

educational systems).

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to have interaction in class. They are only motivated to be prepared for the NEE. In addition, teachers use test books along with the students' textbook. Students are required to buy different test books. Such teachers are not willing to encourage students' creativity and innovations.

Most EFL teachers do not teach reading strategies, and only emphasize those points which will be in the exam. Pronunciation and writing skill are ignored; oral skills are not taught; only grammatical points, vocabulary items, and reading passages are taught in language classes. Students follow a kind of receptive learning in classes. They like to be spoon-fed. Discovery learning, problem solving, creativity and contemplation are not encouraged in language classes. Students ask for the points needed in attempting multiple-choice items. They believe that they need some more tactics and strategies in taking the NEE, so they will try to learn these points. They even prefer their final exams to be in multiple-choice form. Finally, students are dissatisfied with the way the NEE is prepared and implemented. Therefore, even hardworking students are disappointed with it.

The results of this study may have potentially remarkable implications for teachers, test developers, syllabus designers, and researchers. The present study investigated the washback effect of the NEE on students and teachers. Their views on the test content and its washback were investigated. This study showed that the NEE did indeed affect both what and how teachers taught and students learned. More importantly, it was found out that it is not a test alone that causes washback on testees, but the way the test is approached by administrators, materials developers, and teachers themselves actually creates

washback for it.

Based on the available literature on washback effect, the researchers suggest that further research on washback is needed. Such research must entail "increasing specification" of washback, and must incorporate findings in the areas of motivation and performance, as well as educational innovation, and an ethnographic perspective should be incorporated to help identify explanatory variables accounting for washback. This study was a survey study. A longitudinal research is suggested to be done to measure the washback effect of such important high-stakes exams on different subject matters. Since change in high school textbook will have an impact on the university entrance examination (forwash effect), it is suggested to conduct a research on the interface between the washback and forwash effect. Further research is suggested to be done in this regard to find the extent to which test makers are aware of the washback effects of the NEE. It is important to find out the mechanism in which washback works. The NEE has washback on students, teachers, materials writers, researchers, and even society as a whole. This mechanism (investigated in this research) should be clarified to provide a reasonable basis for the measurement of NEE washback. It is suggested that some empirical research is conducted to look for ways to minimize harmful washback effects and ways to promote positive or beneficial washback effects of NEE on the English language education in Iran. This study was carried out at the micro level (the effect of the NEE on individual students and teachers). It is suggested that the same research is conducted at the macro level (the impact of the NEE as a whole on society and on

of responsibility among them. Besides, students will make a cross-comparison between their teachers, schools, materials and other university applicants' facilities. They will try to achieve more and to fill the gap. The NEE will encourage the students and will motivate them in learning the subject matter. All teachers do their best to provide positive classroom experiences for their students through giving tests.

Some teachers assume that the main responsibility of an instructor is to provide good instruction. As a matter of fact, good instruction cannot do much if it is not accompanied with appropriate evaluation. Appropriate evaluation provides a sense of accomplishment in the students and in many cases alleviates students' dissatisfaction, frustration, and complaints about the educational programs. The NEE helps the students prepare themselves and thus learn the materials. Repeated evaluations will enable students to master the language. They will also benefit from the test results and the discussion over these results. Moreover, several tests or quizzes during a given term will make students better aware of the course objectives. The analysis of the test results will reveal the students' areas of difficulty and, accordingly, the students will have an opportunity to make up for their weaknesses. It is generally believed that a better awareness of course objectives and personal language needs can help the students adjust their personal activities towards the achievement of their goals.

As for the harmful washback effect of the NEE, most teachers follow the textbook during the year. They work their way through the materials, unit by unit, exercise by exercise. This happens because they believe they have to "cover the book"

so that their students will do well on the exam. Furthermore, less attention is paid to the development of oral skills than to written skills. This may be the effect of the exam; however, it may also be due to the fact that the textbook pays less attention to these skills, or that teachers do not know how to teach listening and speaking. Also, there is considerable exam impact on the content of reading and grammar lessons if EFL teachers use the textbook. Teachers occasionally add questions or tasks to the day's lesson, but this may aim to compensate for a lack of suitable exercises in the textbooks and also because of the exam. It is important to note that the changes they do make are always changes in the direction of the exam, and it is clear that there is a "narrowing of the curriculum" as EFL teachers finish or abandon their textbooks and begin intensive work with the past exam papers and commercial publications to prepare their students for the exam. At this point, there is obvious exam impact on how teachers choose their content. Many Iranian EFL teachers give extra classes to their students after normal school hours, on weekends and during holidays to work on special exam preparation materials. This implies exam impact on how teachers choose their content. A number of EFL teachers consistently skip the pronunciation part and listening part in the textbooks because they know pronunciation and listening will not be tested in the exam. Most of them do not use effective teaching methods in their classes. They follow a teaching-to-the-test approach in their classes. There is a kind of direction in the way they teach in language classes since they do not speak English in their classes, and students also do not show any eagerness

we are the ones who make the tests, we should try to make a match between what is tested and what is taught by using more direct testing, making sure the test is known by the students. Tests are one factor that will lead the teacher to “teach to the test”. If we are responsible for helping students pass the test, we should try our best to learn more teaching methodologies by taking more training courses, engaging in peer observations and utilizing the tests to enhance students’ learning while at the same time not inhibiting students’ motivation by cramming too much. As teachers, “we may have limited power to influence high-stakes national and international examinations, but we do have tremendous power to lead students to learn, to teach them language and how to work with tests and test results” (Bailey, 1996, p. 269). All in all, it is the teacher who has the most power to turn it into positive or negative washback.

## 5. Conclusion

This study was based on the basic model of washback proposed by Hughes (2003). The researchers considered the participants being directly influenced by the NEE. The participants of this study were high school teachers and those students who were in their second semester of senior high school. Due to the importance of such an examination, the present study investigated some of the claims one might face in large scale exams in general and the NEE in particular. To provide a reasonable answer to the research questions, the researcher made use of a questionnaire, to investigate the washback effect of the NEE on teachers as well as on students. The data obtained from the questionnaire was sufficient for answering the research questions stated in the study.

We must see washback as one form of impact, as suggested by Wall (1996), and impact as including every aspect of our instruments and scoring procedures. It is not enough to evaluate tests from our own perspectives; neither is it enough to evaluate them by including teachers’ perspectives. Madaus’ study and Smith’s study both took account of teachers’ views and beliefs but did not encompass students’ views and beliefs. Cohen (1984) was a very early article falling within the broad construct validity approach described by Messick (1996), but regrettably, it has been very little followed up. Many more studies are needed of students’ views and their accounts of the effects on their lives of test preparation, test-taking and the scores they have received on tests.

The NEE has some positive and negative washback on the English language teaching process. Although the NEE has many harmful washback effects on the language teaching process, it may also have some beneficial ones.

Regarding the positive washback effect, most high school EFL teachers are determined to cover the textbook within the expected time because they believe that students’ success in their textbooks will guarantee their success in the university entrance examination. There is much use of item types which have appeared on the exam when they have also appeared in the textbook. While students taking the exam, they are somehow familiar with such item types. The high school EFL teachers consider the NEE as a criterion for their effectiveness. If they help students pass the exam, they will be considered successful teachers. This may motivate teachers to compete and create a sense

As Table 4 indicates, the Cloze passage shows the highest amount of washback compared with the other parts. However, when it comes to the second ranking, for teachers using correct forms of the words is important, while it is using background knowledge for the students. Then in the third place, both groups are in agreement with regard to the remaining parts i.e., Pronunciation and Stress. Having alluded to earlier, the students have generally given more weight to the exam subsections which means that compared to teachers, they are more inclined to have more work on those areas. This is an indication that the test enjoys a high level of washback in the eyes of the students.

The next important section comes on the list is Reading Comprehension for teachers and Gap-filling for the students. The former enjoys a mean of 3.53, while the latter has a mean value of 3.94. What this means is that the fourth

important section of the test is Reading Comprehension for teachers and Gap-Filling for the students. The next item in the rank order is Spelling for the teachers and Conversation for the students. They have a mean of 3 and 3.32 for teachers and students respectively. This result might be attributed to the nature of these subtests. While Spelling is something which has to be developed by the students themselves through ongoing practice, the teachers do not consider this area to be worthy of instruction. On the other hand, regarding Conversation questions, as far as this section is in the form of matching, the chance of guessing is higher. Therefore, in a sense they like such items to appear on the test.

Based on the findings and results of the study, it has to be noted that there are two major perspectives that teachers should bear in mind while they are involved in the process of teaching and testing. If



As Table 3 shows, the questionnaire includes thirteen items which reflect content of the NEE and its different sections. For the purpose of illustration, first, the findings are reported in the order in which the corresponding sections appear on the exam. By giving a close look to the content of the above table and having the number of each participants, one can easily detect a slight difference in the mean value of both groups. Therefore, if we go to individual items, we will experience the difference between the two groups in terms of the amount of value they attach to each subsection of the NEE. More specifically, looking at Spelling evaluated by the teacher participants, their mean is 3 which means that it is the average score which come out of five (the higher end of the Likert scale). The implication is that this total

score is higher than the total mean value which is 2.5 for both groups. Generally speaking, it can be safely claimed that the participant teachers attach more value to this section according to the total score which is higher than the amount of mean value. On the other hand, if we go to the other end of the extreme and give a look to the students average score to the same section i.e., Spelling, it amounts to 3.52. This figure is clearly larger than the former one attained by the teachers. What this means is that the students have attached more value to this exam section compared to teachers. In other words, for students this specific subsection has more value in terms of washback compared to the target teachers.

In order to have a balanced account of the findings, arrange the total scores in an ascending order.

**Table 4. The Total Scores of Participants in an Ascending Order**

	Teachers	Total score	Average		Students	Total score	Average
1	Cloze Passage	61	4/06	1	Cloze passage	370	4/11
2	Using Correct Forms	58	3/86	2	Using background knowledge	359	3/98
3	Pronunciation and Stress	56	3/73	3	Pronunciation and stress	359	3/98
4	Reading Comprehension	53	3/53	4	Gap-filling (vocabulary)	355	3/94
5	Unscrambling words	51	3/4	5	Using correct forms	344	3/82
6	Sentence comprehension	50	3/33	6	Unscrambling words	338	3/75
7	Using background knowledge	50	3/33	7	Sentence completion	337	3/7
8	Gap-filling (vocabulary)	49	3/26	8	Sentence comprehension	333	3/74
9	Grammar MC questions	48	3/2	9	Reading Comprehension	332	3/68
10	Answering Qs using pictures	47	3/13	10	Answering Qs using pictures	321	3/56
11	Sentence completion	46	3/06	11	Grammar MC questions	320	3/55
12	Conversation Qs (Matching)	45	3	12	Spelling	317	3/52
13	Spelling	45	3	13	Conversation Qs (Matching)	399	3/32

valuable to very valuable). It needs to be mentioned that the format of NEE is fixed and the number of questions is also the same. The difference lies just in the content of the test.

#### ● Procedure

Having been prepared, the questionnaire was administered to two groups of participants; that is, students and teachers to elicit their views on the content and washback effect of different sections of NEE. Having collected the data through the mentioned tool, the researchers analyzed the data using the frequency count and averaging out the final results which were based on the Likert scale of one to five.

## 4. Results and Discussion

To achieve a reasonable answer for the research questions, the questionnaire was administered to both teachers and students. As mentioned earlier, the present research endeavor revolves around the washback effect of the National English Exam (NEE) which is administered as a compulsory examination with a series of other majors such as math, chemistry, physics and so on. The underlying logic behind such exams is to inject an acceptable dose of fairness in testing; hence, these exams are held nationally not to exert any bias against different social and ethnic groups. For the purpose of this study, the participants' responses to the questionnaire items were collected and analyzed. The results are displayed in the following table:

**Table 3. Teachers and Learners Evaluation of the National English Exam (NEE)**

	Teachers	Total score	Average		Students	Total score	Average
1	Spelling	45	3	1	Spelling	317	3/52
2	Gap-filling (vocabulary)	49	3/26	2	Gap-filling (vocabulary)	355	3/94
3	Using correct forms	58	3/86	3	Using correct forms	344	3/82
4	Using background knowledge	50	3/33	4	Using background knowledge	359	3/98
5	Grammar MC questions	48	3/2	5	Grammar MC questions	320	3/55
6	Unscrambling words	51	3/4	6	Unscrambling words	338	3/75
7	Sentence completion	46	3/06	7	Sentence completion	337	3/7
8	Answering Qs using pictures	47	3/13	8	Answering Qs using pictures	321	3/56
9	Conversation Qs (Matching)	45	3	9	Conversation Qs (Matching)	299	3/32
10	Pronunciation and stress	56	3/73	10	Pronunciation and stress	359	3/98
11	Sentence comprehension	50	3/33	11	Sentence comprehension	333	3/74
12	Cloze passage	61	4/06	12	Cloze passage	370	4/11
13	Reading Comprehension	53	3/53	13	Reading Comprehension	332	3/68

activities and the contents of teaching (Cheng, 1997; Lam, 1994; Watanabe, 1997). However, as regards how washback operates for learners, there appears to be a lack of clear understanding (Bailey, 1999). The fact is that learners have the highest stakes in test situations and are mostly affected by consequences of test and test results. Hence, some testing experts have argued for the need to be accountable to test takers and to investigate how tests influence them.

There are a couple of important examinations administered in Iran. The university entrance examination which is administered annually selects applicants for higher education. Before that, there is another exam given and taken at national level for and by the high school students. The National English Exam (NEE) is one such examination. Every year, thousands of high school students take this test and a limited number of them can get the pass score. The results of this examination may affect teachers' teaching methods, students' learning strategies, materials development, and even society as a whole. On the other hand, the concept of washback is not quite known to many test takers, test developers, teachers, materials developers, and administrators. Therefore, the current study aims to investigate whether the NEE has any washback affect upon high school teachers and students. Also, the research tries to provide solid evidence for the washback effect of such examination on different aspects of teaching and learning.

The present research aims to investigate the washback effect of the NEE on the Iranian high school teachers and students. To this end, the following research questions were formulated to be approached by focusing on the collected data:

1. *Do participants perceive any value to be attached to different sections of NEE?*
2. *If yes, how?*

### 3. Methodology

#### ● *Participants*

The participants who took part in this study were 90 high school students and 15 teachers teaching at that level. Specifically, the students were studying

**Appropriate evaluation provides a sense of accomplishment in the students and in many cases alleviates students' dissatisfaction, frustration, and complaints about the educational programs**

in Dehkhoda High School in Karaj. They were in their second semester heading for the final exam which is administered nationally to award the candidates with a diploma at the end of high school. The main reason for this availability sampling is that one of the researchers was an instructor there. For the same reason, the English teachers of the mentioned high school were selected as another required group to be included for evaluation purposes.

#### ● *Instrumentation*

The instrument utilized in this research consisted of a questionnaire which was filled by the participants. The questionnaire consisted of 13 sections which reflected the way the National English Exam (NEE) appears each year. It was based on a Likert scale of one to five (from not



teachers' lessons. Moreover, positive washback was seen in the entrance exam in a way the teachers could make use of the exam preparation as an opportunity to improve the English learners' proficiency. Similarly, in Turkey, Yildirim (2010) investigated the effects of the English Component of the Foreign Language University Entrance Exam (ECFLUEE) on future EFL teachers' language proficiencies, and on their performances in their first year classes at university. The results of his study indicated that the exam had some negative washback effects on the students' language proficiency and on their performance in their first year classes at university. More recently, Razavipour, Riazi, and Rashidi (2011) reported a research on the assessment knowledge base of Iranian secondary school teachers. Their findings show that teachers are suffering from a poor knowledge base in assessment and no matter how assessment literate they are; they do tailor their English teaching and testing to the demands of external tests. Furthermore, they argue that in terms of assessment literacy those teachers with a higher level such literacy tend more likely to include non-washback

**Some researchers have argued that tests can have more far-reaching effects in the educational world than just in the language classroom. Bachman & Palmer (1996) used the term "test impact" to refer to the effects that tests have on individuals or educational systems and on the society at large**

practices in their English teaching in a way which would not harm the whole process of teaching and evaluation, on the one hand, and learning, on the other.

In summary, all the above - mentioned studies clearly indicate that washback is a highly complex phenomenon. Therefore, the studies into the influence of high-stake testing have led to a variety of results: influences at different levels, for example, schools teachers and learners, and influences on different aspects of teaching and learning, for example, teaching content, instructional planning, approaches to teaching and student learning outcomes. The greater the consequences attach to a particular test, the more likely it is to have an impact on teaching and learning. Some studies had noted positive (Lewthwaite, 2007; Wesche, 1987) negative (Ghorbani, 2008) and no influence (Scaramucci, 2004) on teaching and learning. The current study will draw on the above findings to explore the areas in teaching and learning that deemed to be influenced by a public examination. Public examinations have often been used as instrument of evaluation in Iranian school system. Their relationship with the curriculum, instruction, and learning is of high importance in most communities. There is evidence to suggest that examinations may have washback effect on teaching and learning (Alderson and Wall, 1993). According to Bachman (1990), positive washback would result when the testing procedure reflects the skills and abilities that are taught in the course. However, there is little or no obvious relationship between the types of test that are used and instructional practice.

Some studies have reported the washback effect of tests on teacher

having a positive effect on class-based writing skills and bearing a reasonable relationship with skills needed at faculty level.

Fournier-Kowaleski (2005), in a study of teachers' behaviors, and to a lesser extent, students' behavior, in the low stakes testing environment of an intermediate level Spanish class, found that the washback behaviors exhibited by teachers during the first quarter of teaching Spanish for the first time, and then in the subsequent quarter, teaching the course for the second time. Teachers' instructional behaviors changed during the second time teaching the course as a result of increased knowledge of the test. Factors such as past teaching experience and teacher beliefs were also found to influence changes in teachers' instructional behaviors. Secondary factors of interest such as student study habits, student perceptions of their teacher's behaviors, and the effect of tests were also investigated. The students' study and classroom behaviors appeared to change to correspond to changed behaviors exhibited by the students' teacher. The student data serves as a potential source for further investigation into the washback phenomenon.

Mizutani (2009) in investigating the washback effects of The National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) as perceived by teachers and students of Japanese, and beliefs about NCEA which contributed to the washback effects, found that the majority of the intended positive washback effects were promoted by the assessment, but the nature of the washback depended on beliefs about NCEA held by teachers and students. Students tended to report more negative washback of NCEA than did teachers.

It can be seen from the above - mentioned studies that the washback effect is a powerful educational phenomenon. It not only influences different people at different levels within educational contexts, but also has an impact on many aspects of teaching and learning in the school contexts. Furthermore, public examinations have often been used as instruments of evaluation of different school systems in different countries, for example, the study of new exams in Sri Lanka (Wall 1996); the Netherlands school language exams (Wesdorp 1982); a needs based exam at a Turkish schools (Hughes 1988); the impact of the University Entrance Examination (UEE) on pre-university English teachers' (PETs) teaching and curricular planning in Iran (Ghorbani, 2008).

Other studies done regarding washback in language teaching have confirmed that while tests may indeed affect teaching and learning in one way or another, those effects are not predictable. Watanabe (1996), for example, found that "the form of university entrance examinations in Japan exerted a washback effect on some teachers, but not on others" (p. 330).

Wall (2005) commented that little research attention has been paid to the impact of tests on the "products of learning": "What is missing . . . are analyses of test results which indicate whether students have learned more or learned better because they have studied for a particular test" (p. 12).

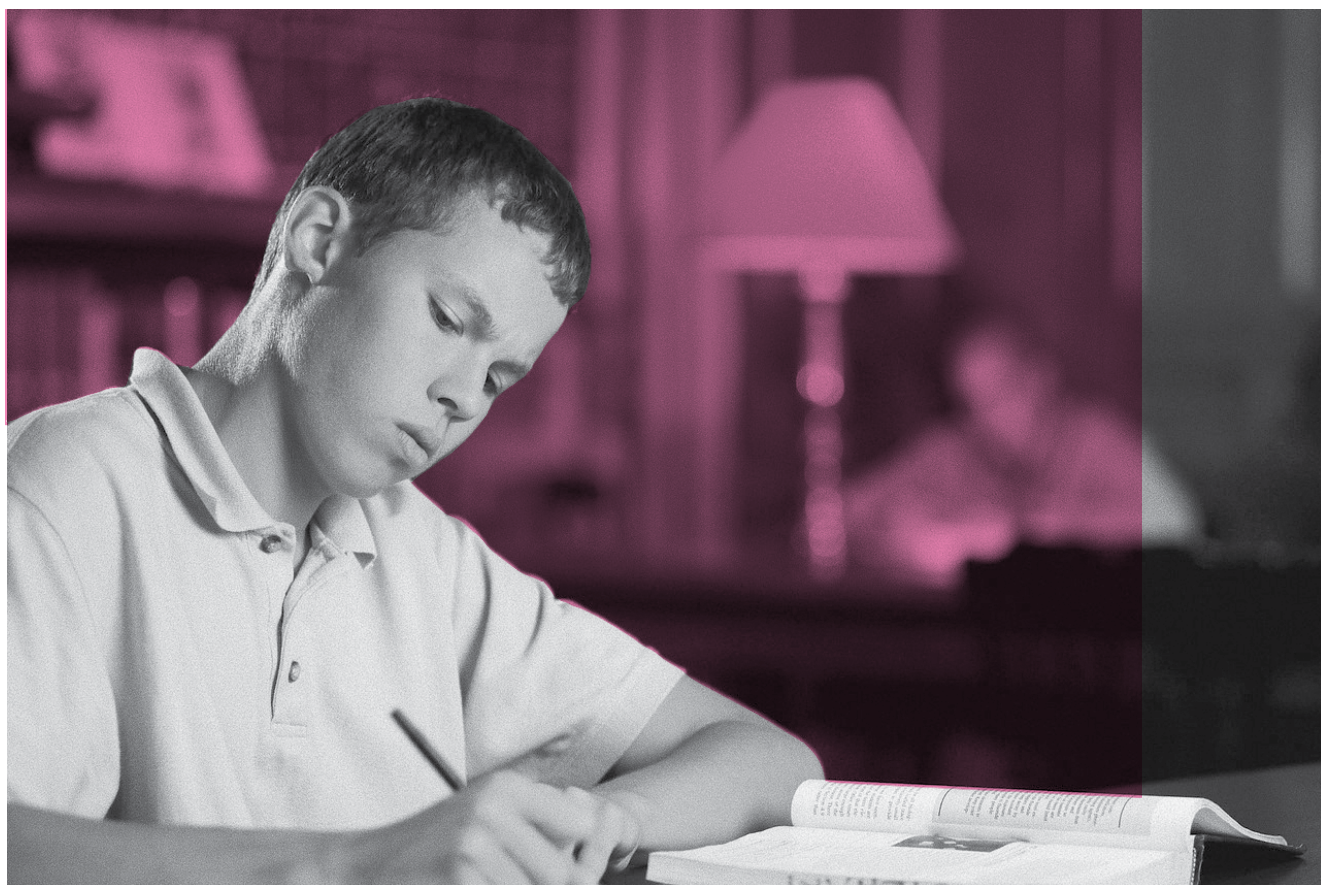
Watanabe (2004) investigated the washback effects of the Japanese university entrance exam on classroom instruction. He concluded that the entrance exam caused only some kinds of negative washback to only some aspects of some

it did exist, whether it was predictable, what form it might take, what explanations there were for its appearance or absence in particular settings. There is a growing interest in the phenomenon both in theoretical and empirical fronts (Alderson and Wall, 1993).

There are quite a number of studies in language education of the washback effect of large scale programs on instruction, illustrating that high stakes standardized tests influence teaching and learning (Pearson, 1988; Wall and Alderson, 1993; Spratt, 2005; Green, 2007). In the view of instructors and students, for example, Chappelle and Douglas (1993) stated that tests contain what students must learn and therefore what must be taught. In this regard, Swain (1985) believes that teachers will “teach to a test”. In other words, if they know

both the content and the format of a test, they will teach their students accordingly. On the other hand, Wall and Alderson (1993) claimed the existence of washback and declared that tests can be powerful determiners both positively and negatively of what happens in classrooms. Also, Andrews and Fullilow (1994) pointed out that tests have continued to exert a powerful negative washback on teaching; therefore, tests often exert a strong force which stops progress.

Moreover, recent studies have shown that high stakes testing influences teaching and learning in the following ways. Lewthwaite (2007) found the attitudes of the teachers and students toward the usefulness of the two IELTS writing tasks. The results indicated that both IELTS task one and task two are perceived by teachers and students as



individuals, policies or practices within the classroom, the school, the educational system, and society as a whole. In a similar vein, McNamara (2000) claimed that tests can also have effects beyond the classroom. The wider effect of tests on the community as a whole, including the school, is referred to as test impact.

Traditionally, tests come at the end of the teaching and learning process for evaluative purposes. However, with the advent of high stakes public examination systems nowadays, the direction seems to be in reverse order. It means that testing comes first before the teaching and learning process in order to influence the learning process. Therefore, looking at the mechanisms of such a complex phenomenon by which washback works is of vital importance. Hughes (2003) discusses the mechanism by which washback works. He states that 'in order to clarify our thinking on back wash, it is helpful, I believe to distinguish between participants, process and product in teaching and learning recognizing that all three may be affected by nature of the test' (p. 2). To him, participants included classroom teachers, students, administrators, materials developers and publishers, all of whose perceptions and attitudes toward their work may be affected by the test. He also believes that any action taken by the participants may contribute to the process of learning. Such a process includes materials development, syllabus design, changes in teaching methodology, the use of learning and test taking strategies.

Bailey (1996) proposes that these variables be divided into "washback to the learner" and "washback to the program." The former involves what learners learn, how learners learn, the rate and sequence

of learning, and the degree and depth of learning, while the latter is concerned with what teachers teach, how teachers teach, the rate and sequence of teaching, and the degree and depth of teaching.

**The greater the consequences attach to a particular test, the more likely it is to have an impact on teaching and learning. Some studies had noted positive negative (Ghorbani, 2008) and no influence (Scaramucci, 2004) on teaching and learning**

Various factors seem to influence the mechanism of washback as the research suggests thus far. The factors may include the following (Wall, 2005): test factors (e.g., test methods, test content, skills tested, purpose of the test, decisions that will be made on the basis of test results, etc.); prestige factors (e.g., stakes of the test, status of the test within the entire educational system, etc.); personal factors (e.g., teachers' educational backgrounds, their beliefs about the best methods of teaching/learning, etc.); micro-context factors (e.g., the school setting in which the test preparation is being carried out); and macro context factors, that is, the society where the test is used.

## **2. Review of the related literature**

Concerns have been raised about the power of tests to affect what goes on in the classroom, the educational systems, and society as a whole, that is, the so-called washback effect. However, it was not until recently that language testers began to take a critical look at the notion of washback and to try to determine whether

**Table 1. Summary of Positive Washback**

Positive Washback	
Classroom settings	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tests induce teachers to cover their subjects more thoroughly, making them complete their syllabi within the prescribed time limits.</li> <li>2. Tests motivate students to work harder to have a sense of accomplishment and thus enhance learning.</li> <li>3. Good tests can be utilized and designed as beneficial teaching learning activities so as to encourage positive teaching-learning processes.</li> </ol>
Educational/societal system	Decision makers use the authority power of high-stakes testing to achieve the goals of teaching and learning, such as the introduction of new textbooks and new curricula.

**Table 2. Summary of Negative Washback**

Negative Washback	
Classroom settings	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tests encourage teachers to narrow the curriculum and lose instructional time, leading to “teaching to the test.”</li> <li>2. Tests bring anxiety both to teachers and students and distort their performance.</li> <li>3. Students may not be able to learn real-life knowledge, but instead learn discrete points of knowledge that are tested.</li> <li>4. Cramming will lead students to have a negative attitude toward tests and accordingly alter their learning motivation.</li> </ol>
Educational/societal system	Decision makers overwhelmingly use tests to promote their political agendas and to seize influence and control of educational systems

To summarize, in terms of the classroom setting at a micro level, the positive washback integrates meaningful and innovative learning activities in teachers’ educational methodologies, and thus educators will devote more attention to students’ intentions, interests, and choices. Students at the same time will be encouraged and motivated to work harder. On the other hand, the negative washback is that teachers will usually teach to the test, narrow the curriculum and only focus on what will be tested. Moreover, cramming will be the washback brought by measurement-driven tests, even though there is an ongoing debate as to whether cramming is positive or negative washback (Fulcher and Davidson, 2007). In terms of educational setting, the positive washback is that the institution can use the test to attain its goal of teaching and learning. However, the negative washback is that

the authority uses that goal to control and obtain the power of the academic system that will usually place undue pressure and anxiety on school staff members, teachers and even students. In other words, the washback on the side of the educational setting is one coin with two sides, depending on the stakeholder’s point of view and the practical consequences that unfold as the instruction goes on.

Some researchers have argued that tests can have more far-reaching effects in the educational world than just in the language classroom. Bachman & Palmer (1996) used the term “test impact” to refer to the effects that tests have on individuals (teachers and students) or educational systems and on the society at large. In their own words, the former is the micro level while the latter is the macro level. Wall (1997) held a similar view by stating that test impact refers to any of the effects that a test may have on

## چکیده

دو حوزه عمده مربوط به مطالعات بازشویی (washback) وجود دارد: اولی به آزمون‌های سنتی، چندگزینه‌ای و در مقیاس بزرگ مربوط می‌شود که به‌طور عمده تأثیرات منفی بر کیفیت آموزش و پرورش دارند و دومی مطالعاتی است که در آن‌ها آزمون معینی اصلاح یا بهبود یافته است تا تأثیر مثبتی بر روند آموزش و یادگیری داشته باشد. مطالعه حاضر که بر روی تأثیر بازشویی آزمون ملی انگلیسی (NEE) انجام شده است در دسته‌بندی دوم قرار می‌گیرد. هدف از این مطالعه این بود که معلوم شود آیا آزمون ملی انگلیسی (NEE) هیچ تأثیر روان‌شناختی بر معلمان و زبان‌آموزان دارد؟ نمونه مورد مطالعه شامل ۱۵ نفر از معلمان زبان انگلیسی و ۹۰ دانش‌آموز بودند که به روش دسترسی به اعضای نمونه (Convenience Sampling) برای شرکت در تحقیق حاضر انتخاب شدند. ابزار مورد استفاده پرسش‌نامه معلم و زبان‌آموز بود. پرسش‌نامه شامل ۱۳ سؤال بود که منعکس‌کننده ۱۳ بخشی است که آزمون ملی را تشکیل می‌دهند نتایج نشان داد که آزمون ملی بر روی محتوای برنامه آموزشی، روش‌های آموزش انگلیسی دبیرستانی، ساخت آزمون و روش‌های اجرای آن، نوع آزمون‌هایی که در کلاس‌های دبیرستان استفاده می‌شود، نحوه درک موارد آزمون و نگرش دانش‌آموز و معلمان نسبت به آن‌ها تأثیر دارد. علاوه بر این، آزمون ملی برخی تأثیرات مثبت و منفی بر روند یادگیری زبان انگلیسی را نشان می‌دهد. در این مطالعه، همچنین، استراتژی‌هایی جهت ارتقای اثرات مثبت و کاهش اثرات منفی پیشنهاد شده است.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** تعیین‌کننده، ارزیابی، فورواش، آزمون ملی انگلیسی، بازشویی

### 1. Introduction

It is generally believed that language testing affects teaching and learning. Washback, a term commonly used in the field of applied linguistics in general and in language testing in particular, refers to the influence of the test on teaching and learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993). It refers to the extent to which a test influences language teachers and learners to do things 'they would not necessarily otherwise do because of the test' (Alderson & Wall, 1993). However, numerous explanations of the term 'washback' can be found throughout the published research and literature on language testing with various meanings, which reveal differences in scope and intentionality. Furthermore, Messick (1996) points out that washback refers to 'the extent to which the introduction and use of the test influence language teachers and learners to do things they would not otherwise do that promote or inhibit language learning (p. 241). A good example of washback based on the above mentioned definitions is the effect of university entrance examinations such as Gaokao taken by students in China

after the completion of high school by the candidates. Another example would be the so called "National" exams in Iran given at the end of high school to finish formal education at this level.

**Positive washback would result when the testing procedure reflects the skills and abilities that are taught in the course. However, there is little or no obvious relationship between the types of test that are used and instructional practice**

Generally speaking, washback can be analyzed according to two major types: positive and negative, depending on whether it has a beneficial or harmful impact on educational practices (Hughes, 2003). To present a clear view of positive and negative washback at both micro-level (classroom settings) and at macro-level (educational and societal system), Tables 1 and 2 (adapted from Hughes, 2003) are presented below for clarification.

# Washback in Action: The Case Study of Iranian EFL Teachers and Learners

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## Abstract

There seems to be two major areas of washback studies- those relating to traditional, multiple-choice, large-scale tests, which are perceived to have mainly negative influence on the quality of education, and those studies where a certain examination has been modified or improved to exert a positive influence on the teaching and learning process. The present study done on the washback effect of the National English Exam (NEE) can be included in the latter domain of washback studies. The purpose of this study was to find out whether the National English Exam (NEE) has any washback effect on EFL teachers and learners. The sample included 15 Iranian EFL teachers as well as 90 students who were conveniently selected when they were to take the test. The instrument used was teacher and learner questionnaire. The questionnaire included 13 items reflecting the 13 sections that constitute the NEE. The results indicated that the NEE did have a washback effect on the content of the educational program, methods of high school English instruction, the test construction and administration procedure, the types of tests used in high school classes, the way that the participants perceive the test items and the students' and the teachers' attitude toward it. Furthermore, the NEE proved to have some positive and negative washback effects on the English language teaching-learning process. Also, some strategies were suggested to promote the positive washback effect and some for reducing the negative ones.

**Key Words:** high-stakes test, evaluation, forwash, National English Examination (NEE), washback