

Examining the Influence of the Iranian School-Leaving Test of English (ISLTE) on the Teachers' Perceptions and Performances

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Abstract

This study examined both the actual and anticipated washback effect of the Iranian School-leaving tests of English (ISLTE) on teachers' perceptions and performances with a view to improving our understanding of the washback phenomenon through new empirical evidence, which is much needed for in-depth understanding of this issue. The main research purpose was to explore the nature and the scope of washback on the teachers in Iranian context. In order to achieve the purposes of the study various methodological techniques were applied in order to collect valid and reliable data. These instruments were mainly composed of male high school teachers' interviews (N=10) as well as class observations (N=10). Analysis of the data indicated that the ISLTE had strong negative washback on aspects of teaching: Evidence of negative washback was observed regarding the existence of differences between the teachers' teaching and communicative activities, that is, negative washback was reflected in teachers' translation of materials, rather than making meaning or repetitive tasks of the lessons rather than communicative activities. The study also explored the role that

contextual factors (e.g., materials, educational systems) and beliefs might play in mediating washback. The immediate implication of this study concerns the need to use a new test which addresses the communicative features of the language. Due to the huge impact of the test on teaching in the classroom; there must be a serious reviewing of the ISLTE in order to reach communicative way of teaching.

Keywords: ISLTE, High-Stake Test, Stakeholders

1. Introduction

Traditionally, tests come at the end of the teaching and learning process. However, with the advent of high-stakes public examinations nowadays, the direction seems to be reversed. Testing usually comes first before the teaching and learning process. Pearson (1988) points out that examinations are commonly used as levers for change. It, also, seems that in a typical English class in high schools in Iran, teachers manage their sequence of presenting their teaching materials based on what is included in the test. They also prefer to examine prior the tests in advance to assure themselves that their teaching materials cover all or most of the test items.

It is commonly believed that washback phenomenon is especially prevalent in Iran, a country which has a long history of test-driven teaching and learning. The Iranian English School Leaving Test (ISLTE) is extremely important for both students and teachers since it is a prerequisite to entering university. According to Jahangard (2007), teachers in Iran are pressured into shaping their teaching practices based on the demands of nationwide exams (also Hosseini, 2007). It is widely asserted that most high school students in Iran complain that their language skills are poor. However, they rarely complain about knowing grammatical points. Students are also obliged to memorize lists of vocabulary and grammatical rules. This is because, it is claimed, in Iranian high schools a lot of attention is paid to memorizing vocabulary, learning grammatical rules, and translating texts, while oral activities are completely ignored. In fact, in Iranian schools as it is generally practiced, there is no time spent on speaking, writing, and listening. Most activities seem to revolve around using cognitive skills rather than communicative ones. This is against current language pedagogy moving from an approach that focuses on language as formal structure to one that emphasizes language as communication and the potential for learning and acquisition through communicative language use over the world (Bachman, 1995). However, although many Iranian language researchers and educators assume that the ISLTE has a negative impact on English teaching in high schools in Iran, there is hardly any empirical evidence on the existence or on the nature of the influence. The study is going to take into account not only what teachers report about the effect of the examination on their classroom practices but also what their teaching looks like in reality. Also, Washback is a highly complex phenomenon. The influence has been observed on various aspects of teaching and learning (Bailey, 1996; Cheng, 1997; Watanabe, 1996). Because of this complexity literature suggested triangulation for investigating washback.

2. Theoretical & Research Background

2.1 The Concept of Washback

The impact that tests have on teaching and learning is often referred to as washback or backwash in the field of applied linguistics (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Bailey, 1996; McNamara, 2000). There is no distinction in meaning between washback and backwash (Alderson, 2004).

2.2 Pioneer Study of Washback

The first empirical research on washback was conducted by Alderson and Wall (1993). They conducted a two-year investigation of the effects of the implementation of the revised O-Level English examination in Sri Lanka on teaching methodology. The revision of the examination was made to reinforce the innovations in textbooks and teacher training, which were intended to promote communicative English language teaching with its emphasis on practical speaking, reading and writing skills, while discouraging traditional teacher-dominant, grammar focused lessons. The observations of English lessons in 14 secondary schools before and after the implementation of the revised examination revealed that language learning activities and the design of classroom tests were influenced by the new textbooks or tests. However, Alderson and Wall (1993) found that there was basically no difference in the way the teachers taught over the two years of the study as the English lessons remained teacher-centred with little chance for the students to use English in a practical way. They concluded that the positive and desired washback effects were much more limited than expected. Following Alderson and Wall's (1993) study, a number of evidence-based washback studies investigated various types of tests in various countries in the world (Burrows, 2004; Wall, 2000).

2.3 Positive and Negative Washback

I will present some outstanding views toward positive and negative washback in both language and general education.

2.3.1 Positive Washback

In the early 1990, some researchers made general statements about test impact. They simply stated that if it is a good examination, it will have a positive effect on teaching and learning; if bad, then it will have a damaging effect. However, later researchers found out that test design was only one of the components (Wall, 2000). Other components were mentioned by Wall and Alderson (1993) as teacher ability, teacher understanding of the test and the approach it was based on, classroom conditions, and lack of resources. Wall and Alderson (1993) also suggested that test can be powerful determiners, both positively and negatively, of what happens in the classroom (Wall and Alderson, 1993).

2.3.2 Negative Washback

The negative side of washback was first stated by Vernon (1956). He claimed that teachers inclined to ignore activities that did not contribute directly to passing the exam (Wall, 2005). However, Vernon does not provide evidence for his claim.

According to Wall and Alderson (1993) negative washback is the undesirable effect of tests on teaching and learning. The tests may fail to reflect the course objectives. Teachers and learners may wind up teaching and learning toward tests, regardless of whether or not they understood its aims. They simply stated that if it is a good examination, it will have a positive effect on teaching and learning; if bad, then it will have a damaging effect. Washback effects of tests on language teachers' practice and students' learning seem to have been inconsistent or unpredictable (Andrews, 2004; Hayes & Read, 2004). Researchers in the applied linguistic

field such as Andrews (2004) and Watanabe (1996) have claimed, as did Fullan (2001) in the field of education, that washback is an extremely complex phenomenon. *2.4. Model of washback* The traditional model of washback emerged in the early 1990s prior to the study by Alderson and Wall (1993). It was characterized in the trichotomy model proposed by Hughes (2003). In his unpublished paper cited by Bailey (1996), and Cheng and Curtis (2004), Hughes (2003) made a distinction between participants, process, and products. Also, Alderson and Wall (1993) focused more on micro aspects of teaching and learning. They proposed a set of 15 washback hypotheses based on the findings of their Sri Lankan study and the limited literature available in the field of applied linguistics at that time. The hypotheses were as follows:

- (1) A test will influence teaching.
- (2) A test will influence learning.
- (3) A test will influence what teachers teach; and
- (4) A test will influence how teachers teach.
- (5) A test will influence what learners learn; and
- (6) A test will influence how learners learn.
- (7) A test will influence the rate and sequence of teaching; and
- (8) A test will influence the rate and sequence of learning.
- (9) A test will influence the degree and depth of teaching; and
- (10) A test will influence the degree and depth of learning.
- (11) A test will influence attitudes to the content, method, etc. of teaching and learning.
- (12) Tests that have important consequences will have washback; and conversely
- (13) Tests that do not have important consequences will have no washback.
- (14) Tests will have washback on all learners and teachers.
- (15) Tests will have washback on some learners and some teachers, but not for others.

2.4 How the Literature Review Informs My Study

To clarify the concepts of washback and to establish boundaries for investigation, Alderson and Wall (1993) stated 15 washback hypotheses which have been highly influential. These hypotheses illustrate some of the effects that tests might have on teaching and learning. They argued that test developers should specify the types of impact that they wished to promote and the kinds of effect test evaluators should look for when deciding whether the desired washback has occurred (Wall, 2005).

The factors which are influenced are: teaching, learning, content, rate, sequence, degree, depth, attitudes and also the number of teachers and learners affected by a test. I will use the following eight hypotheses as my guide. Five of these hypotheses directly concern learning:

1. A test will influence teaching;
3. A test will influence what teachers teach;
4. A test will influence how teachers teach;
7. A test will influence the rate and sequence of teaching;
9. A test will influence the degree and depth of teaching;

The following three, however, refer to both teaching and learning:

11. A test will influence attitudes to the content, method, etc. of teaching and learning;
14. Tests will have washback on all learners and teachers;
15. Tests will have washback effects for some learners and some teachers, but not for others.

3. Method

In order to carry out this research, approval was obtained from four schools in two different parts of Sari, Iran. Participants were ten teachers of Iranian from four secondary schools (all state schools) agreed to participate in the study. The schools were single sex boys' schools. All of the teachers were male. The number of years teaching English of the participating teachers varied from 7 years to 30 years, with an average of 18.5 years.

This study was a mixed method research and made use of triangulation. According to Mackey and Gass (2005), the use of multiple independent methods of data collection for a single study enables researchers to examine the issue under study more accurately. Thus, in order to evaluate teachers' attitudes and performances deeply, the current research drew on (a) classroom observation and (b) interview.

3.1 Data Collection Instruments and Procedure

In order to accomplish the purpose of the research, the data collection instruments included direct observation and semi-structured interviews with students. I believed that these instruments would provide a better understanding of the participants' actions and the reasons behind them than other instruments such as a questionnaires would. The below table shows which research question each instrument is supposed to answer.

3.2 Procedure of Data Collection

The transcripts were read thoroughly so that the researcher could become familiar with the data and identify patterns and key themes which might emerge. The statements in the transcripts were coded directly, and then coded into categories according to the nature of the responses. The categories were organized. And, in order to validate the results of the analysis, three experts coded manually almost the same. Any differences between the coders were discussed and resolved.

3.3 Data Analysis

I had two sets of data to analyze: interviews and observation. First, after transcribing the data,

I drew up tables in which I included information about the characteristics of the data. Then, I entered the frequency of a category every time it occurred. Finally, the length of time for each category was measured. And, the mean for each category was calculated and ranked according to the mean score.

4. Results

The results are discussed with regard to the language skills, teachers' strategies, class activities, and materials. As mentioned before, to answer Research Question 1, the teachers were asked what activities they did to make students ready for ISLTE. It is worth mentioning here that, this section only concerns the frequency of the data.

4.1 Results from Interview

4.1.1 Reading

It is interesting to refer to the fact that, among all the teachers 50% of them reported that they paraphrased in English sentence by sentence by giving the students some synonyms and antonyms word by word first in English then in Persian and finally gave the students the Persian equivalents.

Table 1. Frequency of different reading activities

Skills	Activities	Teachers' ID	Frequency
Reading	Have the student read the text at home	1,4,8	3
	Asking some questions before the actual reading (pre-reading)	1,5,6	3
	Ask Students to read aloud	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10	10
	Paraphrase the text sentence by sentence	1,3,5,7,8	5
	Translation into mother tongue	1,2,3,,4,5,6,7,8,9,10	10
	Asking comprehension questions	1	1

4.1.2 Speaking: With respect to Speaking, 50% of the teacher reported that they have modeling and the students will mimic the model

"I simply have the students repeat after me after each drill, in a way that I get the students to mimic the model I give."

Table 2. Frequency of different speaking activities

Skills	Activities	Teachers' ID	Frequency
Speaking	Modeling(have the students repeat the speaking section after the teacher)	1,4,5,6,8	5
	Teach speaking by answering oral drills(Speaking)	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10	10

As you can see in Table 2, all the ten teachers (N=10) answer oral drills included in the book reportedly. It is interesting to report the fact that, all the teachers activities, either the ones who would have modeling or not, evolve around repeating the sentences.

4.1.3 Grammar

With regard to grammar, all the teachers (N=10) reported that they taught grammar through explanations of the rules in Persian. Actually they followed the deductive way of presenting grammar for the student:

"First, I teach the grammar by explanations in Persian then I use lots of example to make them understand. In fact, our major focus is teaching them exactly the rules".

Only two of the teachers (N=2) reported that they had warm up by asking some questions related to the new grammar.

"I usually have some preview, I mean; I ask some questions related to the new lessons from some brilliant students."

Table 3. Frequency of different grammar activities

Sub skills and other components	Activities	Teachers' ID	Frequency
Grammar	Warm up	1,6	1,6
	Explanation of grammar rules in	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10	10

	Persian and then use examples		
	Practice the rules with some final sample tests	1,3,5,7	4

4.1.4 Vocabulary

In the case of vocabulary, all the teachers (N=10) reported that they teach vocabulary by translating into mother tongue.

“I render the new words into mother tongue.”

In the same vein, seven tenth of the teachers reported that they use synonyms and antonyms to teach vocabulary.

“I sometimes write some synonyms and antonyms which are really helpful.”

However, one teacher (N=4) claimed that he often explains in English for smart students and have them look the new words up in dictionary. Also, another teacher (N=6) claimed he teaches in context by examples. He believed contextualization is one of the best ways to make students understand.

“I often use examples to teach new words, you know, I think it s one of the best ways to make students understand the meaning of the new words that they may use in the context in future in appropriate situations.”

Table 4. Frequency of different vocabulary activities

Sub skills and other components	Activities	Teachers' ID	Frequency
vocabulary	Synonyms and antonyms	1,2,6,7,8,9,10	7
	Explanation in English for smart student and have them to look the new words up in dictionary	4	1
	Exemplifications	6	1
	Translation in mother tongue for non-smart student	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10	10

4.1.5 Spelling: In the case of spelling, only 30% of the teachers (N=3) reported that they teach the rules on and off

"I sometimes say the spelling rules by some examples where I meet them in the lesson"

But almost all the teachers (N=7) claimed that they teach spelling through giving students several tests and quizzes.

"I try to use lots of tests and quizzes to make the students ready for ISLTE."

Table 5. Frequency of different spelling activities

Sub skills and other components	Activities	Teachers' ID	Frequency
spelling	Teach spelling by giving students several test and quizzes	2,3,4,5,6,7,8	7
	Teach the rules	1,6,8	3

4.1.6 Cloze test: In the case of cloze test, the teachers asserted that they don't have the actual cloze test which they believe is as the same as reading. However some of them (N=6) brought some sample test to the classes to make the students familiar with the format of it.

"I don't have actual teaching of cloze test but sometimes I bring some sample test in to the classes but in well order fashion".

R: How?

T: I start bringing from simple texts to complicated ones."

Table 6. Frequency of different cloze test activities

Sub skills and other components	Activities	Teachers' ID	Frequency
Cloze test	Give some pre-design test	1,3,4,5,6,7	6

4.1.7 Pronunciation: In the case of pronunciation, all the teachers (N=10) claimed that they solely got the students to repeat after each word to help them get the right pronunciation

"R: How do you teach pronunciation?"

T: I try to pronounce in a correct way and try to b a good model that students learn how to pronounce correctly.

R: How?

T: I read aloud and have the students repeat after me."

Table 7. Frequency of different pronunciation activities

Sub skills and other components	Activities	Teachers' ID	Frequency
Pronunciation	Modeling(have students repeat after the teacher)	1,2,3,4,5,7,6,8,9,10	10

To put in a nutshell, teaching Grammar deductively through explanation in Persian, translation into mother tongue and having the students repeat after each word or sentence for teaching speaking and pronunciation were among those strategies frequently employed by the respondents.

According to teachers' reports, the teachers' teaching strategies were highly based on non-communicative activities. The statistical data in the table below demonstrate the teachers' extensive use of non-communicative activities (e.g. translation, repetition). As the table illustrates, the frequency of non-communicative activities were extremely more than the communicative ones.

Table 8. Frequency of communicative and non-communicative activities

Types of activities	Frequency	Percentage
Non-communicative	98	90.74
Communicative	9	9.26

4.2 Results from Observations

As with any similar study one may ask how much perception of the teachers manifested in actuality. Considering all of the information reported by the teachers about teaching and teaching activities, I employed observation to explore whether what respondents had stated about their activities would be observable in their actions.

4.2.1. Skills based on Observations

One of the main factors to be considered was how much attention teachers paid to each skill area and how they do in classes. At first, the researcher brought all the activities and their frequencies for the main skills have been taught in the classroom, then it will be discussed in details further. In reading, there is a consensus among all ten teachers who followed grammar-translation way of teaching. From the preceding data, it is shown that teachers spent

more time on translation, reading aloud and paraphrasing most of the time. It is shown that teachers spent more or whole time on answering oral drills. But as it can be seen from the table, some teachers (ID=3, 5, 6, 9) did some communicative activities like role play, ask for elicitation and asking some questions before the actual speaking. The teachers claimed that at first they usually had the students repeat after them for each speaking section and then answer language function section which is alike pronunciation, and what the researcher saw him:

“Rarely did the teachers ask the students to listen to them and repeat, that is almost all teachers referred to as modeling in interview, they just asked the students answer the speaking question.

Table 9. Frequency of Reading activities

Skills	Activities	Frequency	Teachers' ID
Reading	Have the student read the text at home	3	1,4,8
	Asking some questions before the actual reading (pre-reading)	3	1,5,6
	Ask Students to read aloud	4	1,2,7,10
	Using visual clues	1	2
	Guess the meaning	1	1
	Paraphrase the text sentence by sentence	3	1,7,8
	Translation into mother tongue	10	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10
	Using audio aids(C.D)	1	1
	Asking comprehension questions	5	1,2,3,7,10
	Refers the Ss to past exams	1	7

As it has been discussed in previous section (question one), some teacher (N=3) claimed that they had pre-reading by asking some related question to the topic and when I observed their classes:

“They started asking from very general questions to specific ones and sometimes they asked

questions about the students real life to get them engaged which usually took 5 to 10 minutes”.

Some teachers (N=5) claimed that they paraphrase the sentences in reading for the students and I saw:

“They had some students to read the paragraph and then they gave some synonyms and antonyms where they felt it s necessary and then they got the students to translate the sentences and it continued to the end.”

Only in one case, there was a contradiction between what the teachers said and what they did when just one teacher (N=1) asked some comprehension questions at the end of reading.

Table 10. Frequency of speaking activities

Skills	Activities	Frequency	Teachers’ ID
Speaking	Modeling(have the students repeat the speaking section after the teacher)	2	3,6
	Asking some warm up question	1	3,6
	Role play	2	5,9
	Asking for elicitation	1	3,6
	Teach speaking by answering oral drills	10	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10

To summarize this part, there were some evidences that revealed the way teachers presented the lessons and got students to practice may appropriate for the exam; however, it might have been in contrast with the aims of textbook (negative washback).

4.2.2. Sub Skills and Other Components

4.2.2.1 Vocabulary: The observation demonstrated that the main activity done by the teachers included giving Persian equivalents of (F=10) the new words that were present in the end of each unit and teaching by synonyms and antonyms (F=9).

Table 11. Method for vocabulary and their mean rank

Method for vocabulary	Mean rank
Giving Persian equivalents	1
Synonym and antonym	2
Teaching by examples	3
Defining the words in English	4
Using audio aids	5
Teaching the vocabulary in the text	6
Have the students to look the new words up in dictionary	7
Use sample test	8
The use of vocabularies in students' self-made sentences	not taught
Teaching vocabulary in the context	not taught

Note: 1= most time spent, 8 least time spent

The table above shows that teaching vocabulary by giving Persian equivalents and using by synonyms and antonyms have higher mean and use of the vocabularies in students' self-made sentences and using vocabulary in context have lowest rank in comparison with other vocabulary teaching methods.

4.2.2.2 Grammar

In terms of grammar, in all of the classes, the teachers were presented the grammar deductively, that is they provided the students with explanations of the grammatical rules in L1, and then the students were expected to practice the grammatical exercises from the past papers or the textbook. Other types of methods were used by some teachers. For instance, some teachers (N=3) starts teaching by asking some real life related questions. Other teachers often draw students' attention to some grammatical points about last year/s or previous lessons while teaching reading.

Table 12. Method for vocabulary and their mean rank

Method	Mean rank
Explanation of grammatical rules in L1	1
Practice the rules with some final sample tests	2
using of new structures in students' self-made sentences	3
Teach grammar in reading or new words	4
Warm up	5
Teaching the structures with different examples	not taught
Giving handout	not given

4.2.2.3 Pronunciation

In terms of pronunciation, repetition of the correct forms of the words and teaching the differences were the sole methods. Teaching pronunciation, they had the students look at their books and repeat the correct forms of the words as the majority of the teachers (N=10) asserted in interview sessions.

4.3 *The media of Teaching*

One of the other factors to consider is the language the teacher used during class session. some of them chose English media just a little amount of time in the classroom, some other chose English and Persian as half as the other , and few of them chose English as their sole media.

Table 13. The media of teaching

Media of language	Amount of time dedicated	Teachers Id
English	A little	3,7,8,10
	More than the half the class	1,5,6,8,9
	None	2,4
Persian	A little	1,3,5,8,9
	More than the half the class	2,4,7,10
	None	6
English and Persian both	Intermingle	1,3,5,7,8,9,10

As it can be inferred from the tables that teachers provide students with the language they felt they needed in classroom interaction. As it can be seen from the above table, the half of the teachers chose English as their main media of instruction; meanwhile the other half chose Persian in classroom interaction which was independent from choosing their method of teaching.

As Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) mentioned teachers are “merely part of a huge test preparation industry fuelled by students' anxiety to succeed” and the teachers in this study are under surveillance of the students’ success. As it can be seen from the above table teachers might well find ways to make closer connections between test preparation and their preferred media. All teachers seem willing to go along with the demands of the exam (if only they knew what they were).

4.4 The Reasons behind the Teachers' Activities

The researcher also asked about the reasons for each activity the teachers said they did. In the following sections, I will discuss the reasons with respect to each activity.

4.4.1 Reading

In the case of reading, most of the teachers reported that this skill has been considered as the most important and time consuming skill. Apart from non-test factor, there are some test factors which need to be paid attention. Some teachers (N=1) said that it is students needs for the test that push us to teach this way and also the number of reading items which the ISLTE includes. The number of items in exam and test necessity had a large impact in their works, as almost all the teachers (N=10) reasoned so.

According to what were explained by the participants, this couldn't be inferred that many of them put the blame onto the test.

Table 14. The reasons behind the teachers' activities for reading

Skill	Reasons	Teacher s' ID	Sources of effect	
			Test factor	Non-test
Reading	Teachers' views of heterogeneous educational level of the students	1,2,4,6,8		5
	Test necessity	2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9	8	
	Educational system necessity	6		1
	Students educational background	1,2,4,6,8		5
	Teachers' feeling as a best method	8,9		2
	Material needs	2,3,4,5,6,9		6
	Students needs	1	1	
	Weighting of the test	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10	10	

4.4.2 Speaking

In the case of speaking, most of the teachers reported that this skill was almost ignored by them. According to the teachers, the book seemed to be having a fairly strong influence on teaching and learning of oral skills. Because the book does not have focused on the speaking section as well as on reading, grammar and vocabulary.

In addition, another teacher justifies their works by relating to Social factor and lack of the time. He said we don't have enough time to work the things include in the book let alone the speaking which is not included in the book. Some other, also, related their works to the lack of facility. They said the schools don't have audio video facility. Therefore they can't work speaking in case they really want to put some times on it.

Only two teachers asserted that *"we don't teach because there is no item dedicated to Speaking section, so what is the use of it?"*

These two teachers found speaking useless when it is not going to be questioned in the final exam. Therefore, through the preceding analysis, it is shown that material has a large effect on speaking. The oral skills are completely ignored by teachers.

Table 15. The reasons behind the teachers' activities for speaking

Skill	Reasons	Teacher s' ID	Sources of effect	
			Test factor	Non-test
Speaking	Material necessity	1,6,7,9		4
	System needs	1,3,4		3
	Social factors	10		1
	Teachers command in English	1		1
	Test necessity			
	Lack of the time	1,4 10	2 1	
	Lack of educational facility	4		1

4.4.3 Vocabulary

Teachers believed that if the students have a command on vocabularies and grammar, the students might answer all the test sections much more easily. This is probably why all the teachers translated the vocabularies and gives lots of synonyms and antonyms in the classroom. The teachers reasoning revealed that the number of items was another motivation which determined the amount of time spent on language skills. In the case of vocabulary they believed that most of the test items were devoted to vocabulary. However, some teacher couldn't explain why as they(N=3) said I feel that it is a good method and there is no reason except the matter of experience and when we did , the majority of the students got acceptable results in ISLTE. Consequently, it must be a acceptable method as well. So, their feeling and sense of a good method made them keep going.

Table 16. The reasons behind the teachers' activities for vocabulary

Sub Skill	Reasons	Teacher s' ID	Sources of effect	
			Test factor	Non-test
Vocabulary	Test needs	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10	10	
	Students future test needs	1,3	2	
	Teacher sense of a good method	2,4,5,7,9		5

4.4.4 Grammar

In terms of grammar, the teachers also believed that the numbers of items were relatively more than other language skills. In another words, it was test's necessity to teach this way. And then they didn't make lots of time on grammar comparing with reading and vocabularies. Fairly similar to vocabularies, the teachers sensed that it was a good method and there was no reason except their long year of experience. They attributed the students' success in ISLTE and their high marks to these ways of teaching grammar. Consequently, it must be a acceptable method as well. So, their feeling and sense of a good method made them believe in these activities.

Table 17. The reasons behind the teachers' activities for grammar

Sub Skill	Reasons	Teacher s' ID	Sources of effect	
			Test factor	Non-test
Grammar	Test necessity	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10	10	
	Students future exams	1,4,6,9	4	
	Weighting of the test	5,7,9	3	
	Teacher sense of a good method	2,4,3,6,9		5

In other words, the clearest impact was on the amount of attention that teachers paid to vocabulary and grammar as opposed to speaking, listening, writing, pronunciation and other components of language.

4.4.5 Pronunciation

In the case of pronunciation, another reason that must not be ignored is the weighting of the test. As all the teachers (N=10) asserted that this section did not emphasize in ISLTE. So, they clearly stated that the pronunciation was merely limited to the exercises of their school book. To quote the teachers:

R: How much time of your class is spent on pronunciation?

T3: Hardly ever. It is limited to the exercises of our school book. You know, in the exams, the pronunciation questions just have one point overall.

The teachers who gave this declaration further explained that they did not put much emphasis on pronunciation activities in the classroom due to the fact that less than 5% of the test was dedicated to pronunciation. In another words, the teachers reported that their teaching activities were influenced by the weighting of the test due to the fact that the section on pronunciation was not asked in ISLTE. In fact, most of the teachers stated that students had many problems in learning pronunciation; however, teachers did not work on pronunciation scientifically.

“Although the majority of high school students have problem on pronunciation section, we can’t do such scientifically and based on special methodological framework, we simply have the students repeat after me.”

The second factor to be considered is the future needs of the students. Some of the teachers declared that it the future of their students and their needs that guide our teaching.

“We don’t teach based on our interest or the way we like rather based on the students future needs. Because next year they will have university entrance exams, in that exam, pronunciation doesn’t have any items.”

The next factor that should be highlighted related to the test methods. Owing to the fact that the test is in written form, it was not essential for him to practice oral activities in class.

Table 18. The reasons behind the teachers' activities for pronunciation

Sub Skill	Reasons	Teacher s' ID	Sources of effect	
			Test factor	Non-test
Pronunciation	Weighting of the test	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10	10	
	Students future test needs	1,2,8,9,10	5	
	Test necessity	3	1	

4.4.6 Cloze Test

Regarding to cloze test, there was a consensus among the entire teacher in that all ten teachers attributed their works to deficiency of the material. As there was no part relate to

cloze test.

4.5 Summary of the Results

The findings regarding the first research question which was 'What activities do the teachers report doing in order to prepare students for the ISLTE?' demonstrated that the teachers predominantly teach the language through Grammar-Translation method mostly. Thus, as it is clear from the teachers' reports, the majority of the teachers asserted they had to apply such a traditional way of teaching. It also revealed that translation was perceived as the best strategy for teaching reading as well as other language components. To facilitate the process of gaining better faster and to the point, as one of the teacher asserted, the teachers first employ translation as a safe route to make students understand.

Concerning the second research question which was 'What activities are done in high school classes in order for the students to prepare for the ISLTE?', revealed that: it ought to be their responsibility to prepare their students well for the examination. If they have not done enough to familiarize their students with the test formats, they would feel guilty.

Also, repetition of the correct forms of the words and teaching the differences were the sole methods in teaching pronunciation. The teachers spent more time on reading than on other language components. Certainly in the classes, there was less student questioning, less time spent in student-student interaction and student-teacher interaction but the effect is not the same in degree or in kind from teacher to teacher.

Concerning the third research question which was: "What reasons do the teachers report about their teaching activities?" demonstrated that: that most of the teachers' time was allocated to reading followed by vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, spelling and speaking. Most of teachers' teaching activities revolved around practicing reading, and then on vocabularies and grammar whereas the amount of time spent on oral activities were negligible.

All in all, in vocabulary, teachers related more than 70% of the reasons to test factor and less than 30% to non-test factor. In addition, 77% of the reasons in grammar were attributed to non-test factor and less than 23% were related to test factor. In case of spelling, only 18% of reasons were test factor and more than 82% were test factor and surprisingly, all reasons for doing activities in pronunciation and cloze test were attributed to test factor. In another words, it is the test which push the teachers teach the way they teach. Finally, School administrative and organization staff, teachers and students will all work hard to achieve better scores on the test.

5. Coclusions

The current research uncovered the nature of washback effects of ISLTE When the washback effects identified among teachers. This was endorsed by teachers who reported that ISLTE was not helping them know exactly what to teach how to teach. The findings were in line with those reported by Alderson and Wall (1993), and Cheng (1997, 1998), that high stakes tests often altered what teachers taught. Based on these findings, it could be concluded that as

predicted, ISLTE had negative washback in teaching.

Thus, it can be argued that understanding beliefs is the key to predicting the nature of washback. ISLTE influenced by external factors such as material, educational system and family background. These indirect influences of contextual factors on washback make the washback of ISLTE more complicated, but it can be argued that the patterns identified could indicate pathways to washback and make it more predictable.

5.1 Implications

The first implication for language teachers from the present study is that language teachers should employ the teaching methods to promote the strategies that led to a greater emphasis on communication, not primarily on test-taking. Also, an understanding of the belief systems and contextual factors of participants made the effects more apparent; In this case, a close collaboration between the language curriculum developers and testing authorities is very important which will help ensure the incorporation of communicative skills into the curriculum and the standardized (national) examinations.

5.2 Limitations

In order to establish generalisability, it would be useful to have a larger sample size, especially of teachers. Also, the gender played a role in mediating washback may suggest that it would be worthwhile to have female participants to identify its role more accurately. Additionally, this study is limited in that I had no opportunity to carry out any follow-up interviews with teachers. Therefore, another limitation related to this study was lack of time which resulted in withdrawing the effort.

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