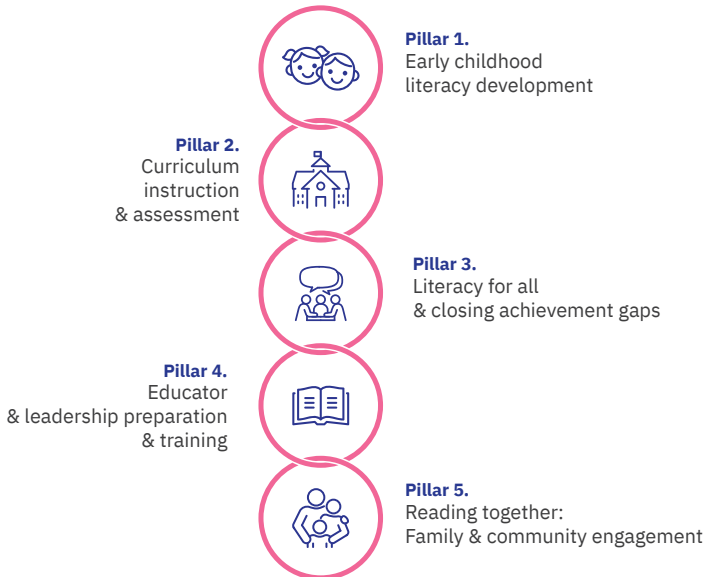




State of Palestine
Ministry of Education

Palestine National Arabic Literacy Strategy

Phase 1 | 2023-2026



Acknowledgement

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Thank You

Introduction

Reading is a gateway to learning and an essential skill for all children. Reading is a means of acquiring human capital to power careers and economies, engage citizens, and nurture healthy, prosperous families.

This strategy outlines the actions to be taken to significantly improve students' preliteracy and reading skills across Palestine and is based on the monitoring and evaluation reports and national tests that are designed to measure students' reading skills and competencies.

Goal

The goal of Phase 1 of the strategy is to improve students' preliteracy and reading skills in early years and lower primary school settings by 2026.

Background

Reading is one of the most important skills that a child needs to learn in their early school years. It is the gateway to further learning, and essential for developing deeper learning skills such as problem solving and critical thinking. However, across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), more than half of children cannot read and understand an age-appropriate text by age 10 – this is known as the learning poverty rate.

There are many reasons for the poor results in Arabic reading across the MENA region, including a lack of engagement with books and stories from an early age, and instruction that does not always follow the scientific evidence on how best to teach children to read.

Phase 1 of this strategy focuses on improving the teaching and learning of Arabic to raise reading outcomes for children across Palestine.

Theory of change

If every school has a literacy-focused leader in a literature-rich environment, and every classroom has knowledgeable, creative, and literacy-minded teachers, the foundations will be set for students' literacy development, academic achievement, and overall success.

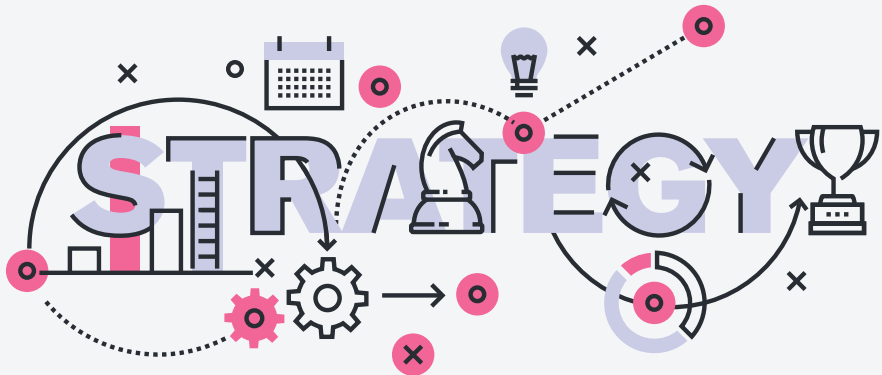
This strategy aligns with the set of policies that most successful countries have undertaken to achieve fast and sustained improvements in foundational literacy (appendix A).

This strategy also aligns with the specific Arabic recommendations set out in the World Bank's proposed path for reducing learning poverty in the MENA region, based on the latest evidence including from the science of reading (appendix B).



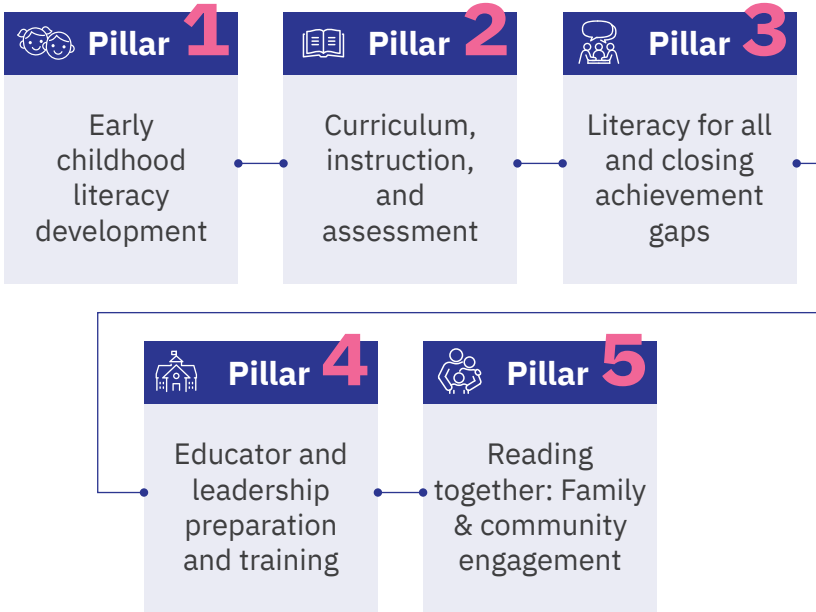
This strategy:

1. Builds on previous projects and initiatives, available resources, and existing structures across the education system in Palestine.
2. Aligns with the 5-year Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Palestine, 2024–29.
3. Provides a framework to enable development partners to align their support to prioritized activities. The strategy includes, but is not limited to, activities under the SERATAC (Supporting an Education Reform Agenda for Improving Teaching, Assessment, and Career Pathways Project).
4. Is expected to continue beyond 2026, to raise outcomes in primary and secondary school settings, according to standards and proficiency indicators that are appropriate for each grade level.
5. Harnesses partnerships across institutions, communities, and families.



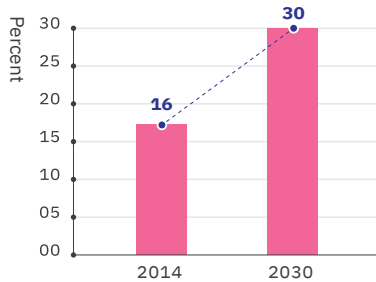
Organization of the strategy

Actions in the strategy are organized across five pillars of the education system:



National target

This strategy works toward a long-term goal for **all children to be on track to become skilled readers.**



Percentage of Grade 2 students reaching minimum oral reading fluency*

* Minimum oral reading fluency is defined as 30+ correct words per minute. The baseline, which is the most recent data available, is from the 2014 Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), which was administered in West Bank.



Pillar 1. Early childhood literacy development

- ✓ Early stimulating environments, such as in high-quality kindergartens, promote early language and literacy development, which is key for school readiness and enhances learning across all areas of knowledge. (World Bank 2022: Quality Early Learning: Nurturing Children's Potential)
- ✓ Teachers tend to assume that less advantaged children who have not attended kindergarten (KG) are not as capable and that this situation has long lasting impacts on their academic development. (Findings from Supervisor focus groups)
- ✓ Less than half of Palestinian children benefit from KG1, and those that do are from more affluent families. (MOE database)
- ✓ Access to KG2 is higher, with a Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) of 83% across the West Bank and Gaza, but many children are in classes led by unqualified teachers. (MOE database)
- ✓ A new KG Professional Diploma, with a comprehensive module on early literacy teaching and learning, has been developed to raise the qualifications of KG teachers. In 2024, 1,005 of the approximately 3,282 unqualified KG teachers are due to complete the diploma. (MOE database)

Strategic actions

- 1 Universalize KG2 enrollment** in phase 1 of the strategy.
- 2 Increase the number of qualified KG2 teachers** who can teach and assess early language skills expected for KG, and provide instruction based on children's needs by:
 - a** Scaling up the KG Professional Diploma to reach all private unqualified KG2 teachers.
 - b** As part of private KG licensing requirements, mandating qualifications for KG2 teachers (with a grace period for full implementation). In addition to developing legislation that prevents teachers who do not have a professional diploma from practicing the profession.
 - c** Leveraging the KG Professional Diploma curriculum to strengthen the continuous professional development of public KG2 teachers.
- 3 Adopt a structured pedagogy approach** in which teaching steps are organized and unified among all KG2 teachers. This approach includes lesson plans and supporting educational materials and resources to improve children's learning in Arabic language and other subjects.



Pillar 2. Curriculum, instruction, and assessment

✓ Among grade 2 students in 2018: (EGRA 2014 data)

16%

Met minimum oral reading proficiency

22%

Could not read a single word

36%

Could not correctly answer any comprehension question, of those who could read a word

- ✓ Lower primary classrooms do not fully **utilize research findings on the science of reading**. Important teaching resources, such as children's literature and posters, which are effective teaching resources that aim to enhance learners' awareness of the importance of reading, are rarely used. (Supervisor and teacher focus groups)
- ✓ The use of **curriculum standards and proficiency indicators for Arabic language arts** can allow teachers to judge and communicate student progress in a transparent and consistent way. (Gregory et al. 2021)
- ✓ Instructional time for literacy in Palestinian schools is similar to other countries; however, **the use of time is not optimal**. (Supervisor and teacher focus groups)
- ✓ There is a big gap between the intended **Arabic language teacher profile and current teacher preparation programs**. (Supervisor and teacher focus groups)

Strategic actions

- 1** Develop Arabic language standards and proficiency indicators for KG2 to grade 6, building on the existing curriculum expectations and the evidence on best practices in teaching and learning. This would include:
 - a** Developing students' oral reading fluency in MSA across the curriculum
 - b** Adopting a phonetic approach for spelling and decoding
 - c** Leveling texts for every grade according to number of words, expected fluency ranges, and text genres
 - d** Identifying common sight words and vocabulary words per grade level, for grades 1–4
 - e** Adopting explicit and clear strategies for reading (aloud, shared, guided, independent) and for writing
 - f** Determining proficiency indicators to help teachers assess and support students on a continuous basis
- 2** Adopt modern strategies in teaching reading (from grades 1 to 4) through the following measures and procedures:
 - a** Monitor the scope and sequence of teaching content
 - b** Aligned lesson plan outlines detailing specific learning objectives; suggested teaching and learning strategies (including explicit and direct instruction, teacher use of MSA and materials) and ways to check students' progress

- 3** Provide a supporting guide that includes instructions on how to enrich the curriculum with the following:
- a** Fun and attractive children's literature that teachers read aloud to the learners (reading texts should be based on fictional, scientific, and informational texts)
 - b** A list of books appropriate for each grade level, to be read in classrooms and at home
 - c** Reading logs documenting students' daily readings, whether accompanied by parents or caregivers
 - d** Additional fun and engaging activities centered around children's literature to help build a learning portfolio that contains evidence showcasing learners' progress in reading and writing

4 Rollout an Arabic language screening check for grades 1 and 2 students to check that all children have gained some of the key expected age-appropriate early literacy skills associated with reading fluency and comprehension. The primary purpose of the screening check is for schools to identify and respond to children needing additional support. The results can also be aggregated and monitored at a national level to ensure that efforts toward the national literacy strategy are working well and to provide the needed support to schools. The screening check would be accompanied by guidance to schools.

- 5** Include in curriculum and instructional materials for the lower primary grades (grades 1–4) a focus on the following:
- a** Strategies rather than content
 - b** Inclusion of global topics with a Palestinian cultural flair
 - c** Adopting formative evaluation as a methodological guide in building teaching and learning content
 - d** A selection of themes and texts that are appropriate to children's ages and cognitive development. These texts should be interesting, attractive, and engaging to all children, and effective in developing their value system

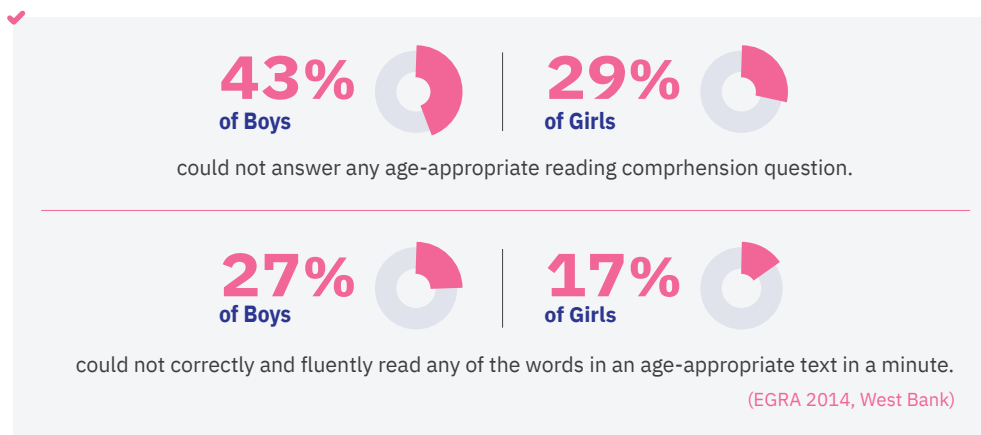
6 Conduct a general inventory of available stock of reading resources (fictional stories, scientific and information books) available for lower primary grades (grades 1–4) and provide schools with what they need from these reading resources. In addition, facilitate schools' access to e-resources for Arabic language learning.

7 Increase the time allocated for high-quality teaching of reading and writing, given that the time currently available is 40 minutes for 9 periods per week, while a 90-minute block of activities focused on literacy has been found to be effective in other contexts.



Pillar 3. Literacy for all and closing learning gaps

- ✓ There are large gaps in preliteracy and literacy development amongst children. These gaps are evident in the differences in performance of children from different socioeconomic backgrounds, the types of schools they attend, in addition to a noticeable gap in performance between genders. [Data: Disaggregated data from EGRA, national assessment, TIMSS]



- ✓ **Lost learning time due to the COVID-19 pandemic and teacher strikes** has resulted in large proportions of children being behind in acquiring literacy skills, particularly in grade 4. (Supervisor and teacher focus groups)

Strategic actions

- 1** Continuously communicate to districts and schools to clearly set the expectation that all children will meet minimum proficiencies in Arabic literacy, and monitor using formative and summative assessments (including the new screening check).
- 2** Ensure that:
 - a** Schools use the screening check to identify students who may need additional support and follow up based on the guidelines
 - b** Schools are fully committed to follow the approved observation guidelines, to identify children in need of additional supports
 - c** Schools are well prepared and committed to respond to the needs of learners who have not achieved the required minimum standard performance levels for reading skills. These measures include additional classroom support; support from resource room staff (where possible); and diagnostic testing for specific learning difficulties when needed
- 3** Identify schools with large proportions of children needing additional supports, and target supervisors' support to those schools to develop and implement remediation plans that respond to the realities of these schools and their needs.

- 4 For each of the grades 1–4 Arabic curricula, identify and communicate to schools the critical content and skills to be learned, and the importance of periodic evaluation checkpoints throughout the school year to ensure that all students are on track and to intervene with additional support as needed.
 - 5 In teacher guides, provide clear instructions on teaching strategies that should be adopted for differentiating teaching and learning, and stipulating ways to employ periodic evaluation checkpoints and methods for including them in the lessons throughout the academic year (e.g., paired reading, small group work, peer-to-peer support).
 - 6 Roll out Resource Rooms to all schools and ensure they are equipped to identify and work with children who need additional support in literacy development.
-



Pillar 4. Educator and leadership preparation and training

- ✓ Research shows that **teachers and the quality of teaching** are major determinants of children's learning and wellbeing. Going from a poor-performing teacher to a great teacher can increase student learning by multiple years of schooling. (Beteille and Evans, 2021)
- ✓ There are increasing numbers of newly trained teachers who are looking for vacancies. Once hired, they require **induction and continuous professional development**. (MOE database)
- ✓ The Teacher Education Improvement Project (TEIP) for grades 1–4 classroom teachers developed a professional development index of teachers' pedagogical competence, which was used to redesign, develop, implement, and evaluate preservice and in-service programs. This is still being used in 5 universities and is considered a strong basis and reference for teachers' training and development programs. (TEIP report)
- ✓ School leaders have a significant impact on student literacy learning. (Lead for Literacy)
- ✓ Palestinian school principals have a new job description that includes the responsibility to create a school climate conducive to learning and wellbeing. (MOE)

Strategic actions

- 1 Review teacher preparation programs and teacher training plans to ensure inclusion of:
 - a Science of reading including phonological awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension
 - b Phonics
 - c Reading comprehension strategies
 - d 6+1 traits of writing (writing process)
 - e Standards-based instruction and assessment
 - f Using children's literature in class
 - g Differentiated instruction in the classroom
- 2 Review and enhance the TEIP module on Arabic language instruction. Use this as a basis for the continuous professional development offered to grades 1–4 teachers, delivered by universities in collaboration with the National Institute for Educational Training (NIET). Include two levels of the module: one for Arabic specialist teachers; and one for non-Arabic specialist teachers. This should include supporting them in their use of MSA.

- 3** Support universities and institutes in the development of a national professional qualification for literacy leaders (or specialists) which should be based on the findings in academic research, and on practical training that provides opportunities to immediately apply the required skills and strategies (phonological approach, comprehension strategies, higher order thinking skills) in the classroom. Enrollment for this qualification would be offered to current teachers who would have or are aspiring for a role in supporting their colleagues in literacy instruction.
- 4** Target in-service training to schools with the most need. Consider a model of school literacy hubs in which schools with literacy leaders work with partner schools to build capacity to raise performance standards through evidence-based teaching strategies, initially targeting areas with the most need for support.
- 5** Revisit supervisors' checklists for teacher observations to include good practices and strategies for Arabic language teaching and learning. Take measures to ensure a reflective approach to teacher supervision for all participants — teachers, supervisors, principals and school learning communities to embed a culture of continuous improvement.
- 6** In line with their new job description, provide training to school principals to equip them with the strategies needed to build school environments that enhance literacy and stimulate more growth (beyond competitions and prizes), and document these practices and strategies within the monitoring networks of what they have achieved in supervising their schools.



Pillar 5. Reading together: Family and community engagement

- ✓ There are many initiatives promoting reading. However, it is necessary to ensure that they suitably cover all levels of student achievement within each grade (not just the top achievers), and that they effective initiatives are sustained. (Supervisor and teacher focus groups)
- ✓ Parents in Arabic-speaking countries are less likely to have children’s books at home and to read to their children. This generally deprives children from an early exposure to reading, to children’s literature books, and to activities that build fluency in Arabic and promote the habit of reading for pleasure. (Gregory et al. 2021)
- ✓ Children whose parents often engaged them in early literacy activities had an average score of around 100 points higher in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) than others who did not get this early exposure. (PIRLS)

Strategic actions

- 1** Promote reading and literacy awareness campaigns via available media outlets (radio, podcasts, TV, social media) to help parents and the community at large understand how crucial reading is to their children’s future. Examples of such campaigns include launching an electronic reading passport initiative, and granting an award to those who excel in it, to encourage reading in the community and provide students with the basic skills necessary for learning in the lower grades.
- 2** Collaborate with local governmental and nongovernmental institutions to help promote access to books and a love of reading.
- 3** Develop infographics and home guides to help parents support children’s literacy development at home.
- 4** Collaborate with bookstores in West Bank and Gaza to promote availability of books, storytelling and reading activities.
- 5** Launch sustainable and equitable school-based initiatives that link with the community. For example, a weekly “My Parent (or my grandparent) Reads”, where parents take turns to read to their child’s class during the school year.

Appendix A

A Policy Package to Promote Literacy for All Children

The World Bank's [Literacy Policy Package](#) constitutes the set of interventions that most successful countries have followed to achieve fast and sustained improvements on foundational literacy at scale.

1 Assure political and technical commitment to making all children literate.

This includes developing age-appropriate milestones for literacy acquisition; measuring and monitoring these milestones; and acting when children fall behind.

2 Ensure adequate amounts of effective instruction by supported teachers.

This includes having clear curricula and pedagogical guidance (e.g., teacher guides, lesson plans, or other materials); ensuring sufficient class time for reading; and providing teacher support (e.g., coaching or other continuous professional development).

3 Provide quality, age-appropriate books and texts to children.

This includes providing a variety of level- and content-appropriate books and texts so that children can read at and outside school; and having book production chains that function to make texts available, affordable, relevant, and used.

4 Teach children first in the language they speak and understand best.

This includes ensuring that children become literate first in their home language; and ensuring that any transitions to additional languages later in schooling are well-planned and well-timed.

5 Foster children's language abilities and love of books and reading.

This includes engaging caregivers to read to and with children at home each day; and including early experiences with books and reading as part of quality childcare and early childhood education to promote preliteracy and language skills.

Appendix B

A Path for Reducing Learning Poverty in MENA



Set literacy goals

Set quantifiable national goals and standards for Arabic language learning outcomes with highest-level commitment



Build bridge from colloquial to modern standard Arabic (MSA)

Harness common features/vocabulary of MSA and colloquial Arabic to help learn MSA



Expand early MSA exposure

Expand children's early exposure to MSA in engaging ways



Align instructional resources to follow a systematic phonetic approach with a focus on reading comprehension in a literature-rich environment

Align Arabic instruction, resources, and assessments to focus on a systematic phonetic approach, emphasizing reading comprehension across the curriculum — with sufficient time in the school year — and make extensive use of children's literature to build vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension



Revisit Arabic language teacher education programs

Align preservice and in-service teacher training programs to focus on effective methods of teaching Arabic with extensive practical experience opportunities



Reduce achievement gaps

Recognize literacy achievement gaps — gender, regional, socioeconomic — and provide targeted support to schools with underperforming students



Intervene early with struggling readers

Assess, diagnose, support with early interventions, and monitor struggling readers



Promote family and community awareness

Encourage families, community groups, and the private sector to understand and prioritize children's Arabic literacy development



Balance purposeful use of technology

Ensure technology investments are based on evidence of effectiveness and that they encourage more MSA listening, speaking, reading, and writing and/or streamline the work of teachers, balanced with proven paper-pencil methods



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State of Palestine
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