



MANAHEL - JANUARY 2025

SYRIA
EDUCATION
PROGRAMME

LEARNING BULLETIN

Welcome to the first Manahel bulletin of 2025! Since our last update, Manahel has implemented a new initiative in Special Education Centres to address bullying, created a competition to inspire a love of learning and strengthened the provision of mental health services in collaboration with the German Syrian Association (DSV). The Manahel team has also been identifying how the programme can continue making the greatest impact possible on education in the new era of a post-Assad Syria. More on that in future bulletins.

Standing Up to Bullying in Special Education Centres

Bullying presents a major threat to the morale, well-being and education of children with special needs. Whether it takes the form of verbal, physical, or social abuse, bullying can undermine confidence and self-esteem, potentially leading to school disengagement, social isolation, and even long-term withdrawal from education. To cultivate a more supportive environment and foster a culture of empathy, respect and inclusion, Manahel developed an Anti-Bullying Initiative for Special Education Centres (SECs).

Awareness campaigns reinforced the shared responsibility of educators, parents, and society in creating a safe educational space. Parents were encouraged to participate, and their response was positive, recognising the crucial role in protecting and empowering children.

Meanwhile, theatrical performances illustrated the harmful consequences of bullying to parents and children. These conveyed powerful messages of kindness, acceptance, and the importance of standing up against bullying. The initiative inspired collective action, compassion and a commitment to developing an inclusive learning environment.

Learning: The Anti-Bullying Initiative demonstrated that a collective effort is required to address bullying, rather than isolated school-based interventions. The initiative also helped create a culture of empathy, reducing stigma and promoting understanding of children with disabilities. Ultimately, the initiative reaffirmed that when students with disabilities feel safe and supported, they are more likely to remain engaged in their education, boosting their confidence and academic success.



Strengthening Critical Thinking and Student Engagement

Manahel schools participated in the Monthly Reading and Math Challenge Competition towards the end of 2024 with the goal of strengthening foundational literacy and numeracy skills among students in Grades 2-4. Beyond a test of academic ability, the competition was designed as a dynamic approach to fostering a love for learning, inspiring creativity, and enhancing student engagement.

The Competition covered three areas:



Reading skills:

By being encouraged to read as many stories as possible, learners improved reading fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. This approach motivated students to develop a reading habit and strengthened their ability to interpret texts, confidence and academic success.



Mathematical proficiency:

Real-world problem-solving scenarios required learners to creatively apply mathematical understanding. Students were able to build confidence in their numeracy skills and implement logical reasoning.



Critical thinking and creativity:

By incorporating interactive and student driven learning methods, the competition promoted independent learning. It provided a platform for students to think critically, explore innovative solutions, and approach problems from multiple perspectives.



By making learning fun, engaging and relevant to their lives, the competition enabled students to practice and develop essential skills – for their academic journey and beyond the classroom.



Learning: Similar initiatives have reinforced essential reading and maths competencies, but also cultivated an environment where learning is seen as an exciting and rewarding journey. The success of the Competition highlights the impact of student-centred, engaging educational strategies in improving academic outcomes. It also highlighted the importance of creativity and critical thinking by exploring problem-solving strategies beyond traditional classroom exercises.



Collaborating on Mental Health Support

Manahel began collaborating with the German Syrian Association (DSV) on offering Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) for children and caregivers facing psychological distress, so that they can access specialised clinical mental health services directly.

DSV's services were integrated into awareness-raising initiatives and Learning Circles, while DSV's contact information was shared with caregivers and students so they knew where and how to access support.

Manahel and DSV also organised a two-day training for 14 Protection and Safeguarding instructors on monitoring and referral of children with behavioural issues, equipping instructors with the knowledge and skills to identify, assess, and refer cases in need of intervention.

A follow-up training session is planned for the second school semester, targeting instructors on self-care and burnout prevention. This training will then be cascaded to School Safeguarding Officers, who will, in turn, facilitate PSS sessions for teachers, ensuring a broader, school-wide impact on mental health awareness and resilience-building.

Learning

DSV's technical expertise complement Manahel's existing interventions, bridging the gap between school-based psychosocial support and specialised clinical mental health services. The initiative demonstrated that raising awareness of direct support available and providing referral pathways significantly increases access to much-needed care. The collaboration also emphasised the value of capacity-building efforts; training protection and safeguarding instructors not only improved their ability to identify and refer behavioural issues but also ensured a sustainable, school-wide approach to psychosocial support. Through this work, Manahel reinforced its commitment to creating a holistic, responsive, and well-supported educational environment for students and educators.

Plans for the coming months

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| 1 | Implementation of case management and referral services |
| 2 | Preparation for the after-school club activities |
| 3 | Launch of the new Maths and Reading challenge |
| 4 | Training for School Community Committees on protection concepts |

Manahel, which in Arabic means 'fountains' – of hope, of knowledge, and of life -, is the northwest component of the UK aid-funded Syria Education Programme (SEP). Delivered by Chemonics UK, Manahel provides access to safe, inclusive, and quality learning opportunities for children in Northwest Syria. It impacted more than 600,000 children over the first phase of the programme (2018-2023) and a second phase runs from 2024-2027.