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How Do Teachers of English Perceive the Use of ICT in Primary Education in
Bahrain?

By

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Abstract

This research aims at investigating English teachers' perceptions on the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in primary English classroom in Bahrain. Integration of ICT into education is a fundamental issue. A quantitative research approach is applied. A web-based survey questionnaire has been developed. A sample of 35 English teachers from different primary schools around Bahrain has participated.

Results of data show that the ICT is highly appreciated in primary Education. The English teachers have a positive attitude towards the application of ICT tools. However, they express their frustration as to the technical problems they often encounter as well as the time consuming for preparing ICT-based lessons.

In general, the use of ICT in the primary education can be a fun tool and a strategy to be utilized for better learning and more enhancing environment.

Keywords: Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Integration, Perceptions, challenges, internet, primary education, ICT-based lessons.

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Introduction

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have become an integral part of our daily life. Children before adults have the necessary skills needed to utilize the different types of modern ICT. Ranging from computer skills, word processing, websites surfing, to mobile and tablet skills. Hence, integration of ICT into education is a fundamental issue. When used appropriately and without difficulties, the modern ICT can assist and support effective teaching strategies in primary, intermediate and secondary education.

Having been inaugurated for more than a decade, ICT is no longer an accessory. Primary schools in Bahrain are provided with the latest technological equipment. English classes comprise ICT tools, such as internet, smart board, data show, computer, remote control, microphone, CD player and the like. This is all done for the purpose of making the teaching and learning process as convenient as possible.

Teachers have to be trained to acquire the basic skills for a better understanding of the modern technological school environment. It is not overstated to declare the fact that there is scarcely a place for ICT illiterate to be an active part of the teaching and learning process in the English primary education in Bahrain. ICT has imposed itself in the modern classes due its powerful means of enhancing teaching and learning in general and in English instruction in particular.

This study is an attempt to:

- 1- Find out how teachers perceive the use of ICT in their English classrooms in the primary education in Bahrain.
- 2- Explore the challenges teachers find when using ICT.
- 3- Assess whether the pupils are benefiting from the use of ICT in improving their English.

5. Literature Review

5.1 Introduction

Prensky (2001) pointed out that the biggest problem in education nowadays is that Digital Immigrant instructors, who use a language of the pre-digital age can't find it easy to teach learners of world of language. (as cited in Jiménez, p 7). Those Digital Immigrant teachers presume that the same old methods used in the past would work for current learners. (as cited in Jiménez, p 7).

5.2 General Survey of Review

Kerr's (1991) interviews and observations with American teachers who had successfully incorporated technology into their practice indicated "that using it allowed 'obvious and dramatic' changes in classroom organization and management. (as cited in Hennessy, Ruthven, and Brindley, p 4). Steve Higgins (2003) pointed out that the rapid change in technology brings about new opportunities and offer new possibilities for the process of teaching and learning. (p. 16).

Beckett and Miller (2006) pointed out that technology in primary education is an effective means for language learning activities. Oral practice, reading and writing skills are some examples. They also noted that technology is effective when integrated into project-based language learning. (as cited in Motteram, 2013, p. 18).

In addition, Malik and Shabbir (2008) and Saba (2009) emphasized effective use of technology is an opportunity for self-reliance learning students. It can result in more increases of achievement. (as cited in Ismail, Bokhare, Azizan, and Azman,p.3). In the last decade, Kumar and Tammelin (2008) pointed out that active learning is commonly known to have raised the quality of the language learning experiences. (p. 5)

Wang (2014) stressed that technologies continues to support effective teaching strategies. It is increasingly spreading around the world and has become a trend in all levels of education. (p. 188). Koivisto et al. (2001) pointed out that parents are an influencing factor in school, and it is due to using technology that communication is increasing in education. (as cited in Ilomäki,p.11).

5.3 Previous Research Studies

Somekh and Davis (1997) stressed that it takes time to find the best way to utilize the ICT to apply effective learning strategies within the primary classroom. (as cited in Higgins p. 16).

In their study, Salehi and Saleh Z. (2012) noted that teachers thought that lack of technical supports at hinders them from using ICT in their classroom. Short period of classes also discouraged from integrating ICT in class. (p. 3) Salehi and Saleh Z pointed out that the item “Time needed to learn using ICT prevents me to use ICT” received 40 percent of the teachers’ agreement. (p. 3)

Ghasemi and Hashemi (2011) argued that integrating ICT in language learning raises challenges for teachers as language teachers have to consider new strategies in teaching using ICT. (as cited in Wang, p.189).

6. Methodology

For the purpose of obtaining more accurate data about the English teachers' views on the use of ICT in primary education, a quantitative research approach was used. A web-based survey questionnaire was developed by the researcher. It contained nine objective questions and only one content-type question. The questionnaire was designed on the Likert scale agreement as it is practically helpful to collect data within a limited time frame.

6.1 Participants

The research involved 35 teachers of English from different primary schools in Bahrain among which the number of males was 18 and the number of females was 17. As indicated in figure 6.1. A total 100 of surveys was sent. The responses were 35. It meant that the response rate for the instrument was 35%. The number of male and female is almost identical to ensure equal number of responses from both genders.



Figure 6.1 Respondents gender

6.2 Data Collection and Analysis

A pilot test was taken by trying out with some English teachers colleagues and the questionnaire was revised accordingly. The final content of the questionnaire involved four parts. The first was related to gender and experience. The second part related to how convenient ICT was to teachers. The third was about the degree of motivation and support ICT provides and the last part was a content question for

teachers to express their opinions in terms of support that can be obtained from ICT in the process of teaching and learning.

7. Results and Discussion

Results and discussion are incorporated into one section because the study raises immediate questions that can be dealt with within the current context. Graphs and charts are found make results visually clear. Averages for some of the Likert scale questions are assigned to weigh the answer choice.

7.1 Age and work experience of participants

Figure 7.1 shows the work experience of the participants. Over 44% of respondents were from 1 – 5 years work experience. Over 23% were from 6-10 years. Over 17% were from 11-15 years and less than 15% were more than 15 years. This might signal the fact the results of the overall research might reflect, more or less, the perceptions of younger generations.

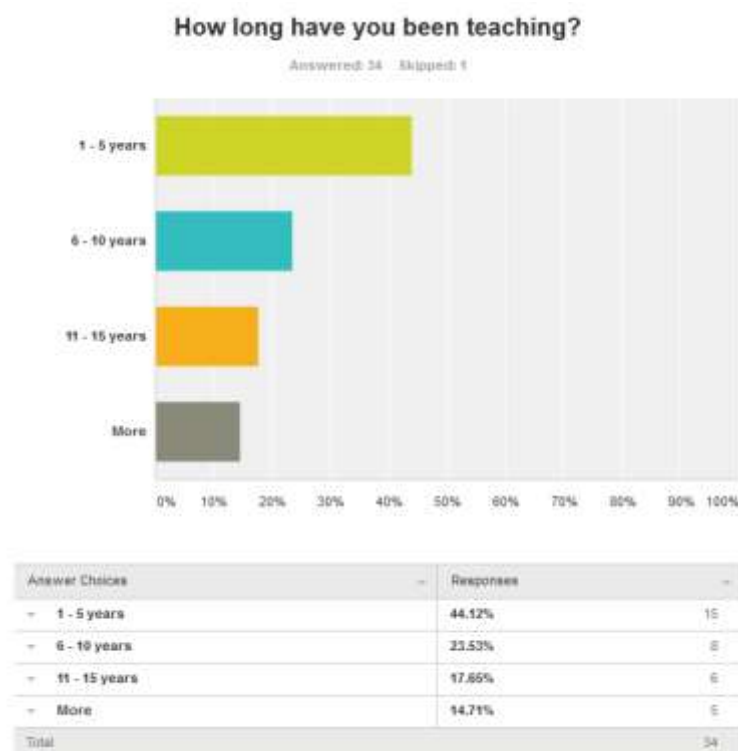


Figure 7.1 Work experiences of participants

7.2 Participants' responses on the use of ICT

When asked about their satisfaction about using ICT in language teaching in item 3, the majority of the respondents accepted using it. As indicated in following figure 7.2, over 74% of participants strongly agreed, over 26% agreed and 2.83% strongly disagreed. This goes along with the findings of Toyoda (2001) when he stated that perceptions of teachers on the subject of ICT vary from person to person. Despite the fact that most of teachers agree to use technology for language teaching, their use of technology might be different depending on their beliefs. (as cited in Saqlain and Mahmood, 2013, p. 108).

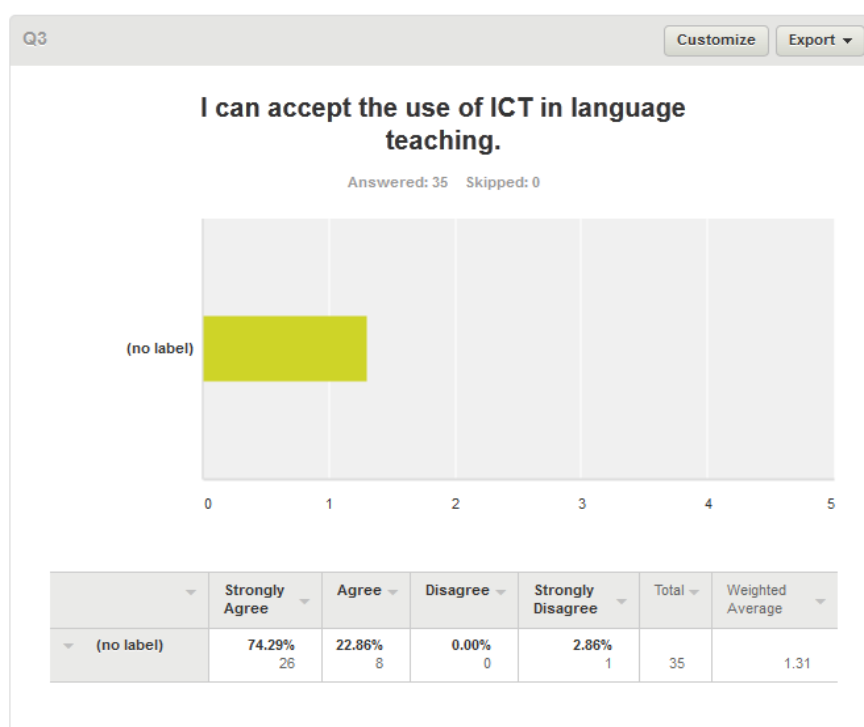


Figure 7.2 Satisfaction of ICT use

Item 4 had 100% positive response. 60% of respondents strongly agreed and 40% agreed on the convenience of using ICT in their language classroom. This could be taken as clear evidence of the young and old generations' positive attitude towards the use of ICT within classroom. This also gives a great indication of teacher's willingness

to "equip themselves with the skills to make effective use of ICT. However, many instructors are used to teaching without ICT, and many teachers in the field of language learning are not advanced computer users", which is what Kim and Baylor (2008) argued in their research. (as cited in Wang, p.189).

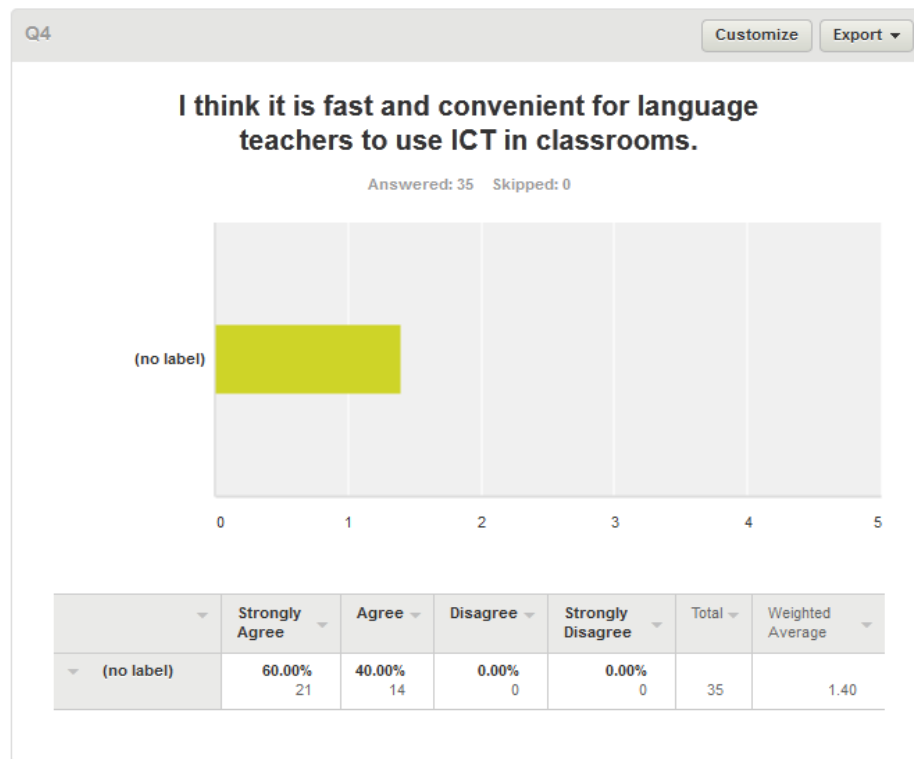


Figure 7.3 Convenience of ICT use

The graph in figure 7.3 illustrates this trend. As far as item 5 was concerned, over 90% of the respondents thought it was easy and simple to use ICT in class. Less than 6% disagreed. These findings suggest what Somekh and Davis (1997) admitted in their research that it is not suffice to have some knowledge of and experience with computer for teachers to be able to make use of ICT in their classrooms.

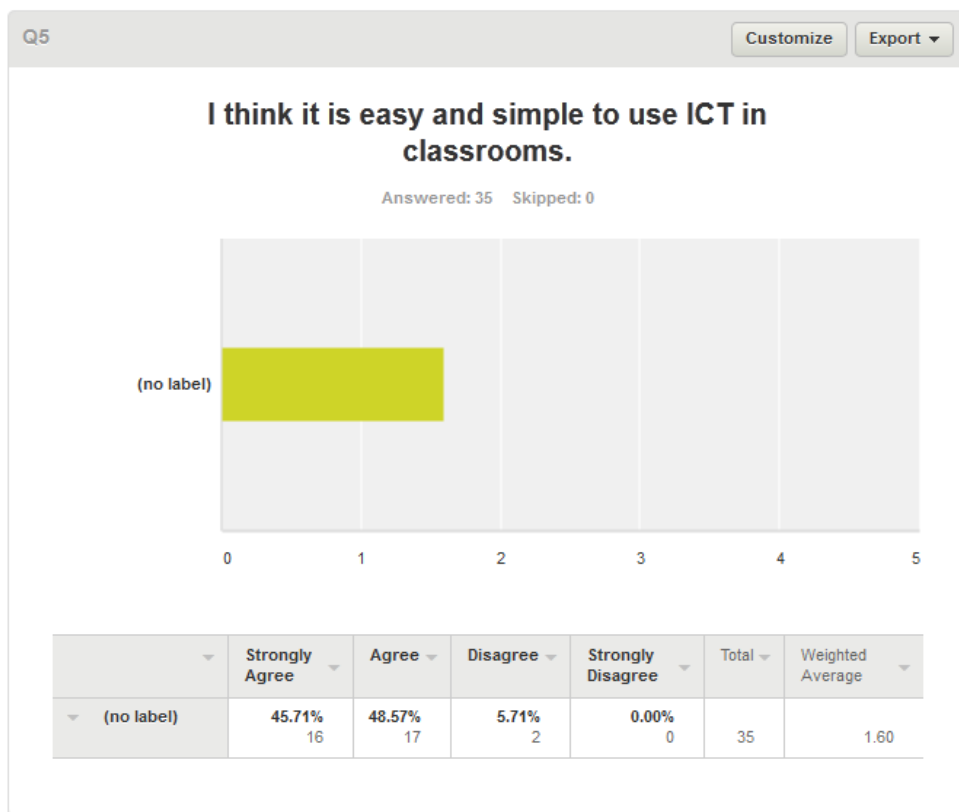


Figure 7.4 Ease of ICT

The participants express their positive agreement to item 6 (94.29%) that ICT can support communication between teachers and parents.

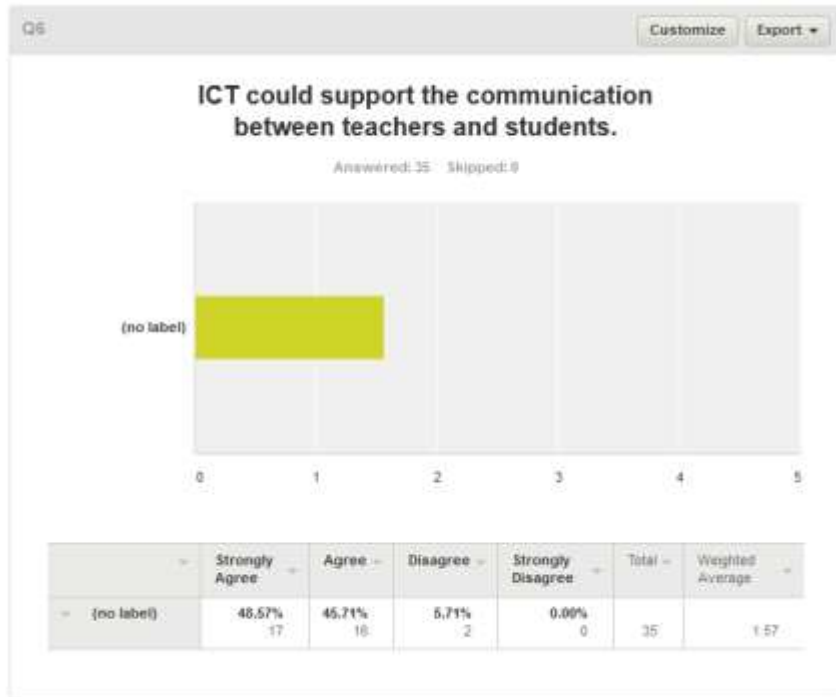


Figure 7.5 ICT support of teacher-student communications

More than 97% agreed that ICT enhanced students' motivation and that the classes with ICT were more fun than traditional classes. Figure 7.6 reflects this trend. This most likely supports what Battro (2004) and Facer et al. (2003) stated in their research that teachers are increasingly using ICT in schools. Learners are experiencing a variety of technologies from a very early age in the home and when they go to nursery, many of them may have already developed at least some of the digital skills that enable them to use technology tools as soon as they start school. (as cited in Motteram, 2013, p. 18).

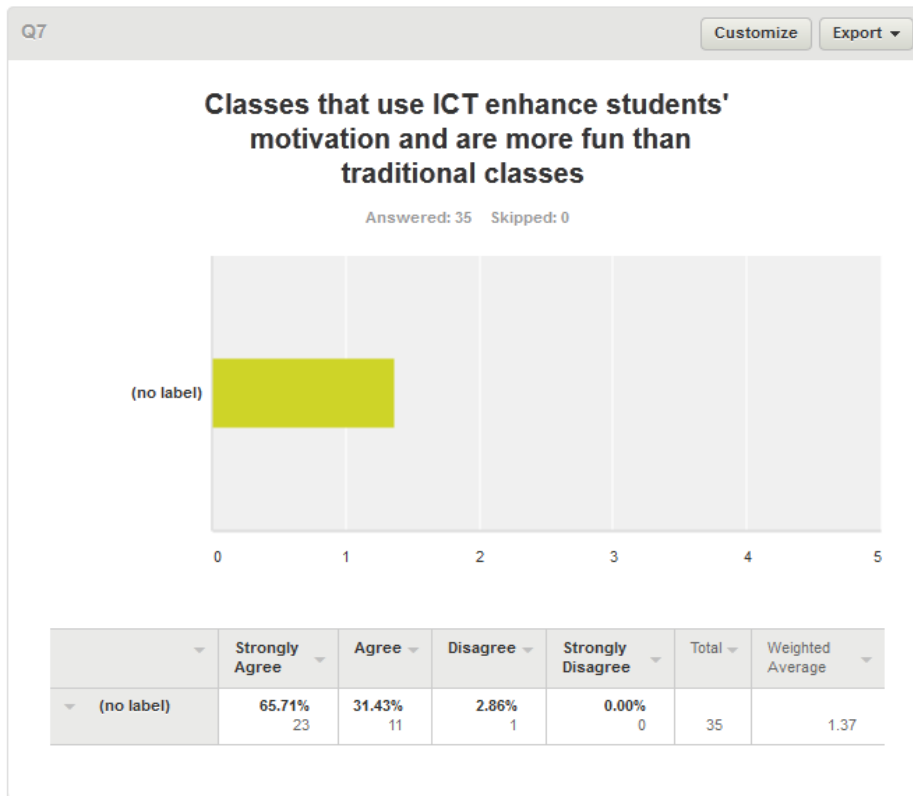


Figure 7.6 Students' motivation in ICT classes

On item 8, (97.14%) of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed to view that ICT provides opportunities to help improve students' knowledge of English. This goes well with what Wang (2014) has stated about innovative technology and its support to effective teaching strategies in all levels of education. (p. 188).

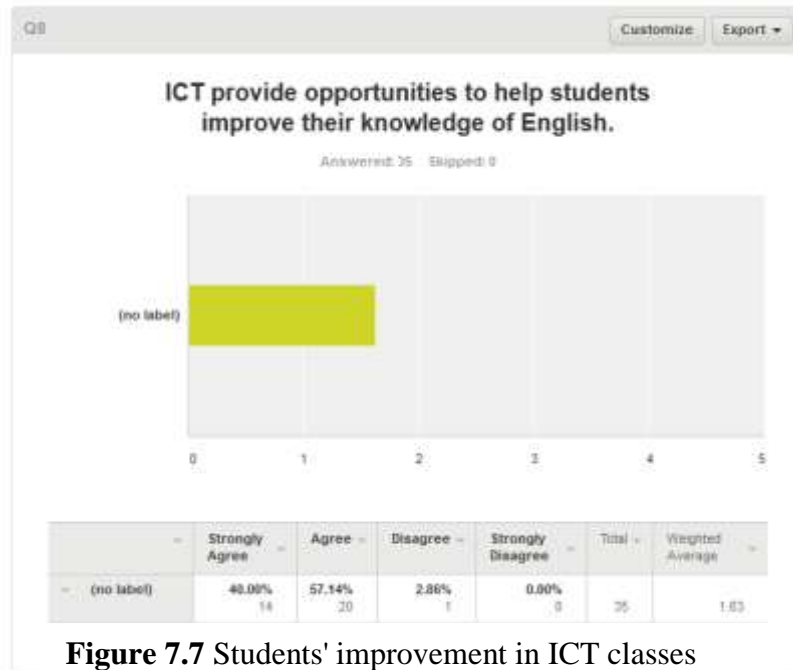


Figure 7.7 Students' improvement in ICT classes

When asked if ICT can support communication between teachers and parents, Over 25 % of the respondents strongly agreed and 57.14% agreed whereas 17.14% disagreed on such supportive communication. It could perhaps be argued that although the majority of participants believed in ICT as a means of keeping connected with parents of learners, there are only few of them who did not approve of it. This is what Koivisto et al. (2001) stressed on parents being an influencing factor in school, and using technology as a means of communication is increasing in education. (as cited in Ilomäki,p.11).

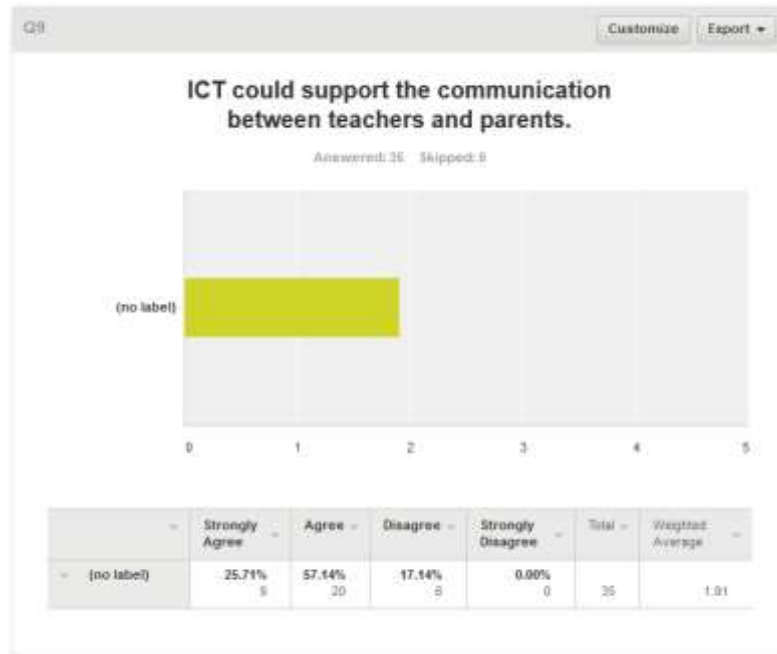


Figure 7.8 ICT support of teacher-parent communications

7.3 Advantages of using ICT

An open-ended question asked the participants to list down any advantages and disadvantages of using ICT in primary education in Bahrain. Participants believed that ITC is an effective, motivating and an interesting tool.

The Advantages expressed by the teacher participants focused on the ease of use of ITC, helpful tools, attractiveness to students, varieties of sources, fun, communication support, teaching and learning strategies.

Kumar and Tammelin (2008) also stated that language learning experience is a result of active learning by means of ICT. (p. 5)

7.4 Disadvantages of using ICT

When the participants were asked to list down the disadvantages of ICT in primary education, they noted that ICT was time consuming as far as prior preparation was concerned, had technical problems, needed training, and needed regular updating.

These findings correlate with Somekh and Davis' idea (1997) when they emphasized that utilizing ICT to apply effective learning strategies within the classroom takes time. (as cited by Higgins p. 16).

8. Limitations:

The research does not claim complete accuracy of measurement nor does it allege the most comprehensive coverage of the study under investigation.

The research mainly relied on a mere survey without actual observations, as this latter approach could explore more tangible result in the field of this research.

Another point worth mentioning is the fact that the research did not take into account gender differences which may have reflected various opinions on the issue. The sample of the study was relatively small. The results might have been different if more respondents had been involved. This might represent a difficulty as to make accurate generalizability.

Finally, a factor that might have affected the results of the study is the fact that out of 35 participants, 22 participants answered the last content question of the questionnaire and 13 skipped it.

9. Conclusions

The essential inference that can be drawn from the study is the fact that teachers of English in primary education in Bahrain have a positive attitude towards the use of information and communication technologies in their classroom. One may conclude that ICT is widely applied in the daily lessons of English teaching in primary instruction. The major problems teachers encounter are related to technical faults that often occur and hinder the lesson, and lack of time for preparation that ICT tools usually require.

Despite being widely a discussed issue, research on ICT from the teachers' perspective in primary education in Bahrain is very rare. Hence, results and findings of the research represent a contribution to the current literature.

For future research in the same field, interviews could be carried out in order to collect more descriptive analysis, thus, combining the quantitative survey approach with the qualitative observational approach simultaneously so as to achieve more accurate and rigorous results.

Questions can also be added to the questionnaire to touch on more specific details such as the actual application of ICT within the English classroom.

One might suggest an issue concerning the likelihood of the sample to be representative of the target population. Information about the total number of English teachers in the primary sector, both males and females, should be obtained from the ministry of education. This would allow for careful and equal selection of the sample gender and thus obtaining more valid and accurate results.

10. Recommendations:

To eliminate the claim of lack of time that the teachers often take as a justifiable reason for not using ICT, some recommendations are made as follows: Firstly, teachers' should be given no more than three lessons per day so as to offer them extra time to prepare for lesson supported by ICT. Secondly, the period of the classes should not be less than one hour to provide teachers with the opportunity and the sufficient time to use ICT. Thirdly, teachers should be encouraged to use ICT by means of some sorts of rewards and incentives. As Kumar and Tammelin (2008) suggested that when teachers begin using modern technology, they deserve financial incentives. (p. 12)

Another recommendation to hint at is the fact that maintenance to ICT tools and equipment in classes should be made on a regular basis.

11. Appendices

How Do Teachers of English Perceive The Use of ICT in Primary Education in Bahrain?

A questionnaire on Teachers' perceptions on the use of ICT

This questionnaire is for primary school teachers in Bahrain. All participants will NOT be identified and responses to this questionnaire will only be used to serve the purpose of this research.

1. Gender

Male

Female

2. How long have you been teaching?

1 - 5 years

6 - 10 years

11 - 15 years

More

3. I can accept the use of ICT in language teaching.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. I think it is fast and convenient for language teachers to use ICT in classrooms.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. I think it is easy and simple to use ICT in classrooms.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. ICT could support the communication between teachers and students.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. Classes that use ICT enhance students' motivation and are more fun than traditional classes

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. ICT provide opportunities to help students improve their knowledge of English.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. ICT could support the communication between teachers and parents.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of using ICT in primary education?

1 / 1 100%

Done

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