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High-Stakes Assessment and its Impact on High School EFL Instruction

Dr. Youssef Oufela

Assistant Professor, Education, Moulay Ismail University, Meknès, Fès-Meknès, Morocco

Email: y.oufela@umi.ac.ma

Abstract

Introduction: The issue of how examinations influence teaching and learning is commonly referred to in Applied Linguistics and educational assessment and language testing fields as “washback”. The focus of the current research study was to explore how the National Baccalaureate Examination of English, a high-stakes public examination administered in the Moroccan context, influences high school EFL teachers’ classroom instructional practices. Additionally, the study examined the influence of three teacher-related factors on teachers’ perceptions of the washback effect.

Methodology: To investigate these aspects, a Convergent Parallel Mixed Method Design was employed. Quantitative data from a questionnaire administered to 316 teachers was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Additionally, qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with eight teachers and two EFL inspectors and classroom observations with five teachers were analyzed through content analysis.

Results & Discussion: The results indicated that teachers have mixed perceptions with regard to the intended purposes, content representativeness and relevance and overall quality of the examination. The results revealed that the examination was found to indeed influence teachers' instructional practices, demonstrating a strong washback effect. Teachers' instructional behaviors were influenced though at varying degrees. As the exam did not align with the syllabus, a negative washback effect was significantly observed at the level of WHAT teachers teach: content of teaching and materials. The results also revealed that unlike gender and academic qualification, teaching experience was found to influence teachers' perceptions of washback.

Conclusion: The results of this research are important for instructors, researchers, policy makers, EFL inspectors, Test designers and textbook writers. The study also provided recommendations for future policy to enhance the quality of the exam in Moroccan high schools. It advocates for better alignment of the exam and the curriculum, provides practical insights into the achievement of positive washback and offers suggestions on how this could be realized.

Keywords: High-stakes Examination, Washback, EFL Teachers, Instructional Behaviors, Content of Teaching, Materials.

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