RISE and Refine: Diagnosing teacher management policies and practices in Jordan

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Background and Introduction:

In high-income contexts, evidence consistently demonstrates that teachers not only play the most important role in student learning, but their impacts last into adulthood (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2014). In conflict-affected contexts (CACs), where schools can serve as a safe and predictable environment amidst chaos, the role of the teacher may be even more critical and far-reaching. For example, building or strengthening social relationships with caregivers—inclusive of teachers—provides a buffer against the harmful consequences associated with traumatic experiences often suffered in CACs; these relationships help children achieve more positive outcomes, even in the face of extreme hardship (Rutter, 1985).

Despite teachers' importance in CACs, it is precisely these contexts where teachers are the least professionally prepared and supported. Teachers are often un- or under-trained in instructional practice, receive little ongoing support to develop their instruction, and are managing large class sizes with a wide variety of learning levels. For example, out of nearly 80,000 public school teachers in Jordan, less than one percent attended pre-service education training in university before entering the classroom (USAID, 2020).

Emerging evidence demonstrates that teacher capacity-building interventions are among the most effective and efficient at raising student learning outcomes in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) (Kremer & Holla, 2009; Conn, 2017). But despite this promise, many—perhaps even most—teacher capacity interventions fail to impact student learning (e.g. Muralidharan & Sundararaman, 2010; Berlinksi & Busso, 2017; Kerwin & Thornton, 2015). It's hypothesized that this is partially due to a "symptom-management" or "piecemeal" approach to education that fails to consider the constraints of the educational ecosystem in which teachers are embedded (Banathy, 1991; Kaffenberger et al., 2022). For example, improving the quality of a curriculum is unlikely to produce increased student learning without simultaneously considering—and, if necessary, adapting—other system norms and constraints, such as teacher training and skills, content assessed on student exams, and teacher supervision and evaluation processes. Systems research views persistent education challenges as components with complex, and often dynamic, interdependencies within the education system (Ndaruhutse et al., 2019).

In this paper, we use a systems framework approach to explore the (in)coherence of the teacher management system and its implications for in-service capacity building in the country of Jordan. We also consider the contextual fit of the systems diagnostic framework (RISE; Pritchett, 2015) and potential adaptations for conflict-affected contexts.

Specifically, we ask:

   RQ1a. What factors enable/constrain teacher management both (a) between and (b) within national policies?
   RQ1b. How do teachers and school leaders experience the implementation of policies of the national and/or state government?

RQ2. What adaptations are needed for a system diagnostic framework (RISE) to capture, diagnose, and improve coherence of education systems regarding teacher management in CACs?

Context

Jordan is a relatively small, highly-centralized country of 10.8 million, over 3 million of whom are refugees. Since the outbreak of Syria's civil war in 2011, 1.4 million Syrians have sought refuge in Jordan; 80% of these refugees are integrated into host country communities, increasing demand on public services, including schools (Delprato, Al Nahi & Morrice, 2020). This increased demand has resulted in a two-shift school day in affected public schools, where mostly Jordanian students attend the morning ("first") shift, and Syrian students attend the afternoon ("second") shift. COVID-19 then exacerbated existing access and learning challenges, as all schools closed in mid-March of 2020 for nearly a year, with continued schooling interruptions for many months thereafter. Over the last 10 years, donors have spent over $2 billion USD to improve education in Jordan, but the fragmented nature of actors providing services has led to parallel and duplicative systems and few coordinating structures.

Methods and data

This project utilized the Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE) diagnostic tool to find points of incoherence amongst the elements and actors of the formal public education system in Jordan. The RISE framework proposes two important dimensions for accountability in education: "relationships" and "design elements" (Silberstein et al., 2023). The four major accountability relationships are: *(1) Management:* Relationships between the Ministry of Education (MOE) and its Agencies; (2) *Client power*: relationships between citizens/parents and teachers/schools; (3) *Politics*: Relationships between citizens and the state; and (4) *Compact*: Relationships between executive bodies of the state and the MOE. The RISE framework also describes five "design elements" through which the principal can influence the behavior of the agent in each accountability relationship. These are: (1) *Delegation:* What are the principal's objectives for the agent? (2) *Information:* What information is collected/used to determine how well objectives are met? (3) *Resourcing:* What resources (including financing) are provided to meet these objectives? (4) *Motivation:* What are the consequences (positive or negative) if the agents succeed or fail to meet these objectives? And (5) *Support:* How is the agent supported to meet these objectives?

Researchers first conducted a stakeholder mapping of the education system in Jordan, with a focus on actors who influenced education in conflict and crisis settings. Then a desk review was conducted on recent national education policy documents, a political economy analysis, and the outputs of related research projects. Based on their ranking in the stakeholder mapping process, influential stakeholders (n=10) were invited to a workshop to both jointly determine a focal topic for the RISE diagnostic as well as to provide additional information that could not be sourced from the desk review. Stakeholders also assisted in nominating additional key informants to the research team for interviews.

Researchers conducted a total of 10 interviews and 8 focus group discussions with 7 to 8 participants per group. Interviews were conducted with personnel from the Ministry of Education (n=5), regional-level directorates (n=2), and NGOs (n=3). Focus group discussions were

conducted with first shift civil servant teachers (n=14), second-shift contract teachers (n=15), school principals (n=15) and teacher supervisors (n=16). All interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in Arabic, recorded, and translated. Coding of all data—inclusive of the policy documents and interview data—were completed according to work by Silberstein et al. (2023), which determines whether components of the system are aligned for learning, access, socialization, or patronage/interest groups.

Selected Preliminary Results

Misalignment within teacher management.
The teacher management landscape is fractured at several levels in the Jordanian public school system. First, contract teachers, as civil servants, are regulated by two distinct departments – the Ministry of Education (MoE) as well as the Civil Services Bureau (Aljaghoub, 2012). Civil Services Bureau (CSB) regulations determine teacher career outcomes, which are not tied to the policies desired by the MoE. Attempts by the MoE to reform the teacher career ladder have conflicted with the regulation of civil servant career progression. Additionally, nearly 10,000 teachers (one-eighth of the public school workforce) are "daily paid" contract teachers—primarily working in second-shifts—who can neither participate in CSB ranking structures nor many of the professional development opportunities that influence career advancement. Though these teachers meet all of the qualifications of their civil servant counterparts, there are insufficient funds in the Jordanian education budget to formally hire them. As such, they work for less pay, receive no benefits, and are decentrally managed by MoE regional directorates while awaiting a civil servant opening. Though the process for securing a position is formally documented by the MoE, contract teachers report conflicting accounts and confusion regarding who obtains these coveted positions and how.

Teachers' ongoing pedagogical practice is supported, in theory, by a cadre of supervisors at each regional MoE district. The role of the supervisor has shifted in recent years from that of an inspector who ensures compliance to a pedagogical adviser. This shift, however, has not been accompanied by retraining for supervisors. Though supervisors report feeling competent in their abilities to support teachers' instructional practice, teachers' experiences and opinions of this support vary widely. As part of the transformation of the supervisory role, teacher evaluation duties were largely re-assigned to school principals, as "residential supervisors". This shift resulted in substantial confusion of division of responsibilities among supervisors, teachers, and principals. Supervisors expressed frustration that their authority had been usurped by principals, who reported feeling overextended by administrative tasks and resentful of additional duties. This fragmentation of roles and responsibilities between supervisors and principals decreased opportunities for high-quality instructional support for teachers.

Adaptation to conflict-affected contexts.
We suggest three revisions for adaptation of the RISE systems diagnostic to conflict-affected contexts. First, we suggest a more explicit focus on global actors -- such as international and/or multi-lateral donors, UN agencies, and INGOs -- that operate within and influence the education landscape in areas of conflict and crisis. We note that there are rarely effective and efficient mechanisms for coordination, both across global actors and between global and national actors. As such, this is a source of incoherence within the education system landscape that requires further consideration in areas of conflict and crisis.

Second, we suggest an analysis of the relationship between the Ministry of Education and prominent non-governmental organizations and other donors. Given (a) the influence that donors can/often strive to have with ministries of education and (b) the movement to integrate previously parallel refugee education systems, largely run by NGOs, into formal schooling, we believe that these relationships should be further considered in areas of conflict and crisis.

Last, areas of conflict and crisis often contain a multitude of education actors who occupy spaces outside of the formal education system; we recommend these actors are also analyzed. For example, in Jordan, the majority of second-shift students are taught by contract teachers, who are largely governed by a patchwork of opaque policies at the regional level. Similarly, those who work in NGO programming, particularly in refugee camps and nonformal programming, are likely not MoE-sanctioned teachers but rather trained facilitators. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the education landscape in CACs, it is crucial to analyze and examine the roles and policies of such education actors who in the nonformal education system.

Implications
Teachers are our most direct and influential path to providing students with quality academic learning. But not only do teachers in CACs receive little instructional support, the resources we do invest often fail to make meaningful impacts. To enable maximum impact, we require knowledge of how to systematically diagnose the misalignments within education systems that prevent or impede reform and identify the most actionable interventions. This study provides emerging evidence that such knowledge can be generated by the adaptation and application of a high-quality diagnostic framework in partnership with in-country partners who have lived experience in CACs. Study results' application to alignment interventions as well as directions for future research will be discussed.

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