



Education in Ethnically Mixed Areas of Northeastern Syria

Background Paper

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Executive Summary

Education in northeastern Syria has been one of the most controversial topics, as the Autonomous Administration (AA) – announced in 2014 – has attempted through education to assert its influence within society. It asserts the right of ethnic groups to education in their mother tongue, but this issue raises a number of problems regarding the use of multiple curricula in northeastern Syria, the fate of the degrees and diplomas given by the administration to students. It also raises the popular and political division regarding the validity and future of the educational process and the fate of students, especially those with preparatory and secondary degrees, regarding the recognition of the degrees and diplomas given by the administration. It also raises the question of the future of the education administration and the workforce trained to teach in Kurdish and Syriac.

The problem of education in northeastern Syria has transformed into an arena of political competition between various sides, and as well as a source of anxiety for families of the students, as many parents are hesitant to send their children to the schools belonging to the Autonomous Administration as a result of fears regarding the legitimacy of the degrees and diplomas awarded. Unlike the schools belonging to the Autonomous Administration, government schools are overflowing with students, where 75 to 80 students are crowding into a classroom. That is in addition to the lack of a proper educational environment in those schools at the most fundamental level.

Direct interviews with specialists in education, along with interviews of families of students and education officials, have provided a deeper understanding of the nature of the problems facing the independence of education in northeastern Syria. This includes the opportunities to reach a deal that leads to an agreement over a unified curriculum and which provides legitimacy to diplomas and degrees, reducing the ideological aspects in the curricula of both the government and the Autonomous Administration. It also involves finding solutions for the future of those involved in the educational process in northeastern Syria, both administrators and teachers, including the retraining of the education workforce. Most important is finding a solution to the question of multilingual curricula whereby the administration insists on teaching children in their native tongue and Damascus refuses education in any language except Arabic, and to increase the amount spent on education. The education system in its current form needs urgent solutions to distance itself from politicization.

This paper focuses on the areas with a Kurdish majority and those that are multi-ethnic, where government institutions operate alongside those of the Autonomous Administration. At a later stage, we will focus on the areas of Deir al-Zour and Raqqa to provide a more complete picture of the educational system.

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Methodology

Primary Topics of Discussion

This paper will discuss the educational process in ethnically mixed areas of northeastern Syria, including curricula and teaching methods; the level of competency for employees and teachers in the education field in the Autonomous Administration; the various political influences on education; and the mechanism for integrating students and teachers into various entities.

The paper is based on interviews and meetings with education experts and teachers, as well as employees involved in the Syrian government's education sector who do not have party or political backgrounds, and the families of students. Interviews were conducted in person and via social media. All interviews were conducted in the city of Qamishli, where the situation is similar to that of the city of Hassakah as both the government and the Autonomous Administration operate schools. The list of interviews and meetings included:

- Technical and educational experts working in the Syrian government's education sector
- Employees, teachers, and officials in the Autonomous Administration, and retired teachers concerned with finding solutions to the problems of education in northeastern Syria
- Three meetings with parents of students from the local community with different political, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.

Focus of this Paper

- The general orientation of the local community and the extent of its acceptance or rejection of the curricula imposed by the Autonomous Administration, and general indicators of these positions; the influence of the nature of the political dispute between the various sides over the educational process, and their positions towards the curricula.
- The level of qualification of the workforce in the Autonomous Administration schools regarding university education and specialization, how to resolve their status in the future, and the fate of graduates of Rojava University; the best solutions regarding the fate of students enrolled in the two sets of curricula, and their integration into one status despite the differing languages between the two curricula; the mechanisms used by the Autonomous Administration to introduce ideology into the curricula; the extent of ideology present in the Syrian government curriculum, and how can all ideologies be overcome in the new curricula.
- Suggested solutions to emerge with one curriculum that satisfies all sides, and how to resolve the issue of language for students at the same level; how to eliminate dormant sensitivities resulting from the circumstances of students, particularly those in the preparatory and secondary stages.
- Practical suggestions and recommendations that should be implemented now and in the foreseeable future, concerning the sensitivity raised by the Autonomous Administration's curriculum, and the sensitivity surrounding the entire educational system of the Autonomous Administration.

1. The Community's Position and the Influence of the Political Dispute

A. The current situation of the educational system (Curricula and Parents' Positions)

The most prominent factors pushing parents not to gamble on an education system whose future and fate are uncertain include the lack of any recognition for Autonomous Administration curricula outside of the administration itself, combined with the fact that one political party stands behind the curriculum and that there is no national or even Kurdish consensus regarding it. Additionally, the Syrian government will not allow any discussion regarding this topic officially or theoretically, even within its own educational directorates.

On the other hand, the Autonomous Administration's curriculum has not been accepted by the Arab community to any noteworthy extent. The social norms of the Arab community would not allow a move directly to a Kurdish-language curriculum, in addition to their general disagreement with the vision mentioned above.

A faction of parents refuse to send their children to Autonomous Administration schools, and paradoxically a number of Autonomous Administration officials send their children to private or government schools that use the government curriculum. Another faction prefers to send their children to Autonomous Administration schools, evidenced by the fact that Kurdish and mixed areas have not seen widespread rejection of the schools via demonstrations or protests, as happened in Deir al-Zour where people rejected the contents of the curriculum.

Syrian government schools are overflowing with students, and the number of students in a class exceeds 75 or 80 students using two sessions – one in the morning and one in the afternoon. A number of government facilities have been turned into temporary schools in Qamishli and Hassakah within the security quadrants (government-controlled sections of the cities). In Qamishli there are approximately eight school clusters, where students of varying levels are placed in one school facility, using separate morning and afternoon sessions. There are also approximately six schools in areas under government control and twelve schools in rural areas belonging to the government. In Hassakah there are approximately thirteen of these school clusters and five schools.

In contrast to the overflowing government schools, the number of students in Autonomous Administration schools does not exceed twenty students per classroom, and the number of students numbers 330,490 students between the Jazira and Euphrates regions. The number of schools belonging to the Autonomous Administration is 2106.

There has been a return of students from Autonomous Administration schools to government schools, particularly in the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 school years. They are treated in the same manner as those coming from other provinces without official papers that prove how much schooling they have completed, such as the progression from one year to the next or the most

recent diploma completed by the student. In order to address their situation, a system is used whereby they are put in a category called (Class B) and taught two school years in the course of one year. For example, for the Autonomous Administration a twelve-year-old student should be in the sixth grade. When they return to a government school from the Autonomous Administration, they are given a test of their knowledge to determine their grade level. If, for example, this student were assigned to the second grade, then the system of two years taught in one would look like this: in the first term of year one they would be in second grade, and in the second term of year one they would be in third grade, until the student catches up to their peers within their age group.

Thus the student is placed within the Arabic-language curriculum based on their linguistic capabilities according to their age and grade level when they begin in the Syrian government schools. Many parents who sent their children to Autonomous Administration schools sent their children to private remedial lessons at home, using the government curriculum, to ease their transition back into government schools.

At the preparatory level there has also been a return to government schools, but in smaller numbers than primary school. Students' status is resolved using three factors. They are able to obtain a primary school diploma through the free-learning education system, where the education directorate has allowed for students to take an exam in the city of Hassakah exclusively, conducted multiple times in December of each year to allow for the maximum number of students possible. Subsequently the student can take preparatory school exams through the free-learning education system if they pass the primary school exam. After passing the primary school exam the student can obtain a sequence of grade levels from any preparatory school to prove that they were a student at that school and pass the exam through the normal method. In either case the student has not built up an accumulation of educational knowledge. The region has not seen a demand for return at the secondary level, but in such a case the student would need to receive primary and preparatory diplomas, then either complete their secondary studies or pass the secondary exams through the free-learning system. Discretely, the government's education directorate has facilitated the return of students to government schools in areas teaching the Autonomous Administration curriculum. Some say that this is causing the education system of the Autonomous Administration to fail, and ingraining illiteracy since most of these students are Kurdish and can therefore obtain a primary or preparatory diploma without building up an accumulation of education knowledge and completing their sequence of grade years. In this case the student fails academically, and misses key information, and is affected psychologically as they fall behind their peers from their age group. In contrast to the desire of parents to teach their children in Arabic, the primary motivation in this case is for their children to obtain a primary or preparatory degree regardless of whether they have obtained the knowledge that they were lacking.

While the Autonomous Administration has clarified that they looked at the educational experiences and curricula in a number of European and Arabic countries and borrowed from each of these to benefit their curricula, they did not clarify the mechanism or tools or entities that they engaged with and benefited from. In contrast, education specialists see the process as

having lacked any connection to proper scientific and academic methods, and that the results are dangerous and not guaranteed. The Autonomous Administration has countered by saying that methods of teaching and curricula differ from country to country and therefore they did not directly rely on the experiences of those countries.

The Autonomous Administration says it is in dialogue with the Syrian government and UNESCO to resolve the issue of education, but they have not clarified the nature or results of those discussions, saying instead that the results have not come to fruition yet and that they prefer for those discussions to be led by UNESCO and UNICEF. They also say that the solution they are striving for is the decentralization of education, and that an agreement can be reached regarding a curriculum for scientific subjects to be used throughout Syria, provided that it be available in Kurdish. They also reject any infringement on the subjects of ‘Culture and Values’, ‘Social Sciences’, and ‘the Democratic Nation’, and insist that the curricula be taught in the three languages of the area’s communities.

Interviewees said that the justification for the quick steps taken to change the curricula was a result of the Syrian government’s refusal of any changes or the introduction of the Kurdish language into official school curricula, and that the Kurdish curricula and students that were taught in Kurdish will become a card in the hands of the Autonomous Administration in any discussion with the Syrian opposition or the Syrian government over any future political deal, allowing them to assert the right to education in the mother tongue.

B. Affects of Political Disagreement

Political disputes play a key role in defining positions towards the curricula. A faction of residents who are not in line with the Autonomous Administration or under the influence of political positions opposed to the Autonomous Administration send their children to government schools. The fact that these students take government exams for preparatory diplomas is the biggest indicator of this. This is not to deny that belonging to a political movement opposed to the Autonomous Administration and its ideology is also an important factor. The local community is sensitive to ideas imposed upon them that they see as contrary to their beliefs. Diverging political affiliations, combined with some of the ideological elements within the single-party education system in northeastern Syria, has created violent reactions and increased the division between the Autonomous Administration’s Education Directorate and the local community. On the other hand, if there were a unified position between the two Kurdish sides over a unified curriculum it would contribute to unifying public opinion towards the curriculum. It is important to remember that the political disagreement is both Kurdish-Kurdish and Kurdish-Syrian.

Those belonging to the Autonomous Administration’s educational directorate say that they do not force anyone to enroll in their schools, and that there is popular demand for education in Kurdish, while the Syriac-Assyrian community has private schools that teach in their language and Arabic education already exists. And some blame the Kurdish National Council who, according to the Autonomous Administration, prefers the government curriculum over that of the Autonomous Administration.

2. The Prominent Challenges

A. Unqualified Workforce

The Autonomous Administration's education system was began in 2015, and it consisted exclusively of primary education. Gradually, the Autonomous Administration increased the range of its curricula and by 2018 it included secondary education. Teaching was in Kurdish using the Syrian government curriculum in most areas of the Jazira, with schools closed and reopened repeatedly. In 2012, after a decision by the Kurdish Language Institute to teach in the Kurdish language from Derik/al-Malikiyah to Hassakah, the Syrian education directorate issued a decision to close schools that taught subjects in Kurdish in all areas of Hassakah province. In response, the PYD ordered that locked schools reopen and continue teaching in Kurdish. Later, the two sides agreed to teach three lessons of Kurdish per week in ninth grade, five per week in seventh and eighth grades, and seven per week to primary students, with those courses taking the place of Arabic, IT, social studies, and science.

In 2015, the Autonomous Administration replaced the Syrian government's curricula with its own curricula in areas under its control, which prompted the education directorate of the Syrian government to close these schools and to ban teachers at those schools from cooperating with the Autonomous Administration. This resulted in the suspension of primary school classes in most schools where the Autonomous Administration had imposed its curriculum, whereas schools in government-controlled areas continued class as normal. The Autonomous Administration put plans in place to train teachers who wanted to work in their schools.

In 2015 the Autonomous Administration resorted to creating an education system for the democratic society, which includes an education directorate for areas belonging to the Autonomous Administration, consisting of a Kurdish-language teaching institute, along with academies and institutes to teach Kurdish. This system is used in all areas belonging to the Autonomous Administration, and its most basic principle is to teach each ethnicity in its own language during the first three years of education, then adding a local language in the fourth grade, meaning that Kurdish students then begin to study Arabic and Arab students study Kurdish. Starting from the sixth grade a foreign language, either English or French, is added to the curriculum until graduation. The same system is used for other levels of education. The course on nationalism and patriotism is removed from the curriculum, whereas a course is added on the democratic nation instead. Later it is replaced by social studies in primary school, and by 'culture and values' in preparatory and secondary schools, along with adjustments to the subjects of history and geography. Islamic studies is replaced with the history of religious belief. This has affected Kurdish students' learning of Arabic, and is not used in private church schools.

Included within the ranks of the Autonomous Administration's education directorate, especially the first two classes, were those who should not have been involved in teaching, education administration, supervising the education process, or preparing curricula. Most of them had preparatory or secondary degrees and were hired as teachers after a training course lasting three to six months. This created a lack of capacity and quality in the education sector, especially in teaching scientific subjects. Additionally, those hired as teachers had to be approved by the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the Autonomous Administration based on prior political considerations, with the goal of holding the education portfolio and not allowing

those who were not committed politically. After that a number of students from Syrian universities who had not been able to finish their studies because of the war were added to the workforce. A number of students were allowed to graduate from Rojava University after only a two-year course. Later, a group of university teachers with qualifications joined the ranks, some because their financial situation had deteriorated and others out of a desire to contribute to the education sector. There are currently around 19,000 teachers working for the Autonomous Administration.

The complete extent of the damage to the education system can be measured by the lack of specialized teachers within schools, the number of students dropping out from the last semester before starting the new curriculum, the number of specialized teachers leaving the field, and the lack of knowledge properly acquired in their subsequent grade levels, etc. Given the lack of official statistics regarding school dropouts, the education workforce specifically become the second basic dilemma for parents after the content of the curricula. On the other hand, the fate of those working in the education sector without proper qualifications is uncertain and their situation also needs to be resolved.

The Autonomous Administration views its educational workforce as qualified, given the significant knowledge accumulated through their experience, and that it is illogical to fire them. Instead, their position is that they should be relied upon, and that the door is open to those who wish to join the education workforce. They opened institutes to train teachers, which were only recently closed because of the excess numbers of teachers. In fact, a number of teachers were removed because of their lack of qualification. Nonetheless, the Autonomous Administration does not have any idea of the future of the government's education workforce, or how they will be dealt with if the curricula are integrated or a single curriculum is agreed upon. But they accept in their ranks those who have been fired or have retired, or those working for both sides, as long as they follow the educational program, including its faults and weaknesses. In other words, they are accepted within the educational system without addressing the more fundamental issues at the heart of the educational process.

B. Multilingual Education

One of the most prominent problems facing the future of education is a generation divided by language. This problem is specific to the Kurdish areas, rather than other areas of northeastern Syria (Arab areas), where the majority of students are Kurdish and are being taught in Kurdish. This has hindered their ability in Arabic, which will affect their ability to study at universities that teach in Arabic. Students in government schools, on the other hand, do not know how to read and write in Kurdish – at least for subjects taught in school – but they can acquire study in the language outside of school. Given the importance of unifying the curriculum, or finding a mutually agreeable formula, the issue of linguistic compatibility is one of the biggest problems facing the integration of students between the two curricula together in one class. It will require plans to integrate students gradually, including from the beginning of primary school, from grades 4 to 9 to a lesser extent, and taking yet another form in secondary school. This will be discussed in the recommendations section.

In contrast, the Autonomous Administration has presented its curriculum as an ‘ethnic’ model, given that it is taught in local languages (Arabic, Kurdish, Syriac), and has called for it to be patterned after to further the goal of multilingualism, with the possibility of adjusting the curriculum based on conditions set by the Autonomous Administration. Those conditions would be centered around the culture of the ‘democratic nation’ and the ‘brotherhood of peoples’. At the same time, the Autonomous Administration does not have any vision to solve the dilemma of multilingualism for those of the same generation, and has sufficed it to say that a solution can be reached during discussions over the issue.

C. The Ideology of the Curricula

There are noticeable ideological indications in the school books, beginning from the primary school in subjects like social studies, which is exclusive to primary education, then in ‘culture and values’ in the preparatory and secondary levels. These represent the leanings of the PYD. The Kurdish Language Institute belonged previously to the Democratic Society Movement, and now belongs to the Autonomous Administration, though without any indications of a change in goal according to those that we interviewed. There is an announced position of summarily rejecting this ideology on the part of Syriacs and Arabs, as evidenced by the first phase of imposing the curricula of the Autonomous Administration.

In the view of the Autonomous Administration, these curricula are not in any way ideological, and that the understanding of a *democratic nation* and *Jinology* (women’s studies) are changes brought on by the modern era. They also believe that women’s rights should be respected in order for societies to be liberated from a patriarchal, authoritarian mindset, and the Kurdish Language Institute works exclusively on research regarding the Kurdish language. The Autonomous Administration does not see it necessary to list the names of the authors of the curriculum for school books, and that the sources of information used by the authors are not important. They say that is secondary, and that authorship was done by a group rather than an individual.

The points of gender equality, political and ethnic pluralism, and understandings of freedom can be supported without conflicting with traditional ideas regarding women and marriage. Freedom to choose the curricula taught can be given to families depending on how they want to educate their children.

The Autonomous Administration responds to opposing opinions regarding the educational system by accusing opponents of distorting the curriculum, and tying education to politics.

D. The Ideological Curriculum of the Regime

On the other side of the equation, the curricula used by the Syrian government expresses a political ideology through subjects like ‘national education’ – whose name was changed later to ‘patriotic education’ – and some aspects of history classes, reading and writing, and the names of places and features in geography books. This political ideology has severely distorted facts and reality. Additionally, the government banned the teaching of Kurdish. Generally, students lived a contradiction between what they learned at school and what they learned at

home or in the media. Some of them were also involved in political groupings or parties, and were living in a social environment that rejected the erasure or distortion of Kurdish history. Their resistance was limited to the oral recollection of facts and reality. On top of that, there were organizations like the Baathist Vanguard and the Youth of the Revolution, alongside Baath Party bureaus within schools themselves and a policy of enforcing ideological education. Requiring students and teachers to participate in pro-government marches was another form of enforcing ideology in the education process.

3. Integrating or reconsolidating existing Curricula

A. Multiple Curricula in Different Languages

There are three curricula being used in different languages: 1) the Autonomous Administration's curriculum in the Kurdish language, and to a lesser extent in Arabic for the small number of Arabs enrolled in these schools. There is also a Syriac curriculum which again this year was not implemented in Syriac schools, and the Syriac commitment to this curriculum is almost non-existent. 2) The Syrian government's Arabic-language curriculum is used in the security quadrants of Hassakah and Qamishli, in the area of Tel Brak, and in the rural areas south of Qamishli which support the Syrian government. 3) The third curriculum belongs to UNESCO, which is used in the areas of Deir al-Zour, Raqqa, and Tabqa, and is in Arabic. This has created a fissure in public opinion and has led to Kurdish discontent as well as a social crisis. Because of the rejection of the curriculum, those concerned say this has led to an overflow of students in government schools. The Syriac community in Qamishli, Hassakah, and Derik (al-Malikiyah) has also previously protested against the implementation of this curriculum in their schools. There are also cases where a student studies the Autonomous Administration's curriculum in the morning, then studies at a government school in the afternoon, leading to exhaustion on the part of the student. It also distances the student from their peers, which is a key factor in intellectual and social development.

At the same time, some teachers and administrators working for the Autonomous Administration believe that integrating the curricula is damaging to the education process, and that the UNESCO curriculum resembles those used in literacy campaigns, and is not sufficient from an education or information perspective.

B. Preparatory and Secondary Exams

As a result of the Autonomous Administration's control of different neighborhoods and schools, the Syrian education ministry prohibits students from taking exams in these areas. As such, thousands of students come from Derik to Qamishli to take their exams. Others come from Amuda and Derbasiye and Ras al-Ayn to Hassakah to take their primary school exams. Additionally, students come from all areas to Hassakah to take their exams for free-learning education (without classroom study), which causes delays, overcrowding, and a number of other problems for the exam process. Other students cannot take exams because of mandatory military service, while a smaller number can't take the exams for financial reasons.

Recommendations

1. Increase Spending on Education and its Share of the General Budget

It is not known how much is budgeted and spent on schools, teachers, and the education system as a whole because the Autonomous Administration has not revealed its overall budget nor the share of the budget dedicated to education. However, all schools under the control of the Autonomous Administration are facilities belonging originally to the Syrian government. The Autonomous Administration has not built any schools, institutes, or universities, and has not developed the infrastructure of those schools, including playgrounds, halls, sports facilities, or parks within the school, or developed laboratories, etc.

2. Distance Education from Political and Ideological Disputes, and Agree on a Unified Curriculum

There is no alternative to ensuring national recognition of the curriculum, given the lack of clarity regarding the political future of the area as it stands now. The education portfolio should not be a part of the political and ideological struggle. Scientific school subjects like math, physics, and chemistry should be separated from political disputes.

An agreement over a unified curriculum will necessarily mean writing internal regulations for the education system, as well as clarifying the mechanism for evaluating teachers who do not have a university degree in order to benefit from their accumulated experience. The local community is not concerned with the policies of local governance structures that cannot get any international or regional recognition for degrees issued by their educational bodies.

3. Work to Retrain the Education Workforce of the Autonomous Administration

A neutral, non-partisan special committee of qualified individuals should be formed to address the challenge in this field of benefiting from the accumulated experience that exists, and to benefit from educational expertise available in the area. The committee should divide teachers into three segments: 1) Those with preparatory and secondary degrees. 2) University students who have not yet completed their studies, and these can be divided into two groups: Students of education, literature, and science should be treated separately from those who have studied engineering or other fields that are not directly related to education. 3) Studies of Rojava University who graduated after only two years of study.

Those who graduated from Syrian institutes and universities should be allowed to remain in the education sector. The other three groups should be treated according to their accumulated experience, academic knowledge, and knowledge of teaching methods. They should be either sent for further training, employed within the education sector, or sent away from the education sector to work elsewhere.

Suggested Mechanism for Work

- 1) Remove those with only primary education. Many of the Kurdish language teachers have only a primary education, and they should be employed elsewhere as long as there is a clear work hierarchy. Those with a secondary degree should be given a 500-day course where they are given all exams, quizzes, and tests. Those who have

demonstrated an accumulation of experience should be chosen to take a two-year course in education, where in the first year they are taught the basics of education and in the second year they specialize in a particular field. During these two years it is recommended that they be sent out of the cities and fill vacant teaching positions in rural areas but in small numbers, so that they in essence continue their studies as trainees. They should only teach in beginning levels – primary and preparatory – with a focus on primary education. After two years they should take a test that encompasses what they’ve learned over the entirety of the two years, something resembling the ‘national exam’, from which a group should be chosen to study two years at a college of education, after which they graduate a regular university graduate in education. The other group should be hired as teachers with the equivalent of a graduate of an institute. The hierarchy should be made obvious. In this process the age of those included should not exceed thirty years, and a retirement age of no more than 60 years should be set. Their previous experience should be considered for their salary but not for their seniority, in order to benefit from their experience, but taking into consideration that they will also be receiving free education. This can be implemented after a political agreement is reached, and education and appointment should not be subject to any political decisions. This can be implemented with the presence of a curriculum and teaching workforce.

As for those with secondary degrees who cannot demonstrate their competence, they can become recess monitors at elementary schools or civilian employees within the educational departments without allowing them to be involved in the education process, or they can be hired at other institutions.

- 2) University students can be divided into two segments: Engineering graduates can be used to teach scientific subjects, whether to fill vacancies or to be appointed within a competition to fill teaching positions. They can also be hired to maintain buildings, computer labs, or agricultural facilities, but they should not be hired until they have finished their university studies. This could be accomplished by developing Rojava University into an officially recognized university, as with other educational institutions, following a political agreement between Kurdish sides and between Kurdish sides and other Syrian sides. Students at Rojava University should be able to continue their studies in the field they had studied elsewhere, or if their specialization is not available they should be moved to another field, taking into consideration the subjects that they have already completed. For students at other branches, they should be kept within the field of education and allowed to finish their education at either Rojava or Euphrates University, after an agreement is reached, and their experience should be taken into consideration when setting their salary according to a special law regarding those teaching while completing their university studies.
- 3) Graduates of Rojava University: They should not be integrated into the educational process without first completing at least another year of study, given the weak state of the university and the lack of specialized faculty.

Mechanism for Changing the School Curriculum

- 1) Give students the choice between the Autonomous Administration's curriculum or the government's curriculum, whereby students return to their original schools, and those studying each curriculum study together in the same school, or assigning separate schools for each curriculum until a political deal reached for all of Syria. This would address the risk of educational stagnation and the risk to the future of students within the Autonomous Administration.
- 2) Use the UNESCO curriculum, which uses four basic subjects to be taught in situations of war or disaster, with additional Kurdish language courses. The four subjects are math, science, physics and chemistry, and education, and within these subjects there is no room for politicization or party politics. As it stands there are three curricula used throughout northeastern Syria: two in Arabic – the UNESCO curriculum which is removed from political and partisan conflicts, and the other belonging to the regime and which is ideological – and the third curriculum in Kurdish belonging to the Autonomous Administration, which is also politicized.
- 3) One solution to integrate the three curricula is to eliminate the subject of 'national education', 'democratic nation', and 'jingoism' from the curriculum along with any text in history, reading, or writing that proclaims the Arab nature of Syria, or that Arabizes Kurdish names areas in the subject of geography.

In some countries where Syrians went as refugees, Arabic is not used. In Turkey, for example, they dealt with Syrians by using an Arabic curriculum for several years while teaching students intensive Turkish, and then integrating them into the Turkish-language curriculum.

Were approval to be given for an integrated curriculum from the three curricula currently used, the changes required would not be equal between all subjects and grade levels. Instead, change would occur to different degrees between different grade levels. Since it is not known whether the new curriculum would be taught in Kurdish or Arabic, we can use the following model: Curriculum in language (A) and curriculum in language (B), according to the two languages used:

It is recommended that there be a temporary curriculum until there is a common language for reading and writing in use for those of the same generation. If the curriculum was previously in language (A), then students must be trained in language (B), and vice versa.

- 4) Agree on one temporary curriculum taught in two languages, Arabic and Kurdish. Each group uses their language, but the difference would be in using a standardized curriculum between the government and the Autonomous Administration under the supervision of UNESCO. This experience exists in Switzerland and Canada, where each ethnicity is taught the curriculum in their own language, but the curriculum is standardized between the languages. Maintain the use of an entirely Kurdish curriculum and an entirely Arabic curriculum, requiring Syrian students to use one of the two

languages, and requiring the use of Syriac as a second language in both curricula, but with the requirement that the curriculum be standardized. This would maintain the current differentiation based on language given the difficulty of integrating them immediately. The changes to the curriculum must be done using specialists from the three ethnicities in the region.

The school book for the first year should be entirely changed. The book for the second and third years should be partially changed to teach in both languages, while teaching scientific subjects in Arabic.

Integrate the subjects of the curriculum of the second stage (preparatory education) from fourth to sixth grades, giving the student proficiency in the two languages. In seventh and eighth grades, train students in both languages so that they can take examinations in both languages. For the ninth graders of this year, or next year's students, it is recommended to only include some subjects in the other language, and students for this year should not be given exams or final grades in the subject of language.

Secondary education: Secondary students for this year cannot have their curriculum changed at this point, while partial changes can be made to the tenth grade, and less so for the second year of secondary education. The student in their first year who has been given a new curriculum will have the curriculum changed with each new level that they reach, and the curriculum for preparatory and secondary education can be changed more broadly than the preceding year.

The Syriac language should be introduced into the tenth grade (first year of secondary) as a first phase, as an essential language course, then gradually can be introduced into other levels given the difficulty of complicated the changes to the curriculum.

- 5) There is an alternative solution for secondary students: keep the same curriculum, and adjust the curriculum, makeup, and structure of Rojava University so that the university can gain official recognition, introducing more subjects in Arabic within the secondary school curriculum. (This solution specifically would require national political agreement.)

4. Separating Ideology and Politics from Education and Curricula

Separating ideology and politics from the education system can be done as follows:

1. Separate education from politics, and distance students and the education process from political conflicts. Give importance to cultural, intellectual, and historical symbols that contributed to Kurdish thought, heritage, and language, using as an example Arab figures in books.
2. Ban the requirement for any student to participate in a demonstration or any political activity for any side.

3. Retrain teachers to prioritize the public interest over party interests; unify educational rhetoric regarding each issue, which requires cultural and social subjects to be written on values, human culture and rights, mental health, self-esteem, small project management, life skills, positive thinking and social intelligence, and neuro-linguistic programming as replacement subjects for the ideological aspects imposed by both sides.
4. Do not create books that distort the history of the peoples and ethnicities of the area; history and geography books should not be limited to the history of a specific political movement.
5. Separate the hiring of teaching and school supervision workforce from political interference, which should be removed entirely, relying instead on degrees and experience in the field of education.
6. End the monopoly of the Kurdish Language Institute which gives approval for the hiring within the Autonomous Administration. Institutes for the Kurdish language should be created by the entity responsible for supervising education rather than belonging exclusively to one party. The Kurdish Institute of Paris can also be relied upon, or graduates from the Higher Language Institute in Damascus, which has graduated a group of Kurdish language students.
7. Keep all concerns and approvals regarding the writing of curricula within specific educational considerations, rather than party approval. The process of writing curricula needs two groups, one to write the curriculum and another to supervise it. Membership in either group be conditioned on specialized academic qualification and accumulated experience. It is necessary that those working in all positions take regular and continuous courses and examinations.
8. Parents of schoolchildren will be reassured if the names of the authors are written on school books, recognizing that all school books require a number of specialists, reviewers, editors, and education experts.
9. It is necessary for the author and supervisor of the curriculum to have complete experience and knowledge of all grade levels, from the first level of primary school to the third year of secondary school. Writing a curriculum requires an amount of accumulated knowledge that corresponds to the brain development and level of the student in each grade level. The author or supervisor of a subject in grade one – math for example – must be aware of the math lessons that a first-year student should be studying, continuing up until the secondary degree. The same is true for all grade levels and subjects.
10. In the case of purchasing or using international curricula, they should be reviewed. Though most of them will be acceptable given that they have been written by specialists, and that they have been recognized by governments and by the United Nations, it is better for a specialized committee to review the curricula to know the content before using them for instruction.

Temporary Solutions

The Autonomous Administration must open the door for students with preparatory and secondary degrees to take exams in their areas and cities so that students in the ninth grade can

take their exams in their own city rather than traveling to Qamishli or Hassakah. Free-learning students should be able to take their exams in either Qamishli and Hassakah, bearing in mind that a number of young men will not take their third-year secondary exams out of fear that they will be taken to the army by the Syrian government. The Autonomous Administration should also have accepted the request of the education directorate to take over some schools belonging to the Autonomous Administration during the spread of COVID-19.

To view the subjects and curricula of the Autonomous Administration

<https://bit.ly/3mjiAkF>