

# Standpoints towards Curriculum Change: Attitudes and Experiences of High School English Teachers Regarding the New Literature Module of the English National Matriculation

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**Abstract.** The goal of this research paper was to explore the experiences and attitudes of high school English teachers in a peripheral Southern Israeli town regarding the new Literature Module of the English National Matriculation. Twenty-six English teachers from three different comprehensive high schools were given a questionnaire with seven open-ended questions regarding their experiences and opinions of the new Literature Module. The research was conducted with a qualitative method, grouping together the open answers into categories, subsequently analyzed in order to understand the attitudes of the teachers. The results show that the teachers had mixed feelings about the program, highlighting both the positive and constructive elements as well as discussing the more negative aspects of the program. In conclusion, the Literature Module is seen as a curriculum with potential that encourages higher-level thinking, learning, and teaching, but must undergo changes in order to make it more teacher and student-friendly, especially in the aspects of organizational and structural frameworks.

**Keywords:** High school English teachers; English Matriculation; English as a Foreign Language; curriculum change; Literature Module.

## **Introduction**

Curriculum in the academic world is an ever changing and evolving phenomenon. Education is on the forefront of change in society in general and is the foundation for movements of change around the world. In his paper "Five Principles for Guiding Curriculum Development Practice" (1995), Ronald E. Hansen describes curriculum building as a practice which took form in the 1950's when focusing on clear objectives, teaching methods, and forms of measurement. As society evolved from traditional, to modern, then post-

modern, as did the different views and school of thought regarding changes in curriculum and their implementation.

In 2008, the English Inspectorate of the Ministry of Education in Israel announced a far-reaching and important change in its Matriculation ("Bagrut") system. All English teachers would have to learn and implement this change by fall 2011. One third of the matriculation, which had been an external exam testing reading comprehension, would now be an intensive, 3-year literature program, which would focus not only on reading comprehension, but mostly on thinking skills, creative writing, and more. The effects of such a change are extensive and significant. The number of hours teachers must teach and subsequently check, grade, and return assignments and quizzes of each student in each level of matriculation classes have been multiplied exponentially. The work load is great and reactions from English teachers around the country have been varied. As English teachers in a southern, peripheral town in Israel, we have chosen the topic of recent changes in the national English high school curriculum as it affects our day-to-day teaching, professional development, and changes the way we teach. As the curriculum evolves so do the goals and expectations of those who must then teach it to their students. This means that not only does the actual curriculum change, the way in which teachers are trained, taught, and learn changes. The new Literature program is intensive in its requirements of both teachers and students alike. We have chosen this topic as a way to check teachers' attitudes towards the program and their overall experiences in order to draw conclusions regarding this major change and hopefully be a constructive tool in this ever-evolving process.

### **English as a Foreign Language (EFL)**

English is a language which is taught all over the world as a foreign or second language. Its influence is far-reaching and is considered by some to have become the internationally accepted global language. English has spread around the world to a scope unknown to any other language. (Jenkins, 2006; Leshem & Markovits, 2013). The importance of learning English today has important implications to a person's career, work choices, and their ability to succeed in a global environment. In his book "Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice", 2002, Richards and Renandya discuss the history of English language teaching methods and practices in the past through to the current school of thought on this issue. In the 1950's, English quickly became one of the most taught languages to non-English native speakers. This presented a need for the development of language teaching methods, curriculum, and practices. The accepted approach was focused on "methods" much like mathematics, with specific models to teach grammar, vocabulary, etc. which proved to be systematic and unified, not taking into account the needs, different skills and strengths of a specific student. The "method" approach quickly lost its holding as the accepted academic view because of many reasons, the most poignant being that the "method" approach was too prescribed, too "square" and overgeneralized. It was impossible to expect that one method would be applicable to each level of learning in each situation around the world.

The school of thought, which emerged following the "method" approach, was the "principled" approach. This approach speaks of the experience of the learner, the subjective learning skills and needs of each student. Enlightened choices are made based on thorough research. Enlightened teachers adapt according to their students' needs and the curriculum is not "set in stone" but rather a living and dynamic phenomenon. (Brown, 2002).

English language learning today has evolved into a multi-faceted, highly developed and sophisticated field with increased emphasis on the ongoing assessment of student performance. Today with the advent of performance-based assessment, portfolio building, and more, student evaluation has changed from formative to flexible. If in the past student assessment was called an exam or quiz, today the modern teacher uses words like "portfolio" or "project." The educational community has emerged into an era in which there is an array of teaching approaches with an even greater array of learners.

### **The Role of English Literature in EFL**

The role of literature in the English as a Foreign Language curriculum was a highly debated one until recently. In the older school of thought, teaching literature had no inherent value in teaching the actual language and was far too difficult for EFL learners. (Collie and Slater, 1987) Critics sighted the cultural barriers of teaching texts which may not be understood by EFL students, not because of the actual words but because of a lack of understanding of the cultural context and meaning. Also mentioned, as a disadvantage to teaching literature to EFL students is the syntactic difficulty inherent in literary texts, which makes reading a burdensome task. (Literature in EFL/ESL Classroom (Khatib et al 2011; Savvidou, 2004). Literary texts don't always use Standard English which can make it extremely difficult to comprehend and interpret. Despite these reservations, today including literature in the EFL curriculum has become an accepted and integral part of teaching English for several reasons. Literature is "inherently authentic and provides authentic input for language learning" (Khatib et al 2011; Shrestha, 2008). This is important since students must feel that the material is relevant, up to date, and most of all, authentic. Literature deals with conflict, feelings, and emotions to tell a story, teach a lesson, or moral. Also, because of its meaningful texts and powerful messages, literature very often is a motivating factor to students who might have difficulties with the language but want to learn the story for content's sake.

Another major advantage of teaching literature in EFL classes is exposing students to multi-cultural awareness, to universal concepts, especially in an ever-developing globalized world. According to Maley (1989), literature deals with universal ideas such as love, hatred, death, nature, etc. that are common to all languages and cultures. The resemblances and even variances between cultures and tongues can further our understanding of the whole world. In addition, teaching literature as a means of teaching language is excellent for encouraging intensive reading. When a student is captured by what he reads it makes it much easier to struggle through a text in a foreign language because of

its content in spite of the difficulty in language comprehension. Reading is one of the best ways to enrich language knowledge, learn syntax, spelling, and more. The more EFL students read, the more English they learn and absorb. Much can be learned through the intensive reading of poetry, such as important literary terms and concepts (metaphor, stanza, simile, rhyme scheme). Using literature as a means of teaching EFL students is beneficial to helping students learn vocabulary and grammar. Literature involves a vast range of vocabulary, dialogues and prose (Khatib et al 2011; Van, 2009). By being exposed to different topics, they are exposed to a great amount of varied vocabulary that may otherwise have not been taught if not for the specific topic of the literary piece. The exposure to a wide range of vocabulary through literature makes the words relevant when seen and taught in a context and not just another worksheet or textbook.

Also, literature is a good medium for critical thinking enhancement among language learners and can bring about changes in the attitudes of the learners. (Van, 2009). According to Langer (1997), literature allows students to reflect on their lives, learning, and language. Literature can open "horizons of possibility, allowing students to question, interpret, connect, and explore." The teacher has an important role of encouraging students to think critically, delve deeper into the literary texts to find and analyze meaning, conflict, morals, etc. Today, critical thinking is the foundation of education mainly at advanced stages of education. Critical thinking prepares us not to take things for granted and to attempt to untie the concealed agenda of texts. (Ghosn, 2002 ; Khatib et al 2011;).

### 1. The English Matriculation in Israel

The English Matriculation in Israel began in the 1930's before the creation of the State of Israel. Dr. Yosef Luria was the head of the Education Department in Knesset Israel, the pre-state organizational body, and headed the committee which outlined the first Bagrut structure. At that point, only about a tenth of the high school aged youth were actually learning in school. (Shmida, 1987). The ones in school were those who showed the highest potential in academic studies while the rest of the county's youth either joined the work force or learned in professional schools, such as agriculture. (Levi, 1990).

In 1933, two main tracks for the Bagrut were set, Realist and Humanities. The Realist track included math, physics, English, Bible, Hebrew language, and history. The Humanities track included math, English, history, Hebrew language, Bible, and Hebrew literature. In both tracks English was taught and tested nationally. The exam for the English Matriculation was divided into two parts, a grammar exam and a reading comprehension exam, and was the same for all. (Schiak, 2003) In the 1950's and 1960's the exam remained the same and there was a strong movement to encourage as many youth as possible to continue high school education and test for the Bagrut matriculation. Many subjects were added and some were removed from the mandatory Bagrut tracks but English remained as one of three main core subjects, along with Hebrew language and math. (Shmida, 1987). In the 1970's comprehensive high schools were created, giving all youth an opportunity to complete their high school education and be able to apply to universities. Only then did the Education

Ministry decide to divide certain subjects into levels for Bagrut testing, including English. The testing was set on three levels, 1-2 points, 3-4 points and 5 points. (Levi, 1990) The educational ministry realized that with the influx of students coming to learn in comprehensive high schools, they must change the uniformed way of testing in order to provide for different levels and abilities of students.

During the 1980's many changes were made regarding curriculum and the general outline of the Bagrut matriculation. English remained one of the required core subjects and all students were required to learn on the level of 3 points at least, making the English exams divided into 3, 4 and 5 point levels. Each level included one external national exam with a reading comprehension text accompanied by seven to eight questions, and a writing task or translating task.

In the middle of the 90's a system of "Lottery" was put in place where each year one of the seven core subjects, including English was picked to be optional as an external exam. This meant that between 1995 and 1997 there were subjects that weren't tested nationally but given a grade on the matriculation certificate by the teacher, an internal grade. This system was quickly dissolved and by 2000, English was still a permanent requirement for all Israeli high school students in order to be awarded a full Bagrut. (Levi, 1990)

In 2002, the Education ministry added another set of exams in math and English called "Moed Bet" in July where students had a second chance at taking these exams in case they hadn't passed in the regular summer or winter term. This is still the case until today, where students are able to test in math and English three times during a school year, January, May and July, unlike any other subject. This change shows how math and English were and remain the main core subjects in the Israeli Educational system. (Protocol of Knesset Educational Committee, 2002)

Also in 2002, the Ministry changed the way the math and English Bagrut were structured entirely. Instead of one exam for each level, 3, 4 or 5, now the English Bagrut would be divided into a system of accumulative exams which all together made up the final grade for each student. The accumulative system is still the way the English Bagrut is calculated until today. (Schiak, 2003)

A 3 point Bagrut in English now includes three different exams, starting from Module A which includes two texts with questions meant to test reading comprehension together worth 70 points and a listening comprehension task worth 30 points. Module A is worth a total of 27% of the total 3 point English Bagrut. Module B includes a text with questions testing reading comprehension worth 70 points and a short writing task worth 30 points. Module B is worth a total of 26% of the final grade for a 3 point Bagrut. Finally, Module C includes only a text and questions testing reading comprehension which is worth 100%. Module C is worth a total of 27% of the final grade for a 3 point Bagrut. These three modules together are worth 80% with the 20% remaining based on an oral exam in interview form, where an English teacher conducts an interview asking students questions about themselves and about a project they have researched and wrote during the year.

### The matriculation Modules

<b>Three Point matriculation</b>	<b>Calculation</b>
<b>Name of Module</b>	<b>Percentage of final grade</b>
<b>A - 2 Unseens (70%) and Listening (30%)</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>B- Unseen (70%) and Writing Task (30%)</b>	<b>26%</b>
<b>C - Unseen (100%)</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>Oral Exam - interview based on 40% personal information and 60% explanation of project</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Final Grade</b>	<b>100%</b>

A 4 point Bagrut now includes Modules C, D, and E. Module C is the "cross-over" exam which is the higher 3 point exam, and the beginner 4 point exam. Module D includes a text and questions testing reading comprehension worth 70% and a writing task worth 30%. Module D is worth 26% of the overall 4 point English Bagrut. Module E is the last exam in the 4 point Bagrut which includes a text and questions worth 70% and a listening comprehension task worth 30%. The overall worth of Module E in a 4 point Bagrut is 27%. Together, Modules C,D and E are worth 80% with the remaining 20% being an interview with an external tester who conducts a ten minutes interview about personal details and the aforementioned project.

### Four Point matriculation

<b>Four Point matriculation</b>	<b>Calculation</b>
<b>Name of Module</b>	<b>Percentage of final grade</b>
<b>C -Unseen (100%) and Listening task (30%)</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>D- Unseen (70%) and writing task (30%)</b>	<b>26%</b>
<b>E - Unseen (100%) and Listening task (30%)</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>Oral Exam - interview based on 40% personal information and 60% explanation of project</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Final Grade</b>	<b>100%</b>

Finally, the five point Bagrut is based on Modules E, F and G, where E is the "crossover" exam between 4 and 5 point Matriculation t. Module F is a text with questions worth 70% and a writing task worth 30%, where its total worth is 26% of the total 5 point English Bagrut. Module G is a text with question worth 60%

and a writing task worth 40%, where its total worth is 27% of the final Matriculation calculation. As with 4 points, the 5 point student must also do an interview worth 20% with an English teacher who is an external objective tester about person information and a project.

### Five Point matriculation

Five Point matriculation	Calculation
Name of Module	Percentage of final grade
E -Unseen (70%) and Listening (30%)	27%
F- Unseen (70%) and Writing Task (30%)	26%
G -Unseen (60%) and Writing Task (40%)	27%
Oral Exam - interview based on 40% personal information and 60% explanation of project	20%
Final Grade	100%

### The New Literature Module for English Matriculation

In 2008, the English Inspectorate, in conjunction with the Department for Pedagogical Affairs and the High School Division of the Ministry of Education, announced The Literature Module Program for teaching and assessing literature in English in high schools. The program was based on innovative Ministry of Education policy to teach and assess higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) via either a Bagrut examination or school-based evaluation (the Log) (Explanations of the Changes in the Literature Program, 2014). The program was also a response to teacher feedback concerning the assessment in the Bagrut program of that time. (Literature Handbook, 2009) Through this program, the structure of the English matriculation would change dramatically for 4 and 5 point students. Module D and F would be replaced with Literature modules giving each school the choice to have its students be tested externally on a national literature exam or internally, where each student would create a portfolio or literature log which their teacher would grade, therefore making the Log an internal component of the English Bagrut. This required English teachers around the country to undergo training in order to be able to implement this new curriculum. Courses were given in teacher training centers around the country and an online course opened to allow teachers living in the periphery to receive this much needed training as well. Since 2012, after a trial period where only a handful of schools began to implement this program, today all students in Israel have begun testing according to the new Literature program. For 4 point students, Modules C and E along with the oral exam or interview has remained the same. Module D,

however, has now become the Literature Module. 4 point students are required to learn 7 literary pieces, whereas each unit must consist of seven main components. The 5 point Bagrut still consists of Modules E and G along with the oral exam as in the past. Module F has now become the Literature Module where students must learn 8 literary pieces, consisting of the 7 main components as well.

The English Inspectorate published a teacher's handbook (2008, 2013) outlining precisely what is expected of students and teachers in both the exam option and the Log option. The seven components mentioned there are described at length and are the moduls for the Higher Order Thinking Skill program and they include:

- Pre-reading Activity
- Basic Understanding
- Analysis and Interpretation
- Bridging Text and Context
- Post-reading Activity
- Reflection
- Summative Assessment

The major goal behind this main reform in the English Matriculation is to encourage students to think critically and enrich their knowledge of the English language through using these Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) while learning English literature. The teaching of HOTS not only enhances students' ability to analyze literature, but also gives them the ability to better answer reading comprehension questions in expository texts, and improves their writing skills as well as their thinking skills. (Literature Handbook, 2009). The following are the higher-order thinking skills that are required to be taught to students taking the Bagrut Literature exam as well as students who are doing the Log:

- a. Comparing and contrasting
- b. Distinguishing different perspectives
- c. Explaining cause and effect
- d. Explaining patterns
- e. Inferring
- f. Problem solving

For those students doing the Log, grading is based largely on content rather than grammar and syntax. Since the goal of this new program is to develop and sharpen thinking skills, the Inspectorate has distanced itself from concentrating



on dry language knowledge and has actively encouraged learning the English language in a variety of content based contexts.

### The breakdown of each individual unit

Grade for Unit	Element
20%	Unit contains all the required activities for the Key Component (by handing in all the required work, even students who have difficulties with the language, rules, grammar etc. receive the 20% for their effort and handing in their work on time)
30%	At least one graded Key Component (Either the Bridging Task or Post-Reading writing activities are graded, based on 20% language (grammar, spelling mistakes, etc.) and 80% on content.)
50%	Summative Assessment (Quiz at the end of the unit which covers Basic, Analysis and Bridging questions based on what was learned in class)

The 4 point Literature Module includes 7 literature pieces including three poems and four short stories. The 5 point Literature Module includes 8 literature pieces including 4 poems, 3 short stories and a novel or play. The ministry has published a list of accepted literary pieces and teachers who wish to teach poems or stories which are not on the list must get approval from the local English Inspectorate to do so. Below is the breakdown of the grade for a 4 point Literature Module Bagrut. 20% of the final grade is based on presentation of the Log, aesthetics, and handing work in on time. Teachers are required to send in a sample of their class's work that was done during the year. In May, the English Inspectorate sends a list of randomly selected students which have been chosen to turn their work into the Ministry. Teachers then receive feedback regarding the Log, what to change or improve, and any other comments. For schools that choose to test their students externally with the Literature Module Exam, the learning process is identical to the Log, including the teaching of all seven main components and the use of Higher Order Thinking Skills. The Literature Bagrut examination assesses the students' understanding of the literary texts and their ability to use lower-order and higher-order thinking skills that they have learned and applied in the learning process, as well as demonstrate their ability to make connections between the text and new information relating to the text.

The following tables show the 2 options given to schools as to which literary pieces will be tested on the Literature Exam.

### **Literary Text- OPTION 1**

#### Four Short Stories:

"The Treasure of Lemon Brown" by Walter Dean Myers

"Mr. Know All" by W. Somerset Maugham

"The Split Cherry Tree" by Jesse Stuart

"Thank You, Ma'm" by Langston Hughes

#### Three Poems:

"Introduction to Poetry" by Billy Collins

"The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost

"Count That Day Lost" by George Eliot

### **Literary Text - OPTION 2**

#### Four Short Stories:

"The Treasure of Lemon Brown" by Walter Dean Myers

"A Summer's Reading" by Bernard Malamud

"The Split Cherry Tree" by Jesse Stuart

"Thank You, Ma'm" by Langston Hughes

#### Three Poems:

"Grandmother" by Sameeneh Shirazie

"The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost

"Count That Day Lost" by George Eliot

For the 5 point Literature Exam, there are 2 different options as well. Teachers must notify the English Inspectorate as to which option they choose. Both options comprise of one play or novel (All My Sons by Arthur Miller & The Wave by Morton Rhue), three short stories and four poems (Compatibility document, 2013).

## Method

Research question: What are the attitudes and experiences of high school English teachers in a peripheral Southern town regarding the New Literature Module of the English National Matriculation?

Research method: Qualitative- This method was chosen because checking attitudes and experiences is something that is better expressed by words through interviews or questionnaires rather than numbers in a qualitative approach.

Research Tool: Questionnaires which were made up of seven open-ended questions were used.

Sample: The questionnaires were given to 26 high school English teachers from three different high schools in a peripheral Southern town in Israel. Their ages ranged from 25 to 58. Out of the 26 teachers in the sample, 4 had been teachers for less than five years, 15 had been teachers between 5 and 15 years, 5 had been teachers between 16 and 25 years and 2 had been teachers for over 25 years. Out of a sample of 26, 2 were male and 24 females. All teachers questioned identified as teachers who have taught all three high schools grades at a range of levels, including 3, 4 and 5 points.

## Results

The answers for each question are divided into main topics which were identified throughout the teachers' answers.

**Table No. 1: What do you think are the advantages of the new Literature Bagrut program? Explain.**

Writing and Reading Intensive	12 teachers included answers such as: "Students are encouraged to write and read a lot", "writing activities about different topics including relating to one's life makes creative writing much easier and more fun", " Enriching students' vocabulary, students are able to express feelings and through the topics of each literary piece"
Higher Grades are achieved through the Log	8 teachers included answers such as: "The student will score higher grades on the Module F Log than they would on the exam. Since the goal in Israel is getting higher grades then I guess this is good.", "Grades are higher when work is done in class. Their Bagrut isn't dependent on one day of the external exam". "Grades are higher with the Log"

Content based program takes focus off of dry grammar and language and encourages creativity	11 teachers included answers such as: "Encourages reading and writing, takes focus off grammar and technicalities", "Students are graded on content over language mistakes.", "Since we give only 20% for language and 80% for content, students aren't embarrassed to write in English and express their opinions."
Internal grading by teacher helps weaker students	6 teachers included answer such as: "This makes it easier for weaker students. Also it's an internal grade so teachers feel that the work done in class is meaningful and important.", "Weaker students benefit by having their teachers in class to help them".
Encourages High Order Thinking	7 teachers included answers such as: "Students are asked to write about their own experiences making the program relevant and important to them. This makes learning English more interesting and hopefully a more successful experience.", "The fact that the program encourages critical thinking in an English context is great."
Negative: No benefits	5 teachers wrote answers such as: "None", "There are no benefits", "There are none."
No answer	2 teachers left this question blank.

**Table No. 2: What do you think are the disadvantages of the new Literature Bagrut program? Explain.**

Time consuming for the teacher	21 teachers included answers such as: "The grading is impossible. It tripled our work load!", "The amount of grading is absolutely out of control.", "I spend hours grading and checking writing tasks. When I teach 2 or 3 classes with Logs it becomes just crazy.", "The workload is overwhelming and tedious"
Large amount of paperwork to Keep Throughout 3 years.	8 teachers included answers such as: "I keep all of my students' Logs at my house. My whole office is packed with binders and folders!", "I don't trust my students to keep their Log from year to

	year so I have to hold onto everything." "My students are constantly forgetting or losing their papers and assignments"
The program is boring.	6 teachers included answers such as: "Some of the the program is boring", "pieces are really boring and not relevant.", "Students are not interested in literature at all"
Students don't take the Log seriously	10 teachers included answers such as: "The students don't take it seriously and don't turn in their work on time.", "I have to beg my students to do the work. I have to remind them constantly to submit their work in on time.", "My students don't realize that this is their actual Bagrut grade, they don't take it seriously and don't put in the effort."
Too difficult for weak students	4 teachers included answers such as: "The program is too difficult for my very weak students." "In the past they could reach 4 points by doing unseens, now they have to learn literature and it's just too difficult". "Some of the pieces have very difficult language or syntax. They use expressions and slang that the students don't know."

**Table No. 3: What would you add to the program? Explain.**

Easier pieces	9 teachers included answers such as: "I would add in lighter poems, funnier stories, with easier vocabulary.", "Easier poems and stories.", "Choosing easier pieces will make it easier on the students and teachers".
More interesting activities	16 teachers included answers such as: "Add more interesting aspects such as seeing the movie, hearing songs", "The book is too dry, adding in fun activities can make it much more interesting.", "We can take the students to see the

	play All My Sons".
More modern pieces	8 teachers included answers such as: "Using modern More modern pieces poetry will make it more interesting for the students.", "I think we should teach Tupac poems. He wrote beautiful poetry and the students would love it!", "We must teach more modern pieces", "We should teach more contemporary works".
No answer	4 teachers left this question blank

**Table No. 4: What would you remove from the program? Explain.**

2-3 Pieces	9 teachers included answers such as: "I would take off 2-3 Pieces of literature at least 2 poems or stories. It's just too much work", "We should take off All My Sons which we've been teaching for 70 years!", "I would remove the boring pieces of literature because the workload is crazy".
The paperwork required	18 teachers included answers such as: "I would remove the paperwork required for teachers to keep and fill out.", "Too much paperwork to keep all these years".
Confusing and difficult questions in the textbooks	6 teachers included answers such as: "The questions are too confusing.", "The book has really confusing and sometimes repetitive questions which are unnecessary".
Remove the program completely	5 teachers included answers such as: "Remove the program entirely.", "All of it.", "Everything."
No answer	4 teachers left this question blank

**Table No. 5: What is your opinion regarding grading the Literature LOG?**

Time consuming	20 teachers included answers such as: "It's a nightmare", "So time
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	consuming", "Takes forever, we have to spend hours grading assignments that the students don't even invest in.", "Grading the Log takes up all of my free time", "The grading is tedious.", "Too many grading charts", "Frustrating and long! I can't stand it."
Rubrics are clear, easy to use	6 teachers included answers such as: "I don't have any problem grading the Log. We only have one assignment and the quiz to grade.", "The rubrics in the handbook are very straightforward and clear.", "I like that we grade mostly based on content and not language which makes my grading easier."
No answer	3 teachers left this answer blank

**Table No. 6: Do you think that changing Module D/F to a literature program is better or worse than the old Bagrut program? Explain.**

Better	16 teachers included answers such as: Better "because the students are learning English on a higher level, are taking it more seriously.", "Students are exposed to many forms of literature, culture, and interesting content.", "Using thinking skills is probably the most important thing taught in high school".
Worse	19 teachers included answers such as: "It's too time consuming for both and is a disaster.", "It's worse because all of a sudden we raised the expectations from our students and have to begin teaching a higher level of English", "Worse because it takes up all of our Time" , "Too much work for the same pay".
No answer	3 teachers left this question blank

**Table No. 7: How has the new Literature Bagrut program changed the way you teach? Explain.**

No time for other subjects	17 teachers included answers such as: "I don't teach the text book anymore." ,I don't get to teaching anything else."
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	"I have completely neglected any other projects".
I have to try to make it as interesting as possible, book insufficient	8 teachers included answers such as: "I search for new material to make class more interesting.", "I have to make the Log relevant for the students.", "The book is boring so I prepare my own material as well".
Go "by the book"	6 teachers included answers such as: "I go "by the book" as told.", "I do what I have to.", "Follow the program".
Changed attitude- more strict and demanding	7 teachers included answers such as: "I have to be much more strict and make sure the students turn in their work." "I find myself screaming at students who lose their work".
No answer	4 teachers left this question blank

## Discussion

The overall attitudes of teachers regarding the Literature Module were varied. Many teachers wrote positive and negative answers in the same questions and seemed very torn as to whether the advantages of the program were worth all of the disadvantages that came with it. In question one, teachers were asked about the advantages of the Literature program. Most of the teachers found that there was a great advantage in terms of the amount of reading and writing students were exposed to. If in the past, much time was spent on worksheets, grammar, and fill-ins, the program achieved a greater level of English exposure within the context of literature, time periods, messages, and moral dilemmas. Also mentioned as a significant advantage was the fact that program was content based, making English learning more relevant, taken more seriously, and less focused on difficult grammar rules and spelling. This changed the way English was taught and added a new element to the curriculum. It also encouraged creativity and individuality as many tasks were subjective and creative writing. In addition, the Higher Order Thinking Skills were mentioned by 7 teachers as encouraging students to think for themselves, to dig deeper into the literary pieces to find meaning and relevant messages in their own lives, and to think critically about the world around them. Higher order thinking skills (HOTS) is thinking on a level that is higher than memorizing facts. HOTS takes thinking to higher levels than repeating the facts and requires students to do something with the facts – comprehend them, infer from them, connect them to other facts and notions, categorize them, manipulate them, put them together in an original ways, and apply them to new solutions to novel problems (Criscuola, 1994).

The fact that the grades were given internally was mentioned as an important advantage to the program since it helps the weaker students which couldn't



otherwise succeed in a 4 or 5 point Bagrut. The internal exam took off pressure from those who don't perform well on the day of the Bagrut and gave them a chance to achieve higher grades.

Out of the questionnaires, five teachers included negative answers, that there were no advantages and two teachers didn't answer the question at all. In general the answers in question one showed that the teachers see an educational value in the Literature program. The fact that students are exposed to a high level of English, varied cultural contexts, and receive the final Bagrut grade for this module from their teachers makes the program a seemingly welcomed change.

Question two asked teachers about the disadvantages of the Literature module. Almost all of the teachers mentioned time consumption as the main disadvantage. The teachers complained of a huge amount of workload, endless tasks to grade, and an impractical amount of paperwork to keep. In addition, the paperwork became the responsibility of the teachers as most students failed to keep their work organized properly and many even lost units of literature. Also, many students didn't take the program seriously, many times not handing in work on time or handing it in at all. Another disadvantage is that six teachers found the program boring and irrelevant to the students, making it subsequently boring to teach as well. Especially for weaker students, the teachers felt that the program was too difficult and expected too much from the students. The language, slang, and syntax made it almost impossible for weaker, borderline students to succeed on a 4 or 5 point Bagrut, making them "stuck" in 3 points.

In general, the disadvantages mentioned were definitely not negligible. These were serious points that should be taken into consideration, especially since with the greater amount of workload, time, and effort; the teachers mentioned that they received the same amount of remuneration. In addition, the negative attitudes of students were mentioned as a big factor contributing to dissatisfaction of teachers since now most of the responsibility was shifted from the students to the teachers as the Bagrut became internal.

In question three, teachers were asked what they would add to the program. Most teachers mentioned the fact that they would add more interesting activities to the program to compliment and add to the boring and dry literature textbooks. The teachers suggested many ideas such as adding multimedia, interactive activities, and more to enrich the learning experience and curriculum. Also, teachers mentioned the desire to add more modern pieces to the program in order to make it more relevant to the students. Many teachers also wanted to be able to choose pieces that were more appropriate level-wise for their students, especially in the weaker groups. Four teachers left this question blank.

Out of these answers, the general attitude showed that teachers desired to improve the program through creative mediums and activities. Many teachers thought of their weaker students and suggested ways to help them succeed despite the difficulty of the program.

Question four asked teachers about what they would remove from the program. The most suggested answer was the amount of paperwork teachers had to deal with. One of the solutions given as to what could be removed which would result in less paperwork was removing two to three literature pieces from the program. This would help reduce the amount of tasks to grade, paperwork to fill in, and more importantly, paperwork to keep throughout the three year program. Another suggestion as to what would benefit the program by being removed was to remove the confusing and difficult questions from the textbook which often lead to frustrated students and teachers alike. Five of the teachers wrote that they would remove the entire program altogether and four teachers left this question blank. The overall attitude of the teachers regarding the removal of a part or parts of the program focused on the large amount of grading and paperwork, as a way to lighten the workload and ensure success of both teachers and students. The main suggestion was to lessen the number of literary works which seems like a very practical and doable solution worth taking into consideration.

Question five asked teachers their opinion regarding the grading of the Logs. Almost unanimously, the teachers answered that it was too time consuming, tedious, and overall very frustrating. Only six teachers mentioned the handbook as a useful tool which laid out the grading rubrics very clearly. Three of the teachers left this question blank.

In general the teachers complained about the amount of grading rather than the difficulty of the grading system itself. The handbook might be very clear but it doesn't help those teachers with large classes and multiple levels. Teachers are already overwhelmed by the amount of work, exams to grade, projects to check, book reports to assess, phone calls to make, meetings to attend, etc. that the English teaching profession requires. Adding the Log on top of all these responsibilities and tasks became almost unrealistic to expect from teachers.

In question six, teachers were asked if they think that the new Literature Modules were better or worse than the old Module D and F, and to give an explanation as to why. Most teachers answered with mixed reactions, giving reasons for better and worse.

Teachers noted that the new Literature program was better because of the higher level of learning, the change from grammatical, dry learning material to rich, relevant, and content based literature. They appreciated the fact that since the grade was now given by the teacher, many weak students felt more confident to try a 4 point Bagrut. In addition, students were exposed to many different kinds of dialects, slang, and sayings that they wouldn't learn otherwise. Many teachers wrote that the amount of work, paperwork, grading, and time made the new program worse than the old modules. Teachers mentioned the fact that they have no time to teach other important lessons needed for language learning and the other two modules tested in the Bagrut. Also mentioned was the fact that the work load for teachers increased significantly but the pay stayed the same. Expectations from students and teachers were raised significantly and teachers felt that preparation was needed from before high school to be able to deal with the content of the program. In addition, teachers felt that the responsibility of

handing in and keeping work had shifted from the students to teachers adding to the stress of the program.

In general most teachers wrote answers that mentioned how the new program was both better and worse than the old modules. This shows that teachers didn't see the program as "all good" or "all bad" but saw potential in an innovative and new curriculum while also suggesting that there were changes to make before it was seen as an accepted and effective program.

Question seven asked teachers to describe how the new Literature Bagrut program changed the way they taught. Most of the teachers identified the fact that with the new program they didn't have time for other subjects and had to dedicate all of the frontal lessons to the Literature Module to be able to reach deadlines. Because of the apparent lack of interesting questions and activities in the course books, many teachers felt they had to invest much time searching for and creating new material in order to keep the learning process stimulating. Seven teachers changed their attitudes completely towards teaching English in Bagrut classes since they felt they had to be much stricter and demanding regarding due dates, assignments, tardiness and absences. Six teachers mentioned that they just go by the book and follow instructions of their superiors and the Inspectorate, while four teachers left the question blank.

In all, the teachers felt that the new program had lead them to make changes in the way they teach, whether in terms of curriculum and material or in terms of their general attitude towards teaching. Most teachers felt that the course books being used were insufficient and they had to invest much time and effort into supplementing the material given in order to make the program more relevant and exciting. By sorting the answers written in each question and identifying common categories, we saw that the teachers in general identified both positive and negative aspects in the new Literature Module. Many times the same teacher wrote both for and against in the same question highlighting the fact that the program is seen as having potential and moving in the right direction in terms of content, but on the other hand, still needed much reform and change in regards to the actual logistics and framework. The overall attitudes of teachers when mentioning the positive aspects of the program showed how much they invested themselves in their classes and groups. The teachers suggested ways to include weaker students, to improve the curriculum in order to make it as relevant, interesting, and motivating as possible. Their general goals were to make the English Language experience a positive one, both for the teachers and students alike. Through their suggestions and ideas, it's clear that the teachers were not totally against the program, but were interested in adding, changing, and improving it to become more beneficial for all. Many of the suggestions were very practical and definitely have a place in curriculum reform.

When identifying negative aspects of the Literature Module, the most important and significant point mentioned was the unforgiving and overwhelming work load. The amount of assignments to be checked, exams to be graded, and papers to safe keep over the three year length of the program was the biggest complaint. As teachers responsible to lead their students to success in the English Matriculation, they almost all stated that the amount of time being allotted to the

Literature program engulfed them, leaving no time for teaching other vital skills in language learning. This frustration at the lack of time, amount of work, and the irresponsibility of students leading to even more toil on the part of teachers, lead to an overall negative attitude towards the program, not so much because of its content, but because of its structure.

## Conclusion

The answers given by the teachers were mostly written in a constructive and practical way, giving us a glimpse as to what teachers "in the field" experienced when faced with a new and daunting curriculum change. The most effective way of achieving successful curriculum reform is to listen to the bottom of the educational "food chain": the teachers who actual implement and live the change. It's important to note that as far as we know, no research has been done on the new Literature program as it has been fully implemented only the past year in all schools nationally. Our goal is to be able to use this paper as a means to effect change in the Literature program and give teachers an opportunity to voice their comments, concerns, and experiences. We hope that the English Inspectorate will take these results into consideration and effect the necessary changes in the program in order to improve the experiences of both teachers and students. In addition, the research was done after only the first full year of implementation of the new Literature program. The fact that the program was new overall and required much preparation because of this could have led to increased frustration and stress not connected to the actual program itself. It's possible that in a few years, after becoming accustomed and familiar with the program, teachers will react differently and more positively. It's important to mention that just a week before this paper was due, long after the questionnaires had been filled out, returned, and analyzed, the English Inspectorate published an updated version of the Literature Handbook (August 2013) which made quite a few minor changes but one major change came as a relief to many teachers. The Inspectorate decided to lessen the number of literature pieces to be taught both for the exam and the Log to 6 pieces for 4 and 5 points alike. This will definitely be a welcomed reform in hopes that the Literature program will reap the benefits of all of its positive and constructive aspects, while lessening the stress and frustration associated with its weaker points. It would be interesting to conduct a similar type of research in a few years to check the effect of these recent changes on the attitudes and experiences of high school English teachers nationwide.

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