

Towards an inclusive education: A comparative longitudinal study

A study of the education of refugee and national children in Lebanon, Turkey and Australia

LEBANON REPORT 2020

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report presents the findings from the first wave of data collection for an ongoing comparative and longitudinal study entitled “My Future Five Years From Now”, funded by Lyle Spencer foundation.

This five-year study led by the Centre for Lebanese Studies at the Lebanese American University in collaboration with partners abroad, examines the relationship between contexts of refugee asylum, education policies and education outcomes across three national contexts: Lebanon, Australia, and Turkey.

This report presents the findings from the first round of data collection in Lebanon in 2018-2019 academic year.

All reported findings are statistically significant (at the 5% level), unless stated otherwise.

Team members

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METHODS AND ANALYSIS

“My Future Five Years From Now” is a mixed methods study. The study uses policy analysis, interviews, survey and observational data to gain varied insights into the educational provisions made for national and refugee students. Mixed methods data offers rich and diverse perspectives on complex educational phenomena and supports the triangulation of data.

Data was collected during the 2018/19 academic year in **16 public schools** that cater for **Lebanese nationals and Syrian refugees**. These schools were located in all **6 governorates** in Lebanon.

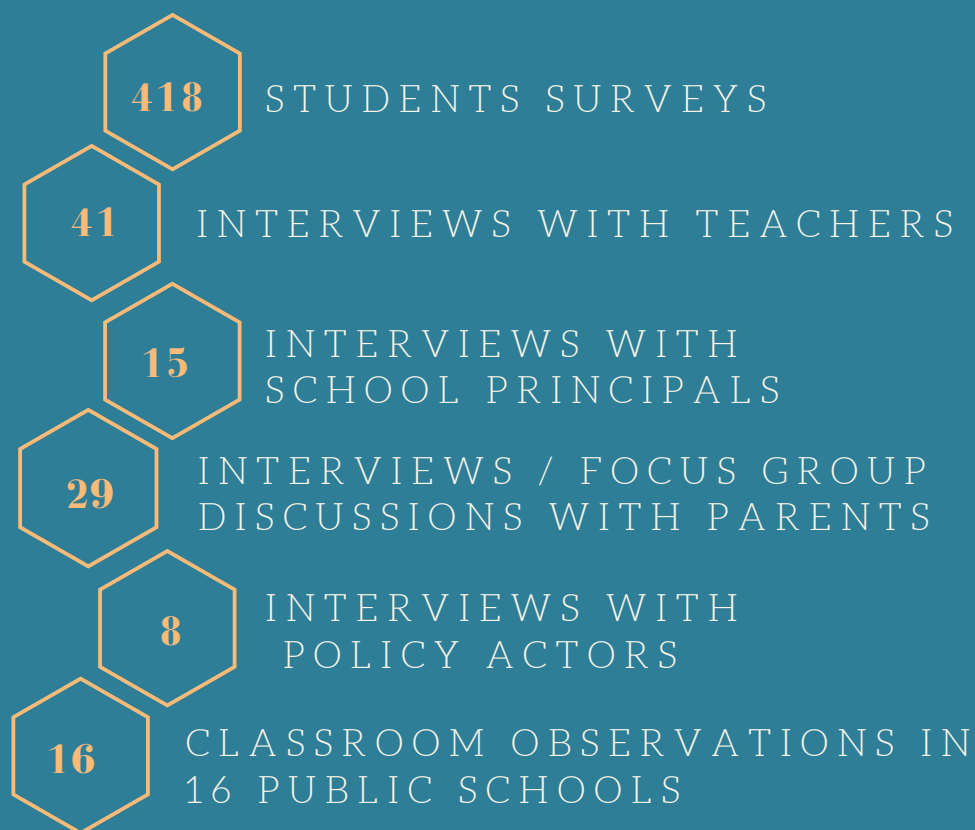
An overview of the data sources that inform this report can be found in the following pages.



Approved by

The Institutional Review Board
of the Lebanese American
University

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS



Survey data was analyzed using Stata statistical analysis software to examine the differences reported by Syrian and Lebanese students. We further analyzed differences based on whether students attended a morning or afternoon shift, because of the different policies implemented in each context (see below for a description of the double shift system in Lebanon).

Owing to limitations imposed by the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) and the lack of disaggregated, reliable and publicly available data regarding the target populations we used convenience sampling.

The sample was selected from a list of public schools provided by the MEHE based on criteria specified by the research team: schools representing the 6 governorates in Lebanon, offering morning and afternoon shifts and, with a large number of Lebanese and Syrian students attending grade 7. Because this is a convenience sample, the results reported here cannot be generalized to all public schools in Lebanon. Nevertheless, the findings are indicative of our phenomenon of interest, in conjunction with the rich qualitative data, and offer valuable insights into the policy environment and education experiences of Lebanese and Syrian students in Lebanese public schools.

Interviews were analyzed using NVivo qualitative coding software using a combination of emic codes derived from the content of the interviews and etic codes that reflected important themes identified through relevant literature reviews.

Prior to presenting the quantitative and qualitative data findings from the first wave of data collection, the results of the policy analysis are discussed.

COUNTRY CONTEXT

Since 2011, over a million Syrians have sought asylum in Lebanon.[1] The legal environment for refugee protection in Lebanon is weak. The country has neither signed nor ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and Optional Protocol and Syrians are required to apply for six-month renewable residency permits to stay in the country. The Government of Lebanon (GoL) also advocates the repatriation of Syrian refugees as soon as possible and political discourses towards refugees are often hostile.



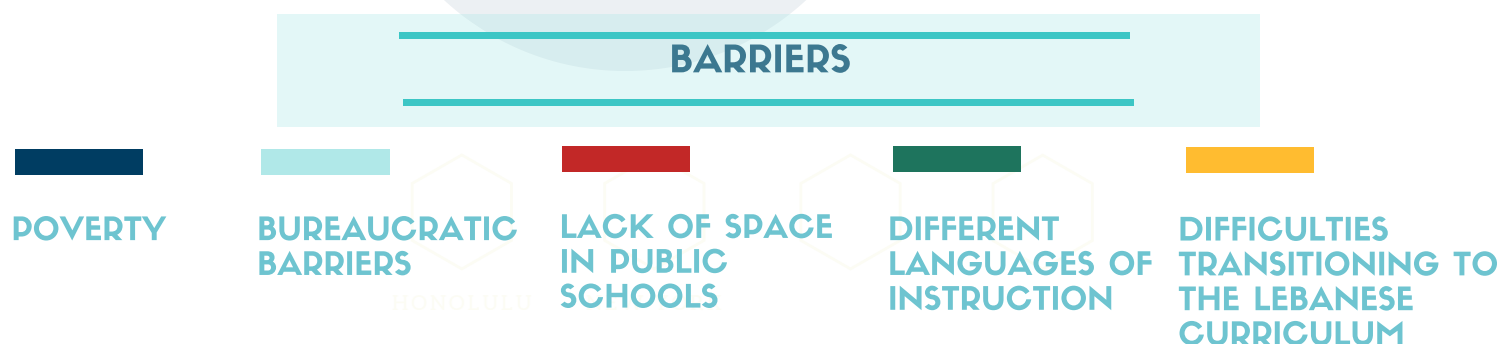
[1] Lebanon also already hosted a Syrian migrant population many of whom were sponsored to work in the country.

EDUCATION PROVISIONS FOR REFUGEES

At the beginning of the Syrian crisis, the UN in collaboration with NGOs developed the Regional Response Plan (RRP) to organize the education of Syrian refugees in each of Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Turkey and, Egypt was later on included in 2015. Syrians benefited from informal education programmes offered by non-governmental organizations, went to different kinds of schools, including private Lebanese schools, private schools that taught the Syrian curriculum, and public schools along with Lebanese students in the morning shift.

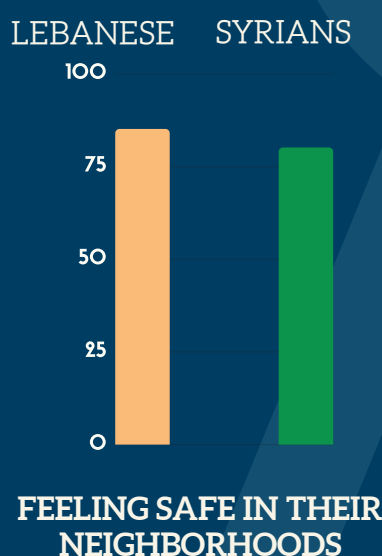
In 2015, all of the work of NGOs was discontinued only to be taken over by the government. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) centralized the governance of all education-related decisions for refugees. One of the most prominent decisions was the separation of Syrians from their Lebanese peers in public schools into afternoon shifts, owing according to MEHE to the high number of students and the language barrier faced by Syrian students who often struggle with lessons that are taught in English and French in Lebanon (notably mathematics and sciences). Second shifts are staffed by temporary contract teachers who teach the Lebanese curriculum.

In spite of the second shift scheme, the study identified numerous barriers that prevent Syrian children from accessing quality education opportunities in Lebanon. These barriers include **poverty which increases the opportunity cost of attending school and forces children into the informal work market, lack of space in accessible public schools, difficulties transitioning to the Lebanese curriculum and the different languages of instruction used in Lebanon and bureaucratic barriers** which greatly complicate enrollment and registration processes.



STUDENTS' LIVING CONDITIONS

In the sections that follow, the findings are presented from the first wave of data collection which speak to the ways in which these barriers shape student's learning contexts.



Syrian students lived in more crowded conditions than Lebanese students. They reported a higher percentage of people living in one house and a fewer number of rooms per house as compared to Lebanese students. On average, Syrian students had moved house **three times** since they arrived in Lebanon. The top three reasons for moving were **lack of affordability (37%)**, **houses being too small (46%)**, and **poor services (25%)**.

This transience may help explain that only **67% of Syrian students reported feeling attached to their neighborhoods** compared to **84% of Lebanese**. However, on a more positive note, **80% of Syrians and 85% of Lebanese reported feeling safe in their neighborhoods**.

Underscoring economic vulnerability of children who attend public schools, school staff expressed in interviews concerns regarding the ability of both Lebanese and Syrian families to meet the non-fee costs of education.

Focus groups with parents also revealed that **Syrian families endure significant economic hardship to keep their children in school until grade 7**. Hence our selection of grade 7 students might already exclude the most vulnerable Syrian families from our sample.

REASONS FOR MOVING HOUSES AMONG SYRIANS

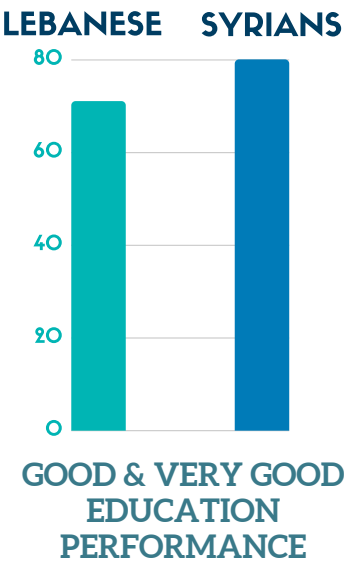


SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Both school staff and the parents found MEHE's policies ambiguous and confusing.

Students' experiences at school can have a profound impact on their learning outcomes. **54% of Syrian students attending afternoon shifts** in our sample, reported **good and very good education performance** while simultaneously reporting that they never or rarely experienced hostility on school premises. We also found a **statistically significant relationship between Syrian students' feeling safe in neighborhoods and performing well in school (60% of Syrians reported these combined outcomes compared to 55% of nationals).**

Another prominent theme to come out of the interviews was the presence of significant bureaucratic barriers to accessing quality education opportunities. **Parents, teachers and school principals reported feeling overburdened and confused by policy processes.** School principals also noted that the high frequency of different communications from the Ministry created confusion regarding which policies to implement and how to implement them. Lastly, parents also reported feeling confused about how to pursue processes like student enrollment or transfers.

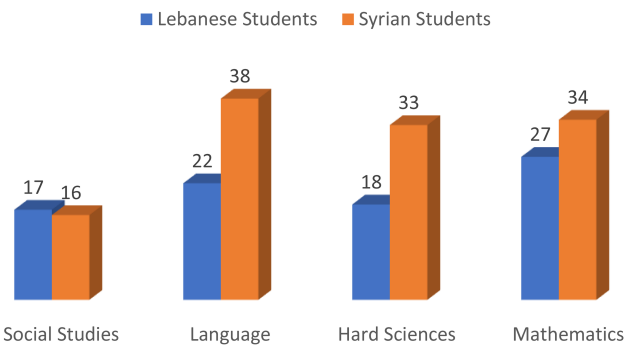


LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION POLICIES

The Figure shows how **Syrian students reported more difficulties than their Lebanese peers in different subject matters with the notable exception of social studies subjects that were taught in Arabic.** The differences reported were however, only statistically significant in the case of **language classes and hard sciences.** Although mathematics is taught in English or French, the barriers posed by language of instruction may be minimized perhaps because comprehension relies more on numeracy rather than literacy skills.

These findings suggest that **language of instruction** rather than subject comprehension per se **poses the most significant barrier to students' learning experiences.**

Students reporting difficulties by subject matter



Language of instruction remains a key challenge facing refugees and affecting their education attainment.

TEACHERS' PRACTICES

Syrian students (23%) reported greater challenges than their Lebanese peers (16%) to focus in class. For both Syrian and Lebanese students there is a relationship between students' difficulties focusing in class and education performance (i.e. students' difficulties to focus in class help explain poor education performance). Another possible explanation is the different teaching methods that Syrians and Lebanese were exposed to.

59% of Syrian students reported that teachers promoted group activities compared to 71% of Lebanese students.

Lastly, our qualitative data suggests that difficulties related to language of instruction and the more stressful living and learning conditions may contribute to poor education performance among Syrian refugees.

**23 %
SYRIANS**

23% of Syrian students have difficulties focusing in class.

**16 %
LEBANESE**

16% of Lebanese students can't focus in class.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

**LEBANESE
71%**

students reported group activities

**SYRIAN
59%**

students reported group activities

**MORNING
SHIFT
68%**

**AFTERNOON
SHIFT
59%**

FAMILY SUPPORTS

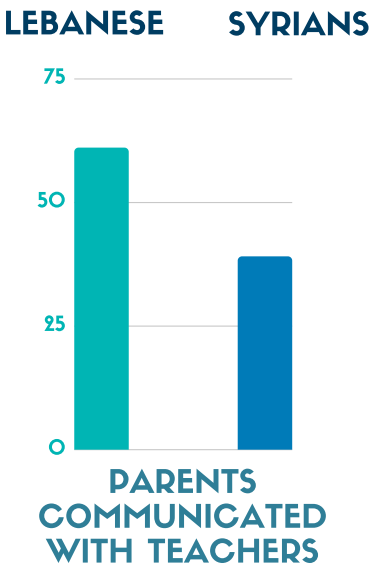
Lebanese children received more support from their parents with their school work, compared to their Syrian peers.

Parents and siblings also play an important role in supporting students’ education performance, through direct academic guidance and maintaining high expectations for children. This can be promoted through regular constructive contact between parents and school staff.

Familial support for students’ homework was positively associated with good or very good education performance for Lebanese students but not for Syrian students. In other words, **Lebanese families helped children more with their school work.**

Moreover, significantly **fewer Syrian students reported that their parents communicated frequently with their teachers compared to Lebanese students:** differences were also visible when we analyzed the data by shift (i.e. the parents of students in the morning shift had more contact with schools than the parents of students who attended the afternoon shift).

In interviews, Syrian parents also reported that they were prevented from meeting with school staff.



Only Lebanese parents are allowed to participate in parents teacher associations. (school principals)

Syrian families have fewer opportunities to communicate with school staff.

- **39% of Syrian students** reported that their parents communicated frequently with their teachers.
- Over **61% of Lebanese students** reported that their parents communicated with their teachers. Similar differences existed by shift.
- **38% of afternoon shift students** reported that their parents met with teachers regularly.
- **56% of morning shift students** reported that their parents met with teachers regularly.

Our financial resources are not enough to cover our 130 Lebanese students. If it weren’t for our Syrian students, we wouldn’t have been able to do anything at this school. Especially since everything has to be funded by the school now, the ministry is no longer contributing. We have to pay the cleaners, some of our teachers from the parents’ council treasury. (School principal)

PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL

Somewhat surprisingly, **95% of afternoon shift students reported liking school, compared to 81% of morning shift students.** This finding requires more analysis since the conditions during the afternoon are worse than those reported for the morning shift. It could be partly due to the overall conditions and experiences that Syrian children are experiencing in the school, where school becomes one of the few positive things they look up for in their precarious future.

Both Lebanese and Syrian parents expressed overwhelmingly negative perceptions about the public school system.

Teachers and school principals felt that the Lebanese curriculum is out of date, inflexible and relies too heavily on memorization rather than higher order analytical skills. School staff in our sample also felt that the public education system was underfunded and underprioritized. Staff also reported that the **displacement crisis played a contradictory role for school financing.** On the one hand, the increased number of students created strain on existing resources, on the other hand the enrollment of Syrians had provided a much-needed injection of finances to the public system.

STUDENTS WHO LIKE SCHOOL

**81%
OF
MORNING
SHIFT
STUDENTS**

81% of morning shifts students like school.

**95%
OF
AFTERNOON
SHIFTS
STUDENTS**

95% of afternoon shifts students like school.

SOCIAL COHESION

In interviews, teachers and school principals also often referred to the vulnerabilities facing Lebanese students and expressed concern that international aid was primarily directed towards Syrian students. **There was a perception among school staff that Syrians were prioritized over and above Lebanese students and this was expressed in terms of resentment towards Syrians.** Similarly, a common theme that came up in our analysis of qualitative data was the perception that the second shift was of lower quality than the first shift.

NEXT STEPS

The second wave of data collection for this longitudinal project will begin in Spring 2020. We will examine whether the trends and patterns identified in this report persist or have changed (and if so, how). We will also explore the ways in which the economic crisis in Lebanon is shaping education experiences and outcomes and, how the pressures that Syrian refugees are under to repatriate, may be affecting their education. Interested readers are also encouraged to consult our country reports on Australia and Turkey in which we discuss wave one findings from those countries.