SYRIAN REFUGEES' EDUCATION IN LEBANON: POLICIES, CHALLENGES, AND PATHWAYS FORWARD

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Abstract

This study critically examines Lebanon's response to the Syrian refugee crisis through an analysis of the Reaching All Children with Education (RACE) I and II policy frameworks. Grounded in a Foucauldian understanding of power, knowledge, and discourse, and drawing on Fairclough's three-dimensional model for critical discourse analysis, it analyzes policy texts to explore how RACE I and II construct the subject positions of Syrian refugee learners and how social inequalities are addressed or reproduced. The findings identify five key discursive mechanisms: the erasure of refugees' agency, governance through technocratic rationalities, the relocation of responsibility, the normalization of temporariness and crisis, and the depoliticization of inequality. Together, these mechanisms reveal a form of humanitarian–technocratic governance in which authority is exercised indirectly and rendered non-political. The study contributes to the literature by unpacking the role of language in organizing power and responsibility within refugee education policy in Lebanon.

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The decision to examine education policies issued by the Lebanese government in relation to Syrian refugees was shaped by both personal and political experiences. As a Lebanese citizen and secular social activist, and as someone who participated in and witnessed the October 2019 demonstrations, I have long been attentive to questions of inequality, power, and access to education. I have also witnessed the struggles faced by Syrian refugees in Lebanon in accessing public and non-formal education. These experiences motivated me to pursue a research project that examines how power, knowledge, and discourse shape educational inequality within a sectarian system that affects both Lebanese citizens and refugee communities. I am especially grateful to Dr. Asim for valuing this vision and supporting me as I developed it into a research project.

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Introduction

The global refugee crisis has reached unprecedented levels, with 43.4 million refugees recorded at the end of 2023, nearly half of whom are under the age of 18 (UNHCR, 2024). Around 20% of these refugees are hosted by the world's 46 least developed countries, which are expected to carry this responsibility despite collectively contributing only 1.3% to global GDP (UNHCR, 2023). Of the nearly 15 million school-age refugee children, half remain out of school. As the number of displaced individuals continues to rise each year, an increasing proportion of children are being deprived of their right to education (UNHCR, 2023). Protracted conflicts, lasting an average of 17 years (Adelman et al., 2019), exacerbate this crisis, causing widespread destruction of civilian infrastructures, including schools. For instance, Syria's civil war led to the destruction of 7,000 schools (UNICEF, 2018). With over half of the children missing out on education living in conflict-affected regions, the issue of education in emergencies has gained growing attention from policymakers, UNICEF, UNHCR, and other international organizations. These groups increasingly recognize that modern conflicts strip children of their fundamental right to education, making the provision of education in conflict zones a critical policy priority.

Lebanon, hosting over 1.5 million Syrian refugees since 2011 (UNHCR, 2023), has made efforts to provide education to refugee children. However, these efforts have fallen short of adequately addressing their needs, deepening social inequalities between Syrian refugees and their Lebanese counterparts (Abu Moghli, 2022). The research study will critically examine the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education's response to the crisis, focusing on emergency education policies and other initiatives through two seminal policy documents, and explore if and how they may perpetuate social inequalities. The study aims to inform future policymaking to address the educational challenges faced by displaced youth during crises.

Research Context and Background

The Syrian uprising in March 2011 emerged as part of the broader Arab Spring movements demanding democratic reforms across the Middle East (Khan & Khan, 2017). The initially peaceful demonstrations were met with violent repression by the Syrian regime, including the use of live ammunition and arbitrary detention (Khan & Khan, 2017). By the end of 2011, the conflict had escalated into a full-scale civil war, shaped by sectarian divisions between the Alawite-led regime and a predominantly Sunni opposition. This political landscape contributed to the conflict's longevity and the resulting displacement crisis. The humanitarian consequences of the Syrian conflict have been catastrophic, displacing over half of the country's pre-war population of approximately 23 million (UNHCR, 2023).

Lebanon, owing to its geographical proximity and historical ties with Syria, became a primary host country. The scale of this displacement has placed severe strain on Lebanon's fragile socio-economic and political systems, particularly its public education sector (Hamadeh, 2019). During the early phase of the Syrian refugee influx Lebanon did not permit the establishment of formal camps, designed to host refugee communities and coordinate humanitarian assistance (UNHCR, 2014). This meant that Syrian refugees were allowed to enter freely and integrate into host communities or live in informal settlements, increasing pressure on public services particularly the education system.

Abdul-Hamid and Yassine (2020) explain that the education sector in Lebanon is shaped by both administrative and political structures. At the political level, legislative authority lies with Parliament, which establishes the legal framework governing education, allocates financial resources, and regulates teachers' employment conditions. The executive authority, represented by the Council of Ministers, sets the broader policy direction for the sector, while implementation

is led by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE). Despite this structured framework, the education bureaucracy faces significant institutional constraints, particularly in areas such as strategic planning, performance management, and monitoring and evaluation. As a result, key policy processes have historically relied on external technical support from international actors. Within this institutional context, the Reaching All Children with Education (RACE) policies were developed as the primary frameworks guiding Lebanon's response to the Syrian refugee crisis. In 2014, MEHE established a Program Management Unit (PMU) to coordinate the education sector's response. The creation of the PMU was supported by external donors and international organizations and was designed to avoid overburdening existing bureaucratic structures, enhance responsiveness to the crisis, and facilitate the management and tracking of financial contributions (MEHE, 2016).

MEHE issued a ministerial memorandum allowing the enrollment of Syrian students without requiring legal residency or academic records in 2012. (MEHE, 2014). However, Hamadeh (2019) highlights that implementation was inconsistent, and schools quickly became overwhelmed. The RACE I initiative was launched in May 2014 by MEHE as a three-year plan (2014–2016). Its primary objective was to ensure that vulnerable school-aged children, particularly those affected by the Syrian crisis, had access to quality formal and non-formal education in safe and protective environments. RACE I promoted the integration of refugee children into the country's public schooling system. Supported by international humanitarian organizations, the policy emphasized integrating refugee students into the public education system, while expanding capacity through arrangements such as double-shift schooling, whereby Syrian students attended school in a separate afternoon shift following Lebanese students in the morning, resulting in their physical segregation from their Lebanese peers. Thus, the Lebanese government focused on

expanding the capacity of its schooling system to accommodate both Lebanese and refugee students. The RACE policies were formally developed and led by MEHE but emerged within a broader framework of international collaboration, particularly with UNICEF and the World Bank (MEHE, 2014; Hamadeh, 2019). Their intended audience extended beyond domestic education actors to include international donors and humanitarian agencies (MEHE, 2014, 2016). The policies were supported through external funding, including contributions from the World Bank, multi-donor trust funds, and bilateral donors (MEHE, 2016). RACE was accompanied by MEHE's Accelerated Learning Programs (ALPs), which provide condensed curricula to help students who have missed several years of schooling catch up and reintegrate into formal education.

In practical terms, the Lebanese MEHE implemented several policies to expand educational access for Syrian refugee children. By the 2012–2013 academic year, around 33,000 Syrian children were enrolled in public schools, and an additional 70,000 attended second-shift programs (Hamadeh, 2019). Simultaneously, UNHCR supported informal education by enrolling 79,360 children and providing resources to over 400 schools, benefiting approximately 134,560 children overall. This number grew by the 2014–2015 academic year, with 110,000 Syrian children enrolled in public education through 160 schools operating double shifts. However, more than half of school-aged Syrian children remained out of both formal and non-formal education, indicating persistent systemic barriers to equitable access (Hamadeh, 2019). Between 2015 and 2016, of the 488,236 non-Lebanese school-age children—primarily Syrian refugees—150,947 were enrolled in public schools, and nearly 11,878 participated in ALPs (MEHE, 2016). As a result, the out-of-school refugee rate dropped 30% by the end of 2015 (London Conference, 2016). Despite these improvements, major challenges remained: by 2016, approximately 180,419 Syrian refugee

children were still out of school, and retention issues persisted, with 7,000 students dropping out of second-shift schools due to factors such as unsafe transportation (Buckner et al., 2018).

Following the implementation of RACE I, the Lebanese government launched RACE II (2017–2021) to expand and deepen its efforts in addressing the educational needs of Syrian refugees. RACE II was structured around three key pillars: equitable access to education, improved quality of learning, and strengthened educational systems (MEHE, 2016). These initiatives have been central to Lebanon's broader response to the Syrian refugee crisis and are aligned with frameworks such as the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP), receiving support from international partners including UNICEF, the World Bank, and donor governments. Brun and Shuayb (2020) highlight that despite the efforts, a critical limitation of the RACE initiative remains its failure to provide educational pathways beyond grade nine, significantly constraining refugees' access to higher education and limiting their prospects for long-term economic independence.

Research Problem

The Lebanese state's response to refugee education is shaped by a complex interplay of the institutional and political structure of refugee education provision, international donor support, and embedded social hierarchies. This study critically examines the policy discourse surrounding Syrian refugees' education in Lebanon, focusing on two seminal documents- RACE I and II- to understand how they construct the subject positions of Syrian refugee learners, and how social inequalities are addressed, exacerbated, or reproduced through these documents?

Literature Review

This literature review is organized around five interconnected themes that critically examine the intersection of refugee education and education policy in general, and in Lebanon in particular. The first theme explores the global evolution of education in conflict settings, tracing

how education has transitioned from a short-term humanitarian response to a recognized right and long-term development priority, with specific attention to its application for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The second theme examines the complexities of refugee education policy design in Lebanon, highlighting the tensions between humanitarian, developmental, and rights-based approaches that shape national strategies for integrating Syrian refugee students. The third theme investigates the challenges of policy implementation, focusing on the disconnect between national education policies and their local application, as well as the influence of international actors and the constraints of limited state capacity. The fourth theme addresses the politicization and commodification of Syrian refugees in Lebanese policy discourse, analyzing how refugee experiences are manipulated to serve broader political agendas and how this framing affects their access to education and legal protection. Finally, the fifth theme discusses how educational policies play out in practice, with emphasis on the structural and social inequalities such as language barriers, economic hardship, and social exclusion that shape Syrian refugees' educational experiences and limit their opportunities for meaningful integration into Lebanese society.

The Evolution of Education in Conflict: Global Frameworks and the Case of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

Refugees are individuals fleeing conflict or persecution. They are protected under international law and are entitled to access basic education in host countries, as specified in Article 22 of the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [UN Human Rights], 1996). Education, while a vital element of humanitarian aid, is often deprioritized during crises. Yet its role as a stabilizing force in emergencies is increasingly acknowledged (Burde et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2025). For Syrian refugee children in Lebanon, education is not merely a right but a critical pathway to future opportunities amidst displacement. The concept of education in conflict dates to World War II, when refugee communities established

schools for displaced children (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Since then, the rights-based framework for education has evolved, beginning with the 1948 “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, which recognized compulsory primary education as a universal right (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 1996). This was reinforced by the 1989 “Convention on the Rights of the Child”, confirming education for all children, regardless of their circumstances, and the 1951 “Refugee Convention”, which emphasized equal access to primary and higher education for refugees (OHCHR, 1996). Global initiatives such as Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals further advanced these commitments, highlighting the importance of education in emergencies. The 1990 Jomtien Declaration and the 2000 Dakar Forum drew attention to the challenges posed by conflict, advocating for education as a tool to foster peace and tolerance (UNESCO, 1996, 2000). Frameworks like the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards provide technical guidelines for implementing education in conflict settings, institutionalizing the field and shaping international responses (INEE, 2010).

Thus, the establishment of education in conflict as a policy domain is rooted in three main developments, the creation of a universal rights-based framework, the imperative to protect children in armed conflicts, and the global commitment to universal education access (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). However, Syrian refugees in Lebanon are not officially recognized under the 1951 Refugee Convention, as Lebanon is non-signatory of refugees’ agreement. Nevertheless, Lebanon is bound by other international agreements, such as the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. As a result, Syrian refugees in Lebanon primarily rely on the efforts of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to coordinate with the Lebanese government and establish asylum procedures, while providing humanitarian support (Abu Moghli, 2022).

Policy Design Challenges in Refugee Education in Lebanon

Burde (2005) identified three broad approaches to refugee education - humanitarian, human rights, and developmental - that remain central to refugee education strategies. The humanitarian approach views education as a safe space during emergencies, the human rights approach upholds education as a fundamental right in all contexts, and the developmental approach sees education as a long-term investment in individuals and communities (Burde, 2005, as cited in Hamadeh, 2019, p. 375). Research in the expanding field of education in conflict highlights that education provides both immediate and long-term benefits for refugees. It secures reestablishing a sense of stability while also preparing children for future opportunities (Buckner et al., 2018). Arar et al. (2024) emphasize that refugee education is a multifaceted and challenging area of research, shaped by a range of complex issues such as trauma, poverty, restricted access to schools, difficulties in school placement, and pervasive social prejudice. These challenges not only impact educational policies but are also influenced by them, with community attitudes toward refugees varying depending on the context (Arar et al., 2024). As a result, the prevailing humanitarian discourse often frames refugee education as a crisis or problem to be addressed, rather than recognizing it as a fundamental right or potential opportunity. This deficit-based narrative tends to characterize refugee students primarily as traumatized and in need of assistance; while overlooking the cultural and social assets they can offer to host communities (Arar et al., 2022). This dynamic is particularly evident in Lebanon, where the refugee situation is often framed through a security lens, with displaced populations frequently associated with terrorism. A notable example of this approach is the 2016 agreement under which the European Union provided Lebanon with €1 million for security measures, along with an additional €1.2 million for initiatives aimed at countering violent extremism and fostering social cohesion (European Commission, 2016, as cited in Abu Moghli, 2022).

Policy Implementation Challenges

The literature discusses the challenges that arise as refugee education policies move from development to implementation (Buckner et al., 2018; Hamdeh, 2019), as policy objectives are reshaped through local institutional constraints (Kelcey and Chatila, 2020). In Lebanon, the educational policy landscape for refugees is particularly complex, raising critical questions about how refugees' educational needs should be addressed and who bears responsibility for their provision. Although the Lebanese government does not officially recognize the rights of refugees, it has succeeded in crafting a formal education policy framework that expanded access to public schools for Syrian refugees. This has been made possible through a combination of significant donor support, advocacy efforts, and Lebanon's international obligations to protect children's rights, culminating in the development of the RACE policy framework (Buckner et al., 2018).

In the case of Lebanon, the international community has played a significant role in driving the RACE education policy. Hamadeh (2019) notes that in conflict situations, such as the Syrian refugee crisis, international aid often plays a major role in policy decisions. This aid comes with its own set of global interests and priorities, influencing how policies are shaped and implemented. Buckner et al. (2018) observed through their qualitative study that a reduction in donors' funding for Syrian refugee education could lead to a corresponding decline in the Lebanese government's commitment to these efforts.

While advocacy can be successful in establishing inclusive national policies, low levels of engagement from the host community can result in resistance to the practical implementation of these policies. Hamadeh (2019) argues that when implementing educational policy at the local level, the important question is not what is the official policy, but rather who has the authority and legitimacy to make educational decisions on behalf of refugees, as in many cases local actors compete with the authority of the central government. Meanwhile, many local NGOs may be

viewed as legitimate actors who possess authority from their personal relations, proximity to refugee communities or technical expertise. In the Lebanese context, the gap between policy and practice is exacerbated by local resistance and a lack of coordination among government entities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and schools (Buckner et al., 2018). These factors undermine the successful integration of refugees into the national education system, hindering the policy's intended impact.

The Politicization and Commodification of Syrian Refugees in Lebanese Policy

Initially framed as a humanitarian crisis, the Syrian refugee influx has gradually been reframed as a matter of national interest, with Lebanon implementing restrictive migration policies that have rendered Syrians as foreign nationals subjected to complex legal and bureaucratic hurdles (Doraï, 2018, as cited in Abu Moghli, 2022). Abu Moghli (2022) highlights that refugees must either be registered with UNHCR or secure sponsorship from a Lebanese national to obtain legal residency, arguing that this system deprives them of basic rights such as education, employment, mobility, and housing. This legal framework positions refugees as passive aid recipients, stripping them of agency and individuality (Abdelnour & Abu Moghli, 2021). This reduction of refugees to a voiceless, homogenized group constitutes a political act, as Said (1978, as cited in Abu Moghli, 2022) asserts, reinforcing their dehumanization within policy and public discourse. The commodification of refugee presence is further perpetuated by international agreements such as migration deals between European countries and first-asylum states that offer financial and political incentives to host countries like Lebanon without prioritizing the actual needs or rights of displaced populations (Barbelet et al., 2018).

At the local level, the politicization of refugee policy continues through the fragmented authority structures within Lebanon. Local actors often aligned with political parties or religious

factions derive legitimacy independently of the national government, sometimes opposing or undermining central policies. For example, school principals may implement or reject MEHE directives based on sectarian or political affiliations (Frayha, 2003, as cited in Buckner et al., 2018). This fragmented governance means that refugee education policies can be inconsistently applied across districts, depending on local priorities and loyalties. Mendenhall et al. (2017) observe that such inconsistent implementation is common across refugee-hosting nations, largely due to weak state capacity, limited political will, lack of coordination, and resistance from decentralized authorities. In Lebanon, these dynamics deepen the gap between policy and practice, which contributes to the exploitation of the crisis by politicians for political and financial gains (Shuayb, 2020, as cited in Abu Moghli, 2022).

Policy in Practice and Consequences

The literature shows that in practice, policies for refugee children does not address the differences in educational backgrounds between Syrian refugee children and Lebanese students (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019; Kelcey and Chatila, 2020). One major issue is the disparity in language of instruction. In Lebanon, mathematics and science are taught in either French or English, while in Syria all subjects are taught in Arabic. This language barrier forces Syrian students to learn a new language before they can begin to understand the scientific subjects (Hamadeh, 2019). Additionally, subjects like history and social sciences in Lebanese schools are taught from a national perspective, which often does not align with the Syrian students' cultural and national identity. To ease this transition, MEHE in collaboration with NGOs, introduced non-formal education programs, including ALPs mentioned in the RACE policy. However, the RACE policy only focuses on education up to grade 9, leaving Syrian refugees with limited access to vocational education or higher education, which is crucial for their long-term livelihood.

Additionally, financial challenges, such as registration fees and transportation costs, further hinder access to vocational training for low-income Syrian families (Hamadeh, 2019).

The issue of social inequality between Syrian refugees and host communities has been widely examined in the literature, particularly in the context of education and social services (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019; Brun and Shuayb, 2020). Social exclusion emerges as a critical aspect of this inequality, contributing to the marginalization of Syrian refugees as they struggle to integrate into host societies. In Lebanon, sectarianism plays a pivotal role in shaping societal attitudes toward refugees (Hamadeh, 2019). Historically, Armenians and Palestinian Christians were granted citizenship as part of a political strategy aimed at increasing the Christian population, while the majority of Sunni Muslim Palestinian refugees, continue to be confined to under-resourced camps and face systemic marginalization (Hamadeh, 2019). This marginalization is also evident in the education system, where the double-shift school model, implemented under the RACE initiative, physically segregates Syrian students from their Lebanese peers. Although this system was designed to provide educational access for both groups, it inadvertently reinforces social divisions and perpetuates feelings of isolation among Syrian refugees. A similar situation is observed in Jordan which also adopted the double-shift school system. Salem's (2022) study on Syrian refugee children in Jordan reveals that, much like in Lebanon, refugee students experience a conflicted sense of belonging and exclusion. Shortened school hours, lower-quality instruction, and discriminatory behavior from teachers and peers further entrench feelings of alienation from the broader community. While Syrian students often form strong bonds with one another, their limited interactions with Jordanian students, compounded by instances of harassment and bullying, heighten their sense of social isolation. Many participants in the study view education as a pathway to a better life; however, the structural barriers and exclusionary school environments they

encounter frequently undermine their motivation to continue their education. The double-shift system emerges as a key mechanism of marginalization, contributing to diminished agency and constraining students' ability to envision a more promising future (Salem, 2022).

Prior to the influx of Syrian refugees, approximately 70% of Lebanese families opted to send their children to private schools, which are often affiliated with specific sects or religious groups (Buckner et al., 2018). Baytiyeh (2018) highlights that the reliance on private education reinforces sectarian divides, as it limits opportunities for cross-sectarian interaction and perpetuates inequality. Public school enrollment in Lebanon is predominantly composed of children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, who come mainly from the North, Bekaa Valley, and the South, with fewer attending public schools in Beirut (Bahou, 2015, as cited in Buckner et al., 2018). Given that most Syrian refugees settled in the Bekaa Valley and the North, they arrived in areas where public schools were already struggling to meet demand (Buckner et al., 2018). This exacerbates the challenges faced by both Syrian refugees and the host communities, as public resources are stretched thin, and the quality of education suffers for all students in these regions. The combination of economic hardship, strained infrastructure, and the legacy of sectarian divisions reinforces the social and economic inequalities between Syrian refugees and the Lebanese population, complicating efforts to promote integration and equitable access to services.

Critical Gaps in the Literature on Syrian Refugee Education Policy in Lebanon

Despite the growing body of literature on Syrian refugee education in Lebanon, several critical gaps remain. First, while existing studies examine policy development and implementation, they often overlook the ideological and discursive forces that shape these policies, failing to interrogate if and how power structures influence policy design and language. Second, as discussed

above, refugee education is frequently framed through a humanitarian lens, emphasizing trauma and vulnerability while neglecting asset-based perspectives that recognize the agency, identities, and sociocultural contributions of Syrian refugees. Third, existing frameworks such as RACE I and II emphasize access to basic education but leave unaddressed the exclusion of Syrian youth from secondary, vocational, and higher education pathways, which are essential for long-term social and economic integration. Fourth, although scholars acknowledge the disconnect between national policy and local implementation, there is limited research that captures how school-level actors such as principals, teachers, and NGOs interpret and enact policies in politically fragmented contexts. Finally, while policy evaluations and administrative reports are abundant, few studies center the lived experiences or voices of refugee students themselves, resulting in a top-down analysis that risks marginalizing those most affected. These gaps underscore the need for a critical, discourse-oriented examination of refugee education policy in Lebanon one that attends to questions of power, representation, and justice. This study attempts to address the first and second gaps in the literature through a discourse analysis of policy documents.

Research Questions

The research study will answer the following main research questions:

- How do RACE I and II construct the subject positions of Syrian refugee learners?
- How are social inequalities addressed, exacerbated, or reproduced through these documents?

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Foucault's conceptualization of power as relational (Foucault, 2000). As elaborated by Saunders (2018), power operates through social relations, practices, and rationalities that shape what can be known, said, and governed. Power is repressive but also

productive (Foucault, 2000). Power could punish, but it can also create categories, meanings, and ways of seeing the world. From this perspective, knowledge does not exist outside power relations, nor can it be understood as neutral or detached from governing interests. Foucault (2000) argues that power and knowledge are mutually constitutive. Power relations generate discourses and forms of expertise that render the social world knowable, while knowledge produced through these discourses enables more effective governance (Foucault, 2000; Saunders, 2018). Therefore, policy discourse does not merely describe social reality but actively participates in shaping it.

This understanding of the power-knowledge relationship is foundational to the present study, as it frames policy texts as sites where governing rationalities are articulated and enacted. When knowledge is developed into policy, it acquires the authority of truth and begins to produce material effects. In this sense, discourse sustains what Foucault terms a regime of truth (Foucault, 2000) - a dominant way of knowing that is treated as self-evident and authoritative (Saunders, 2018). Thus, discourse embedded in policy documents shapes institutional practices, justifies particular interventions, and normalizes specific ways of understanding social issues.

Building on this relationship between power and knowledge, this study draws on Foucault's concept of governmentality. Governmentality refers to the ways in which populations are rendered knowable and manageable through particular forms of knowledge, techniques, and institutions (Foucault, 2000; Bröckling et al., 2011). As Foucault argues, governing involves shaping "the possible field of action of others" (Foucault, 1982, p. 790). He highlights that power operates not primarily through coercion but through shaping the conditions under which individuals and populations act. In this sense, governance functions through guiding conduct, organizing social practices, and rendering certain actions rational, necessary, and desirable. Within this framework, governance does not only regulate populations but also produces forms of subjectivity. Foucault

(1982) emphasizes that modern forms of power operate through everyday practices that categorize individuals, attach them to specific identities, and impose socially recognized truths about who they are (p. 781). Individuals thus become subjects in a dual sense; they are subjected to external forms of control and governance while simultaneously coming to understand themselves through these imposed identities.

To understand how discourse operates, this study draws on Lemke's (1995) analysis of technocratic discourse. His work demonstrates how expert and technical knowledge is translated into policy language in ways that present political and value-laden decisions as neutral, factual, and necessary. Central to this form of discourse are its monological and condensed characteristics. Technocratic discourse is monological in that it presents policy claims as settled and authoritative, leaving little room for dialogue, contestation, or alternative perspectives (Mckenna and Graham, 2000). At the same time, it is condensed, compressing complex social processes, value judgments, and political decisions into abstract technical terms, indicators, and frameworks that obscure their underlying assumptions (Mckenna and Graham, 2000). By privileging research evidence, performance metrics, and technical terminology, technocratic discourse limits debate and shifts authority towards managers and experts (Bertsou and Caramani, 2020). Policy actions are framed as direct consequences of what works rather than as contingent and contestable social or political choices. Through condensation, responsibility and agency are displaced from identifiable actors onto impersonal systems and processes, while monological presentation discourages questioning and critique.

Zooming into education, scholars such as Ydesen and Elfert (2023) and Mundy and Verger (2016) argue that technocratic discourse is pervasive in international education policy. As demonstrated by the analysis of these scholars, global education governance does not primarily

operate through formal political authority, but through lending capacity, policy knowledge, and agenda-setting. The World Bank's education policy agendas emerge through the interplay of geopolitical interests, the Bank's bureaucracy, and the preferences and resistance of borrowing states (Mundy and Verger, 2016). Mundy and Verger (2016) show that education policy is not treated as a fixed or unified program, but as a contingent and negotiated policy shaped by dominant neo-classical economic rationalities. This understanding guides the analysis of national policy texts as sites where global policy rationalities may be articulated, negotiated, and embedded in local policy discourse.

Conceptual Framework

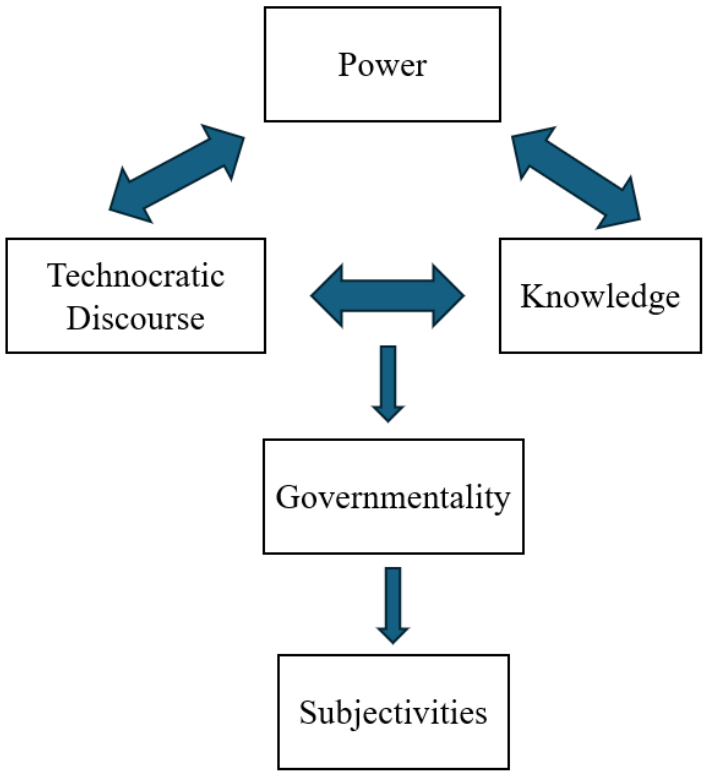
Conceptually, this study focuses on the relationship between knowledge, power, and technocratic discourse in the analysis of refugee education policy. Power is treated as the central organizing force that operates through both knowledge and discourse. Knowledge informs technocratic discourse by supplying categories, indicators, and forms of expertise that structure policy language. Technocratic discourse, in turn, functions as a modality through which power is exercised, shaping how problems are framed, responsibilities are allocated, and interventions are justified (Foucault, as cited in Saunders, 2018).

Building on this relationship, the study further draws on Foucault's concept of governmentality to understand how these elements are operationalized in practice. Technocratic discourse becomes a key mechanism through which governance is enacted, translating knowledge into strategies that organize and regulate refugee education. Within this framework, governance is also understood as productive of subjectivity. The interaction of power, knowledge, and discourse does not only shape policy but also produces particular kinds of subjects by categorizing individuals, attaching them to specific identities, and normalizing certain ways of being.

The conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1 directs analytical attention to how these elements interact within policy texts, guiding the examination of the discursive mechanisms through which refugee education governance is constructed, and how these processes contribute to the production of particular subjectivities.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of the Study



Methodology

Janks (1997) conceptualizes CDA as emerging from a critical theory of language, where language is viewed not merely as a communicative tool but as a form of social practice. These practices are always situated within broader historical and sociopolitical contexts, functioning as means through which social structures are either maintained or challenged. CDA, in Janks' (1997)

framework, is deeply concerned with the dynamics of power and interests. How are subjects positioned within discourse? Whose interests are prioritized, and whose are silenced? What are the implications of these configurations for social relations? By interrogating such questions, CDA aims to expose how discourse contributes to the reproduction or transformation of social inequalities.

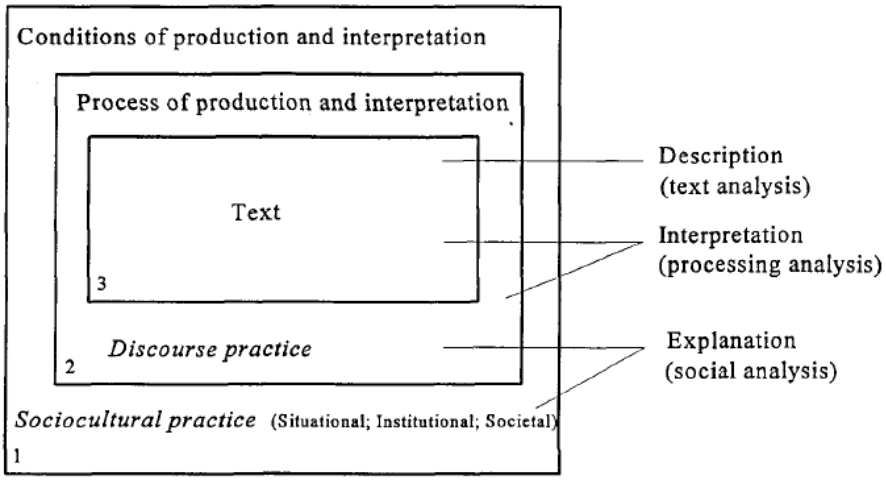
Fairclough's CDA Model

I use Fairclough's (1995) multi-dimensional CDA model, as it allows me to look at the totality of the discourse regarding the education of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon and examine the selected texts individually and then read the coded texts together to identify patterns that reveal the sociocultural context informing their production. Fairclough's (1995) model permits examining the texts through the linguistic features, interpreting the discursive practices at work in the texts, and analyzing the wider social context and conditions that inform these processes. By approaching the selected documents in a similar manner, I identify links that could build an understanding about the discourse that might surround the education of Syrian refugees. According to Janks (1997), Fairclough's (1989, 1995) three-dimensional model provides a systematic framework for analyzing texts. This model calls for a multi-layered approach that includes detailed scrutiny of texts across three analytically distinct but interrelated levels: text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice (Fairclough, 1995, as cited in Janks, 1997, p. 330). Fairclough three-dimensional model is depicted in Figure 1. Textual analysis focuses on linguistic and structural features, including vocabulary, grammar, and syntactic choices. It forms the basis for broader interpretive work. The second level, discursive practice, attends to the processes of text production. As Janks (1997) notes, interpretation must also be applied to both the situational and intertextual contexts. Fairclough considers these contexts crucial for understanding how texts are produced

(Janks, 1997). Situational context involves asking when and where a policy was produced, while intertextual analysis examines how texts draw upon, recontextualize, or exclude other texts. At the level of social practice, discourse is analyzed in relation to its broader socio-historical and institutional contexts, linking textual and discursive patterns to structures of power, ideology, and social relations (Janks, 1997). Fairclough (2010) conceptualizes discourse as dialectically related to social structures, such that it both reflects and actively shapes political, economic, and institutional arrangements. From this perspective, discourse is not merely representational but plays a constitutive role in reproducing or transforming social realities. Accordingly, analysis at the level of social practice attends to the wider governance frameworks, economic conditions, and institutional constraints that shape how policy discourse is produced and what meanings it can sustain. While the dominant discourse may not be readily apparent by examining a single text or two texts separately, but when these are treated together, discursive patterns, processes, and relationships begin to emerge that might point to the broader organizing discourses and their potential effects.

Figure 2

Fairclough's CDA Model



Note. Adapted from (Janks, 1997, p. 330)

Positionality

This study is informed by my positionality as a Lebanese citizen who has witnessed the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis. My proximity to the context, including my interactions with Syrian refugees through an international non-governmental organization, shaped my awareness of the inequalities affecting refugee education. In addition, my experiences as a secular social activist have contributed to a critical understanding of the relationships between state institutions and refugee populations. My involvement in this organization was initially motivated by a desire to support Syrian refugee learners through teaching. However, this experience also raised critical questions for me about the seriousness, consistency, and accountability of some humanitarian and educational interventions. During my participation, formal teaching sessions were rarely implemented in a sustained or organized manner, despite the organization's stated commitment to supporting refugee learners. This gap between humanitarian discourse and practice led me to question how refugee education is represented, managed, and justified through institutional and policy language.

In addition, my experience as a secular social activist has contributed to my critical understanding of the relationships between state institutions, international organizations, and marginalized populations. This background has made me attentive to issues of power, inequality, accountability, and representation. At the same time, I recognize that my personal and activist experiences may lead me to approach policy discourse from a critical standpoint, particularly by foregrounding questions of power and inequality. This perspective may make some dimensions of the data more visible while potentially underemphasizing alternative interpretations.

To address this, the study adopts a systematic analytical approach grounded in critical discourse analysis. The analysis relies on clearly defined linguistic categories and is based on recurring patterns across RACE I and II rather than isolated examples. This approach aims to

ensure that interpretations remain grounded in the textual evidence while maintaining transparency in the analytical process.

Approach to Methodology

The methodology involves 4 steps: 1) Document Selection; 2) Preliminary Familiarization with the Data; 3) Coding; and 4) Analysis.

Document Selection

RACE I and RACE II are selected because they constitute the primary official policy frameworks governing the education of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The policies shape how refugee education is defined, structured, and implemented. RACE was the effort of a group of senior MEHE officials in collaboration with UNICEF advisors. While UNICEF's *No Lost Generation* strategy emphasized social cohesion, psychosocial support, child protection, and education, the Lebanese national response concentrated on infrastructure expansion, funding mobilization, and teacher training and development (Hamadeh, 2019). Although RACE I (2014–2016) and RACE II (2017–2021) were formally issued under the authority of MEHE, scholarship demonstrates that both plans were shaped by international actors, most notably UNICEF, UNHCR, and the World Bank (Buckner et al., 2018; Hamadeh, 2019). The policies reflect donor priorities, political constraints, and the broader aim of stabilizing Lebanon's public education system amidst the Syrian refugee crisis. The analysis focuses on RACE I and RACE II as the primary policy frameworks guiding Lebanon's response to Syrian refugees' education, which define the overall structure and priorities of the sector. While this limits the scope and does not capture the full range of documents, these texts provide a focused snapshot of ministerial commitment to education. Given the depth and rigor required by critical discourse analysis, a concentrated corpus allows for detailed and systematic analysis of how meanings are constructed within official policy texts.

Preliminary Familiarization with the Data

The analysis begins with an initial surface-level examination of the text. This stage involves approaching the policy documents openly and descriptively, focusing on its stated objectives, challenges, rationale, and components without critique or interpretation. This preliminary reading supports the development of the initial summaries that inform the development of the analytical framework and the textual analysis (Janks, 1997). This meaning-oriented reading permits familiarization with the narrative of RACE I and II. To support this, I produce a descriptive summary of each that captures the key components. This preliminary engagement provides the necessary foundation for the subsequent stages of Fairclough's (1995) CDA, including detailed linguistic description and interpretation of discursive and social practices. The following sections present a condensed summary of the policy documents. The full summaries of RACE I and II are provided in the appendix.

Preliminary Read of RACE I. RACE I is structured as a comprehensive plan that includes an introduction outlining the crisis context and international response, a detailed situation analysis of the socioeconomic and education sectors, and program components focused on access, quality, and system strengthening. It further presents program budget, monitoring mechanisms, and implementation arrangements for delivering education to Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese children. Through the preliminary read, RACE I provides a narrative of the situational context post-refugee influx, the international community's decision to support Lebanon's response to the crisis, and the objectives and core components of the RACE I framework. In 2012, MEHE opened public schools to all Syrian children regardless of legal status and waived fees, enabling the enrolment of around 40,000 students with support from UNICEF and UNHCR; however, overall access remained critically low. Refugee children faced multiple barriers to education, including language, transportation, documentation, discrimination, and limited psychosocial support,

increasing risks of child labor, early marriage, and violence. These pressures also strained teachers, degraded educational quality, and accelerated the deterioration of school infrastructure. Following the ESIA of the Syrian crisis in 2013, the international community agreed that Lebanon needs support to respond to the magnitude of the Syrian refugee crisis against its already fragile socioeconomic and political conditions. World Bank, Government of Lebanon (GoL), and UN developed a stabilization framework that emphasized system strengthening and reform.

RACE I is a three-year initiative aimed at reaching an average of 413,000 vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugee children each year by expanding equitable access to education, improving the quality of teaching and learning, and strengthening the national education system. Expanding access to education is a key priority, requiring the rehabilitation and equipping of public schools and the removal of economic barriers. While MEHE has increased capacity through double-shift schooling, this approach is not financially sustainable without substantial external support. Besides formal education, non-formal education plays a crucial transitional role for children who have been out of school, supporting reintegration into formal education through targeted academic and psychosocial interventions. Besides access quality must be strengthened to ensure meaningful learning.

RACE I highlights institutional strengthening as a central priority, with MEHE requiring technical assistance to develop and regulate policies regarding curriculum, language of instruction, and certification, particularly for out-of-school children and learners in non-formal pathways. Overall, RACE I enables MEHE with support from international partners to lead a coordinated and robust national education response to the Syrian crisis.

Preliminary Read of RACE II. RACE II builds directly on RACE I by clarifying MEHE's commitments and the responsibilities of donors, who continue to provide financial and technical

support to strengthen MEHE's capacity. The policy is developed within the same strained context. RACE II revisits the three core issues access to education, the quality of teaching and learning, and the strength of the national education system. While enrolment remains at 42%, RACE II highlights RACE I's achievements in expanding access to formal public education for both Lebanese and Syrian refugee children. However, persistent challenges continue to drive school dropouts. Besides access to education, RACE II highlights teacher capacity as central to students' experience of quality education. The document introduces attention to the education of children with disabilities.

Pillar I focuses on addressing the barriers that prevent children from school enrollment. It plans a *multi-year national Back-to-School (BTS) initiative* designed to increase participation in formal and non-formal education through a combination of nationwide media campaigns, community-level *outreach and mobilization*, family-based *case management*, and strengthened preparedness of public-school administrators. There is a re-emphasis on alleviating financial barriers. Pillar II interventions focus on strengthening teaching quality, school governance, and community involvement in the learning process. Teacher training programs developed by CERD aim to enhance classroom management, promote positive discipline, provide psychosocial support, and build educators' capacity to teach children with special needs. Additional academic assistance will be provided through remedial programs implemented by NGOs, and community volunteers will facilitate communication between schools and refugee communities. PILLAR III aims at achieving systemic transformations that transfer the public education sector toward a stabilization and development agenda.

To better support the various systems' interventions planned, RACE II proposes frameworks, standards, and strategies for operationalization. The policy outlines a set of indicators

to evaluate the outcomes of its three pillars. RACE II is built on a long-term partnership between MEHE, donors, UN agencies, and other education partners. However, if donors' fundings decrease, RACE II will seek funding from private institutions. If the influx increases, the education system will rely on new investments in RACE II to sustain the increased pressure.

Following the pre-analysis stage, I developed a coding framework for CDA in NVivo. A sample of the coding process is in Appendix B. As I coded, recurring patterns in how Syrian refugees' education were identified and constructed within the policy texts. These initial observations informed the development of specific queries in NVivo, which were subsequently examined at deeper levels of analysis. A more detailed account of this analytical process is provided in the analysis chapter.

Development of the Analytical Framework - Textual and Discursive Level

Following Janks' (1997) approach to CDA, I developed an analytical framework based on Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model. This framework guides the organization of the analysis into two distinct but interconnected levels – textual and discursive. The textual analysis dimension follows Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (1985, as cited in Janks, 1997) to code grammatical features, while the discursive practice level is informed by Fairclough's (2010) focus on discursive framing and contextual construction.

Halliday's SFL is a linguistic tool that explores the relationship between language and other elements and aspects of social life, and its approach to the linguistic analysis of texts is always oriented to the social character of texts (Fairclough, 2003). SFL is used to code grammatical features at the textual level. In addition, segments of text that function to establish contextual conditions are coded at the level of discursive practice. This step provided the empirical foundation for interpreting discursive patterns in the analysis stage. In the initial stages of working with a text,

Janks (1997) draws three large, empty embedded boxes, reflecting Fairclough's (1995) nested structure of analysis and discourse. She records analytic comments in the appropriate box as they occur. This approach enables the tracing of interconnections between textual, discursive, and social levels of analysis in a simultaneous rather than strictly sequential manner.

Drawing on this logic, the analysis was operationalized in NVivo through a hierarchical coding structure using parent and child nodes. Coding categories at the textual level were informed by Halliday's SFL (1985, as cited in Janks, 1997), while additional coding structures captured patterns relevant to the discursive practice dimension. The coding structure is summarized in Table 1 and detailed in the appendix. This design enabled the systematic coding of words, phrases, and clauses pertaining to the textual and discourse practice dimensions of Fairclough's (1995) model.

Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) conceptualize language as a social semiotic system through which experience, social relations, and textual coherence are simultaneously constructed. These functions are theorized through three analytic metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational metafunction concerns how language represents experience, including processes, participants, and circumstances, and was used in this study to examine how actions, events, and conditions are linguistically constructed in policy texts. The interpersonal metafunction relates to language as social action and informed the analysis of evaluative meanings, modality, and tone. In this regard, evaluative language was examined following Fairclough's (2003) discussion of explicit and implicit evaluation, including modality and assumed values embedded within discourse. The textual metafunction concerns how meaning is organized and made coherent across clauses and texts, supporting analysis of thematic structure, sequencing, and cohesion. Together, these metafunctions informed the textual analysis dimension of Fairclough's (1995)

model by providing a systematic framework for examining how grammatical choices contribute to the construction of meaning, evaluation, and coherence within policy discourse.

Discourse practice, including situational context, identifies how a text constructs the immediate social environment in which it claims relevance. It is about how the document frames the problem-space, the crisis, needs, and constraints that justify its existence. Building on Fairclough's (2003) conception of orders of discourse, this study treats discursive practice as the level where texts draw on and reproduces the socially regulated ways of meaning-making available within a particular field. Fairclough (2003) argues that between the abstract linguistic system, the grammar rules, and concrete textual events lies an intermediate organizational layer in which genres, discourses, and styles operate as the "linguistic elements of networks of social practices" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 24). Fairclough (2003) defines these as *orders of discourse* that selectively enable certain linguistic and representational possibilities while excluding others, thereby socially organizing how language varies across different areas of life. In policy contexts, discursive practice includes the adoption of established genres (policy reports, humanitarian frameworks), the mobilization of dominant discourses (crisis, resilience, humanitarian-development), and the use of particular styles (bureaucratic, technocratic). The analytical framework was operationalized in NVivo through the systematic coding of the texts according to these textual and discursive categories.

Coding

For the textual category, I create a hierarchical node structure aligned with Fairclough's (1995) model and Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) metafunctions as shown in Table 1. Under the ideational metafunction, I developed a parent node titled content of communication, which captured representations of reality through processes, participants, and circumstances. Child nodes

reflected transitivity processes, including material (active, passive, causal), relational, and existential. Examples from RACE I include active constructions such as “committed to doing” (MEHE, 2014, p. 2), passive forms like “are being pulled out” (MEHE, 2014, p. 4), and causal expressions such as “helps address” (MEHE, 2014, p. 6). Relational processes included attributive structures like “can be particularly associated with” (MEHE, 2014, p. 7). While mental and verbal processes were insignificant, existential clauses such as, “Lebanon is quite generous” (MEHE, 2014, p. 4) were more frequent and thus retained. Additional child nodes were created to capture the key participants and circumstances in the texts. Agents such as MEHE, UNICEF, and UNHCR, appear in RACE I and recipients such as refugees, children, and teachers, are also identified. Goals in RACE I such as “absorption capacity of public schools” (MEHE, 2014, p. 31), and circumstances such as, “as a result of the crisis” (MEHE, 2014, p. 4) and “because of the presence of Syrian refugees” (MEHE, 2014, p. 4) are also coded. Also, a child node was created for nominalization, coding instances where actions were rendered as abstract nouns, such as “provision of NFE education” (MEHE, 2014, p. 34) or “reintegration into the formal education system” (MEHE, 2014, p. 33). For the interpersonal metafunction, a parent node titled enacting power and attitudes was created. This included child nodes for modality with grandchild nodes for obligation, possibility, and certainty, evaluative language in RACE I such as “urgent” (MEHE, 2014, p. 7, 24), “vulnerable Syrian refugees” (MEHE, 2014, p. 4), “robust policy” (MEHE, 2014, p. 16), and technocratic tone such as “efficiency of the system” (MEHE, 2014, p. 6), “sustainability from the start” (MEHE, 2014, p. 7), “cost-effectiveness” (MEHE, 2014, p. 54). Under the textual metafunction, the organization of meaning node explored how information was structured. Child nodes included theme and rheme, foregrounding versus backgrounding, and repetition.

Table 1

Coding in NVivo for Fairclough's Model (1995): First Dimension - Textual Analysis

Fairclough's First Dimension	Halliday's Metafunctions	Parent Node	Child Node	Excerpts from RACE I
Textual Analysis	Ideational	Content of communication	Material Processes (Active/Passive/Causal)	committed to doing (active)
			Relational Processes	can be particularly associated with
			Existential Processes	Lebanon is quite generous
			Agents	MEHE and UNICEF
			Recipients	refugees
			Goals	absorption capacity of public schools
			Circumstances	as a result of the crisis
			Nominalization	provision of NFE education
	Interpersonal	Enacting Power and Attitudes	Modality (Obligation, possibility, certainty)	are able to
			Evaluative Language	urgent
			Technocratic Tone	sustainability from the start
	Textual	Organization of Meaning	Theme	non-formal learning
			Rheme	is meant to be transitional
			Repetition	investing in

Note. Extracts reproduced from RACE I (MEHE, 2014, pp. 1- 34)

Next, a parent node was created to reflect second dimension of Fairclough's (1995) model, discourse practice, as shown in Table 2. Accordingly, in this study, coding nodes intertextuality and situational context fall under discursive practice, because they capture how the policy text draws upon prior texts and discursive resources, and how it constructs the situational conditions it responds to. These features serve to identify how the policy document participates in the broader order of discourse shaping refugee education governance in Lebanon. Thus, intertextuality was coded when policy text explicitly draws upon, cites, or recontextualizes other texts from UN, World Bank, UNICEF, and others.

Table 2

Coding in NVivo for Fairclough's Model (1995) Second Dimension - Discourse Practice

Fairclough's Second Dimension (Parent Node)	**Child Node**	**Example from RACE I**
Discourse Practice	Intertextuality	The impact of the Syria crisis on the already difficult socioeconomic situation … has been highlighted by the UN through a number of emergency assessments including high hosting ratios, increased expenditures and decreased incomes for Lebanese families hosting Syrian refugees.
	Situational Context	By December 2014, the number of registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon is projected to reach nearly one and a half million, a figure exceeding 30 % of the total population of the country.

Note. Extracts reproduced from RACE I (MEHE, 2014, pp. 3- 4)

The analysis of RACE I served as a methodological blueprint for the approach to RACE II. Familiarity with CDA and the analytical framework enabled coding RACE II paragraph-by-

paragraph. The outstanding sentences were coded directly in NVivo as grammatical patterns, and discursive features relevant to the study's analytical focus were recognized promptly, allowing immediate interpretation of how linguistic choices contributed to the policy's intended aims. As a result, working with RACE II did not require post-coding queries.

Queries. To interrogate the data systematically, words and phrases were coded in various child codes. Then a series of NVivo queries were employed to identify the recurrent linguistic patterns and their distribution across the corpus. Matrix queries were then conducted to examine the intersection between linguistic features, particularly to explore how agency and governance were constructed in RACE I and RACE II. This serves to identify continuity or change across both policies, allowing to check if patterns identified in RACE I recur across RACE II. The following queries were conducted: circumstances and agents, nominalization and goals, relational clauses and nominalization, relational clauses and goals. These queries have been selected based on the coding framework and their relevance to CDA. Halliday (1994, as cited in Fairclough, 2003) highlights that circumstances and agents are the key elements of a clause while Mckenna and Graham (2000) emphasize that technical writing relies mainly on relational clauses and nominalization.

Approach to Analysis

While Fairclough's three stages of analysis allow for multiple points of analytic entry, this study, following Janks (1997), engages with CDA from text to discourse, beginning with textual analysis and moving toward interpretation and explanation. Although the analysis is presented in a linear sequence, the analytical process itself was iterative and non-linear, involving continuous movement between textual, discursive, and social levels. This back-and-forth process functioned

as a form of analytic triangulation, whereby insights generated at one level were systematically examined and validated against findings at other levels, enhancing the credibility of the analysis. At the explanation or social analysis stage, texts were examined both in relation to one another and in relation to the broader institutional and sociopolitical context in which they were produced. Interpretations were grounded in recurring linguistic and discursive patterns identified across the texts rather than isolated instances, ensuring consistency and analytical rigor. Although the stages of analysis are introduced separately for clarity, they remain interdependent and mutually explanatory, reflecting Fairclough's (1995) model of nested analytical dimensions. As Janks (1997) notes, the strength of this approach lies in its flexibility provided that all stages are systematically integrated. This principle guided the analysis throughout.

The analysis was further guided by the study's conceptual framework, particularly concepts of power, knowledge, and discourse. Linguistic features were examined in relation to how they obscure or distribute agency, while discursive patterns were interpreted through Foucault's lens of power. This allowed the analysis to move beyond description toward an explanation of how language contributes to the construction and normalization of power relations within refugee education policy.

Findings

Textual analysis

In this section I focus on the coded texts closely and critically analyze the discursive strategies and constructions at work in them.

Agency - Active and Passive Voice

Syrian Refugees Agency. As I coded for agents, recipients, active processes, and passive ones, I noticed that the linguistic and discursive relationships reveal how the policy discourse constructs certain actors such as MEHE or international donors as active agents, while Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese children are positioned as passive recipients of aid, reform, or intervention. The agency of Syrian children appears rare throughout RACE I. It is mainly limited to entering the education system. For example, the following sample excerpts demonstrate how the Syrian children's agency appears across RACE I. “Nonformal learning is meant to be transitional in order to allow for Syrian students to enter the formal education system” (MEHE, 2014, p. 2). “MEHE together with UNICEF and UNHCR had supported some 40,000 refugee children to enter the public school system” (MEHE, 2014, p. 20). “Most of the Syrian children enter schools in areas that are already under-privileged and the influx has led to overcrowding (26 to 35 students per learning space), particularly in rural areas in Tripoli” (MEHE, 2014, p. 20). Through these excerpts, agency is restricted to entering the public schools, while the causal or enabling agency lies elsewhere (UNICEF, UNHCR, MEHE). These clauses illustrate how the text producer, MEHE, constructs participation as entry into a system designed and managed by others. Syrian children’s agency is confined to being absorbed or integrated into an institutional structure.

Of the three clauses, Syrian children appear as grammatical agents in the last one, and even here their agency is narrowly confined to the act of *entering* a constrained overcrowded system;

the first clause is relational, with Syrian students positioned as part of the identified transitional system. In the second clause Syrian students appear as recipients and their participation is limited to being enabled and supported to enter. This text reflects a technocratic discourse utilized by MEHE which limits human agency and favor quantifiable participation and managerialism, "40,000 refugee children to enter" (RACE I, p. 20), over subjective experience or agency. Syrian children are thus discursively positioned not as educational actors, but as subjects of integration within an institutional arrangement designed and controlled by others.

Along with that Syrian refugees appear as subjects in passive structures, when they are positioned as dependents of policy action or when describing the implementation of programs or outcomes affecting them as reflected in the following excerpts of RACE I, "refugee children were enrolled at over 980 Lebanese schools" (MEHE, 2014, p. 20). "Youth between the ages of 15-24 … suffer from both denied education and employment opportunities. They need to be provided with learning and life skills opportunities that empower them …" (MEHE, 2014, p. 25). "Those children who, for different reasons … cannot access public schools, will be supported in gaining relevant and meaningful knowledge and skills in non-formal settings (through ALP, basic numeracy and literacy courses, and life skills programmes)" (MEHE, 2014, p. 29). "For children enrolled in ALP and NFE, learning materials … will be provided" (MEHE, 2014, p. 37). Across these sentences, refugee learners are not acting subjects, and agency is backgrounded using passive constructions in which the actor is syntactically omitted. This results in an impersonal representation of provision where responsibility is diffused, and no specific institution is explicitly accountable. This discursive framing blurs who is directly responsible for supporting or providing. These passive sentence structures reflect MEHE authorship. The policy writers foreground their own technical efficiency ("supported" and "provided"). The consumers of text, international

donors and implementing partners, read refugees as targets of service delivery. This is characteristic of technocratic discourse, where the Syrian students are rendered dependent and managed.

Thus, the linguistic structures reveal Syrian refugees primarily as recipients of institutional action within passive constructions, while the limited occurrences of active agency are confined to *entering* or *accessing* the public education system. The scarcity of active agency underscores a discursive pattern in which refugees are managed, supported, or integrated, but seldom portrayed as capable participants in their educational trajectories. Such a representation reinforces hierarchical relationships where power and decision-making remain firmly with institutional actors.

I observe a similar pattern in the representation of Syrian refugees in RACE II. Throughout the document, refugees are primarily referenced through statistical indicators describing their educational conditions rather than as participants in educational processes. As RACE II focuses on systemic reform, governance, monitoring, and evaluation, agency is largely located at the institutional level, particularly with reference to MEHE and donor actors. Syrian refugees appear mainly as beneficiaries or target populations within the policy framework. The following excerpts from RACE II illustrate how refugee children are represented through data on vulnerability and educational access. The following excerpts from RACE II reveal data regarding the cases of disability and achievements under RACE I. “As for Syrian refugee children, there has been no comprehensive assessment of disability prevalence. Limited data from VASYR 2015, estimates that over 72% of Syrian children with disabilities are not enrolled in school” (MEHE, 2016, p. 9). “Over 42% of (compulsory school-age) refugee children received a certified education despite significant documentation barriers” (MEHE, 2016, p. 3).

To explore further how RACE I constructs the identities and subject positions of Syrian refugee learners, I turn to the role of circumstances in shaping meaning. Circumstances such as "in a crisis context" (MEHE, 2014, p. 25) or "limited public school absorption capacity" (MEHE, 2014, p. 29) situate actions within a broader frame of conditions and constraints. In RACE I, these linguistic choices play a critical discursive role in defining the context surrounding refugees' education. The circumstances vary in their function; some describe the structural barriers limiting access "limited public school absorption capacity, loss of school time, and distance from school" (MEHE, 2014, p. 29), while others describe the conditions of implementation "community-based centres" (MEHE, 2014, p. 34), "in a crisis context" (MEHE, 2014, p. 25), "safe and protective environments" (MEHE, 2014, p. 2). Together, they present the education system as operating within a set of external conditions. This grammatical framing positions both refugees and institutions as limited by the existing circumstances, instead of focusing on how agents can work on eliminating the limitations resulting from the circumstances. For example, the clause from RACE I "Those children who, for different reasons – limited public school absorption capacity, loss of school time, and distance from school – cannot access public schools" (MEHE, 2014, p. 29) presents barriers as pre-existing conditions that are descriptive rather than contested. The circumstance phrases depoliticize the systemic inequities behind these limitations. Similarly, "vulnerable school-aged children affected by the Syria crisis are able to access quality learning opportunities in safe and protective environments" (MEHE, 2014, p. 23) situates refugee learners within a humanitarian frame that emphasizes protection and vulnerability, reinforcing their identity as dependents of care.

A similar pattern appears through RACE II as the circumstances are identified. "Existing systemic resource and capacity gaps will continue to widen" (MEHE, 2014, p. 3), "curtailed

mobility and restricted livelihood opportunities" (MEHE, 2016, p. 5), "underserved regions" (MEHE, 2016, p. 13). These circumstances reinforce those identified across RACE I which aim to present the pre-existing barriers. Identifying these circumstances reveals how Syrian refugees and their access to education is confined to pre-structured conditions. The discourse naturalizes these circumstances, transforming them into neutral background situations rather than the result of policy and power. Through this pattern, RACE I and RACE II legitimize programmatic interventions as necessary and technical responses, presented as neutral solutions rather than as responses to structural inequalities.

MEHE Agency. I explore instances of active voice that predominantly attribute agency to MEHE in RACE I. For instance, "MEHE is already investing enormously in accommodating extra children within its system, in first and second shift classes. This cannot be sustained without financial support" (MEHE, 2014, p. 24). This excerpt explicitly positions MEHE as an active agent, highlighting its role in sustaining the education system. However, such a clause reveals how agency is qualified by a subsequent passive or conditional clause, "this cannot be sustained without financial support" (MEHE, 2014, p. 24), which dilutes responsibility and underscores institutional dependency on donor support. Also, when it comes to technical responsibility to develop policies and guidelines on language, curricula, and certification, we see a shift towards passivity, "this will need to be accompanied by additional technical assistance to MEHE to develop policies and guidelines on language, curricula, and certification" (MEHE, 2014, p. 26). The modality here ("will need to") can be seen as obligation or necessity but also has to do with action and social relations (Fairclough, 2003, p. 166). This hints to the obligation to develop and support technical capacities of MEHE, identified here as recipient, which aligns with a broader tendency to

depersonalize the accountability of MEHE and present actions as reliant on donor support rather than politically contingent decisions.

Even MEHE, which appears as an agent in active constructions, is also framed in passive terms a few times across RACE I. “Developing MEHE’s capacity to address education needs is essential for a cost-effective and sustained response” (MEHE, 2014, p.7). “MEHE’s capacity on information management and M&E will also need to be strengthened to support adequate targeting and effective interventions as well as improved learning” (MEHE, 2014, p. 26). Here, MEHE is presented as recipient of international technical assistance, reflecting its constrained autonomy within a donor-led governance structure.

In RACE II, MEHE appears in the executive summary as an agent with active material process “commit to” (MEHE, 2016, p. 3); yet what it is expected to commit to are forms of grammatical abstraction, including nominalization such as “increase in the number of students enrolled into formal education” (MEHE, 2016, p. 3), and non-finite constructions such as “improving the curriculum” (MEHE, 2016, p. 3), “regulating NFE opportunities” (MEHE, 2016, p. 3), and “improving efficiency and accountability of its institutions” (MEHE, 2016, p. 3). Also, MEHE is an active agent meeting with school directors to get ready to support the *Back-to-School (BTS)* initiative (MEHE, 2016, p. 12), but this is immediately followed with a passive voice which blurs the planning. “The MEHE will meet with school directors … to ready themselves in support of the Initiative. These planning sessions will be organized to jointly discuss … Standard Operating Procedures … to be followed at each public school” (MEHE, 2016, p. 12). MEHE appears also as active agents across RACE II through emphasizing the achievements of RACE I. “The MEHE further incentivised enrolment into formal public education by waiving documentation requirements for non-Lebanese children, ... For those children and youth who could not qualify for

entry into formal public schools, MEHE took the lead to regulate non-formal learning opportunities" (MEHE, 2016, p. 5, 6). This text highlights the achievements of MEHE, as an active agent through RACE I, *incentivizing enrolment*, *waiving documentation*, and *regulating non-formal education*. Also, MEHE appears as active agent planning and implementing through its active unit PMU; "the PMU, …, holds the primary role and responsibility in the coordinated planning and implementation of the emergency education response strategy (RACE) in Lebanon" (MEHE, 2016, p. 24). As for community involvement, this section is presented using passive structure. The agent is pushed towards the rheme, "remedial support programmes will be organized … and implemented jointly by MEHE and NGOs. Homework Support Programmes will be implemented … through NGO partners" (MEHE, 2016, p.15). It is vague how MEHE and NGOs organize and coordinate the implementation of programs.

Overall MEHE's agency is expressed as active in planning and implementing educational provision for Syrian refugees, while it is framed as passive in relation to donor-led financial and technical support.

Donors Agency. Across RACE I, the donors appear as active agents initiating responses, designing programs, and managing activities through the following excerpts. "The international community steps up to provide a joint response commensurate with the crisis in Lebanon" (MEHE, 2014, p. 2), "UN agencies and development partners, with the support of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and led by … (MEHE), committed to doing more to meet the acute and immediate education needs of Syrian refugee and Lebanese vulnerable children" (RACE I, p. 2). "They agreed to develop an expanded and well-coordinated three-year Programme for response" (RACE I, p. 2). "MEHE together with UNICEF and UNHCR had supported some 40,000 refugee children to enter the public school system" (RACE I, p. 20). These extracts construct the

international community and donor actors as agents in the education response via material processes that foreground action, coordination, and program control. Discursively, donors are positioned as both moral responders to crisis and technocratic designers of policy solutions, legitimizing their authority through language of coordination, efficiency, and system strengthening. This framing reflects broader humanitarian–development governance structures in which external actors assume decision-making power, while MEHE is identified as in need of technical and financial support.

As for RACE II, donors are identified in the executive summary using the passive voice "are requested to" (MEHE, 2016, p. 3) indicating obligation or responsibility followed by active verbs, "commit to large-scale, multi-year financing to exclusively support the RACE II framework" (MEHE, 2016, p. 3) , "support current RACE II costing estimates …" (MEHE, 2016, p. 3), "support MEHE and its institutions develop their capacity …" (MEHE, 2016, p. 3). Thus, active verbs are used when referring to donors. This shift to the obligation suggests that MEHE expects the international donors to do more in addressing the crisis. Yet MEHE acknowledges the possibility that donors might refuse to provide more, described as, "another possible risk to the proposed interventions is the possibility of donor fatigue and insufficient funding to reach RACE II targets" (MEHE, 2016, p. 23). *The possibility of donor fatigue* naturalizes the possibility of withdrawal, framing donors as benevolent providers rather than accountable actors.

Besides that, the necessity for partnership is highlighted, for example, "achieving results for an ambitious plan as RACE II requires strategic visioning and robust partnerships amongst the MEHE, United Nations agencies, donors, and other education partners" (MEHE, 2016, p. 24), yet donors are not foregrounded. UN agencies and donors are framed as technical supporters rather than political influencers, thereby diffusing responsibility for policy outcomes. Through the

framing of technical weakness, “as the main institutional implementers of RACE II, the PMU, CERD, and DOPS require capacity support in the areas of project administration, procurement, and financial management” (MEHE, 2014, p. 18), the deficit is managerial in administration, procurement, and financial management. Since the local institutions *require capacity support*, it becomes legitimate for donors, UN agencies, and consultants to step in as supporters.

Regarding the policy to monitor violence against children in schools, *UNICEF and UN agencies* appear as participating in the child protection policy but are not foregrounded. “The development of a child protection policy for the education sector is underway with the support of UNICEF … The detailing of SOPs will be supported by UN agencies ...” (MEHE, 2016, p. 17,18). In this instance, UN agencies are represented using the passive voice which backgrounds responsibility. UN agencies are framed through passive or relational clauses, associated with support, guidance, and clarification, rather than action or enforcement. This depoliticizes international influence, presenting UN agencies as neutral technical supporters rather than policy drivers. It places responsibility for child protection primarily on national institutions. Thus, it normalizes humanitarian governance, where global actors appear to support while domestic systems act.

Overall, across RACE I and II, donors are discursively positioned as indispensable yet depoliticized actors—initially as active moral and technocratic leaders, and later as conditional supporters whose influence operates through funding, monitoring, and capacity building rather than explicit decision-making. This shift suggests a move toward what can be understood as governance at a distance, where donors shape policy indirectly rather than through direct intervention. This difference may reflect the transition from an emergency response phase in

RACE I to a more nationally framed policy approach in RACE II, in which donor influence becomes less visible but remains structurally significant.

Agency Obscured through Abstracting Actions

Alongside the discursive pattern of agency, a related discursive pattern emerges through forms of grammatical abstraction, including nominalizations and non-finite constructions, where processes are transformed into abstract nouns or generalized actions that obscure agencies. This grammatical patterm depersonalizes action shifting attention from who acts to what is being achieved. In RACE I, nominalizations and non-finite forms such as *access*, *improving*, *strengthening*, *retention*, and *learning* dominate the text, particularly in the program objective and the components. For instance, "vulnerable school-aged children (3-18 years), affected by the Syria crisis, are able to access quality formal and non-formal learning opportunities in safe and protective environments" (MEHE, 2014, p. 2). Similarly, "the Programme aims at ensuring equitable access to educational opportunities, improving the quality of teaching and learning, and strengthening national education systems, policies and monitoring" (MEHE, 2014, p. 2). In the first clause, Syrian and Lebanese vulnerable children are subject to an abstract process, access. As for the second clause that places *the program* as the subject, nominalizations and non-finite forms such as *access, teaching, learning, and monitoring* turn education into a set of measurable deliverables, aligning with technocratic and results-based management discourses. This discursive form hides the agents behind these pursued actions (MEHE, donors, or NGOs), presenting progress as a neutral and inevitable outcome of the program rather than of politically situated interventions. Phrases such as "providing schools with libraries" (MEHE, 2014, p. 25), "the introduction of e-learning programmes" (MEHE, 2014, p. 25), and "training of community members" (MEHE, 2014, p. 38), further continue to obscure the implementing agents. The cumulative effect is a policy

discourse that emphasizes what is being done over who is doing it and for what purpose. Through the reliance on grammatical abstraction, RACE I treats the education of Syrian refugees as a technical process of delivery and optimization, rather than a political and social right negotiated through power relations.

Similarly, forms of grammatical abstraction, including nominalizations and non-finite constructions appear across RACE II, "an acceleration towards ensuring that all children … are enrolled in quality … education ... expands the Sector's responsibility to support education … for all …, to improving quality of teaching services …, and a focus on equipping children and youth with effective life-skills" (MEHE, 2016, p. 3). We see this objective is constructed out of nominalization, "an acceleration towards ensuring …" (MEHE, 2016, p. 3) with the passive voice and the goal. Then "improving quality of teaching services" (MEHE, 2016, p. 3) and "equipping children and youth with effective life-skills" (MEHE, 2016, p. 3) are non-finite constructions that identify the education sector's responsibilities. The blurring of agency, combined with these forms of grammatical abstraction, reinforces the technocratic language identified already in RACE I.

As for the output of equipping public schools in underserved areas, a similar sentence structure appears with nominalizations and passive voice. "Rehabilitation of schools will be undertaken especially in underserved regions …" (MEHE, 2016, p. 13). "Rehabilitated schools that meet the ESP standards will be provided with equipment according to MEHE's specifications …" (MEHE, 2016, p. 13). These sentences show how the agent is obscured through the passive voice. We do not know who does the rehabilitation and who provides the equipment. The sentence constructs MEHE as the technical authority through "according to MEHE's specifications". This frames MEHE as quality controller and technical expert reinforcing technocratic governance discourse.

Together, nominalizations and non-finite forms across RACE I and II reveal that agency is linguistically obscured. Donors' influence is implicit; as primary funders, they shape intervention agendas while remaining largely unmentioned. MEHE is positioned as an implementer or recipient of abstract processes. Refugees are framed as beneficiaries, and the goals are for them, not with them. This depoliticization of agency masks the asymmetric power relations between donors, the Lebanese state, and refugees.

Querying Agents and Circumstances

Querying agents and circumstances through RACE I reveals how integration into Lebanon's public education system is framed as a function of situational constraints rather than decision-making. Circumstances such as financial scarcity, crisis conditions, and overcrowding shape how agency is distributed among institutional actors. MEHE frequently appears as an agent, but its agency is limited by material and structural conditions that render its role reactive, conditional, and dependent on donor support. Excerpts from RACE I include, "MEHE is already investing enormously in accommodating extra children within its system, in first and second shift classes. This cannot be sustained without financial support" (MEHE, 2014, p. 24). "Prior to the crisis, Lebanon faced many challenges in the delivery of education" (MEHE, 2014, p. 14). "Most of the Syrian children enter schools in areas that are already under-privileged, and the influx has led to overcrowding …" (MEHE, 2014, p. 20). In these excerpts, MEHE is portrayed as an agent performing actions, issuing memoranda, investing, but each act is framed within restrictive circumstances. For instance, the phrase, "this cannot be sustained without financial support," (MEHE, 2014, p. 24) directly ties MEHE's capacity for action to donor funding, foregrounding its reliance on external actors. Similarly, while Syrian children appear as grammatical agents in "Most of the Syrian children enter schools…", their agency is immediately constrained by the contextual

circumstances “areas that are already underprivileged” and “overcrowding”. This shows that integration occurs under strain.

The co-occurrence of agents and circumstances establishes a discourse of conditional agency, where MEHE is represented as active yet restricted by different constraints. When MEHE acts, it does so within conditions of financial limitation or donor support. When refugees act, their actions are constrained by structural barriers such as location, resources, or access. These dynamics construct both MEHE and the refugee population as bounded by the circumstances.

The interaction between circumstances and agents across RACE I exposes how agency bounded by conditions are linguistically reproduced within the policy discourse. At the macro level, MEHE’s agency is subordinated to the financial and technical control of international donors. The repetition of the conditional phrasing, “This cannot be sustained without financial support” (MEHE, 2014, p. 24, 25), when identifying accommodation within the existing education system through the second shift, and also when identifying the introduction of non-formal education, “widening access opportunities through NFE and the strengthening and further development of ALPs is therefore timely as well as highly needed. This also cannot be sustained without financial support” (MEHE, 2014, p. 25), reflects a donor–state hierarchy where access and development of programs is reliant on external funders. At another level, MEHE mirrors this same conditionality toward refugees. The integration of Syrian children is depicted as dependent on structural capacity (“limited public school absorption capacity” (MEHE, 2014, p. 29), and “overcrowding” (MEHE, 2014, p. 20)), reinforcing a technocratic logic where access is determined by systemic constraints rather than rights. By presenting contextual hardships as neutral facts, the text dilutes political accountability. Overcrowding and lack of resources become inevitable realities, not policy choices.

Summary – Agency, Circumstances, and Grammatical Abstraction. Agency, grammatical abstraction, and circumstances in RACE I reveal how dominant power structures shape policy discourse. Agents in active clauses highlight the state's formal role, reinforcing institutional engagement, while passive clauses obscure responsibility, normalize dependency, and depoliticize structural inequalities. The result is a discourse that sustains donors as indispensable partners, MEHE as implementer yet dependent actor, and refugees as passive subjects of management. The distribution of agency across donors, MEHE, and refugees in RACE I exemplifies a multilayered hegemonic formation manifested linguistically through the depoliticized, technical tone of policy discourse. Donors maintain leadership by defining policy language and priorities under the guise of support, MEHE internalizes this discourse, reproducing it in ways that maintain its own authority over refugees. In this way, the RACE I document reflects the discursive sedimentation of international discourse regarding refugee education into national policy practice.

Grammatical Abstractions and Goals

Besides identifying nominalizations and non-finite forms and their effects on agents, querying grammatical abstractions and goals across RACE I shows goals as technical fixes as opposed to politically situated acts. An excerpt from RACE I that shows nominalization with the goal, "strengthening the Lebanese public sector to address the crisis and improve and sustain its provision of quality education for vulnerable children" (MEHE, 2014, p. 2). This clause transforms what could be a dynamic action of providing quality education by specific actors "UN agencies and development partners, with the support of the Global Partnership for Education ... and led by … the MEHE" (MEHE, 2014, p. 2) into an abstract process. Here, the goal is identified as the *Lebanese public sector*, positioned as the entity that must be reinforced and managed, but without reference to who is exactly doing the strengthening. Similarly, in "ensuring that the vulnerable

children from the refugee and host communities are able to access education is integral to an effective and equitable response and helps address underlying issues of conflict" (MEHE, 2014, p. 6), the goal is the *issues of conflict*. These goals and others in RACE I policy document predominantly refer to institutional or systemic outcomes rather than human-centered or participatory ones. The goals tend to focus on what needs to be improved such as system, quality, or access. For instance, the goal, *Lebanese public sector*, is positioned as the entity that must be reinforced and managed. The public sector itself is framed as an object of technical intervention. This further abstracts the policymaking process and aligns with a technocratic discourse of performance and efficiency, presenting education reform as a technical enterprise.

Similarly, RACE II's section on quality of education starts with forms of grammatical abstraction; "providing quality education services throughout the continuum of formal schooling significantly contributes to real learning outcomes for children; improving their life-skills, employability, and resilience" (MEHE, 2016, p. 8). The *quality of education* is foregrounded through a non-finite construction followed by the goals it impacts. "With weaker entry requirements …, public schools have exponentially increased the number of contractual teachers in service leading to a significant over-supply of under-qualified teaching staff ... reliance on an under-qualified … teaching force has important consequences on the real learning outcomes of children …" (MEHE, 2016, p. 8). The active agent, *public schools*, *increased*, yet the goal highlights an *over-supply of under-qualified* teachers. Thus, the nominalization "reliance on an under-qualified and unskilled teaching force" (MEHE, 2016, p. 8) in a relational clause follows to identify the concerns, *the learning outcomes of children in public schools* (MEHE, 2016, p. 8). Thus, a similar reliance on grammatical abstraction and goal abstraction follows from RACE I, reflecting a technocratic mode of discourse.

Nominalization, Non-finite Forms, and Relational Processes

After exploring agency, circumstances, nominalizations, non-finite forms, and goals, I explore patterns of transitivity. Querying relational processes alongside nominalizations and non-finite constructions in RACE I document reveals how the policy constructs education reform and refugee integration as a set of technical necessities rather than political choices. Relational clauses assign qualities to abstract entities such as *education*, *equity*, or *the system*, while nominalizations and non-finite constructions transform dynamic processes into abstract or generalized forms. Together, these grammatical features create a discourse that naturalizes policy directions, depoliticizes responsibility, and reinforces a managerial, technocratic view. Excerpts from text include, "ensuring that the vulnerable children … are able to access education is integral to an effective … response …. Investing in equity is part of investing in social cohesion." (MEHE, 2014, p. 6). "Investing in equity also means investing in, strengthening and sustaining the systems that cater to the vulnerable …. This is the public sector. Without upscale support to the overstretched public schools, the efficiency of the system is at serious risk …" (MEHE, 2014, p. 6, 7). Across these statements, non-finite constructions such as *ensuring*, *investing*, *strengthening*, *sustaining*, together with nominalizations such as *efficiency*, are coupled with relational processes ("is integral to," "is part of," "is the public sector") to construct policies as factual realities rather than socially negotiated issues. Mckenna and Graham (2000) highlight that within technocratic discourse nominalized forms with relational processes function as authoritative statements that are meant to be taken as given rather than questioned. The text positions these policy objectives as self-contained truths, leaving little space for questioning their political underpinnings or implementation mechanisms.

The co-occurrence of relational processes and forms of grammatical abstraction, including nominalizations and non-finite constructions, creates a rhetorical pattern that turns policy actions

into objective facts. Instead of describing who ensures, invests, or strengthens, the text assigns abstract attributes to the system. For instance, "efficiency of the system is at serious risk" (MEHE, 2014, p.6) attributes vulnerability to an abstract system rather than to political or managerial decisions. "Investing in equity also means investing in, strengthening … the systems that cater to the vulnerable and the marginalized" (MEHE, 2014, p. 6) reframes equity, a deeply political value, as equivalent to the technical development of the system. Refugee education becomes a matter of system optimization rather than political will or rights' enforcement.

As in RACE I, RACE II relies heavily on relational clauses to frame education reform as technical, inevitable, and evidence based. Across RACE II, reform is repeatedly legitimized through constructions such as "X is key", "X is a proven strategy", and "X is central", while agency and responsibility are displaced onto abstract processes, systems, and capacities. "The provision of quality education and learning opportunities are time-tested as effective mitigation strategies in the contexts of chronic crisis, ... Education mitigates future threats to lives … Education … mitigate the psychosocial impact of violence and displacement, … Education … empowers girls …" (MEHE, 2016, p.5). The paragraph starts with a relational clause with a nominalization "provision of quality education" as an effective mitigation in the circumstance of *chronic crisis*. Then education, an abstract concept, is foregrounded with active verbs highlighting its importance as a mitigation during crisis.

Similarly, relational clause with nominalization, *investment*, is used when highlighting the achievements under RACE I by MEHE leading and donors supporting financially. "Substantial investments from the international community were key to these noteworthy outcomes for vulnerable children and youth" (MEHE, 2016, p.6). Also, the push towards improving the quality of education is again achieved through nominalization in a relational clause. "Structuring systemic

interventions that holistically address entrenched demand and supply barriers to a quality education for all children in Lebanon is key to maintaining the successes of RACE I" (MEHE, 2016, p.6). Thus, to maintain what was achieved under RACE I, the following action towards access to education and quality of education are non-negotiable or a necessity.

Also RACE II utilizes relational processes and nominalization to evaluate the school-parent interaction as not required. "Accountable and structured interaction with parents and children towards the improvement of school environments is not systematic or required. Support systems for children from parents … in poorer communities are also noticeably absent. Unsupportive school and home environments are often hidden causes for dropout and low learning achievement" (MEHE, 2016, p. 9). The relational clauses shift responsibility to abstract entities *interaction*, *systems*, and *environments* which appear responsible for educational problems. Parents in poorer communities are framed as lacking. This deficit narrative frames poor communities as problem spaces. Thus, dropout becomes a result of environments rather than policy.

As part of the issue of restructuring the Lebanese education system, relational clause appears with nominalization; "to sustain this momentum and ensure resilience of the MEHE …, a structured undertaking to mainstream industry-standards in the planning, management, regulation, and monitoring of emergency education programming, is key" (MEHE, 2016, p. 10). In this relational clause the rheme is foregrounded for emphasis. It can read perfectly "a structured undertaking to mainstream industry-standards … of emergency education programming, is key to sustain this momentum and ensure resilience of the MEHE to possible future shocks". The heavy use of nominalization through "planning, management, regulation, and monitoring" obscures agency. This supports technocratic, depersonalized policy rhetoric. The relational clause "X is key to Y" presents the argument as factual and non-negotiable. By beginning with a long purpose

clause, “to sustain this momentum and ensure resilience…” (MEHE, 2016, p. 10), the text frames the action as necessary, appeals to managerial logic, prepares the reader to accept the evaluation *is key*. Managerial discourse words like *structured*, *mainstream*, *industry-standards*, *planning*, *management*, *regulation*, *monitoring* construct reform as a technical exercise, not political one.

As for RACE II’s section on improvement of access to education, relational clause appears alongside grammatical abstraction; “subsidizing the costs of education and increasing the availability of quality education spaces is a proven strategy to increase access to learning opportunities” (MEHE, 2016, p. 12). A *proven strategy* appeals to evidence, constructs authority, positions the policy beyond debate, and normalizes a particular solution. The sentence presents interventions “subsidizing the costs of education and increasing the availability of quality education spaces” as abstract strategies. The discourse emphasizes economic and logistical factors, which align with donor-driven problem framing. The relational clause implicitly asserts; this is the right strategy.

Relational Processes and Goals

Querying relational processes and goals in RACE I reveals how policy discourse transforms political intentions into self-evident truths. Relational clauses in RACE I establish equivalence between abstract ideas such as development, resilience, and capacity, while goals express the program’s aspirations. The result is a language that frames education reform as a technical certainty. Excerpts from RACE I include, “an effective response needs to bridge between the humanitarian and the development divide … which can strengthen and sustain the capacity of the education system to respond to needs in a protracted context. Investing in development means investing in resilience …” (MEHE, 2014, p. 7). In the relational clause, “investing in development means investing in resilience”, development is equated with resilience and presented as a factual

relationship. Meanwhile, the goals *bridging humanitarian-development divide* or *strengthening and sustaining the capacity of the education system* appear as imperative objectives that must be achieved but with no actor responsible for funding or implementing. The relational–goal pairing serves to depoliticize responsibility, constructing goals as universal truths rather than negotiated political issues. Besides that, the reliance on managerial vocabulary, *response, priorities*, *capacity*, and *resilience*, reflects a technocratic framing which privileges efficiency and system survival over justice or equality. Thus, the response is identified as effective when it addresses the humanitarian problem and strengthens the education system.

Similarly, the relational-goal pairing in RACE II shows that dealing with teacher capacity addresses the problem of providing quality education to the refugees. "Teacher capacity is central to a child's experience of a quality education" (MEHE, 2016, p. 8). This clause equates *teacher capacity* to student experience of *quality education*. "Professionally-educated teachers can no longer be easily attracted into the public teaching corps due to MEHE's restricted budget that can only offer limited compensation, benefits, and support infrastructure" (MEHE, 2016 p. 8). Through the combination of the circumstance, *MEHE's restricted budget*, and the goal, *professionally educated teachers*, developing teachers' capacities is constructed as an inevitable necessity for improving education quality.

These relational clauses transform complex socio-political processes into statements of equivalence, granting them the appearance of common-sense truth. Goals are articulated through donor language that privileges measurable outcomes and systemic efficiency. MEHE and national actors internalize donor technical vocabulary *resilience*, *capacity*, and *efficiency*, reproducing the power of international institutions over national policy. The absence of explicit actors in relation to goals *who bridges* and *who strengthens* eliminates accountability and re-centers authority within

an abstract system. In this instance, refugee learners are subsumed under *needs* and *priorities*, positioned as the objects of policy rather than subjects of rights. This linguistic strategy masks structural inequality while legitimizing donor-driven agendas.

Summary of Querying Goals, Grammatical Abstraction, and Relational Processes. The combination of relational clauses and forms of grammatical abstraction, including nominalizations and non-finite constructions, naturalizes policy priorities and depoliticizes educational governance by presenting policies as stable realities rather than contested decisions. Through relational constructions, institutions and policies are assigned fixed attributes, while grammatical abstraction shifts attention away from specific actors toward abstract goals articulated through donor-oriented language. These linguistic patterns reflect how technocratic and donor-oriented documents produce legitimacy through technical rationality and measurable outcomes. The backgrounding or omission of actors in relation to these goals eliminates accountability and re-centers authority within an abstract system, positioning refugee learners primarily as objects of policy needs and priorities rather than as subjects of educational rights.

Evaluative Language

Evaluative language is a key interpersonal resource in Halliday's SFL (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). For instance, *efficiency* and *adaptability* are inherently desirable. In RACE I, evaluative meanings are central to how the program is legitimized, the national context problematized, and refugee identities constructed. Across the text, evaluation clusters around four dominant types, positive institutional, negative contextual, moral and ethical, and technical and managerial as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Evaluative Language across RACE I – Textual Analysis

Type of Evaluation	Example	Function/Effect
Positive Evaluation of the Program	an effective and equitable response, expanded and well-coordinated three-year programme, robust policy	legitimizes institutions
Negative Evaluation of Context and Conditions	fragile socioeconomic and political context, lack of social safety nets, overstretched public schools	frames crisis and justifies external intervention
Moral	vulnerable Lebanese populations, urgent education needs, an essential element	invokes humanitarian morality and sustains dependency framing
Technical and Managerial	structural integrity of school buildings, cost-effective and sustained response, greater predictability, increased funding	foregrounds efficiency and accountability

Note. Extracts reproduced from RACE I (MEHE, 2014, pp. 2- 31)

Across RACE II the evaluative language signals systemic incapacity. “National education data is neither reliable nor relevantly analysed for meaningful programming or policy interventions” (MEHE, 2016, p. 10). The evaluative language “neither reliable nor relevantly analysed” construct national education data as fundamentally deficient. This negative appraisal foregrounds systemic incapacity and undermines the credibility of the data system. Also, system incapacity appears through deficiency. “Necessary policy frameworks to support decentralisation of school governance, a sound teacher professional development strategy, alternate pathways to formal education … are lacking” (MEHE, 2016, p. 10). The key evaluation is *lacking*. This is a strong negative judgment of the system’s capacity. Also evaluative is *necessary* which signals

obligation and *sound* that signals quality judgment. This instance is indicative of a deficit discourse. The language develops a systemic deficiency narrative. It lists multiple missing elements to give the impression of widespread gaps, deep systemic failure, structural incompleteness. This builds a strong case for policy reform. Similarly, the relational clause, "the Lebanese curriculum and correlated pedagogical standards are not as learner-centred as industry-standards require, lacking a life-skills base or a gender-appreciation lens" (MEHE, 2016, p. 10), constructs the Lebanese curriculum as inadequate. The phrase "not as learner-centred" frames the system as outdated and not learner-focused. It legitimizes critique through external norms *industry-standards*. The clause uses a deficit discourse "lacking a life-skills base or a gender-appreciation lens" (RACE II, p. 10). This portrays pedagogy as incomplete, curriculum as not modern, system as failing to meet contemporary expectations. It introduces a gender discourse saying the curriculum lacks *gender-appreciation lens*. This constitutes a negative evaluation, presenting the curriculum as lacking a gender-appreciation lens and implying alignment with gender-sensitive and rights-based approaches.

Evaluative language in RACE I performs three key functions. Positive evaluative terms present the program, policies, and strategies as rational, evidence-based, and necessary. Negative and moral evaluations of Lebanon's fragility and refugee vulnerability justify the scope and continuation of external governance framing crisis and dependency. Technical and managerial evaluations shift focus from social justice and rights to efficiency, cost, and capacity, aligning with the rationalities of global education governance. Refugees are consistently evaluated through the lens of *vulnerability*, *urgency*, and *need*. Their inclusion in the education system is justified as an act of benevolence, not as a realization of rights. RACE II evaluative language develops the deficit narrative that makes the policy reform a necessity. The evaluative language constructs a

technocratic-humanitarian discourse in which the MEHE agenda is naturalized, Lebanese institutions are rationalized, and Syrian refugee learners are rendered vulnerable subjects in need of managed solutions rather than political inclusion.

As Lemke (1995) argues, technocratic discourse relies on a technical, expert-oriented tone to present institutional decisions as rational, evidence-based rather than contested political choices. The technical tone of RACE I and II reflects a dominant discursive strategy that positions education as a managerial, expert-led, and depoliticized domain. The technical tone permeates sections of RACE I and II related to the programs components, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and partnership and coordination; thereby shaping the documents' overall rationales and procedural characters. Table 4 shows the four major clusters of technical tone.

Table 4

Technical Tone across RACE I and II– Textual Analysis

Linguistic Feature	Text Extract	Discursive Effect
Institutional and managerial language	robust policies, institutional development, oversight, reporting framework, school-based management	frames education as administrative and managerial
Efficiency and Accountability Language	cost-effectiveness, coordination, alignment, capacity development, monitoring	promotes efficiency as an unquestioned value
Donor-Driven Metrics	one joint overarching monitoring and reporting framework that will be supported by MEHE, the REC will maintain its oversight functions for the financing and results of RACE II	accountability to donors, technical oversight as necessary
Policy Buzzwords	resilience, sustainable, standards, coherence, institutional strengthening	development jargon creates a sense of professional consensus

Note. Extracts reproduced from RACE I (MEHE, 2014, pp. 2- 43) and RACE II (MEHE, 2016, pp. 6- 24)

These clusters converge to form a way of speaking about education that emphasizes system performance, monitoring, and optimization, while minimizing human and political dimensions. The document's reliance on technical vocabulary *monitoring*, *oversight*, and *reporting* transforms political decisions into technical operations. The technical tone operates as a discursive mechanism of control and legitimation. It depoliticizes education, transforming complex inequalities into administrative challenges. It legitimizes donor and governmental authority through neutrality and expertise. Ultimately, this tone situates education within a technocratic framework, where managerial rationality replaces political accountability, and refugee inclusion becomes a matter of system optimization rather than social justice.

Discourse Practice

Intertextuality

Fairclough (2003) highlights that intertextuality brings other voices into a text. Text draws upon, quotes, or recontextualizes other texts to construct meaning and authority. In RACE I, intertextual references are extensive across several sections including the introduction, the program components, and the implementation arrangements (MEHE, 2014). These references anchor RACE I within a web of international and national frameworks, producing a discourse of legitimacy.

Intertextuality in RACE I does not merely involve referencing external documents; it functions as a mechanism through which implicit assumptions enter the text. As Fairclough (2003) notes, assumptions operate implicitly at existential, propositional, and value levels, forming the *common ground* upon which the text relies. When RACE I draws on UNICEF, UNHCR, INEE,

World Bank, and ESDP frameworks, it imports the existential through confirming the impact of the crisis on Lebanon, the propositional claims associated with humanitarian crisis governance, and the value system that prioritizes efficiency, adaptability, and system strengthening. These assumptions validate the text as part of the global humanitarian–development discourse. The review of RACE I reveals that it is developed by MEHE but discursively co-constructed with global agencies such as UNICEF, UNHCR, and the World Bank. The coded texts in NVivo show that intertextuality in RACE I clusters around four main sources of reference as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Intertextuality across RACE I – Discourse Practice

Intertextual Source	Text Extract	Discursive Effect
UN and Global Humanitarian Reports	the impact of the Syria crisis… has been highlighted by the UN through a number of emergency assessments ...	provide external validation for the crisis narrative
Global Frameworks - "A Lost Generation?"	the strategy … covers both immediate humanitarian response interventions as well as longer term support …	highlight UN-led humanitarian plans, showing dependency on global frameworks
Lebanese State Strategies (*ESDP*, *National Education Strategy*)	the ESDP was endorsed by the GoL …. It … outlines ten programmes that respond to the priorities identified in the National Education Strategy	link RACE I to pre-existing national plans to claim continuity
Empirical and Quantitative Reports (ESIA, MICS 2009)	the MICS 2009 reported high primary school net attendance at national level…	anchor argumentation in statistical data
Donor Programs and Projects (AFD, WB SBM, UNICEF)	the SBM programme developed by the WB … is composed of grants based on school improvement plans…	introduce donor-driven school management model

Note. Extracts reproduced from RACE I (MEHE, 2014, pp. 4- 43)

Across some intertextualities, authority flows from global to local, reflecting a pattern of discursive dependency. The legitimacy of RACE I relies on its consistency with global frameworks, but it refers to a local policy baseline to anchor itself in national policy. The frequent citations of UN assessments, UNICEF surveys, and World Bank frameworks provide epistemic authority. References to datasets, such as MICS 2009 and ESIA 2013, infuse the text with quantitative credibility.

Similarly RACE II utilizes intertextualities. Regarding access to education opportunities, RACE II refers to studies and surveys that can support the reasons why there is low demand for education. These surveys show that "Nearly 60% of refugee working children interviewed in 2014 indicated that the choice to work was their own …" (MEHE, 2016, p. 7). The text comes to support the identification that the same barriers to access remain as identified in RACE I, transportation and learning material. Similarly, surveys are used to identify the quality and availability of spaces in public schools. "Surveys found strong links between school enrolment and physical infrastructure; concluding that schools that are in better condition have more students enrolled and retained … A 2004 study by MEHE states that one third of school buildings assessed at the time did not meet the standards for Effective School Profiles (ESP) …" (MEHE, 2016, p.8). These intertextualities aim to support the reasons identified by MEHE as limiting access to education. Also, there is referral to data from UNESCO (2013) to highlight the current situation of Lebanese children with disabilities. "Currently, only 5,800 registered children are in one of the 100 specialized institutions …" (MEHE, 2016, p. 9). As for Syrians again intertextual data highlight that almost all children with disabilities have no access to education. "As for Syrian refugee children, there has been no comprehensive assessment of disability prevalence. Limited data from

VASYR 2015, estimates that over 72% of Syrian children with disabilities are not enrolled in school …" (MEHE, 2016, p. 9). Besides that, intertextual data is used to highlight the pressure of the Syrian crisis. "With the public education system accustomed to catering for less than a third of Lebanese students (pre-Crisis estimate), the scale … of the Syria Crisis has exponentially increased the challenges faced by MEHE …" (MEHE, 2016, p. 10). This intertextual data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics and CERD (2012) identifies the situational context due to the influx of Syrian refugees. The intertextual data serves to frame crisis as an overwhelming external force, and MEHE is portrayed as the recipient of external pressure.

RACE I and II's rhetorical authority is built through borrowing and recontextualizing excerpts and data from international institutions. Intertextuality, across the policies, weaves together reference to UN reports, World Bank frameworks, and donor-funded initiatives which secures credibility through embedding the policies within global education governance discourse. Within these policies, the borrowing of authority normalizes international influence and constrains alternative visions of refugee education that might emerge from local context. The influence of donor institutions on shaping Lebanon's refugee education policies operates through intellectual leadership and donor frameworks becoming the common sense of policymaking. Thus RACE I and II internalizes the discourse of global education governance, prioritizing efficiency, system strengthening, and resilience over local pedagogical and social concerns.

Discourse Practice – Situational Context

The situational context in RACE I serves as the narrative setting against which the program's rationale is justified. Situational context refers to how texts represent the immediate social, political, and institutional environment in which they are produced (Fairclough, 2015). RACE I's situational context constructs the education crisis as part of a broader national

emergency, economic collapse, refugee influx, and institutional strain. The discourse foregrounds national vulnerability, demographic pressure, and institutional incapacity. The situational context clusters around six dominant themes identified in Table 6.

Table 6

Situational Context across RACE I – Discourse Practice

Theme	Text Extract	Discursive Function
National Fragility	constrained public system, fragile internal stability	portrays Lebanon as overburdened
Scale of Refugee Influx	42% of the Syrian population are school-aged children …	highlights overwhelming numbers of refugees
Strain on Public Services and Institutions	public services are under pressure…, depreciation and deterioration of the school infrastructure	presents service overload as an administrative challenge
Social tensions between Hosts and Refugees	tension that is mounting between the communities …	frames social friction as psychological or perceptual
Existing Educational Inequalities	MEHE catering only for 30% of its student population, disparities between public and private schools	depicts inequality as a pre-existing background
Institutional Positioning	MEHE and MoSA remain under-resourced, donors with the WB and key UN agencies – that were coming together within … the WB stabilization framework	presents ministries as dependent implementers

Note. Extracts reproduced from RACE I (MEHE, 2014, pp. 3- 53)

Almost every coded situational passage foregrounds *crisis, fragility,* or *strain*. The crisis rhetoric frames intervention as inevitable and constructs consent for external support. Education becomes a domain of emergency management rather than a right. Also, quantitative data,

percentages, enrolment rates, and cost estimates are used to describe social realities. This technocratic mode aligns with donor expectations of accountability and monitoring. Besides that, RACE I repeatedly pairs *vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugees*, implying shared hardship. While this dual vulnerability legitimizes international aid, it depoliticizes their relationship, masking structural hierarchies. This narrative legitimizes donor intervention as necessary, reinforcing a hierarchy MEHE are implementers of externally designed frameworks such as World Bank's stabilization roadmap.

Also RACE II highlights the situational impact of the crisis and the already strained public education system, but this is very limited, as it is more focused on the systemic reform. "The magnitude of the Syrian refugee-influx significantly impacted the institutional capacities of an already-compromised Lebanese public education system. Reeling from a chronic lack of underfunding since 2005, the erstwhile prestigious education system has been in slow decline" (MEHE, 2016, p.6).

The crisis narrative across RACE I naturalizes donor involvement as an urgent and rational response. Educational disparities and regional deprivation are framed as contextual facts rather than outcomes of governance. The situational context in RACE I is not a neutral background but a discursive device of justification and control. Through its crisis-heavy framing, technocratic quantification, and portrayal of institutional fragility, the text constructs Lebanon as a dependent state and of refugees as passive burdens. This configuration legitimizes international actors' influence and depoliticizes inequality by embedding it in the language of vulnerability.

Analysis

The analysis chapter explores the recurring discursive mechanisms identified and how language organizes power and responsibility across the findings of RACE I and II. The findings include five mechanisms: erasing refugees' agency, governing through technocracy, relocating responsibility downward, normalizing temporariness and crisis, and depoliticizing inequality. Together, these mechanisms reveal a humanitarian–technocratic governance in which authority is exercised indirectly and rendered non-political.

Erasure of Refugee Agency - Production of the Managed Learner

Across RACE I, refugee learners are discursively constructed as managed beneficiaries. Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese children are positioned as passive recipients of aid, reform, or intervention, with agency largely confined to entry into an education system designed and governed by others. Refugees are rendered legible through needs and priorities rather than participation. This erasure of agency is sustained through passive constructions, nominalizations, and evaluative framings that emphasize vulnerability and need, positioning refugees as objects of policy action or targets of service delivery rather than as subjects shaping their educational trajectories. This pattern persists across RACE II, where refugee learners are referenced primarily through indicators highlighting need, while MEHE, institutional actor, mainly dominates the actional space as the policy mainly focuses on systemic reform. By foregrounding management over participation, the discourse legitimizes policy intervention for refugees rather than with them. Through a Foucauldian lens, the erasure of refugee agency shows how policy discourse produces refugee learners as governable subjects by defining them through vulnerability, need, and institutional management.

Governing through Technocracy and Managerial Rationality

Across RACE I and II, education policy is framed through a technocratic rationality that prioritizes efficiency, system strengthening, and measurable outcomes. Linguistically, this is achieved through abstractions, non-finite constructions, nominalizations, relational clauses, evaluative language, and technical tone. Education is repeatedly constructed as a set of deliverables to be optimized. For instance, RACE I equates equity to system strengthening; "investing in equity also means investing in, strengthening and sustaining the systems that cater to the vulnerable and the marginalized" (MEHE, 2014, p. 6). RACE I frames equity, a political value, as equivalent to the technical development of the system. Refugee education becomes a matter of system optimization rather than political will or rights' enforcement. Nominalized forms such as development, monitoring, provision, and strengthening transform dynamic political decisions into abstract processes, obscuring the actors responsible for defining actions. Relational clauses, in the form "X is key to Y", present policy directions as factual necessities rather than contestable choices, foreclosing debate. This appears significantly across RACE II. "To sustain this momentum and ensure resilience of the MEHE …, a structured undertaking to mainstream industry-standards in the planning, … and monitoring of emergency education programming, is key" (MEHE, 2016, p. 10). This presents the restructuring of the Lebanese education system as inevitable and non-negotiable. Technical and managerial evaluative language such as "cost-effective and sustained response" (MEHE, 2014, p. 7) reinforce this logic by focusing on efficiency, cost, and capacity. Through a Foucauldian lens, this mechanism illustrates governmentality by showing how policy discourse transforms education into a technical field of management, measurement, and optimization. The discourse produces a regime of truth in which

political questions of rights, responsibility, and justice are reframed as technical problems to be managed.

Relocating Responsibility Downward - Governance at a Distance

The third mechanism relocates responsibility for policy implementation and outcomes downward to MEHE, while preserving donors' influence. Donors are discursively positioned as supporters, enablers, and monitors, rather than explicit decision-makers. Thus, they govern at a distance through frameworks, standards, evaluative instruments, and funding without being identified as political drivers. While donors support, enable, or monitor implementation across RACE I, the responsibility for planning, implementation, and outcomes is formally assigned to MEHE. However, this responsibility is repeatedly framed as contingent on donors' financial and technical support. This linguistic arrangement preserves donor influence while shifting responsibility for outcomes onto national institutions. In RACE II, this pattern is maintained, but there is acknowledgement of the possibility of donor fatigue or insufficient funding through risk-oriented language. "Another possible risk to the proposed interventions is the possibility of donor fatigue and insufficient funding to reach RACE II targets" (MEHE, 2016, p. 23). The potential withdrawal of support is naturalized as a contextual risk rather than as a political choice, thereby shielding donors from responsibility. At the same time, MEHE is constructed as the primary actor responsible for sustaining reforms and achieving targets, even as its capacity continues to be framed as dependent on donors' technical and financial support. MEHE is constructed through active grammatical forms that signal responsibility for coordination and implementation. However, this agency is frequently qualified by conditional or passive structures that foreground dependency on donor financial and technical support. "This cannot be sustained without financial support" (MEHE, 2014, p. 24). Nominalized actions further depersonalize accountability, presenting policy

outputs as procedural necessities rather than politically situated decisions. In RACE II, responsibility is further fragmented across several units of MEHE, with vague description of coordination with NGOs and partners. This dispersal obscures lines of accountability and reinforces a managerial logic in which authority is distributed across structures. The cumulative effect is a redistribution of responsibility without a corresponding redistribution of power. This mechanism reflects governmentality by showing how power operates indirectly through funding arrangements and technical support. The discourse relocates responsibility for implementation and outcomes onto MEHE while preserving donor influence, thereby producing a form of governance in which accountability is localized but power remains transnational and dispersed.

Normalizing Temporariness and Crisis

Crisis framing and circumstantial language function to normalize temporariness across both RACE I and II. Structural barriers such as overcrowding, limited absorption, resource scarcity, are presented as external or pre-existing conditions constraining both refugees and institutions, while diverting attention from the role of policy and power in producing them. Evaluative language intensifies this framing by constructing the context as fragile, strained, or overwhelmed, as in reference to a "fragile socioeconomic and political context" (MEHE, 2014, p. 3). Such evaluations generate urgency and legitimize the need for continued external support. Integration is framed as conditional on capacity and funding constraints rather than articulated as a social and political commitment. Through this discursive configuration, integration becomes reliant on management of limitations. As a result, temporariness becomes permanent, second-shift education system persists, and long-term inclusion remains deferred. The governance effect is the normalization of crisis management. This mechanism reveals how crisis is produced as a regime

of truth that makes temporary and exceptional arrangements appear necessary, rational, and continuous.

Depoliticizing Inequality

The interaction of agency erasure, technocratic discourse, and circumstantial framing depoliticizes inequality. Relational clauses and forms of grammatical abstraction transform socio-political problems into neutral facts, presenting these problems as conditions whose resolution appears necessary for achieving access to quality education. Structural inequality is acknowledged but rendered non-political. Problems are framed as technical deficits or contextual hardships rather than outcomes of policy and power. Intertextual references to international frameworks and data further reinforce this depoliticization by embedding national policy within global governance discourses. These references secure legitimacy while constraining alternative understanding of refugee education grounded in participation, rights, or redistribution. Across both documents, inequality is managed, mitigated, and monitored rather than addressed as a political question. Refugee inclusion is thus framed as system optimization rather than social justice.

These five mechanisms together constitute a multilayered humanitarian–technocratic governance regime. Donors exercise leadership through standards, evaluation, and funding while remaining linguistically depoliticized. MEHE appears as an active yet contingent implementer, internalizing donor rationalities while retaining formal authority over refugee education. Refugee learners are positioned as vulnerable beneficiaries, incorporated through management rather than participation. This configuration reflects a hegemonic formation in which consent is produced through technical language and crisis narratives. Policy discourse stabilizes existing power relations by rendering them practical, necessary, and non-political. In doing so, RACE I and II

sediment global education governance logics into national policy practice, shaping how refugee education is administered and justified.

Discussion

Drawing on the discursive mechanisms identified in the analysis, this chapter discusses the findings in relation to the research questions and situates them within literature on refugee education.

Construction of Syrian Refugee Learners' Experiences and Subjectivities

The analysis demonstrates that Syrian refugee learners are predominantly constructed as managed beneficiaries rather than educational agents. Across RACE I and II, refugees are positioned through discursive mechanisms that emphasize vulnerability, need, and absorption into an existing system, rather than co-production and participation in their educational trajectories. This construction aligns refugee experiences with humanitarian approach of care, reinforcing dependency while marginalizing claims to rights and agency. From a governance perspective, this framing reflects that identifying refugees as vulnerable and in need, paved the way to identify refugees as people to incorporate through management rather than participation. Education is treated as something delivered to refugees, limiting the discursive space for integration grounded in agency and social membership. This goes hand in hand with the literature, as Abu Moghli (2022) highlights that the restrictive migration policies required Syrian refugees to register with UNHCR or secure sponsorship from a Lebanese national to obtain legal residency. Abdelnour and Abu Moghli (2021) emphasize that this legal framework positions refugees as passive aid recipients, stripping them of agency. The review of the policies reinforces critical scholarship that demonstrates how refugees are identified as agentless subjects, thereby limiting their capacity to influence or shape their educational trajectories. This reflects the production of subjectivities,

whereby Syrian refugee learners are constituted as governable subjects through discursive practices that categorize them as vulnerable and dependent, thereby normalizing forms of intervention that prioritize management over participation and agency.

Power Structures and Governance at a Distance

While the policy discourse emphasizes national leadership and ownership rhetorically, the underlying mechanisms of responsibility relocation and technocratic governance reveal how external influence is preserved without being explicitly named. This configuration reflects governance at a distance, whereby authority is exercised indirectly through standards, expertise, and funding arrangements rather than formal political control. Buckner et al. (2018) note that at the supranational level, donors such as the World Bank and UN agencies including UNESCO and UNICEF exert significant influence over education policy through normative pressure, financial support, and technical expertise, despite lacking direct authority (p. 450). This study extends this body of scholarship by demonstrating how such forms of governance are discursively produced and normalized within national policy texts. The CDA of RACE I and II reveals how these actors are discursively positioned at a distance, even as policy sustainability is made explicitly dependent on their continued technical and financial support, as evidenced by the declaration that "this cannot be sustained without financial support" (RACE I, p. 24). This illustrates how national responsibility is rhetorically foregrounded while the policy implementation remains structurally dependent on external funding and expertise. In line with Hamadeh's (2019) observation that international aid embeds donor priorities within national policymaking, this dynamic demonstrates how RACE I and II simultaneously relocate responsibility to national institutions while sustaining technical and financial dependency on international actors.

These dynamics align with Mundy and Verger's (2016) analysis of how the World Bank governs education through lending capacity, agenda-setting, and knowledge production rather than direct political authority. In line with this analysis, Ydesen and Elfert (2023) further demonstrate that the World Bank has become one of the most influential education policy actors in low-income countries, underpinned by a highly technocratic management approach. The RACE policy discourse can therefore be understood as securing alignment with an externally structured governance strategy that is internalized within MEHE as the primary national educational institution. From a Foucauldian perspective, this reflects the operation of governmentality, whereby power is exercised not through direct imposition but through the production of knowledge, norms, and rationalities that shape how governance is understood and enacted. In this sense, technocratic discourse functions as a governing technology that renders external influence as technical and necessary, thereby organizing the conduct of institutions and actors while obscuring the political nature of these interventions. This way, technocratic discourse functions not as a neutral policy language but as a mechanism through which power is exercised, redistributed, and rendered invisible.

Social Inequality and the Depoliticization of Disadvantage

The literature highlights the marginalization and social exclusion of Syrian refugee learners; Salem's (2022) scholarship argues that the double-shift system not only alienates students but also undermines their sense of agency. Refugee students experience a conflicted sense of belonging and exclusion due to shortened school hours, lower-quality instruction, and discriminatory behavior from teachers and peers which further entrench feelings of isolation from the broader community (Salem, 2022). CDA of RACE I and II demonstrates how such outcomes are discursively produced and legitimized. The analysis shows that circumstantial framing justifies

structural inequalities as external conditions, such as funding availability, system capacity limits, resource scarcity, or crisis management, thereby normalizing temporariness and crisis. This framing plays a decisive role in the continuation of parallel systems such as the second-shift schooling while deferring long-term inclusion. As a result, integration is redefined as managed access within constraints rather than full integration into the public education system. This discursive configuration masks the distributive consequences of education policy, particularly with respect to access and quality of education. Refugee learners bear the costs of system constraints through parallel structures such as second-shift schooling, while these arrangements are framed as pragmatic responses rather than as political compromises. Consequently, inequality is stabilized within policy discourse, limiting the possibility of rights-based or redistributive approaches to refugee education.

Synthesis: Governance, Consent, and Power Stabilization

Taken together, the discussion demonstrates that RACE I and II construct refugee education in ways that systematically strip refugee learners of agency, reinforce a hegemonic governance structure through technocratic discourse, and stabilize inequality within national policy practice. Refugees are predominantly positioned as vulnerable beneficiaries of managed inclusion rather than as rights-bearing educational subjects, limiting their capacity to participate meaningfully in shaping their educational trajectories. At the same time, technocratic framing and crisis-based rationality depoliticize external influence, securing consent to an externally structured governance arrangement while relocating responsibility to MEHE under conditions of constrained autonomy. Within this configuration, structural inequalities are presented as circumstantial constraints rather than as outcomes of policy choice, enabling parallel systems and differentiated access to persist as normalized solutions. Read through a Foucauldian lens, these discursive mechanisms foreclose

alternative understandings of refugee education, demonstrating how policy discourse operates as a key site through which power is exercised and inequality reproduced. In this sense, power operates through the production of knowledge and normative rationalities that define what constitutes a legitimate problem, an appropriate intervention, and a governable population. By structuring refugee education through technocratic categories and crisis-based logics, policy discourse organizes the field of possible action, limiting what can be thought and enacted.

Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations, primarily arising from the methodological demands of CDA and the constraints of time. CDA is an intensive qualitative approach that requires sustained engagement with texts, repeated analytical readings, and careful contextual interpretation. While the analysis provides critical insight into the educational policy framing within RACE and RACE II, the study did not extend to a broader corpus of related ministry documents, implementation guidelines, or the Lebanese Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) issued from the Ministry of Social Affairs that may further illuminate discursive shifts over time. Similarly, the time frame did not permit CDA of relevant UN reports or World Bank documents, which could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of how international discourses intersect with and shape national policy language.

In addition, as with all CDA research, the analysis is interpretive in nature. Although the study follows established theoretical frameworks and applies systematic coding procedures to enhance analytical rigor and transparency, interpretations are shaped by my theoretical positioning and analytical focus. Alternative readings of the texts may emerge if different CDA traditions, complementary methodologies, or additional data sources are applied. These limitations do not undermine the validity of the study's findings but rather delineate their scope. The thesis should

therefore be understood as an in-depth qualitative examination of the discursive construction of refugee education policy within the Lebanese context, rather than an exhaustive analysis of all institutional and international policy texts related to Syrian refugee education in Lebanon. Future research could build on this work by expanding the corpus of analyzed documents or integrating policy discourse analysis with ethnographic or interview-based approaches that foreground refugees' voices.

Conclusion

This thesis critically examined Lebanese education policy responses to the Syrian refugee crisis through a CDA of RACE I and RACE II frameworks. Drawing on Fairclough's three-dimensional model and informed by Foucauldian conception of power and Lemke's technocratic discourse, the study analyzed how policy language constructs Syrian refugee learners, allocates agency, and legitimizes governance arrangements within the education sector.

The analysis demonstrated that both RACE I and RACE II are characterized by a dominant technocratic discourse that frames refugee education primarily as a problem of system management, capacity, and efficiency. Linguistic patterns such as nominalization, passive constructions, and abstract language systematically obscure agency and depoliticize responsibility. Syrian refugee learners are predominantly positioned as passive recipients of intervention, whose role is limited to entering or being absorbed into an education system designed and governed by institutional actors. Their subjectivity and agency are largely absent from policy representations. At the same time, MEHE is discursively positioned as an active yet constrained agent. While MEHE is frequently foregrounded as the planner and implementer of educational reforms, its agency is consistently bound by conditions of financial scarcity, crisis framing, and reliance on donor support. International donors and UN agencies are constructed as indispensable yet

depoliticized actors, framed as technical or financial supporters, whose influence is normalized through language of partnership, capacity building, and system strengthening rather than explicit political authority.

Across both policy phases, social inequalities are simultaneously acknowledged, managed, and reproduced through the discursive construction of refugee education. While the policies address inequality at the level of access by expanding enrollment and increasing system capacity, they do so within a framework that prioritizes technical solutions over structural transformation. Inequality is exacerbated through mechanisms such as double-shift schooling and differentiated provision, which institutionalize unequal learning conditions while being framed as pragmatic responses to crisis. At the same time, inequality is reproduced discursively through circumstantial framing, whereby constraints such as limited capacity, funding, and emergency conditions are presented as external and unavoidable, thereby deflecting attention from policy choices and power relations. In this way, refugee marginalization is normalized as a condition to be managed rather than contested, limiting the space for rights-based or redistributive approaches and reinforcing existing hierarchies within the education system.

By foregrounding the ideological and discursive dimensions of refugee education policy, this study contributes to the literature by addressing gaps in existing research that often focus on access, implementation, or outcomes without interrogating how policy language itself produces and sustains inequality. The findings underscore the value of CDA in revealing how governance operates through neutral policy texts and how technocratic discourse reinforces exclusionary structures. Overall, the thesis demonstrates that refugee education policy in Lebanon is not merely a response to crisis but a discursive site where power, responsibility, and belonging are negotiated. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing more equitable and inclusive education

policies that move beyond managing displacement toward recognizing refugee learners as social and educational actors.

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Appendix A

Preliminary Read of RACE I

The purpose of this meaning-oriented reading was to familiarize myself with the narrative of the policy. To support this, I produce a descriptive summary of RACE I that captures its key components. This preliminary engagement provided the necessary foundation for the subsequent stages of Fairclough's (1995) CDA, including detailed linguistic description and interpretation of discursive and social practices.

Through the preliminary read, RACE I provides a narrative of the situational context post-refugee influx, the international community's decision to support Lebanon's response to the crisis, and the objectives and core components of the RACE I framework.

In 2012, MEHE opened public schools to all Syrian children regardless of legal status and waived fees, enabling the enrolment of around 40,000 students with support from UNICEF and UNHCR; however, overall access remained critically low, particularly at the secondary level. Rapid growth in the refugee population and its concentration in already deprived regions led to severe overcrowding, amplified systemic weaknesses, and contributed to high dropout among Syrian students, alongside rising dropout rates for Lebanese learners. Refugee children faced multiple barriers to education, including language, transportation, documentation, discrimination, and limited psychosocial support, increasing risks of child labour, early marriage, and violence. These pressures also strained teachers, degraded educational quality, and accelerated the deterioration of school infrastructure, further burdening an already overstretched public education system prior to crisis.

Following the Economic and Social Impact Assessment of the Syrian crisis in 2013, the international community agreed that Lebanon needs support to respond to the magnitude of the

Syrian refugee crisis against its already fragile socioeconomic and political conditions. The Regional Response Plan (RRP6) addresses refugees' humanitarian needs while supporting efforts to prevent further deterioration of public infrastructure. World Bank, Government of Lebanon, and UN developed a stabilization framework that emphasized system strengthening and reform, with pre-crisis education initiatives and donor support from the EU, World Bank, and USAID partially redirected to address emerging needs.

By December 2014, projections estimated that Syrian refugees could reach 1.5 million, representing over 30% of Lebanon's population. Children and youth aged 3 to 18 accounted for 42% of this population, with more than 280,000 refugee children out of school across 1,400 localities, mainly in the poorest regions such as northern Lebanon and the Bekaa. The scale and concentration of the influx heightened social tensions in host communities and schools, fueled by perceptions of unequal aid distribution, job competition, and pressure on public services.

RACE I is a three-year initiative aimed at reaching an average of 413,000 vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugee children each year by expanding equitable access to education, improving the quality of teaching and learning, and strengthening the national education system. It frames education as both a humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis and a strategic tool for promoting social cohesion and reducing tensions within host communities. The initiative emphasizes sustained investment in public education to support the most vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian learners. The Program prioritizes the 250 most disadvantaged localities, which host most of Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese, ensuring that investments are directed towards the most deprived areas. RACE I increases the absorption capacity of the public system by improving pupil–teacher ratios in first shifts and introducing second-shift schooling. Also, the program intends to support children's transition into formal education through non-formal education programs. RACE

I consists of three components access to education, quality of teaching and learning, and system strengthening.

Expanding access to education is a key priority, requiring the rehabilitation and equipping of public schools and the removal of economic barriers, particularly transportation costs, that affect both Lebanese and Syrian families. While MEHE has increased capacity through double-shift schooling, this approach is not financially sustainable without substantial external support. Besides formal education, non-formal education plays a crucial transitional role for children who have been out of school, supporting reintegration into formal education through targeted academic and psychosocial interventions. Additional community-based learning opportunities, especially in informal settlements, provide basic education and structured activities tailored to the needs of refugee children. Besides, access quality must be strengthened to ensure meaningful learning. Teacher training is essential for utilizing child-centered pedagogies and providing psychosocial support and positive discipline. Also, communication networks must be developed between schools, Lebanese parents, and refugee families to build trust, support student learning, and foster social cohesion.

RACE I highlights institutional strengthening as a central priority, with MEHE requiring technical assistance to develop and regulate policies on curriculum, language of instruction, and certification, particularly for out-of-school children and learners in non-formal pathways. MEHE assumes a lead role in reviewing and approving non-formal education content, including the development of a comprehensive Accelerated Learning Program curriculum aligned with the Lebanese context and responsive to diverse learner needs. Strengthening school-based monitoring systems in public schools is intended to generate timely data on attendance, retention, learning outcomes, and psychosocial well-being, enabling early and targeted interventions. In parallel,

school-based management and school grants are used to empower schools to manage increased enrolment, enhance learning environments, and strengthen community engagement.

Overall, RACE I enables MEHE with international partners to lead a coordinated, robust, and sustainable national education response to the Syrian crisis.

Following the pre-analysis, I design coding for CDA in NVivo. As I code, I notice patterns in how Syrian refugees' education is identified and constructed. These initial observations informed the development of specific queries in NVivo, which I examine at deeper levels of analysis; more details of this process are elaborated in the analysis chapters.

Preliminary Read of RACE II

RACE II is an ambitious five-year program, covering the period 2016–2021. It aims at bolstering institutional technical capacities, reinforcing the policy framework, fostering long-term partnerships, and establishing a coordinated platform for education programming. The program is led by PMU, in collaboration with CERD and DOPS, along with relevant stakeholders including UN agencies, donors, NGOs, and academic institutions. Through preliminary reading, RACE II builds directly on RACE I by clarifying MEHE's commitments and the responsibilities of donors, who continue to provide financial and technical support to strengthen MEHE's capacity. RACE II identifies RACE I donors yet also highlights a critical funding gap. International financial support covered only 30% of the costs generated by RACE I, leaving MEHE significantly underfunded. RACE II is developed within the same strained context; the Lebanese public education system remains in need of significant strengthening to deliver quality education. RACE II revisits the three core issues access to education, the quality of teaching and learning, and the strength of the national education system.

While enrolment remains at 42%, RACE II highlights RACE I's achievements in expanding access to formal public education for both Lebanese and Syrian refugee children. However, persistent challenges continue to drive school dropout, child labor, and early marriage as coping mechanisms for poverty. Besides access to education, RACE II highlights teacher capacity as central to students' experience of quality education. The document introduces attention to the education of children with disabilities. Only 40% of registered Lebanese children with disabilities are enrolled in one of the 100 specialized institutions (UNESCO, 2013, MEHE, 2016). As for Syrian refugee children, over 72% of Syrian children with disabilities are not enrolled in school (UNHCR and AUB, 2016, MEHE, 2016).

Pillar I focuses on addressing the barriers that prevent children from school enrollment. It plans a *multi-year national Back-to-School (BTS) initiative* designed to increase participation in formal and non-formal education through a combination of nationwide media campaigns, community-level *outreach and mobilization*, family-based *case management*, and strengthened preparedness of public-school administrators. The media campaign aims to widely circulate information about enrolment opportunities, while community engagement activities seek to counter negative social norms and reinforce the importance of education. Sensitive issues such as child labor, early marriage, special needs, and school violence that might limit children's enrollment in schools through *case management*. There is a re-emphasis on alleviating financial barriers such as registration fees and education-related costs. The need to rehabilitate schools, especially where the host population is mostly impacted by the presence of refugees (MEHE, 2016, p. 12).

Pillar II interventions focus on strengthening teaching quality, school governance, and community involvement in the learning process. Teacher training programmes developed by CERD aim to enhance classroom management, promote positive discipline, provide psychosocial support, and

build educators' capacity to teach children with special needs. To assess the impact of these capacity-building efforts, CERD and DOPS will jointly establish a National Teacher Assessment Framework alongside classroom observation tools, while DOPS will monitor second-shift schools to ensure compliance with national performance standards. In parallel, MEHE will work with DOPS to promote safe, inclusive, and healthy school environments through annual health checks and psychosocial support, including training teachers to identify violence and refer students requiring specialized support. Additional academic assistance will be provided through remedial and homework support programs implemented by NGOs, and community volunteers will facilitate communication between schools and refugee communities, helping address issues such as bullying, violence, and discrimination that contribute to student dropout.

PILLAR III aims at achieving systemic transformations that transfer the public education sector toward a stabilization and development agenda. There is an emphasis on the reform of the Lebanese curriculum to improve learning outcomes for students. The new curriculum will be based on learner-centered pedagogy and will emphasize the development of cognitive, social, and employability skills. Also CERD will revise and develop the NFE programs after the ALP and other preparatory programs in basic literacy and numeracy.

To better support the various systems' interventions planned, RACE II proposes frameworks, standards, and strategies for operationalization. CERD will take the lead in developing and implementing a national education data management system and a comprehensive national learning assessment strategy. MEHE will initiate collaboration with MoSA and other ministries to develop a policy and mechanisms to monitor violence against children in schools. Besides that, MEHE will coordinate with MoSA and UNICEF to create a comprehensive special needs education framework aimed at reducing barriers to education for these children.

RACE II outlines a set of indicators to evaluate the outcomes of its three pillars. Progress in expanding access to education is assessed by the number of students who receive waivers for registration fees. The quality of education services is measured through indicators such as completion, retention, and transition rates across education cycles, as well as the proportion of children and youth enrolled in regulated NFE who successfully transition into formal schooling. Improvements in teaching quality are monitored through the percentage of trained educators whose classroom performance meets national standards. Strengthening of the education system is evaluated through the development and adoption of policies and regulatory frameworks governing education programs, school management, teaching practices, monitoring of violence against children, and provision for learners with special educational needs.

RACE II is built on a long-term partnership between MEHE, donors, UN agencies, and other education partners. However, if donor fundings decrease, RACE II will seek funding from private institutions. If the situation in Syria improves and refugees return home, RACE II should support reintegration into Syrian schools. If the influx increases, the education system will rely on new investments in RACE II to handle the increased pressure.

Appendix B

This appendix provides examples of the NVivo coding process used in the analysis.

Figure 1B

Coding stripes with RACE I text

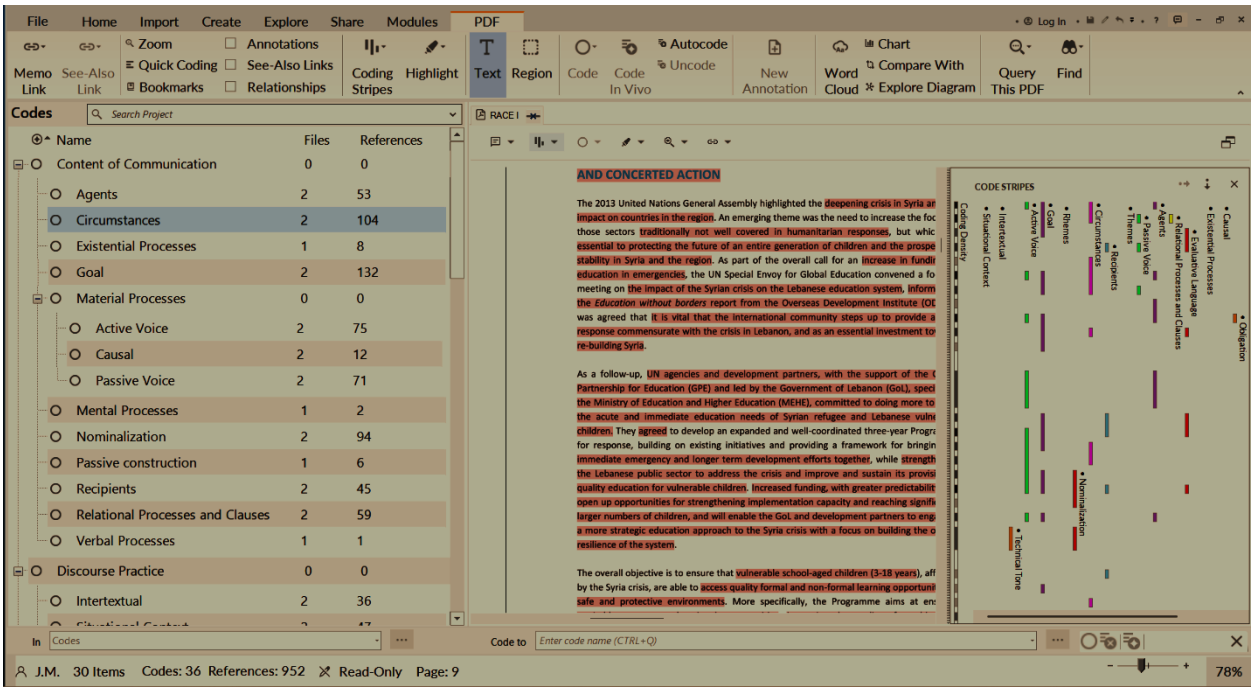

Figure 2B

Code definition

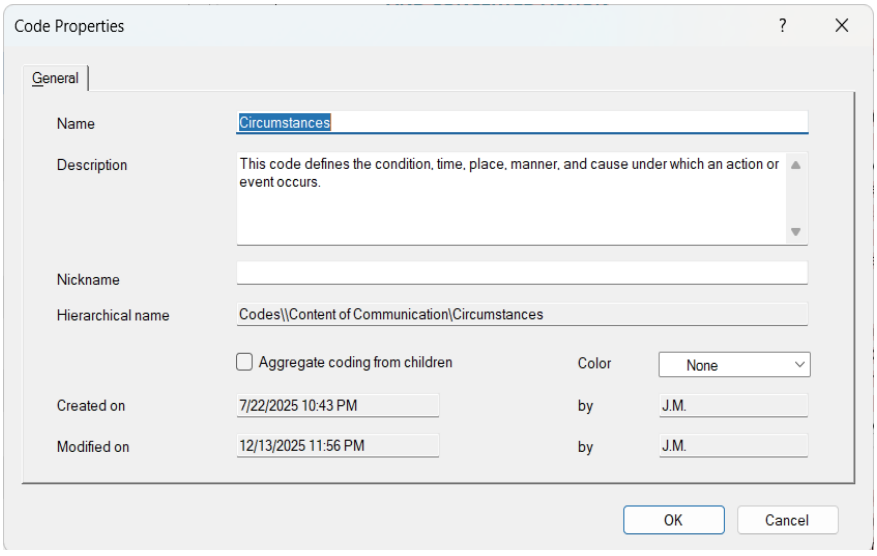

Figure 3B

Coding stripes with RACE II text