

## An Investigation into the Influence of Testing on the Instruction of English as a Foreign Language at a University in Saudi Arabia.

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### Abstract

#### The purpose of this study

To ascertain whether or not English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers are influenced by testing and outcomes during their teaching, the concept of washback, which pertains to the impact of testing on instruction, is examined. Tests yield both favorable and unfavorable effects on students. The attitudes of teachers towards washback have a substantial influence on students as they play a crucial role in mitigating the adverse effects on teaching and learning.

#### Methodology:

A background information questionnaire is created for 57 Saudi EFL teachers. In addition, a questionnaire containing sixteen items is presented, and participants are requested to react using a 5-point Likert scale. The data is analysed using pie and bar charts, SPSS, and students.

This research identifies several instructor viewpoints on the influence of testing on instruction. With no washback, experienced faculty instruct and assess students. Washback, on the other hand, affects both moderately experienced and less experienced teachers. This study discovered that experienced teachers are unaffected by testing.

**Applications of this research:** If universities provide a platform for all EFL teachers to learn from one another, they will be able to learn from one another. This study discovered that the third category, the experienced, is unaffected by testing. If their experience helps the first and second groups, it will benefit not just students but also the teaching profession.

**This study's novelty/originality:** The experienced teachers focus on teaching rather than testing, which is a good indicator. The moderately experienced teachers concentrate on both. All remarks are neutral for the less experienced teachers. Based on the findings of the current study, administrators can provide a platform for all EFL teachers to gain from one another.

**Keywords:** English as a Foreign Language, Teaching, Testing, Washback,

### Introduction

It is beneficial to teach English language skills and encourage pupils to learn. Teachers must exert considerable effort to ensure that pupils acquire the requisite skills. Because pupils' requirements vary, different teaching tactics are required [1]. Teachers must employ a variety of tactics in order to encourage, persuade, and compel students to engage in classroom discussions and learning. At the same time, they must thoroughly evaluate the kids [2]. They must be aware of their pupils' learning levels. There are several degrees of evaluation or testing. Testing is an integral element of education, and the two go hand in hand [3]. Teachers should strike a balance between these two approaches [4]. Teachers must utilise both tactics properly to deliver language skills to pupils since they are interconnected [5].

Testing is used to evaluate the teaching and learning processes. All colleges and institutions in Saudi Arabia use regular evaluation techniques [6]. These are needed to evaluate pupils' learning. Some of these are assignments, quizzes, midterm examinations, final exams, solo and group presentations [7], debates, and extempores [8]. Teachers use a variety of instructional tactics, including lectures, small group discussions, projects, role plays, situational talks, mind mapping, individual presentations, and so on [9].

### **Background of the study**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has made significant investments in education. Between 2005 and 2012, the number of public universities increased from eleven to twenty-five, according to Hamdan. During the same time span, the number of private universities more than doubled, from four to eight (Hamdan, 34). Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, founded in 2010, is one of such new institutions [10]. It provides instruction in a variety of specialisations such as medicine, engineering, science, business, computer science, pharmacy, and so on. The medium of teaching is English. Because English is a foreign language to the kids, it is a difficulty for both teachers and students [11]. The institution is trying its best by instituting a preparation year for students focusing mostly on English language classes such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, etc [12].

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Washback or Backwash**

Washback refers to the effect of instruction on testing. Tests have both good and bad effects on pupils. Exams can motivate pupils to learn more, practise more, and gain knowledge. This is a positive test washback. Students who are unable to pass the tests may withdraw from the course or programme. One of the harmful consequences of washback is this. Teachers are sometimes to blame for bad washback. If their primary concentration is on test preparation and their whole teaching is geared towards ensuring that their pupils pass the exam, this is negative washback [13]. It impacts teaching and learning since most colleges, universities, parents, instructors, administrators, professional bodies, and politicians measure instruction via testing.

A examination of relevant literature reveals several more crucial and intriguing aspects concerning washback. The word "washback" is used by Buck (1988), Alderson and Wall (1993), Messick (1996), Pearson (1988), Bailey (1996), and Cheng (2005). Hughes (1989), Spolsky (1994), and Biggs (1995) refer to it as "backwash." It is referred to as "test impact" by Bachman and Palmer (1996), Wall (1997), McNamara (2000), and Andrews (2004). It is referred to as "systemic validity" by Frederickson and Colling (1989). Messick (1989) refers to it as "consequential validity." Marrow (1986) calls it "washback validity."

### **The Influence of Positive and Negative Washback**

In different situations, washback behaves differently. Washback, according to Buck (1998) and Shohamy et al. (1996), can have a detrimental or good effect on pupils. "Washback can be either positive or negative in the sense that it either promotes or impedes the achievement of educational goals held by learners and/or programme personnel," Bailey (1996) noted (269).

A few detrimental washback effects are outlined by Pan (2009). Teachers limit the curriculum to prepare pupils for the exam. Instead of teaching, they spend more time preparing pupils for tests. Test anxiety affects both professors and students, misguiding both. Students prioritise obtaining grades above studying. They do not learn material that has not been tested. Students get negative washback as a result of memorization. This has an impact on their learning, and kids are unmotivated as a result.

### **The Teacher's Role**

According to many researches, teachers have a critical role in reducing the impact of negative influences on teaching and learning. According to Bailey (2005), we can affect high stakes national and

international assessments to some extent; nevertheless, we can greatly impact our kids to learn, educate them how to acquire language, and how to have good washback.

The impact of washback on students is heavily influenced by teachers' attitudes. According to Spratt (2005), the acuteness and direction of the washback effect are unquestionably influenced by teachers' attitudes.

## METHODOLOGY

The scientists are collaborating with Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University (PSAU). It is a new university in Saudi Arabia. It has several colleges on campus and in Al Kharj. It also has a few colleges within 500 km.

The questionnaire was completed by 57 EFL teachers, 12 from the College of Business Administration, Kharj (CBAK), 9 from the College of Preparatory Year Programme College (PYP), 15 from the Community College (CC), 6 from the College of Business Administration, Howtah (CBAH), 12 from the College of Science and Humanities (CSH), and 3 from the College of Science and Humanities, Sulayyel (CSHS).

The researchers employed graphical presentations as well as hypothesis testing to determine the study's conclusions. The student t test was used to assess the differences between two separate groups, which helped to find discrepancies between the replies of two different groups of samples. The formula is used to compute the t value.

$t = \frac{\bar{x} - \mu}{\frac{s}{\sqrt{n}}}$  where  $\bar{x}$  represents for the sample mean,  $\mu$  stands for the hypothesised value for the population mean,  $s$  stands for the sample standard deviation, and  $n$  stands for sample size. The null hypothesis denotes that there is no difference between the mean values of the two samples. The alternative hypothesis advocates for a considerable difference between the two by default.

Furthermore, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is used.

F ratio =

$$F = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^k n_i (\bar{x}_i - \bar{\bar{x}})^2 / (k-1)}{\sum_{i=1}^k \sum_{j=1}^{n_i} (x_{ij} - \bar{x}_i)^2 / (N-k)}$$

$k$  = number of population;  $N$  = sum of the sample sizes from all population;  $n_i$  = sample size of population  $i$ ;  $\bar{x}_i$  = sample mean from population  $i$ ;  $\bar{\bar{x}}$  = grand mean.

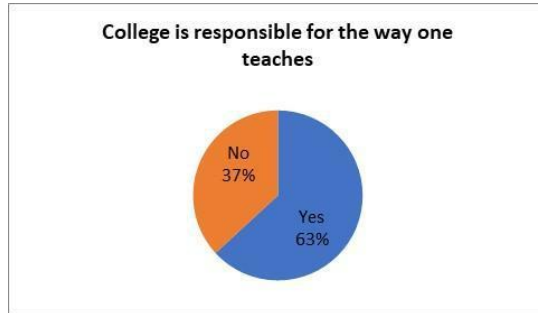
Based on previous research on the impact of testing on teaching and learning, the current study's researchers intend to investigate how far teachers are satisfied with their teaching strategies in EFL classrooms, as well as whether the teachers are influenced by washback. They also want to see whether there are any disparities in the teaching and testing tactics used by teachers from one college to the next. They also investigate if the teacher's position influences the teaching and learning process. They also want to know how experience affects teachers' teaching and learning processes. The researchers propose the following aspects for their investigation.

Questionnaire for Background Information

Even though the participants were well educated and experienced, they had to follow university rules. They were, however, free to use their own teaching tactics. The researchers aim to know if the colleges where the participants work have an impact on their teaching and assessment practises. In this regard, we want to collect information such as years of experience at PSAU, college of affiliation, and name (optional) via a questionnaire. It also contained two additional questions. The participants were asked to submit Yes/No answers to the following questions.

Is the university/college at blame for how you teach?

Is the university/college responsible for the way you teach?



## 2nd Hypothesis

The researchers seek to discover if the teaching and assessment methodologies used by their different university colleges satisfy the professors. The university used typical teaching tactics such as lectures, presentations, small group discussions, and so on, as well as testing strategies such as assignments, quizzes, individual presentations, midterm examinations, and so on. The participants were asked in the Background Information Questionnaire to answer a Yes/No question (Are you pleased with the teaching and assessment procedures used by your college?) to determine the instructors' level of satisfaction.

	Statement 1		Statement 2		Statement 3		Statement 4		Statement 5	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Strongly Agree	12	21.1	2	3.5	9	16	5	8.8	3	5.3
Agree	24	42.1	7	12	7	12	13	23	11	19
Neutral	7	12.3	9	16	11	19	15	26	32	56
Disagree	10	17.5	17	30	12	21	19	33	9	16
Strongly Disagree	4	7	22	39	18	32	5	8.8	2	3.5

F stands for frequency on the Likert scale. Statement one is supported by 24 teachers, whereas statement two is strongly opposed by 4 teachers. Statement two, on the other hand, has 22 instructors strongly disagreeing with it and 2 teachers strongly agreeing with it. Statement three is strongly opposed by 18 teachers, while it is supported by 7 teachers. Statement four has 15 instructors who are neutral, and 5 teachers who strongly agree and strongly disagree. At the same time, 19 instructors are opposed to it. Surprisingly, 32 instructors do not react to statement five. It indicates that they either do not wish to react or do not agree or disagree

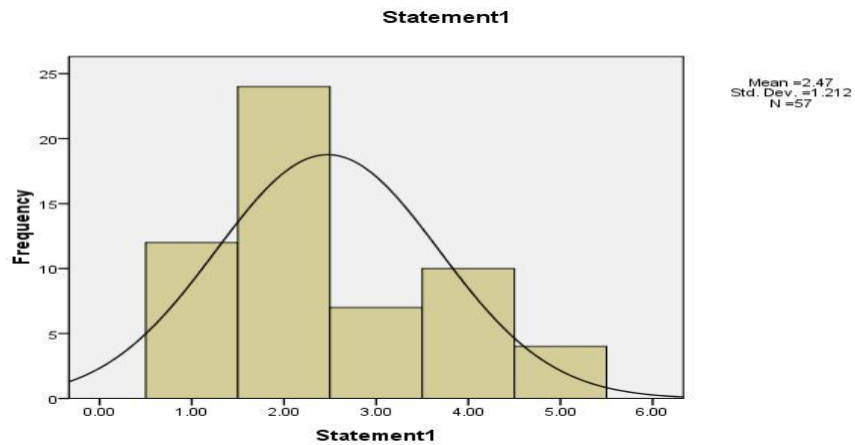


Figure 5. Questions which are likely to come in exam are well practiced in class

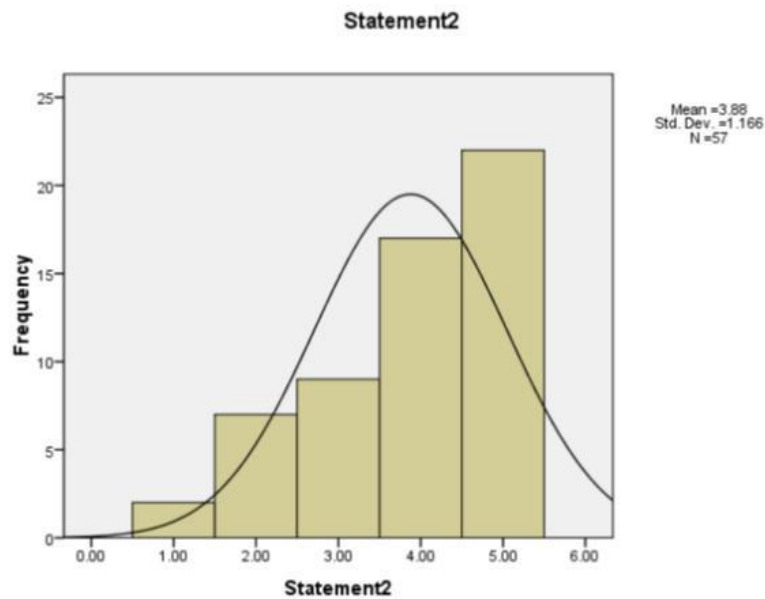


Figure 6. I will not teach the content that is not tested in the exam

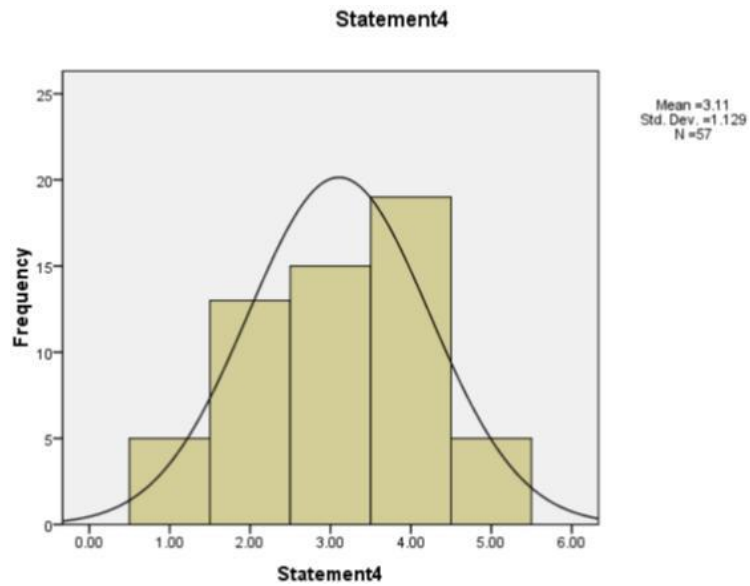


Figure 7. I am not worried about my students' performance in final exam

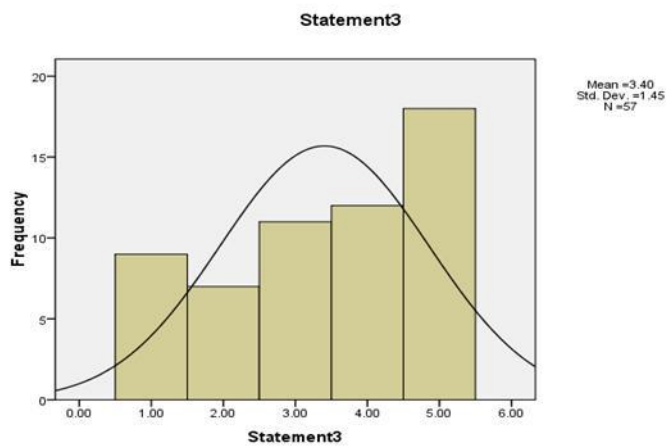


Figure 8. As the exams approaches, the teaching becomes exam-centric

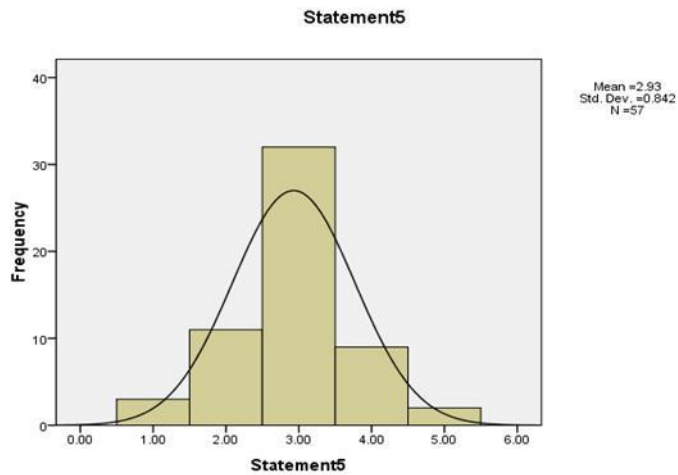


Figure 9: Amount of time devoted to teaching the concepts: less marks, less time: more marks, more

## Conclusion

The preceding study adds greatly to the body of knowledge on teaching and assessment procedures. The aforementioned study concludes that professors' teaching and testing attitudes in various universities alter depending on the scenario and are not consistent. At the same time, it is recognised that experienced teachers focus more on teaching rather than testing, which is a good indicator.

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