



Investigating the Effectiveness of National Standards: Teachers' Views

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Abstract: Results of national tests highlighted a general deficiency affecting English language education in public schools and in intermediate schools in particular. Such results stressed that there are various difficulties facing students in observing English as a second language. The Ministry of Education and the Quality Assurance Authority (QAA) have introduced various initiatives to improve the field of English as a second language teaching while continuously monitoring outcomes and results. These initiatives focused on key areas such as curriculum design, teaching methods, teaching mediums, session length, teachers' qualifications and other factors. This is a pilot study that attempts to investigate the effectiveness of national standards and programs by doing in-depth interview of 20 teachers and conducting an attitude survey to about 100 teachers. In addition, the study will also highlight concerns of teaching staff from a practical perspective. The findings of the questionnaire and interviews are further analyzed to draw a common conclusion from available sources.

Keywords: curriculum design, teaching methods, teaching mediums, teachers' qualifications national standards

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of formal programs for teaching English as a second language (TESL) in the early 1940's, various methods has been used in an attempt to achieve the best learning outcome possible. (Light, 1978)

It is as useful to ask "Does bilingual education work?" as it is to ask, "Does Education work?" The questions raised here "What are the problems in Education?" "How can we go about solving them?" "What does research tell us about settings that are successful?" Similar questions can and should be asked about bilingual education. Bilingual Education is not essentially a language program, it has broad education goal. (Hakuta, 1986)

Increased understanding of bilingual education will disseminate the demand for demonstrations of success. In fact during the beginning years of the bilingual education movement, there was not a great deal of solid research supporting bilingual education. Since that time positive research evidence has been accumulating that students educated bilingually in carefully designed and well-implemented programs do extremely well academically and do learn English. (Crawford,J.,1987. Cummins, 1986. Krashen, 1988. Willig, 1985)

2. THE SIX BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE BILINGUAL EDUCATION:

The literature identified six general characteristics that affect student achievement in bilingual classes. These characteristics are:

1. *A working knowledge of the subject material:*

English teachers should have a working knowledge of the subject they teach. (Glasser, 1990) argues this point by simply stating. "Teachers have to previously learn a lesson somewhere along the line before they can teach it." The teacher who knows the subject content area is better prepared to present the material and redirect any misconceptions held by the students (Glasser'1990).

English teachers not only know the subject matter they intend their students to learn, but also the misconceptions their students bring to the classroom that will interfere with the learning of the subject matter. One characteristic of



the teaching staff in high performing schools seems to be their knowledge of the structure and substance of the subject being taught (Glasser'1990).

2. *Specific learning outcomes to be taught to students:*

The specific learning outcomes desired upon completion of the course should be identified at the onset of the bilingual educational program. The outcomes must then be adjusted to fit the abilities and needs of the students. (Berline, 1984) believes that the most important variable in determining the effectiveness of a bilingual education is whether the delivered curriculum of that classroom is linked logically to the desired outcomes.

3. *High expectations for the students:*

Bilingual education has some goals for their students to achieve. Teachers can expect too little or too much in their instructional assignment interactions with students (Good,1984). Teachers who expect too little from their students do not expose their students to all the curricular material needed to master concept and subject areas. Bilingual teachers who expect unreasonable outcomes from their students will cause the students to become discouraged. Teacher should strive to achieve appropriate expectations of their students. Expectations of students should be high enough to achieve optimal goals, but not unreasonable, causing students to abandon efforts (Brophy, 1986). Several researchers (Cummins, 1994, Dong,2004, Genesee, 1994) have emphasized the need for mainstream subject-matter teachers to develop English language learners' higher-order thinking skills, along with language and literacy skills.

4. *Selection of high quality instructional materials:*

Bilingual education select high quality instructional materials to use in their teaching lessons (Good,1984). If bilingual educators carefully select instructional materials to us during instruction that fit the curriculum goals and the characteristics of the students, teacher will be able to devote more of their time and energy to educational practices that enrich the lesson content.

5. *Planning structured classroom activities:*

The selection and development of instructional materials should be accompanied by well-organized and structured learning activities. In a review of studies examining the relative effects of "open" and more traditional forms of education, (Gage,1978) found more structured programs were associated with greater student achievement. One of the more consistent findings from aptitude treatment interaction research is that students with low pretest scores need more structure than students with higher pretest scores (Good,1979). Clearly, structured lessons and activities are associated with increased student achievement, especially when teaching students who produce below average results. Most successful English teachers are those who continually keep their students working up to their capacities. (Good, 1979).

6. *Using structured lesson to present subject material:*

Effective bilingual education typically use a structured approach to present their lessons that usually includes four basic components: These are:

- *Introducing the lesson:*

English teachers prepare their lessons with a format introduction to prepare the students to learn and begin to gain control of their classroom during the initial phases of instruction. The introduction typically contains a specific plan to manage student behavior and a statement of the expected activities and outcomes of the lessons to the students. Good introductions appear to prepare students to learn more effectively by giving them a general summary of what to expect during a lesson or course of study. (Kounin,1970) identified three major components of an effective classroom management system:

1. Clearly specified definition of teacher expectations regarding student behavior with clear guidelines of what constitutes an infraction.
2. The use of fair and consistently applied standards for evaluating student behavior.
3. The firm, dispassionate and consistent application of disciplinary actions by the teacher when necessary.

- *Focusing on academic content:*

Effective English teachers stress academic content in their lessons. The academic content of the lesson usually begins with a review of previous material and the checking of any homework assigned from previous lesson (Good, 1979).

The presentation of new lesson material begins by initially linking the new information of the lesson to past concepts (Good, 1979). This occurs briefly to improve the students' accommodation of the material. Bridging



new concepts to experience improves the students' development of a schema related to the subject to the subject material.

The effective English lessons are highly structured and well prepared. Smith and Sanders (1981) found those teacher presentations exhibiting high degrees of structure produced higher student achievement and ratings of teacher effectiveness. Smith and Sanders (1981) in their review of research on classroom instruction see a general pattern of results suggesting the central importance of a structured approach. Indications of a structured approach might be the availability of detailed teacher lesson plans for classroom activities with specific instructional objectives, a logical progression of instructional units, frequent monitoring of student progress, and provisions for feedback on student performance. Generally, successful teachers move their students briskly from step to step, but the steps themselves are kept small and easily within the grasp of most students.

- *Assigning follow up activities and practice:*

More effective English teachers give their students' opportunities to use the information they present in their lesson. Although independent seatwork is probably overused, it is not a substitute for active teacher instruction or drills recitation, and discussion opportunities; seatwork and homework assignments provide needed practice and application opportunities for students (Brophy & Good, 1986).

Teachers should monitor student progress during seatwork assignments. (Brophy & Good, 1986) found that students who spend most of their time being instructed by their teachers or working independently under teacher supervision made greater gains than students who spend large amount of time in nonacademic activities or who were expected to learn largely on their own.

In addition to establishing procedural and behavioral expectations during seatwork, teachers must also demand that students use their classroom time to complete curriculum tasks. Effective managers assume that students will complete assignments and hold students accountable for work. Students know what to do when they finish assignments and do not waste time trying to determine the next step they are expected to complete. Effective managers construct classroom environments in which expectations for student behavior are continuous (Good, 1979).

- *Providing Accurate and Timely Feedback to Students:*

Effective English teachers provide accurate, timely, feedback to students. Research indicated that providing academic feedback to students keeps their success high. Feedback keeps children from being failures too long. One basic requirement for feedback is that teachers provide accurate feedback to students on their responses to class questions, test, and written assignments. A considerable amount of research indicated that the pattern of teacher reinforcement for correct and incorrect student responses is highly erratic and often inaccurate (Doyle, 1979).

3. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The following data collection methods have been used:

- *Questionnaires*

A questionnaire was completed by fifty respondents, the questionnaire focused on the five research objectives that were translated into seventeen questions. Each respondent was provided the ability to express his level of agreement with each statement.

- *Interviews*

Interviews were completed by ten respondents, the interviews focused on the five research objectives that were translated into seventeen open ended questions. Each respondent was provided a basic explanation of each question.



4. QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

36% of the sample had less than 5 years of teaching experience, followed by teachers with 16-20 years (24%). Teaching staff with 11-15 years of experience represented 20% of the sample. 16-20 and above 21 years segment representing the remaining 20%, with 10% each.

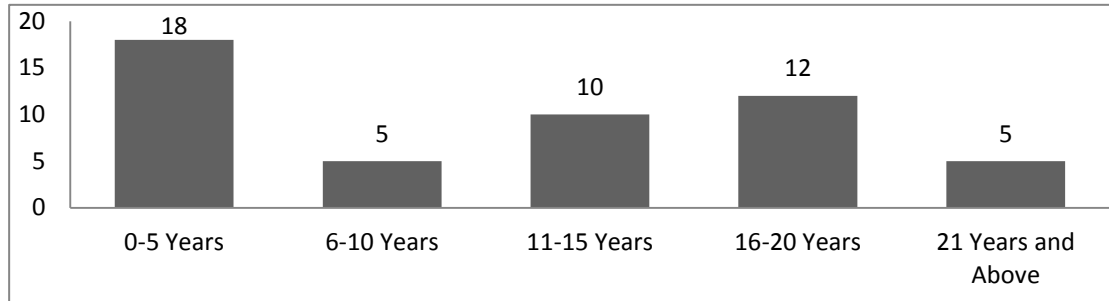


Figure 1. Years of experience

The majority of the sample strongly disagreed with the statement, while 26% disagreed. Both giving a very strong negative view of the effectiveness of the Ministry of Education and Quality Assurance Authority's programs and initiatives. 10% remained neutral. And 34% showed support that such initiatives are improving education in Bahraini schools.

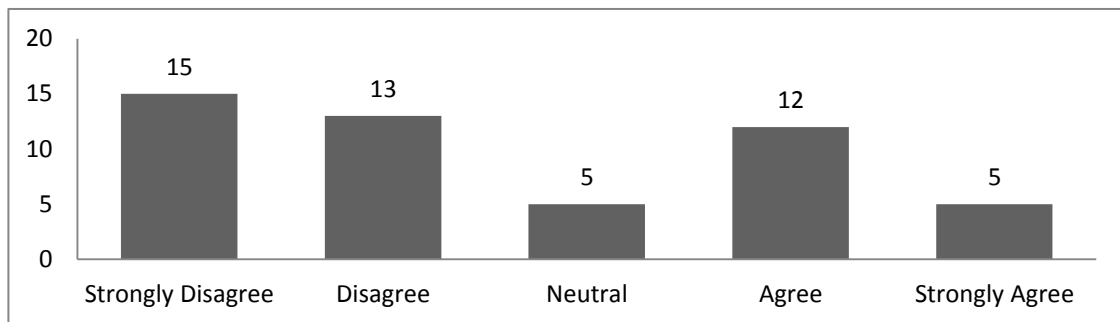


Figure 2. National Programs Effectiveness

When asked about the benefits of internal and external standards enforced on teaching staff, 60% of the sample had a very negative view on their effectiveness. 30% supported the standards and only 10% remained neutral.

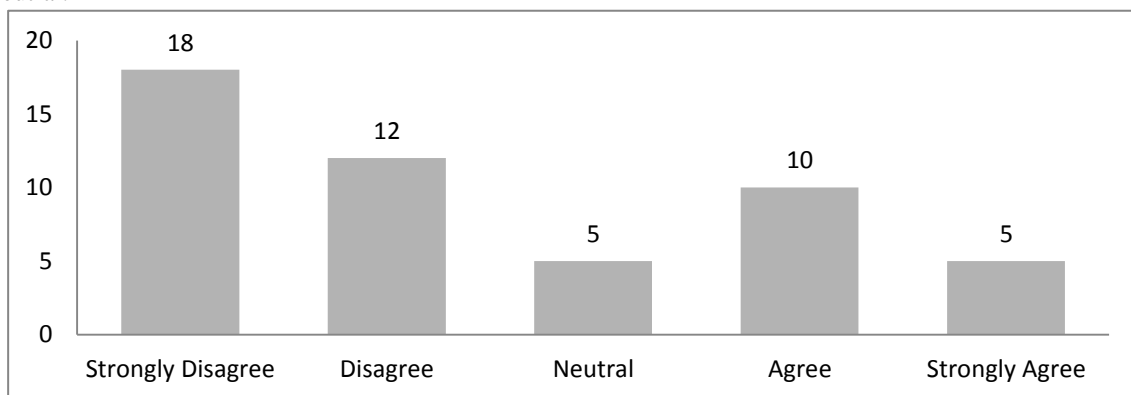


Figure 3. Internal and External Standards



16% of the sample found that English language curriculum and books are extremely ineffective, followed by 60% who found them ineffective. Only 20% were somehow satisfied and 4% remained neutral.

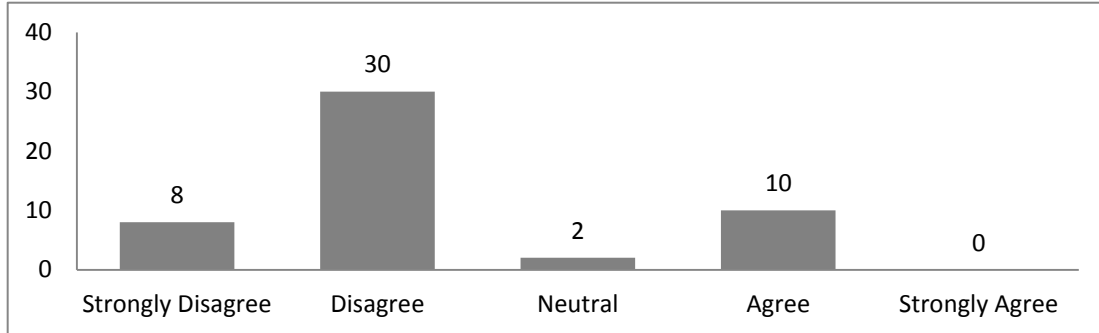


Figure 4. Curriculum and Books Effectiveness

66% of the sample highlighted that books and curriculum are irrelevant to Bahraini culture. 10% found them somehow relevant and 20% expressed strong support.

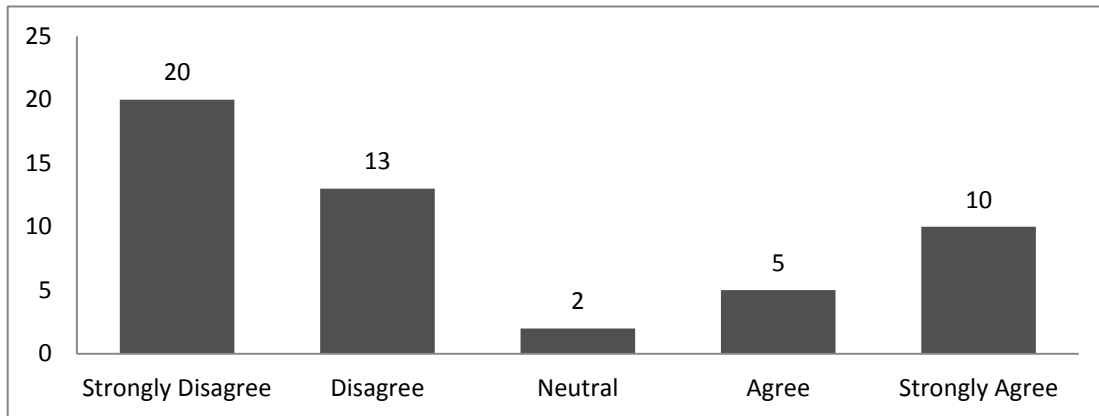


Figure 5. Books and Curriculum Relevance

The majority of the sample (44%) strongly supported the importance of various teaching methods. 20% agreed with the statement and 20% remained neutral. Only 6% expressed disagreement and 10% strongly disagreed.

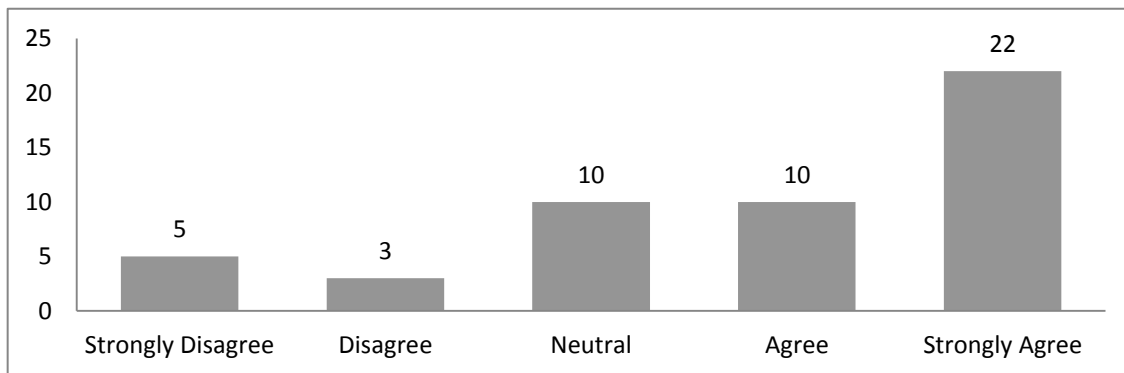


Figure 6. Importance of Teaching Methods



The overwhelming majority of the sample (60%) highlighted that students are not provided with unique skills at each educational level. 26% remained neutral and only 14% strongly agreed.

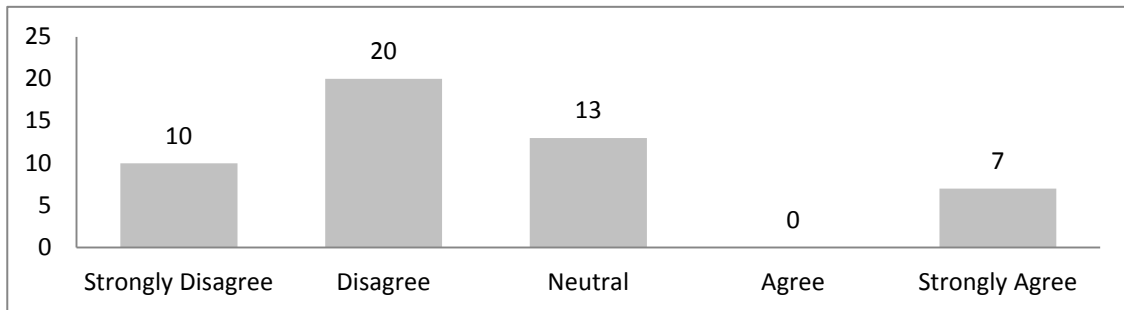


Figure 7. English Skill Development

The absolute majority of the sample expressed strong and general disagreement with the statement. Highlighting that curriculum are not adequately designed to cater for abilities and differences in students' performance and background. Only 10% strongly supported current curriculum and 4% remained neutral.

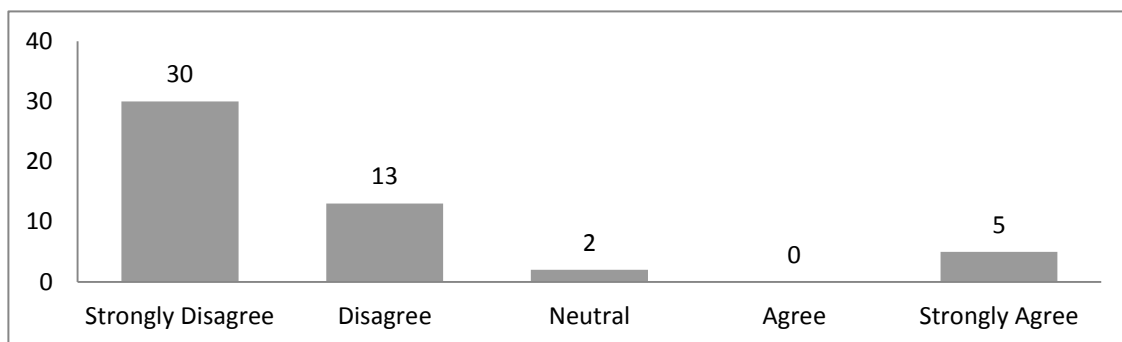


Figure 8. Curriculums Adequacy

46% of the samples were extremely critical of the effectiveness of technologies utilized in their school. 24% supported new technologies and 30% remained neutral.

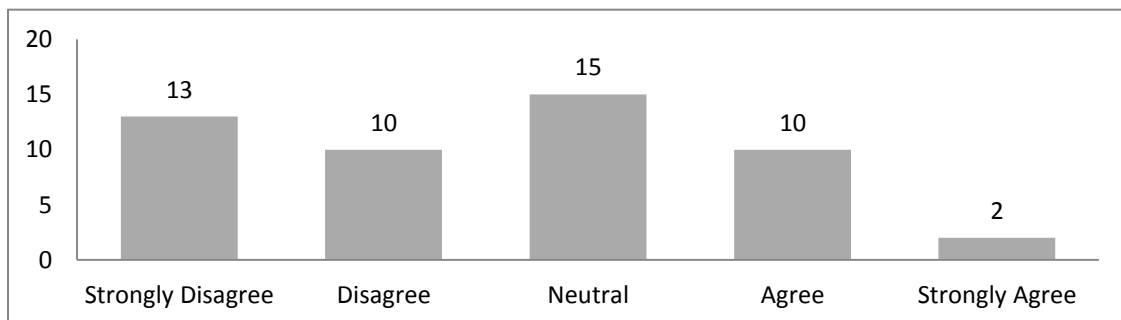


Figure 9. Benefits of New Technology

46% disagreed with the current method of allocating teachers the responsibility of developing E-learning lessons. Only 14% supported the approach and 40% remained neutral.

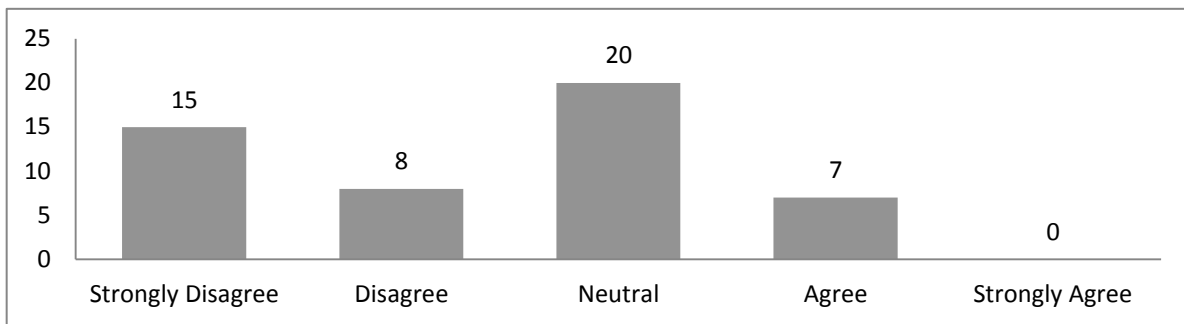


Figure 10. E-Learning Lesson Development

66% of the sample found that school facilities are not adequate. On the other hand, only 20% found them somehow adequate. The remaining 14% remained neutral.

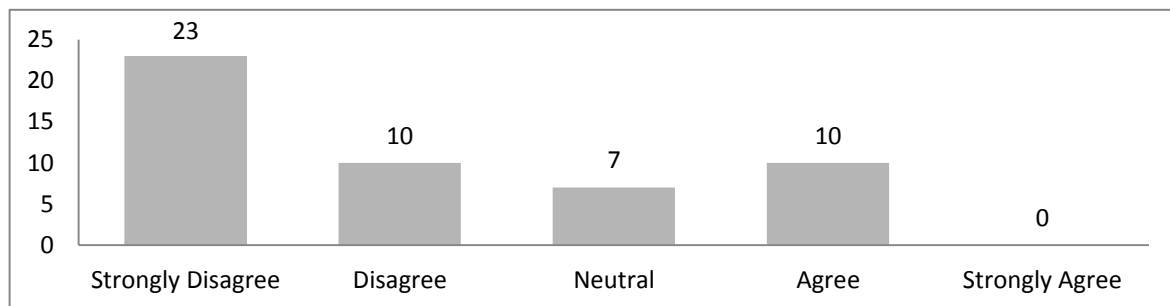


Figure 11. School Facilities Adequacy

An overwhelming majority of the sample (86%) expressed their strong or general dissatisfaction with the adequacy of activities carried out by English Language Department. Only 10% remained neutral and 4% strongly supported existing activities.

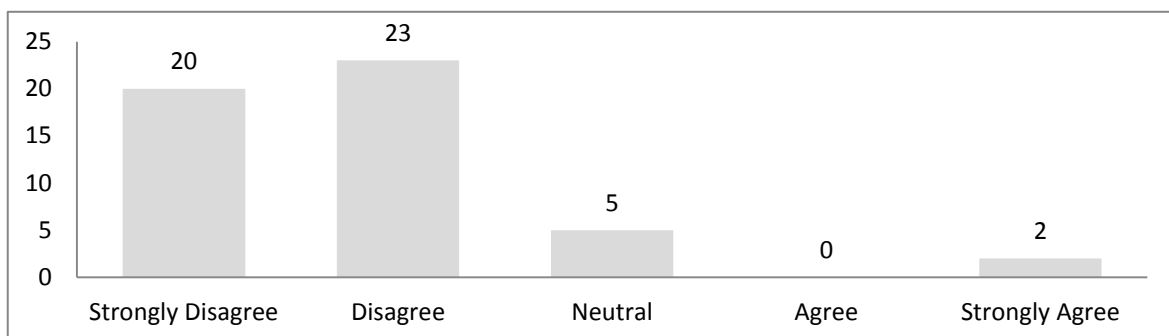


Figure 12. English Department Activities



72% expressed strong and general levels of demotivation across teaching staff. And 24% stated that they are motivated.

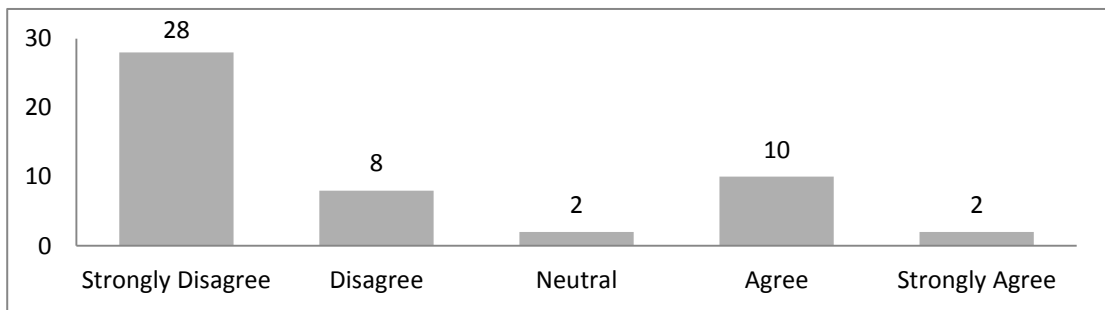


Figure 13. Teachers' Motivation

52% of the sample stated that teachers are not genuinely interested in the field of teaching. Only 18% supported the claim and 30% remained neutral.

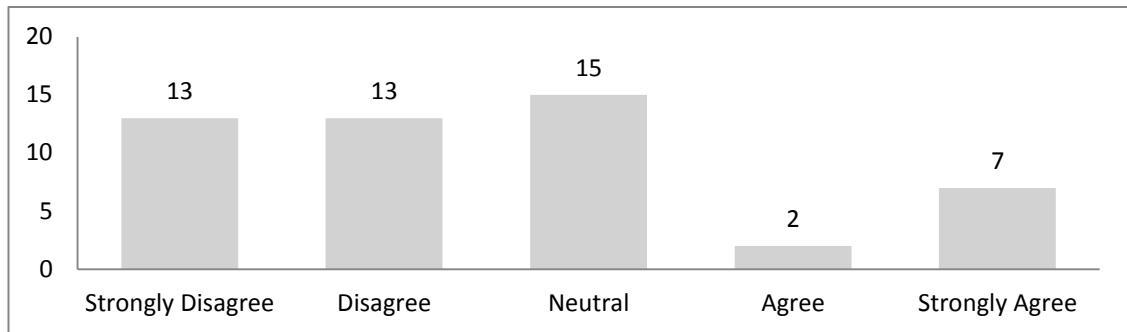


Figure 14. Teachers' Interest in Education

46% of the sample expressed strong disagreement with the claim that teachers are willing to change their teaching methods. On the other hand, 8% supported the claim. The remaining 46% remained neutral.

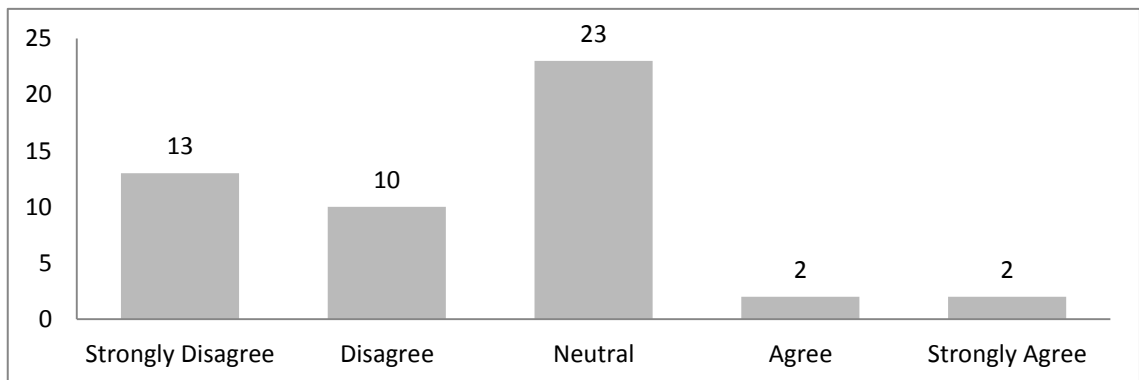


Figure 15. Teachers' Changing Teaching Methods



86% of the sample expressed serious concerns about the adequacy of students English Language backgrounds. And 4% supported the statement. 10% of the sample remained neutral.

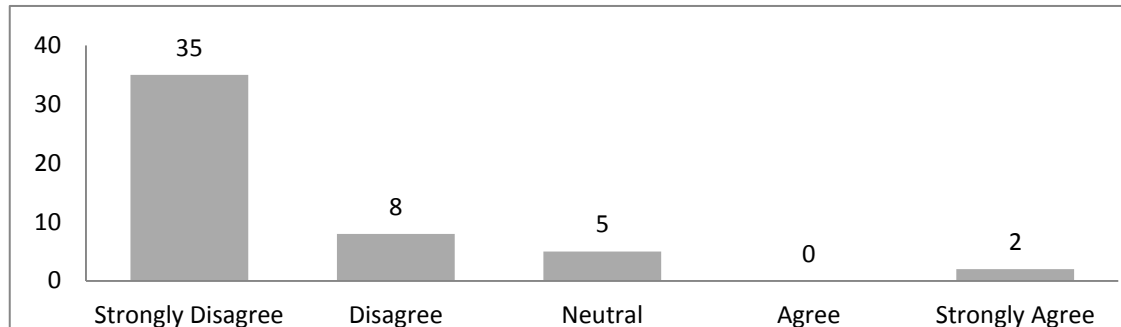


Figure 16. Students English Background Adequacy

40% expressed strong disagreement with adequacy of student assessment methods currently used. While 36% disagreed. The remained 24% remained neutral and no respondent expressed her agreement.

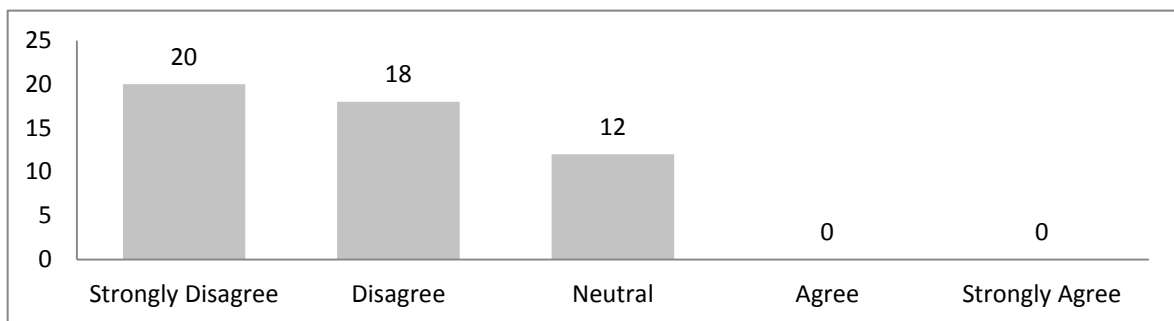


Figure 17. Students' Assessment Adequacy

CONCLUSION

a) External / Internal Elements

It was clear that national programs are not widely accepted by teaching staff and that there is a significant level of scepticism on the actual benefits and motivation behind initiating such programs. Teaching staff expressed their disagreement with the theoretical approaches enforced by the Ministry of Education, Quality Assurance Authority and Internal School Administration, highlighting their inadequacy in real life schooling environment. Curriculum and Methods

During our research we observed a general discontent with current curriculums and books, most teaching staff expressed their dissatisfaction with quality of books and relationship with Bahraini culture.

It was also observed that curriculums are designed with minimal emphasis in gradually building students' background across educational levels.

b) Technology and School Facilities

Although technology is generally known as an excellent facilitator in rapidly enhancing students' abilities and enhancing teaching practice, teaching staff expressed their dissatisfaction with the way technology is applied, where the focus is targeted in demonstrating the use of advanced technology rather than creating a strong foundation to use technology as an alternative mean to disseminate and convey knowledge.



It was also observed that school facilities are generally poor and inadequate and require a major renovation and enhancement to fulfil teaching objectives.

c) *Teaching Staff*

Teaching staff express their dissatisfaction with activities and programs initiated by English Language Department and highlighted that English teaching staff are unable to perform additional activities due to time and resource limitation.

It was also observed that many teaching staff are in the field for various reasons and interest in education is not one of them. Most respondents highlighted that teaching staff are in the field to benefit from long holiday, exclusive female environment and shorter working hours.

d) *Students*

Students' background in English was extremely weak due to insufficient foundation and basic education. A number of respondents also highlighted that there are major issues faced by students from foreign nationalities who moved recently to Bahrain and have extremely insufficient English language background.

The results also highlighted a major dissatisfaction with the methods used to evaluate and assess students' abilities and progress.

RECOMMENDATION

a) *External / Internal Elements*

It is strongly recommended to involve teaching staff in the development of standard, especially ones developed and enforced internally. This will effectively ensure that programs are effective and realistic, and that they can be applied with the available resource and not as an additional burden.

b) *Curriculum and Methods*

It was also recommended that teachers are provided the ability to participate in the selection and development of curriculum. And that national curriculums selected are appropriate and related to local culture.

c) *Technology and School Facilities*

It's recommended that e-learning lessons are developed by specialized trained staff for lessons that require additional aids and an alternative mean to ensure easier comprehension of knowledge.

In addition, school facilities require a major revamp, to ensure that the schooling environment is comfortable and adequate to fulfil educational goals and objectives.

d) *Teaching Staff*

It's recommended that teaching staff must undergo extensive practical training programs that are not focusing on theoretical aspects of education.

In addition, school administration and the ministry must evaluate teaching staff candidates prior to joining any organization.

e) *Students*

It was recommended that students from foreign backgrounds are provided with additional programs to enhance their background in English or they are placed in lower classes to ensure that their capabilities are adequately built and developed.

It was also recommended that current assessment methodologies are enhanced to ensure that students are evaluated using a fair and objective approach instead of the current method focusing on exam performance and inflated markings.

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