

Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of the Effect of Public Examinations on English Instruction at the Secondary Stage in Jordan

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Abstract: This study aimed at examining the teachers' and students' perceptions of the effect of public examinations on English instruction at the secondary stage in Jordan. Teachers of English and students were randomly chosen from Amman Second Educational Directorate. Survey questionnaires for teachers and students were utilized. Teachers were interviewed to discuss their perceptions and the effect of the national test on their instruction. The percentages and means were calculated for the questionnaires and the interviews were narrated. The findings of the five dimensions included in the teachers' questionnaire have shown a relatively high percentage for the effect of the national test on instruction. Simultaneously, the students' questionnaire has shown a similar result which is related to the effect of the test on the students' learning. Both teachers and students were affected by the content and the format of the national test. Most of the teaching and learning were oriented towards the national test with a clear abandonment of the listening and speaking skills. All in all, teachers should take into consideration the inclusion of all the stated objectives and utilize alternative assessment tools to reflect positive washback on the instruction of the four skills of the English language.

Keywords: English Examinations, Instruction, Perceptions.

حَدَّادِين، عهد وبدر الدويك وعوافف شعير (2008) مدى إدراك المعلمين والطلبة لأثر الامتحانات العامة على تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في المرحلة الثانوية في الأردن . المجلة الأردنية للعلوم التطبيقية : سلسلة العلوم الإنسانية 11 (2): 331-344.

المخلص: هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى بحث مدى إدراك معلمي وطلبة المرحلة الثانوية في الأردن لأثر الامتحانات العامة على توجيه عملية التدريس الصفّي لمهارات اللغة الإنجليزية. وقد شملت أفراد الدراسة على عينة عشوائية من معلمي ومعلمات اللغة الإنجليزية وطلبتهم في المرحلة الثانوية من مديرية التربية والتعليم لمنطقة عمان الثانية . تم استخدام استبيان على مقياس ليكرت للمعلمين وآخر للطلبة، وتم إجراء مقابلات مع معلمي المرحلة الثانوية لمناقشة مدى إدراكهم لأثر الامتحانات العامة على توجيه عملية التدريس الصفّي. وبعد حساب النسب والمتوسطات للاستبيانات والسرد الوصفي للمقابلات، كانت نتائج النسب لاستبانة المعلمين للمحاور الخمس لأثر الامتحانات العامة على توجيه عملية التدريس عالية نسبياً، وكذلك الحال بالنسبة لاستبانة الطلبة . فمحتوى وشكل الامتحان العام أثر على المعلمين والطلبة بحيث أنه وجه عملية التدريس نحو محتوى الامتحان مع إهمال مهارتي الاستماع والمحادثة لعدم إدراجهما في امتحان الثانوية العامة، وتوجه الطلبة أيضاً نحو تعلم مادة الامتحان فقط. وبناءً على ذلك، يوصى بأن تشمل الامتحانات العامة للغة الإنجليزية على المهارات الأربعة وربطها بالأهداف العامة، واستخدام وسائل تقييم بديلة لإظهار الأثر الإيجابي للامتحانات في توجيه عملية التدريس الصفّي.

Introduction

By the end of each stage, students are expected to have achieved the stated objectives in the English language curricula, which are listed under the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Any educational system, by any means, has to measure the outcomes of the teaching and learning processes. Therefore, the proper relationship between teaching and testing is

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surely that of partnership. Brindley[1] has pointed out that assessment should be integrated with instruction as there is a direct link between achievement targets, course objectives, and learning activities. Thus, the assessment process of students should be integrated with the teaching and learning processes.[2,3,4]

In view of that, the curriculum, which is driven by assessment, leads to what is called a washback effect.[5,6,7] The concept of 'washback' has appeared in the language teaching and testing literature to describe how tests are held to be powerful determiners of what happens in classrooms. Bachman[8] has defined 'washback' as the effect or the influence of assessment on the teaching and learning processes. Although Bachman (ibid.) has drawn attention to what is called positive washback that occurs when the assessment used reflects the skills and content taught in the classroom, he reported that many tests drive the curriculum to negative washback. Students look for prepared materials to help them understand the syllabus, and teachers attempt to summarize the syllabus in commercial books to guarantee the students a pass.[9] Moreover, teachers of English are in a way ensnared by the final public examinations, where they have to prepare their students for those tests at the end of each term.

Prodromou[10] has mentioned how "teachers are trapped in an examination preparation cycle and feel that the communicative and humanistic methodologies are luxuries they cannot afford" (p.14), despite the presence of the curricula guidelines, the stated objectives, the theories of language learning and the approaches to language teaching. In view of that, reading and writing skills in classrooms are given more weight than the other two skills, speaking and listening. (ibid.)

Examining the General Guidelines and Curricula for the Basic and Secondary Stages[11] in Jordan for teaching English as a foreign language shows that teachers have to emphasize the four language skills in their teaching. Dweik[12] has also pointed to the importance of teaching the four language skills as a means of developing students' intercultural communicative competence. Having another look at the General Secondary Certificate Examination (GSCE), reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar and writing are the only skills that are tested.

The GSCE is considered a high-stakes test, due to its significance, weight and impact on the students' future. For this reason, the GSCE has been chosen to investigate the teachers' and students' perceptions of the washback effect of public examinations on English instruction. Although the washback effect attracted the attention of researchers in America and Asia, this study to the researchers' knowledge is the first one in Jordan which deals with this particular issue. Hopefully, this study will fill a gap in the literature related to the influence of the washback effect on Jordanian learners of English.

Review of Literature

The term 'washback' has got numerous definitions,[5,7,8,10] ranging from simple and straightforward to very complex ones. Some took a narrow focus on teachers

and learners in classroom settings, while others included reference to tests' influence on educational systems and even on society in general.

Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt, and Ferman[13] defined washback as "the connections between testing and learning" (p.298). Buck[14] explained the concept as "a natural tendency for both teachers and students to tailor their classroom activities to the demands of the test, especially when the test is very important to students" (p.17).

Several different terms were used to refer to washback across disciplinary literatures, including measurement-driven instruction, curriculum alignment, and systemic validity. Outlining the traditional notion of measurement-driven instruction, Popham[15] addressed the relationship between instruction and assessment in which tests acted as powerful "curricular magnets" by directing teachers' attention to the content of test items. The research related to curriculum alignment and performance-based assessments was linked closely to the goals of instruction. The notion of 'systemic validity' referred to the integration of assessments into the educational system at all levels and to the need to demonstrate that the introduction of a new test could actually improve learning.[16]

The nature of 'washback' was divided into two categories, negative and positive. Teachers who tended to limit the curriculum and teach the students what was exactly tested referred to negative washback. Through this, teachers did not teach what was stated in the aims and goals of the curriculum itself. On the positive side, the examinations forced teachers to instill the curriculum with related content, thereby creating a chain of educational priorities. That is, if the skills correlated with the objectives of the curriculum then the washback of that exam is said to be positive.[17] Some researchers[7,8] believed that testing and particularly positive washback could bring about beneficial changes in language teaching through changing examinations.

Educators[18,19] generally emphasized the idea that teachers should assist students to focus their attention on learning rather than stressing surface learning which would lead to the failure of the learner. Thus, washback was assumed to have an effect on students, teachers and educational systems. It affected students directly by the experience of preparing for and taking the test and the feedback they received about their performance.

Public examinations usually contained what students had to learn and therefore what had to be taught. It had been noted that teachers would teach to a test; that is, if they knew the content and the format of the test, they would teach their students in view of that knowledge.[20,21] Smith[22] and Bailey[6] argued that in order to maximize test score for learners, teachers would be forced to deliberately focus on the limited content that the test covers. That in turn would result in throwing away the curricula and teaching to the test, thereby leading to less of a focus on education. Due to the great significance of general examinations, the main goal of most teachers shifted to preparing their students for those national examinations. On the negative side, teachers themselves complain of losing autonomy, teaching inappropriate material too fast and focusing on test preparation to the loss of other learning objectives.

Since the time when tests were initiated, teachers and students have worked together to achieve the goals which were previously planned to reveal the outcomes of the educational processes. In a way, it showed that teachers were responsible for their decisions in the classroom. If teachers, however, truly wanted to motivate students to devote their effort to learning, they had to design the process of learning to meet or at least recognize students' needs.[23] What exactly students needed was appropriate tests to promote the teaching and learning processes, not to impede their motivation by preparing them only for test sessions to be passed with good grades.[24] For that reason, Raffini[23] pointed out that for students to succeed, they needed to know precisely what knowledge and skills they were required to master. "Test questions should not come as a bolt from the blue; students need to know exactly what is required of them" (ibid., p. 190). If students received the instructional objectives they were required to achieve, they would benefit more.

Smith[24] stated that the higher the stakes attached to a test, the more it would distort the teaching process. Past exam papers eventually became the teaching curriculum, teachers adjust their teaching to fit the form of exam questions, and test results became the major goal of schooling. On the other hand, some researchers[5,7] viewed washback in a positive way and believed that it was desirable, for it could bring about beneficial changes in language teaching through changing examinations. Hughes[7] considered some implications for how to promote beneficial washback (pp. 53-56).

Related Studies

Hwang[25] designed a study to examine the washback effect of the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT). This study examined if a washback effect from the CSAT existed. It also distinguished the nature of washback and the variables influenced by it. The results indicated that the curriculum corresponded to the textbooks, while the CSAT did not represent the curriculum, and that there was a negative washback effect of the CSAT on EFL teaching and learning. The participants of the study had negative attitudes towards the test.

On the other hand, Bedford[26] investigated evidence of positive and negative washback in year eleven English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes following the implementation of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). A questionnaire was distributed to ESOL teachers. Only one student was interviewed using audio recording. It was clear that for ESOL teachers' unit standards had been the driving focus in program planning and teaching practice in the first year of NCEA. The main themes that emerged showed evidence of both positive and negative washback.

In contrast, Smith,[24] who conducted a qualitative study of the role of external testing in elementary schools, revealed that the publication of test results included feelings of fear, guilt, shame, embarrassment, and anger in teachers, and the determination to do what was necessary to avoid such feeling in the future. The classroom observation showed that testing had reduced the time available for instruction and narrowed the curriculum and modes of instruction. Smith (ibid.)

noticed that the teachers were coaching classes for the exam, especially in April when the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) testing approaches. Teachers shift from laboratory, hands-on instruction, to fewer lessons out of textbooks, to no instruction at all in the weeks before the test, to precise tailored instruction to the questions in the district criterion-referenced test.

Cheng's[20] study presented the washback effect of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) in Hong Kong secondary schools by employing two questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations. The results indicated that washback effect works quickly and efficiently in bringing about changes in teaching materials, and slowly in the methods teachers employ in their teaching.

Abdel Rehim[9] examined the impact of AlAzhar Secondary Certificate final test of English on the teaching and learning of content and process. The results indicated that this final test had a significant impact on teaching and learning content and process. It showed that teachers were willing to go along with the demands of the test at the expense of the skills that did not appear on the exam. It also showed that the students were keen to study only what the test measures. Moreover, it was found that teachers lack the skills of implementing recommended methodologies. They preferred to teach for the test to satisfy their students. This study also revealed how the oral skills were ignored and the focus was on reading, writing and practicing grammar transformation exercises. It also showed how students were concerned for test-taking strategies.

Al-Lawati[27] examined the washback effects of the English secondary certificate exam on teachers' and students' practices. This study aimed at determining the extent to which those practices might differ in relation to teachers' and students' sex, teachers' experience and students' stream. The researcher developed two questionnaires, one for the teachers and another for the students, including the following dimensions: students' perceptions on grammar, vocabulary, language skills, exam changes, time management and the match between textbook and exam. The findings indicated that there was a washback effect for teachers and students in all the previous dimensions. It also showed that the students of the arts stream were more influenced by the exam than the scientific stream students. However, there were no significant differences between experienced and less experienced teachers, and between male and female students in the washback effect.

Research Questions

This study has investigated the following questions:

- What are the secondary school teachers' perceptions of the washback effect of the public examinations on the instruction of the English language skills?
- What are the secondary students' perceptions of the washback effect of the public examinations on the learning of the English language skills?
- What are the teachers' practices in the classroom in view of the public examinations of the English language?

Methodology Participants

The subjects of this study were 45 teachers of English, 95 students from the first secondary class and 130 students from the second secondary class. They were randomly chosen from schools located in Amman Second Educational Directorate. To survey their perceptions, they responded to two separate questionnaires. Then, eight teachers of English were interviewed to discuss their perceptions in depth. Five female teachers were also requested to be observed to notice the methods and techniques they used during their teaching. Those teachers were purposefully chosen upon their willingness and cooperation.

Instruments

Teachers' and students' questionnaires with a five-Likert scale (i.e., strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree) and semi-structured interviews were used. The purpose of those questionnaires was to reveal the teachers' and the students' perceptions of the washback effect of public examinations on the English instruction. The dimensions and statements, which were included in the questionnaires, were written with reference to research and literature review.

The instruments were used after establishing their content validity by a panel of experts. To establish the reliability of the questionnaires, a sample of teachers and students were selected to respond to the items, and then the collected data was applied to Cronbach's Alpha formula to set the coefficient reliability of the instruments.

Procedures

In this study the qualitative research was utilized. The means and percentages of each item in the questionnaires were estimated to determine the washback effect of public examinations on the teachers' and students' teaching and learning, respectively. The narration of the interviews was written down from the cassettes and organized according to the categories.

Results

Results of Teachers' Perceptions

The teachers' questionnaire contained thirty statements divided into five dimensions. The first dimension consisted of four statements that were related to time management; the second consisted of four statements related to methods and strategies; the third consisted of five statements related to instructional materials; the fourth consisted of ten statements related to content; and the fifth consisted of seven statements related to assessment procedures.

Teachers' responses in accordance with the five dimensions on the questionnaire are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Teachers' Questionnaire

	Items	Means	Percentages
1	If the GSCE were cancelled, subject or skill emphasis in teaching would be different.	4.2	84%
2	I give more time to grammar instruction than the communicative skills because it is tested on the GSCE.	4.64	92.9%
3	I teach test-taking strategies to the secondary classes.	4.49	89.8%
4	My planning and instruction are influenced by the teaching time.	3.29	65.8%
5	My teaching methods are influenced by what is tested on the GSCE.	4.33	86.7%
6	The GSCE has little impact on how I teach.	2.53	50.7%
7	I rarely change my teaching methods and strategies to help my students succeed in the GSCE.	2.42	48.4%
8	Students' learning abilities influence my teaching.	3.93	78.7%
9	I use additional commercial books because they help my students succeed in the GSCE.	3.42	68.4%
10	I provide my students with worksheets to review content expected to be in the GSCE.	4.33	86.7%
11	I have my students do the Ministry of Education mock tests to familiarize them with the GSCE.	4.02	80.4%
12	I supply my students with software programs and special media to help them prepare for the exam.	1.58	31.6%
13	I just employ "the chalk and talk" in my teaching.	4.27	85.3%
14	The GSCE affects my syllabus, including practicing the components of the language that are to be tested.	4.04	80.9%
15	I pay little attention to the GSCE while preparing my lesson plans.	2.24	44.9%
16	I emphasize the skills which are more likely to be tested on the GSCE while planning for my syllabus.	4.27	85.3%
17	I skip over certain sections in the textbook because they are not tested on the GSCE.	3.93	78.7%
18	The GSCE has little impact on what I teach.	2.2	44%
19	I cover all the skills in the textbook: Reading, Vocabulary, Structure, Writing, Listening and Speaking.	2.2	44%
20	I would teach what I think is important whether my students like it or not.	2.95	59.1%
21	I rarely use specific teaching activities to promote my students' language skills just for the GSCE.	2.62	52.4%
22	I arrange my classroom activities according to the objectives of the GSCE.	4.55	91.1%
23	The GSCE stimulates me as a teacher to apply activities which promote my students' test-taking skills.	3.37	67.6%
24	I evaluate my students' assignments by using the criteria used by examiners when marking the GSCE.	4.24	84.9%
25	I adopt test items from the Ministry of Education tests in my classroom quizzes.	4.46	89.3%
26	My evaluation is mostly based upon the students' written works: reading comprehension text, vocabulary, structure and writing.	4.31	86.2%
27	I include listening tests in my classroom quizzes.	1.6	32%
28	I don't include speaking tests in my classroom quizzes.	4.48	89.8%
29	I don't think the GSCE is able to test my students' language abilities.	4.44	88.9%
30	The GSCE provides little feedback about students' learning skills.	4.26	85.3%

Results of Students' Perceptions

The students' questionnaire contained twenty-three statements divided into five dimensions. The first dimension consisted of four statements related to time management; the second consisted of four statements related to methods and strategies of learning; the third consisted of four statements related to instructional materials; the fourth consisted of seven statements related to content; and the fifth consisted of four statements related to assessment procedures.

Students' responses in accordance with the five dimensions on the questionnaire are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Students' Questionnaire

	Items	Means	Percentages
1	When the exam date gets closer, I give more attention to previous exam papers and quit using the textbook.	3.69	73.8%
2	I give more attention to grammar rules because they have more weight in the GSCE.	3.02	60%
3	I spend more time to understand the difficult points in the textbook.	3.45	69%
4	I emphasize studying the sections that are only relevant to the GSCE.	4.12	82.4%
5	I focus on reading and writing tasks in learning English.	4.18	83.6%
6	Listening and speaking skills are as important as reading and writing.	2.89	57.8%
7	I concentrate on the vocabulary that might appear in the reading comprehension exam.	3.91	78.2%
8	I give equal efforts for the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing to prepare myself for the exam.	2.20	44%
9	I like better the teacher who teaches the textbook to the exclusion of other materials.	3.71	74.2%
10	My teacher brings to class worksheets similar to the exam papers.	4.19	83.8%
11	If I only studied the textbook, I would get high marks in the GSCE.	3.22	64.4%
12	I usually buy the commercial books because of their similarity to the national exam.	4.29	85.8%
13	I don't feel pleased if my teacher helps me understand the whole textbook.	2.71	54.2%
14	I often ask for help to master the whole textbook.	4.35	87%
15	I would attend extra lessons with the teacher when s/he prepares us for GSCE.	4.57	91.4%
16	Learning all the language skills in the textbook will help me with my future career and education.	3.96	79.2%
17	I don't take private lessons with a teacher who is not familiar with the content of the textbook.	4.36	87.2%
18	I like better grammar drills even if they are not similar to those in the exam.	2.79	55.8%
19	What is learned in the classroom is not always the same as what appears in the exam.	3.07	61.4%
20	I study well to get marks and have a seat at a university.	4.51	90.2%
21	Our teacher includes listening and speaking tests.	1.92	38.4%
22	Our teacher's tests are mostly based upon written works similar to the GSCE.	4.32	86.4%
23	Our teacher assesses our learning through class participation.	1.92	38.4%

Results of the Interview

The interview questions were related to the following dimensions: the approaches and teaching processes utilized; the skills and activities teachers highlighted; the effect of the national test and time management on their instruction; and the assessment procedures used in classrooms.

Most of the interviewed teachers have clearly indicated that they teach their students the strategies of passing the exam not the English language skills. One of them has mentioned that in the final year teachers often train their students to pass the exam with good grades. The teacher stated that:

...In the Tawjihi classes, we prepare the students to pass the test, because there is no time to teach them the skills of the language. Even the strategies that are used in those classes are absolutely different. We rarely ask the students to work in pairs or groups. We must teach what is expected on the test paper and that is what even the parents demand.

The interviewed teachers confirmed that their teaching processes in the second secondary class were different from any other grade. They were lecturing and training students on appropriate strategies to pass the public exams with high grades. Additionally, they taught no more than the tested skills, which were the reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and writing. The teachers referred to the public exam:

...It makes us completely abandon the listening and speaking skills. In addition to that there is no pair or group work. There is no time. We have only three hours a week.

The interviewed teachers mentioned that most of their students used commercial books which contained previous exams. Samples of previous exams were habitually collected and discussed in class. Teachers added that their aim was to make the students familiar with the exam, because the issue of understanding was a different story. Owing to the restricted time and the exam phobia no communicative strategies or even discussions were used. All the teachers corroborated that the listening and speaking skills were entirely skipped over. Students might have a chance to discuss a writing task in class; however, they were asked to write it at home as an assignment, because they did not have enough time to finish it in class.

The teachers, who taught both the first and second secondary classes, stated that they trained their students on the national test and concentrated simply on the skills that were tested. All of the interviewed teachers stated that they relied entirely on the textbook. One of the teachers mentioned that grammar rules were taught and explained like mathematics, and that the Arabic language was used in explaining those rules.

All the teachers admitted that they taught the reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar and writing skills as in the exam. The same reading comprehension passages which were in the student's book were taught, in addition to the vocabulary. Two teachers revealed that even the supervisor told them not to exaggerate using unseen reading passages for their students as the exam included only seen passages.

In relation to the activities that were used in the classroom, teachers stated that they did all the book exercises. The types of activities that were practiced in classroom were derived from the national exam. All of them confirmed that:

...No instructional materials are used whatsoever in our classes. Textbooks and chalkboard are the only instruments that are used in our classes. There is no access to computer labs.

Concerning the writing skills, the teachers stated that they set models for predicted writing tasks and students memorized them for the exam. Some teachers stated that they taught the students the writing skill but still it was a repetition for the same topics over and over again. Two teachers stated that:

...The English language is utilized in our classrooms. But we use Arabic in explaining the rules and giving instructions. It is faster and even easier.

The interviewed teachers admitted that they dominated the class and taught the students the procedures of solving questions that might come in the exam. The reading and writing skills were mostly emphasized; on the other hand, the listening and the speaking skills were totally neglected.

All the teachers stated that they thought that the test did not motivate the students to learn the English language.

...Our students can only pass this exam, and that is why most of them fail in passing the English placement test at the universities. Even this exam (GSCE) does not measure the competence of the students' English abilities.

All of the interviewees thought that the national exam did not ever employ any authentic testing tasks. In the classroom it was the same; teachers gave exams, tests, and even quizzes similar to the national test. There was no need to burden the students with topics, materials and tasks that were not tested at all.

Results of the Observation

Five teachers were requested to be observed while teaching. The function of the lesson observation was to examine what really took place in the language classroom. It was found that the objectives of the observed lessons were not clear or identified at the beginning. The lesson planning did not contain any sequence of the following procedures: introduction, transition, and reviews. There were no activities for the students to perform a variety of tasks. The teacher and students in most of the observed lessons have only used the textbook activities. They were reading and barely explaining the points. The teacher had hardly utilized different content types or the students' world as a context for language presentation.

All of the observed lessons did not demonstrate any appropriate order of activities, nor applied questioning techniques that encouraged students to think in diverse ways. They practiced the exercises in the students' book and the workbook in a lifeless, unconscious and repetitive manner. None of the observed lessons utilized the listening activities that were integrated in the unit. Throughout the time of the lesson the teacher centered the students' attention on the reading skills and explained the words that might appear on the national test.

In one of the observed lessons, the teacher strove to conduct a group work but hardly any communication in English had occurred. The teachers' role could be described as a lecturer and translator rather than a facilitator or manager. Few students got roles in the discussions; most of the other students were passive, unenthusiastic and reluctant. The teacher dominated the lesson time; she justified her control for the limited time.

Teachers did not use any aids or materials except worksheets that were designed to familiarize the students with the form of the exam. "Chalk and Talk" were the only aids that the teacher utilized in the observed lessons. There was no access to language or even computer laboratories, in spite of the fact that most of the

teachers attended training sessions and were qualified to use computers. All of them did not use the cassettes for the listening tasks. They skipped these activities, as they were not tested. They stated that they did not want to waste the students' time on untested skills; later on they could manage with the language skills.

Discussion

Throughout this survey it was found that GSCE was an important test for both teachers and students. The findings reached by this study have shown that the GSCE has a great effect on the instruction of the English language in the secondary stage. It was evident that the characteristics of this test influence not only the teaching and learning processes but also the atmosphere in the classroom. It seemed that the high-stakes nature of the GSCE drove teachers' perceptions of instruction in the direction of teaching for what was required in the test. It appeared that such perceptions also affected students' learning modes. Students, particularly those who were vastly oriented toward excelling on the GSCE, expected their teachers to teach what would be tested.

According to the interviewed teachers, students in secondary classes were taught to pass the GSCE, because students often have high expectations for success on the GSCE, and they require their teachers to cover as much information related to the test as possible, particularly the contents, skills, and format to be tested.

It was shown that most of the teachers' planning was influenced by what was tested on the GSCE, teaching the test skills and test-taking strategies as well. Therefore, copious teachers did neglect untested skills. Results from the teachers who were included in the survey indicated that they had increased the amount of time they spent on the tested skills, namely, reading comprehension for seen passages, vocabulary, grammar and writing, while several teachers indicated that they had dropped off class time devoted to skills not covered by the national test such as listening and speaking.

Based upon the attitudes and beliefs of the teachers interviewed, the GSCE has an effect on the materials that they teach because the second secondary class is greatly driven by test measurement. Students did not want to be taught and burdened with extra knowledge that was not tested.

It has been found that teachers in secondary schools tended to rely on textbooks. Most of the teachers interviewed admitted that they teach the textbook according to the test paper. If they taught other grades, they stated that they might change their strategies, but as they say this exam determined the students' future, for that they had to follow what was expected of them. Most of the teachers' teaching activities were test-oriented.

The findings of the study showed the washback effect of the GSCE on the teaching and learning of the English language in the secondary schools. Changing the test format might be a proof and would necessarily bring about positive changes in the teaching strategies. It was evident from the teachers' responses when they spoke about their worries about the oral skills of their students. Teachers were also worried about difficulties over classroom management and the involvement of teaching facilities as there was an increasing requirement to carry out communicative learning activities. The intention to bring in positive washback effect in classroom teaching by changing its major public examination might be ideal, yet it might only change the form of teaching, not the substance of teaching.

As some educators have pointed out, examinations were not the be-all and end-all of the teaching and learning processes. They were not an end in themselves.

Research into the role of assessment in the teaching and learning processes and the relationship between testing and teaching would contribute to all education purposes assessment serves.

Conclusion

This study revealed that public examinations steered teachers' instruction towards teaching just the skills that were required for the national examination. The GSCE also tempted students to study only the tested English language skills, namely reading and writing. Teachers were forced to neglect two important skills, i.e., listening and speaking. The GSCE constrained teachers in teaching in the direction of what was required in the examination. Most teachers were aware of the format skills and content to be tested on the GSCE, so they were more likely to teach to the examination. The implementations of teaching revealed negative washback. Therefore, teaching for the exam would lead to the narrowing of instruction. It was evident that untested skills would not be included in the actual teaching syllabus.

Recommendations

On the basis of the results of this study, a number of points should be taken into consideration by teachers and all those who are involved in the teaching and learning processes:

- Promoting positive washback is more likely to occur when the objectives of the curriculum and test are highly matched.
- Offering teachers more training on how to use test data to improve their instruction.
- Providing teachers with in-service training workshops regarding how to align the lesson plans with the General Guidelines' standards.
- Teaching communicative skills to secondary stage students and previous stages is a necessity.
- Including communicative language goals in oral assessment is necessary.
- Integrating the four skills in classroom instruction, through providing teachers with language competence and supplementary communicative activities, to help bridge the gap between theory and practice.

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