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WASHBACK EFFECTS ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Washback refers to the test influence on teaching and learning in Applied Linguistics. The present study examined the effect of "Higher Secondary School Certificate English Language Examination" (HSSC-ELE) on English language teachers in Kohat district, Pakistan. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of the test on teachers. The target population was all English language teachers teaching the higher secondary class in Kohat. A survey questionnaire consisted of 19 Likert scale items was used in order to collect the data. The questionnaire aimed at measuring how the HSSC-ELE affected English language teachers' method selection in terms of four domains: activity/time arrangement, teaching methods, materials teachers would use in the classroom and content teachers would teach. Findings of the study indicated that the HSSC-ELE has affected English language teachers' method selection. Findings also revealed that English language teachers in Pakistan used the grammar-translation method in teaching English.

Keywords: washback, HSSC-ELE, grammar-translation, teaching method, English Language Teachers

1. INTRODUCTION

Tests are assumed to influence teaching and learning practices in classroom (Wall & Alderson 1993, Cheng 2001). This influence of tests is described as washback in applied linguistics while in education parlance it is termed as backwash. Studies conducted on washback indicated that washback is not as simple a phenomenon as it appears and its nature becomes more complex especially when interpreted in terms of teaching and learning (Cheng, Watanabe & Curtis, 2004).

It is not a test but use of the test which has the power either to enhance or hamper teaching and learning practices. Shohamy (1992) concluded that 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.

Wall & Alderson (1993) and Cheng (2001) also indicated that tests are powerful enough to affect teaching and learning process.

However, the maverick study to understand washback phenomenon was conducted in Sri Lanka by Wall and Alderson (1993, p. 120-121), to investigate "Does washback exist?". During the study of the phenomenon, their findings showed various kinds of influences which were reported in form of following hypothesis. Hypothesis no. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7 can easily be verified by classroom observation.

- 1) A test will influence teaching
- 2) A test will influence learning
- 3) A test will influence what teachers teach
- 4) A test will influence how teachers teach
- 5) A test will influence what learners learn
- 6) A test will influence how learners learn
- 7) A test will influence the rate and sequence of teaching
- 8) A test will influence the rate and sequence of learning
- 9) A test will influence the degree and depth of teaching
- 10) A test will influence the degree and depth of learning
- 11) A test will influence attitudes to content, method, etc. of teaching/learning
- 12) Tests that have important consequences will have washback
- 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 effects for some teachers and some learners, but not for others.

The Higher Secondary School Certificate English Language Examination (HSSC-ELE) in Pakistan is considered very important for students as well as for teachers. It is important for students because good grades in

HSSC-ELE can open the gates of professional colleges (e.g., Medical, Engineering & IT Colleges etc) for them. Similarly teachers use the teaching methods which can help their students score good grades. Shamsi (2006) reported that in Pakistan, students and teachers concentrate on examination and neglect the actual teaching and learning. There is only one thing which is important of all and that is examination.

Over the past several decades, many educational experts and senior teachers of English language have asked for conducting a reform on the HSSC English Language examination, which they think is too grammar-and-vocabulary oriented. The examinations are divided into two big sections: a section of multiple choices and a section of non-multiple choices i-e subjective section. The multiple choice section carries 20 % while rest of 80 % paper consists of long and short questions from plays and lessons, paraphrasing the poetic lines, essay writing etc, while a large portion is devoted to grammatical items.

The disadvantages of current HSSC English Language examinations, in the author's opinion, are as follows: first and most importantly, lack of a speaking and listening part, which is believed to be the cause of so called mute and deaf English in Pakistan.

Khalid (2006, p. 84, cited by Hasan) remarks that:

Teaching of English in Pakistan that students' failure ratio in the subject of English is much more than it is in any other subject in Board as well as in University exams. Even those who achieve high grades in English in these examinations cannot speak or write in it well. He declares the reason that the teachers mostly stress on rote learning and do not bother upon speaking of a few sentences in the class. The main purpose is to pass the subject of language with the help of memorizing some particular lessons, essays and letters. These students mostly fail in competitive examinations and lay the blame of their failure on education system and interview as the examination of which they were familiar, was merely a test of written language. The importance of speaking and pronunciation they realize when they step into a need of its practical use.

Secondly, the examination is still too grammar-vocabulary centered. All most all the questions in the paper whether directly or indirectly are designed to test the grammatical competence of the students.

The above mentioned situation is still prevailing in Pakistan because syllabus and test pattern is the same. Kohat University, in September 2012, has declared BA results which showed a massive failure in the subject of English. Same is the case with BISE Kohat 2012 HSSC English results, while the situation is not different in other boards of Pakistan.

The present study examined that how test influences English Language Teachers in different ways: teaching method selection, content and material used in English class. According to the researchers' knowledge, no local studies have been conducted in this specific area of investigation, neither on teachers' nor on learners. Factors, mostly due to lack of time, made the researchers tend to investigate the washback effect only in Kohat district. The investigation, however undertook the effect, if any, of washback on teachers' instruction, as well as, on their teaching methods. In Kohat, the English Language exam is administrated under the supervision of "Board of Intermediate & Secondary Education" (BISE) Kohat, Pakistan. A vigorous competition exists among the students; because most students expect to score high grades so as to get admission in professional colleges i-e medical and engineering colleges. In such situation teachers teach to the exam and students learn to the exam to succeed on exam and score good grades. Rationale of the study is to point out the reasons and consequences of a massive failure of students in the subject of English in Pakistan. It will enable the educationists and other related figures to suggest necessary changes in paper pattern and items to reduce failure rate in the subject of English and enhance learning and discourage the practice of rote memorization

2. METHODOLOGY

The desired study is quantitative in nature. The quantitative approach was adopted due to the following two reasons. Firstly it is easy to determine the extent, to a maximum, to which an affect can take place. Secondly, most of the teachers refused interview or observation. Total number of English language teachers of the district Kohat who participated in the study was 254 Pakistan. The questionnaire provided to the sample consisted of 19 items with likert scale i.e., five options; Strongly Agree, Agree, No Option, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. English language teachers who participated in the study consisted of equal number of male and female teachers who are teaching at higher secondary level. Moreover some retired professors who had been teaching at Higher secondary level also participated in the study. The questionnaire was first piloted twice in southern and northern zones of Kohat district to check reliability and validity of the tool. Results of both pilot studies testified its validity and reliability. The questionnaire was the circulated among the participants to collect data which was then analyzed using SPSS 15 according to the following scale validated by a panel of professors from the department of Statistics.

1. Mean scores (5-3.5) as having strong effect.
2. Mean scores (3.49-2.5) as having moderate effect.
3. Mean scores (2.49-1.5) as having little effect.

3. DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1. *Activity and time arrangement*

Item	S.A %	A %	N.O %	D %	S.D %	Mean	Item Effect
1- I would like to introduce activates in my classroom that may help to improve my students test taking skills.	11.5	65.4	11.5	11.5	0.00	3.77	Strong
2- Time allotment in classroom will be different incase HSSC-ELE is cancelled.	26.9	38.5	7.7	19.2	7.7	3.58	Strong
3- Because HSSC-ELE tests the grammatical competence of the students, that is why I spend more time teaching grammatical items.	23.1	46.2	7.7	15.4	7.7	4.13	Strong
4- I perform only those activities which fulfill HSSC-ELE objectives.	11.5	50	11.5	19.2	7.7	3.38	Strong
5- I teach my students 'test taking techniques' especially when HSSC-ELE dates are announced.	30.8	53.8	3.8	11.5	0.00	4.04	Strong

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, NO = No Opinion, DA = Disagree, SA = Strongly Disagree

Table (1) item No. 1 shows that English language teachers practice such activities in classroom that are helpful in improving the test skills of the students at HSSC level. The strength of the practicing such activities is indicated by a strong effect of the item (3.77). Similarly the strong effect (3.58) of the item No. 2 indicates that teachers will change teaching methodology in terms of time allotment for different items if HSSC-ELE is cancelled. English language teachers teach only grammatical items in classroom throughout the academic year because HSSC-ELE exam is totally grammar-based. This is one of the widely used teaching methods in Pakistani schools/colleges, clearly indicated by a strong effect of the item No. 3 (4.13), stronger than item No. 1 & 2. Item No. 4 shows that English language teachers prefer only those activities in classroom that may fulfill the objectives of HSSC-ELE. The popularity of the practice is indicated by the strong effect (3.38) of the item. English language teachers wish their students to score high on HSSC-ELE and for this purpose they teach their students those techniques that may enhance their test scores. Majority of the teachers teach these techniques when exam dates are announced, clearly indicated by a strong effect (4.04) of the item No. 5.

Table 2. *Teaching method*

Item	S.A %	A %	N.O %	D %	S.D %	Mean	Item Effect
6- I select only those teaching methods which may help my students succeed on HSSC-ELE.	38.5	42.3	7.7	11.5	0.00	4.08	Strong
7- I prefer teaching those skills which are tested on HSSC-ELE.	53.8	38.5	3.8	3.8	0.00	4.42	Strong

8- I do not use teaching methods that, I think, will not help my students succeed on HSSC-ELE.	23.1	61.5	3.8	11.5	0.00	3.96	Strong
9- HSSC-ELE has influenced my teaching.	19.2	46.2	15.4	19.4	0.00	3.65	Strong
10- I scarcely use teaching methods which can help my students score good grades.	11.5	19.2	3.8	50	15.4	2.62	Moderate

Table (2), item (6) shows that teachers have strong tendency towards using methods which might help the student to score good grades on HSSC-ELE. The strong effect of the item (4.08) clearly shows the strength of the practice. Though English language is generally divided into four skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing, English language teachers, however, prefer teaching those skills in their classroom which are generally tested on HSSC-ELE which is indicated by a stronger effect (4.42) of the item (7). Because HSSC-ELE tests writing and reading skills, teachers teach these two skills in their classrooms. English language teachers avoid using teaching methods that will not help the students succeed on exam as indicated by a strong effect (3.96) of the item (8). Generally, teaching of communication skills is not encouraged in classroom because HSSC-ELE does not test communication skills. That is why teachers consider it 'waste of time' and risk of being embarrassed if their students do not show good results. Item (9) indicates that HSSC-ELE manipulated English language teachers teaching method; teachers teach what is tested on HSSC-ELE, indicated by a strong effect (3.65) of the item. Item (10) of the table indicates that English language teachers always practice such teaching methods which can enhance the HSSC-ELE scores of their students as indicated by a moderate effect of the item

Table 3. Material Selection

Item	S.A %	A %	N.O %	D %	S.D %	Mean	Item Effect
11- I use extra material in classroom to enhance my students test score.	34.6	57.7	0.00	0.00	7.7	4.12	Strong
12- I suggest my students to review and memorize those questions which are expected to be tested on HSSC-ELE.	23.1	42.3	0.00	23.1	11.5	3.42	Moderate
13- I suggest my students to solve previous HSSC-ELE papers.	50	42.3	7.7	0.00	0.00	4.42	Strong
14- I prefer to use the supplementary material that may help my students succeed on HSSC-ELE.	19.3	69.2	11.5	0.00	0.00	4.08	Strong

Table (3), item (11) shows that teachers, in English classroom, prefer using extra material along with prescribed material to help the students score high marks on the English language exam. The strong effect (4.12) of the item posits that use of extra material in English language classroom is a common practice in English language classroom at higher secondary level in Pakistan. Similarly English language teachers suggest several techniques to their student prior to the exam; review and memorizing the expected questions is stressed in particular. However, this practice is not popular among all English language teachers as indicated by a moderate effect (3.42) of the item. On the other hand, English language teachers strongly recommend to their student to solve the previous test of HSSC-ELE because every year certain items are repeated with a random sequence. The strong effect (4.42) suggests that English language teachers consider solving previous papers as one the key techniques for the success of their students. Similarly the use of supplementary material as an integral part of the English language teachers teaching because it helps the students to score good grades on HSSE-ELE. The strength of the practice, using supplementary material, is indicated by the strong effect (4.08) of the item.

Table 4. Content selection

Item	S.A %	A %	N.O %	D %	S.D %	Mean	Item Effect
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15- I do not teach chapters which are not important from HSSC-ELE point of view.	11.5	34.6	7.7	30.8	15.4	2.96	Moderate
16- My sequence of teaching objectives is influenced by HSSC-ELE.	15.4	65.4	7.7	11.5	0.00	3.85	Strong
17- I include all the relevant content which can help my students succeed on HSSC-ELE.	34.6	46.2	11.5	7.7	0.00	4.08	Strong
18- The objectives of HSSC-ELE are clearly displayed in my course content.	26.9	42.3	3.8	23.1	3.8	3.65	Strong
19- I cover every chapter of the text book though some of the chapters may not be tested on HSSC-ELE.	11.5	53.8	0.00	19.2	15.4	3.27	Moderate

Table (4), item (15) suggests that although English language teachers teach those chapters of the text books which are likely to be tested on HSSC-ELE, there are a large number of teachers covering all the chapters of the text book. The moderate effect (2.96) of the item suggests that the practice of teaching a specific chapter of the text books is not very common among English language teachers in Pakistan. However, item (16) posits that English language teachers prefer teaching those chapters first which are expected on HSSC-ELE indicated by a strong effect (3.85) of the item while rest of the chapter, not by all teachers, are covered after the important ones are taught in the classroom. Similarly the item (17) explores that the use of relevant content for teaching in English classroom is also very common in Pakistan as indicated by a strong effect (4.08) of the item. The strong effect (3.65) of the item (18) indicates that English teachers teach to come up with the objectives of the HSSC-ELE, witnessed by the items taught in the classroom, achieving HSSC-ELE, to be administered by the Board of Intermediate & secondary education (BISE), objectives appear to be the foremost and the only goal while teaching English at intermediate level in Pakistan. English language teachers seem divided when it comes to a question whether to cover all the chapters of the text book. Item (19) moderate effect (3.27) shows that although English language teachers teach a certain chapters which may meet HSSC-ELE objectives, there is a major faction of teachers who claim to cover all the chapters of the text book irrespective of its being 'unimportant' with HSSC-ELE point of view.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of the study showed that most of the teachers who answered the questionnaire felt that HSSC-ELE did influence and affected their selection of teaching methods because in District Kohat HSSC-ELE is considered very important for students' future career and also because English language teachers in Kohat are taken as the primary source of English language learning at intermediate level. This automatically created pressure on English language teachers to develop their students' linguistic competence so as to meet the objectives of the HSSC-ELE in Kohat District.

Teachers reported that time allocated in the classroom was hardly enough to teach the items expected on HSSC-ELE. Findings also revealed that teachers teach according to the objectives of the exam and not according to the needs of the students. Teachers were of the view that if they were given more time, they would be able to use modern techniques and content to improve students' communication skills. Findings of the study revealed that there were some teachers who did not teach according to the objectives of the HSSC-ELE but tried to improve students' communication skills. This trend was observed in the generation of young teachers who had done their masters in Linguistics or studied linguistics as a subject in masters which might have made them conscious of the importance of

the use of English language rather than its usage. Teachers reported that time duration is the principle hurdle which affects their teaching. These results are similar to studies conducted by Read (1999), Chen (2002), Manjarres (2005). They all highlighted the importance of time for teachers because it affects teachers' choice of teaching method. The study also revealed that teachers in Kohat still used traditional method of teaching English language based upon improving students translation and grammatical abilities than improving their communication skills (i-e listening, speaking, reading and writing). In researcher view, it might be due to the fact that HSSC-ELE does not test communication skills. Teachers expressed that they used teaching methods which could make students perform well on HSSC-ELE as remarked by Wall and Alderson (1993) "teachers would use whatever methodology they felt most expedient to help them to prepare their students for the examination"

The findings of the study indicated that teachers focused on promoting students writing and reading skills however they did not focus on improving their listening and speaking skills. The reason for this, as mentioned earlier, was that HSSC-ELE did not test listening or speaking skill. Here we agree with (Andrews 1994 and Hawkey 2006) who remarked that high-stakes examination led teachers to use different teaching methods in order to engage their students in certain exam tasks. However the findings disagree with those of Cheng (1997) who witnessed changes in contents but did not observe any change in teaching method.

The findings of the study revealed teachers use of supplementary material as well as teaching of specific sections of the text books. Teachers pointed out that they would like to use all that material which might help their students succeed on HSSC-ELE. They also agreed that they taught only those sections of the text book which were most likely to be tested on HSSC-ELE. As mentioned earlier, teachers focus on such practices due to the time constrain and pattern of the test. The findings also revealed that teachers suggest their students to review important questions. They advise their students to revise and practice previous HSSC-ELE papers of "Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Kohat" BISE Kohat. This is because of the fact that same questions are repeated after every few years which makes the task easy but effect the learning badly. Teachers in Kohat teach those items in classroom which is supposed to be tested on exam and hand down their students previous papers so as to familiarize them with the test. Cheng (2001) and Hayes and Read (2004) pointed out that teacher would select certain material and content to help students familiarize with test and questions expected on the test. Similarly Lam expressed that teachers believed that the best way to prepare students for an exam was by doing past papers. The findings of the present study were found to be in complete harmony with some to the hypothesis presented by Alderson and Wall (1993): 1) A test will influence teaching. 2) A test will influence what teachers teach. 3) Tests that will have important consequences will have washback. 4) Tests will have washback on teachers and students.

5. CONCLUSION

In the light of above discussion, it is concluded that English language teachers in district Kohat, Pakistan teach only those items in the classroom which are to be tested on exam. Moreover grammar-translation method is used in classrooms. Students are advised to revise previous papers of HSS-ELE and memorize the frequently repeated questions. Such practice ultimately enhances grades but ruins learning.

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APPENDIX

Washback Questionnaire

Name. _____ Designation. _____

Name of Institution. _____

HSSC: Higher Secondary School Certificate (Intermediate)

ELE: English Language Examination (English Paper)

Tick one of the boxes below each enquiry.

What are the effects of the Higher Secondary School Certificate English Language Test on my teaching?

1. I feel motivated by the HSSC-ELE to implement activities that may promote my students' test-taking skills.

Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree

2. I feel time allotment in class would be different if the HSSC-ELE were cancelled.

Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree

3. I spend more time instructing grammar other than communication skills because I think grammar is more likely to be tested on the HSSC-ELE.

Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree

4. I arrange my classroom activities based upon different factors but not just based upon the objectives of the HSSC-ELE.

Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree

5. I teach test-taking strategies, especially as the HSSC-ELE testing dates get closer.

Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree

6. I select my teaching methods in a way that tend to help my students to succeed on the HSSC-ELE.

Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree

7. I select teaching methods that tend to help develop my students' skills, which are more likely to be tested, on the HSSC-ELE.

Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree

8. I neglect some teaching methods that are un-able to prepare my students for the HSSC-ELE.

9. My teaching has been influenced by the HSSC-ELE.

Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree

10. I rarely select my teaching methods that tend to help my students succeed on the HSSC-ELE

Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree

11. I use materials in addition to the textbooks if they will help my students succeed on the HSSC-ELE.

Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree

12. I give students worksheets to review questions expected to be on the HSSC-ELE.

Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree

13. I give my students the BISE previous tests in order to familiarize them with the HSSC-ELE

Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree

14. My choice of supplementary materials is influenced by the HSSC-ELE.

Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree

15. I skip over certain sections in the textbook because they are less likely to be tested on the HSSC-ELE.

Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree

16. I adjust the sequence of my teaching objectives based on the HSSC-ELE.

Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree

17. I include some relevant content to help my students' perform well on the HSSC-ELE.

Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree

18. I display the objectives of the HSSC-ELE through out my course content.

Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree

19. I cover every section in the textbook although some sections are unlikely to be tested on the HSSC-ELE.

Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree