

The Challenge of Learning a Foreign Language: The experiences of Lebanese and Syrian children in public schools in Lebanon

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Foreign language an instrument for marginalisation

- Demoting
- Segregating
- A permanent problem
- Dropout

Research question

- How do Syrian and Lebanese Refugee children describe their experiences in learning foreign languages?
- Is learning a foreign language a bigger barrier to Syrian refugees than to Lebanese children?

Research Sample

- The sample is formed of 107 Lebanese students and 116 Syrian students, all attending public schools in Lebanon. They ranged from 9 years old to 17 years old, enrolled in grades 4 to 9.
- All of the Lebanese students attended morning shifts, whereas Syrian students were split almost equally between morning (48.7 %) and afternoon (51.3 %) shifts.

Education facts in Lebanon

- Total of 943 763 students in Lebanon
- N Public schools = N Private Schools
- 30 % in Public
- 65 % Private
- 4 %UNRWA

(CERD, 2015)

Percentages of students in schools

Type of school	Public %	Private %
Pre-school	19	81
Elementary	26	69
Intermediate	34	61
Secondary	45	52
Total	29	67

Foreign language strategy in 1997 curriculum

- Conflict over status and role equity vs internationality?
- First foreign language
- Second foreign language
- “The curriculum aims to develop like native like proficiency in English”. (p, 147)
- 7-5 hours per week
- Math and Science taught in first foreign language

Quality of Public Schools

Drop-out rates 2004 highest in North, Bekaa and South (LAES, 2007)

Level	Drop out Rate
Elementary	0.5%-3.4%
Intermediate	4%-5%
<i>Grade 9</i>	27%

Class Repetition rates, 2004 (CERD, 2004)

Level	Rate
Elementary	24%
Intermediate	41%

Quality?

- 74% brevet (grade 9) success rate in private compared to 55% in public schools;
- Second Language Baccalaureate Exams Results: 8/20 (CERD, 2013).

Strategies for dealing with foreign language facing Syrian refugees

- Teachers translating Math and Science textbooks
- Compromising with the Ministry (official exams)
- Other Arab certificates (Syrian, Libyan, Syrian coalition curriculum)

Strategies for dealing with foreign language facing Syrian refugees

Segmented approach

- Focused on learning key terms
- English accompanied with Arabic translations

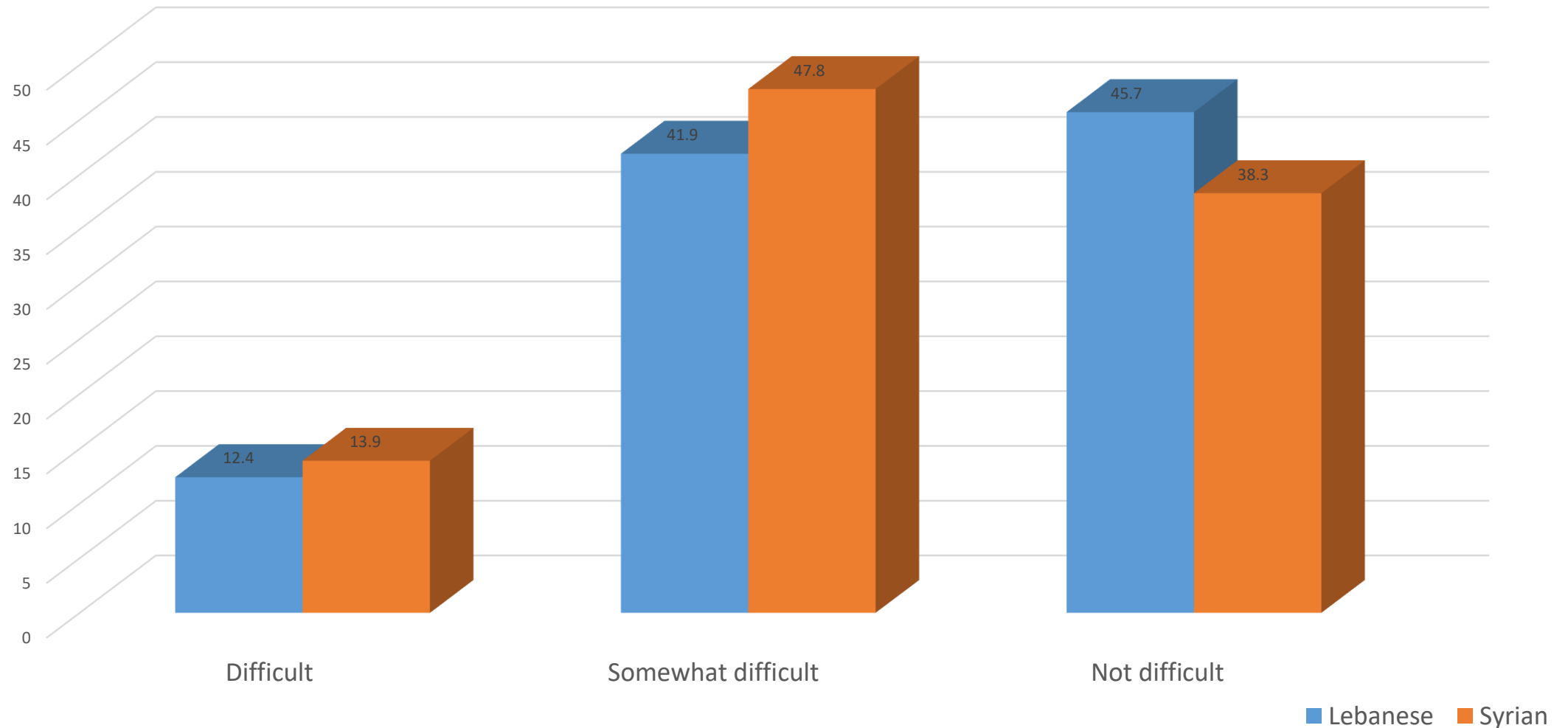
Holistic approach

Learning through games, drama, etc.

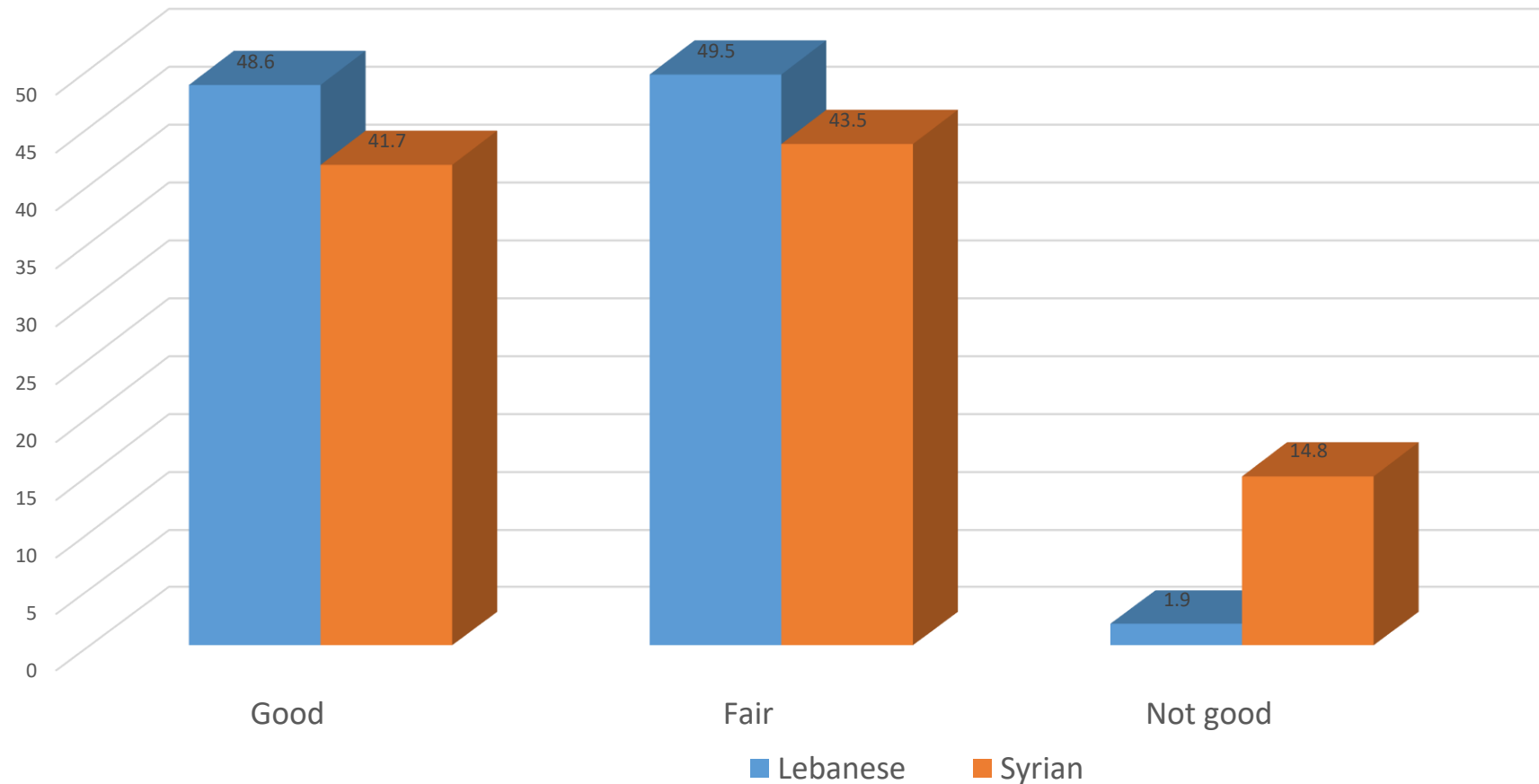
Language barrier pushing children to go to non-formal and non-accredited schools and dropping out.

“This child who is repeating his class, because of lack of English, is unfair because in other subjects they are doing well.”

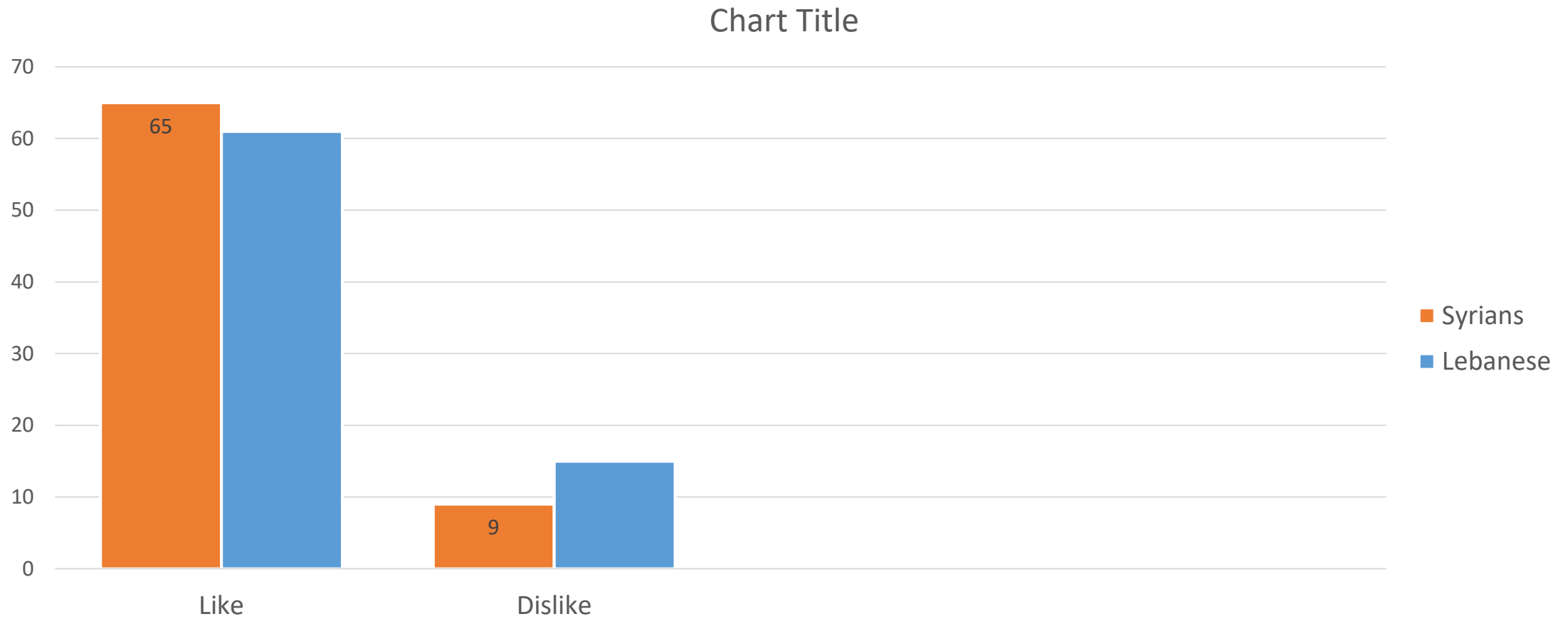
Lebanese and Syrian student's perception on the difficulty of learning foreign language



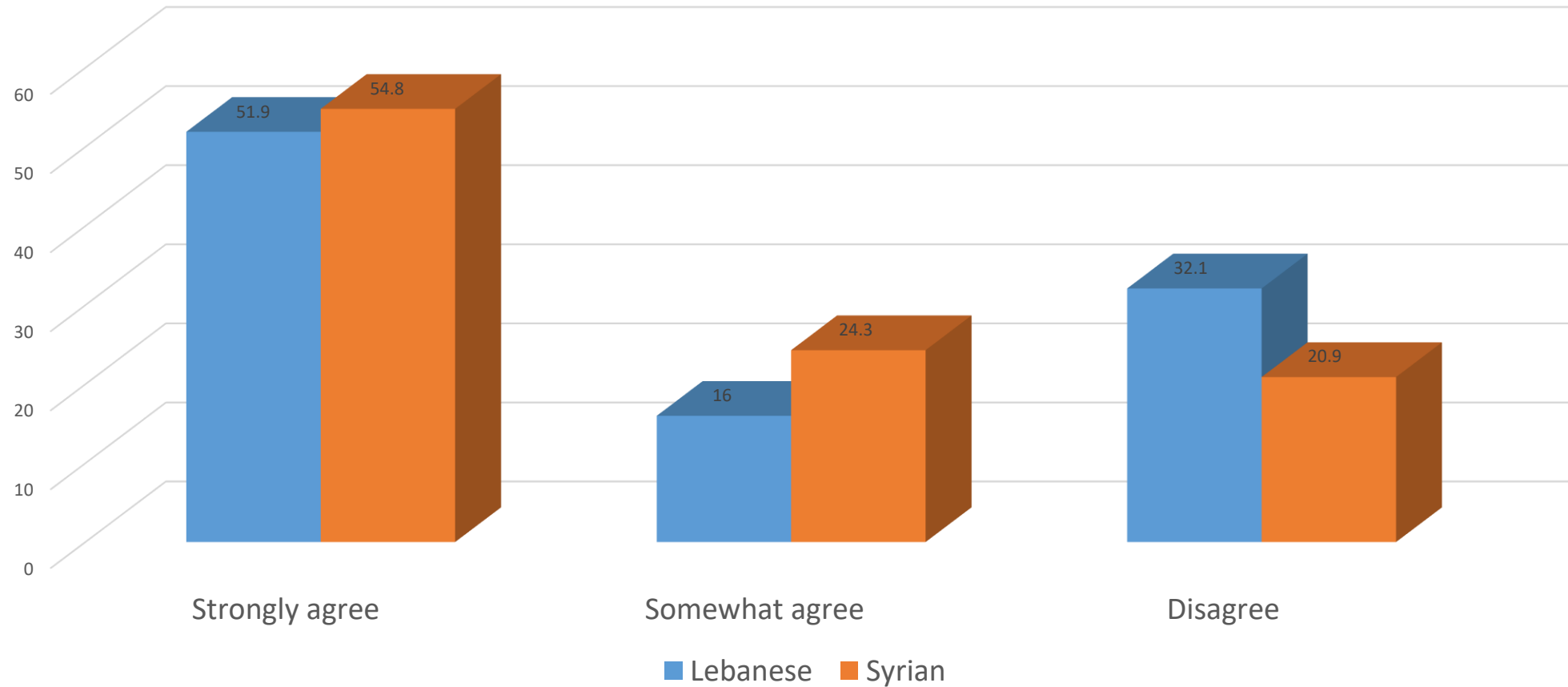
Perception of their grades in foreign language classes



I like learning a foreign language



Would have passed more easily if math and science were taught in Arabic



Challenges reported by Lebanese and Syrian children

- Limited use outside classroom
- Limited support at home
- Struggle with homework
- Written mainly
- Struggle to understand exam question

Final thoughts: Status of foreign language

- Macro/policy: Status of foreign language
 - Lebanon's a cosmopolitan country
 - Decolonizing language and the curriculum (STEM)
 - Foreign or second?
 - Assessment
- Micro:
 - TEFL pedagogies
 - Textbooks

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