Rationale

The purpose of UNRWA’s Educational Research Briefs is to disseminate the findings of key and pertinent research to UNRWA Education staff – Teachers, Principals, School Supervisors, and Area Education Officers, relevant Field Office staff, as well as the education staff at UNRWA Headquarters.

The Research Briefs will be of three types:

1- Summaries of specific research papers

Summaries of high profile research papers and studies such as: the Mc Kinsey Report “How the World’s Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better”; the PISA publication on “Key Competencies in Reading, Mathematics and Science”; and the Mc Kinsey report ”How the World’s Best Performing School Systems Come out on Top”.

2- Reviews of regional, national, and UNRWA research on a specific theme of relevance to UNRWA

a) Relevant themes for research to be addressed include: characteristics of highly effective schools; impact of repetition; student evaluation; class /specialist teacher model; drop-out; and potentially other themes such as successful TVET programmes, school report cards, or inclusive education / SEN children.

b) Relevant research papers published in the UNRWA Student-Teacher Journal may also be synthesized by theme, for example themes relating to teaching and learning practices, school management, and corporal punishment.

3- Research Briefs on data or research techniques themselves, aiming at contributing to data or research capacity building

This type of brief would detail the methodology of a specific kind of research; or consider the issue of EMIS systems or specific issues with regard to data collection and use.
Introduction

This brief summarizes the main conclusions of the article: "How the world’s most improved school systems keep getting better", by Mona Mourshed, Chinezi Chijioke, and Michael Barber, edited by McKinsey & Cie. The article was released in December 2010 and is available at: http://ssomckinsey.darbyfilms.com/reports/EducationBook_A4%20SINGLES_DEC%202.pdf.

The article looks at countries across the world that have shown progress in terms of students’ academic achievement or made a promising start to that effect. It highlights the role of reform in this progress and identifies key lessons learnt and implications for other countries in improving their school system.

Improving quality in developing and developed countries alike: it is possible

What do all these countries have in common?

Lithuania, Singapore, and the United Kingdom have all improved their educational achievement consistently over a long period of time with Ghana, Minas Gerais State in Brazil, and Jordan having made promising starts. How did they do?

A common key to ensuring successful change: undertake systemic change

The study shows that all successful countries considered educational reform as a systemic change, whereby educational interventions mutually reinforced one another to produce overall improvement in the education system. The diagram below shows the elements of this systemic change.
Key lesson learned: Intervene more when success is lowest, and vice versa

Education systems which succeeded in bringing about improvement adapted the intervention to the level of performance of their system as follows:

- Poor performing systems focused on literacy and mathematics basics, providing strong guidance and support for their teachers and fulfilling students’ basic needs;
- Systems with “fair” performance focused on consolidating the system foundation, including with regard to data, accountability, financing, organization structure and pedagogical approaches;
- Systems with “good” performance ensured teaching and school leadership were regarded as full-fledged professions;
- The best performing systems put the schools at the forefront of performance improvement (e.g. by encouraging peer learning and school-based innovation).

The ingredients of change: crisis, a new leader, a like-minded team

The study highlights how crisis (political and/or economical) and negative assessments of the education system can always be an opportunity! Most systems which succeeded in improving their performance began their journey towards improvement following a political or economical crisis, or from a negative evaluation of the education system.

Furthermore, all systems which succeeded in improving themselves had a new leader who gathered a team of like minded people to work towards improvement.

How to start?

- Decide on what is “non-negotiable” in the reform and secure related resources;
- Engage with stakeholders (e.g. parents, teachers, principals, and community leaders);
- Get “early wins” (fast, highly visible and meaningful changes) on the board quickly;
- Ensure new pedagogical practices are internalized, that is to say that teachers’ thinking about teaching and learning changes, in order for changes to be sustained.

A last key lesson learned: how to contextualize reform

This global study suggests that the main aspects of successful reform do not change according to countries. It is only how reform is implemented (what to impose, what to propose, which pace to choose) which depends on the context. (Mc Kinsey & Cie. Report, 2010)
Introduction


The McKinsey Report looks at the countries across the world with the highest scores in core subjects (such as Reading, Mathematics and Science) in international assessments. It also looks at other countries whose students’ scores have shown rapid improvement. The main characteristics of successful education systems are also highlighted in the Report.

This Report was later complemented by the 2010 McKinsey Report (summarized in the first UNRWA Research Brief) which analyzes the change process leading to quality improvements in education. The study found that there are three factors in successful school system.

Get the right people to become teachers

The first key factor identified as contributing to the success of the best performing school systems is the teacher selection process. Best systems recruit the right people, in terms of their abilities, attitudes and motivation to become teachers. They achieve this in the following way:

- **Best performing systems strive to attract a broad base of applicants.**

  This may mean, for example, advertising for the candidates to enter the teaching profession in newspapers, online, or through public broadcasting. It also means creating paths for mature people, currently perhaps working in other jobs, to become teachers.

- **Best performing systems have a rigorous teacher selection process.**

  They assess candidates with regard to a wide range of criteria (qualifications, academic abilities, personality, motivation). This is carried out through varied evaluation processes (e.g. CV screening, tests, interviews, observation) to ensures students who have the required attitudes, motivation, and academic qualifications are those that are selected.

- **Best performing systems ensure a match between the number of trainees and the number of teachers needed.**

  They do this by ensuring the number of places available for Teacher Training, reflects the projected teacher needs. Some systems achieve this by hiring teachers before they enter Teacher Training, others by restricting Teacher Training places offered by Universities through controlled funding allocation. These processes then ensure trainees get a teaching position after they finish training.
• Ensure appropriate starting salaries for teachers

The best performing systems recognize that teaching is about much more than salaries, but they do recognize that teachers need to be paid a starting salary comparable to that of graduates moving into other professions.

A good level of initial remuneration does not mean however that the best performing systems have higher unit costs than other systems. This may be achieved by the system having a different career structure with lesser career progression, but good initial pay, or by having larger class sizes (this is supported by research, which indicates that changes in class size have at best very limited impact).

Ensure appropriate training and ongoing professional support and development

Best performing school systems use various strategies to provide teachers with ongoing professional support. This is achieved by:

• Ensuring that much of the Initial Teacher Training is in the classroom, to ensure the building of concrete, practical skills;
• Ensuring there are “Coaches” or “Expert Teachers” in schools who are tasked with providing feedback on teachers’ practice, modelling better instruction, and helping teachers to become more reflective practitioners;
• Enabling teachers to learn from each other by giving them time to plan lessons together, and ensuring that best practices are sustained in the school, rather than being lost through staff changes when a teacher moves on;
• Strengthening instructional leadership with regard to supporting and improving teaching and learning. This is through selecting the right people to become School Leaders and then developing the appropriate skills for them to perform their leadership role. In best performing systems, the time of School Leaders’ is focused on the task of leadership and school management, rather than on administrative tasks.

Delivering for every child

To be high-performing, a system cannot afford to forget some children. In line with that, the best performing systems provide all children with appropriate support and opportunities to learn. They do this by:

• Setting high expectations for all children, focusing particularly on literacy and numeracy in the early years;
• Monitoring the quality of their schools and ensuring independence and transparency of the evaluation process;
• Making interventions at school level, for example providing support to ensure improved leadership, or providing additional funding to schools as needed for training or infrastructure;
• Best performing systems ensure that action is taken immediately to support all students who are at risk of falling behind.

In summary

This Report underlines three main characteristics of best performing systems:

• Getting the right people to become teachers;
• Developing them into effective instructors;
• Ensuring that the system is able to deliver the best possible instruction for every child.

This analysis is complemented by the later McKinsey Report of 2010, which underlines the way towards becoming a best performing schools from different starting points.
Introduction

Throughout the world, governments are trying to improve the education of their children within an environment of limited financial resources. Increasing class size is often proposed as a means to improve cost efficiency, but teachers, schools and parents themselves prefer smaller classes because they are perceived as easier to manage and as offering better opportunities for teachers to pay individual attention to children. However, what evidence is there to support this view?

This brief provides a synthesis of existing research on class size and its effects on student achievement, and hence the implications for UNRWA education policies and initiatives.

Review of Research and Key Findings

The relationship between class size and student achievement has been the subject of many studies in recent decades. In order to guide the UNRWA Education Programme the following is a critical review of the main studies that have been conducted as to the effects of class size on student achievements.

The review of relevant research highlights that there are numerous factors affecting an education system and students’ achievement, and therefore caution should be taken before concluding that the results of any individual study on class size apply to another system or context. For instance teacher and parent bias can affect study results due to differences in methodology, parental expectations, or school-related systems. On the other hand, there are differing definitions of ‘small’ and ‘large’ class sizes, depending on the system being considered (for example average primary class sizes: USA 20; Japan, 28; China 37; South Africa 44; Malawi 76 (OECD, 2012; UIS, 2012).

A first review of 40 studies conducted in 1978, mostly from North America, yielded inconclusive results (Haddad, 1978). Another review in 1994 of over 50 studies from the USA and Britain, provided evidence of a positive link between lower class size and educational attainment in the early years of education, for classes smaller than 20 and for disadvantaged pupils (Blatchford and Mortimore, 1994). However, a larger analysis of 276 studies in 2003, that estimated the impact of pupil:teacher ratio on academic achievement, found that most results were statistically insignificant, and the remainder were equally divided between positive and negative effects (Hanushek, 2003).
A major research project on the impact of class size on early school grade is the STAR project, which was implemented in the 1980s in Tennessee, USA, where children were randomly assigned to regular size classes (22-24 students) or small classes (14-16 students) up to grade 3. The study reported that students in the smaller classes achieved a higher level in reading and mathematics. However, the research has been substantially reviewed by many other researchers who concluded that the initial study was biased, and that there were many other contributing factors that needed to be considered. The study does not therefore support any widespread reduction in class size (Hanushek, 1998; Robinson, 1990). Other studies and reviews indicate that large reductions in pupil:teacher ratios (a proxy for class size) in the USA over a period of 25 years have not been accompanied by improvements in student performance (Hanushek, 1998).

Few studies have been conducted outside North America and Europe. A study on class size in rural Bolivia highlighted that increased class size was shown to have a negative effect on achievement (Urquiola, 2001). Likewise, in Nigeria, a larger class size (more than 35 pupils) were found to have a negative effect on examination results (Adeyemi, 2008). However, in Bangladesh, larger classes would found to yield more positive effects than small classes (Asadullah, 2005).

These studies highlight that there are no definitive results as to any remarkable effect of class size on learning achievements. Overall research indicates that “within the range of 40–45 to as low as 20 pupils per teacher, declines in class size are not correlated with appreciable gains in student learning” (Lockheed and Verspoor 1991, quoted in the World Bank, 2003).

Looking at comparison across countries, a recent review of class-size effects, based on an analysis of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in 11 countries, found that smaller classes have beneficial effects only where the average capability of the teaching force is low (Wößmann and West, 2006). The results of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) across 35 countries found that the average performance of students in large classes (greater than 30 students) was better than in medium-sized classes (20-30 students), and that students in small classes (less than 20 students) had slightly worse performance on average than those in medium-sized classes (Willms, 2006).

What the studies do tell us is that there appears to be no consistent relationship between class size and student achievement. As many studies show inconclusive results, and even those that do indicate a positive or negative effect, the differences are not generally very great.

“In most cases there was no difference in achievement between 20 and 40 pupils in a class and in some cases between 20 and 55 pupils. If class size dropped below 15 pupils and if this was accompanied by teachers individualising the instruction then there was an increase in achievement.” (Warue Kariuki & Guantai, 2005)

A key perspective is that size, per se, cannot improve academic achievement, but it can have implications for the way that teachers and learners interact (Little, 2008). Small classes can offer opportunities for more individualised student learning (Anderson, 2000), but this potential advantage has to be seized by teachers. Research finds that many teachers whose classes have been reduced, even by substantial numbers of students, do not change their teaching techniques to take advantage of smaller classes leading to very limited effect on student performance (e.g. Ehrenberg et al, 2001; Blatchford, 2009; Robinson, 1990). Research suggests that if class size is around 40 students, then rather than trying to reduce class size to below 20 students, there are other more effective ways to improve student achievements. This is a key for making policy decisions for many countries where salaries are a high proportion of the budget. Class size itself may not be a key determinant of quality, but what goes on inside the classroom and the school, and the relationship between children and parents to the school, do matter (Alexander, 1982; Lee & Bryk, 1989; Bryk et al., 1990; Scheerens, 1992; Slavin, 1994; Ho & Willms, 1996; Little, 2008; Ehrenberg et al, 2001; Betts et al., 2003; Nye et al, 2004; Abadzi, 2006; Wößmann and West, 2006). The key findings of class size research and their policy implications are given below.
Policy Implications

“While policies to reduce class size [to below 40 students] may enjoy popular political appeal, such policies are very expensive and, according to the evidence, quite ineffective.” (Hanushek, 1998)

- Class size in itself is not a key determinant of good quality. If class size is around 40-45 students, reducing class size is not correlated with significant improvement in student achievements.

- However, a minimal reduction in class size has a high impact on overall educational costs.

- The allocation of resources for decreasing class size needs to be carefully considered against the real gains in educational achievement as research highlights inconclusive results. This is why it is more cost effective to consider other ways of improving quality.

- Factors that have a more significant effect than class size on students’ educational achievements include (McKinsey, 2007):
  - good use of class time;
  - structured and adaptive teaching approach;
  - teacher qualification and years of experience;
  - appropriate and sufficient text books and educational resources;
  - coverage, content and pace of the curriculum; parental involvement, and supportive attitude of parents, students and the wider community towards education;
  - small number of days lost to disruption, irregular attendance and teacher absenteeism;
  - nutritional status of students; supportive gender attitudes; socio-economic status; and
  - parental education,

- Quality education means investing and continuing to improve what happens in classrooms and schools. This is far more challenging than reducing class size, but rather is about changing classroom practices through a much broader approach.
introduction

“Grade repetition” is a practice by which students are held in the same grade for an extra year rather than being promoted to a higher grade with their peers. It is often used as a strategy for dealing with low achieving students. In UNRWA host countries, grade repetition is the general policy, but what evidence is there to support the effectiveness of this approach for improving student learning and school management?

This brief provides a synthesis of existing UNRWA-relevant research on grade repetition and its effects on student learning, and hence the implications for education policies and initiatives.

review of research and key findings

Grade repetition is one of the indicators used to measure the overall quality of national education systems and the performance of schools. Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have the highest rate of repeaters in primary education, for example Burundi has 35%, whereas in countries of East Asia, North America and Europe repetition is less than 2%. Table 1 provides a comparative overview of percentage of repeaters in primary education in selected countries around the world:

Table 1: Percentage of Repeaters in Primary Education (grades1-6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestine</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNESCO-UIS (most recent data – 2008-2011)
Within UNRWA schools, students repeat a grade if they fail an end-of-year exam (and then the subsequent re-sit before the start of the next school year). Across UNRWA Fields, repetition rates vary considerably, with Lebanon having the highest number of repeaters in primary education. Tables 2 and 3 indicate how repetition in early grades is high in Syria and Lebanon, while in other Fields such as Gaza, Jordan and the West Bank repetition does not begin until Grade 3 in Gaza, Grade 4 in Jordan and 5 in West Bank. Comparing the data in Tables 2 and 3 highlights that grade repeaters are more likely to be male than female. Data also shows that an increasing number of students are progressively left behind at early ages with major negative effects in Gaza and Lebanon, where children are generally struggling to meet the graduation requirements at Grade 4 and 5.

Table 2: Percentage of repeaters (males) in UNRWA schools by grade (Syria data 2010-2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Gaza</th>
<th>Lebanon</th>
<th>Syria</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Percentage of repeaters (females) in UNRWA schools by grade (Syria data 2010-2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Gaza</th>
<th>Lebanon</th>
<th>Syria</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Impact of Grade Repetition

Although the immediate reason behind repetition is the failure of the student to meet learning requirements, research highlights how repetition is intrinsically linked with socioeconomic inequality. Repeaters are mostly from families of lower socioeconomic status, and their parents are less likely to be involved with school activities (Brophy, 2006; Beebe-Frankenberger et al, 2004).

Evidence suggests that grade repetition has a strong impact on the individuals concerned, both in the short and long-term, and on the school, whether in the classroom, or the school as a whole. The consequences of repetition are analysed below, particularly with regard to: academic achievement, student well-being, and school operations.

Academic achievement: Grade repetition is generally found to improve achievement in the short term, but over time, grade repeaters fall further and further behind their age-peers (Bernard et al, 2007; Brophy, 2006; Verspoor, 2006; Bernard et al, 2005; Hong & Raudenbush, 2005; Pustjens et al, 2004; Paul, 1997). Repeating the grade may enable the students to perform better in subjects if they are studying them for the second time, but it does not generally lead to overall advance in their knowledge or competencies to enable them to progress in subsequent grades.

Furthermore, since student promotion is often tied to performance on a single specified test, school administrators and teachers might choose to focus on the tests rather than attempting to improve overall learning. This means that more time is devoted to tested subjects, with a subsequent narrowing of the curriculum (Roderick et al, 2005). While these efforts might succeed in raising scores on the targeted test, they produce little gain on academic achievements (Amrein & Berliner, 2003).

Student well-being: Research shows that grade repetition is associated with reduced student self-esteem, lower academic motivation, impaired peer relationships, high levels of stress and marginalisation from school. This can lead to long-term problems such as lower attendance, poor academic achievement and behavioural problems that often result in dropping out of school (Andre, 2008; Ndaruhutse et al, 2008; Brophy, 2006; Troncin, 2006; Anderson et al, 2005; Hong & Raudenbush, 2005; Corman, 2003; Anderson et al, 2002; Hacsi, 2002; Jimerson, 2001; Eisenmon, 1997; Holmes, 1989; Shepard & Smith, 1989; Holmes & Matthews, 1984). Data on repetition and enrolment in UNRWA schools indicate that repeating grades substantially increases the probability of school dropout: from 10 times more likely amongst boys in Jordan, to 73 times more likely amongst girls in Gaza.

School Operations: With regard to school operations, research indicates that making classes more homogenous in achievement levels (and thus in theory easier to teach), does not have in fact any positive effects on students (Hong & Raudenbush, 2005). On the contrary, classes that include significant numbers of previously retained students present serious challenges concerning student motivation and classroom management (Brophy, 2006). These problems can become worse as the grade level increases (e.g. Grade 8 compared to Grade 2) and where there are larger age-differences between students in the same school. The UNRWA Universalia (2010) review found that problems can
arise when older children are placed with children who are just two to three years younger. Parents described how some 17 year-old males are in the same mixed primary/preparatory school as 9 year olds, and how they felt publicly humiliated and angered by this situation. Parents also reported that they would pull their children out of school if they begin to fail. (Universalia, 2010)

Grade repetition is also a factor leading to inefficiency and waste of resources. Repetition in fact increases the overall cost of schooling, through the expense of providing an additional year of education for a student. It also implies a cost to society, as a student’s entry into the labour market is delayed. (UNESCO-UIS 2012)

"Once students have been advised to leave UNRWA schools at any grade level, there generally is no learning alternative for them. Most try to find employment, but many end up on the streets..." (Universalia, 2010)

Table 4: Grade Repetition: Assumptions and Research Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumptions</th>
<th>Research Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It improves achievements in the short term</td>
<td>Achievements are lost over time and repeaters fall further behind their age peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a tool to harmonize learning levels of a classroom</td>
<td>Classrooms with repeaters are more difficult to manage and motivate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a tool for ensuring high standards of learning outcomes</td>
<td>It causes decreased confidence and lack of motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a tool to enable low achievers to catch up with learning</td>
<td>Repeaters are much more likely to drop out compared to non-repeaters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a tool to motivate children for better performance</td>
<td>It negatively affects children with learning disabilities as they become progressively marginalized from school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Policy Implications

The alternative to grade repetition is generally considered to be ‘automatic promotion’. Automatic promotion in itself, however, does not necessarily address the learning needs of the failing students. Alternatively there is a need for a number of interventions that support students at risk of school failure, and help them to catch up with their peers. Successful strategies to support students with low academic achievements include:

- ensuring that the early primary grades strongly focus on basic literacy and numeracy allowing sufficient time for students to master these skills;
- assigning the strongest teachers to the early primary grades;
- developing peer to peer support or tutoring to support students who are falling behind; and
- allowing alternative assessment strategies to replace high-stakes examination systems (Universalia, 2010).

In regards to these types of interventions, UNESCO’s Education Policy Series booklet on ‘Grade Repetition’ (Brophy, 2006) concluded that “the strategy should be to prefer automatic promotion – provided that this is supplemented with a range of initiatives (early intervention, remedial instruction, parent involvement, etc.) that are specifically designed to help struggling students to achieve at acceptable levels.”

Key recommendations for reducing repetition (Brothy 2006, Ndaruhutse 2008):

For teachers:

- Work in partnership with parents, e.g. close communication, classroom visits, materials for them to use in tutoring their children at home.
- Develop supportive relationships with struggling students focusing on early grades.
- Closely monitor low-achievers’ participation in lessons and homework, and intervening if necessary.
- Provide at-risk students with additional learning opportunities as soon as possible.

For the education system as a whole:

- Educate and support teachers to enable them to understand and meet special needs, with a focus on literacy and numeracy at early grades.
- Educate teachers to use assessment (through tests, lesson participation, homework) as an ongoing component of the curriculum, designed to evaluate the effectiveness of their own instruction and track progress in their students’ learning, and hence identify and follow up as soon as possible on unmet instructional needs.
- Improve teacher training in light of the Universal Primary Education Agenda.
- Provide a relevant, competency-based curriculum.
- Improve availability of quality, appropriate teaching materials.
- Ensure achievement expectations for each grade are realistic.
- Provide support for at-risk students, especially when they are mastering basic literacy and numeracy skills.
- Ensure adequate and sufficient infrastructure.
- Raise awareness amongst all stakeholders (e.g. policymakers, school managers, teachers, parents) of alternatives to grade repetition.
- Address non-educational factors that affect attendance.
- Provide adult literacy programmes for parents (as the educational level of parents is strongly positively correlated with the duration and achievement of their children’s studies).

Research shows that repetition decreases with improvements in quality of education system and provision of appropriate learning support. This means that focusing on quality and inclusiveness as a strategy for dealing with low achievement, is far more effective than grade repetition,
UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and is mandated to provide assistance and protection to a population of some 5,000,000 registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip to achieve their full potential in human development, pending a just solution to their plight. UNRWA’s services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, microfinance and emergency assistance. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions.