SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: THE LANGUAGE COMPONENT

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To my sister Najwa and my father Kassem

May you rest in peace.

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Abstract

This study attempts to answer a number of questions relevant to the external and internal factors affecting the performance of a private school in a low-income rural environment in Lebanon. The study utilizes qualitative and quantitative methods to gauge the impact of the administration, faculty, students, and curriculum on school improvement. It also examines the role of parents, as well as cultural, and socio-economic conditions affecting the school.

The study accompanied one specific rural school over a period of a little over a year and was advantaged by readily available access to administration, parents, faculty, staff and students. This allowed for a thorough examination of the relationship between school and environment, between parents and administration, and between faculty and students. The argument is made that while school improvement is dependant on internal dynamics, it is also conditioned by external factors beyond the control of the administration.

A particular focus of the study is the English language component of the curriculum, and the use by faculty and students of the language, the medium of instruction in most courses. Despite the high value placed on the importance of the language by all parties, deficiencies in the teaching and use of English are significant and impact markedly on student performance.

The school offers a program leading from KG to grade 9, the Brevet year, and the students success rate in that official exam in the year of the study was 87%. This high rate of success has been maintained for a number of years. However, the minimal involvement by parents, shortcomings in the teaching staff, limited motivation on the part of students and faculty, and weak school culture result in a bare minimum educational environment. The limited resources available to the administration, forced to operate in a low income environment where the pool of potential students is limited, makes any major change virtually impossible.

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Chapter one

Introduction

The primary purpose of education in most societies is twofold: to perpetuate the culture, and to prepare students for productive adult roles. The main activity of schools is to teach particular status cultures, both inside and outside the classroom. These cultures may be derived from various sources stemming primarily from differences in economic status, i.e. class; social status, i.e. power position; and cultural conditions, i.e. religion, education, geographic location, and ethnicity (Collins, 2004). School and community share the responsibility of generating and maintaining a social, economic, political, and intellectual order. Socially schooling is the glue that binds together members of a certain society and is a key ingredient to their stability. It serves in socializing children into their society's future roles, behaviors, and values. The economic purpose of education is to prepare students for their future job-related roles, therefore to allocate individuals into the division of labor. The political role is to nurture love of country, to teach children the laws of their society -their rights, roles, and responsibilities-and to prepare them to participate in the political order. The intellectual purpose of schooling, is to teach basic cognitive skills, transmitting specific knowledge, and helping learners acquire higher order thinking skills (Sadvonik, 2004).

Education and social, economic, and political institutions are interrelated and interdependent in a society. Any change in one generates change in others. Schools are an essential component of society; they affect both their immediate and global surroundings. As schools do not exist in a vacuum, their functioning is influenced by their environments and their students' school experiences may consequently be affected (Ballantine & Spade, 2004).

In this study, I will attempt to give a general overview of the Lebanese educational system. The study focuses on low-income rural private schools, and investigates the effect of the environment on those schools, their culture, their programs, their effectiveness, their improvement and their precarious survival.

1.1 Background

Parents from various socio-economic backgrounds desire quality education for their children and trust schooling to be both a guarantee for financial security and an investment in their children's future (Volk, 2000). Parents aspire for their children to become doctors, engineers, lawyers, and prominent business people. In Lebanon, the high literacy rate estimated in the year 2002 at 86% (UNDP, 2006) illustrates the value of education to the Lebanese people. Public and private schools cater to almost 900,000 students from all socioeconomic backgrounds with an estimated 61% enrolled in private schools (LAES, 2002). While public schools are subsidized by the government, private schools are subsidized either by a religious, political or philanthropic group, or are financially self- sufficient (US Library of Congress, 2006). Urban and rural private-run schools, which rely completely on student tuition for survival, may possibly face numerous challenges related to student enrolment, hiring and retaining qualified teachers, offering quality programs and maintaining high standards. Low-income rural private schools could face additional problems such as the interference of external factors or what Ubben, Hughes, and Norris (2004) call informal power.

Challenges faced by privately-run schools and especially low-income urban and rural ones are further exasperated by the lack of supervision by Lebanon's educational authorities and by the non-existent school accountability system. Therefore, to be able to survive in a highly competitive and unpredictable market, those schools run their operation on a very tight budget, often jeopardizing their standards and in the process their student outcome. Low-income rural private schools are frequently confronted with the inadequacy of hiring qualified experienced teachers especially in the field of languages. Lindohlm (1990), states that high-quality instructional staff are a major component of an effective dual-language program (as cited in Freeman, 2004).

In Lebanon, education has evolved along bilingual and multilingual modes of thinking, so that consequently, there has been a tendency to equate bilingualism with higher academic standards. Bilingualism has been the norm in the Lebanese educational system since foreign religious missionaries established their educational institutions in the country in the 18th century during the Ottoman Empire rule. In 1920, after the fall of

the Ottoman Empire, Lebanon came under the French Mandate. The French colonized Lebanon and made their language the official language along with Arabic; French became the medium of instruction for sciences, mathematics and social studies at all levels of education (Shaaban & Gaith, 1999). Even private American and British schools which use English as the medium of instruction had to teach French as well. In addition the French introduced a system of public education modeled on their own educational system (Diab, 2000) and official testing to exit grades 5, 9, and 12 became the norm. French became a semi official language, outlasted the French Mandate, and even attained a "nativised status" (Cangarajah, 2002, p.134). This development has since been reflected in many, if not most, school curricula and is still portrayed in the standardized testing system.

Upon acquiring its independence in 1943, Lebanon assumed an educational system that mandated all schools to teach Arabic and French or Arabic and English. The Ministry of Education directly supervised and inspected public schools; however, it was not until 1950 that private schools were to fall under the direct supervision and inspection of the ministry, a responsibility to be relinquished nine years later (Abouchedid, Nasser, & Van Blommestein, 2002). Today, the Lebanese government plays a rather insignificant role in supervising the private educational sector, and, as a result, accountability is not an issue for private schools whose survival or demise depend greatly on a plethora of internal and external factors mostly not relevant to public schools.

In Lebanon, more than one half of the schools are private and financed either by individuals, in the form of tuition, or by religious orders (Massialas & Jarrar, 1991). Most Lebanese private schools share common characteristics: self- governance, self-support, total control of the selection of their teachers and students, adherence to the National Curriculum stipulated by the Ministry of Education and addition of programs and courses that cater to their own agenda. A further particular characteristic that schools in disadvantaged contexts share is that they are typically small in size.

The New Educational Ladder stipulates that education is compulsory until age 15, when all students sit for their first set of official examinations better known as the Brevet examination. Students may then join a vocational institution, pursue secondary education, or quit school. Parents in disadvantaged contexts tend to withdraw their students from

school due to many factors such as the low standards of schools, the scarcity of government schools in poor rural areas, the low occupational and economic return of education, and the high costs of higher education on poor families. In rural areas where agriculture is the main source of income, and where 75% of the families are poor and 40% of them are extremely poor, education at the secondary level becomes a commodity (Haddad, 1996).

The educational structure in Lebanon is divided in two sectors: public and private. It is also arranged into three types: general, vocational and technical, and higher education. The new educational ladder designates 12 years of general education, which students must complete to enter a higher education program. Pre-elementary education has a duration of three years (3-6 years old). After completing the pre-elementary stage, students at age six enter the elementary cycle that covers grade one to six and complete it at the age of twelve. This stage is followed by three years of the intermediate cycle that includes grade seven to nine and is completed at age fifteen by an official examination known as the Brevet (A plan for educational reform, 1994). According to the new educational ladder, and in compliance with the plan for educational reform, education in Lebanon is compulsory until age fifteen, therefore the elementary and intermediate cycles are the most critical and crucial part of the Lebanese educational system.

In countries where standardized national curriculum is the norm, academic achievement is often measured solely by standardized tests (Freeman, 1998). In Lebanon, the Intermediate level or cycle 3 is capped by the Brevet examination. Pupils who succeed in the Brevet test may either move on to the secondary level which lasts for three years and is capped by another official examination known as the Baccalaureate exam at the age of eighteen, or proceed to vocational or technical schools, or quit school.

1.2 The purpose of the study

Some researchers in school management and leadership argue that administrators, faculty members and staff bear the sole responsibility for the success of a school and its programs. Others proclaim that external factors are critical determinants in the success of

an educational institution, while others advocate that both internal and external factors are decisive factors in the success of a school. The study looks at the internal and external factors that determine the success of privately owned low-income educational institutions through investigating a Lebanese low-income rural school, its strengths and weaknesses, its culture, its constituents' attitudes and perception toward education in general and languages in particular. Furthermore, the study investigates the social, economic, religious and political context. The research focuses on attributes of language programs of low-income autonomous schools where there is a general consensus in the research that where there are attempts to improve, they are handicapped by lack of financial and human resources. Success can be short-lived and fragile in disadvantaged contexts as it is difficult to sustain any improvement.

The purpose of the study is to identify the decisive factors that contribute to the success of a private and autonomous institution in a disadvantaged context in Lebanon. The study also provides information, insight, ideas, and guidance to school owners, educators, and policymakers as they grapple with the urgent challenge of defining, costing-out, and providing students from various socio-economic backgrounds with a quality education.

This one-year study explores practices in actual schools, investigates attitudes and conceptions of school constituents towards learning in general and towards learning languages in particular and offers alternatives to the management currently practiced in schools. The value of this research lies in its ability to delve in depth into the relevance of the community on the success and quality of management of a local school.
The research aims to find answers to the following questions:

- What internal factors determine the functioning of a low-income private school and its success?
- What external factors influence the functioning of a private school in disadvantaged contexts?
- How does the interaction between a private school and its environment influence its management and its output?

- How do family's attitudes towards language learning affect language programs in a low-income private school?
- What factors shape students' motivations and attitudes towards learning second languages?
- How do teachers' attitudes towards professional training and development affect language teaching and therefore language programs in challenging circumstances?
- Does creating a strong school culture and rallying community support affect the success of a school in disadvantaged contexts?

The research illustrates that school improvement is very complex in disadvantaged contexts and depends greatly on internal dynamics; however, sustaining improvement in such situations may be imperiled by external factors. In addition, the study illustrates that parents' and learners' attitudes toward learning in general and learning languages in particular are affected by social factors that are beyond the immediate control of the community, i.e. the move toward globalization. The study reveals evidence of failings in language teaching in low-income schools where teachers are inadequately hired, unqualified, improperly equipped, not trusted with any power, and therefore demotivated.

As for parents' involvement in school activities, the research shows their involvement to be negligible despite the fact that parents have high expectations of the school their child attends.

The school chosen for this research is a low-income privately-run rural school and can be identified, to use Harris (2002) nomenclature, as a trapped school.

> Trapped schools are those that undertake all the necessary maintenance activities but neglect developmental work. These schools are not obviously failing as they appear to be efficiently run. However, their reluctance to develop or to take on new ideas means that they will, at best, remain where they are and, at worst, gradually deteriorate (p. 16).

A fictional name, The Sunshine School, has been given to the participant school to preserve its privacy. Also for further confidentiality, any information that makes it possible to identify the school or an individual participant has either been modified or eliminated.

The Sunshine School has very limited financial resources. Tuition is its financial lifeline. According to the students' results on the official standardized exams, the school is effective. From 87 to 90% of its students pass the brevet official examinations, but with low scores in the English language and most other subjects taught in English, such as physics, chemistry and biology (Appendix G). In 1996, due to external political factors the school suffered a major drop in its student enrolment and has not recovered since. The study presents evidence that factors such as religious background, political affiliations, and socio-economic status play a crucial role in shaping schools, their marketability, and their success.

1.3 Definition of terms

The following definitions of terms are used in this study.

1.3.1 School culture:

School culture has been an enigmatic word in educational theory and practice. School culture has a proliferation of meanings, and there is no agreement among educational researchers on its definition (Prosser, 1999). Ethos, climate, character, atmosphere, and tone are terms used by researchers to refer to the sum of the values, cultures, safety practices, and organizational structures within a school that cause it to function and react in particular ways. Teaching practices, diversity, and the relationships among administrators, teachers, parents, and students contribute to school culture (McBrien & Brandt, 1997).

1.3.2 School environment

The environment refers to all the elements that surround and influence an institution. For schools, an important aspect of the environment is economic-where schools get their funds. Another important aspect is the employment market and what job skills are needed (Ballantine & Spade, 2004).

1.3.3 School Success

The school discussed in this study is a private autonomous school whose funding relies solely on tuition fees. Even though results on standardized exams are an important

criterion and in some contexts the only criterion in defining the effectiveness and success of a school (i.e. the league tables in the UK), success in this context means the ability of the school to attract students, to increase its funds and resources, to recruit and retain qualified teachers, to provide solid and consistent academic standards, to achieve and maintain good student results in official exams, to offer professional development opportunities, and to plan for, implement, and sustain improvement.

1.3.4 School improvement

School improvement is a process by which an educational institution generates strategies to consolidate its culture, to promote inter-personal relationships among its constituents based on cooperation and collaboration, and to enhance its student outcome through ameliorating the nature and quality of their learning (Hopkins, 1996, Barth, 1990, Harris & Chapman, 2001).

1.3.5 School effectiveness

School effectiveness generally refers to the degree to which schools achieve their goals, in comparison with other schools that are 'equalized', in terms of student-intake, through manipulation of certain conditions by the school itself or the immediate school context. School effectiveness can also be described as the extent to which the desired level of output is achieved. The output is traditionally measured by the number of students who successfully pass their official exams. However, a more accurate measurement should take into account the input into a school, namely the students' financial, social, and academic characteristics (Scheerens, 2000).

1.3.6 Disadvantaged context

Difficult, challenging, disadvantaged circumstances are terms used to describe schools working in environments and communities that differ from what might be accepted as tolerable (Clarke, Reynolds, Harris, 2005). Disadvantaged environments refer to environments where student learning is impaired by poverty, the schools' inadequate financial and human resources, and the administrations' poor planning for sustainable improvement and development.

1.3.7 Bilingualism

Technically, bilingualism means using two languages for instructional purposes. This term also refers to a wide range of programs that may have different ideological

orientations toward linguistic and cultural diversity, different target populations, and different goals for those populations (Hornberger, 1991, as cited in Freeman, 1998). Bilingualism indicates the ability to effectively communicate or understand thoughts and ideas through two languages' grammatical systems and vocabulary, using their written symbols (Hargett, 1998).

1.3.8 Bilingual education

An educational program in which two languages are used to provide content matter instruction and where proficiency in two languages is essential for academic success.

1.3.9 Second language programs

Programs whose main objective is to "teach the target language as a subject area for students who do not live in contexts that use that language as a medium of communication" (Freeman, 2004, p.2).

1.3.10 Professional development

Professional development generally refers to continuing learning opportunities available to teachers, and other education personnel, through their educational institutions. Effective professional development is at the present time considered vital to school success and teacher's ability to enhance and build on their instructional knowledge. Professional development caters to teachers' learning needs before teachers can meet the needs of their students. Professional development can be achieved in two ways: either through staff attending in-house or offsite training courses or through planned experience (Fiddler & Atton, 1999).

1.4 The research context

The Coleman report released in 1966 proclaimed that academic achievement was less related to the quality of a student's school and more related to the student's socioeconomic status. Coleman's findings sparked criticism and debate that continues through the present day. Some educators have claimed that low socioeconomic status is very a strong drawback for schools to overcome its negative effect on student achievement while others have argued that some schools in disadvantaged contexts have the ability to surmount the barriers presented by their environment and to make a

difference on student achievement (Henchey, 2001). Researchers have been investigating the correlation between schools, socioeconomic status, and student achievement. They have been looking at all elements that might affect student achievement, such as the quality of the school, the adequacy of its resources, its environment and its interaction with that environment, its culture, its effectiveness, and its plans for improvement and development.

The relationship between adequate school resources and the ability of high-poverty students to succeed educationally is frequently debated, especially since most of the low-income institutions have very limited financial resources with which to make major changes or any changes. Some researchers have found that a strong relationship between adequate school resources and student achievement exists, while others disagree. However, it is plausible that external factors might also be important - that the local context of a school might influence its organization and management and the activities of its staff, causing variations in quality. Concentrated poverty in an area might have a detrimental effect on school quality as well as on attainment (Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll, & Russ, 2004)

These elements are familiar to public schools in several countries where education is funded by local communities or government agencies. In Lebanon, the public and private educational sectors coexist and compete for student enrolment. According to Shaaban and Gaith (1996) great differences in teachers' qualifications and instructional programs exist among private and public schools in urban and rural areas. Private schools in Beirut are known to be more rigorous and have higher standards of education and stronger foreign language programs than public schools and many schools outside Beirut.

While in the United States the legitimacy of monolingualism in Standard English is the unquestioned norm in mainstream US schools, bilingualism and multilingualism are the indisputable norm in all Lebanese schools since the national curriculum requires the teaching of two languages as early as kindergarten and the introduction of a third at the intermediate level.

The New National Curriculum deals with the Arabic language as a tool of communication, continuity, thinking and creativity. It considers the use of the classical Arabic language a medium for written expression, and meaningful oral communication.

In addition, the New National Curriculum sees the teaching of Arabic as a requirement to ensure students have access to the rich written culture of the Arab World, and as a means to safeguard the language viability in a modern context.

The First Second Language curriculum has been designed around the premise that the integration of language and content improves the linguistic and content area gains, enhances academic, linguistic, and cognitive development, and provides comprehensible input. "The curriculum aims at developing three levels of English language proficiency: a) English for social interaction, b) English for academic purposes, and c) English for socio-cultural development" (English Language Curriculum, 1997, p.149). The same goals apply to the French as a First Foreign Language curriculum

The Second Foreign Language curriculum emphasizes the four language skills, promotes critical thinking, and cultural awareness in order to extend learners' "communicative competence, [to] construct and use their academic knowledge effectively, and [to] expand their socio-linguistic and socio-cultural horizons in a stressed reduced learning environment (English Language curriculum (Second Foreign language), 1997, p.34). However, since colloquial Arabic is the language of wider communication outside of school, English and French language learners have inadequate support for their language development. Arabic language learners have a better support, albeit the fact that there are significant differences between the classical Arabic and the colloquial form of the language.

1.4.1 School history

Situated in the Bekaa valley, The Sunshine School is located in a village near Baalbeck with an estimated population of 2500, 85% Shiites and 15% Maronites. Founded in 1984, as a secular institution, the school licensed to reach the capacity of 700 students, opened its doors with 180 students enrolled from kindergarten to grade 5. The number increased yearly by 10 to 15 students to reach 315 students in 1997. During the first three years 85% of the students were either members of the owner's extended family and children of families living in the village where the school is located. The remaining 15% came from neighboring cities and villages. Since its opening the school has been serving only Shiite and Sunni students. The villagers from the Maronite faith refrain from

enrolling their children in The Sunshine School for several considerations, namely that they prefer their own religious schools.

In 1997, the owner decided to expand and opened a new campus in Beirut. In the same year, municipality elections were due, and the village was split in two factions: supporters of the family and village traditional leader and followers of a religious party. The divide in the family, due to political discord, severely affected the school and subjected it to numerous challenges.

Villagers affiliated with the political party antagonized the owner of the school, a supporter of the traditional leader. The mayor of the village, an enthusiast of the religious party and an old foe of the traditional leader, incited villagers against the school and its owner. The new Beirut campus was presented as evidence for the villagers that the school owner was making large profits out of the tuition fees they were paying. There was also a strong sentiment among the villagers that the academic standards at the Baalbeck campus might decline, as the Beirut campus will require the administration's undivided attention. Most students were pulled out to join schools founded by an influential religious party, while others moved to various other schools in the region. The school in Baalbeck then faced a major drop in enrolment and a drastic shift in population. In one year enrolment plummeted from 315 to 160 students and has since been fluctuating between 160 and 200 students, 85% of which come from nearby villages and cities and 15% from the village.

The school adopted a conventional advertising plan to recruit new students and to convince some of those who had left to return. It promoted itself through bill boards drawing attention to its success rate in the brevet exams. It also distributed flyers and hung street banners. The director also visited the homes of many families whom he believed he could convince to send their children to the school. The new strategy to recruit students, paid off and 45 new students joined the school in the 2006-2007 academic year (Personal interview, April 10, 2007).

The crisis in enrolment at The Sunshine School was further exasperated by competition from other schools. In communities where schools do not necessarily stand out and parents do not see a good reason for keeping their children in a particular school, transfer from one school to another is easy. Factors that matter to parents in privileged

schools, such as waiting lists, development fees, high tuition fees, high admission rates in top local and international universities, a highly qualified faculty, a strong extra curricular program, are not part of the picture in low-income schools. According to the owner of The Sunshine School, the supply of schools in the area is greater than demand, therefore, to survive, schools have a non selective admission policy and are ready to bend their vision and mission statement, if any, to attract students (Personal interview, October 12, 2006).

According to Mr. Farid, the school owner, his institution competes directly with a neighboring private school with a student body of 650. Mr. Farid says that the director of the competing school enjoys a certain status in the community because he is a Christian from Beirut who is seen not to be politically affiliated. The local Shiite community, says Mr. Farid, is prejudiced in favor of Christians and Beirutis whom they see as more competent and cosmopolitan. In addition, according to Mr. Farid, the director is willing to jeopardize standards in order to satisfy parents and secure a larger share of the market. Mr. Farid says that most schools in the area, including the neighboring school, automatically promote their students from one level to the other until they reach grade 8. Then, in order to preserve a good academic reputation, based on students' results in the official tests, those schools tend to sift their grade 8 students, promote those able to pass the Brevet exams and retain or simply expel the others (Personal interview, June 10, 2006). However, both the Christian director and Mr. Farid, a secular Shiite, have to offer religious instruction as dictated by a political party. Thus both men, in this case, have to cater to local pressures.

Another factor affecting the financial well-being of the institution is the payment of tuition. When payments are due, Mr. Farid feels inhibited by the fact that some of his customers are family members. The tuition fees are supposed to be paid twice a year, however, most parents pay on a monthly basis; some need many reminders to pay, and others, particularly relatives, never pay. This creates a difficult financial situation for the school since tuition fees are the only source of income and the only means to pay teachers' salaries. The tuition fees are as follow: KG 900,000LL, elementary 1,000,000LL, middle school 1,100,000 LL, and 1,200,000 LL for the brevet class. Parents also pay a refundable registration fee (Personal interview, November 21, 2006).

1.5 Thesis Division

The thesis is organized around the conventional qualitative report structure. The study describes the demographics of the school selected and chronicles the events that created change in the school. The research relies mostly on survey and interview data from key informants, but also includes observational data and document reviews. Chapter one identifies and contextualizes the problem. The second chapter presents a review of the literature on school effectiveness, school improvement, bilingualism and multilingualism. The literature review relies extensively on western concepts as empirical literature on education in the Lebanese disadvantaged context is missing and more research is called for. The third chapter describes the methodology, the sample selection, the data collection, and the data analysis procedures. In chapter four data collected through surveys, interviews, and observations are presented, analyzed and discussed. Chapter four includes as well a return to the research questions and a discussion about the implications of the study on the literature, practice and policy. Chapter five concludes the research, summarizes it, presents the results, makes a few recommendations, and suggests further work.

Chapter two

Literature review

2.1 Introduction

School improvement and school effectiveness have been the focal point of educational research for the past few decades. Educators and researchers have been attempting to identify the defining characteristics of effective schools and effective programs by exploring themes such as the distinctive features of successful schools, the factors that affect school effectiveness, parental involvement in curricular and extra-curricular activities, language program evaluation, socio-economic status and academic performance, school culture, among others. The review of the literature covers an extensive array of themes, with a main focus on literature pertaining to schools in disadvantaged or challenging circumstances.

2.2 Problems and challenges of low-income schools

Lewis (1937) depicted the challenges faced by public rural schools:

> Rural schools usually have poorer teachers and poorer teaching than do city schools. This condition is largely due to insufficient salaries, poor buildings, and inadequate equipment. Insufficient salaries and inadequate equipment in turn are the result of a lack of interest and trained leadership on the part of rural citizens. The lack of community interest and leadership is finally due to poor teachers and poor teaching (xii).

The same challenges continue to prevail nowadays and study after study show that "high staff turnover, poor facilities, lack of resources, falling pupil numbers and a constant stream of supply teachers are pressures that schools in more prosperous areas simply do not face" (Clarke, Reynolds, & Harris, 2005, p.8).

These problems, particular to public schools in several countries, present significant challenges to private rural and low-income schools in countries where the private educational sector exists, competes with and overshadows the public sector. Challenges such as student poverty, dysfunctional culture, recruiting and/or retaining qualified teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators, lack of parent involvement, and absence of community support exert pressure over decisions made by private schools in disadvantaged contexts and impinge on the character and dynamics of school life.

However, Wrigley (2003) finds it indisputable that some schools achieve much greater success than others in similar environments, in term of examination success and of a wider sense of achievement. He argues that the problem lies in understanding adequately: "what counts as success, why some schools achieve more of it, and how other schools can become more successful" (p.12). Schools in disadvantaged areas can become successful if certain characteristics are present. According to research, the elements of success involve

> a positive climate of order and security, active leadership, collaboration among teachers, supporting programs and services, high expectations for performance, behavior and achievement for all students, warm personal relationships between educators and students and a wide range of learning opportunities and resources for all students (Henchey, 2001, p.6).

Stringfield and Teddlie (1993) found a strong relationship between school effectiveness and teacher effectiveness, and Wu (2005) confirms that teacher effectiveness is a basic component and an important predictor of school effectiveness. However, one of the main challenges facing schools in disadvantaged circumstances lies in the inadequacy or the unavailability of financial resources to make meaningful change to improve effectiveness. Even with low salaries, school budgets are spent on personnel, leaving very little for developmental purposes (Levin & Lockheed, 1993).

2.3 Characteristics of rural private schools

Private schools are financed either by individuals, in the form of tuition, or by groups-religious orders, philanthropic organizations, and local communities. Most private schools share common characteristics: self- governance, self-support, total control of the selection of their teachers and students, adherence to the national curriculum, national standards or state standards, and addition of programs and courses that cater to their own agendas. Private schools in disadvantaged contexts share a further particular characteristic; they are typically small in size (Jimerson, 2006).

What constitutes a small school? Smallness is relative. Some researchers define it by enrollment numbers varying from 100 to 400, while others describe school size using enrollment in relation to number of grades within a school. Lastly, some researchers use a continuum of enrollment sizes and correlate the incidence of a particular variable with

schools of all sizes (Jimerson, 2006). This research will adopt the enrollment numbers definition.

Christensen and Karp (2003) write "Small schools create a more human scale and more supportive environment for collaborative, personalized interaction among students, teachers and communities. They can nourish creativity and mutual accountability in powerful ways that large, traditional schools cannot" (p. 3).

Wasley et al., (2000) indicate that the climate in small schools fosters closer relationships between the adults and students, and among students themselves. These personal relationships with each other keep students engaged and a part of school.

In addition, Jimerson (2006) notes that small schools play often a positive role in their settings, they act as the glue that binds together small communities and serve as their economic and social hub.

2.4 Socioeconomic class and student achievement

The size of a school in a disadvantaged context does not necessarily lead to better student achievement nor does it imply adequate instructional spending. According to Wenglinsky (1997), students originating from low-income status are more likely to be enrolled in schools with poor resources that do not have the means to make sound fiscal decisions. This results in levels of achievement even lower than one would expect solely on the basis of student's socioeconomic status. Nieto (1996), in Villegas and Lucas (2007), notes that teachers tend to see students from subordinated groups from a deficit perspective. Socioeconomic class has repeatedly being linked to educational outcome.

> A student behavior is strongly influenced by her or his own capabilities and achievements, as well as by three general categories of factors: the home and the family, the community, and the school. The three categories are in turn influenced by state and school district factors as well as the condition of the overall society (for example the current status of the economy) (Englert, 1993, p.12).

Students are able to overcome social and environmental disadvantages when schools foster and exhibit the following characteristics: feeling successful, feeling valued, feeling needed, feeling empowered, and feeling encouraged and hopeful (Pikes, Burrell, & Holliday, 1998). Students tend to have more positive attitudes about their school experience and learning, have higher self-esteem, and have higher expectations about

obtaining a college degree when they take part in extra-curricular activities. A body of research shows that participation in such activities is associated with several positive outcomes for students, such as higher grade-point averages, higher standardized test results, and better attendance rates (Jimerson, 2006).

Lupton (2004) questions whether the school effect plays a critical role in student academic attainment. She argues that "the key to raise attainment in poor neighbourhoods is the reduction of child poverty, not the improvement of schools" (p.2). Sammons (1999) agrees with Lupton and confirms that student learning is affected by their social and economic background; therefore school effectiveness is greatly impacted by its intake variations and not by anything that schools do.

2.5 Bilingualism and multilingualism

Bilingualism is of all times. People have always learned languages for economic or practical reasons i.e. economic, academic or integrative. Speakers of languages have always been attributed more prestige as a result of their proficiency in more than one language. Nonetheless, the need for competency in more than one language has probably never been greater than at the turn of the third millennium. This is the result of a range of factors, including globalization of business, commerce and entertainment, massive population shifts from different ethno-linguistic backgrounds, rapid urbanization, and cheaper and faster means of international travel and communication (Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, & Salgado, 2005).

To Hornberger (1991), bilingual education technically means "using two languages for instructional purposes. This same term, however, is actually used to refer to a wide range of programs that may have different ideological orientations toward linguistic and cultural diversity, different target populations, and different goals for those populations" (as cited in Freeman, 1998, pp.2-3).

Gardner and Lambert (1972) introduced the notions of instrumental and integrative motivation into the field of Second Language Acquisition. Instrumental motivation references the desire that language learners have to learn a certain language for utilitarian purposes, such as employment, while integrative motivation suggests the need that language learners have to blend into the target language community.

Bordieu in Norton (2000), uses the term 'cultural capital', which references the desire to learn and invest in a second language with the understanding that the learner will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase their cultural capital. This investment in the second language may also be an investment in the learner's own identity, an identity which is constantly changing across time and space like in the case of Lebanese third culture students.

It is assumed that the learner's attitudes towards the target language community determine how motivated the second learner is, and that levels of anxiety determine how much comprehensible input becomes cognitive intake (Krashen, 1981). Due to globalization and the prevailing "conception that English is the international language and the acquisition of English is useful for international communication," (Kubota, 2002, p. 20), bilinguals enjoy economic and social benefits that are not available to monolinguals, including the possibility of obtaining high-paying jobs, communicating and interacting with a wide variety of people both inside and outside their communities. (Pease-Alvarez, 2003). Moreover, some learners will migrate to the target language communities to continue their educational and social life.

2.5.1. Bilingualism and multilingualism in Lebanon

English became the new commodity in many countries as well as in Lebanon. Bilingualism and multilingualism are the norm in all Lebanese schools since the national curriculum stipulates teaching two languages as early as kindergarten and introducing the third at the intermediate level. The English language holds great power in the Lebanese context, in which anyone hoping to advance academically, socially, or professionally must attain a certain level of proficiency in English. Moreover, most prestigious private universities in Lebanon use English as the medium of instruction and require scores on English entrance examinations to determine whether students are admitted or not (Diab, 2000).

There are different kinds of bilingual education programs in practice that have different ideological orientations, target populations, goals, program structures, and outcomes. The goal of the Lebanese curriculum is additive bilingualism and academic achievement through two languages. Students should develop oral and written expertise in two languages. In Lebanon, one may say that language programs fall in the category of

the foreign/world languages programs. These programs "teach the target language as a subject area for students who do not live in contexts that use that language as a medium of communication" (Freeman, 2004, p.2).

The Lebanese educational system has evolved along bilingual and multilingual modes of thinking, and consequently, there has been a tendency to equate bilingualism with higher academic standards. Alternatively, in many other countries, education has evolved along monolingual modes of thinking and consequently bilingual education has been equated with numerous intricate connotations, "including lowering of academic standards, organisational and managerial problems, cost effectiveness, and general inefficiency and educational anarchy" (Hammer et al., 2005, p.6).

Many linguists and educators posit that in learning another language and another culture, a bilingual will experience social alienation, a conflict of personal and ethnic identity, personal disorientation, social isolation, and anxiety. Wei, Dewaele, and Housen (2002) contest and cite a huge body of studies to support their standpoint. Study after study on bilingual and trilingual language acquisition reveal no trace of confusion in the minds of the learners. This traditional argument is based partly on the fear of loss of national identity and partly on an extreme interpretation of theories on linguistic relativism: since (first) language and thought are closely connected, the early introduction of a second language may disturb the development of thinking skills of the young.

2.6 Types of bilingual education

Hornberger's three model types of bilingual education: the transitional model, the maintenance model and the enrichment model, help us define which model type applies to the Lebanese educational system. The transitional model relies on language minority students to shift to the majority language, mainstream to their culture and blend into the national society. This model applies to third culture students, those whose families moved back to Lebanon after long years of immigration. The maintenance model encourages "minority language students to maintain their native language, strengthen their cultural identity, and affirm their civil rights" (Freeman, 1998, p.3). This model applies to Lebanese students from Armenian origins. The enrichment model, also referred to as the two-way bilingual, bilingual immersion, two-way immersion, or developmental bilingual, targets "additive bilingualism for all students, academic achievement through two

languages, and cultural pluralism" (Christian, 1994, as cited in Freeman, p. 5). This model applies to the Lebanese national curriculum that stipulates instruction in two languages, Arabic and French, or Arabic and English and the introduction of a third language, either French or English at the intermediate level. Students should graduate from school fully proficient in two languages and familiar with the third. According to the new Lebanese curriculum issued in 1997, the number of hours both the native language and either English or French is taught is equivalent at all the educational levels (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1999). However, it is noteworthy that in the Brevet official exams the weight given to the Arabic language is 20 points greater than the grade assigned to the English language.

Some commentators have suggested that languages are coming to be treated more and more as commodities. "The commodification of language affects both people's motivations for learning languages and the choices made by institutions as they allocate resources for language education" (Block & Cameron, 2002, p.5). This commodification creates a complex situation. In order to survive schools need to attract parents, and so vary their spending priorities in order to increase their competitiveness. However, low-income schools face the dilemma of the inadequacy of their resources for meaningful improvement in their language programs. They spend most of their limited budget on salaries, however low they may be, leaving little for instructional material and staff development (Levin & Lockheed, 1993).

2.7 School effectiveness

A huge body of research on school effectiveness illustrates some common school effectiveness factors, including "school environment, principal leadership, teachers' teaching, students' learning achievement, administrative support, staff satisfaction, and parent and community involvement" (Wu, 2005, p.5). School effectiveness generally refers to the degree to which schools achieve their goals, in comparison with other schools that are 'equalized', in terms of student-intake, through manipulation of certain conditions by the school itself or the immediate school context. School effectiveness can also be described as the extent to which the desired level of output is achieved. The output is traditionally measured by the number of students who successfully pass their official exams. However, a more accurate measurement should take into account the

input into a school, namely the students' financial, social, and academic characteristics (Scheerens, 2000).

Since students in Lebanese public and private schools are required to sit for two official exams in grades 9 and 12, their performance on those standardized tests represents an essential criterion for the effectiveness of the educational institutions and their marketability. However, good student performance on standardized official tests does not necessarily mean more marketability of a school in rural and disadvantaged contexts. Private schools and in particular those that are not affiliated with religious or political orders, rely solely on student enrolment for financing their operation, and consequently are at the whim of unsteady conditions that may affect their culture, the number of cycles they offer, the languages they teach, their student performance, and as a result their effectiveness.

Harris (2002) recommends that for schools to develop, school owners and administrators should undertake all the necessary maintenance activities and provide for developmental work. Failing that those schools will, at best, remain where they are and, at worst, gradually deteriorate. Their reluctance to take on new ideas and their inability to develop results in generating trapped schools.

"Schooling has many outcomes and there is no objective way of deciding which to focus on. SER (School Effectiveness Research) veers towards measurable outcomes, and especially test scores" (Wrigley, 2005, p.15). Freeman (2004) describes this "regime of truth" as a hindrance that may position teachers as curricular technicians rather than as professional educators who orchestrate instruction according to the needs and possibilities of their students (p.v). Wrigley (2005) concedes that low trust in the ability of the faculty to act as educators demotivates teachers and undermines the daily dynamics of teaching which depend as much on emotions and flexible responsiveness as rational planning. In the long run, it destroys the trust in which lasting improvement depends.

Another considerable factor of instability for private institutions is when parents can choose which school their children attend and have the opportunity to exit an establishment that does not satisfy their 'wants and needs.' Students and parents who find a school that provides a better program will have a new want but the same need (Kotler & Fox, 1995). Changing student needs and societal expectations, increasing competition for

scarce students and funding resources, and intensifying financial pressures constitute significant threats to institutions in disadvantaged contexts (Ravitch, 2002). In communities where schools do not necessarily stand out, and parents do not see a good reason for keeping their children in a particular school, transfer from one school to another is easy. Waiting lists, development fees, high tuition fees, high admission rates in top local and international universities, a highly qualified faculty, a strong extra curricular program, factors that matter to parents in privileged schools, are not part of the picture in low-income schools.

2.8 Staff selection

A growing body of research indicates that the most important thing schools can do to achieve or to improve student outcome is to ensure there is a high-quality teacher in every classroom (Wu, 2005). This creates an added challenge to low-income rural schools in attracting and retaining well-qualified teachers already repelled by low salaries, social and professional isolation, and hard working conditions. Holloway (2002) cautions, good salaries alone won't guarantee that well-qualified teachers will stay in an isolated region. Comfort and connectedness within the rural community are especially important because these advantages can help teachers overcome feelings of isolation (Hammer et al., 2005).

Research on school effectiveness points out that the higher the teachers' teaching effectiveness, the higher the school effectiveness (Wu, 2005). However the question remains: what are the characteristics of effective teachers?

Kyriakides, Campbell, and Christofidou (2002) summarized related literature on teacher effectiveness and pointed out that effective teachers provide an ample amount of instruction, possess good classroom organizational and management skills, effectively use instructional time, structure instructional materials, provide students with practice and application opportunities, foster good classroom climate, and have adequate subject knowledge, knowledge of pedagogy, teaching beliefs, and teachers' self-efficacy. However, Stoll (1999) argues that teachers do not work in isolation and their professional performance may possibly be influenced by their interactions with others, their pupils, the school culture, its management, and its economic resources, and so forth.

Also, in disadvantaged contexts good student outcome is very hard to achieve and maintain due to difficulties in recruiting teachers to geographically isolated areas in a highly competitive labor market for educators, particularly in hard-to-staff subject areas such as mathematics, science, foreign language, and special education. The ability to recruit adequately is not the only impediment to good student outcome. Ravitch (2002) believes that much depends on the economic resource of an organization. He writes: "school facilities should be ample; school supplies should be adequate to students' needs; and teachers should get additional education to stay abreast of improved methods and knowledge" (pp. 20-21). Providing teachers and students with adequate materials happens to be an excessive expenditure for low-income schools which already function on a very tight budget. Such schools often face the dilemma of having to choose between costly (but necessary) amenities and teachers' effectiveness, with either decision negatively impacting their student outcome in the long run.

To meet the goal of the Lebanese curriculum, where all students are expected to become bilingual and biliterate- and to achieve academically through reliance on two languages- schools have to simulate the target language context either by hiring native speakers or by relying heavily on technology and state of the art materials. The inability of low-income rural schools to hire well qualified teachers, let alone native speakers, and to spend money on technology and resources, also have direct impact on the student's ability to succeed and the school's capacity for assisting that success (Forsyth & Tallerico, 1993)

Working conditions in small rural schools present an additional barrier to well-qualified teacher recruitment and retention. Teachers might have to teach multiple disciplines due to low student enrollment, and teaching "out of field" is common since low-income schools cannot afford to hire teachers to cover all the required subjects (Jimerson, 2003, 2004). Having more classes to prepare for means greater teachers' workloads and less pay.

2.9 Professional development

Professional development generally refers to continuing learning opportunities available to teachers, and other education personnel, through their educational institutions. Effective professional development is at the present time considered vital to

school success and teacher's ability to enhance and build on their instructional knowledge. Professional development can be achieved in two ways: either through staff attending in-house or offsite training courses or through planned experience (Fiddler & Atton, 1999).

Berry, Johnson, and Montgomery (2005) reviewed a considerable body of research investigating the correlation between teaching quality and student achievement. They noted that since the early 1990s, a steady flow of research has documented a close relationship. Improving student outcome requires improving teaching –learning strategies and students' experiences in classrooms. According to Lawson and Briar-Lawson (1997) this requires that school administrators improve their teachers' professional development, work orientations, practices and working conditions (as cited in Valdez-Perez, 1999). Administrators should generate and maintain a sound staff development plan based on their respective school needs and those of its community. Slavin (1989) recommends that the "emphasis in staff development must shift from scattershot presentations on what's new to systematic implementation of what works" (p.757).

Schools in disadvantaged contexts cannot rely on their environment to provide needed support for improvement; therefore they should place a high value on all kinds of achievement in order to become rich learning communities (Wrigley, 2005). A learning community is "one that learns continuously and transforms itself" (Watkins & Marsick, 1999, p.8). It is "how a group of people collectively enhance their capacities to produce the outcome they really wanted to produce" (Senge, 2006) Learning takes place in individuals, teams, the organization, and even the communities in which the organization interacts.

Teaching methods and pedagogical paradigms developed in the west are hailed by language teachers and linguists in third world communities as being the most effective, efficient, and authoritative for their purposes. Greeting each new method that is shipped out of the west with awe and bewilderment, institutions spend their limited resources on acquiring the new teaching material, often foregoing the need for training modules and other forms of preparation (Canagarajah, 2002).

An added challenge to low-income rural school lies in the limited availability of professional development opportunities in rural and remote areas. These schools cannot

afford attendance and transportation fees even when professional development opportunities are found. Also the limited availability or the lack of substitute teachers makes it difficult to release staff to attend training (Hammer et al., 2005).

2.10 Parental involvement

The primary purpose of education in most societies is twofold: to perpetuate the culture, and to prepare students for productive adult roles. However, both of these objectives are shared responsibility between school and community. Therefore, a critical component for the effectiveness and success of a school is enveloped in the concerted effort among principals, teachers, staff, parents, students and community (Schmuck, 1993).

Student success is related to parent involvement; therefore, parents need to be involved so that students achieve academically at higher levels.

> Academic learning is an acquired interest that students usually gain through social, emotional, and cognitive interactions with meaningful others. Thus, academic and healthy development are inextricably linked. Parents and teachers must work together, seamlessly supporting development at home and at school (Comer, 2005, p.40).

Involving parents and community members in school related activities and seeking their assistance regarding school matters is of paramount importance for student achievement and success. Researchers and educators have long agreed that when parents get involved in education, children try harder and achieve more at school. Parents who help and encourage their children to learn at home, and who help develop positive attitudes towards school, contribute to their children's personal growth and academic success (Maynard & Howley, 1997). Berliner (1997) underlines that since children spend 87% of their waking hours in the neighborhood and with families and 13% at school, the family and community are the primary influences on youngster's attitudes, values, habits, and goals.

However, one of the critical issues for educational institutions is to actively involve parents in the schooling process. The educational literature highlights the desire of citizens to be more involved in school affairs. Nevertheless, when school administrators

try to increase community involvement in schools experience, they may encounter significant lack of concern (Snowden & Gorton, 2002).

Parents stay away because they had poor experiences in schools themselves, are intimidated by the social and educational status of people who work in the school, or are under economic stress and have little time or energy (Comer, 2005). On the other hand, parents are often marginalized in schools because many school personnel suspect parents of not caring about their children's education. Educators might not know how to involve parents or might fear adversarial relationships even though parents can offer insights about students and the community that may not be perceptible to the teachers (Valdez-Perez, 1999).

Fullan and Steigelbauer (1991) recommends that school leaders should articulate a clear plan for parental and community involvement through conducting specific activities to bring all stakeholders to focus on particular goals and purposes. The effective principal needs to understand the various facets of rural or urban life of which the school is an integral part.

2.11 School environment

Political, economic, social and religious factors located outside schools permeate school boundaries through students and staff, influence school organization and may impede student outcome (Busher, 1992; Barker and Busher, 1998 as cited in Busher, 2001). Schools are also affected by "informal power" (Ubben et al., 2004). Informal power refers to the ability of certain groups and organizations within the community to mobilize their resources, to react in a particular manner to any given issue. Informal power may reflect and reinforce racial, ethnic, religious, political or economic homogeneity.

People's reaction to community concerns, as research reveals, may not be based on objective data but rather on the influence of friends and neighbors. Ubben et al. (2004) suggest that the school principal should get acquainted with the political and social structures of the community that the individual school caters to. It is noteworthy that conflict in any society is frequent and is not necessarily of a bad nature nor does it inescapably lead to negative results. Therefore, educational institutions should develop a system where concerns are identified, openly discussed with stakeholders, properly

analyzed, and delicately negotiated in order to achieve desirable changes, which often can be reached without schools jeopardizing their principles and losing their integrity.

High- performing schools depend significantly on "broad-based community support" (Ubben et al., 2004, p. 318) and that support is only possible when all stakeholders are well-informed and engaged in the educative processes that happen in the school. Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll, and Russ (2004) assert that the external context (community, policy, global culture) of the school influences the school's capacity. Wrigley (2003) describes the relationship between a school and its environment to be complex, dynamic and reciprocal. He argues that several schools in poor areas succeed

> through an intelligent and hopeful engagement with the community and that the school's improvement may sometimes even be an important factor in an area's economic regeneration. In other cases, school and community seem bound to each other in a downward spiral of helplessness and despair (p.18).

School and its community must work together to ensure student healthy academic, social, emotional, and cognitive development.

2.12 School improvement

School improvement is a process by which an educational institution generates strategies to consolidate its culture, to promote inter-personal relationships among its constituents based on cooperation and collaboration, and to enhance its student outcome through ameliorating the nature and quality of their learning (Hopkins, 1996; Barth, 1990; Harris & Chapman, 2001).

School improvement concentrates on what Hopkins et al. (2001) call "the cultural dimensions of schooling" (as cited in Harris & Benett, 2002), in other words the process through which schools improve (Harris & Benett, 2002).

Even though research on school improvement in disadvantaged contexts is still limited, educational researchers put forward various stances on school improvement in difficult or challenging circumstances (Muijs et al., 2004).

The contingency theory concedes that schools are affected by situational factors that can be both internal and external to the institution. The compensatory model states that schools have to compensate for the lack of resources in students' homes. The additivity

hypothesis maintains that schools that function in socially and economically disadvantaged areas are more likely to be ineffective, and consequently reinforce the social and economic status quo. All three theories concur that in order to improve student achievement, to get to the necessary results, and to sustain improvement, staff in low-income schools have to exert a bigger effort than those in middle and high socio-economic-status contexts.

As schools do not exist in a vacuum, educational change does not happen in a vacuum. Cooperation, collaboration and communication between the school and its marketplace should always prevail in order to enhance students' results and consequently satisfy the marketplace. School owners and school administrators should have a clear understanding of their communities, they should define their vision and articulate it clearly to their communities, and they should enhance educational effectiveness by generating and maintaining a sound school improvement plan.

According to Valdez-Perez, Wood, and Jacquez (1999) various ingredients are critical to achieve school change: "cultural change, vision building, leadership, professional development, support, and site-based management" (p. 4). Wrigley (2005) argues that real school improvement not only requires good management techniques but a deep discussion of social and educational purposes. What sort of young people do we want to create? What sort of world do we want to live in? School change also requires continuity. The effort exerted by educational institution to improve must be permanent and what was an innovation must become institutionalized to avoid a relapse (Valdez-Perez et al., 1999).

How does an educational institution determine how well it is satisfying its market place? "Most educational institutions focus attention on student numbers and on budgets, but many rarely take a long look at their accomplishments and problems. They wait for major problems to overtake them before considering how to alter their course" (Kotler & Fox, 1995, p.465). Satisfying the marketplace a school serves is a double-edged sword because, in the process, the school might jeopardize its mission and its distinctive competencies to offer whatever educational programs happen to be "hot" at the moment (p. 9). To preserve its academic reputation and institutional goals, an educational institution must have an effective school culture that is characterized by people "who

have learned how to trust and share as well as to accept other's needs to trust and share" (Cunningham, 1993, p. 143).

2.13 School culture

Culture is the set of beliefs, customs, practices, and social behavior that influence the way constituents relate to each other in a certain environment. Brighton and Sayeed describe culture as "the social energy that drives (or fails to drive) organizations and that allows an organization to survive the external environment and manage the internal environment" (as cited in Christensen & Karp, 2003, p.113). Educational institutions struggling to retain their constituencies must develop a culture where people "work as a team to meet the needs of their specific target markets, focusing on creating and projecting a climate of service and continuous improvement" (Kotler & Fox, 1995, p. 9).

Changing school culture may mean moving from bureaucracy to community, from isolation to collaboration, or from teaching orientation to a learning orientation. It also suggests that to be effective, cultural change must begin with or be accompanied by changes in individual mind-sets and outlooks (Valdez-Perez et al., 1999). Fullan (2002) writes that creating and maintaining a positive school climate requires a strong school administration supported by a core of staff and families. A successful administrator must engage school staff, families, community members, and students in transforming a climate, and must be willing to provide ongoing support to those engaged in the process.

Schools in disadvantaged context cannot eliminate poverty and misery. However, they can break the cycle of poverty. Schools can give poor children a chance to succeed and reach high expectations in learning and advancing toward gainful life employment (Costley, 2006)

Schools can build effective bridges with the outside community to ensure that students enjoy healthy academic, social, emotional, and cognitive development. School and community may be bound together in an upward spiral of hope and improvement, or in a downward spiral of helplessness and despair. "Small villages that lose their schools lose more than a building—they lose their collective cultural and civic center" (Jimerson, 2006, p.3).

2.14 Gaps in the related literature

Empirical literature pertaining to the Lebanese educational context is scarce; therefore the literature review presented in this chapter relies to a great extent on literature produced in the west, mainly the US and the UK. A few studies on the language situation in Lebanon have been referred to; however, literature on improving schools in general and low-income schools in particular is lacking.

Chapter three

Methodology

3.1 Research design

This case study has been conducted on a Lebanese low-income rural school from April 2006 until May 2007 covering almost two academic years. The Sunshine School has been undergoing a drop in student enrolment in addition to facing difficult financial challenges. This study could be described as an instrumental case study since it examines a particular case that may represent other cases mainly in order "to provide insight into an issue" (Stake, 2002, p. 437), or to allow readers to find similarities and possible applications in their contexts.(Burns, .

Two main methods were undertaken in this case study: quantitative and qualitative. Integrating the two methods, which are founded on two conflicting paradigms- factual, statistical and objective versus humanistic, investigative and subjective- contributed considerably in gathering valuable data. Quantitative methods were used to count and measure occurrences while qualitative approaches were carried out to "capture the human meanings of social life as lived and experienced by the research participants" (Gay & Airasian, 2003, p. 187).

Qualitative data in this mixed-method research was more heavily weighed than the quantitative data and was gathered through the following approaches: unstructured interviews with teachers, students, administrators, and parents; structured interviews with teachers, students and administrator; observations of general faculty meetings and language departments meetings; observations of language classrooms where the English language is taught and classrooms where the Arabic language is taught; and surveys.

The interviews elicited information from participants, illustrated their beliefs, opinions, perceptions, and behaviors, and investigated "in more detail the informant's typifications of persons and events" (Burns, 2000, p. 410). Unstructured interviews took place and emerged from observations; structured interviews were resorted to when specific lacking information was sought, while unstructured interviews served to acquire unique, non-standardized, personalized information about individuals' attitudes and perceptions (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000).

Unstructured interviews provide the research with greater depth than the other methods used and help overcome the misinterpretation data collected through surveys and structured interviews. Respondents may be fluent in the language of the interviewer, but there are different ways of saying things. Unstructured interviews allow for clarifications to be made and for disastrous misunderstandings to be avoided (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

Observations of various meetings, classes in session, and the daily actions of all constituents, assisted in unveiling informants' implicit behavior. Repetitive and prolonged observations allowed for events and series of events to be observed more than once and therefore established reliability in the observational data (Cohen et al., 2000).

Qualitative data was also collected through surveys that included a variety of question formats to elicit information about participants' attitudes toward language learning, school improvement, and the role of parents, school, socioeconomic status, and school environment in student achievement. Ninety parents, students and teachers participated in the questionnaires.

Quantitative data was collected through students' achievement records, official tests records on the Brevet exams and official tests records on language skills taken from the Lebanese Brevet records on English and Arabic language tests.

3.2 Sample

This study has been conducted on a population of students, teachers, parents and administrators from one Lebanese school that is located in the vicinity of Baalbeck, in the Bekaa valley. The convenience sampling strategy was selected for this case study. Respondents were picked on the basis of convenience, i.e. easy access to teachers, parents and students. Subjects in this study consisted of 49 Middle School students, 15 teachers, 26 parents, and one administrator during the academic year of 2005-2006. The school has been chosen according to its curriculum and student and parent socio-economic status. The school offers solely the Lebanese program from kindergarten to grade 9, commonly known as the Brevet class.

3.2.1 Data about staff

The Sunshine School has one administrator, 3 support staff members, and 15 faculty members. As for paraprofessionals, the school coordinates with a psychologist specialized in speech therapy and learning difficulties.

The student–teacher ratio is 13 to 1. There are 6 male teachers and 9 female teachers mostly Lebanese Moslem Sunnis. As for teachers' professional qualifications, 4 out of the 15 teachers are still pursuing their university education, 9 teachers have an undergraduate university degree from either the Lebanese University or the Arab university in the subject area they teach. The remaining two are graduates of German and Czech Republic Universities. The years of teaching experience range from 3 to 25 years for most teachers, while only one teacher is a total novice. The salaries range from a minimum of 450,000LL to reach a maximum of 900,000LL a month. In their first year of teaching at The Sunshine School, teachers are only paid 9 months. Teacher retention is high, with almost no mobility at the middle school level, and a yearly change of English teacher at the pre-school level. The school provides compulsory professional development opportunities to its teachers through periodical in-school workshops covering various issues and concerns. In addition, English language teachers attend the yearly workshops organized by the Association of Teachers of English in Lebanon (ATEL), and Arabic language teachers participate in workshops presented at the Haigazian University in Beirut. Concerning follow up on professional development, teachers are required to present a report to the administration summarizing their experience. No further systematic follow-up is in place.

As for teachers' involvement in extra-curricular activities, it is almost non-existent except for the physical education teacher voluntarily coaching the handball and the basketball school teams, and advising the scouts club.

3.2.2 Data about students

One hundred and sixty seven students from k-9 were enrolled at The Sunshine School during the academic year 2005-2006. Of those 41.3% were female students versus 58.7% male students, with 73% at the elementary and preschool, and 27% at the middle school level (figure 1). Students come from poor to low-income socioeconomic status where parents' yearly earnings range from $6000 to $13000. According to the school's records,

only 10% of the student population has a computer at home with access to the Internet. As for post graduation education, 90% join public schools and the remaining 10% go to vocational schools. Seventy percent of the students are Sunnis and 30% are Shiites. The language The Sunshine School students speak at home is Arabic.

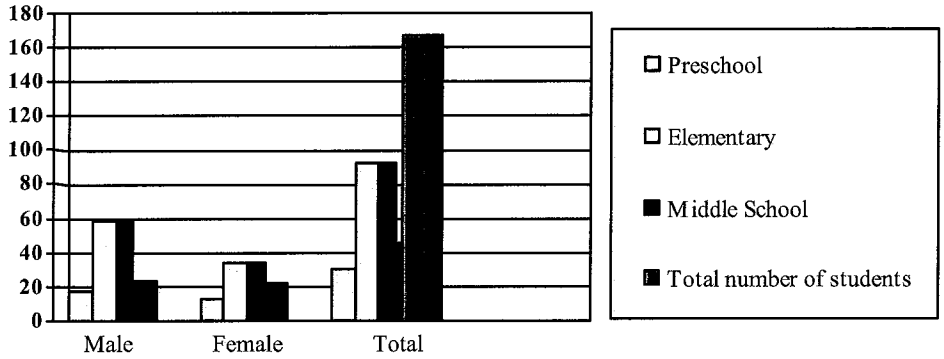

Figure 1
Student enrolment in the 2005-2006 academic year

In the academic year 2006-2007 the school suffered yet another drop in enrolment. One hundred and fifty one students currently attend school The Sunshine School out of which 38.4% are female students versus 61.1% male students, with 74.1% at the elementary and preschool, and 25.9% at the middle school level.

3.2.3 Data about parents

Twenty-six respondents filled out the parents' questionnaire. Their ages range from 26 to 60 years. Seventy percent of the parents cited that their yearly income varies between $6000 and $13000, while the remaining 30% chose not to reveal their income. On the educational level, 35% of the participants hold an undergraduate degree from the Lebanese University, 27% pursued their secondary education, 35% completed the intermediate cycle, and 3% did not specify their educational level. As for language proficiency, 50 % of the respondents are monolingual, 35% bilingual and fluent in both Arabic and French, and 15% are fluent in Arabic and English.

3.3 Collection and tabulation of data

At a first stage the The Sunshine School was contacted in order to obtain consent to conduct the study (Appendix E). In addition, the school agreed to allow students to be

interviewed and observed during their language classes and their recess. Permission was also granted to interview teachers, attend faculty meetings, parent teacher meetings, parent teacher association meetings and school related activities.

Mr. Farid, the school owner and administrator, has been interviewed in his office through several structured interviews. Mr. Farid has also been interviewed through a number of unstructured interviews inside and outside the school.

Students were interviewed in the playground during recess as to allow for more natural and valid responses (Eder & Fingerson, 2002). The interview with students, which took the form of a focus group interview, included open-ended questions to elicit information about the participants' experiences with the relevant issues such as their education in general and learning languages in particular. The participants discussed language learning and interacted with each other rather than with the interviewer, allowing for a large amount of data that might not have been available in a straightforward interview to emerge (Cohen et al. 2000). Demographic data was obtained through structured questions in a questionnaire distributed to 49 students (Appendix C).

Out of the 50 questionnaires given out to middle school students aged 12 to 16, 49 were answered. Of the 49 participants, 62.5 % have been at school for 6 to12 years, the remaining 27.5% for 1 to 5 years of which 55.5% have been there for one year only. The questionnaire investigated through 18 dichotomous questions students' attitudes towards school, learning, languages, parental support, and success. Students also answered 4 open ended questions on school improvement and on their likes and dislikes about their school.

A second questionnaire was given out to middle school students to investigate their attitudes and motivation toward learning English as a second language (Appendix D). This questionnaire, contrary to the other questionnaires, was in English.

Teachers' structured interviews (appendix F) were conducted in the teachers' lounge or in a room adjacent to the principal's room. Although teachers were interviewed in a room next to the administrator's office, he was not able to hear participants' responses nor did his proximity interfere with the interview process. Structured interviews helped in obtaining comparable data from participants since the same questions were asked in the same order (Burns, 2000). Unstructured interviews with faculty members took place in the hallways, in the classroom, and during meetings.

Arabic and English language teachers were interviewed and each interview which lasted approximately 30 minutes was recorded on audio-tape. Tapes were later transcribed and reviewed carefully. The data from the transcripts was analyzed, first by establishing coding categories and then by identifying themes describing relationships across categories.

Open-ended questionnaires have been distributed in Arabic to teachers, students, and parents to explore their attitudes towards the school and the learning environment (appendices A, B and C). Parents completed a questionnaire investigating their attitudes towards the school environment, their aspirations, expectations, and interests in their children's education (appendix A). The first 5 questions elicited demographic information about the respondents, followed by 8 dichotomous statements investigating parents' attitudes towards language learning, school success, and student achievement in official exams. Additionally, parents responded to 10 open-ended questions describing their attitudes to achievement, language learning and to The Sunshine School. The data was collected, tabulated, and then translated to English.

3.4 Pre-testing the questionnaires

To avoid any confusing and problematic questions, questionnaires were administered to students, teachers and parents from the Beirut campus of The Sunshine School. The school in both its campuses caters to the same socioeconomic class, functions within the same religious and political environment, offers the same programs, and operates under the same administration. Student questionnaires were given out to a sample of 30 middle school students attending the Beirut campus of The Sunshine School. Teachers' and parents' questionnaires were piloted in the Beirut campus on a pool of 20 parents and 10 teachers. All items in the 4 questionnaires were fully answered by the participants, and the major findings were shared with the school administration.

3.5 Data analysis procedures.

To allow for patterns and themes to be identified, qualitative data gathered through interviews has been transcribed, category-coded through TextSmart software and filed through the MAx Version 3.5 program. To avoid decontextualization, the transcript files,

personal files and analytical files of all interviews, conversations and observations were interpreted and analyzed electronically as well.

Reporting and analyzing quantitative data has been conducted via the SPSS software because of its ability to present results in simple descriptive statistics. As the research develops, if computing correlations and comparing means deem necessary to further explore and interpret data, SPSS will perform these functions.

3.6 Triangulation

School improvement and the attitudes and perceptions of school constituents towards language learning are viewed as multi-dimensional concepts, requiring multiple instruments for their exploration. In the triangulation procedure, data collected with three instruments surveys, observations, and interviews enhanced the internal validity of the findings, secured an in-depth understanding on the topic, and added rigor, breadth, and depth to the study (Cohen et al., 2000). Furthermore, the triangulation procedure culminated in a rather comprehensive understanding of school constituents' attitudes with respect to school improvement and language learning.

3.7 Ethical issues

The study has addressed ethical issues in a variety of ways. A fictional name, The Sunshine School, has been given to the participant school to preserve its privacy. The Sunshine School was contacted in order to obtain consent to conduct the study and to allow the researcher to interview and observe students during their language classes and their recess. Permission was also granted to interview teachers, attend faculty meetings, parent teacher meetings, parent teacher association meetings and school related activities. Since the surveys and the interviews include no personal identifiers, the risk to individual participants that privacy might be compromised is minimal. Also for further confidentiality, any information that makes it possible to identify the school or an individual participant has either been modified or eliminated.

Chapter four

Results and Discussion

So far, the study has described the demographics of the school selected and chronicled the events that created change in the school. In this chapter, the study relies mostly on survey and interview data from key informants, while also including observational data and document reviews. The data collected through surveys, interviews, and observation are presented, analyzed and discussed.

4.1 Surveys

4.1.1 Parents' views (appendix A)

When asked about their ambitions for their children 27% answered that they would like to see them become medical doctors, 23% said they wanted them to hold 'an important position', 11.5% said they wanted them to become engineers, 11.5% saw the army as their preferred career, and the remaining 27% varied between businessman, teacher, computer engineer, journalist, and lawyer. Parents answered questions that elicited attitudes on language learning, school success, student achievement and parental involvement (table 1).

Table 1

Parents' attitudes on language learning, school success, and student achievement

Please comment on the following statements with	**Yes**	**No**
I prefer that my child learns only Arabic		100
Acquiring the English language is by far more important for my child's future than acquiring the Arabic language	69.3%	30.7%
I prefer that my child learns well both the Arabic and English languages	100%	
I wish the school taught a third language	96%	4%
The percentage of success in the official exams is an accurate indicator of the effectiveness of the school	73%	23%
The school is solely responsible for the success of its		

students and for providing them with quality education	15.3%	84.6%
Both school and parents are responsible for students' success and for providing them with a quality education	100%	
The school is responsible for the success or failure of its students in official examinations	15.3%	73%
*11.4% agree if students attended the same school since lower classes		

The reasons parents gave for enrolling their children at The School included what they identified as the school's good academic standards, its good administration, its well-qualified teachers, its teaching methods, its good reputation, its closeness to home, its school plant and location, its rules and regulations, its good curriculum and the books being used, its philosophy of educating the whole child, its good social environment, being the best in the area, its continuous improvement, its students' scores on official exams, its educated school owner and director, its good teacher-student relationship, its affordable tuition fees, the emphasis it places on math and English, its small class sizes, and its constant follow up with parents. A few parents mentioned family relations.

When asked if teachers are key players in the success of their students, all parents answered in the affirmative. Parents consider that teachers play a critical role in the success of their students and went as far as describing the qualities of good teachers. Good teachers are highly qualified, patient and committed educators. They should have a pleasant personality, be fair and be their students' advocates. Good teachers should equip their students with self confidence, motivate all students and involve them in the learning process, mentor and guide, teach values, cater to all learning styles, and act as role models. However, only 4.2% of the respondents believe that good teachers are those who constantly seek professional development and those who involve parents in their children's education.

As to the role parents have in children's education, they answered that parents should care, supervise, guide and assist their children, motivate them to study, follow up on their studies at home and with their teachers, and provide them with the necessary materials for school, a right learning environment at home, and recreational activities. Parents,

they also wrote, should teach their children values such as respect, sharing, and responsibility, cooperate with teachers, teach their sons and daughters the importance of education to their future, and keep an eye on their friendships and relationships. Parents try to instill in their children self confidence, freedom of expression, and perseverance. On the other hand, parents have a moral and financial responsibility toward the school by paying tuition fees on time. Some parents think that their attitude toward school is reflected through their children's attitude.

Concerning the effect of the surrounding environment (society, politics, economy, etc.) on the success and prosperity of a school, 85% of the participants answered the question. Parents believe that the surrounding environment plays an important role in school success and prosperity. According to parents, the environment can break or make a school; therefore it should shield itself completely from its environment and teachers and administrators should stay away from politics. Parents believe that the political, social, and economic situations, as well as tribal and family tensions, affect educational institutions negatively. The economic situation might affect student enrolment, therefore tuition fees should be well studied to cater to the environment.

Of all respondents, 77% agree that language curricula at The Sunshine School should be improved and that languages are very important for their children's future. Parents believe that the English language is been taught at a superficial level at The Sunshine School. Language teachers are not well qualified and the time allotted to the teaching of languages, and especially English, is insufficient. Parents would like the school to make an adequate effort to improve its language programs. They recommend the use of the target language, in other words English, as the sole language of instruction, the use of the target language to be emphasized in language classes and among students. Parents suggest consulting language experts, updating language curricula and teaching methods and strategies, hiring teachers that are specialized in language teaching, offering continuous professional development to teachers, emphasizing writing skills, periodical testing, adding a third language, equipping the school with a library, creating a language lab, using audio visual materials, omitting some meaningless lessons in the Arabic books, and organizing more field trips. Only 15.4% of the participants are satisfied with the language programs while 7.6% did not reply.

As to what respondents consider the most important subject matter in the Lebanese curriculum, 54.8% of the parents find it to be English, because of the following reasons: its significance to the Lebanese society, being the key language to the study of other subject matters, being an international language due to globalization, and finally for immigration, travel and professional purposes. Some parents chose civics, arguing that it acquaints students with their community and their rights and responsibilities. The remaining parents preferred mathematics, biology, character education, religion, and science. One parent thought that all subjects are important depending on students' interests. One parent did not reply.

Most of the respondents, 92.3% of them, agree with the following opinion: a school is a small community whose paramount objective is to teach students how to interact with the reality of life, especially if the school provides a well planned athletic and artistic activities program. The remaining 7.7% did not reply.

As to the subjects whose aim is to help in the students' social and emotional growth, and consequently a healthier performance in real life situations, parents suggested that the following be either added to the curriculum, or, when already offered that the time allocated to them be increased. The parents' choices varied between general politics, history, civics, English language, French language, character education, health, nutrition, general knowledge, religion, theater, art, technology, Internet, computer, scouts clubs, music, physical education, and crafts. Parents also expressed the need for a guidance and counseling program. Some said that a good vocational program such as electronics, carpentry, and printing would be a good addition to the school curriculum. Some parents would like their children to participate in interschool athletic competitions. Six parents did not reply

Concerning their expectations of The Sunshine School, parents want the school to improve and prosper even though they recognize that the school's financial situation might hinder any attempt for improvement. Parents expect the school administration to hire qualified teachers, to expose its staff to professional training, to have stricter discipline, to dismiss incompetent teachers, to take parents' suggestions into consideration, to better advertise the school's accomplishments and activities, to improve its transportation facilities, and enhance its physical plant. Parents also expect the school

to keep what they consider to be its good standards and avoid 'becoming commercial', like many other schools in the area. Five parents did not reply.

As to any suggestions to improve the school's administrative and academic aspects, participants suggested that The Sunshine School honors its graduates, introduces the teaching of a third language, improves its teachers through training and professional development, supervises them closely for favoritism and offensive language, hires an advisor to follow up on students' social, emotional and academic development, administers rigid entrance exams, and follows a stricter admission policy. One parent suggested changing faculty and administration, another recommended shifting days off to Friday and Sunday instead of Saturday and Sunday. Two parents did not reply.

4.1.2 Teachers' views (Appendix B)

Concerning the characteristics of a successful educational institution, teachers' answers grouped around several themes: teachers, administration, school plant, parents, and students. They expressed the view that teachers in a successful educational institution should be qualified, experienced, collaborative, and committed. They should implement new teaching methods, trust each other, and cooperate with parents, students, and administration. Teachers should nurture in their students qualities such as creativity, self confidence, and honesty. Educators must respect their own rights and responsibilities and be active in a dynamic teachers' association. As for the administration of a successful school, it should be efficient, dynamic, honest and transparent in communicating with its constituents. In addition, it should hire experienced and qualified staff, respect teachers' rights, offer professional development opportunities, provide teaching and learning tools and equipment, supervise its staff properly, preset clear goals, and realize all educational objectives.

An efficient administration clearly articulates the rights and responsibilities of all constituents, provides curricular and extra curricular activities, communicates constantly with parents as well as teachers, caters to students' social and emotional needs, respects teachers' opinions and accommodates their financial, moral and professional needs. A capable administration delegates responsibilities based on competence and qualifications, hires coordinators for each subject area, encourages parental involvement in all school

aspects through a dynamic parent committee, promotes a healthy student life through an active student council, and fosters a school atmosphere based on mutual respect and understanding under the umbrella of well articulated school bylaws, rules and regulations. As for the school facilities, the campus should be away from noise and traffic, should have a well maintained school plant, well equipped classrooms, ample space for physical education activities, updated technology and audio-visual equipment, an operational library and computer lab, and science laboratories. Parents should get involved in the children's education and in all school activities. Students on the other hand should be loyal to their school, respect its rules and regulations, be ethical, self confident, committed and have a strong sense of belonging to their institution.

As to how teachers contribute to the success of their institution, answers varied between loving their subject matter, performing all teaching duties, being committed to the school, respecting colleagues, students, and parents, implementing all school rules and regulations, assisting students in solving their problems, using new teaching methods, being updated and well prepared to teach, using audio-visual material, managing their classroom well, catering to all students needs and learning styles, knowing their pupils' strengths and weaknesses, communicating constantly with parents, collaborating with colleagues, and participating in improving the school system. Teachers mentioned other behaviors that contribute to the success of a school such as seeking support and training by educational specialists, pursuing constant professional development, being disciplined with a high level of integrity, assessing students fairly and accurately, updating teaching methods, implementing new and appropriate teaching strategies, being role models to their students, and maintaining good relationships with colleagues, administration, students and parents.

Concerning the role that the environment (society, politics, economy, etc.) plays in the success and prosperity of a school, respondents consider that, since schools do not exist in a vacuum, they are affected by society, economy and politics, as are the teachers themselves. Political and religiously affiliated associations affect schools, as the administrator's political, tribal or religious affiliation affect the management and student enrolment. The economy, according to The Sunshine School teachers, is an important factor in the making or breaking of a school. Poor areas produce poor educational

institutions as dire economic circumstances impact on an educational institution. Schools should have reasonable fees and practical payment methods when the surrounding environment is disadvantaged, poor, and illiterate. Parents in disadvantaged areas often delay or ignore payments of tuition fees, creating a difficult financial situation for the school and the sustainability of quality education and improvement plans. However, this is not applicable to all situations, argue the teachers, as some schools in poor areas can succeed and become reputable regardless of their environment if they are able to adequately insulate themselves. Respondents added that financially secure environments produce good schools capable of hiring qualified teachers and consequently enjoy a greater chance of succeeding. Teachers are conscious of the negative effects of the volatile political situation in the country on the learning process and particularly in disadvantaged environments. Participants cited parents' involvement and cooperation with the administration and teachers as essential to the success of the school especially in terms of keeping politics outside of the school walls.

Are both parents and teachers responsible for the success of an institution and consequently in providing their students with a quality education? Teachers believe that parents need to be aware of all values passed on to students. The school administration should communicate clear objectives to parents and motivate them to contribute to their children's education. Parents' involvement is critical to the success of an institution; however uneducated parents, teachers say, cannot provide the right assistance to their child. Some teachers are of the belief that the relationship fostered between the child and parent(s) is significantly more critical than that established between the child and his/her school and teachers. Parents should also get involved in school life through a parent committee. An active parent committee might affect the administration's performance, increase student enrolment, and instill a strong sense of belonging and success in all school constituents. Teachers, on the other hand, should cater to individual students' needs and situations, meet continuously to look into student behavioral and academic problems, constantly communicate any concerns to parents and administration, and provide students with assistance. Teachers also believe that parents, students, school, and community create a perfect combination to accomplish solid academic, social, and intellectual standards. In addition, the roles that parents, teachers, school, and community

play complement each other in providing learners with moral support and motivation and hence influence student learning and success. Teachers also cited that lack of communication between school, parents and children could result in student failure or even withdrawal from school.

As for the responsibility for the success or failure of students in the official exams, respondents say that learning is a process that involves all school constituents, thus the responsibility for success or failure is shared by the environment, parents, students, administration, and teachers in previous grades. Parents need to motivate and encourage their students when they lack the will and the motivation to learn, follow up on their children at home, and meet regularly with their teachers. Teachers should be well qualified, well prepared, work as a coherent team, communicate regularly with parents and administration, and support their students. School administrations hire unqualified and inexperienced teachers and admit new students with weaknesses in many areas which might affect the teaching and learning process and consequently student outcome.

The Sunshine School teachers believe that the whole concept of the Brevet examinations needs to be revisited by the Ministry of Education. Most teachers stated that they disapprove of official exams as they do not take into consideration the student's individual capabilities and they tend to foster a negative competitive attitude. Standardized tests are intimidating one-size-fits-all tests; they are neither designed to evaluate students accurately nor to assess their knowledge appropriately. In addition, many factors might affect student results in official exams such as test anxiety, health or emotional problems, and the possibility of cheating.

Concerning the success or failure of students in official exams being an accurate indicator of the effectiveness of a school, 60% of The Sunshine School teachers replied that official exams are not a good indicator of the effectiveness of a school and cited various reasons such as cheating, learning problems, test anxiety, and lack of student commitment and motivation. To earn a good academic reputation some schools eliminate weaker students in grades 8 and 9 and therefore guarantee 100% success in the Brevet exams. Teachers consider this modus operandi to be unfair and unethical to both students and parents. Also, to secure 100% success rate on official exams, some schools tend to

focus on certain subject areas and disregard others that are vital to student emotional, intellectual and social development such as character education and social skills.

However, 40% of the respondents believe that the success rate is a good indicator of the effectiveness of a school, and especially indicative in figures obtained from students who attended same school from K-9. Results are also a good indicator on how effective, committed, helpful and caring teachers are, how closely school administrations follow up on their students' learning, and how well they equip their teachers with adequate teaching resources. Parents evaluate schools based on official exams results and schools use those results as a marketing tool to attract more students. However, this could be a double edge sword, as for financial considerations schools might admit new students who do not fit their academic profile and likely to fail the official examinations. Teachers recommend that new students entering grade 9 be carefully chosen because their failure will negatively affect the school.

Who is responsible for professional development at an educational institution: the teacher, the administration, or both? The teachers at The Sunshine School believe that professional development should be an important component of a school improvement plan as it creates a solid and professional working environment. Administration and teachers are equally responsible for professional development. The role of the administration lies in motivating teachers to develop and improve, announcing workshops and training sessions in due time, and providing the adequate training, follow up, and financial support. Teachers, on the other hand, identify their professional needs based on their students' needs, attend workshops related to their fields and consequently participate in developing and improving their school.

As to the amount of workshops attended and their impact on their daily performance in class, teachers said they had attended workshops ranging from one year training sessions to one-day workshops. The workshops, they said, had affected their daily performance in class; however, the impact on their relationships with colleagues was minimal because of lack of time and communication among the faculty. Training sessions offered at the school were reported to be beneficial to teachers' daily performance in class with regards to detecting weaknesses, motivating students, applying new teaching methods and assessment strategies, solving problems, understanding the curriculum,

implementing new approaches in dealing with students, and collaborating with colleagues.

As to how workshops affect teachers' professional performance, 86% of the respondents described the workshops they have attended to be effective, positive, motivating, and professionally rewarding. Workshops help teachers get organized, be better prepared, deal with gaps, evaluate objectives, and move away from traditional teaching methods. Also training sessions improve teacher performance, increase their self-confidence, establish higher standards, and introduce new and effective teaching strategies. Some teachers said that implementing newly acquired methods and strategies require extensive work and effort and particularly in the absence of a subject coordinator. A few teachers reported no obvious effect on their performance.

Participants mention that the main reasons behind seeking professional development and participating in workshops were to enhance teaching performance, gain self-satisfaction, seek self-improvement, take part in school improvement, acquire broader experience, learn new methodologies, and advance professionally. Participants add that the school administration should provide support, incentive, and motivation to its staff to develop professionally.

As to the obstacles that hinder their professional development and their participation in workshops, teachers cite time, money, distance, expenses, emotional and physical exhaustion from over teaching, family commitments, age, long years of work, and being uninformed. Some teachers replied that their colleagues' negative attitudes hinder their professional development. Three teachers said they do not face any obstacles

Concerning the most important subject matter in the Lebanese curriculum, The Sunshine School teachers mentioned languages since they are the tool for communication and instruction. Teachers added that languages are the key to sound learning skills. Students tend to be weak in all subjects when they are not proficient in both English and Arabic. However, teachers believe that all subjects are important to student emotional, social and intellectual development. All subjects are interrelated to build a good citizen not just a rote learner. However, the English language remains the most important since students need it to succeed in their university studies and then to compete in the labor market.

The language that The Sunshine School should focus on is English because of lack of practice and also because most parents are not able to assist their children with their homework assignments. The English language should receive the main focus for it is an international language, the language of instruction in most reputable universities, the language of business and technology, and the language of all scientific subject matters in the Lebanese curriculum. A few teachers mentioned the Arabic language, pointing out that students are weak in their own mother tongue.

Eighty seven percent of the respondents agree that the language curricula should be improved and explain how. The remaining found the programs to be appropriate (table 2).

Table 2

Reasons for or ways to improve language curricula

Government books should be improved
Offer training sessions in choosing the right book.
Come up with a school philosophy and articulate clear objectives
Adopt programs that fit our students' needs.
Use American books even though they do not cover the Lebanese curriculum.
Change currently used books and adopt ones with better texts, vocabulary and idioms, to better motivate students to read and write.
Language curricula are always in need of improvement since teaching is dynamic, needs change with new generations and different groups.
Some improvement happened lately but more is needed
Improve the Arabic language by speaking classical Arabic to our students, chose appropriate texts, motivate them to read novels, articles, magazines and newspapers. The same applies to the English language.
Design more dynamic programs, simplify concepts, and implement better teaching methods based on hands on activities as most students consider languages to be boring and stiff subjects.
Emphasizing communication to acquire proper vocabulary, pronunciation, and intonation.

Concerning missing components needed to improve language programs, The Sunshine School teachers replied that the school lacks communication with other institutions, consulting with experts in education, motivating reading programs, educational tools, audio-visual material, coordinators to supervise teachers and hold them accountable for their performance, opportunities to practice languages, a language lab, a computer lab, access to the Internet, and qualified and experienced teachers to improve the programs.

As to the role schools play in shaping good citizens and how teachers contribute to the achievement of this role, The Sunshine School teachers presented various answers (table 3).

Table 3

Role of school and teachers in shaping good citizens

Teachers have to be role models, model good behavior, and respect rules.
School owner tries his best to build good citizens and to implement cultural and educational values.
Major role because students spend most of their time with teachers and classmates.
Major role, I act as a counselor and implement the values I teach.
As an educator I teach students good behavior and respect.
Teachers should follow teachers' rules and regulations, model good behavior, implement values, and be good role models.
Teaching subject matter and values.
No reply.
School should react to the situation in the country, teachers and students should discuss current events and not just spend time teaching and learning facts as if school is detached from its surroundings.
Teachers should respect rules, model good behavior, foster critical thinking, and be good role models.
Schools and teachers teach students respect, love of country, trust, and national pride.
Teachers mentor, guide, and act as role models.

Concerning the subjects that could be added to the curriculum whose aim is student social-emotional growth and consequently healthier performance in real life situations, teachers suggest extracurricular activities such as art, drama, and music because they help promote intellectual, moral and aesthetic sense. Some teachers suggest technology, because of its importance in students' present and future lives. Others mention character education to teach social values as well as a good community service program to foster national belonging. A few respondents recommend increasing field trips for their educational value. Other suggestions include general knowledge, woodshop, heath and hygiene, and first aid. Two teachers believe that the subjects offered are enough to teach students all the skills they need.

As for improving the school's administrative and academic aspects, teachers presented various suggestions, some of them of doubtful relevance, such as changing the school's uniform. Two teachers did not reply (table 4).

Table 4

Suggestions for improving the school

Hire coordinators for all subject areas to mentor and support teachers, help them develop and supervise their performance.
Provide more tools and educational support for language teaching.
Increase field trips and artistic activities.
Articulate clear guidelines for teachers to abide by.
Offer workshops prior to academic year.
Supply audio-visual material.
Teachers should be fully committed to the school.
Administration willing to change and be better organized.
Pay attention to students' needs, problems and differences.
Give more importance to lesson objectives.
Healthier communication between administration and teachers.
Better admission policy.
Usage of English as the only language of instruction in math and science classes.
The effort to improve languages should be collective not individual.

Implement a new teaching methodology based on a student-centered approach.

Use various types of assessment.

Hire teachers with professional integrity

Administrators should be stricter with students and teachers.

4.1.2 Students views and perceptions (Appendix C)

Forty-nine middle school students, aged 12-16 answered the questionnaire; 62.5 % have been at The Sunshine School for 6 to 12 years, the remaining 27.5% for 1 to 5 years, of which 55.5% have been there for one year only. Participants answered 18 yes or no questions exploring their attitudes and perceptions toward success, language learning, teaching styles, parents' involvement with their studies, and their post graduation plans. All students believe that success at school is their responsibility. As for passing the official exams, 75.4% think that the quality of teaching at school plays a major role. Almost two thirds of the respondents admit they need help at home with their studies while 42.8% of them need help with their English assignments. Nearly two-thirds, or 59.1%, prefer Arabic to English, and only 18.3% struggle in Arabic because they consider it to be a complicated language. Also, 42.8% struggle in English because the language is complicated and 24.4% blame their incompetence in English on the fact that their parents do not know it well. Sixty nine percent think that all subjects they study are important, and 85.7% are comfortable with their teachers' teaching styles. More than half, or 55% of The Sunshine School students, like going to school; 69.1% feel comfortable while at school, and 61.2% believe that their teachers are understanding and offer them help whenever they face personal or academic problems. Of the respondents, 89% plan on pursuing their secondary schooling and 77% their university education.

In the first open-ended question students were asked to identify activities to be added to the school curriculum that could facilitate the application of the knowledge acquired in class. A large majority, 83.6%, replied that the administration should offer music, drama, technology, extracurricular activities, French language, scouts clubs, ballet, art, crafts and hands on activities like science labs. While 12.2% of the respondents were satisfied with the programs offered at school and 4.2% did not reply.

The second open-ended question solicited students' suggestions on changes in buildings, playgrounds and classrooms and the reasons behind those changes. Most students suggested that classrooms should be better equipped, properly heated in winter and made more inviting. Many students proposed having a covered playground to be used as a gymnasium and to protect them from the harsh winter weather. Students also wished for more cleanliness on campus and particularly in the bathrooms. Some students suggested renovating the school façade and painting the interior; others wanted larger playgrounds graced with comfortable benches, an auditorium, a cafeteria instead of the school canteen, and a library. One student wanted separate playgrounds for boys and girls

Concerning those things The Sunshine School students like about their school, the answers came as follows by descending order: garden and playgrounds, caring teachers, kind administrator, school system, teaching style, big classrooms, yearly festivals, friends, athletic field, freedom of expression, holidays, cleanliness, and Arabic teacher. Five students did not reply.

As for those things students do not like about The Sunshine School, 14.2% did not reply. The remaining 85.8% answered along 2 major themes: school plant and school system. Concerning the school plant participants complained about the bathrooms, the classrooms, the playgrounds, the school building and its location, the chalkboards, the lack of cleanliness, the desks, the canteen, and the heating system. As for the school system, students expressed their dislike of the school rules and regulations, a number of uncaring teachers, the lack of compliance to school rules and regulations, the school uniform, the favoritism displayed by some teachers, the physical violence exerted by a few teachers, the lack of field trips, some students, term exams, the amount of homework assigned on a daily basis, and the long hours spent at school.

The second student survey (appendix D), which was administered in November 2006, aims at studying the relationship between the level of proficiency and the attitudes and motivation of rural Lebanese students towards learning the English language. Students answered four agree/disagree questions and justified their choice through open ended questions. Ten questions included statements and a list of options that students had to chose from. In one question students had to rate on a Likert scale their language skills. In

the last question students had to agree or disagree with two statements related to learning English and then justify their choice from a list of statements.

Almost all of the 49 respondents, 96%, agreed that mastering the English language is important to them at present or in the future and justified their opinion (table 5).

Table 5

The importance of mastering the English language

If I go to the USA I will be able to communicate with ease
Most common language in and out of Lebanon
In case I travel I need to speak English
It helps me succeed in my studies and communicate with people
Most subjects are taught in English except for the Arabic language and Social Studies
English is important in all subject areas. It helps me learn more information
English is important nowadays
Learning English helps in obtaining a university degree which helps in finding a good job
To get a better job in the future
To know about other cultures and to be able to communicate with them
International language. Everybody must know it. It is important for a university degree
An important language that helps us reach our future aim
Basic language in today's world. It is very important for our future
An international language, important language for our present and future,
Most important language in the world. It is the language of instruction in good universities in Lebanon and abroad. It is also the language of instruction of most subject areas in the Lebanese curriculum.
It is a very important language.
An International language, it is essential for my future studies at the university, my future career, and social life.
It is the language of instruction of many subjects, and without learning it I will be a simple man.
An important language in our lives. We cannot pursue and succeed in our university studies without English.

Important to my studies now and in the future

It helps in our future

I like the language, and it is important for my future

It affects our lives

It is good for our future

It is important for communication with other cultures

No comment

It is necessary and important in Lebanon and other countries

It is important for communication with other cultures

An international language, it is important for our future and for communicating with other cultures

An international language, it is important for our future and for communicating with other cultures

It helps me succeed and it is a nice language

It helps us communicate with the rest of the world

It helps me find a good job in the future

For travel and communication with other people from other cultures

English is important and I love the language

English helps me get a better my future

It helps in my future career

It is important for my future

I love the language

It helps me access more information

I want to be an English teacher in the future

An important language. It helps me access valuable information

Important language and helps me access valuable information

It helps me get a better future

It helps me succeed in life

It helps me communicate with people from other countries

Only 4% of the participants disagreed that mastering the English language is important to them at present or in the future and presented reasons for their choice and justified their opinion saying that they do not liking the language and the language teacher.

The second question in the survey inquired whether there are disadvantages in studying English as a second language. Twenty two percent of the respondents agreed and stated the following reasons for their opinion: when my teacher speaks English I do not fully understand, the language needs a lot of studying, English should not be studied as a second language because of its importance to our future, sometimes I feel that my classmates and I do not know how to speak English well, it is hard to study because of the interference of our first language, I do not understand English. It is a very difficult language.

On the other hand, 77.5% of the participants disagreed and explained their choice through various statements (table 6).

Table 6

The advantages of learning English as a second language

English is an international language, people in the future may only speak it
Because of the way it is being taught
English is important for all social classes all over the world
The language is important in our society , it is the second important after Arabic
It is better to learn it at a young age
A second language is a passport to a good job and a good future
We need this language
It is good for our future
It is a difficult language to study when compared to Arabic
An important language after Arabic. It is a gate to a better future and career.
My teacher teaches the language well
It is being well taught
Mainly advantages, no disadvantages
Knowing many languages opens up new horizons

We need to learn it in order to compete in our society

It helps us acquire better positions in society

It is an easy language to learn

I like to study English as a second language

An important language that helps me access valuable information.

It is important to learn many languages

Because my language is Arabic

It is important and I love it

I like both languages

It helps me become a famous person

Because my language is Arabic

It helps in society and travel

It is normal to learn a language even though it is difficult

It is important to speak more than one language, to compete in our society

No disadvantages, it helps us compete socially and professionally in our society

English to communicate with other people and to compete in our society

Arabic is not an international language like English, we need to master the English language

There are advantages and disadvantages. It is an important language

Whether sufficient time was allocated to learning English, and whether there were adequate opportunities to practice the language were investigated in questions 3 and 4 (table 7).

Table 7

The time allocated to learn English and the opportunities to use the language.

	Agree	Disagree	NA
3. The amount of time spent learning English in school is sufficient for me to master the language.	65.3%	34.6%	
4. I have enough opportunity to use English in school	71.4%	26.5%	2.04%

When students were asked to rate their performance in English, the majority believed that their language skills are excellent to good, 18.3% average and 6.12% believed that their language skills are below average (table 8).

Table 8

Students rate their proficiency in English

	Excellent	Good	Average	Below Average
My performance in English is	20.4%	55.1%	18.3%	6.12%

When asked about their preferences concerning the language they use to communicate orally, 63.2% of the respondents answered English and Arabic, while 40.8% favor writing in both languages. However when asked about reading 63.2% replied that they prefer reading in English (table 9).

Table 9

Students' preferences concerning the language they use for communication

Please tick the most relevant answer	Arabic	English	Both
A) When speaking I prefer to use	22.4%	14.2%	63.2%
B) When reading I prefer to use	10.2%	63.2%	26.5%
C) When writing I prefer to use	22.4%	36.7%	40.8%

Questions 7 to 14 inquired about the languages used by both teachers and students in classrooms where subjects ought to be taught in English. Students had to rate on a scale ranging from always, frequently, rarely, to never (table 10).

Table 10

Students rate the percentage of class usage of English and Arabic

Please tick the most relevant answer	Always	Frequently	Rarely	Never	NA
7. My English language teacher speaks English in class	71.4%	28.6%			
8. My classmates speak English in the English language class	12.2%	34.6%	44.8%	6.12%	2.04%

9. I give oral reports in English	16.3%	44.8%	30.8%	4.08%	4.08%
10. I write in English	36.7%	20.4%	18.3%	22.5%	2.04%
11. My science teacher speaks English in class	36.7%	44.8%	18.3%		
12. My classmates speak English in science class	10.2%	22.4%	57.1%	10.2%	
13. My math teacher speaks English in class	10.2%	22.4%	57.1%	10.2%	
14. My classmates speak English in math class	8.1%	16.3%	34.6%	40.8%	

As for the four language skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, students rated their performance on each skill on a Likert scale of 1-5, 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest (table 11).

Table 11

Students rate their four language skills

	1	2	3	4	5
Listening to and understanding instructions and conversations in English	22.4%	10.2%	6.1%	28.5%	28.5%
Speaking, expressing myself and holding a conversation in English	6.1%	32.6%	30.6%	12.2%	10.2%
Reading and understanding instructions and passages in English	16.3%	14.2%	24.4%	26.5%	14.2%
Writing and expressing myself in English	28.5%	16.3%	14.2%	24.4%	10.2%

As to the last question in the survey, 91.9% agreed that they like learning English in school and ticked the most relevant statements. Only 25% of those who agreed answered the open-ended section where participants could share their views. Also, the majority of the respondents ticked more that one statement (table 12).

Table 12

Reasons for liking learning English at school

English is an important subject for my future	91.8
My English textbook is interesting	16.3
I am comfortable speaking English	65.3
English lessons are enjoyable	38.7
I like my English language teacher	57.1
My parents encourage me to learn English	75.5
I do well in English language assessments	63.2
I like to read in English	73.4
I like to write in English	71.4

Students shared the following additional comments: I like to speak English, I like to learn English, I like English homework, I like the English teacher, she is polite with students, I like English because I like to learn, I love to be an English teacher, or interpreter, I love English, it is the best language, I love to speak it everywhere, English is my favorite language, it is a great and enjoyable language and I love to speak it. English is the best language in my life, I love it. I like to speak English, I love the language but I do not like my English teacher. It is an interesting language but I dislike the teacher. I like to learn English more, it is a useful language. I would like to thank my teacher because he speaks English inside and outside the classroom to help us practice and be better at speaking the language. I like to speak the language. I would like all our teachers to only speak English in class, except for those who teach Arabic. English is an important language for my future. I like to read in English and I like my English teacher. I may travel to places where the English language is the general one.

However, 8.1% do not like to learn English in school (table 13). Three participants wrote additional comments; however, their statements were discarded due to their irrelevance.

Table 13

Reasons for disliking learning English at school

I do poorly in English language assessments	4.08
I have to memorize many English words	0
I do not like reading in English	6.12
I dislike my English teacher	4.08
I do not like writing in English	2.04
I am not comfortable speaking English	4.08
English lessons are not interesting	6.12
My English textbook is not interesting	4.08
English is not an important subject for my future	4.08
My parents do not encourage me to learn the English language	0

4.2 Observation of English language classes

4.2.1 Grade 9

During the observation of a grade 9 class, the teacher communicated in English with her 11 students who replied in Arabic to her questions. The lesson was about paraphrasing passages from a text about mysteries of supernatural events. At the beginning of the lesson new vocabulary words were written on the board with their meanings in Arabic. Then students had to read the passage and work in pairs in order to paraphrase each paragraph. The teacher paraphrased a paragraph as an example and asked her students to note it down: *Man feels afraid of what he does not know. When he knows it, he won't be scared any more.*

The teacher spoke only English but made mistakes in pronunciation i.e. *beneaz* instead of beneath, in spelling i.e. *interpretition* instead of interpretation, in syntax i.e. *live for very deep places* instead of in deep places, *for God's sakes*, and *I will give you a homework.*

4.2.2 Grade 8

The teacher and his 13 students communicated in English throughout the whole 50 minute period. The teacher conducted a prewriting activity where students brainstormed the challenges they would face camping in the wild. The teacher wrote students' answers

on the board and asked questions to solicit more responses. The next activity was reading an extract from Robinson Crusoe and students took turns to read aloud without any interference from the teacher to correct mistakes or explain difficult words. The last activity was to write a paragraph explaining how to solve a problem one might face while camping. Students shared their ideas and discussed them with their classmates.

4.2.3. Grade I

The teacher spoke only English to her 17 students who replied in Arabic to her questions. Students were very attentive, quiet and disciplined while the teacher was explaining the lesson. Students understood the explanations, the questions, and the instructions but had difficulties replying in the target language.

4.3 Observation of a grade 5 science class

The teacher made an effort to explain the lesson and to conduct the class in English. He spoke the language with a heavy accent and made mistakes such as *"platelets makes a clot and becomes thickened to stop bleeding"* and *"what mean by nutrients?"* Students answered a few questions in English, but mostly communicated in Arabic.

4.4 Observation of a grade 3 physical education class and recess.

The physical education class was fully conducted in Arabic. Students and teacher communicate in their native language. Also during recesses Arabic was the only language heard on the playground.

4.5 Interviews

4.5.1 Interview with a grade 9 English teacher.

The grade 9 English teacher was interviewed by the researcher in an office adjacent to the director's office. The teacher, who is teaching for the first time at The Sunshine School, reported that her students are very weak in English, and particularly in listening and speaking skills. She also described her pupils as lacking in concentration, of being low achievers in all areas, easily frustrated, and undisciplined. The English teacher, who has 12 years of teaching experience in private and public schools, complained about the lack of adequate teaching resources, audio visual materials and equipment, strict rules and regulations, and proper communication between the teachers and the administration. She did not request any assistance from the administration because she did not believe it

would be forthcoming. The English language teachers rarely meet as a group with their coordinator, they do not trust each other, and consequently do not collaborate. Students' weakness in English is blamed on rote learning, looping, the choice of books, lack of parental involvement, and the fact that the school principal (and the owner) does not push for improvement.

4.5.2 Interview with a science teacher

The interview took place in an office adjacent to the director's office. The interviewer asked questions in English while the interviewee responded in Arabic. The teacher complained about his students' weakness in the English language which he believes stems from rote learning and the choice of books. The science book, published in the United States, is a 1989 edition meant for native speakers. The teacher said students were not able to understand much of the vocabulary and concepts of science because teaching in previous years was based on rote learning.

4.5.3 Interview with grade 9 students

The interview took place in the playground. Students were asked to define the reasons for learning English. All students replied that the language is very important for their present and future studies and their future careers. Students also mentioned that English is the most commonly used language throughout the world and a requirement for speaking and communicating with people from different cultures. Students find their books to be appropriate for their needs and level even though the themes covered are uninteresting to their age group. Students said that they like learning the language; however they do not like their English teacher for the following reasons: low grades, unreasonable classroom rules, uninteresting lessons, and alienating teaching style. The most challenging things in learning languages for The Sunshine School students are communicating in English and writing in Arabic.

As for the things students like about their school life they cited activities such as sports, scouts, parties, trips, and arts. The one thing they dislike is their English language teacher.

4.5.4 Interview with grade 8 students

Grade 8 students offered the following reasons for learning English: travel to the United States or other countries, the need to be bilingual, to communicate with other cultures, to pursue university studies, and to work towards a better future. They also mentioned the fact that technology is mostly based on the English language, and the language of the Internet and entertainment is mostly English.

As for the challenges they face, students mentioned the difference between English and Arabic, the different accents, their previous teachers, and the grammar being taught out of context. Concerning their books they find them helpful but boring because the themes are not related to their age group. When asked about ways to improve their language skills, students suggested allocating more time for language instruction, better-qualified teachers, emphasis on oral skills, better reading and writing programs, using dictionaries, being exposed to more difficult words, and being better prepared for their exams.

4.6 Books used

The English language, math and science books used until the 7th grade are published in the United States and target native speakers. The books used in grades 8 and 9 are published by the National Center for Educational Research and Development (NCERD).

4.7 Document reviews

The documents reviewed in this study are 'Calander Book' (sic), reports from the English language coordinator, and announcements displayed on the school's bulletin boards. The 'Calander Book', meant to be a view book, includes a letter from the principal, students' rights and responsibilities, a word about the curriculum, the yearly calendar, the calendar of activities, financial aid and registration forms, pictures of various activities at school, and pictures of teachers with their students in addition to few captions. The mistakes found in the book range from spelling mistakes such as *calander* to convoluted sentences -probably translated from Arabic- such as a *zone of tolerance is highly taken into consideration in The Sunshine School. Non physical engagements, non-bad mouthings and shows of fun and decent kidding are classified as acceptable and healthy. A sense of decent humor is encouraged as an active vehicle for pleasant moods and pleasant environment* (See excerpts from the book in appendix I).

Other documents reviewed are announcements posted on bulletin boards in the school hallways and next to the administration. The announcements written in Arabic are faultless while the ones in English display spelling mistakes, such as *'simister'* for semester.

The weekly reports revealed spelling mistakes made by the English language coordinator and a weakness in the language structure. Some of the spelling mistakes that occurred in the reports are *speggitti* for spaghetti, *accept for* instead of except for, *a homework*, *guidlines* for guidelines, *a student was jelous from the other*, and *interferred* instead of interfered. The awkward use of the language can be demonstrated in the following excerpts from various reports:

She asked them to write a paragraph about a place he likes to go. I told her to tell them to write a paragraph about a place he went to. Who went with him? And what did he see there? So by this subject they could achieve using the nouns of persons, places, and things in one paragraph.

...because this way she imaginged that all students depend on their ears. What about the visuals and most of our students are visuals.

...so she read all the writing copybooks of them all but non of them wrote a correct writing so she gave them information how to write it.

Also in her observation forms, the coordinator reported that some English language teachers speak Arabic, in class in lieu of the target language, and make mistakes such as *what are these boys and girls make*?

4.8 Results

The major findings of this study are:

(1) Teachers' qualifications and commitment to professional development are significant internal factors to school effectiveness.

(2) Professional development in low-income or rural areas can be hindered by a lack of collaboration and cooperation among teachers, and consequently affecting overall school performance.

(3) Learning English is of great importance to all school constituents because of the social, academic and professional value of the language. They believe that knowledge of English is instrumental to better future academic, social, and career opportunities.

(4) Parents, teachers, and students in rural areas hold bilingualism in great esteem and equate bilingualism and trilingualism with high quality education.

(5) In low-income rural schools, teachers of English and those who teach in that language lack adequate qualifications in the language.

(6) Parents' involvement in their children's education is very low while parental expectations of their children's school are very high.

(7) School improvement in low-income rural schools is a complex process involving the challenges of recruitment, training, leadership, inadequate financial resources, and in this case specific issues related to the school's environment.

(8) Improving the teaching of English in disadvantaged rural contexts obviously requires well qualified teachers, but also a well informed and capable administration.

(9) While many parents enroll their children at The Sunshine School because of its reputation, the recruitment of students in rural schools is also dependent to a significant extent on religious, tribal and family relationships.

4.9 Discussion

To recap, some of the concerns of this study are:

- What internal factors determine the functioning of a low-income private school and its success?
- What external factors influence the functioning of a private school in disadvantaged contexts?
- How does the interaction between a private school and its environment influence its management and output?
- How do family attitudes towards language learning affect language programs in a low-income private school?
- What factors shape students' motivations and attitudes towards learning second languages?

- How do teachers' attitudes towards professional training and development affect language teaching and therefore language programs in challenging circumstances?
- Does creating a strong school culture and rallying community support affect the success of a school in disadvantaged contexts?

In most parts, the findings are consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The attitudes and motivations of rural Lebanese students towards learning the English language are instrumental and integrative as described by Gardner and Lambert (1972). Students' motivations are utilitarian as they recognize the importance of being bilingual and trilingual for their future social, academic and professional careers. Students' motivations can as well fall into the integrative realm as students would like to integrate in both the local and global societies where English holds great sway.

Despite the fact that 87% of the students succeed in the official exams, their levels of achievement are low, and especially in the second language and in subjects taught in that language such as biology, physics, chemistry and mathematics. Hiring well qualified teachers and supplying them with educational resources represent the biggest fiscal challenge to schools in low-income rural environments (Wenglinsky, 1997). The Sunshine School teachers are qualified in their discipline, but their inadequate command of the English language may affect their performance negatively and consequently student outcome (Stringfield & Teddlie, 1993; Wu, 2005).

The study revealed that parents held extremely positive opinions about English, French, Arabic, bilingualism, or trilingualism. All parents expressed the view that it is very important for their children to be either bilingual or trilingual (Kubota, 2002). When responding to the question which language, if any, should be emphasized in their children's school, a large percentage of parents favored English. The reasons given by parents for their interest in the English language reflect a concern with enabling their children to cope with the challenges of an environment more cosmopolitan than theirs (Pease-Alvarez, 2003). They were also worried that their children were not learning enough English to succeed at the university level (Diab, 2000). Despite attaching greater importance to English in the curriculum, some parents said they wanted their children to receive some instruction in French (Hammer et al., 2005).

Students say they communicate in both Arabic and English when they speak and write, but prefer to read in English. Arabic is mostly used by students in all their classes, and when they use English, a lot of code switching takes place. Students rate their listening skills in the English language as 'good,' their oral skills as 'low,' their reading and comprehension skills 'average,' and their writing skills as 'deficient.' The students' ratings in reading and writing are consistent with their grades in both school (appendix H) and official exams (appendix G). These results are inconsistent with the goals of the Lebanese curriculum where students should develop oral and written expertise in two languages (Freeman, 1998).

The Sunshine School students reported that their parents encourage them to learn the language. They also said that they like learning English even though they mentioned finding the language complicated, disliking their English teachers, the English lessons, and the textbooks and in particular those published by NCERD (Krashen, 1981). Students reported that teachers of English use the language when in class. Those in other disciplines, who should use English as a means of instruction, switch back and forth between English and Arabic. However, as the observation reports, both language instructors and others have wanting language skills. A large percentage of students feel comfortable while in school, and with their teachers because of their teaching styles, understanding and support (Wasley et al., 2000). However, students would like the school to improve on its equipment and facilities.

A large percentage of parents and teachers believe that language curricula should be improved through the recruitment of better qualified teachers, allotting more time to language teaching, emphasizing the practice of the language, and providing opportunities for professional development (Block & Cameron, 2002). More than half find English to be the most important subject matter in the Lebanese curriculum.

Parents and teachers consider that improving the teaching of English requires well qualified teachers and a well informed and capable administration willing to undertake all the necessary maintenance activities and to provide for developmental work (Valdez-Perez et al., 1999)

Parents hold ambitions for their children and consider schooling to be a guarantee for financial security and therefore an investment in their future (Volk, 2000). Two-thirds of

the parents believe that the official exams are an accurate indicator of the effectiveness of the school (Wu, 2005). Parents want to ensure their children's access to quality teaching which will lead to success. They believe that both school and parents are responsible for providing a quality education for their students and that the school is not solely responsible for success or failure in official exams (Lupton, 2004; & Sammons, 1999). Parents believe that their involvement in school life is essential to school success and student achievement (Maynard & Howley, 1997). They also believe that the school should insulate itself from aspects of its environment, such as politics, that may affect its culture negatively (Muijs et al., 2004).

It can also be concluded from the study that the socio-economic environment has a marked effect on the caliber of the teachers, particularly in subjects where English is the language of instruction. The literature recognizes that there are difficulties in the recruitment of well qualified teachers in rural areas (Clarke, Reynolds, & Harris, 2005) but argues that this problem may be circumvented (Henchey, 2001). However, in the case of The Sunshine School, this problem is compounded by the fact that recruiting faculty to teach in a foreign language, English, is more difficult in Lebanon's rural areas than in its more cosmopolitan cities (Shaaban & Gaith, 1996).

The enrolment at The Sunshine School has been suffering for almost a decade from informal social and political power affecting the local community (Ubben et al., 2004), and also reflected in the divide in the large tribal and family relations of the owner. Moreover, after the devastating summer 2006 war, and as a result of the deteriorating economic situation in the country, the enrolment declined yet another 10% in the 2006-2007 academic year.

The Sunshine School, like the rest of the Lebanese private and public schools, offers the Lebanese program which relies to a great extent on the second language in the instruction of its nine subject matters. Five out of nine subjects – English, Math, Physics, Chemistry, and Biology – are offered in English, a fact that requires that students, teachers, and administration be proficient in that language in order to comprehend and communicate information. After examining documents published or released by the administration and coordinators, and observing a few teachers, one may infer that to provide a rich dual language environment, The Sunshine School should exert

considerable effort, particularly at the managerial level, to improve and sustain student outcome and teacher effectiveness (Wrigley, 2005; Valdez-Perez et al., 1999). The administration must have the ability to assess the adequacy of its staff and language faculty if it is to offer quality education in that area.

Parents and teachers consider the professional development of the faculty to be beneficial to student outcome as well as instrumental to school improvement. However, teachers believe that professional development is not being optimized as an integral component of the school's philosophy. Their experience has been that seminars and workshops have helped them individually but have failed to foster collegiality and collaboration (Muijs et al., 2004).

As a small school, The Sunshine School lacks the supportive environment that nurtures collaboration and collegiality among teachers and personalized interaction among students, teachers and communities. This counters the claim made by Christensen and Karp (2003) that small schools create a supportive environment for collaborative interaction among its constituents. Low-income schools lack the adequate resources to make good fiscal decisions and to indulge in sound instructional spending (Levin & Lockheed, 1993).

Parents and teachers believe that a well qualified educator should be committed, willing and able to cater to different learning styles, have experience, know how to cooperate with all school constituents, and be consistent in abiding by and enforcing school rules and regulations (Kyriakides, Campbell, & Christofidou, 2002). Parents and teachers also believe that good teachers should recognize and respect their own rights and responsibilities.

According to parents and teachers, the socio-economic environment has a bearing on student outcome and consequently on the effectiveness of a school. They both agree that the home, the community, and the school influence student achievement (Englert, 1993). Parents and teachers spoke about the financial difficulties faced by The Sunshine School and suggested that tuition fees should be scaled to the environment's economic conditions. They also believe that school effectiveness can be greatly impacted by its intake variations and recommend that the school admission policy should be stricter

because new students can affect the reputation of an educational institution if they do not fit the school's academic profile (Sammons, 1999).

Parents' expectations of the school are high. They would like the school to provide professional training to its teachers, who should be well qualified. They also expected the school to engage in better and constant cooperation with parents, and a more visible advertisement of the school's activities and achievements in the community. Even though parents said they recognize the financial limitations of the school, their suggestions for improvement are professional development and better administrative follow up on both students and teachers (Stoll, 1999; Ravitch, 2002; & Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997)

Parents said they recognized that their involvement is instrumental to their children's education, personal growth, and academic success (Comer, 2005; Maynard & Howley, 1997). However, from observation and interviews with the principal, very few parents attended the first parent committee meeting held at school, fewer parents showed up to the next one and only one parent attended the last meeting (Snowden & Gorton, 2002). Parents' involvement is mostly passive and takes place through their attendance of events such as Mother's Day Show, the End of Year Show, and athletic events.

Teachers recognize that parents' involvement is elemental to their children's achievement and to the school's success. However, teachers admitted that they prefer that parents' involvement in the academics be minimal since some parents are illiterate and therefore their participation might prove detrimental (Valdez-Perez et al., 1999).

Parents, teachers, and students believe that the school should add extracurricular activities to its program in order to nurture a school culture more conducive to positive attitudes about school and learning (Pikes, Burell, & Holliday, 1998). However, only the physical education teacher volunteers to coach extracurricular activities. Even though teachers and parents value those additional activities and are aware of their positive impact on students, they do not volunteer to engage or assist in any activity (Wrigley, 2003; Comer, 2005; Maynard & Howley, 1997; & Schmuck, 1999).

In an attempt to stand out in its environment and to attract more students, the school implemented the learning organization approach through creating a teacher training center that offers workshops and seminars to both The Sunshine School faculty and to teachers from other educational institutions to keep them abreast of improved methods

and knowledge (Ravitch, 2002). Two one-day training sessions, in different disciplines, were offered by teachers from schools in Beirut. About a hundred teachers from the area attended the sessions.

Chapter five

5.1 Summary

The main focus of this study has been to answer a number of questions relevant to the external and internal factors affecting the performance of one particular private school in a low-income rural environment in Lebanon. The study utilized qualitative and quantitative methods to gauge the impact of the administration, faculty, students, and curriculum on school improvement. It also examined the role of parents, as well cultural, and socio-economic conditions affecting the school. A main concern of the study has also been to present its conclusions in a larger context, by relating the work to the relevant literature.

The study accompanied one specific rural school over a period of a little over a year and was advantaged by readily available access to administration, parents, faculty, staff and students. This allowed for a thorough examination of the relationship between school and environment, between parents and administration, and between faculty and students. The argument is made that while school improvement is dependant on internal dynamics, it is also conditioned by external factors beyond the control of the administration. If measured simply by the success rate of its students in official exams, the accomplishments of the school reviewed here are significant. However, in areas where the measure of accomplishment is less well defined, the mechanisms for school achievement are not in place effectively.

A particular focus of the study is the English language component of the curriculum, and the use by faculty and students of that language, the medium of instruction in most courses. Despite the high value placed on the importance of the language by all parties, deficiencies at the administrative level, in the teaching of English and use of the language are significant and impact markedly on student performance. While almost all parents expressed great concern for the teaching of English, only 16% of them said they were proficient in the language and thus able to assist or evaluate their children's performance. The level of proficiency of the parents was not assessed in this study. One of the recommendations for further work is to assess that proficiency.

The school offers a program leading from KG to grade 9, the Brevet year, and the students' success rate in that official exam in the year of the study was 87%. This high rate of success has been maintained for a number of years. However, the lack of school culture, minimal involvement by parents, shortcomings in the teaching staff, and limited motivation on the part of students and faculty result in a bare minimum educational environment. The limited resources available to the administration, forced to operate in a low-income environment where the pool of potential students is limited, makes any major change virtually impossible. However, some suggestions are made in the section below.

5.2 Conclusions

This study of The Sunshine School has led to a number of findings, many of them interrelated, some more significant than others, some obvious, others not. However, probably one of the more noteworthy findings is that professional development in low-income or rural areas can be hindered by a lack of collaboration and cooperation among teachers, and consequently affecting overall school performance. Teachers' qualifications and commitment to professional development are significant internal factors to school effectiveness.

Another finding is that parents, teachers, and students in rural areas hold bilingualism in great esteem and equate bilingualism and trilingualism with high quality education. Learning English is of great importance to all school constituents because of the social, academic and professional value of the language. They believe that knowledge of English is instrumental to better future academic, social, and career opportunities.
However, in low-income rural schools, teachers of English and those who teach other subjects in English lack adequate qualifications in the language. While improving the teaching of English in disadvantaged rural contexts obviously requires well qualified teachers, it also requires a well informed and capable administration.

School improvement in low-income rural schools is a complex process involving the challenges of recruitment, training, leadership, financial resources, and in this particular case specific issues related to the school's environment. Another challenge is parental involvement. Parents' involvement in their children's education at The Sunshine School is very low while parental expectations of their children's school are very high. While many

parents enroll their children at The Sunshine School because of its reputation, the recruitment of students in rural schools is also dependent to a significant extent on religious, tribal and family relationships.

Based on the results of this study, some recommendations are offered below.

5.3 Recommendations

1. Low-income school administrators need to foster better communication between themselves, teachers and parents based on mutual desires and objectives.
2. Small rural schools should take advantage of their small class sizes to offer individualized and differentiated instruction, rather than teacher-center instruction.
3. Administrators should either be proficient in the languages they offer or have someone who is empowered to recruit qualified teachers and to oversee the quality of education in those languages.
4. Administrators should rally internal support for the school's objectives from teachers and students and create a school culture that will eventually invite parents and the larger community to be active participants in school activities and decisions.
5. Administrators should institutionalize the belief in school improvement by encouraging and monitoring improved teaching methods and by providing the resources and support needed for that improvement.
6. Teachers in low-income rural schools should be shown how to create much of their needed resources, including graphic organizers, bilingual dictionary, study guides, flash cards, and visual cues.
7. Administrators, teachers, and parents should be educated on the importance of extra-curricular activities, a required first step toward their implementation.
8. The Ministry of Education should monitor private schools in disadvantaged contexts, rural or urban, to ensure a high quality instruction.
9. Teachers of languages should be asked to obtain an appropriate certificate that vouches for their competence.

5.4 Limitations

This study attempts to uncover the effects of the internal and external factors on the success of a low-income school and how they impact its climate, its programs, and its professional development. The limitations include the disparity in meaning associated with the definition of school success and whether the results can be generalized to all students considering the biased sample (socio-economic status). The sample size was too small to make broad generalizations about the effects of the environment on school success, school improvement and bilingualism. In addition, the selection of this particular school may not be representative of low-income schools around the country due to significant changes in leadership and environment.

Another limitation of the study was the timing of the case study. The school was under tremendous financial pressure resulting from the drop in student enrolment. The administration and teachers were reacting to intense change in a relatively short time frame. The actions taken by the owner may take a considerable amount of time to implement and to have a desirable impact on school success. Further study over a longer time period is suggested to investigate the full impact of the change process. The methodology of a case study was also a limitation. A case study, by nature, denotes that there are possibly more variables than were considered by the study. The study was restricted by the sample selection and the data collection system. This study did not aim to be comprehensive; its focus was on school improvement. Despite these limitations, this study contributed to our understanding of how low-income schools improve, become more successful, and sustain rigorous language programs.

5.4 Further work

While this study provides significant insight into the context in which one low-income rural school operates, more general conclusions would require that the study be broadened to include more than one school in the area, and in various disadvantaged rural contexts. In addition, other variables should be examined, including parents' proficiency in the second language, factors impairing greater parental involvement, and more definite budgetary considerations.

A comparison between the rural and urban schools run by the administration of The Sunshine School, both of which exist in low-income communities, would allow for a clearer understanding of the challenges peculiar to rural environments, particularly in such areas as faculty recruitment and parental involvement. Further work is also needed to follow up on the improvement plan, i.e. the creation of a teaching training center, and report on its benefits for school improvement and success.

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Appendix A.

Dear Parents,

The following questions are part of a research that studies the factors that determine success in private schools and that identifies ways to improve their performance. You are kindly requested to answer the questions and to return the document to The Sunshine School administration before_____.

I thank you for taking part in this study and I assure you that all your answers will be treated with confidentiality and will be strictly used for research purposes.

Nabila Abdul Sater Maluf

Information about the respondent

Age: _____ Education:_____ Yearly income: _____

Place of residence: _____

Languages I know very well: _____

Languages I know a little about: _____

I like for my child to become _____ in the future

1. **Please comment on the following statements with yes or no.**

- I prefer that my child learns only Arabic _____
- Acquiring the English language is far more important for my child's future than acquiring the Arabic language _____
- I prefer that my child learns well both the Arabic and English languages _____
- I wish that the school teaches a third language _____
- The percentage of success in the official exams is an accurate indicator of the effectiveness of the school _____
- The school is the sole responsible for the success of its students and for providing them with quality education _____
- Both school and parents are responsible for students' success and for providing them with a quality education ___
- The school is responsible for the success or failure of its students in official examinations _____

2. **Please answer the following questions**

1. Why did you enroll your child at The Sunshine School?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Are teachers key players in the success of their students?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Define parents' role in the education of their children?

4. How does the surrounding environment (society, politics, economy, etc.,) affect the success and prosperity of a school?

5. Should language curricula at The Sunshine School be improved? How?

6. What is the most important subject matter in the Lebanese curriculum? Why?

7. Do you agree with the following opinion: a school is a small community whose paramount objective is to teach students how to interact with the reality of life? Explain

8. Which subjects whose aim is students' social emotional growth and consequently healthier performance in real life situations could be added to the curriculum?

9. What are your expectations of The Sunshine School?

10. Do you have any suggestions to improve the school's administrative and academic aspects?

Thank you for your cooperation
Nabila Abdul Sater Maluf

Appendix B

To the honorable teachers of The Sunshine School,
The following questions are part of a study about the factors that determine success in private schools. You are kindly requested to answer the questions and to return the document to Mr. /Mrs. _____ before the _____ of June.
Thank you
Nabila Abdul Sater Maluf

---

1. What are the characteristics of a successful educational institution?

_____

_____

_____

2. How does a teacher contribute to the success of the institution he/she works in?

_____

_____

_____

3. What role does the surrounding environment (society, politics, economy, etc.,) play in the success and prosperity of a school?

_____

_____

_____

4. Is there a partnership between the school on one side and students and their parents on the other in the success of the institution and consequently in providing students with a quality education?

_____

_____

_____

5. Who is responsible for the success or failure of students in the official exams?

_____

_____

_____

6. Is the success or failure of students in official exams an accurate indicator of the effectiveness of a school? How?

7. Who is responsible for professional development at an educational institution? The teacher? The administration? Or both?

8. How many workshops have you taken part in throughout the current academic year? What was the impact on your daily performance in class and with your peers?

9. How do workshops affect your professional performance?

10. What is the main reason behind you seeking professional development and participating in workshops?

11. What are the obstacles that hinder your professional development and your participation in workshops?

12. What is the most important subject matter in the curriculum? Why?

13. Which language should your school focus on? Why?

14. Should language curricula be improved? How?

15. What components does your school lack to improve its language programs?

16. What is school role in shaping good citizens? As an educator, how do you contribute in achieving this role?

17. Which subjects could be added to the curriculum whose aim is students' social emotional growth and consequently healthier performance in real life situations

18. Do you have any suggestions to improve the school's administrative and academic aspects?

Thank you
Nabila Abdul Sater Maluf

Appendix C

Dear Student,

The following questions are part of a study about the factors that determine success in private schools. Please answer all questions and return the sheet to Mr. /Mrs. _____ before the _____ of June.

Your answers will be treated with confidentiality and will be used only for research purposes.

Thank you

Age: _____ Town or city of residence: _____

Male: _____ Female: _____

Years spent at The Sunshine School: _____

Please answer the following questions with	**yes**	**or**	**no**
• Success at school is my responsibility	____		____
• All subjects that I study are important	____		____
• At home I study without any help	____		____
• I need help when I study Arabic	____		____
• I need help when I study English	____		____
• I prefer Arabic to English	____		____
• I prefer English to Arabic	____		____
• Both languages are the same to me	____		____
• I struggle in English because the language is complicated	____		____
• I struggle in English because my parents do not know it well	____		____
• I am comfortable with my language teachers' teaching style	____		____
• Passing the official exams depends on the quality of teaching at school	____		____
• After I graduate I will pursue secondary education	____		____
• After completing my secondary education I will join university	____		____
• My parents care about my studies and closely monitor my academic achievement	____		____
• My parents encourage me to excel in my studies	____		____
• The atmosphere at my school is comfortable and I feel as if I am with my family	____		____
• All my teachers are understanding and they help me whenever I face academic or personal problems	____		____

Please answer the following questions

1. Would you like your school administration to add activities to your program that could help you apply the knowledge you acquired in class? Give an example

2. What changes in buildings, playgrounds and classrooms would you do? And why?

3. I like the following things about my school

4. I do not like the following things about my school

Thank you
Nabila Abdul Sater Maluf

Appendix D

Dear Students,

This survey aims at studying the relationship between the level of proficiency and the attitudes and motivation of rural Lebanese students towards learning the English language. Your answers will be treated with confidentiality and will be used only for research purposes.
Thank you,
Nabila Abdul Sater Maluf

1. Mastering the English language is important to me at present or in the future
☐Agree ☐Disagree

Please explain the reason for your answer.

_____

_____

2. There are disadvantages in studying English as a second language
☐Agree ☐Disagree

Please state the reason for your answer

_____

_____

_____

3. The amount of time spent learning the English language in school is sufficient for me to master it ☐Agree ☐Disagree

4. I have enough opportunity to use the English language in school
☐Agree ☐Disagree

5. My performance in English is
☐Excellent ☐Good ☐Average ☐Below average ☐Poor

6. Please tick the most relevant answer

a)When speaking I prefer to use	☐Arabic	☐English	☐Arabic and English
b)When reading I prefer to use	☐Arabic	☐English	☐Arabic and English
c)When writing I prefer to use	☐Arabic	☐English	☐Arabic and English

7. My English language teacher speaks English in class
☐Always ☐Frequently ☐Rarely ☐Never

8. My classmates speak English in the English language class
☐Always ☐Frequently ☐Rarely ☐Never

9. I give oral reports in English in class
☐Always ☐Frequently ☐Rarely ☐Never

10. I write in English
☐Always ☐Frequently ☐Rarely ☐Never

11. My science teacher speaks English in class
☐Always ☐Frequently ☐Rarely ☐Never

12. My classmates speak English in science class
☐Always ☐Frequently ☐Rarely ☐Never

13. My math teacher speaks English in class
☐Always ☐Frequently ☐Rarely ☐Never

14. My classmates speak English in math class
☐Always ☐Frequently ☐Rarely ☐Never

15. Rate the following skills in terms of difficulty with a scale of 1–5, 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest.

_____Listening to and understanding instructions and conversations in English

_____Speaking, expressing myself and holding a conversation in English

_____Reading and understanding instructions and passages in English

_____Writing and expressing myself in English

16. I like learning English in school ☐Agree ☐Disagree

a) If you agree, please tick the most relevant statements. You may tick more than one.

☐English is an important subject for my future

☐My English textbook is interesting

☐I am comfortable speaking English

☐English lessons are enjoyable

☐I like my English language teacher

☐My parents encourage me to learn English

☐I do well in English language assessments

☐I like to read in English

☐I like to write in English

☐Others (please specify)

_____

_____

b) If you disagree, please tick the most relevant statements. You may tick more than one.

☐I do poorly in English language assessments

☐I have to memorize many English words

☐I do not like reading in English

☐I dislike my English teacher

☐I do not like writing in English

☐I am not comfortable speaking English

☐English lessons are not interesting

☐My English textbook is not interesting

☐English is not an important subject for my future

☐My parents do not encourage me to learn the English language

☐Others (please specify)

_____

_____

Thank you for your cooperation
Nabila Abdul Sater Maluf

Appendix E

April 12, 2006
Mr. Sami Farid, Principal
Sunshine School, Baalbeck

RE: Lebanese American University Masters Thesis Study

Dear Principal Farid,

Your school has been selected to be part of a thesis study of Lebanese private rural schools. The study examines the influences of internal and external factors on school success, school culture, programs offered at school and in particular language programs.

You professional support is needed in designating a contact person responsible for receiving, distributing, collecting and returning questionnaires from each teacher in your school. Language teachers will be interviewed through both structured and unstructured interviews. Each structured interview will take 30 minutes and, upon your consent, will be recorded on an audio-tape.

Two questionnaires will be given out to Middle School students, then collected and returned by your contact person. In addition to completing the questionnaires, students may be selected at random to be interviewed. Each interview will take approximately 15 minutes and, upon your consent, will be recorded on an audio-tape.

Your help is also needed for distributing, collecting, and returning the questionnaire from parents.

I believe that the information from this study will furnish your administration and other school administrators with essential information for making school improvements. A copy of the study's finding will be provided to you.

If you agree to be in this study, I would like to set up a mutually agreeable time to interview you about different aspects of your school. Each interview will last for approximately one hour. I will note your answers on paper and, with your permission, record the interview so that I may listen to it again at a later time.

Please indicate your permission to survey and interview teachers, parents, and students; to observe language classes, faculty meetings, and language departmental meetings; to attend parent-teacher and parent teacher association (PTA) meetings. Please sign the attached form and mail it to me at the following address Shartouni bldg., Artoi st., Hamra, Beirut, Lebanon.

The records of this study will be kept private. Any information that will make it possible to identify your school or an individual participant will be eliminated from any publication that may result from this study.

Your support and assistance are greatly appreciated. I look forward to working with you to help find ways to improve rural Lebanese private schools and their language programs.

Sincerely,

Nabila Maluf
Phone 03- 891711
nabilamaluf@gmail.com

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I consent to participate in the study and I grant the researcher permission to conduct interviews, to observe classes, to survey parents, students and teachers, to attend meetings, and to have access to any information deemed necessary to the study. I would like to name Mr. /Ms. _____ to be the school's contact person. He/she can be reached at _____.

Name: _____

Signature_____ Date_____

Appendix F

Questions for a structured interview with teachers

1. When did you start teaching at The Sunshine School?
2. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
3. What are the main challenges you face with your students? The administration? Your colleagues?
4. How often do you meet with the coordinator of your subject matter?
5. How do you evaluate the textbooks used for your discipline at The Sunshine School?

Appendix G

Questions for a structured interview with students

1. Why do you learn English?
2. Do you like learning English?
3. What challenges do you face when learning the language?
4. What can you do to improve your language skills?
5. What can your teachers do to help you improve your language skills?
6. What do you think of your English language books?

Appendix H

Questions for a structured interview with school administrator

1. When was The Sunshine School founded?
2. How many students were enrolled the first year?
3. How many grades do you offer?
4. What are the tuition fees?
5. What is the school rate of success in the official exams?
6. Was there one major challenge faced by your school since its opening? If yes, what was it?
7. Did the neighboring schools affect your student enrolment?
8. What are your main problems with the school environment?
9. How do you deal with those problems?
10. What do you consider to be the main financial challenge currently facing the school? Why?
11. What are your plans to recruit students?
12. In which school activities do parents participate?
13. How do you cater to the needs and expectations of your environment?

Appendix I

Sunshine School
Official test scores -Brevet
Academic year 2005-2006

Student	Arabic 60	English 40	Math 60	Physics 20	Chemistry 20	Biology 20	Civics 20	History 20	Geography 20	Total 280
A	43	26	59	15	14	15	15	18	19	224
B	24	12	24	7	3	8	9	15	11	113
C	27	12	21	10	6	4	11	12	11	114
D	40	20	51	16	12	10	15	19	16	199
E	31	10	16	9	5	9	8	14	11	113
F	17	3	7	20	3	3	6	10	9	78
G	46	16	25	9	12	12	15	20	16	169
H	42	13	26	11	8	8	14	16	15	155
I	23	9	14	2	1	1	8	8	8	78
J	48	23	53	13	16	16	14	16	14	206
K	37	17	36	10	14	14	15	20	16	176
L	30	13	38	10	7	7	13	17	11	146
M	37	19	54	14	13	13	13	16	17	199
N	26	12	36	11	6	6	13	14	12	142
O	49	21	53	14	15	15	14	18	17	215

Appendix J

Sunshine School
End of year grades
Academic year 2005-2006

Student	Arabic 60	English 40	Math 60	Physics 20	Chemistry 20	Biology 20	Civics 20	History 20	Geography 20	Total 280
A	49.5	19.5	55.5	17	14	15	15	18	19	224
B	27.5	15	37.5	7	3	8	9	15	11	113
C	15.5	10.5	29	3	6	4	11	12	11	114
D	39.5	16.5	40	11	12	10	15	19	16	199
E	28.5	12	15	8	5	9	8	14	11	113
F	23	10.5	19.5	5	3	3	6	10	9	78
G	43	20	30	12	12	12	15	20	16	169
H	21	8	22	5	8	8	14	16	15	155
I	37	14.5	24	11	1	1	8	8	8	78
J	48	11.5	57	13	16	16	14	16	14	206
K	33	15.5	36	12	14	14	15	20	16	176
L	31.5	19	31	7	7	7	13	17	11	146
M	27.5	13.5	46.5	2	13	13	13	16	17	199
N	46	25	57	16	6	6	13	14	12	142
O	44	26	53	16	15	15	14	18	17	215

Appendix K

Excerpts from the *Calander Book*

A word from the principal

Since the foundation of The Sunshine School, the objectives have been devoted to academic achievements and to educational competencies. Besides progresses that a school may achieve in the academic domains, The Sunshine School has had in its philosophy the objective of raising a twin of decency and good manners. Teaching Sciences, mathematics, English, or Arabic have been always perceived as mediums of interaction and transactional discourses. That is exactly what we mean by the educational medium that is intended to serve the long targets of our students, a medium of human interaction and successful career.

Far long targets are naturally intertwined with successes in one's career. The Sunshine School believes that changes in the global medium of communication requires compatibility to that medium. Eighty percent of the size of that medium is in English. And that is exactly what induces The Sunshine School to cherish English as an official language for the school.

English will be taken care of with the same keenness of parents' interests in their careers and the communication skills of their boys and girls.

Communication skills were underlined in the new Lebanese curriculum. That tells how much advanced and civilized manners of communication will excel our students transactions be it orally or in writing.

Undoubtedly we are taking the challenges of competing with the well established and reputable institutions in the teaching sector in Lebanon. Competing with those reputable institutions is extremely challenging to our school's Governing Board, to our teaching staff, to our students and to the school's community. The school's institutional structure is undoubtedly capable to cope with the challenges and the requirements.

This Calendar Book intends to demonstrate the compatible capabilities of the institutional structure of the school. The activities recorded in this Book are the exact evidences that school is proud to present. They are evidences of the school structural skills and the school.