



RENAISSANCE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT AT
SECONDARY SCHOOL IN UZBEKISTAN

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The reciprocal relationship between language learning-teaching and testing has laid a remarkable influence of examinations on language education, namely the washback effect as it is referred to in the literature of language testing. There are many studies to explore how high-stakes exams affect language instruction. This paper presents the findings of a study which aimed at exploring the washback of the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) English examinations on English teaching and learning practice at secondary school in Uzbekistan. For this purpose, a qualitative research (employing interviews with English teachers, FGDs with students and classroom observations protocol) was conducted in one of the secondary schools in Uzbekistan (Karakalpakstan, Nukus). The results from data analysis indicate that the SSC English tests had strong negative washback on English teaching-learning practice at secondary school resulting from a lack of a congruence between the objectives of the curriculum and the format of the tests, teachers' lack of adequate understanding about the curriculum and present assessment system, respondents' negative attitudes towards the test, and pressure from the schools and the parents to ensure good grades in the final examination. Consequently, teachers and learners adopted such teaching and learning approaches which are highly examination-oriented. The study puts forward some suggestions on how positive washback could be generated. The findings of the study have implications for the decision makers, designers of curricula, assessment and testing, teachers, and teacher trainers involved in the Uzbekistan Educational System and elsewhere.

Testing is an integral part of every educational system. That is why evaluation is one of the necessary modules of each curriculum development program. Tests are originally designed to be at the service of learning and teaching (Davies 1990). However, tests have come to act beyond the original role they were given. With the advent of external tests, a reversal of roles has occurred in educational programs so as sometimes it is teaching which is at the service of testing.

Washback refers to the extent tests outmaneuver teaching (Hughes 1989, Shohamy & Ferman, 1996). A family of similar terms, with slight differences in shades of meaning, have emerged which all have in common a concern for the undesired or desired influences of tests on learning, teaching, and society. In general



education, the terms impact, curriculum alignment, and consequential validity are better known than the terms washback and backwash which are frequently used in language education (Hamp-Lyons 1997).

Language testing is an evaluation of measuring an individual's performance in that language. In many language classes, attitudes towards testing are highly negative. Recent studies (Jones et al., 1999; Smith, 1991) reveals the fact that tests have negative effects on learners and their learning. As an example, Yıldırım (2010) carried out a study to investigate whether 'The Foreign Language Examination' in Turkey exerts a positive or negative impact on test-takers and found that the exam had certain negative effects on students' foreign language competences. Teachers noted several negative effects of testing such as; narrowing of the curriculum, teaching to the test, lowering teacher morale, increasing student and teacher stress etc. The anticipation of a test is almost accompanied by feelings of anxiety and self-doubt along with a fervent hope that you will come out of it alive (Brown, 2004). Test anxiety, an apprehension towards academic evaluation, is a fear of failing in tests and an unpleasant experience held either by consciously or unconsciously by learners in various situations (Horwitz and Young, 1991). Researchers have found that high student anxiety can have detrimental effects on student performance (Everson, Smoldaka, & Tobias, 1994). MacIntyre and Gardner(1989) also found significant negative correlations between a specific measure of language anxiety (French class anxiety) and performance on a vocabulary learning task. Arguments about the direction of washback are an expression of debates between competing theories of learning.

Movement in a particular direction is an inherent part of the use of the washback metaphor to describe teaching–testing relationships. For example, Pearson (1988) stated that “public examinations influence the attitudes, behaviors, and motivation of teachers, learners and parents, and, because examinations often come at the end of a course, this influence is seen working in a backward direction—hence the term ‘washback’ (p. 98). However, like Davies (1985), Pearson believed that the direction in which washback actually works must be forward. The nature of a test can have an immediate impact on the participants' expectations and attitudes toward their teaching and learning tasks. These expectations and attitudes, in turn, can influence what participants do in the course of their work (process), such as practicing the types of things that will appear on the test, affecting learning outcomes. As can be seen, washback is a very complex notion. It can refer to the effect of an examination in the classroom, but also in the school, in the educational system and also in the society. Besides, this effect does not always take place directly but it is mediated by a number of factors, like the teachers' perception of the test, the status of the test as well as that of the subject – matter tested, the macro – context where the examination is used, the purpose of learning the language in the context, among others.

According to Alderson and Wall (1993), washback refers to the effect that tests have on teaching and learning. Although it is a widely held notion that washback exists, we should not consider it an automatic effect of any test or examination



(Spratt, 2005). Hence, studies suggest that each test or exam (especially high-stake ones) demands a tailor-made study on boarding multiple stakeholders (such as teachers and students) to detect its washback effect (Cheng, Andrews & Yu, 2011; Fulcher & Davidson, 2007; Spratt, 2005). Besides, there is a lack of sufficient evidence to confirm its existence and especially the nature of its effect in the context of the current study. The author would like to investigate the washback effect in assessing English Language tests to provide some context that will make it easier to understand the washback problem either for teachers or students.

Test-related aspects may have an impact at different levels: society, language courses, people's attitudes or course materials. The current research examines and uncovers if there is a washback effect in assessing the tests among teachers and secondary school students, as well as this work gives the answers to the following problems, such as the consequences of not having the awareness of the curriculum studies among secondary school teachers. Therefore, there was a need to study the cause of the problem based on teachers' and learners' attitudes towards the assessment of tests.

Concluding the research on the washback of assessment on English teaching-learning practices at secondary school in Nukus, Karakalpakstan (Uzbekistan) requires a robust ethical framework that ensures the well-being of participants, respects their rights, and maintains the integrity of the research process. The following ethical framework outlines key principles and guidelines for conducting this research:

1. Respect for Autonomy:

Obtain informed consent from all participants, including teachers, students, and school administrators. Explain the research purpose, methods, potential risks, and benefits clearly. Allow participants to make informed decisions about their involvement and ensure they understand their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

2. Beneficence and Non-Maleficence:

Design the research with the intention of contributing positively to English teaching-learning practices. Ensure that the research aims to improve education and minimize harm. Consider potential risks, such as emotional discomfort or privacy concerns, and take steps to mitigate these risks.

3. Privacy and Confidentiality:

Assure participants that their identities and personal information will be kept confidential. Use pseudonyms or codes to protect their anonymity. Store collected data securely and limit access to authorized researchers.

4. Cultural Sensitivity:

Respect and consider the cultural norms, values, and sensitivities of participants in Uzbekistan. Adapt research methods and questions to align with the local context.

5. Voluntary Participation:

Ensure that participation in the research is voluntary and free from any form of coercion or pressure. Participants should feel comfortable declining or withdrawing without consequences.



6. Transparency and Integrity:

Clearly explain the research objectives, methods, and procedures to participants. Provide accurate and transparent information about the research process. Report findings honestly and avoid misrepresenting or exaggerating results.

7. Collaboration and Collaboration:

Collaborate with participants and stakeholders in an open and respectful manner. Value their insights and experiences in shaping the research design and interpreting findings. Maintain ongoing communication with participants and address any concerns or questions they may have.

8. Ethical Approval:

Seek ethical approval from an Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Ethics Committee before conducting the research. Adhere to their guidelines and recommendations.

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