

Effects of Washback on High School Teachers of English

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Abstract: *‘Washback can be defined as the influence of testing on teaching and learning’ (Bailey, 1996: p 259). The present study inspects the effects of “Secondary School Certificate Exam” (SSC) on English teachers in Tehsil Faiz Ganj Pakistan. This study aims to discover the effects of test on High school teachers of English. The target population was teachers teaching English classes at the high schools in Tehsil Faiz Ganj. A 16 scale items questionnaire was used data collection. The questionnaire aimed at exploring how the SSC exams affected English teachers’ methods selection in four domains: activity/ time arrangement, teaching methods, materials teachers use in the class rooms and content teachers teach. The results of the study revealed that the SSC exam has affected English teachers method selection. The findings also indicated that Grammar Translation Method GTM is used by the teachers who teach English in their classes.*

Key Words: Washback, SSC, Grammar Translation Method (GTM), English Teachers

Introduction

A language test is an instrument for measuring language ability. Tests allow teachers to get a second opinion about their students’ progress. Wash back refers to the test influence on learning and teaching in Applied Linguistics. Wall & Alderson 1993, Cheng 2001) are of the opinion that tests are assumed to influence teaching and learning practices in classroom. The influence in fact is known as wash back in applied linguistics while in education it is referred as backwash. Studies conducted on wash back indicated that wash back is not as simple a phenomenon as it appears and its nature becomes more complex particularly when interpreted in terms of learning and teaching (Cheng, Watanabe & Curtis, 2004). So the use of the test has a power either to increase or decrease teaching and learning practices.

Shohamy (1992, cited by Dr Mamuna Ghani 2012) concluded that the test results are vital for individual and the program as many important decisions regarding individual and program, are made on the basis of the results obtained. However, Wall & Alderson (1993) and Cheng (2001) also indicated that the tests are powerful enough to affect teaching-learning process.

SSC in Sindh is considered very significant for students as well as for teachers. It is important for students because good grades in the intermediate exams can open the gates of professional

colleges and Universities (e.g., Medical, Engineering, Information Technology Institutes etc) for them. In similar way, English teachers use the teaching methods that can assist their students score good grades. It is a fact that in Pakistan, students and teachers focus on examination and ignore the real teaching and learning. There is only one thing which is important of all and that is examination. It seems through the different findings that the SSC is examination centered not learning centered.

It is high time to modify the outdated SSC exam system which is rather grammar focused. The question papers consist questions from plays and prose text, paraphrasing the poetry, writing of essay while another portion is allocated to grammar. The main drawback of the current SSC examination system is that it gives birth to rote learners who lack practical communication skills in the real life.

There is a considerable number of students who fail in \English in the Board, University exams and other competitive exams later on. Even some high grade achiever in English in these examinations cannot produce a single grammatically correct sentence nor can they write a single unified text. Regarding proficiency in English, the Federal Public Service Commission of Pakistan's (FPSC) has shown its concerns that many candidates face difficulties in presenting the relevant material, and even the essentials of writing an essay. Only two per cent of successful candidates obtained more than 60 per cent marks in the English essay part of the exam in the last few years. (Express Tribune 21 May 2015) This surprising rate is a big question on the efficacy of the existing educational and testing systems.

Moreover, the SSC examination tests grammar and vocabulary of the students. Almost all the questions in the test paper are designed in such a way that they only assess the grammatical competence of the students. So the speaking and listening find no place in these tests therefore it is safe to believe that communicative students at the high school level in Sindh are very rare.

The present study examines that in what way a test affects teachers of English and their teaching method selection, content and material adaptation in English class. The current exploration, however, investigates the effect, if any, of wash back on teachers of English in Tehsil Faiz Ganj as well as, on their teaching methodology. In Khairpur, Examinations are administered under the supervision of "Board of Intermediate & Secondary Education" (BISE) Sukkur, Sindh. There no denying the fact that a cut throat competition exists among the students because each student anticipates a score big grade so as he/she can get admission in a reputed College institutes and Universities in Pakistan. Therefore teachers teach students learn to cram to succeed on exam and secure higher grades. So the rationale of current paper is to pin point the causes and consequences of failure of students in the subject of English in Faiz Ganj Sindh.

Statement of Problem

One of the supposed causes for poor quality in our region is that our teachers pay a lot of heed to examination. Mwanzia & Miano (2007) argue that schools ignore aspects of learning that are specified yet not tested in the curriculum. Some schools possibly may teach the syllabus selectively. The topics which are not likely to appear in the test are not taught. The present study aims at identifying the teachers' assumptions regarding washback effects on their teaching.

Review of Literature

The concept of washback, Messick (1989), terms consequential validity. Being a part of consequential validity Messick (1996, p 241) states that:

Washback refers to the extent to which the introduction and use of a test influences language teachers and learners to do things that they would otherwise do that promote or inhibit language learning.

Mary S (2005) in her research shows that the teachers play decisive role in determining types and intensity of washback, and how much a teacher can therefore become agents for the promotion of positive washback. She further reviews the empirical studies on washback from external exams and tests that were carried out in English language teaching. It aims to do so from a teacher so as to provide teachers point of view with a pure notion of the roles they can play and the decisions they can make regarding washback.

The results of Ana, Marta (2010) research presented positive washback in some of the areas examined. The implications for the classroom are that continuous guidance and backing over time are indispensable in order to support teachers use the system properly and therefore create positive washback.

Alderson and Wall (1993) find the notion of washback to be too simplistic. They suggest that the quality of the washback (positive or negative) may be independent of the quality of the test. They also recommend looking at whether teachers and learners prepare for exams and if so how and why and at whether the test has important consequences within the given context. Their recommendations actually constitute a useful set of guidelines for evaluating the systematic validity of assessment instruments.

Harold (1983) suggests that well-structured tests of English can help students in at least two ways. Firstly such tests can help create positive attitude towards a teacher's class. The teachers, across the globe, aim at providing positive classroom experiences for their students in the interest of motivation and efficient instruction. A second way that English tests can benefit students when they are helped to master the language. They are helped when they study for exams.

Popham (1987) draws the traditional notion of measurement-driven instruction to explain the connection between instruction and assessment: assessment directs teachers' attention to the content of test items, acting as powerful 'curricular magnets'. Whatever that was taught, can be tested, measured, can be administered to all, and re-administered as needed to those who cannot pass.

Cheng (1997) analyses the empirical studies of washback from external exams and tests that have been carried out in English language teaching. It aims to do so from the teacher view point so as to provide teachers with a flawless idea of the roles they can play and the decisions they can make concerning washback.

Cheng (1999) says that during the past 15 to 20 years, the Hong Kong Examinations Authority HEA has made regular efforts so that positive washback can be brought about on teaching-learning through bringing changes in major public examinations.

Methodology

Wash back researchers suggest qualitative inquiry to examine wash back effect of a given test (Cheng 2004). This study is quantitative in nature. The quantitative approach was adopted due to the following reasons. Firstly, it seems easy to determine the extent, to a maximum, to which an affect can take place. Secondly, most of the teachers refused to be interviewed. In addition, the teachers also did not allow observation. There are ten Government High schools in Tehsil Faiz Ganj. The teachers who participated in the study was 50. The questionnaire provided the sample consisted of 16 items. English teachers who participated in the study comprised of equal number of male and female who teach at Secondary level in Tehsil Faiz Ganj, Sindh. The questionnaire was distributed among the participants to collect the data.

Data Analysis

Teachers were provided questionnaire in order to get the results about their teaching influenced by effects of Wash back. As mentioned earlier, questionnaire is divided into four domains: activity and time management, teaching methods, material selection, and last content selection. The result of first domain showed strong effect (3.58) teachers would change their teaching methodology if HSSC were cancelled. Secondly, strong effect of (4.13) of teaching Grammar Translation Method.

Secondly, the domain of teaching method revealed a strong effect of (4.42) teaching only those skills likely to be tested on the HSSC and ignoring the rest. Thirdly, the result of material selection indicated with the effect of (4.42) suggested that English teachers consider solving previous papers as one of the key techniques for the success of their students. Last but not least, the findings of the content selection with the strong effect of (3.85) revealed that teachers teach to come up with the objectives of HSSC. Therefore; English teachers teach certain chapters

which meet HSSC objectives. Through the analysis of these domains it seems that the actual teaching is influenced and affected.

Discussion

The research findings indicate that most of the respondents felt that SSC exam has affected their selection of teaching methods because the SSC exam in Tehsil Faiz Ganj is considered very significant for students' future career and also because teachers of English are taken as the only resource in English at High School level. Therefore English teachers are responsible to meet the objectives of SSC exam in Tehsil Faiz Ganj.

Teacher informed that the time allocated in the classroom was short for teaching the items expected to be completed in the high school course books. . Where as on the most important factor reported by English teachers was students focused interest only to learn what they can write in the final examination. The results also showed that the English teachers teach according to the objectives of the exam. Teachers were of the opinion if they had enough time they would be able to implement modern techniques and methods to improve and increase students' communicative skills. These findings are analogous to studies conducted by Khursheed (2012), Read (1999), Chen (2002), Manjarrres (2005). Time for English teachers, they pointed out was very important because it didn't provide ample chance to teachers for selecting teaching methods. In addition to that the teachers of English in Tehsil Faiz Ganj in particular and the teachers of English in Sindh province in general lack necessary training into their profession. The study also indicates that English teachers in Khairpur till today use outdated method of teaching English which is based on reading and writing skills only. It may be due to the fact that SSC exam does not test speaking and listening. Teachers conveyed that they use outdated methods so that they can help their students achieve higher grades on SSC exam as said by Wall & Alderson (1993, cited by Khursheed 2012) that teachers would use whatever methodology they felt most convenient to help them to prepare their students for the examination.

The findings reveal that teachers of English laid emphasis on enhancing students reading and writing skills overlooking speaking and listening skills. Reason for this has already been reported that SSC doesn't test listening and speaking skills. Andrews (1994) & Hawkey (2006), cited by Khursheed 2012) maintained that high stakes examination directed teachers to use different teaching methods in order to involve students in certain exam tasks.

Teachers of English recommend their students revise and practice previous SSC exam papers of Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Sukkur. This recommendation has reason behind because every few years same questions are repeated which makes the students' task easy but it in fact affects deep learning badly. The research findings of the present study fall in harmony with some of the hypotheses presented by Khursheed (2012) and Alderson & Wall (1993) as follows:

- 1) A test will influence teaching.
- 2) A test will influence what teachers teach.
- 3) Tests that will have important consequences will have Wash back.
- 4) Tests will have wash back on teachers and students.

Conclusion

Keeping in view the above discussion, it is concluded that English teachers in Tehsil Faiz Ganj Sindh teach only those items in their classes which are to be tested on exam. Moreover, the Grammar Translation Method is used in the classes. Students are directed to revise previous papers of SSC exams and cram or memorize the frequently repeated questions. So learning falls nowhere. The findings of the present studies revealed that there is only rote learning. Broadly speaking, such prevalent practice increases grades; but on the other hand it destroys learning. Therefore Washback has a role to play in test validation but one has to assess all the aspects it embodies.

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Questionnaire**Effects of Washback on High School Teachers of English**

Name _____ Designation _____

Name of the Institution _____

Please tick one of the options below each inquiry.

1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Neither Agree nor Disagree 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree

What are the effects of the Higher Secondary School Certificate test on my teaching?

1. I feel motivated by the HSSC to employ activities that may improve my students' test taking skills.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I feel time allotment in class would be different if the HSSC were postponed.					
3. I spend more time teaching grammar other than communication skills because I think grammar is more likely to be tested on HSSC	1	2	3	4	5
4. I teach test-taking strategies, especially as the HSSC testing dates come closer	1	2	3	4	5
5. I select my teaching methods in a way that help my students to succeed on the HSSC	1	2	3	4	5
6. I select teaching methods that tend to help improve students' skills, which are more likely to be tested on HSSC	1	2	3	4	5
7. I ignore certain methods that are unlikely to prepare my students for exam.	1	2	3	4	5

8. My teaching has been affected by HSSC	1	2	3	4	5
9. I hardly choose my teaching methods that assist students succeed on the HSSC	1	2	3	4	5
10. I use additional materials other than the textbooks if these can assist my students succeed on HSSC	1	2	3	4	5
11. I provide students worksheets to review questions anticipated to be on HSSC	1	2	3	4	5
12. I provide my students previous HSSC papers in order to familiarize them.	1	2	3	4	5
13. My selection of additional materials is affected by the HSSC	1	2	3	4	5
14. I adapt the sequence of teaching objectives based on the HSSC	1	2	3	4	5
15. I include some relevant content and exclude irrelevant content to help my students do well on the HSSC	1	2	3	4	5

16. I complete every section in the text book although some sections are not likely to be tested on the HSSC	1	2	3	4	5