


Education in Emergency

Lebanon's educational policy response to COVID-19 and the
pandemic's impact on the learning of vulnerable students in
Lebanon

A Literature Review

Bachelor's Thesis

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Supervisors	Dr. Oriana Ponta, Dr. Deborah Kistler
Student	Myrto Merentitis
Student ID	
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Management Summary

1.5 million Syrians and nearly half a million Palestinian refugees are estimated to live in Lebanon. This number makes it the country with the highest number of refugees relative to its population. More than half of the refugees who live in Lebanon are children, and providing education to these additional students bears an enormous challenge to Lebanon's public sector. As a result, many refugee children do not have access to education. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Lebanon has been facing an economic and political crisis. Then, the pandemic forced Lebanon into a lockdown, including school closures which disrupted the education of 1.3 million students in Lebanon.

The thesis summarizes Lebanon's educational policy response to the pandemic focusing on primary and lower secondary levels. Then, the pandemic's impact on children's learning outcomes was analyzed focusing on refugee students. Lastly, the paper provides tools to measure social and emotional learning in a low-resource setting, such as in Lebanon.

The thesis is based on a literature review. The theoretical framework analyzed Lebanon's existing education policies and built the base for the findings. The pandemic's impact on children's learning was evaluated by monitoring how school closures have affected learning in the past. Then, hypotheses will be drawn on the education of refugee children in Lebanon.

Lebanon's Ministry of Education responded to the pandemic with remote learning in the form of television, online learning, and paper-based methods. A digital platform has been launched with online classes. However, barriers such as a lack of internet and electronic devices hinder many vulnerable children from accessing online learning tools.

The research on past school closures showed that a significant learning loss due to the pandemic is expected. The scope of the learning loss depends on the mitigation strategies and if they are made available for all students. Furthermore, the pandemic is connected with harmful side effects, such as economic shocks of households and social distancing that further decrease the well-being and development of children. Lastly, libraries and measurement tools were found that have been developed to evaluate social and emotional learning programs in crisis settings.

The thesis concludes that the COVID-19 pandemic will increase Lebanon's educational inequalities as refugee and vulnerable children are less likely to access remote learning

options. In 2020, the number of Syrian refugees that live in extreme poverty has increased by more than 30%. Moreover, past research indicates that vulnerable children are at a high risk of not returning to school. Lebanon's government must ensure a resilient and inclusive post-COVID education system supported by transparent policy reforms. Lastly, further research is needed to fully evaluate the pandemic's impact on children's learning outcomes.

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List of Abbreviations

CASEL	Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning
EiE	Education in Emergency
HALDO	Holistic Assessment of Learning and Development Outcomes
INEE	The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
ISELA	International Social and Emotional Learning Assessment
MEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEL	Social and Emotional Learning
SERAIS	Social-Emotional Response and Information Scenarios
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNRWA	UN Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugee in the Near East
VASyR	Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees

1 Introduction

The on-going war in Syria has forced millions of Syrians to leave their home country since 2010. According to data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 6.7 million Syrians have left their home country since the beginning of the conflict. The majority of them fled to neighboring countries. There are more than 900'000 Syrians officially registered in Lebanon with the UNHCR. However, according to estimations, around 1.5 million Syrians sought refuge in Lebanon, but the majority is not officially registered (UNHCR, 2019).

The second-largest refugee group in Lebanon are Palestinians that have repeatedly fled to Lebanon for many decades. According to the most recent Forced Displacement Report of the UNHCR, around half a million Palestinian refugees are estimated to live in Lebanon. The report states that Lebanon is the country with the highest number of refugees relative to their national population; approximately one out of seven people in Lebanon is a refugee (UNHCR, 2020).

Over 50% of the refugee population in Lebanon are children. This demographic shift led to an overburdening of the Lebanese education system that was already facing issues before the refugee crisis. As a result, every second Syrian child of primary school-aged in Lebanon was out of school in the 2016/2017 school year (UNHCR, 2019). Although quality education has proven to be essential for children's well-being, especially in refugee settings. Being out of school leaves children without hope and stability, and it puts them at risk of various kinds of abuse and mistreatment (INEE, 2021).

Then COVID-19 came, and the pandemic led to the most extensive disruption in education, affecting school facilities worldwide and on all levels. According to a UN report, 94% of all students globally were impacted by COVID-19, which represents more than 1.5 billion children and young adults (UN, 2020a). The majority of countries have responded to the pandemic with lockdown measures, including school closures.

The pandemic has brought light to other issues in Lebanon. Prior to COVID-19, the country was facing a stagnating economy, high unemployment rates, social tensions, and a government that failed to provide basic services such as power and transport systems. All of this led to nationwide protests in 2019 that were heated up again during COVID-19 and Beirut's explosion in summer 2020 (Abouzeid, Habib, Jabbour, Mokdad, & Nuwayhid, 2020).

The explosion that destroyed Beirut's port in August 2020 killed 135 people, left thousands injured, and it was the last straw for Lebanon's population. The reason for the explosion was chemicals that have been at the port of Beirut since 2013. The government was aware of its presence and danger but failed to take action. The explosion left about 40% of Beirut with damages, including many schools and hospitals (Abouzeid et al., 2020).

A New York Times article summarized the disaster (para. 1): "As residents picked up the pieces, many saw the explosion as the culmination of years of mismanagement and neglect by Lebanon's political leaders. Lebanese officials treated it (the explosive chemicals) the way they have dealt with the country's lack of electricity, poisonous tap water and overflowing garbage: by bickering and hoping the problem might solve itself" (Hubbard, 2020).

1.1 Problem Statement and Research Questions

In 2015, all UN member states accepted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs are to work collaboratively to achieve peace and prosperity for all nations and to serve as a reminder that immediate action is necessary to accomplish these objectives. Goal number 4 states the following: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UN, 2015).

According to the UN itself, the pandemic threatens years of hard-won educational improvements, especially for the most vulnerable population. Even before the pandemic, refugee children were twice as likely not to be enrolled in school as non-refugee children. Meaning the educational and socioeconomic gap between refugee students and non-refugee students was already immense before the pandemic; now, the gap is expected to be broadening by an enormous amount. Furthermore, the pandemic has pushed more refugee and vulnerable households into poverty, which leads to harming coping mechanisms. Girls are often forced into marriages because of financial reasons, while boys are forced into child labor. In these situations, the risk is high that they may never return to school. The dropouts, among other factors, would widen the existing inequalities, hinder the progress of SDG 4 and other SDGs, and further exacerbate the refugees' social and economic issues (UN, 2020a).

Therefore, the question arises of how Lebanon has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic to keep providing education to children. Furthermore, the thesis will investigate how the pandemic impacts learning and children's social and emotional development in Lebanon. Lastly, it will be identified how social and emotional learning can be measured. This led to the establishment of the research questions.

1. What educational policy responses have been implemented in Lebanon to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted learning and social and emotional outcomes for refugee and vulnerable children (of primary and lower secondary education levels) in Lebanon?
3. How can children's learning and social and emotional outcomes be measured in a low-resource setting (such as in Lebanon)?

1.2 Aims and Scope of the Thesis

This thesis' aims to find evidence of what educational policies have been implemented in Lebanon as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The thesis will focus on primary and lower secondary education levels and on refugee and vulnerable children in Lebanon. Moreover, the scope will be limited to Syrian and Palestinian refugees as these are the two largest refugee groups in Lebanon.

The thesis defines a vulnerable child according to the World Bank definition: A vulnerable child faces higher risks than its peers in the dimensions of health, education, and child protection. For example, an indicator for education would be access to education, and a vulnerable child faces a higher risk of lower school enrollment rates than its peers (World Bank, 2004). In the case of this thesis, this includes refugee children in Lebanon and Lebanese children from a disadvantaged background.

In the next step, the thesis aims to find out more about the pandemic's impact on social and emotional learning (SEL) outcomes of refugee and vulnerable children in Lebanon. Finally, measurements of SEL outcomes in low-resource settings such as in Lebanon will be identified.

1.3 Overview

The thesis will start with the methodology, followed by background information, a theoretical framework, findings, a short discussion of findings, and the conclusion.

The methodology will describe how the thesis aims to answer the research questions and shortly outline the main sources. Background information will be provided on refugees in Lebanon, focusing on relevant demographics and living conditions. Context on education enrollment and barriers to education faced by refugee children will be outlined. Lastly, the effect of COVID-19 on Lebanon, refugee children, and education will be touched upon. The theoretical framework defines the necessary concepts of the thesis. Furthermore, it will include an education policy analysis focusing on refugee education. It aims to give an insight into the condition of the Lebanese educational system to then better understand the findings. The findings aim to attain the research questions based on information and data gathered. After a short discussion of the findings, finally, the conclusion will summarize the thesis and briefly provide an outlook.

2 Methodology

This chapter will describe the methodology applied in this thesis, including the research method, approach, the nature of sources, and the study's limitations.

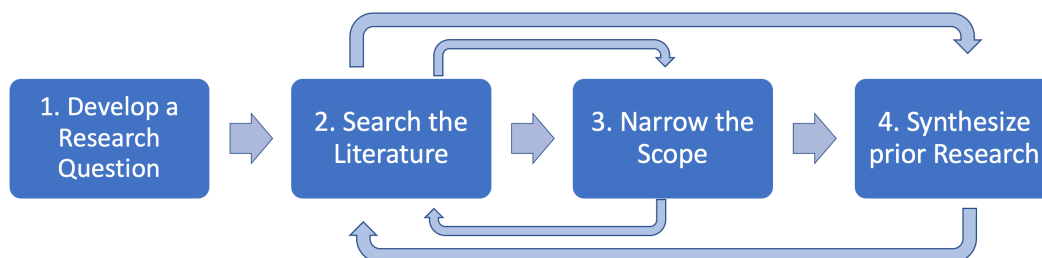
2.1 Research Method

The thesis is based on a literature review gathered as desk research between January and March 2021. The use of existing literature in the form of a review provides various advantages, such as a large scope of professionally collected data (Kumar, 2011). Most relevant for this thesis was that it allowed the monitoring of a large variety of resources and access to literature from many different sources. Whenever possible, more than one source on a certain issue was consulted to get different insights on a topic. The variety of sources allowed to look at the investigated issues from different perspectives while the recency was necessary in regard to COVID-19 and the changing circumstance.

2.2 Research Approach

A four-part literature review approach was applied as proposed by Price (2017).

Figure 1. The Four-Part Literature Review Process



Source: own illustration based on (Price, 2017)

- 1) Develop a research question. Price (2017) states, “develop a topic”, this was slightly adapted to develop a research question. The supervisors defined the broad topic, and the three research questions were discussed and mutually agreed upon.
- 2) After having defined the research question, the search was initiated to get familiar with existing literature in the following four main areas, including sub-areas:
 - a. Lebanon
 - i. Country context
 - ii. Education system
 - b. Refugees in Lebanon
 - i. Demographics and living conditions
 - ii. Education access

- c. COVID-19:
 - i. Its extent in Lebanon
 - ii. Its impact on education and learning
 - d. Social and emotional learning
- 3) Narrow the scope. In some areas, the amount of research was overwhelming, while in others, it was scarce. The thesis consisted of a continuous process of researching and narrowing the scope to adapt the thesis and its chapters according to time and quantity constraints.
- 4) Lastly, the research is synthesized by outlining chapters in a logical order. Searching and synthesizing literature happened in a continuous cycle.

2.3 Nature of Sources

The selected literature was gathered from international organizations, government agencies, international and local media sources, and more. Many different literature categories were sourced, ranging from reports, journal articles, working papers, and needs assessments to further documentation available in English. The thesis ensures a holistic approach and different perspectives to each investigated topic by including a large scope of data and sources.

There was little peer-reviewed research available for research questions one and two due to the recency of events and limitations around social contact which also affected research methods (Berman, 2020).

The table below represents an overview of the selected literature, including the most frequently used categories with examples. The table below is only a representation as the thesis consists of many more sources provided in detail in the references chapter.

Table 1. Overview of Selected Literature

Category	Subcategory	Examples used in Thesis	Criteria for Selection	Purpose
International Publications	Reports and papers from International Organizations	United Nations, World Bank, World Health Organization	Reliable and unbiased	Background information, global view on issues and their impact
Mass Media	Newspaper articles	Arab News, Arab Weekly, BBC, New York Times	Recency	Collect opinions and up-to-date news
Research Institutes	Universities and academic institutions	Harvard University, Centre of Lebanese Studies, Lebanese American University	Reliable data, first-hand information	Useful for definitions, theories and frameworks
International Publications 2	Reports and needs assessments from NGOs	Save the Children, Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergency (INEE)	On-site insight	Collect data for specific issues and background information
Scholarly Articles	Journal Articles	Google Scholar JSTOR Sage	Peer-reviewed	Primary sources, useful for findings
Books	Factual books and handbooks	Lundberg and Wuermli (2012), Handbook for Education in Emergency (2004)	Reliable research	Used for methodology and theories

Source: own illustration based on (Kumar, 2011, p. 163)

2.4 Limitations

The thesis includes several limitations, which will be shortly outlined in this chapter. At the end of the thesis, in the discussion, it will be referred back to the limitations of the study with more specific examples.

The thesis is solely based on existing literature, and no new data was collected. There were no interviews or case studies conducted, which would have allowed a deeper insight into the research questions.

The reviewed literature was limited to English literature. Particularly, for government publications and to find the most recent information on Lebanon's current situations, Arabic literature would have been useful and possibly more up to date.

3 Background Information

This chapter will provide the background information required to follow the subsequent parts of the thesis. It provides background information on the Syrian and Palestinian refugees who live in Lebanon with a focus on children. Then, it will shortly outline the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on children, education, and Lebanon.

3.1 Refugees in Lebanon

Relative to its population of 4.5 million, Lebanon holds the largest number of refugees worldwide. Approximately 1.5 million Syrians sought refuge in Lebanon, additionally to almost half a million Palestinian refugees who live in Lebanon (UNHCR, 2020). This chapter will briefly outline the main demographic characteristics and the living environment of Lebanon's refugee population, focusing on education and children.

3.1.1 Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

It has been almost ten years since the revolt in Syria started, which is still an on-going war. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, almost 600'000 Syrians have lost their lives since the beginning of the Syrian Revolution. Among these, more than 100'000 civilians are included (SOHR, 2020). The country had a pre-war population of 22 million. More than half of the population has been displaced since the beginning of the Syrian conflict. By the end of 2019, more than six million Syrians have been displaced within the country, while 6.6 million have sought refuge outside of Syria. Almost 80% of these 6.6 million Syrians are displaced in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan (UNHCR, 2020).

Since 2013 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund, and the World Food Programme jointly evaluate a representative sample of Syrian refugee families living in Lebanon. The findings are then published yearly as the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR). The majority of the following information is based on VASyR reports.

3.1.1.1 Legal Residency

Many aid agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Lebanon report that Syrian refugees are having difficulties receiving a legal residency in Lebanon because the Government of Lebanon discontinued new registrations of Syrians in 2015. VASyR 2020 reports the many difficulties refugees face every day because they do not have a legal residency, such as less access to essential services, including education which is

particularly relevant for this thesis. The number of Syrian refugees with a legal residency is declining each year; while 27% declared to have legal residency in 2018, only 20% of Syrians stated having one in 2020 (UNHCR, 2021).

3.1.1.2 Demographic Characteristics and Living Conditions

According to the VASyR of 2020, the Syrian population in Lebanon is very young, with 54% being under 18. The largest part of the population is between 0 to 9 years old (UNHCR, 2021). This characteristic is especially relevant given the educational issues evaluated in this thesis.

Taking a closer look at the housing situation of Syrian refugees will help to better understand the impacts that COVID-19 measures had on the refugee population, especially on children.

As stated in the VASyR, the Lebanese government has forbidden the set-up of formal refugee camps. This is one reason why most Syrian refugees live in residential shelters (67%), such as apartments or rooms in a house. The rest lives in non-permanent shelters (21%) such as a tent, while the rest (12%) lives in non-residential shelters. Non-residential shelters are, for example, factories, farms, or school buildings. More than half of the Syrian population in Lebanon has below standard or overcrowded living situations (UNHCR, 2021).

According to the VASyR report from 2019, 51% of households have access to the internet in their living situation. 72% report owning a TV, 84% have a mobile phone, while only 1% report having a computer in their residency (UNHCR, 2019). It is important to note that these percentages are per household and not per person.

In 2020, 96% of Syrian refugee households had access to electricity. However, there are 5.5 hours of power cuts per day on average, which is a three-hour increase from 2019 (UNHCR, 2021). These numbers will gain more context when talking about online teaching during the pandemic in the findings chapter.

3.1.1.3 School Enrollment Rates and Barriers to Education

The large influx of refugees put enormous pressure on Lebanon's public education system. According to the VASyR report, only 69% of Syrian refugee children of primary school age (6–14 years old) were registered for school in 2019 (UNHCR, 2019).

A study from the Centre for Lebanese Studies (CLS), an independent academic institution, summarized the main barriers to education of Syrian refugees in Lebanon based on collected data (Shuayb, Hammoud, Al-Samhoury, & Durgham, 2020).

The study continues to state that the issue starts with the legal residency that a child needs to be enrolled in a public school. Furthermore, many Syrian households do not have enough income to pay tuition cost, school supplies, and the cost of commuting. However, even if the requirements are fulfilled, the chances are high that the school has no available spots as the Lebanese public school system did not have the capacity to enroll the additional children. Another challenge for Syrian refugee children is the Lebanese curriculum that is very different from the Syrian. In Lebanon, they teach many subjects in English or French that are taught in Arabic in Syria. Furthermore, it has to be considered that many refugee children suffer from trauma and psychosocial stress because many of them have escaped war. The traumas the children have experienced can make it only more difficult for them to adapt to new learning environments and focus on learning (Shuayb et al., 2020).

3.1.2 Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon

A survey from the American University of Beirut reports about the socioeconomic status of Palestinian refugees. The study raises awareness about the difference between Palestinian refugees that live in Lebanon. There are Palestinian refugees in Lebanon since approximately 1948 that have fled the Arab-Israeli War, and then there are Palestinian refugees that have fled from Syria more recently (Chaaban et al., 2016).

While both refugee groups face severe issues in Lebanon, the refugees that have arrived more recently from Syria face even more poverty and unemployment. Furthermore, they have similar issues like Syrian refugees when it comes to obtaining a legal residency. Therefore, they are more dependent on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine Refugees (Chaaban et al., 2016). The agency was established after the Arab-Israeli War by the UN General Assembly to support and protect Palestinian refugees (UNRWA, n.d.-b).

In comparison to the Syrian refugees, most Palestinian refugees in Lebanon live in refugee camps. The UNRWA officially manages 12 camps for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Most camps are overcrowded and lack access to essential services and recreational areas, thereby offering poor living conditions (Chaaban et al., 2016).

The demographical situation of Palestinian refugees is somewhat similar to the Syrian refugees; almost half of the Palestinian refugees are under 25 years old (Chaaban et al., 2016).

The school enrollment rates for Palestinian children are higher than for Syrians. According to the UNRWA, 97% of Palestinian refugee children are enrolled in primary school and 61% in secondary school. The higher enrollment can be explained because most Palestinian children are registered at UNRWA educational facilities, while Syrian refugees mostly visit public schools in Lebanon. Precisely, 81% of Palestinian refugee children from 6 to 15 years old attend UNRWA educational facilities (UNRWA, n.d.-a).

The study from Chaaban et al. (2016) corresponds with the numbers of the UNRWA. The study also highlights that Palestinian refugees who came from Syria more recently have slightly lower enrollment rates (88% in primary school) than Palestinian children born in Lebanon (Chaaban et al., 2016).

3.2 COVID-19

According to the World Health Organization, COVID-19 is a disease and originates from SARS-CoV-2, a Coronavirus type. COVID-19 was first discovered by the end of the year 2019 and resulted in a worldwide pandemic. It is a respiratory illness, and the majority of people experience symptoms such as fever, cough, and fatigue, but the majority recover from it without hospital care. However, it is particularly dangerous for older people and certain risk groups for whom it can lead to death (WHO, n.d.). The virus spreads quickly (mainly through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose), which is why most countries implemented nationwide lockdowns at the beginning of March 2020 and further restriction measures, such as social distancing and travel bans. Most lockdowns lasted for approximately three to four months; however, many countries experienced an increase of cases in fall 2020 and had to implement lockdowns again (WHO, 2021). The World Health Organization has reported over 100 million COVID-19 cases and more than two million deaths due to COVID-19 (WHO, n.d.).

3.2.1 COVID-19 in Lebanon

Lebanon was facing the first COVID-19 case in the country on the 21st of February 2020. By the 27th of February, all educational facilities had to close, and shortly after, a total lockdown of all non-essential services was initiated. By the end of April, Lebanon had

approximately 700 confirmed cases of COVID-19, and due to a low growth factor, a step-by-step reopening was put in place (Khoury, Azar, & Hitti, 2020).

As stated in the article by Khoury et al. (2020), Lebanon started with a very aggressive strategy to fight the pandemic's initial spread as the country needed time to build up resources in the health sector. Lebanon's health care system depends primarily on private hospitals and has little resources in the public sector. Additionally, Lebanon relies on foreign supply chains, for example for masks and ventilators, as they have little manufacturing capacities. Lastly, the country is very densely populated, and often many people of different ages live in one household giving the virus a chance to spread quickly (Khoury et al., 2020).

During the summer months of 2020, the COVID-19 cases were increasing again. The explosion in Beirut in August 2020 and the following protests pushed social distancing rules and COVID-19 measures in the background. Due to the dire economic situation, the government did not initiate another lockdown at that point (Abouzeid et al., 2020).

According to the U.S. Embassy in Lebanon, the Lebanese government initiated a lockdown in mid-November 2020, but it was soon eased again. With further rising numbers and hospitals at critical capacity, the government was forced to reimpose another lockdown of non-essential services, starting on the 14th of January and lasting for three weeks (U.S. Embassy in Lebanon, 2021). According to an article on BBC (2021), the lockdown that started mid-January was one of the world's harshest as people were not allowed to leave their homes due to a 24-hour curfew. Only relevant workers, such as health care workers, were allowed to leave their houses (BBC, 2021).

By the 18th of March 2021, there were more than 400'000 confirmed COVID-19 cases in Lebanon, with over 5'000 related deaths, according to the Government of Lebanon (U.S. Embassy in Lebanon, 2021).

3.2.2 The Global Impact of COVID-19 on Education

When the virus started spreading all over the world last year, the majority of countries, including Lebanon, closed school facilities in March 2020 as a prevention strategy. Each country had different measures; however, most schools stayed closed for at least three months or longer and switched to online teaching during that period (Di Pietro, Biagi, Costa, Karpinski, & Mazza, 2020). According to a UN report, almost 1.5 billion learners, approximately 94% of learners globally, from more than 180 countries have experienced

education disruption due to COVID-19. An education crisis on such a scale that affects educational facilities on all levels has never happened before in modern history (UN, 2020a). This crisis impacts children in multiple ways, especially the most vulnerable ones. As the pandemic leads to an economic recession and job losses, more families and children are expected to live in extreme poverty. This, in turn, is a risk to children's health and survival as families cannot afford food and health care anymore, let alone education. Lastly, the pandemic threatens children's safety and well-being as poverty can lead to the exploitation of children as income generators, while lockdowns lead to an increase in child abuse (UN, 2020b).

Therefore, the pandemic negatively impacts a variety of SDGs and among these, SDG 4. According to UN's forecasts, the needed budget to reach SDG 4 is expected to grow more extensive (+18%), and the progress will be slowed down drastically (UN, 2020a).

4 Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of the thesis. It starts by defining relevant educational terms and is followed by a brief outline of the Lebanese education system focusing on refugee education. This theoretical framework will help the reader to understand the findings to the research questions better.

4.1 Definitions

4.1.1 Education in Emergency

Shuayb and Hammoud (2021) describe Education in Emergency (EiE) as “planning the education of refugee children living temporarily in a hosting state while awaiting repatriation” (para. 3).

The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergency (INEE) defines it as fulfilling the human right to education for all people as this right is often neglected in emergencies (INEE, 2004).

The INEE is a network for the global cooperation regarding EiE between NGOs, UN agencies, governments, academic institutions, education centers and affected groups and individuals (Shuayb, Makkouk, & Tuttunji, 2014). According to the INEE, “in emergency situations through to recovery, quality education provides physical, psychosocial and cognitive protection that can sustain and save lives (...) by offering safe spaces for learning (..) and by providing a sense of routine, stability, structure and hope for the future” (INEE, 2004, p. 2).

4.1.2 Non-Formal Education

In this thesis, the term Non-Formal Education (NFE) will be used various times. The INEE defines NFE programs as “characterized by their variety, flexibility, and ability to respond quickly to new educational needs of children or adults. They are often designed for specific groups of learners (...) and curricula may be based on formal education or on new approaches” (INEE, 2004, p. 121).

In Lebanon’s case, this means refugee children who do not attend public schools are often involved in NFE programs that international and local aid agencies offer. The main issue with NFE is that it is not accredited. NFE was initially meant to bridge the time until refugee children can attend formal education in the host country. However, with the protraction of the crisis and the absence of educational services in some regions, the NFE

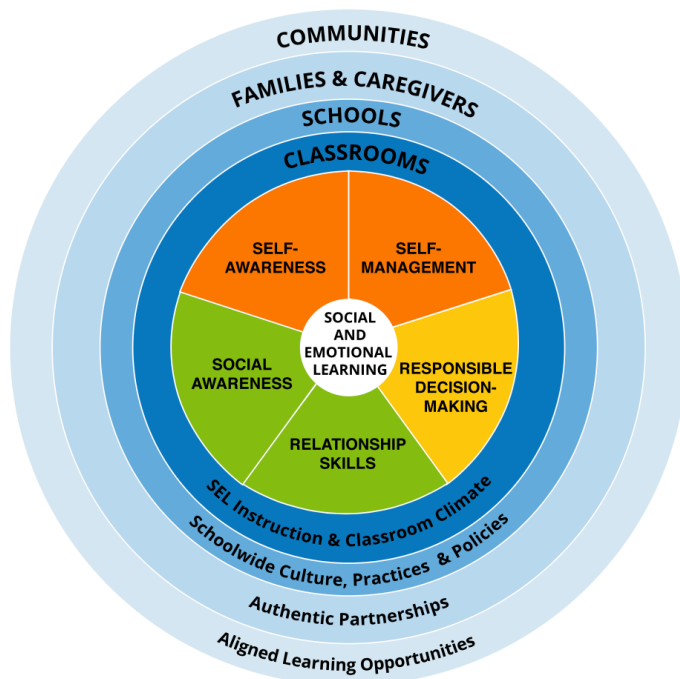
programs became crucial in Lebanon. They took over schools' role to some extent (Shuayb et al., 2014).

4.1.3 Social and Emotional Learning

According to the Harvard definition, social and emotional learning (SEL) is used to describe a variety of skills that can be put into three interrelated fields: cognitive, social, and emotional. Individuals need these skills to manage their everyday lives and receive positive outcomes in their professional and private environments. Cognitive skills help an individual to plan, achieve targets, use existing knowledge for decision-making, and more. Emotional skills include self-management and empathizing with others, while social skills describe the ability to work collaboratively and help build healthy relationships (Harvard University, n.d.).

CASEL stands short for the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning and is a researcher in the field of SEL and provides practices for implementing SEL as a key element of education. The collaborative has developed the “CASEL wheel”, where the five main areas of SEL skills are displayed in Figure 1. The orange ones represent the emotional skills, the green ones the social skills, and the yellow field are the cognitive ones (CASEL, n.d.-a).

Figure 2. CASEL Wheel



Source: (illustration taken from (CASEL, n.d.-a))

Around these five competencies', the settings are presented where children can develop their social and emotional skills. As can be seen on the wheel, schools are an essential setting for developing SEL competencies because it is a place where children can express and practice the skills. Due to the growing research in this field, there are increasing programs and practices that teachers can apply in the classroom to support students in developing SEL skills. It is crucial that children feel safe in the classroom environment and have positive relationships with their peers and teachers. SEL skills develop through relationships by engaging with other individuals and having daily routines (CASEL, n.d.-a).

Benefits of Social and Emotional Learning

While some best practices are still being discussed, most researchers have agreed upon the proven benefits of SEL. SEL can help children and adults to improve their academic achievements, build healthy relationships, and improve their mental health. In the long term, SEL impacts individuals and societies as it can be a factor to improve education equity (CASEL, n.d.-b).

Social and Emotional Learning in Times of Crises and Conflicts

An article published on EducationLinks (2018) highlights the particular importance of SEL for children who are affected by conflict and crisis. Studies have proven that children are negatively impacted in their development when they grow up in crisis-affected regions. However, research has also demonstrated that when children have a safe learning environment where they can practice SEL skills and have healthy relationships with key persons, these impacts can be reduced or even reversed. Therefore, SEL skills are essential to help children build resistance and deal with traumatizing experiences (EducationLinks, 2018).

To achieve the best results in children's SEL development, they need to be in a surrounding where they feel safe and supported. For many children, this place is their school, which is particularly true for vulnerable children who may live in environments where they do not feel safe, physically and emotionally (CASEL, n.d.-a). Moreover, it is important to adapt SEL programs to the cultural and social environment, specific age groups, and marginalized groups and minorities (EducationLinks, 2018).

While there is no doubt that SEL is crucial for all children, they are of utmost importance for children that live in crisis-affected and uncertain environments (EducationLinks, 2018).

4.2 Educational Policy Analysis

The education policy analysis aims to give the reader an outline of the Lebanese education system and what education policies were implemented to integrate refugee students into the system before COVID-19. It is based on a framework by the INEE that focuses on legal aspects regarding access to education in Lebanon.

While the background shortly touched on enrollment rates and barriers to education, the policy analysis will go into more depth to recognize the complexity of what it means to enroll half a million refugee students in an education system.

4.2.1 The Lebanese School System

The Lebanese formal education sector (public and private) is administered and regulated by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) (INEE, 2014).

The education sector in Lebanon is very privatized. Approximately 70% of Lebanese students visit private schools. The privatization is due to the common belief that public schools lack quality and resources, which is true according to Shuayb et al. (2014). Another reason for the high enrollment in private schools is that some are heavily subsidized by religious institutions and are therefore for free or less costly (Abla & Al-Masri, 2015). The high privatization of the Lebanese education system and the qualitative difference between the two systems support structural inequalities between rich and poor in Lebanon (Shuayb et al., 2014).

The UNRWA schools are non-state schools. However, they perform under the Lebanese curriculum and work with official Lebanese schoolbooks. UNRWA provides education to Palestinian refugee children in more than 80 schools, from preparatory level to vocational training. The costs of education are covered by the UNRWA (Shuayb et al., 2014)

4.2.2 INEE Minimum Standards for Education

The INEE Minimum Standards for Education were developed in 2004 by more than 3'500 individuals, including national authorities and education experts from more than 50 countries. The Handbook provides 19 standards to support the quality of educational

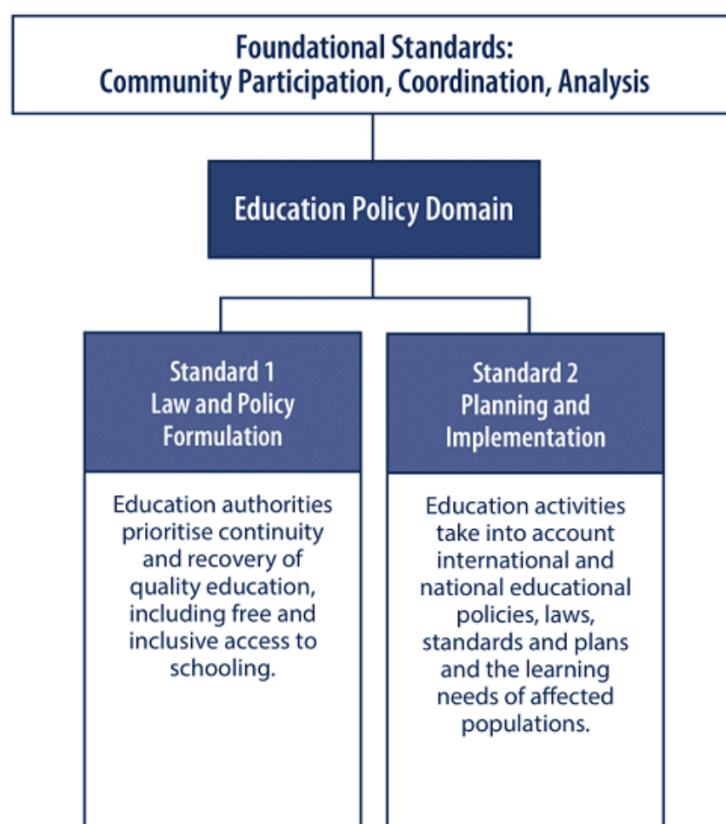
responses. It aims to commit to the right to relevant education for all. Today, the standards are the crucial tool to guide and evaluate programs and policies in the field of EiE. In 2014, a Handbook for the Lebanon context was published (INEE, 2014).

The 19 standards are divided into five domains: “1) Foundational standards, 2) Access and learning environment, 3) Teaching and learning, 4) Teachers and other education personnel, and finally 5) education policies” (Shuayb et al., 2014, p. 24).

For this thesis’s theoretical framework, domain five is relevant that is depicted in Figure 3. An overview of all standards can be found under the following link: <https://inee.org/standards>

The standard “Education Policy Domain” includes two dimensions as represented below. Under Standard 1, Law and Policy Formulation, the free access to school for all children is highlighted. Standard 2, Planning and Implementation, demands education activities that consider the refugees’ learning needs and conform with national and international laws (INEE, 2014).

Figure 3. INEE Minimum Standards for Education. Domain 5: Education Policy



Source: Illustration taken from (INEE, 2014, p. 65)

The following information will mainly be taken from the Handbook that was contextualized for Lebanon or from a report by the Centre for Lebanese Studies that analyzed the Handbook focusing on the refugee context in Lebanon (Shuayb et al., 2014).

4.2.2.1 Standard 1: Law and Policy Formulation

Lebanon has not signed the Refugee Convention of 1951; however, they have ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of Children. Thereby, they are obliged to provide free and inclusive access to primary education for every child (INEE, 2014).

According to Shuayb et al. (2014), Lebanon does not declare Syrian refugees with the refugee status. “They (Syrian refugees) are classified as foreigners, displaced, or migrant workers rather than refugees” (Shuayb et al., 2014, p. 41). By doing so, the government can avoid responsibility and deny Syrian refugees’ access to essential services such as education. This behavior has been disapproved by the UNHCR, as it is seen as a transfer of responsibility from the host country to the UN agencies (Shuayb et al., 2014).

A closer look at Lebanon’s law and policy formulation regarding the right to education will be taken. According to Shuayb et al. (2014), the Lebanese law states, “public education is free and compulsory in the primary phase, and is a right for every Lebanese of primary education age” (Shuayb et al., 2014, p. 42). However, the above-mentioned Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of Children ensure every child’s right to education. Thereby, the Lebanese law contradicts international agreements signed by Lebanon (Shuayb et al., 2014).

Having said that, it must be acknowledged that the MEHE in collaboration with UN agencies, has made considerable efforts to enroll as many Syrian students as possible in the public education system. Furthermore, it should be considered that registering an additional half a million students is a highly challenging task for every public system, especially a fragile one (Shuayb et al., 2014). The efforts made will be outlined in the following chapter.

4.2.2.2 Standard 2: Planning and Implementation

As a response to the large number of incoming refugees, the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan was launched in 2015, founded by the Government of Lebanon, and by many international and national partners that helped with its implementation. Its main goals are the protection of refugees and vulnerable people by providing immediate assistance while

at the same time strengthening the country's resources and stability. Under the Response Plan, an educational program was launched that will be introduced in the following section (Government of Lebanon, 2020).

Reaching all Children with Education

Reaching all Children with Education (RACE) is the strategic educational answer to the incoming refugees, developed by the MEHE in collaboration with UN agencies' support (Shuayb et al., 2014). It is one of the most significant educational programs in the region, including policies to improve quality and access to education for all children and youth. It is split up into RACE 1 and RACE 2. RACE 1 was implemented in January 2014 and lasted for three years, while RACE 2 will presumably last until 2021 (Abla & Al-Masri, 2015). Furthermore, both RACE projects align with the SDG 4 that every child has the right to access education (MEHE, 2014).

Under RACE I and II, afternoon shifts for Syrian students were introduced, curricula and language of instruction were adjusted in some cases, and NFE programs were introduced for the transitional phase to formal education (Shuayb et al., 2014).

When it comes to enrollment rates, RACE 1 was successful. According to the program's web page, there was a 21% improvement in enrolling Syrian children in public schools during the program's first year. The number of public schools that provide afternoon shifts was doubled (MEHE, n.d.). When comparing the VASyR report from 2015 and the most recent one, the results align with the 21% increase in school enrollments of Syrian children (UNHCR, 2015, 2019).

Nevertheless, there are still many displaced children in Lebanon that do not access formal education. The remaining number often attend NFE of aid agencies or are out-of-school (Jawad, 2020). According to Shuayb et al. (2014), the RACE policies did not improve the accreditation of NFE.

Furthermore, Shuayb and Hammoud (2020) state that the education quality is better in the morning shifts where Lebanese students are enrolled. The report continues that teachers from the afternoon shifts are often underqualified (Shuayb & Hammoud, 2020).

Due to the lack of quality and infrastructure in the public education system, RACE II aims to improve these issues and further increase education access of vulnerable and refugee children (MEHE, n.d.). Considering the Beirut blast that destroyed many schools in the

city (Abouzeid et al., 2020) and the expected severe impact of the COVID-19 related school closures, the RACE II reforms will be indispensable.

The UNRWA proceeded similarly to accommodate the incoming refugees from Syrian. When the refugee crisis started, around 6'500 additional Palestinian students from Syria arrived in Lebanon; due to this, the UNRWA started to introduce second shifts in 2013 (UNRWA, n.d.-a). Since the start of the refugee crisis, some UNRWA programs work together with non-profit agencies to extend their program, including psychosocial support and other specific services for traumatized children (Chaaban et al., 2016).

4.2.3 Summary

Lebanon is committed and obliged to provide quality education to every child. However, challenges are faced in coordinating the EiE response due to the large influx of refugees and the fragile education system (INEE, 2014). On a positive note, the program RACE has increased the enrollment of Syrian children and strengthened the collaboration between the MEHE, NGOs, and UN agencies.

On the other hand, Shuayb et al. (2014) emphasize that the MEHE needs to accredit NFE to give more Syrian refugee children a chance. Furthermore, Shuayb and Hammoud (2020) emphasize that even if Syrian children can access school in Lebanon, their education is not connected to workforce and society participation. This is due to denying civic and social rights to refugees (Shuayb & Hammoud, 2020).

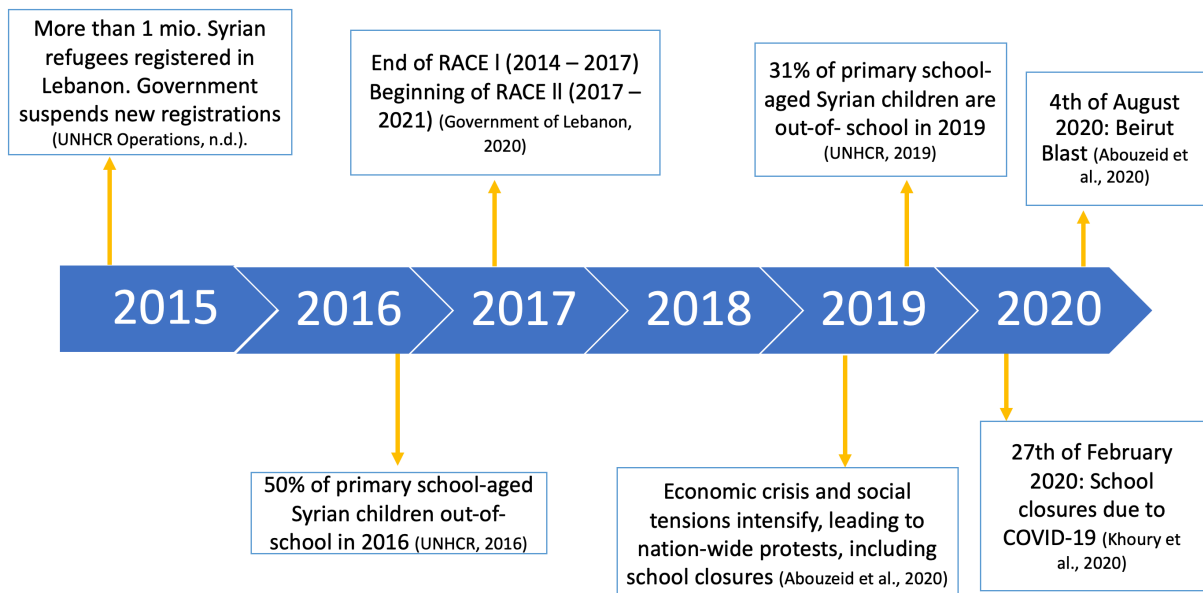
According to an evidence paper of the INEE, prior to COVID-19, the economic crisis forced some Lebanese families to send their children to public schools because they cannot afford the private schools' fees anymore. Therefore, Lebanese students were prioritized for the second shift, leading to the increasing exclusion of refugee students (INEE, 2021).

Moreover, in fall 2019, there were anti-government protests nationwide due to Lebanon's socioeconomic situation, leading to school closures (INEE, 2021). Shortly after, the first case of COVID-19 was discovered in the country. Then, the Beirut blast led to the destruction of over 160 schools and thereby affected more than 80'000 students (Hatch, 2020).

The timeline in figure 4 gives a rough idea of the overlapping crises that Lebanon has been facing, from the refugee crisis to an economic recession, political turbulence, and lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic. These issues are mentioned repeatedly as according to

key informants in Lebanon “it is difficult to separate the impact of school closures from the countries overlapping crises” (INEE, 2021, p. 40). Furthermore, each crisis somehow affects the education of children, directly or indirectly.

Figure 4. Timeline of Overlapping Crises in Lebanon 2015 – 2020



Source: Own illustration

5 Findings

In the following chapter, the findings of the research question will be presented. The chapter is divided into three parts in line with the three research questions. The first part aims to provide an overview of Lebanon's educational policy response. The second part will analyze how the pandemic-related school closures impact the learning of children. This will be done by looking at past evidence. Lastly, measurements of SEL in crisis settings will be provided.

Each part will be concluded with key findings that will be used in the discussion to outline the key observations and their commonalities.

5.1 Educational Policy Responses to COVID-19

As the previous chapter has shown, Lebanon's educational situation was already challenging a year ago, and COVID-19 has only worsened the circumstances. The government decided on the 27th of February to close all schools and advocated the same to all organizations that provide NFE in Lebanon (Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon, 2020). The ensuring of health led to a large disruption of education. According to a report from the Lebanese American University and the Centre for Lebanese Studies, approximately 1.3 million students of public, private, and UNRWA schools and 30'000 children of NFE were impacted by the school closures in Lebanon (Moghli & Shuayb, 2020).

According to an article on Arab News, the Lebanese schools opened after the summer break for a few weeks. However, schools had to close again shortly after due to increasing COVID-19 cases (Houssari, 2020b).

5.1.1 Public Schools

The following information is provided by the Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon, an integral part of the UNHCR Crisis Response Plan. The MEHE of Lebanon responded with distance learning policies focusing on three paths (Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon, 2020, p. 2):

1. **Television:** Mainly used for awareness campaigns or online classes with a primary focus on students who have final exams.
2. **Online Platform:** Either through the platform launched by MEHE (see further below) or through communication apps such as WhatsApp or Telegram, which are mostly used to access vulnerable children, including refugee children.

3. **Paper-based:** Another method that was mainly used to reach vulnerable children.

Furthermore, the MEHE gave teachers guidance and direction to focus their work on three main parts during the distance learning phase (Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon, 2020, p. 2).

1. “Preparing and disseminating lessons
2. Following up with learners on homework
3. Grading and reporting back”

Two months after the initial school closures, the MEHE introduced an online platform for teachers and pupils with various content, including tools for assigning, assessing, and planning homework. The platform was an initiative for digital learning and included five main parts: “TV sessions, assignments, digital library, live online classes, collaboration with teachers and friends” (Moghli & Shuayb, 2020, p. 9). The platform is called “Digital Learning Initiative” and can be found under the following link: <https://dl.crdp.org>. It is available in English, Arabic, and French. The MEHE declared that they want to use the website as an initial step for a general curriculum reform in the near future (Moghli & Shuayb, 2020).

According to a report from the Centre of Lebanese Studies and the Lebanese American University, the website is open-source and available for everyone (Moghli & Shuayb, 2020). However, when visiting the website in March 2021, a login or registration is necessary to receive access to the learning content. The following is written on the website: “Student accounts are only available for registered students in Lebanese public and private schools for the current academic year.” (MEHE & CRDP, n.d.). Therefore, it can be expected that students that attend NFE have not received any registration information for the platform and, as a result, cannot access it.

As stated in an evidence paper of the INEE (2021), schools were not prepared to switch to online learning because of lacking capacity and expertise. “Some schools are just forwarding YouTube videos according to a key informant” (INEE, 2021, p. 41).

The Inter-Agency report informs about the deficiencies of the distance learning plan. Namely, that many students have difficulties in accessing online learning because of daily power cuts in Lebanon. The report continues with the problematic situation of caregivers that, due to the school closures, have to take over the teachers’ role while struggling with increasing economic pressure. Lastly, the paper-based methods, which are mainly used

to reach vulnerable students, got increasingly difficult to execute because of movement restrictions and curfews in Lebanon (Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon, 2020).

5.1.2 Refugee Situation

The report continues to inform that the department of the MEHE that deals with refugee education did not communicate the consequences of the school closures for Syrian children that visit the second shifts at public schools. Furthermore, it was criticized that the MEHE did not consider the refugees' situation when planning the distance learning tools, which means the fact that many refugee children do not have access to the internet or an electronic device such as a smartphone, a tablet, or a computer (Moghli & Shuayb, 2020).

International aid agencies, education unions, and engaged teachers are trying to fill the gap by arranging classes via television, assisting parents via phone calls, hand assignments to pupils, and staying in touch with them. Some organizations have arranged phone cards or tablets for refugee and vulnerable children to increase their access to online learning tools (Moghli & Shuayb, 2020).

In a blog post written by Hussain Jawad, a public-school headmaster and the president of public primary school teachers of Lebanon, similar issues regarding the policy response for refugee children are described. According to Mr. Jawad, the MEHE has not stated what happens to the refugee children that visit second shifts at public schools. He added that second shift teachers did not get any payment during the school closures (Jawad, 2020).

Despite this negative news, Mr. Jawad mentions that education unions in Lebanon are doing their best to provide these students with learning material during the lockdown, for example, by distributing paper-based materials. Due to these achievements, around 50% of refugee children that attend public schools now have access to distance education. Unfortunately, this still leaves a large number of public-school children without access to distance learning. The main barriers are said to be the non-existent assistance of the government and a shortage of infrastructure (Jawad, 2020).

Teachers have come up with ideas to solve the power cut issue, such as a platform that can be entered offline. Moreover, they have asked for payments to cover internet fees for vulnerable children (Moghli & Shuayb, 2020). A report from the Beirut office of the UN stated that the Government of Lebanon offered vulnerable communities free internet

bundles so that more children and teachers receive access to the internet and online learning (UNESCO Beirut Office, 2020). However, no further evidence on this was found in any other report so far.

5.1.3 Non-Formal Education

According to the Inter-Agency Coordination report, many organizations that provide NFE to refugee children relied on paper-based methods instead of online learning. However, with movement restrictions due to the pandemic, this method was getting more demanding to fulfill. To make sure that the gap between formal and NFE does not further increase, Lebanon's education sector, together with its partners, formulated a short-term response plan to assist organizations that deliver NFE to displaced and vulnerable children. Its target group is, among others, the children that visited the NFE programs under the RACE 2 plan before the outbreak of the pandemic (Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon, 2020).

The response includes four main principles (Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon, 2020, p. 3):

1. "Safeguarding the right of education for all and ensuring equity and equality, especially for the most vulnerable;
2. Promoting the health, safety, and well-being of families, learners and teachers as a priority during the crisis period;
3. Ensuring the continuity of learning through distance learning solutions and modalities;
4. Strengthening the support to, and coordination among, Education Sector partners."

The overall goals of the short-term response are to provide support for distance learning, child well-being, and health awareness through various activities (Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon, 2020).

According to the Inter-Agency Coordination, the education sector has provided indirect and direct interventions as a response. The direct intervention means that field staff of NGOs will provide students with learning materials for the following week either via WhatsApp messenger, SMS, or direct phone calls. When choosing the material supplied to students, the field staff was obliged to make sure that it follows the Lebanese curriculum and covers all core subjects. Furthermore, the material had to be adapted to

the students' age and to their SEL development Indirectly, the staff contacts their students each week to monitor their learning process and assist with follow-up questions. Daily routines provide a structure for the students and their families, giving them a sense of normalcy during these unusual times (Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon, 2020).

According to Conto et al. (2020), at the beginning of May 2020, a survey was conducted in Lebanon's NFE centers to monitor their response to the pandemic. 46 out of 48 NFE centers confirmed to provide remote learning. A large majority of teachers used YouTube or Akelius, which is an online provider for language learning.

In view of the internet issue of vulnerable students, many teachers came up with solutions such as providing students with wireless hot spots. Furthermore, the engagement of parents was considered as a key factor for the successful learning outcomes of students. Therefore, many NFE teachers stayed in daily contact with parents via Zoom or WhatsApp (Conto et al., 2020).

A report of the INEE further highlights the importance of caregivers when it comes to remote learning. As long as schools are closed, the education that children receive is largely dependent on caregivers. Therefore, educators should see parents as partners and provide them with as much information as possible. The report states that this was easier to fulfill in the NFE centers (INEE, 2021).

5.1.4 Private Schools

According to an article in the Arab Weekly, private schools have an advancement over public schools as they have better infrastructure than public schools, especially in the availability of electronic devices and technological infrastructure. Therefore, they can better implement online learning (Kadi, 2020).

However, an article on Arab News from May 2020 announces that private schools may soon be forced to shut down due to the economic crisis Lebanon is facing (Houssari, 2020a). Boutros Azar, who is the coordinator of the Association of Private Education in Lebanon, stated the following (para. 2, 16): "If the economic situation continues, private schools will be forced to closed down for good, a move that will affect more than 700'000 students and 59'000 teachers (...) Some families are unable to pay the rest of the dues for the current year either because their breadwinners were fired (...), while others do not want to pay because schools remain closed due to the pandemic" (Houssari, 2020a).

He also highlights that many teachers have not received parts of their salaries in the first half of 2020 (Houssari, 2020a).

If private schools have to close due to the economic crisis, is it likely going to further exclude Syrian refugee students from the public schools.

5.1.5 UNRWA Schools

As stated by the UNRWA, they have responded to the pandemic according to the regulations of the MEHE and therefore, closed all educational facilities in mid-March. The agency has much experience in the field of EiE and has already implemented programs for children that cannot access school physically in the past in some regions (UNRWA, 2020). Therefore, they mainly adapted their EiE approach to the COVID-19 pandemic (Moghli & Shuayb, 2020).

The UNRWA has a range of materials in text, online, and video prior to the pandemic under the umbrella term Self-Learning Program. The program also includes training and counseling for teachers. The current priorities of UNRWA are to adjust the program to each region and needs of students and to make sure that all Palestinian refugee students have access to the material. Internet connection and the availability of electronic devices remain a challenge for many households (UNRWA, 2020).

Additionally, the UNRWA wants to extend psychosocial support during the pandemic to ensure the well-being of Palestinian children. Assistance will be provided to caregivers and teachers to support their students and children during school closures. To safeguard the appropriate hygiene and health behaviors, teachers are asked to provide awareness training for students (UNRWA, 2020).

5.1.6 Summary

The MEHE has responded to the pandemic-related school closures with remote learning, mainly in the form of online learning. The pandemic reveals the weaknesses of the Lebanese education system. Refugee and vulnerable students face particular difficulties accessing remote learning due to a lack of internet and electronic devices. However, despite the overlapping crises faced in Lebanon, the MEHE, NGOs, and education agencies are doing their best to provide all students with new and innovative learning methods.

5.2 COVID-19 and Learning

COVID-19 has led to school closures worldwide to avoid the spread of the virus and has, as a result, disrupted the education of millions of students worldwide. In 2020, most students lost one term of school, if not more. In Lebanon alone, 1.3 million students were impacted by the educational disruption, and the school closures had substantial implications on the student's everyday lives and their learning process (Moghli & Shuayb, 2020).

The extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic impacts educational facilities worldwide is extraordinary and unprecedented. At the time of writing this thesis, it was too early to find enough evidence of the pandemic's full impact on the SEL outcomes of children. School closures on such a large scale have never happened in the past; however, there have been situations where educational interruptions were necessary before (Conto et al., 2020).

The chapter will start by looking at past evidence on summer breaks and learning losses, then the impact of economic shocks on learning will be outlined and applied to Lebanon. Next, a look at mitigation strategies will be taken. Then, the link between unprecedented school closures and learning will be evaluated by monitoring past research. Lastly, three papers that calculated the potential COVID-19 learning losses will be outlined. Based on the collected evidence, hypotheses to the Lebanon case will be drawn.

5.2.1 Summer Breaks and Learning Losses

Research about learning losses during the summer break can help make comparisons and identify students' learning patterns when they are in or out of school. Summer breaks are planned school closures and do not have the additional impacts connected to COVID-19, such as the economic burden of households or traumatic stress of children. However, when viewing the pandemic's educational disruption as an extended summer break, some insights can be provided on how educational breaks impact the learning children's learning achievements.

Depending on the source, the actual degree of learning losses during the break varies. According to Kuhfeld and Tarasawa (2020), there are three main trends on which researchers agree:

1. Learning decreases during the summer break

2. The learning loss is more prominent for mathematics than for reading
3. The older the children are, the more significant the loss.

Kuhfeld and Tarasawa (2020) used the summer learning loss data to predict the learning loss resulting from COVID-19 with the assumption that schools closed in March 2020 and opened in the fall of the same year. The forecasts were calculated based on students from the United States from years 3 to 8 and focused on mathematics and reading. The results of Kuhfeld and Tarasawa (2020) predict that students would return in the fall with a 30% learning loss in reading and a 50% learning loss in mathematics (Kuhfeld & Tarasawa, 2020).

Most research about learning losses during summer holidays comes from Western countries; therefore, it is worth looking at a study from India for comparison. Banerji's (2020) research observed learning losses and learning gains in India's elementary schools and draws hypotheses for the COVID-19 crisis. The study mainly focuses on reading skills. According to Banerji (2020), before the pandemic, the learning levels of children that attend public schools in India were already low, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The study agrees to some extent with Kuhfeld and Tarasawa (2020), as it found a learning loss during the summer break, which predicts that the impact of COVID-19 will be considerable. Furthermore, Banerji (2020) suggested that children who already had reading difficulties were more likely to fall behind during the break than children who had more profound skills. Lastly, Banerji (2020) looked at learning gains. In 2019, India's government introduced a three-month intervention in which schools implemented a focused and strict approach to teaching the children basic skills such as reading. The data from this period proves that the children could learn as much in three months as during a year of schooling when specific programs with a focused effort are introduced in schools (Banerji, 2020).

The evidence from the Indian and the United States studies indicated that COVID-19 will have a considerable impact on children's educational outcomes due to an expected learning loss. With the additional impacts of the pandemic on children and their caregivers, such as job losses, stress, and the loss of social connections, the outcome can be expected to be worse. According to Banerji (2020) the learning loss will be more substantial for vulnerable children.

5.2.2 Economic Shocks

Other past experiences with school closures include natural disasters, extreme weather conditions, teacher strikes, or epidemic outbreaks. According to Conto et al. (2020), all of these situations were linked to learning losses in the past. Additionally, natural disasters and epidemics are often linked to economic shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic is (Conto et al., 2020). In the following part, a first look at how economic shock impacts learning will be provided.

Economic shocks bring further effects that impact education and learning. On the one hand, an economic shock often has a negative impact on public spending on education. On the other hand, it increases poverty, which has a negative effect on children's learning and school enrollment rates. Especially for vulnerable households in low-income countries, poverty is linked to a rise in school dropouts (Conto et al., 2020).

Azevedo et al. (2020) add that in countries where the education system relies mainly on private education, as in Lebanon, economic shocks are particularly threatening to the system. This is because families cannot pay the costs anymore for the private schools, which puts additional pressure on a public system that lacks money (Azevedo, Hasan, Goldemberg, Iqbal, & Geven, 2020). As described in chapter 5.1.4., this is currently happening in Lebanon (INEE, 2021).

Economic Shocks and School Enrollment

Lundberg and Wuermli (2012) outline a phenomenon called the income effect, which describes the impact of economic shocks (e.g., income loss) on school enrollment rates. An effect that is more common in poor communities and households, and it reports that if a family or community experiences an income shock, the enrollment rates of their children are likely to decrease. This is either due to cutting costs or increasing labor supply (Lundberg & Wuermli, 2012).

Considering the fact that Lebanon's economic crisis got exacerbated during the pandemic, more families will live in poverty which is likely to increase dropouts, child labor, and child marriages. This hypothesis is supported by the newest findings of the VASyR 2020. The number of Syrian households in Lebanon that live in extreme poverty has increased by 34% during 2020, from 55% to 89%. This means that now 9 out of 10 Syrian households in Lebanon live in extreme poverty. The report also shows that child labor has doubled during 2020, from 2.6 to 4.4 percentage (UNHCR, 2021).

The number of married Syrian refugee girls under 18 years old was consistent at 27% (UNHCR, 2019). According to a UN report, these numbers were around four times lower among Syrians before the Syrian conflict, and the refugee crisis started. The numbers prove that displacement and poverty drive families to marry their young daughters. By making sure that girls have access to education, child marriage rates can be reduced (UNFPA, 2017).

On the other hand, the drop in income could also lead to a cut in the costs of individual households. Caregivers have to pay school fees, transportation costs, and school supplies. Therefore, one could suggest that a cut in the income could lead caregivers to pull their children out of school (Lundberg & Wuermli, 2012). However, in the refugee setting in Lebanon and the COVID-19 crisis, this is not very likely, as most refugee children are enrolled in public or NFE where schools' fees are little to none and transportation costs are no longer necessary due to remote schooling. Nevertheless, it is likely that children cannot follow the online learning because the household cannot afford electronic devices or internet access.

According to the VASyR report 2020, only 17% of Syrian refugee children between 6 and 14 were able to continue learning due to the pandemic. A lack of internet access was the most common reason for not being able to continue learning (UNHCR, 2021).

COVID-19 impacts almost all aspects of people's lives, and it also affects the economy all over the world, which exacerbates poverty. Although that past experiences with school closures, such as epidemics and natural disasters, also correlate with economic declines, the extent to which COVID-19 impacts health and the economy is historically extraordinary, and it is described as a twin shock (Azevdeo, Hasan, Goldemberg, Iqbal, & Geven, 2020). The twin shock should be kept in mind while evaluating the following past experiences with school closures.

5.2.3 Experiences of Past Unprecedented School Closures

5.2.3.1 Ebola Epidemic Case

From all past experiences with school closures, the Ebola epidemic example may come closest to the COVID-19 situation. The Ebola virus was mainly present in three West African countries, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea, in 2014 - 2015 (Conto et al., 2020). The extent of Ebola was tremendously smaller than COVID-19; however, there are some similarities.

The epidemic led to a decline in economic activity in the region. Due to pressure on the health system, schools closed in all three affected countries leading to the disruption of education of approximately five million children. The closures ranged from five to nine months (Conto et al., 2020). Because Ebola was an infectious virus as COVID-19 is thereby, individuals with symptoms had to quarantine, which led to stigmas and increased mental health issues of the affected. Only a very small number of schools offered learning by TV or radio during the Ebola epidemic. However, due to the fact that most families in the affected countries live in extreme poverty, children were not likely to access remote learning (Santos & Novelli, 2017).

In general, the impact of Ebola was not well monitored with data; however, a few studies proved the learning loss of affected children, as displayed on the table below from Conto et al. (2020).

Table 2. Indicators on the Education Crisis during Ebola in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone

Indicators	Guinea	Liberia	Sierra Leone
Duration of school closures	5 months	7 months	9 months
Learning hours lost per child	486	582	780
Number of children affected	2.4 million	900 thousand	1.8 million
Children who did not return to school when it reopened	7%	25%	13%

Source: Own illustration adopted from (Conto et al., 2020, p. 8)

According to Conto et al. (2020), children lost the motivation to study during the school closures and therefore, a significant drop in the time spent studying was observed. Moreover, many children had to help at home or generate earnings to support their families during the epidemic. The number of children who dropped out of school is particularly alarming. A fourth of all affected children in Liberia did not return to school after the epidemic, as shown on the table (Conto et al., 2020).

5.2.3.2 H1N1 Pandemic Case

Amorim et al. (2020) studied the impacts of the H1N1 pandemic (also known as Swine flu) on children's learning outcomes in Brazil. Based on these, they made assumptions about the potential impacts of COVID-19 on learning.

The H1N1 pandemic was appearing at the beginning of 2009 and lasted approximately until the end of summer 2010. H1N1 was mainly present in North- and South America, and because the infection rates were much lower than with COVID-19, there were no quarantines. Moreover, the school closures were of much shorter duration and only in particularly affected regions (Amorim, Piza, & Lautharte, 2020). Therefore, when drawing a hypothesis of this study's key findings, it should be remembered that the H1N1 pandemic had much smaller impacts on everyday life and presumably on learning outcomes than the COVID-19 pandemic.

The schools only closed in certain districts of the municipality of São Paulo. Therefore, it was possible to have a comparison group who visited school regularly. According to Amorim et al. (2020), due to H1N1, some schools in São Paulo (Brazil) extended the winter break by two to three weeks, which impacted more than five million students. The study tested the learning outcomes for two core subjects, mathematics and Portuguese, focusing on the 5th grade. According to the study, the holiday break extension led to a negative outcome in both subjects, with particular significant falls in mathematics scores. The decrease in math scores was equivalent to two months of learning lost, although the break lasted only two to three weeks. Moreover, the study discovered that the impact was more severe for vulnerable students (Amorim et al., 2020).

The children of the São Paulo study were not offered any remote learning options during that time. Therefore, online learning during COVID-19 could mitigate some of the negative impacts if it can be accessed. Amorim et al. (2020) emphasize that during the H1N1 pandemic, the fear of infection and the social distancing scale was not as large as during COVID-19. The fear of infection can lead to more restrictions of students regarding free time activities e.g., social distancing and increase the risk of not only academic learning, but also the development of children on a social and emotional level (Amorim et al., 2020).

5.2.3.3 Pakistan Earthquake Case

In 2005 an earthquake hit Pakistan, which led to extensive regional destructions. Many schools in the affected region were destroyed, and most of them closed for an average of 14 weeks. Furthermore, the earthquake led to the death of approximately 75'000 people, with many more injured, and almost three million people lost their homes (Andrabi, Daniels, & Das, 2020).

A study was conducted that identified the medium-term impacts of the disaster on human capital by comparing households that live closer and further to the earthquake's fault line. The authors looked at how cash compensation helped limit the negative impacts and which characteristics of caregivers can help mitigate children's learning losses (Andrabi et al., 2020).

The households that lived closer to the earthquake are the group that received disaster and relief aid to help them reconstruct their homes. Firstly, Andrabi et al. (2020) identified that four years after the earthquake, both groups were equally off regarding housing infrastructure (Andrabi et al., 2020).

Coming to education, there was no data that showed a decrease in school enrollment rates for the group that lived closer to the earthquake. However, there was a learning gap difference found between the two groups. Children in all age groups (3–15) who lived closer to the earthquake scored substantially lower in cognitive tests than the counter group. The identified learning gap was equal to approximately 1.5 school grades. According to the authors, if the gap accumulates during later stages in life, it will lead to an income loss of 15% or more (Andrabi et al., 2020).

Lastly, the study proved that the earthquake led to increasing inequalities in the region. Precisely, it identified that children whose mothers finished elementary education were kept from the earthquake's negative impacts on cognitive skills. Meaning that vulnerable households experience greater learning losses even when receiving financial aid (Andrabi et al., 2020).

To summarize the past unprecedented experiences with school closures, all of them led to learning losses with a disproportionately negative effect on vulnerable students. Therefore, research indicates that the impacts of COVID-19 on children's learning will be substantial and long-lasting. However, a closer look at mitigation strategies has to be taken, as the above-described school closures were not linked to remote learning.

5.2.4 Mitigation Strategies

In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic, most governments worldwide have implemented remote learning to mitigate learning losses related to school closures. The majority of past school closures were not linked to a large scale of remote learning activities. Therefore, there is not much evidence yet if remote learning can mitigate learning losses, and the little evidence there is, provides ambiguous results.

According to Azevedo et al. (2020), some research conducted in developing countries showed that online learning could improve students' learning outcomes, particularly for students from vulnerable environments. Nevertheless, the study emphasizes that remote learning must be very well planned, coordinated, and delivered. Azevedo et al. (2020) then draw attention to the fact that most COVID-19 educational policy responses of governments were quickly developed as an emergency response plan (Azevedo et al., 2020). Therefore, it can be assumed that the responses were not well planned.

Di Pietro et al. (2020) report similar findings regarding online learning. Due to the unexpected switch to online teaching, schools and teachers did not have time to prepare and test online learning.

McKinsey conducted a survey with teachers from eight countries in 2020 to view their opinion on remote learning. Although the study was mainly limited to Western and high-income countries, its results suggested that remote learning is particularly ineffective in high-poverty schools. The results further indicate the pandemic's negative effect on educational inequalities (Chen, Dorn, Sarakatsannis, & Wiesinger, 2021).

To conclude, a blog post published by the World Bank, describes a phenomenon called the Remote Learning Paradox. This refers to the fact that "the students who are most at risk of learning losses cannot access online solutions. Globally, 60 percent of national remote learning solutions rely exclusively on online platforms. Yet, almost 47 percent of school student do not have access to the internet at home" (Aedo, Nahata, & Sabarwal, 2020). Furthermore, it highlights that offline solutions to remote learning are underestimated, although they could limit dropouts and learning losses (Aedo et al., 2020).

5.2.5 The Impact of COVID-19 on Learning

During the period of writing this thesis, three studies were considered that tried to measure the potential impacts of the COVID-19 related school closures on learning. The three papers will be shortly introduced, and according to the findings, hypotheses will be drawn on SEL outcomes of refugee and vulnerable children in Lebanon.

First, Kaffenberger (2020) used data from seven countries that range from low- to middle-income and then modeled a variety of long-term learning loss scenarios. Then, two mitigation strategies are added to the model to identify their impact. The findings showed that a three-month school closure for children in grade 3 led to a loss of a full year of

learning by the point children reach 10th grade. In her model, Kaffenberger (2020) takes the out-of-school period, and the added learning regression into account.

Coming to the mitigation strategies, with remediation, children gain six months of learning, and when combining remediation with a planned remake of the curriculum, the losses are mitigated completely (Kaffenberger, 2020). As most schools closed for longer than three months during the COVID-19 pandemic, this forecast provides insight into how much learning children on all educational levels will lose. The mitigation strategies bring some hope. However, the study emphasizes the amount of long-term planning and teacher training needed for the remediation strategy (Kaffenberger, 2020).

The second paper is based on World Bank data of 157 countries. Azevedo et al. (2020) have evaluated the impacts of COVID-19 and identified potential outcomes on learning. The study includes a variety of potentials, such as school closures of three, five, or seven months. Furthermore, Azevedo et al. (2020) take the learning that does not happen due to school closures into account and the learning that will be forgotten in the meantime. Lastly, the study considers the dropout because of economic shocks.

The findings of Azevedo et al. (2020) suggest a learning loss of 0.3 up to 0.9 years of education that will be created due to COVID-19 depending on how long the schools are effectively closed. The study goes further and predicts that because of the economic shock of the pandemic, around seven million children from primary and secondary levels will drop out. Due to the loss of education, the students will face a decrease in their future salary, which ranges from approximately \$6'500 up to \$25'000, calculated over a full career. Additionally, the study emphasizes the increase in educational inequalities due to the pandemic and the significant setback of reaching a variety of SDGs by 2030 (Azevedo et al., 2020).

A paper from the Research Centre of the EU Commission monitored the impacts of COVID-19 on education, based on existing literature and recent international datasets. It resulted in the general expectation that most students will undergo a learning loss during the school closures even if there are online learning offers. This is due to three main reasons; (1) most learners tend to spend less time studying during the school closures, (2) students are likely to feel anxious and pressured because of the pandemic, which harms their concentration levels. (3) due to the lack of direct contact and accountability during online learning and teaching, students feel less motivated to engage in the lectures and while studying (Di Pietro et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the study finds that vulnerable students are likely to experience a more significant learning loss than their peers, leading to socioeconomic learning inequality. The reasons for this can be divided into four main categories: (1) Non-financial parental support, (2) financial parental support, (3) school attended, (4) students' digital skills (Di Pietro et al., 2020).

Each category has various subcategories. For example, non-financial support could be that parents with lower socioeconomic status have less time to help their children learning due to work. Financial resources include the availability of digital tools and the learning environment at home. Vulnerable children often live in overcrowded homes and have few electronic devices available. Next, the school itself can be a reason for more educational inequality due to less digital equipment for example. The last factor refers to the child's digital skills because children from disadvantaged backgrounds are often less familiar with digital devices (Di Pietro et al., 2020).

Applying the knowledge of the three studies to the Lebanon case, a learning loss can be expected and dropouts of the most vulnerable students. Moreover, evidence suggests that COVID-19 will increase educational inequalities. However, while it is true that many vulnerable children in Lebanon cannot access online learning due to a lack of internet, it should not be neglected that many educators and caregivers in Lebanon are trying their best to reach all children with learning material.

5.2.6 Social Emotional Learning and Well-Being of Children

Even if remote learning can mitigate learning losses to some extent, the social aspects of visiting schools physically must be considered. According to Lundberg and Wuermli (2012), the development that children experience from 6 – 12 years in a school setting is highly relevant as they are now embedded in a formal school system. At school, they experience routines and daily interactions with members outside of their family (teachers and peers). Children learn various SEL skills during this period, such as self-awareness, planful behavior, interpreting the social behavior of others, and many more. The development of these skills can be a predictor for later achievements in life, such as employability and certain behavioral aspects (Lundberg & Wuermli, 2012). Due to school closures and restricted free time activities, children only have limited access to interact socially and practice SEL skills.

This suggests a negative impact on children's SEL development during the lockdown as children lose daily routines and social exchange with peers and teachers. The pandemic's circumstances are already demanding for children, which only increases the need for SEL competencies to help them handle the additional stress and the uncertain situation.

Moghli and Shuayb (2020) studied the impact of school closures and the lockdown on the children's well-being in Lebanon. Although the sample size was small, some main trends were clearly identified; it was found that children's well-being and satisfaction across all educational facilities and levels had decreased. Students reported feeling more stressed and missing the interaction with peers and teachers during the lockdown (Moghli & Shuayb, 2020). Other reports have shown that children's mental conditions all over the world have worsened during the pandemic (Conto et al., 2020). This makes SEL more important than ever to support children in dealing with the pandemic.

As stated in an INEE report, hotline calls due to domestic violence have increased by 184% in Lebanon. Even though it is estimated that the majority of affected individuals do not report the abuse. The report continues that the need for psychosocial support of children has almost doubled since the beginning of the pandemic (INEE, 2021).

5.2.7 Summary

The majority of recent studies about the pandemic's extent on children and learning agree on the negative impact on existing educational inequality. This is because school closures create even more unequal learning opportunities. According to a UN report, vulnerable children are likely to be more heavily impacted by the negative effects of COVID-19 and the learning loss. Therefore, they are at a higher risk of falling behind on cognitive terms. Educational inequalities are expected to rise between and throughout countries (UN, 2020b).

Distance and online learning tools minimize the learning losses; however, they cannot mitigate it completely. Furthermore, distance learning cannot be offered to all students and not on the same academic level. The UN report states that only 30% of low-income countries have launched a learning platform for their pupils, compared to much higher percentages in developed countries (UN, 2020b).

However, not only cognitive skills are unequally impacted by COVID-19, but also the emotional well-being of students. The loss of school-based relationships and daily routines leads to lower well-being of children. Vulnerable children are more exposed to

psychological stress at home due to overcrowded living situations or higher stress levels of caregivers. Parents of vulnerable children are more likely to struggle with existential insecurities that lead to increased stress levels (Di Pietro et al., 2020).

5.3 Measuring Social and Emotional Learning in Low-Resource Settings

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, there are increasing studies that prove the positive effects of school-based SEL programs in crisis settings. As a result, many tools have been developed that evaluate these programs and measure SEL outcomes. However, most measurements have been developed in high-resource settings and in the Western part of the world (3EA, n.d.).

According to a report from Save the Children, measurement tools that are used in high-resource and high-income countries often cannot be adjusted to be used in crisis and low-resource contexts. Furthermore, measurement tools for children are often illustrated with pictures and scenarios that need to be translated and adapted to the cultural context. This is a costly and time-consuming process. Emergency and low-resource settings need measurements that are flexible and quickly adapted. Lastly, many existing measurements have strict copyrights and, thereby, high expenses to be used (D'Sa, 2019).

However, with the rising popularity of SEL programs in crisis-affected regions, there is also an increase of measurement tools for these contexts (3EA, n.d.). Some SEL measurements that have been developed for crisis settings, such as in Lebanon, will be shortly introduced in this chapter.

5.3.1 Measurement Libraries

5.3.1.1 INEE Library

The three measurements that will be introduced in more details were found in the Measurement Library of the INEE that can be accessed through the following link: <https://inee.org/measurement-library>

The International Rescue Committee and the Global Ties for Children (an international research center from the New York University) introduced the library together with eight research institutes that work in the Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey region for Evidence for Action. Evidence for Action, also written as 3EA, aims to find evidence on what improves the well-being and learning of children in crisis settings (3EA, n.d.).

The library is a resource for stakeholders that work in the field of EiE. However, its access is open to everyone. The main goal of the library is to provide data and evidence about the learning of children and the impact of implemented programs in crisis settings. This will help researchers and practitioners to make evidence-based decisions and policies (INEE, n.d.).

5.3.1.2 *Middle East, North Africa and Turkey Measurement Inventory*

The Global Ties for Children have put together an additional measurement library as a resource for children’s holistic learning and development. The library can be filtered for many relevant factors such as age, country, language, refugees, and many more. The library can be accessed through the following link: <https://datastudio.google.com/reporting/1rr-tGUQiyLc5A545bJPiTSDOAGfxzWd/page/cwcVB>

5.3.1.3 *RAND Assessment Finder*

Another helpful library is the Education Assessment Finder compiled by the RAND Corporation, a research organization that tackles public policy issues (RAND Corporation, n.d.-a). The Finder can be filtered for grade level, competency, method, time, respondent, and more. It can be accessed via the following link: <https://www.rand.org/education-and-labor/projects/assessments/tool.html#q=>

When filtering, there is a variety of measurements available that only take a little time and effort and are available for free. However, a disadvantage of this library is that many tools were exclusively tested in the United States so far, and many of them are only available in English (RAND Corporation, n.d.-b).

5.3.2 Measurement 1: ISELA

The NGO Save the Children has been developing a SEL measurement tool since 2015 that was brought out in 2018. The tool is called International Social and Emotional Learning Assessment (ISELA). It is a performance- and scenario-based tool to evaluate the following SEL skills of children: Self-concept, stress management, perseverance, empathy, relationship building, and conflict resolution (D'Sa, June 2019).

Instead of using scales and rating systems (that consist of responses such as “strongly agree”, “agree”, etc.), ISELA uses descriptive scenes, drawings and activities that are driven by imagination. For example, to measure empathy and conflict resolution, children

are asked to make sense of their peers' intentions and emotions that are represented in descriptive scenes (EducationLinks, 2019).

ISELA focuses on children between 6-12 years who live in crisis-affected regions, and its main objective is to assess the effectiveness of SEL programs and to observe the SEL development of children over time. The tool was first used on Syrian refugee children in Iraq, and since then, it has been used in many other countries such as Egypt, Jordan, South Sudan, Syria, and more (D'Sa, 2019). By applying ISELA in various regions, it can help educators and researchers to find out if the SEL development of children varies by elements such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, displacement status, and other factors. The measurement tool is free of charge, feasible, and can be adjusted to various cultural and social backgrounds (D'Sa, 2019). ISELA takes around 30 minutes per child to be carried out (EducationLinks, 2019).

5.3.3 Measurement 2: SERAIS

A measurement that was developed by the International Rescue Committee in collaboration with the New York University Global Ties for Children. It is called Social Emotional Response and Information Scenario (SER AIS) and it measures basic SEL skills focusing on children in primary school (age 5-16) in crisis-affected environments.

The IRC managed a SEL based program in Lebanon for more than 3'500 Syrian refugee children in formal schools where they successfully tested SERAIS for the first time. Six theoretical scenarios are presented to the children and by asking the children questions to the scenarios, the following four types of SEL skills can be measured (3EA, n.d., p. 3):

1. **“Hostile Attribution Bias:** the tendency to interpret the behavior of other as hostile intent when it may be ambiguous or benign.
2. **Emotional Orientation:** the type and intensity of the emotions that a child would experience in a social situation: Anger, sadness, calmness.
3. **Emotional Dysregulation:** the ability to modulate the expression of intense emotions in socially challenging situations: Sadness dysregulation, anger dysregulation.
4. **Interpersonal Negotiation Strategies:** The strategies a child uses to deal with socially challenging situations. The items include seven responses that represent interpersonal negotiation strategies identified by Brion-Meisels & Selman (1984).”

The measurement is scenario-based which means that the child is presented with a scenario and then has to answer questions to it. SERAIS is on a self-reporting base meaning the child can read and answer the questions by itself, or an assessor can read the scenarios to a child. Lastly, the SERAIS measurement can be conducted on a tablet or paper-based and takes around 20 minutes per child (3EA, n.d.).

5.3.4 Measurement 3: HALDO

Another measurement tool that has been developed by Save the Children for crisis settings is the Holistic Assessment of Learning and Development Outcomes (HALDO). The tool focuses on children between 4-12 years that live in regions affected by crises and conflicts, and it measures literacy, numeracy, SEL, and executive functioning, which is the ability to remember (Krupar, 2019).

When developing the measurement, the main goal was a tool that can be used rapidly in emergencies and displacement to evaluate a variety of development domains, and that can cover a wide range of age levels at the same time (EducationLinks, 2019). When children are displaced, each pupil has different learning experiences and needs, which provides a massive challenge for educators. The results of the HALDO inform teachers about the SEL development and academic levels of children, which helps them to choose the appropriate learning level for each student. Furthermore, it helps educators to make evidence-based decisions regarding educational policies, priorities, and responses (Krupar, 2019). The main aim of HALDO is the monitoring of programs and then adapt them according to the children's needs (EducationLinks, 2019).

On table 3, an overview of the three introduced tools can be found as a summary and comparison.

Table 3. Overview of SEL Measurement Tools

Tool	ISELA	SERAIS	HALDO
What can you measure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-concept - Stress management - Perseverance - Empathy - Relationship building - Conflict resolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hostile attribution bias - Emotional orientation - Emotional dysregulation - Interpersonal negotiation strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-concept - Empathy (Literacy, numeracy, executive functioning)
Objective	Program monitoring and evaluation		Rapid response tool Program monitoring and evaluation
Type of Measure	Performance- and scenario-based	Scenario-based	Performance- and scenario-based
Self-Reporting	No, assessor needed.	Yes	No, assessor needed
Materials	Paper/pencil or tablet	Paper/pencil or tablet	No information, as the program is not fully developed yet
Time	30 minutes per child	20 minutes per child	
Costs	None		
Age	6 – 12 years	5 – 16 years	4 – 12 years
Refugee Setting	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sources	D'Sa (2019), EducationLinks (2019)	(3EA, n.d.)	Krupar (2019), EducationLinks (2019)

6 Discussion

The following chapter will briefly discuss and summarize the findings that were presented in the previous chapter. The findings will be critically questioned due to their limitations. Furthermore, the importance of the findings will be emphasized, and as a result, the red thread of the topics examined in this paper will be brought to attention.

The thesis aimed to monitor the educational policy response of Lebanon to COVID-19 and to find out how the pandemic impacts the learning of vulnerable children. Some difficulties were faced while researching the answers to the thesis questions. The challenges faced can be summarized into three main areas.

First, the pandemic is a recent phenomenon, and as a result, there is not a lot of reliable and country-specific data available yet. Second, Lebanon is still struggling with getting the pandemic under control, and its population is facing a particular strict lockdown with 24-hour curfews (BBC, 2021). The on-going and very strict lockdown continuously affect households and children in Lebanon. For example, most of the research that studied the pandemic's impact on children's learning was not considering the prolonged and strict lockdown that children in Lebanon face. Third, the research of this thesis was restricted to desk research. While this held many benefits that are outlined in the methodology chapter, it has limited deeper insights into some questions on the other hand. For example, some reports stated that Lebanon's MEHE did not consider refugees' situation when introducing the distance learning plan. However, paper-based learning methods were restricted because of lockdowns. Additionally, refugee children had little access to the internet and electronic devices. Therefore, one could argue that the MEHE's options to provide refugee children with learning materials were very limited. Expert interviews and case studies would have allowed a deeper insight and more holistic views into the topic.

Despite these challenges, given that COVID-19 is still determining many aspects of children's daily lives and is most likely going to impact education for the long-term, it makes the research questions and their answers more important than ever.

The findings to research question two suggested that the school closures will lead to a learning loss for all children with a substantial impact on vulnerable children. This is due to its disproportionately negative effect on education systems that are already unstable and students with minimal learning options at home, such as refugee children. Moreover, there is no clear evidence yet that can prove the mitigation of learning losses through

remote learning strategies unless it is very well planned and accessible to all children (Aedo et al., 2020).

However, what is clear, is that learning losses have a significant impact on children's lives in the long-term. Children who are out of school have less possibilities of entering the labor market at a later stage. There are enormous costs involved by depriving children of education as a learning crisis leads to a decrease in available human capital (Azevedo et al., 2020). Furthermore, school closures lead to a domino effect beyond education, such as economic instability, food insecurity, and increased violence and exploitation of children (UN, 2020a).

This effect is represented in the VASyR report of 2020. Not only poverty increased dramatically, but also food insecurity, child labor, child marriage, and violence (UNHCR, 2021).

Coming back to the Minimum Standards for Education, of which domain five was introduced in the theoretical framework. Currently, Lebanon's educational policy response cannot fulfill the right to education or ensure the continuity of education for all. This is because the policy response does not include all children as many vulnerable children in Lebanon cannot access online learning.

The SDGs were presented in the introduction chapter of this thesis. Considering the thesis's findings, namely the expected learning loss and dropouts of vulnerable students, indicate a dramatic setback in reaching the SDGs. Without immediate and urgent actions from policymakers, SDG four cannot be met by 2030 (UN, 2020a).

The COVID-19 pandemic could trigger change as Lebanon's government should ensure building a more resilient and inclusive post-COVID education system that includes all children. For this, political and social change is needed in Lebanon, supported by transparent policy reforms.

7 Conclusion

7.1.1 Thesis Review

The thesis's objective was to give its readers an insight into the current educational situation of refugee children living in Lebanon under the COVID-19 pandemic. This was done by monitoring the educational policy responses of Lebanon. Secondly, the impact on their learning outcomes was researched. A further aim was to present tools for measuring children's SEL in low-resource settings. The conclusion will review the thesis and highlight the key points.

As this thesis touches on a variety of topics, the introduction aims to give the reader an overview of the refugee situation in Lebanon and the challenges that the country is currently facing. Furthermore, it introduces the global education crisis due to COVID-19 and, by doing so, it points out the importance of the thesis' research questions. The introduction is followed by the methodology that emphasizes the relevancy of an extensive literature review to gain a holistic view on a broad and recent topic.

In the background chapter, the reader is provided with the information needed to grasp the roots of issues outlined in this thesis. The main issue explained is the overburden of an already fragile education system due to the large number of young people that arrived in Lebanon in a short amount of time.

The theoretical framework picks up on the issue by outlining the Lebanese education system and describing the efforts made to increase refugees' school enrollment. The framework is based on the Minimum Standards for EiE. Moreover, it defines some educational concepts and emphasizes how important SEL is for crisis-affected children.

Coming to the findings, Lebanon's MEHE quickly set up an educational response due to the school closures that included online learning and a digital platform with learning resources. However, refugees and vulnerable children face issues accessing these tools due to a lack of internet and electronic devices. Moreover, due to frequent power cuts in Lebanon, teachers and children face difficulties in online learning. Despite the issues faced, many educators and caregivers are doing their best to reach every child with remote learning activities and develop creative solutions.

By looking at the past effects of school closures, it is suggested that the effects of COVID-19 will have substantial impacts on children's learning. Particularly vulnerable children

are at a high risk of dropping out and not returning to school. The longer the schools are closed, the more profound the learning losses are. There is no clear evidence yet if remote learning can mitigate learning losses. The evidence there is, suggests that mitigation strategies must be well planned and accessible for every child. Furthermore, the pandemic has many side effects, such as social distancing or economic shocks that impact children's well-being.

Lastly, the thesis provides measurements to evaluate SEL-based programs in crisis environments.

While the theory suggests that a secure learning environment is essential to develop children on a social and emotional level, the practice cannot always implement this. In Lebanon, there are children left behind with no access to education and possibly traumatized by leaving their home country. Particularly in these situations, education and schools are crucial because it provides vulnerable children with the needed stability and a safe environment.

Lebanon was in a difficult state before COVID-19, and the pandemic has exacerbated the country's issues. Vulnerable children are particularly impacted by increasingly losing access to education which puts them at a higher risk of exploitation. This can leave children with no hope as education builds the basis for a better future.

To conclude, the pandemic is very likely to further increase inequalities between countries and throughout countries as the disruption of education has more far-reaching impacts on vulnerable and displaced children.

7.1.2 Recommendation for Further Research

Further areas for research were identified due to the limitations of this thesis. The limitations are outlined in the methodology and the discussion chapters.

In addition to the desk research of Lebanon's educational policy response, it would be advantageous to conduct expert interviews or case studies. These methods would allow an in-depth and multi-faceted understanding of Lebanon's educational policy response. Regarding the policy response, data on specific groups, such as refugee children, is often not available, suggesting that more research is needed in this area.

At the point of finishing the thesis, it was too early to evaluate the full impact of COVID-19 on children's learning outcomes. As soon as more data is available, it would be

important to critically evaluate the thesis's findings to research question two. As the findings to research question two are mainly based on literature and predictions made on pre-virus data.

Furthermore, it was observed that surveys conducted with children, teachers, and parents during the lockdown are available from high-income countries, mainly the United States and European countries. At the same time, there is little data available from other regions, which indicates a need for further research in this area.

Lastly, little is known so far if mitigation strategies such as remote learning help prevent learning losses. More research in this area can help to design strategies in a way to be most effective.

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