

The Impact of Washback of Classroom Assessment on English Teaching and Learning: A Study Conducted in three ESL Classrooms at Government Degree College for Women, Begumpet, Hyderabad

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Abstract:

The relationship of examinations with the curriculum, teacher teaching, student learning, and to individual life is of vital importance in most societies. Washback or Backwash, the influence of testing on teaching and learning is a prevailing phenomenon in Education. In recent years many assessment researchers have expressed the need to examine the critical role that Washback, the effect of testing on teaching and learning, and the role and the use of assessments for learning in L2 classrooms. The paper is a study conducted in three ESL classrooms at Government Degree College for Women, Begumpet Hyderabad, to investigate how the phenomenon of washback of classroom assessments embedded in Instruction contributes to the promotion of learning processes and the achievement of learning success in three ESL classrooms over five years, 2014 to 2019. Findings of the washback effect from the study reveal that teachers who have had training and experience in administering tests show greater support for the use of classroom assessment than those who are less experienced.

The study also reveals that students feel that frequent testing helps them to retain content, reduces test anxiety, and aids the monitoring of their progress and interestingly students support integrating testing with teaching.

Keywords: backwash, washback, teaching, learning, classroom assessment, impact, ESL undergraduate, GDCs, L2, curriculum.

Examinations occupy a leading place in the Educational system of most countries. The relationship of examinations with the curriculum, teacher teaching, student learning, and to individual life is of vital importance in most societies. Washback or Backwash, the influence of testing on teaching and learning is a prevailing phenomenon in Education.

In recent years many assessment researchers have expressed the need to examine the critical role that Washback, the effect of testing on teaching and learning, and the role and the use of assessments for learning in L2 classrooms. Wall and Alderson (1993) make it clear that washback has the potential for affecting not only individuals but, the education system as well. Bachman and Palmer (1996) refer to the influence of testing and learning as test impact and the scope of impact affects individuals, the education system, and society at large. Washback is an inherent quality of any kind of assessment, especially when people's futures are affected by examination results, regardless of the quality of examinations. It is a truism that 'what is

assessed becomes what is valued, which is what is taught'. Hughes defines washback as 'the effect of testing on teaching and learning' (1989:1).

The paper is a study conducted in three **ESL classrooms at Government Degree College for Women, Begumpet Hyderabad**, to investigate how the phenomenon of washback of classroom assessments embedded in Instruction contributes to the promotion of learning processes and the achievement of learning success in three ESL classrooms over **five years from 2014 to 2019**.

It plans to establish:

- How and to what extent testing influences the teaching and learning of English?
- Why language teachers need to be competent in language testing.
- The need for language teachers to be able to select appropriate language tests, keeping in mind the purpose, context, and the group of the test taker.

The focus of the study is the quality of the relationship between English language testing and English language teaching and learning in undergraduate classrooms. My study also emphasizes the implications of test impact on English language teaching and learning at the tertiary level in the 125 Government Colleges in Telangana. Are tests leading and influencing English language teaching and learning?

The study focuses on the definition and scope of washback and the function and mechanism of washback. The thrust area of study is a detailed five-year study of high-stake examinations at the undergraduate level in Telangana– the End Semester General English Examinations for the first and second year of undergraduate students belonging to the BA,B.COM and B.Sc. streams of the undergraduate programs to examine their influence on the instructional programs.

The findings of the study emerge from the impact study conducted at Government College for Women, Begumpet, a representative college of 128 undergraduate Government Degree Colleges (GDCS}in Telangana. Inputs from language teachers and a cross-section of undergraduate students from rural, semi-urban, and urban areas helped document the nature of test impact on teaching and learning English and examine the mechanism by which washback works on specific areas like the content of teaching, teaching methodology, ways of assessing achievement, the attitude of teachers and learners and the extent of presumed impact – positive or negative.

The study used questionnaires, interviews, test scores, material analysis, and classroom observations to gather information on the influence of testing on English teaching and learning. The student strength and test scores of the three ESL classrooms were documented for five years. It saw five batches of students take the Internal and External General English Exams of Semesters 1, II, III & IV during their two-year course of study of General English as part of their UG program.

**GOVERNMENT DEGREE COLLEGE FOR WOMEN (A) BEGUMPET
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
RESULTS ANALYSIS -GENERAL ENGLISH**

CLASS OF 2014-2016

S.No	Class	No. of Student Appeared	No. of Student passed	Percentage
1	BSc, MSCs	77	77	100
2	BCOM Computers	59	59	100
3	BA journalism	21	21	100

CLASS OF 2015-2017

S.No	Class	No. of Student Appeared	No. of Student passed	Percentage
1	BSc, MSCs	71	71	100
2	BCOM Computers	57	57	100
3	BA journalism	26	26	96.15

CLASS OF 2016-2018

S.No	Class	No. of Student Appeared	No. of Student passed	Percentage
1	BSc, MSCs	59	59	100
2	BCOM Computers	34	34	100
3	BA journalism	5	5	100

CLASS OF 2017 to 2019

S.No	Class	No. of Student Appeared	No. of Student passed	Percentage
1	BA Journalism (HPJ)	8	6	95
2	PSJCE	13	12	92.3
3	BCOM C/A	38	38	100
4	BSc, MSCs	77	76	98.7

Note: Total Marks-100

S.No	Name of the Exam	Maximum Marks	Pass Marks
1	External	75	27
2	Internal		
	a. Average of two objectives types test	15	13
	b. Written Assignment (General Topic)	4	
	c. Seminar (Current Topic)	4	
	d. Attendance	2	
3	Total	100	40

A test or an examination is a tool, a technique to measure the students' expression of knowledge, skills, and abilities. The findings of the Impact Study reveal:

- Evaluation is often very subjective, thereby creating discrepancies in evaluation patterns. Teachers feel that embedded classroom assessments and evaluations of students' performance are fair, objective, and constructive. The methods by which the student's performance is evaluated are clear to the teacher, the student, and the evaluators. Teachers realize that student assessment should be a continuous activity and are aware that a variety of evaluation techniques can be used to evaluate the student's progress in language learning.
- Moreover, interestingly, the study reveals despite their large classes, students find embedded classroom assessment a scaffolding that helps them in the language learning process by allowing them to monitor their learning progress, retain language content, skills, and abilities and reduce Test anxiety which was a major deterrent in exhibiting their language proficiency.
- Findings of the washback effect from the study reveal that teachers who have had training and experience in administering tests show greater support for the use of classroom assessment than those who are less experienced.
- The study also reveals that students feel that frequent testing helps them to retain content, reduces test anxiety, and aids the monitoring of their progress and interestingly students support integrating testing with teaching.
- Teachers and students believe that assessment and evaluation are neither fair nor constructive when the same assessment procedure is used to evaluate all the students in mixed-ability classes.

- An observation made by teachers during the study was that when evaluation practices change, teachers must be updated on the evaluation practices, most teachers felt the need for an orientation course in assessment and evaluation strategies as they realize the importance of embedded classroom assessment in acquiring language skills.
- The survey of undergraduate teachers of English revealed that they believe that since they are the actual classroom practitioners and since they have in-depth knowledge of the various kinds of learner profiles that exist in the large English classrooms of Telangana, practicing teachers should be involved in developing Material, in Curriculum Design and evolving Assessment and Evaluation practices for their students.

Assessment practices are currently undergoing a major paradigm shift in many parts of the world. This can be a reaction to the shortcomings of the prevailing paradigm with an emphasis on standardized testing. Policymakers are aware of the power of tests and can use them to reform the educational system and introduce new curricula, textbooks, and new teaching methods. This impact study of testing on English language teaching, and learning is hoped can initiate a trend toward using assessment to reform English language teaching, learning, and testing at the tertiary level in Telangana State.

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