ethical, and innovative operational framing of them could be reviewed for contextualisation in other FCAS*

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[19] Also called the "banking" style of education in which teachers attempt to "deposit" information into the minds of children.

contexts. This study proved that even in areas affected both by chronic conflict as well as ongoing instability, *it is possible to gather ethically sound, nearly representative data at the most granular level concerning difficult to measure topics, such as attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours in the classroom.*

Unfortunately, there do not appear to be innovative practices or consistent modelling of known best practices in the EiCC field to which the study can point. However, the largely universally valued GoS curriculum has been a potential benefit to the sector. *Its use, with minor variations, across ZoC is likely to be a benefit to sector stakeholders,* as was a similar case in Côte d'Ivoire, discussed by Chelpi-Den Hamer in 2007. In that case, actors not in support of the official government "thinned" the government curriculum to ensure its appropriateness to their sociopolitical requirements, but kept the academic content. This approach enabled *a pathway for children in non-government-controlled schools to follow toward reintegration and certification in formal learning spaces.*

8 Recommendations

DFID's 2018 education strategy states clearly: "Our top priority will be raising the bar on teaching quality" (DFID, 2018). DFID's decision to focus its education work on improving support to teachers is based on a strong evidence base, discussed to some extent in this report, on the exponential returns the education sector reaps when teachers are skilled, motivated, supported, and well.

Many assessments of education sector needs in Syria rightfully identify the more policy level changes that affect the system from the top down. These needs are still significant in Syria and should be considered. They include essential investment in areas such as education sector governance, which often translates to capacity building on policy development, education finance and budgeting, and infrastructure efforts. This study identified a few issues that can be addressed sustainably only through significant macro-level investments, such as improving infrastructure so that more children can be in school and increasing the teacher cohort so that the children to teacher ratio is improved. The ACU's 2018 report thoughtfully called for improved investments in fuel, books, equipment, stationery, maintenance, and teacher salaries. These are both needed and valuable.

This study, however, was designed to focus on the most granular aspects of the education system that support teacher practice, child learning, and child wellbeing. It also builds on the evidence that says improving teacher quality is one of, if not the most important, investments that can be made in education.

The study team identified particular areas for proposed investment, detailed below, focussed at the "micro"-level. The team purposefully chose to not differentiate recommendations by duty bearers, such as researchers, donors, policymakers, and implementors. Instead, it suggests that the proposed investments can only be genuinely actualised when all four stakeholder types work together with end users and leverage their unique positions, perspectives, and resources to improve EiCC.

The recommendations are based on substantial evidence from the literature about what works in improving learning; namely, improving teacher quality. Psachropolous, a well-respected educational economist, made strong arguments for investing in teacher quality in his 2006 piece *The value of investment in education*: *Theory, evidence, and policy.* Burde (2015) identified the importance of investing in teacher training in particular in her piece *What works to promote children's educational access, quality of learning, and wellbeing in conflict-affected contexts.* Burns and Lawrie (2015)

edited a piece that identified a series of thoughtful recommendations about how to best support teacher professional development in areas affected by crisis in *Where It's Needed Most: Quality Professional Development for All Teachers*. Recommendations included creating opportunities for peer-to-peer collaboration, ongoing support to teachers, and the creation of standards for teacher professional development. Frisoli (2013) explored the effectiveness of teacher learning circles (forms of peer-to-peer learning) in conflict-affected Democratic Republic of the Congo in supporting improved teacher motivation and skill development. These examples of research framed the study and heavily influence the recommendations.

The following suggestions relate to shifts that can be made in resource allocation with existing envelopes of funding, earmarking more resources for these investment areas and elevating accountability for practices in support thereof. This suggestion is made based on the existence of sound capacity building content that is appropriate for FCAS and likely already in Arabic. These recommendations are specific to Syria but are relevant to many FCAS contexts.

In non-GoS-held areas of Syria, these investments appear to be of greatest need in Aleppo. Teachers in this governorate consistently underperformed in contrast to their colleagues in Idleb and Ar-Raqqa where socio-cultural norms appear to facilitate more equitable teaching and learning.

8.1 Invest in teacher professional development

8.1.1 *Insist on continuous methods of in-service teacher professional development:*

There is a strong evidence base for the efficacy of this method and its appropriateness for adult learners. It translates into better-sustained learning, is often more accessible for teachers, and is usually more cost-effective. Ensure that peer learning networks, including teacher learning circles, are a part of these systems.

8.1.2 *Help male teachers be better supported:*

The findings suggest that male teachers appear to have higher self-perceptions of their teaching skills than they have abilities to delivery sound teaching. Under observation, they consistently underperformed in comparison to their female colleagues, with a few minor exceptions.

8.1.3 *Focus on the following knowledge building topics for teacher professional development:*

- Differentiation: Teachers proved that they are not able to identify, use different teaching methods that support multiple intelligences, or help include children with special needs. They also suggested that they do not have a willingness to continue supporting children who are struggling.

- Relatedly, inclusive education and practices that support equity in the classroom, with a particular focus on particularly marginalised children like those who are displaced.

- Support for the development of numeracy skills.

- Skill building for teaching reading.

- Positive discipline: Reflecting on the commitments in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the principles of Do No Harm in the humanitarian space, it incumbent donors and implementors to improve both compliance- as well as incentive-based activities to modify teacher practices. Lessons from the Ariely et al. (2015) study around the role of autonomy, mastery, and purpose as strong motivators for people engaged in cognitive forms of labour

should be considered for application. Lessons from the IRC's work on teacher wellbeing should also be reviewed for replication. Moreover, finally, for more rapid due diligence-related efforts, training on positive discipline, strengthening of accountability mechanisms such as teacher screening, performance assessments inclusive of peer reviews, and complaints systems should occur.

- Better prepare teachers for the challenges they face both at the start of the year and with the introduction of newly displaced children into the classroom.

- The effective use of formative assessment.

8.1.4 *Focus on the following attitudinal and behaviour change-related topics for teacher professional development:*

- The positive effects of supportive, nurturing, and motivational communication styles and the adverse effects of abuse on children as they develop.

- The value of inclusive education, alongside principles of the rights of all children to education.

- The positive impacts of involving parents/caregivers as partners in the supporting the learning and wellbeing of children.

- Help teachers leverage their seemingly strong senses of self-efficacy about their teaching practices, while also highlighting the areas for skill building and practice growth that require their focus.

8.2 Invest in helping school administrators and parents create better learning and wellbeing environments for children

8.2.1 *With both cohorts, focus on supporting the better integration of internally displaced populations:*

This effort will require careful nuance, considering that modern patterns of displacement find most displaced persons integrated geographically with local communities. Time and again, respondents in this study noted how marginalised these populations were, and how much higher their support needs were. Some respondents suggested the value of integration programmes that could facilitate behaviour change amongst both displaced and local populations to help them better live and learn together.

8.2.2 *Focus on the following knowledge building topics with school administrators:*

- How to establish PTAs and School Management Committees to help reduce the burden on their workloads and facilitate improved community and parental/caregiver investment in learning.

- Establish Teacher Learning Circles to bring together teachers with varying skill profiles and levels to help each other with the practical and emotional workloads they bear.

- Establishing teacher wellbeing systems that:

  o Include the use of periodic performance assessments.

  o Introduce peer mentoring networks.

8.2.3 *Support parents/caregivers to become more active partners in their children's learning and wellbeing:*

- On formative assessment, prepare parents/caregivers to transition from infrequent formal updates on child progress to frequent informal updates, which might highlight concerns that need to be addressed in partnership between teacher and parent/caregiver.

- Help parent/caregivers understand the positive correlations between learning and wellbeing, and vice versa.

- Introduce simple, practical tasks that parents/caregivers can do, both in the home and through better engagement in the learning space, that even lower literacy parents/caregivers and those with limited time can do.

8.3 Shift funding and programming priorities, by investing in:

8.3.1 *Programme design methodologies that better involve teachers, school administrators, and education authorities:*

The evidence from this study suggests that (I)NGO representatives and their education sector colleagues are not necessarily working collaboratively.

8.3.2 *Further studies that support teacher development:*

- Review teacher wellbeing levels and needs, and their correlation to learning and wellbeing outcomes amongst children.

- Assess teacher knowledge rather than only use observations of and opinions about teacher knowledge.

- Better rapidly engage and support (potential) educators/teachers given the lack of a formal teacher education/professional development process in the existing systems.

- The effectiveness of teacher professional development (comparing what people are trained on and how that is transferred to classroom practice).

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