



Angela Rammouz
English education consultant
Lebanese International
University

LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE: TEN YEARS OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN THE LEBANESE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM (1992/3-2002/3)

*Say not, "I have found the truth, but rather,
"I have found a truth."
Say not, "I have found the path of the soul."
Say rather, "I have met the soul walking upon my path."
For the soul walks upon all paths.
The soul walks not upon a line, neither does it grow like a reed.
The soul unfolds itself like a lotus of
countless petals. ⁽¹⁾*

INTRODUCTION

As a preface to changing approaches in student evaluation in the Lebanese educational system, and to identify current general trends in English language achievement, a study was commenced in 1992/3. This was intended as a (ten-year) predictive study, to consider the Lebanese public school official examination outcomes at the end of the Intermediate Cycle, as a product of the learning process (the National Textbook English program as a first foreign language). The research focused on a comparison of official examination results for a sample of schools in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, as part of a comprehensive report to be presented to the Lebanese Ministry of Education. The Intermediate Cycle was chosen as an essential link between the elementary and secondary cycles.

Due to a change in governmental planning and statistical systems in the Lebanese Ministry of Education after 1996, the original research could no longer be considered reliable as a predictive study. Statistical data was finally retrieved for the completion of a developmental study (1992/3 – 2002/3) from the Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD), a branch of the Lebanese Ministry of Education, in 2004.

To complete the educational report, a further investigation was made of Intermediate Cycle official examination results for 2002/3, in relation to

(i) Regions and foreign language (ii) Regions and type of education and (iii) Regions and gender.

Factors affecting the official examination results were discussed with school teachers, directors and administrative personnel in the English and statistical departments of CERD.

The following report reflects student achievement levels in learning English as a Second Language (first foreign language) from 1992/3 – 2002/3, in Lebanese public schools, and indicates the rate of English language proficiency development

ANALYSIS OF STATISTICAL DATA RELATED TO THE ENG- LISH INTERMEDIATE CYCLE OFFICIAL EXAMINATION RESULTS

Percentage of success of Students in the English Intermediate Cycle (Brevet) Official Examinations: A Sample of Secondary Schools in Beirut and Mount Lebanon: 1992, 1993 & 2003:

With a view to establishing a trend in the average percentage of success in the English Intermediate Cycle (Brevet) examinations, data was gathered for the years 1992, 1993 and 2003 for a sample of schools in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. This data showed varying patterns for different schools although most of the schools showed an increase in the percentage of success in 2003. Beirut Horj (girls), Beirut Horj (boys), Baakline, Moukhtara, Bchamoun and Choueifat schools showed an increase from 23%, 20.3%, 35.2%, 25%, 27.2% and 25% respectively in 1993, to 45.6%, 30.7%, 43.4%, 37.7%, 38.6% and 39.6% in 2003. Ashrafieh School recorded an exceptionally high score of 81% in 1993 but a drop to 40.2% in 2003. As indicated in the footnote of this table, Ramel el Zarif (girls) and Rene Mouawad schools did not record any data in 1993 and for this reason we included data from 1992. This data showed a significant decrease in the percentage of success for Ramel el Zarif (girls) School from 58.62% in 1992 to 35% in 2003. On the other hand, Rene Mouawad School recorded a significant increase in the percentage of success from 15.78% in 1992 to 41.5% in 2003. We are unable to make an inference from the tables regarding Dhour el Choueir School, where the only recorded data is 48.4% in 2003.

Intermediate Cycle (Brevet) Official Examination Results for the Regular Session, 2002-2003, according to Regions and Foreign Language:

The percentage of success of French educated students was 75.23%, 56.29%, 59.07%, 75.51%, 55.06% and 56.10% in Beirut, the North, the South,

Mount Lebanon, Nabatiyé and the Bekaa respectively, with a total average of 65%; while the results show 63.55%, 46.18%, 51.78%, 62.21%, 55.32% and 51.98%, with an average of 57.23% for English educated students for the same regions. These results show that the percentage of success of French educated students was higher than that of English educated students in all regions, except for Nabatiyé, where the results were approximately the same (55.06% and 55.32%). These results reinforce our previous conclusion that French educated students performed better than English educated students in the official Intermediate Cycle examinations of 2002-2003

English / French Intermediate Cycle (Brevet) Official Examination Results for the Regular Session, 2002-2003, according to Regions and Type of Education:

Public Education:

The percentage of success of French educated students was higher than that of English educated students in all regions except for the South. The percentage of success for French educated students was 60.13%, 47.25%, 61.88%, 47.33%, and 39.28% in Beirut, the North, Mount Lebanon, Nabatiyé and the Bekaa respectively, with a total average of 50.78%, while results show 51.58%, 40.82%, 52.92%, 43.32% and 42.67% with a total average of 50.27% for English educated students for the same regions. However, in the South the percentage of successful English educated students was 54.37% compared with 51.05% for French educated students.

Private Education:

Here we observe again that the percentage of success of French educated students was higher than that of English educated students, but the difference in the scores here is even greater. While the percentage of success of French educated students was 87.64%, 75.64%, 80.00%, 82.41%, 77.72% and 76.47% in Beirut, the North, the South, Mount Lebanon, Nabatiyé and the Bekaa respectively, with a total average of 80.72%, results show 76.14%, 48.48%, 53.04%, 67.49%, 66.67%, and 61.61% with

a total average of 63.38% for English educated students in the same regions

Independent Students:

The percentage of success of French educated students was higher than that of English educated students, where the former rated 29.41%, 5.92%, 19.35%, and 33.13% in Beirut, the North, the South, and Mount Lebanon compared with 17.65%, 5.56%, 20.75%, and 27.27% for English educated students for the same regions. However, the scores were higher for English educated students in Nabatiyé and the Bekaa, where they rated 8.82% and 16.82% compared with 7.87% and 7.35% for French educated students.

Finally, we note that the number of French educated participants in the Intermediate Cycle examinations (2002-2003) was 36,814 which was higher than English educated participants, which was only 22,013. It is clear that French educated students generally performed better than English educated students in public education, private education and as independent students in all regions, (except for the South in the public sector and in Nabatiyé and the Bekaa, in the independent sector).

English Intermediate Cycle (Brevet) Official Examination Results, for the Regular Session of 2002-2003, according to Regions and Gender

The tables clearly show that the percentage of success of females was higher than males in all regions. For instance, the percentage of success among females was 76.33%, 57.52%, 55.89%, 73.14%, 55.38% and 55.42% in Beirut, the North, the South, Mount Lebanon, Nabatiyé and the Bekaa respectively, while it was 63.61%, 52.11%, 52.52%, 67.09%, 54.64% and 53.15% among males for the same regions. Moreover, the number of female candidates was higher than male candidates in all regions: female candidates in Beirut, the South and Mount Lebanon numbered 3498, 4260 and 10826 respectively while male candidates numbered 3262, 3355 and 10363 for the same regions. Thus it is evident from the given data that females performed better than males in the Intermediate Cycle official examinations (2002-2003) in all regions.

PREDICTION OF PASSING ENGLISH BREVET RESULTS

In order to predict the minimal Brevet grade result in 2003 as a passing grade, a model is to be constructed. Such a model would hypothesize a relationship between a predicted minimal grade (as the Dependent Variable) and several other Independent Variables. Some of the Independent Variables and related factors are listed below.

The particular social-political history of Lebanon and regional and cultural differences are reflected in this educational study through:

1. Factors Relating to the National Situation:

- Regional Differences
- National Political Climate
- Political Influences

2. Factors Relating to the Educational Situation and Teacher Status:

- Education System
- Financial Resources
- Physical Resources
- School Programs
- Teacher Training
- Staff Mobility
- Personal Attributes

3. Student Related Factors:

- Family Social and Economic Status
- Language Related Factors
- Continuity and Consistency in the Learning Process

Thus, our hypothesized model takes into account the aggregate factors:

$$\text{PASSING} = b_0 + b_1. \text{ National Situation} + b_2. \text{ Educational Situation and Teacher Status} + b_3. \text{ Student Related Factors}$$

To test such a hypothesis, however, relevant time series data for each independent variable is to be found.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Certain data requested from public schools for this study was not made available for reasons of privacy; yet other data was considered controversial. New approaches in evaluation have been insufficiently developed and piloted in the Lebanese educational arena to be considered an effective influence on English language teaching methodology and examination results.

Language proficiency, at the end of the Intermediate Cycle, is related to diverse factors affecting examination outcomes, ranging from the national situation (regional differences, the national political climate and political influences); to factors relating to the educational situation and teacher status (including the education system, financial resources, physical resources, school programs, teaching materials, teacher training, staff mobility and personal attributes); and student related factors (social and economic status, 2 language exposure and continuity and consistency in the learning process).

In addition, despite common problems and common solutions to problems, French educated students' examination results are generally higher than those of English educated students, due partly to concerted efforts by the "Centre Culturelle Français" Furthermore, girls' results appear better than boys' (to be expected as a natural phenomenon).

There is a trend towards improvement in English language proficiency, which is a distant, though not unattainable national goal. A prediction of the minimal Brevet average grade result in 2003 as a passing grade is unreliable, due to various influencing factors, including governmental changes, innovative planning strategies and technological applications. However, effective change through new policies has already made an impact through the CERD to combat English learning problems in Lebanese public schools. Continued cooperative and consistent planning should bear the fruit of these efforts in bringing

us closer to English language proficiency as a means of inter-cultural communication, co-existence in a global village, and the means to explore and express our individual cultural values and skills ■

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