

Critical Literacy in ELT in Pakistan: Contradictory or Complementary

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Abstract

The paper intends to look into the prescribed English language syllabus for the secondary level in Pakistan. It explores to what extent the English syllabus a) serves the needs of the intended citizenship and b) meets the international standards set for the socially well-equipped students. The English language syllabus is required to contain the basic concepts of democratic and political ideals to help and prepare informed citizens for the promotion of democracy and creating a culture of political tolerance. There is plethora of literature available about the purpose of education and literacy. The most important purpose of education is the preparation of the citizens with high adaptive values. For the achievement of these ideal values, the focus of the paper is to find out whether or not any ideal efforts such as policymaking, teacher training, and proper curriculum development as proposed by Apple and Beans (1999) are made in Pakistan. As the number of students at secondary level is very high and relevant sampling from such a large population is sure to be affected by extraneous

variables. The priorities of the government for education could only be observed through the syllabus intended for the institutions under its control. Madrassas and private institutions design and develop syllabus for their institutions independently. The Population for this study is the secondary school teacher. The reason for this delimitation is their direct involvement in the teaching of the English language to the secondary classes. The questionnaire for this study is based on the objectives and suggested topics set for English language curriculum by Sustainable Development Institution New York (cited by A.H.Nayyer 2008). The following five areas are reflected in the questionnaire: Firstly, the importance of some suggestive topics intended to be included in the syllabus of the secondary classes. Secondly, it takes into account the efficiency of the teachers and their knowledge about the suggested topics. Thirdly, the opportunities currently students are being provided with in the schools to learn about these topics. Fourthly, the method for the inclusion of these topics into the intended syllabus and lastly, the efficiency of the existing syllabus to cater to the student's democratic and civil knowledge based needs. The study has shown that the English language syllabus lacks the aim of the education to fulfill the needs of the socially informed citizens in Pakistan. This situation needs immediate revision of education policy and the existing curriculum.

Keywords: Critical Literacy, English language syllabus, Pakistan

1. Introduction

Education is a multilayered term. Education involves all the activities aimed at the well being of the individuals. Education brings literacy and literacy is the power to discriminate things with the power of decoding symbols and deciphering texts. According to educational philosopher John Dewey education is a social function (Dewey 1916). Education affects and is affected by the society. There is plethora of literature available about the purpose of education and literacy. The most important purpose of education is the preparation of the citizens with high adaptive value. So the education in a society, with democratic disposition, means preparation for citizenship. (Print 200, Sears 1996, Osborn 1997). For the achievement of this ideal efforts are required at three basic levels, School situation, teacher attitude and culture, policy and curriculum level (Apple and Beans 1999). Researches show that democratic citizenship education has not been successful in achieving this goal. (Friere 1999, Nayyar and Salim, 2004).

We know that curriculum is a broader statement of objectives and goals to be achieved through a set of organized activities. In present era curriculum of English as a second/ foreign language needs serious revisions. The reason is that English language is not only a tool for access to knowledge but a life skill. That is why the language curriculum is required to contain the basic concepts of democratic and political ideals to help, prepare informed citizens to promote democracy.

2. Pakistani context

Military mentality led the government to seek nation building through the glorification of war and military. This approach fostered hatred in the minds of the learners against minorities and neighbors. In this way, the use of force is idealized in the national curriculum of different

subjects. (Nayyar and Salim, 2008). These are the elements which breed undemocratic behaviors and the situation demands that such issues be discussed in English language curriculum.

Social issues that usually have influence on the democratization of the society are such as poverty, inequality, illiteracy, landlordism, authoritative governments, violence, religious intolerance and violation of basic human rights. (Reimers 2008). Possible standard of social and democratic issues and features of democracy and its popular features, basic rights of the citizens in democratic and autocratic governments, moral position of the autocratic rules and non governments, possible threats to democracy and the confidence of the citizens in governments about preserving of citizen rights could be the part of curriculum.

Political issues that possibly may find place in secondary level language curriculum may be knowledge of constitution, function of civil society, role and function of law, function of political parties and regularly held elections and free media. Smith and Lovate (2003) say that a selection of the ideals, skills, norms, and practices available within society may be represented in curriculum. This is true with reference to Pakistani curriculum.

Democracy in Pakistan is receiving serious blows from different sides. Society has got intolerant disposition. Monster of sectarianism and extremism has shaken its founding pillars. This is due to the slackness and negligence of curriculum and policy makers. (Nayyar and Salim, 2004)

Dean (2008) conducted an action research with the title of 'Preparing democratic citizens in Pakistani Schools'. This research is basically concerned with the difficulties that are usually faced by the teacher in the process of introducing new things in their classes. Findings of the research show that teachers are not free to teach and discuss social and political issues in their classes. Constraints are administrative, cultural and as well as curriculum based. Concern of the researcher has been the administration and appropriateness of action research in the teaching of the social and political issues. Problem related to the inappropriateness of the curriculum have not been addressed in full length.

He found that the curriculum was narrow and inappropriate and irrelevant to the students' lives. This is the state of curriculum of the subject of social studies. English language is a compulsory subject in Pakistan from class 1 to 12. So it is advisable to incorporate relevant material for the citizenship education in it to prepare well-informed citizens.

A report by Amedeo, Putra., Lehmann. R, Hsfeldt, v and Nikolova (2002) on civic knowledge engagement among upper secondary students in sixteen countries could be helpful in the preparation of the key concept about democratic citizenship education to be progressively introduced in English language curriculum

Public sector educational system is very important in achievement of the ideal of the modern, democratic and progressive Pakistan. To achieve this goal we need to inculcate the importance of this ideal in the minds of the learners. We also need to expose the learners to the high values of democracy, equality, responsibility, and love for peace, coexistence and justice. These identities and values of the learners are shaped with the help of national

curriculum and textbooks.

3. Statement of the Problem

Pakistan is having serious problem in the smooth running of transparent democratic political system. Temperament of the society has turned undemocratic. This is most of the time exhibited in sectarian violence and religious intolerance. In my proposition, failure of political system and its inefficiency to redress masses grievances is due to the lack of informed citizens. Our language curriculum is not helping to prepare politically aware and democratic citizens. That is why our language curriculum needs inclusion of certain topics related to democratic and political rights and responsibilities to achieve the ideals of preparing democratic citizens.

4. Delimitations

The syllabus intended for observation is that of the secondary classes. The aim of the researcher is find out shortcomings and inefficiencies of the syllabus to cater for the needs of the ever changing democratic world. As the number of enrollment of the student is higher and the priorities of the government for education could only be observed through the syllabus intended for the institutions under its control. The population of the study is the secondary school teachers. The reason for this delimitation is their direct involvement in the teaching of the English language to the secondary classes.

5. Procedure

A questionnaire has been developed. Opinion of the participants is sought on likert scale. Here in this Questionnaire, some areas have been focused. These areas are

- 1) Importance of some suggestive topics intended to be included in the syllabus of the secondary classes.
- 2) Efficiency of the teachers and their knowledge about these suggestive topics.
- 3) Opportunities currently students are provided with in the schools to learn about these topics,
- 4) The method for the inclusion of these topics into the intended syllabus.
- 5) Efficiency of the syllabus to cater for the students' democratic and civil knowledge based needs.

6. Data analysis

Collected data is of both qualitative and quantitative nature. The nature of the study is basically qualitative. So the qualitative data is analyzed qualitatively. But at the same time to augment the results of the study the data is also analyzed quantitatively. Quantitative analysis of the data is easy to interpret and to determine the severity of the issue.

6.1 Data interpretation

Efficiency of the existing syllabus for the provision of knowledge about the democratic and

social issues to the students

Table 1.

	Current syllabus helps in promotion of democratic rights	Q4 Helps in production of good citizens	Provides basic social and political knowledge
Strongly disagree	4	4	5
disagree	14	18	8
agree	7	4	3
Strongly agree	0	1	2
No response			
Total no of respondents	30		

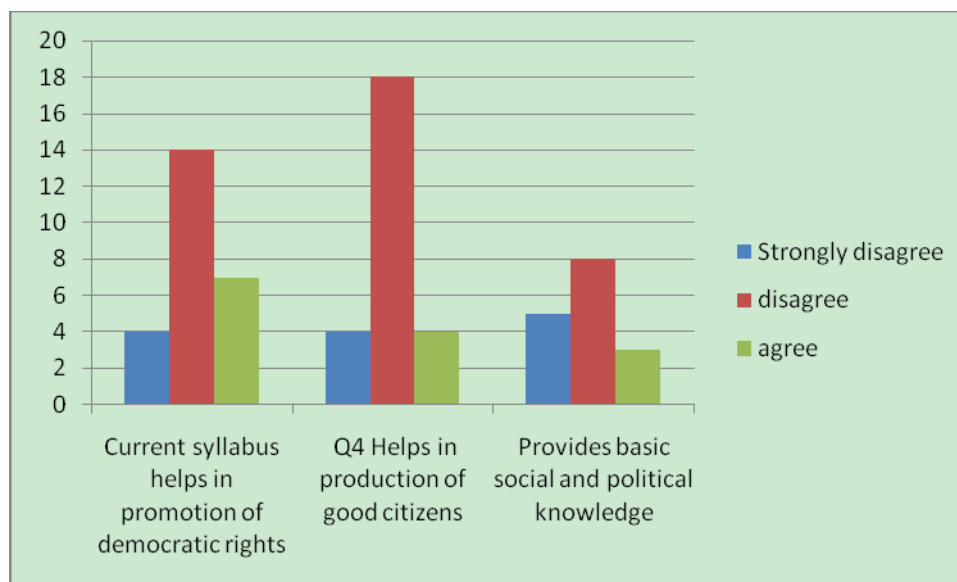


Figure 1.

From the graph it is evident that the inefficiency of the current English syllabus for providing to students knowledge about the real world issues is evident. Most of the respondents disagree with the notion that the current syllabus is promoting democratic tendencies among the students or the syllabus is providing the students with the basic social and political knowledge.

Table 2. Method for the teaching of social and political issues (civic knowledge)

	(Civic knowledge) Treated as a separate subject	Be integrated in humanities	Be integrated in English language syllabus
Strongly disagree	4		1
disagree	15	4	3
agree	7	12	8
Strongly agree	4	2	6
No response			

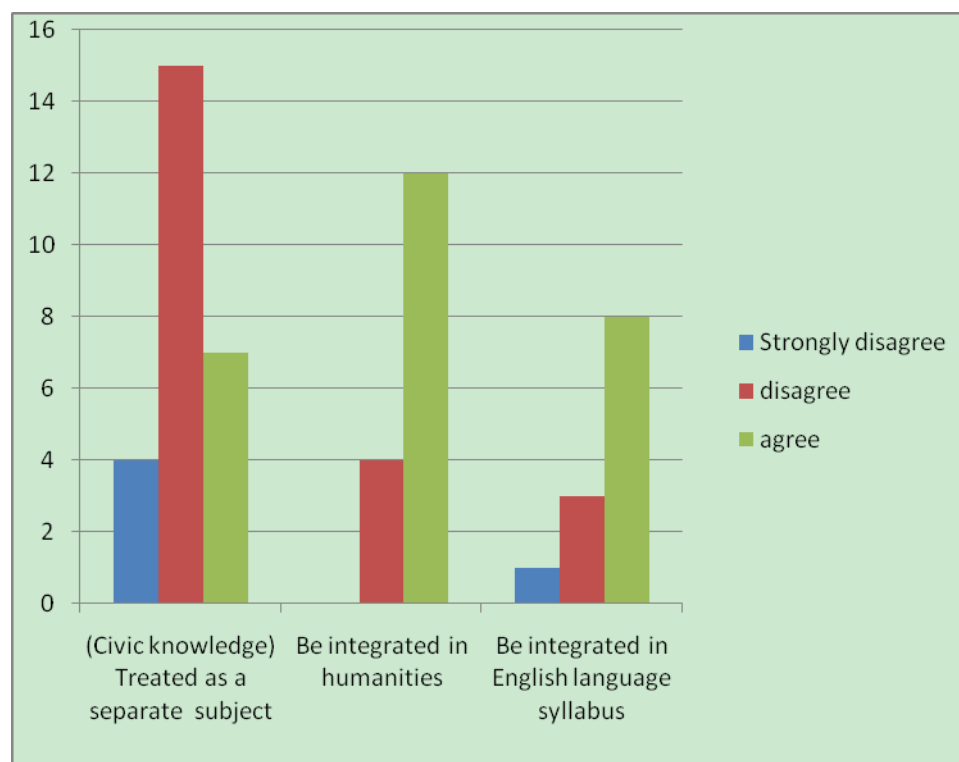


Figure 2.

This graph portrays the suggestions about the integration of the social and political issues in already existing syllabus. The most eminent feature of the graph is to show the appropriateness of the inclusion into the English language syllabus. The graph is showing the

aspirations of teachers about the method to be used to teach the students basic information about the social and political issues.

Table 2. Importance of the social and political knowledge in language curriculum

	Civic education is crucial for the social and political development of the students	Civic education is important for the democratization of the country
Strongly disagree		1
Disagree	2	1
Agree	10	18
Strongly agree	11	6
No response	30	0

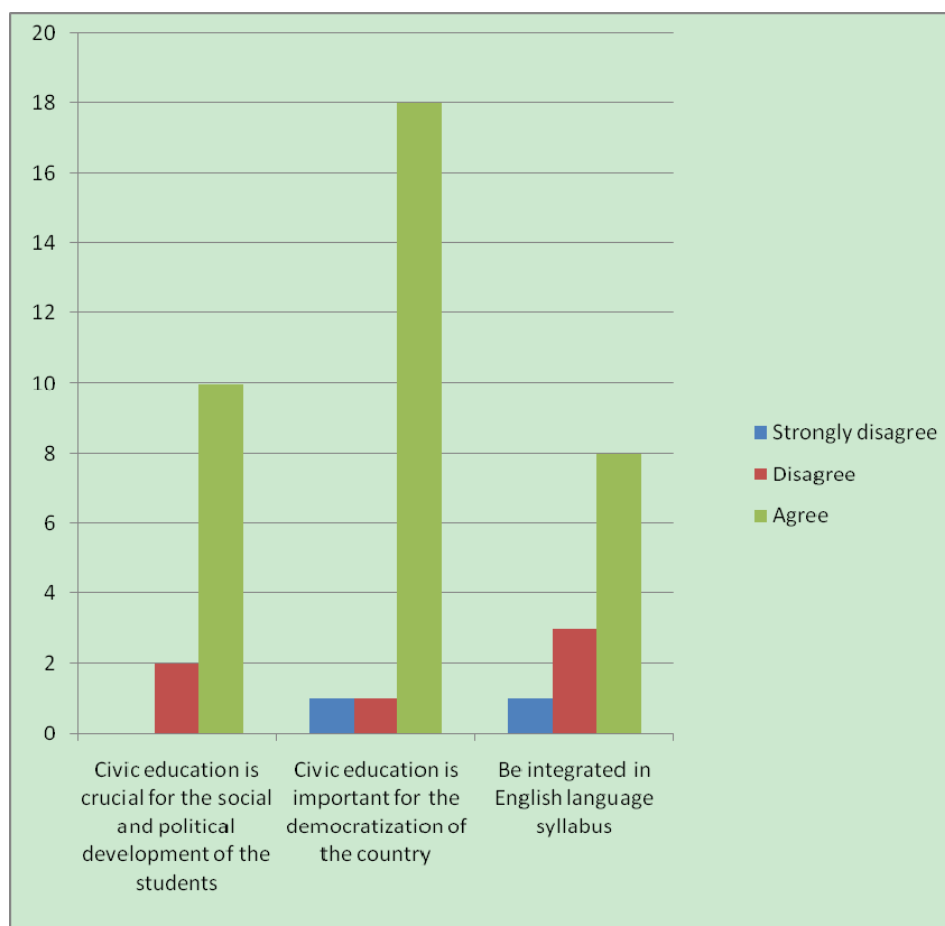


Figure 3.

This graph establishes the importance of the civic knowledge in our society and in the minds of the respondents. It is very evident from the data that most of the teachers in Pakistan consider democracy very important. They are also of the opinion that the teaching about the topics of social issues is very important for the development of democracy in Pakistan.

The graph also depicts the strong willingness of the people about the inclusion of the topics related to civic knowledge in English language curriculum. The question about the importance of the knowledge of civic education is responded very positively. These are the general trends towards the civic knowledge.

Table 3. Need for the inclusion of real social and political issues instead of imaginary stories and tales

	English language textbooks must contain actual social and political issues instead of the imaginary one	Students of secondary classes at school learn about political process such as election	Students have sufficient knowledge about their democratic rights
Strongly disagree	0	12	7
Disagree	2	15	13
Agree	6	2	6
Strongly agree	17	0	0
No response			

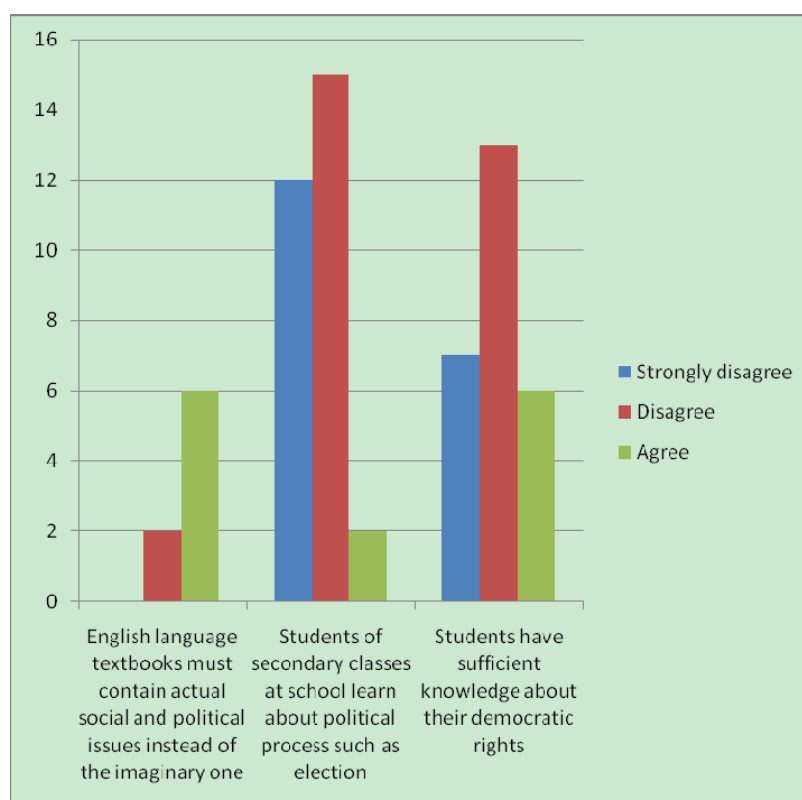


Figure 4.

Here in this graph, the data regarding the method for the teaching of topics related to social political and general interests has been represented. Most of the respondents agree that topics related to civic education should be integrated in English language curriculum.

While on the question of opportunities provided to students in school to learn about the political process was vehemently disagreed. The third question was about the awareness of the students regarding their democratic right. A majority agreed that the case is not so. Most of the respondents agree that schools are not providing student with such type of knowledge. In this way curriculum is promoting ignorance among the students about their democratic rights. This indirectly is promoting “Bradri”(casts) politics.

Topics

Table 5. Importance of social issues

	Citizen rights and obligations	Human and civil rights	Civic virtues	Equal opportunities for the men and women
Strongly disagree		0	0	1
Disagree	1	0	1	4
Agree	9	9	12	11
Strongly agree	19	21	17	13
No response	1	0	0	1



Figure 4.

This graph is the true representation of the most of the Pakistanis. Nearly all the respondent agreed that the topic about citizen’s right and obligation, human and civil rights and civic virtues are very important. This is the true picture about the importance and suitability of these topics for their inclusion in English language curriculum

Table 6. Importance of social issues

	National constitution/ political institution	Elections and electoral system	International problems and relations	Important events in national history
Strongly disagree	1	1	0	0
Disagree	0	3	6	0
Agree	11	15	15	13
Strongly agree	14	8	8	16
No response	4	3	1	1

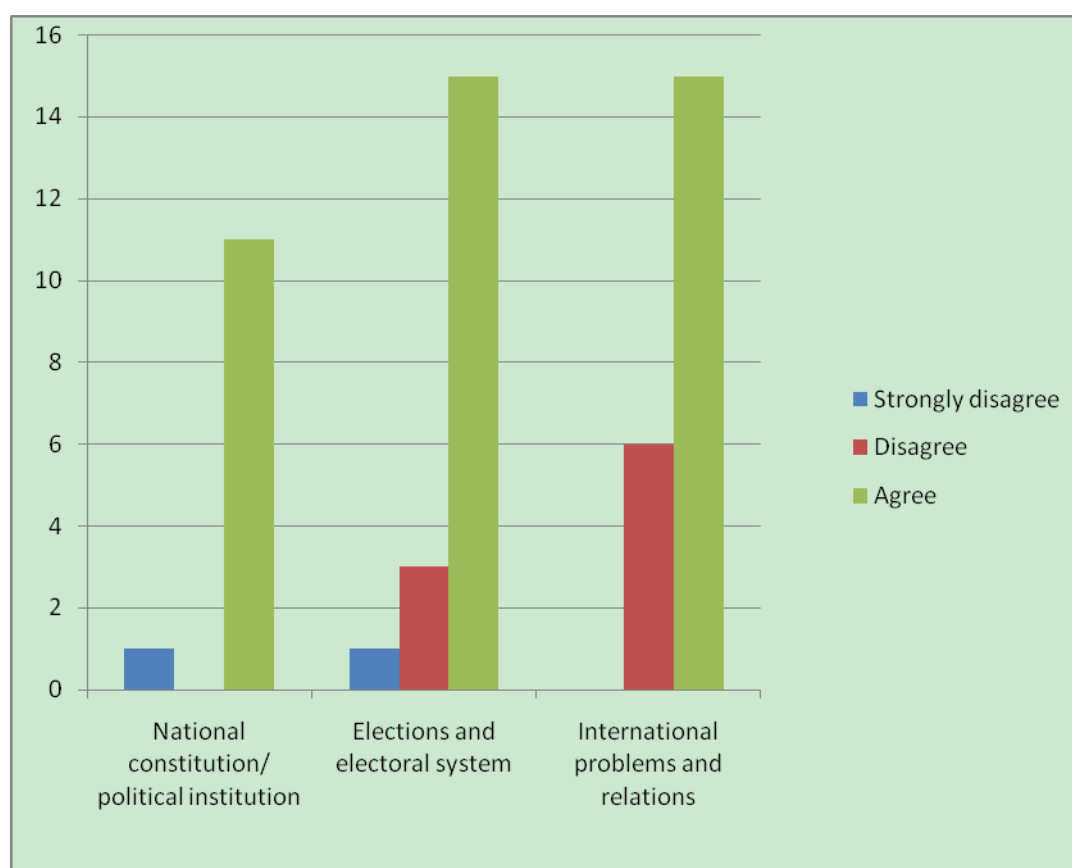


Figure 5.

As we usually come across that most of the people have the opinion that politics must not enter into the educational institutes. So a handsome number of the respondents have the opinion that topics of international problem and relations must not be included in the curriculum and especially in English language curriculum. A good majority of the respondents believe that students must be given the knowledge of the elections and the electoral system of the country. Same is the case with the information regarding national constitutions and other political institutions.

Table 7. Importance of general issues

	Economic issues	Environmental issues.
Strongly disagree	0	
Disagree	1	3
Agree	17	19
Strongly agree	10	7
No response	2	

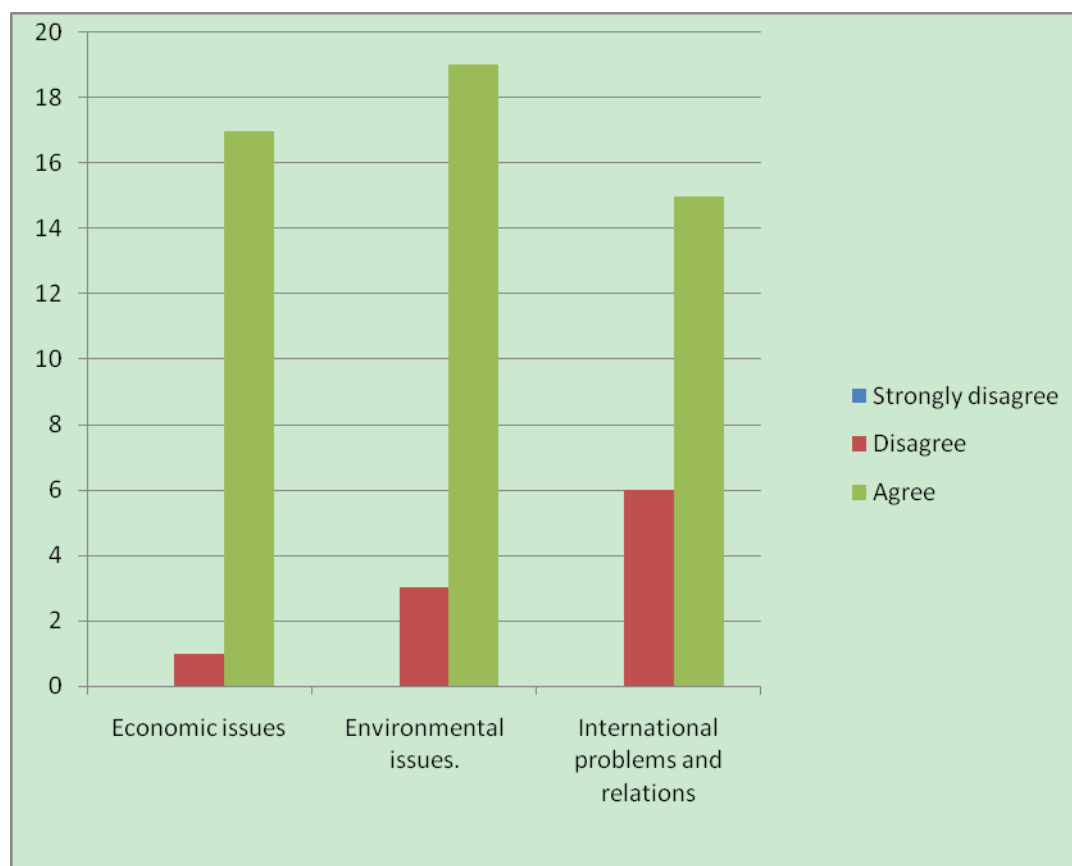


Figure 6.

Economics have become the fundamental reality of this globalized world. Pakistanis are not ignorant of this fact. This is evident from this graph. A huge majority favoured that such topics must be taught at school.

7. Conclusions

Analysis of the carefully collected data reveals that the students of the secondary classes in Pakistan are less informed about the political progress in their country. They are not provided with ample opportunities when they are at school, to learn about their roles and responsibilities in the society. Though, according to the universal franchise they are meant to cast their vote to decide the destiny of their country. They at this stage have no idea even

about what the election means. This sorry state of affair is a great hindrance to the achievement of the ideal of the democratic Pakistan. Inefficiency of the syllabus to inculcate the basic concepts of equality of the members of the society, basic concepts of democracy, mutual coexistence, knowledge of the basic social and economic issues and importance of the social knowledge have been instrumental in the rapid acceptance of the extremist and intolerant tendencies by the students. Our curriculum tries to provide the social knowledge to the students when they are at an early stage. On the other hand, when the students come of age to actively participate in social and political activities they are deprived from it. This situation needs immediate revision of education policy and the existing curriculum.

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