Impact of Washback in English as Second Language Classrooms – An Investigation in the University of Jaffna – Sri Lanka

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Article reference:

Abstract: The manner in which public or in-house examinations affect teaching and learning processes in English as Second Language (ESL) classrooms is normally explained as “washback” or “backwash” (These terms are interchangeably used to denote the same meaning). Currently a large number of definitions have been suggested by language scholars for the notion “washback” right through the accessible researches and relevant literatures on ESL language testing. In this paper I prefer to employ the term “washback” alone to interpret the same situation. At the beginning, the present study attempts to focus on range of definitions of washback. Thereafter, it tries to recognize the parallel terms introduced by other language researchers; after having adequate discussion and reviewing on different definitions, the researcher’s ultimate aim of this paper is to introduce new views on washback with correct pedagogical implications for ESL practitioners; this fresh insight relevant to washback effect on teaching and learning process is doubtlessly believed to help language practitioners to implement the ESL programme effectively. The research method applied for this investigation is based on ethnographic perspective qualitative research components and the subjects for this investigation were thirty Tamil medium undergraduates in the Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

Index Terms: Washback effect, ESL

01. Introduction

Although the term “washback” is frequently employed in applied linguistics nowadays, it is hardly ever observed in all the dictionaries. Nevertheless, the notion “backwash” can be observed in some of the dictionaries and where this term is explained as “the unwelcome repercussions of some social action” by the New Webster’s Comprehensive Dictionary, and “unpleasant after-effects of an event or situation” by the Collins Co-build Dictionary.

Presently, the notions “washback” and “backwash” are interchangeably and very popularly used by different researchers to explain the positive and negative test effects on classroom teaching in the field of Applied Linguistics. For instance, Hughes (1989), Spolsky (1994) and Biggs (1995) exploit the notion “backwash” in their research programmes, whereas Pearson (1988), Buck (1988), Shohamy (1992), Messick (1996), Bailey (1996) and Cheng (1997) in their research programmes employ the term “washback”. Since both of these notions mostly attempt to interpret the same situations, that is
the relationship and effects of a test on classroom teaching and learning programmes, in this paper I prefer to use the notion “washback”.


In this paper I attempt to correlate English as a Second language (ESL) classrooms and washback effects on teaching and learning processes. Presently in the field of ESL, there is a general truth that testing procedures, whether public or in-house evaluation, influence teaching and learning process. Washback is normally supposed to influence the ESL classroom activities positively (beneficial) or negatively (harmful). Positive effects of washback are generally desirable in the language classrooms whereas, negative effects in ESL classrooms relevant to washback is believed to be promote harmful effects in the teaching and learning processes; particularly this situation is supposed to hinder to achieve the objectives and aims. Negative effects emerge when a classroom teaching is conducted entirely based on narrowed examination purposes. For example, in a situation where a language teacher ignores the curriculum including classroom objective, contents, methodology and outcome with national aims and performs his/her teaching only based on multiple choice examinations techniques. Thus if a teacher conducts his ESL classroom activities based on multiple choice examination system in order to obtain more score in a particular examination, the washback effect will be negative. Because in this situation, the entire curriculum including contents/sub-contents, objective, learners’ outcome and teaching methodology is totally ignored by the teacher; this is not the desirable situation. With this brief introduction in the next section some important and acceptable definitions on “washback” are discussed to reach the clear understanding on the concept of the term “washback.”

02. Some important definitions

The effect of washback on ESL/EFL classrooms is a recognized and documented in recent times by various language scholars. The washback corollary has generally been explained as: the power and influence of testing procedures on entire classroom teaching and learning processes (Gates, 1995 also supports this view).

Since I have been working in the University of Jaffna, I intend to present some clues to understand the concept of the term “washback”. At the end of the semester, in the University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka, I usually hear the following utterances from our undergraduates. Some tokens are presented here:

“Sir, shall we meet by next week? -----------”

“Sir, examination clues, please. ---------------”

“Sir, shall we omit any area? ------------------”

These tokens confirm that the learners’ focus is always on examination; their motivation is strongly related to examination and the score. They, most of the time, never think of the outcome of any particular curriculum and most of the learners
never reveal this feeling overtly. When I was a university undergraduate I collected the past papers and checked the questions and their models; based on the past paper questions I prepared some answers and before the examination I read my model answers. Because rather than obtaining knowledge, I gave priority to acquire more scores by presenting accurate answers.

I shall present some major information about washback here; Bachman and Palmer (1996) demonstrate the washback effect by employing the term “test impact”. They declare that washback effects may influence individual learner and his/her intention or sometimes society as a whole; this individual level influencing situation is denoted as micro-level influence and societal level influence is called as macro-level impacts.

In Jaffna (Sri Lanka) situations, let me focus on three separate examinations and their influence on classroom teaching.

1) Grade five - scholarship examination (National examination – macro-level washback effect)
2) General Certificate of Education – Ordinary Level (National examination – macro level washback effect)

Whereas in this paper, I only focus on the University of Jaffna Tamil medium undergraduates in the Faculty of Arts and the washback effect in their ESL classrooms.

As I mentioned earlier, currently ample definitions are available for the term “washback”. These definitions vary from uncomplicated to complicated; most of them provide a narrow focus on language teachers and learners in classroom contexts and other definitions contain information relevant to impact on tests and classroom teaching only.

Now I shall present and consider some important definitions below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/s &amp; year</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01 Pearson (1988, p.07)</td>
<td>“Public examinations influence the attitudes, behaviors and motivation of teachers, learners and parents, and because examinations often come at the end of a course, this influence is seen working in a backward direction, hence the term ‘washback’” (quoted in Pan, 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02 Buck (1988, p.17).</td>
<td>“There is a natural tendency for both teachers and students to tailor their classroom activities to the demands of the test, especially when the test is very important to the future of the students, and pass rates are used as a measure of teacher success. This influence of the test on the classroom (referred to as washback by language testers) is, of course, very important; this washback effect can be either beneficial or harmful”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Author(s) and Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Shohamy (1992, p.513)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Alderson and Wall (1993, p.241)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Wall and Alderson (1993, p.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Shohamy (1993a, p.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>Spolsky (1994, p.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Andrews (1994a, p. 45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Biggs (1995, p.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Messick (1996, p.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Bailey (1996, p.269)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Bailey (1996, p.259)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Shohamy, et al. (1996, p.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Cheng (1997, p.43),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Davies et al. (1999, p.225)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Cheng (2005, p.257)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary:

It is hoped that providing summary of the above definitions may establish a clear picture about washback for the readers.

- Influence of public examination on attitudes, behaviours, motivation of teachers, learners and parents
- Classroom activities are tailored with examination demands
- Teachers’ ability is associated with pass rate of the students
- Teachers and learners’ main focus is on test
- A complex and ill-defined phenomenon
- Tests have the power of manipulating the classroom programmes
- Curriculum alignment focuses on the connection between testing and the syllabus
- Tests requirements can improve learning process
- Testing controls curriculum, teaching methods and learning strategies
- Influence can be positive or negative – it may promote or impede learning objectives
- Classroom activities are limited to multiple choice practice due to the multiple choice examination pressure
- Due to the demand of the public examination, curriculum change is occurred to modify the teaching and learning processes

When we consider the above key points relevant to the definitions, it can be noted that some of them are positive washback effect and a few of them are negative effects of washback. However, many important aspects are not included in the above definitions. Certainly classroom teaching process has to be correlated with year or semester end test; but knowledge building process and learners’ outcome cannot be completely ignored by teachers during teaching process; the classroom objective and national level aim must be clearly articulated in the curriculum and that cannot be overlooked; teachers are supposed to design their classroom activities on par with the specified classroom objective and national level aim. Apart from this chief factor, teachers are believed not to change or alter their teaching methodology, classroom activities and curriculum in order to satisfy the test demand; learners’ needs cannot be narrowed down or modified in order to face the demand of any tests. On the other hand, employers’ requirements also cannot be overlooked during the teaching process because marketability of an undergraduate depends on that. To accomplish these complex tasks, a teacher has to face a lot of challenges. For example, time management, educational administrative requirements, coverage of extra-curricular activities, learners’ needs, stakeholders’ needs and maintaining the quality of the learners’ outcome are some to mention.

03. Tests

In this section I consider some other scholars’ view relevant to washback in association with test (In this context the term “test” referred to year end or semester end written examination). Before I discuss the relationship between test and washback it is better to present the concept of the term “test” and testing processes with purposes. In this paper, since I relate washback with ESL, I precisely attempt to introduce the basic concept of the term “test” in the ESL domain, to provide
some important definitions of test and to offer some information about different kinds of tests and their basic purposes with some of the major formal testing items and their rationales.

The term “test” is generally interpreted as a mode of assessing a learner’s ability, knowledge, or performance in a given subject area. Long time ago, when Carroll (1968) defines test, he states, “A psychological or educational test is a procedure designed to elicit certain behaviour from which one can make inferences about certain characteristics of an individual” (p. 46). According to this author’s view test is mostly conducted to check the behavioural change of an individual learner in any educational field. Messick (1989) briefly demonstrates that testing is not a single step it is an ongoing process. Tharu Jacob (2000) claims, “test a systematic procedure for observation and assessing relevant performance in order to estimate a persons’ level of a specified ability” (p.234). Therefore, we have to consider at least the following:

a) Eliciting certain behaviour/certain characteristics
b) Not one off exercise but an ongoing process
c) Systematic procedure for observation
d) Assessing relevant performance
e) It is a continuous route and journey parallel to teaching process; in the sense, a testee should be assessed incessantly.

Often tests are categorized into two major types based on different purposes: high-stakes test and low-stakes test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High-stakes test</th>
<th>Low-stakes test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To provide awards, grade promotions (schools), university admissions (foreign/local), career promotions and decision relevant to salary.</td>
<td>Low-stakes test outcome may be used for the following measures:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If achievement is not satisfactory some kind of penalty will be declared: for example: stagnating the promotion, discontinuing the salary and so on.</td>
<td>Recognizing learning issues, identifying slow learners, Modifying tutoring style, fine-tuning curriculum, altering teaching methodology and changing teaching strategies/techniques.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conventionally, at the end of English as a Second Language (ESL) course a test is administered to check the achievement rate of the learners. It happened at the schools, technical colleges and universities after completing the teaching programme; no one considers the after effect of the test. But currently, the ESL situation is entirely different and diverse; after completing the examination, much discussion will take place among test takers, teachers and test designers about the test and its effects. It has long been emphasized, in broad contexts that tests apply a type of powerful influence on language learners who are preparing to sit for the tests, and on the teachers who teach in classrooms; therefore it has become important research area in the field of Applied Linguistics. Bachman and Palmer (1996) present at least the following four elements will determine the washback effect: 1) test focus, 2) test type, 3) test delivery and 4) test content.

Apart from this, there are different types of tests based on diverse purposes. I present some important types of tests and their purposes particularly in the field of ESL.
### Table – 3.2 – Tests and purposes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Test Type</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Achievements/attainment/progress test</td>
<td>To check the progress of a learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Proficiency test</td>
<td>To check the current language proficiency level of the learner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Placement test</td>
<td>To rank learners placement test is conducted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Formative test</td>
<td>A test used during a course to assess a student's progress. Such a test is generally aimed at producing feedback for the teacher and the student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Summative test</td>
<td>End course examination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Aptitude test</td>
<td>To check a student’s ability to learn a particular skill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Cloze test</td>
<td>A gap-filling task, where words are deleted and the learner has to replace them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>C-test</td>
<td>A test where the first half of every second word is removed from a text and the learner has to restore the missing letters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Criterion-referenced test</td>
<td>In a criterion-referenced test, the learner’s performance is compared to predetermined criteria, and not to the performance of other students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Norm-referenced test</td>
<td>A norm-referenced test is a test in which a learner’s score is compared to the scores of the other learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Diagnostic test</td>
<td>A test, which diagnoses a learner’s language proficiency level and strengths and weaknesses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Performance test</td>
<td>To check a learner’s efficiency in productive rather than receptive skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Objective test</td>
<td>Multiple-choice and short answer questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Subjective test</td>
<td>Mostly writing and speaking tests are subjectively marked and subjective tests are often marked by raters using analytic or holistic marking scales.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Dictation test</td>
<td>A test of listening in which the learners write down what s/he hears. This test may assess more than just recognition of spoken words.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 04. Influenced areas

So far I have reasonably discussed the important aspects of washback and its importance. In this section, I attempt to present washback effect on teaching and learning areas; it is expected that if we have clear understanding on washback effects and relevant areas, in future as language practitioners, we can realize the areas where appropriate adjustments and managements are needed to make the teaching enterprise success. Many scholars have already listed the influenced areas by washback effect. In the following table I present some of them.
Table – 4.1 – Influenced areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/s &amp; year</th>
<th>Influenced Areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Pearson (1988, p. 98)</td>
<td>Attitudes, behavior, and motivation of teachers, learners and parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Pierce (1992, p. 687)</td>
<td>Classroom pedagogy, curriculum development, and educational policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Shohamy (1993b)</td>
<td>Administrators, teachers and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Andrews (1994a)</td>
<td>Teachers, learners, and parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Lumley and Stoneman (2000, p.75)</td>
<td>Teachers’ positive attitude towards the teaching package; learners want to familiarize the test model</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

05. Some major hypotheses

Alderson and Wall (1993) present 15 hypotheses that they expect will guide to the ultimate enhancement of the washback construct (pp. 120). They submit these hypotheses to the language practitioners based on empirical studies. These hypotheses are hoped to channel teachers and learners and even all the stakeholders to the right direction. These hypotheses evidently provide the influenced teaching and learning areas in order to provide awareness to the practitioners. They are listed here with relevant descriptions; I provide the appropriate descriptions:

Table – 5.1 - Alderson and Wall’s (1993, p. 120) hypotheses and descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Descriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A test will influence teaching</td>
<td>Teaching methods and teaching strategies/techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A test will influence learning</td>
<td>Learning methods, techniques and learning strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A test will influence what teachers teach</td>
<td>Contents/input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A test will influence how teachers teach; and by extension from (2) above</td>
<td>Teaching techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A test will influence what learners learn</td>
<td>Contents (appropriate or not)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. A test will influence how learners learn</td>
<td>Learning techniques</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A test will influence the rate and sequence of teaching

- Syllabus/units/lessons (reference to teacher and gradient)

A test will influence the rate and sequence of learning

- Syllabus/units/lessons (reference to learners)

A test will influence the degree and depth of teaching

- Teachers’ motivation and attitudes

A test will influence the degree and depth of learning.

- Learners’ motivation and attitudes

A test will influence attitudes to the content, method, etc. of teaching and learning.

- Changes are required in content and method relevant to teaching and learning via needs analysis

Tests that have important consequences will have washback; and conversely

- If a test is very significant washback effect will emerge

Tests that do not have important consequences will have no washback.

- If a test is not very significant washback effect will not emerge

Tests will have washback effects on all learners and teachers

- On some occasions, tests will have effect on all learners and teachers

Tests will have washback effects for some learners and some teachers, but not for others.

- On some occasions, tests will have effect on some learners and teachers

The chief advantage of these hypotheses is Alderson and Wall (1993) constructed them from their relevant research findings in Sri Lanka and after examining the researches carried out in Nepal (Khaniya, 1990), Turkey (Hughes, 1988), and the Netherlands (Wesdorp, 1982).

The descriptions presented in the Table 5.1 are hoped to support the stakeholders relevant to their contributions towards ESL teaching and learning programmes. At this point I introduce the notion stakeholders to accommodate all who involve in the language teaching and learning enterprise. The principles related to bottom-up curriculum designing mostly embrace all the stakeholders including parents and members of the society (for detailed discussion, Saravanapava Iyer, 2012).

06. Research method and location

The participants of this study were 30 first year first semester Tamil medium undergraduates in the Faculty of the Arts, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka. They were all having equal level English language learning experience during their formal education but never have the equal proficiency level among them. There were 26 male and 04 female undergraduates in that group. A researcher-made questionnaire was administered among teachers. The questionnaire had a Likert Scale response format ranging from “very much” and “not at all”. With this questionnaire, to triangulate the data, structured interview was implemented to cross-check the data collected through the questionnaire. The responses of the subjects were audi-tape-recorded for analysis and investigation. In addition, participatory observation was implemented to systematically watch the interactions and events in classrooms settings. Classroom observational component is very essential in order to
obtain clear picture regarding to washback effect. To complement the data which were obtained from participatory observation with teachers’ views, I administered questionnaires to ESL teachers.

07. Discussion

Though the main focus of this article is to recognize the washback effect on ESL learning situation in the Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna it may be correlated to other situations also. As usual the washback effect can be felt in many areas. For example, teachers, teaching method, learners, attitude and motivation of the learners and the teachers, number of students in a classroom and time allocation, curriculum, Ministry of Education, parents and community/society, test designers, test and rates, learners needs, educational administrators- In Service Advisor (ISA), Director of Education (English), Faculty staff (University of Jaffna, Faculty of Arts), employers, University Grants Commission’s (UGC’s) educational policy and text/material/activities – highly exam oriented – past papers/knowledge oriented are some of the major important areas to mention. Relevant to my University (University of Jaffna) settings, I attempt to discuss the following areas and the effect of washback on them:

a) Learners’ needs
b) Faculty staff (University of Jaffna, Faculty of Arts)
c) Employers
d) University Grants Commission’s (UGC’s) educational policy
e) Text/material/activities – highly exam oriented – past papers/knowledge oriented

7.1 Learners’ needs

I do not attempt to speak about the needs of the learners in all the Faculties in the University of Jaffna; here I try to talk about the needs of the learners in the Faculty of Arts. For the Faculty of Arts students have been entering the University from various regions in Sri Lanka. Majority of the students are above the level of four University Test of English Language (UTEL) benchmark (specially designed proficiency guidelines for the Sri Lankan University undergraduates). During our casual discussion with the subjects I recognized that their primary need is only obtaining the pass in English as a Second Language (ESL). However, the University task for ESL teaching is enhancing their spoken, written, reading and listening abilities and consequently they have to reach UTEL benchmark level five; reaching benchmark level five is not necessary to obtain a pass in ESL; thus students’ utmost priority will be obtaining an ordinary pass in English. At this point one can note that the alignment between the University ESL learning objective and the learners objective do not agree with each other; therefore this situation creates a sort of classroom conflict or clash; students always target to complete the semester end examination; thus they try to familiarize the past question paper. At his junction, teachers can negotiate with the learners and make slight adjustment to find a compromise between university ESL learning objective and learners’ immediate needs.

7.2 Faculty staff

Faculty staff (other main subject lecturers) view that their learners have to achieve all the relevant competencies in
ESL within 45 hours (one semester). Particularly they hope their learners have to enhance their language abilities related to their respective academic fields; otherwise they try to put the blame on the ESL lecturers without understanding learners’ needs and objectives. At this juncture, Faculty staff, learners, ESL lecturers and test designers have to get together and construct an acceptable alignment between teaching, curriculum, needs and motivation.

7.3 Employers

Most of the employers whether Government or Private sector, expect high level smart graduates when they recruit staff for their organizations in addition to their academic qualifications. Learners’ motivation towards this task is rarely felt in the ESL classrooms due to the influence of washback effect; in the University of Jaffna, for the English language learning less time is allocated compared to their principal subjects. Students’ limited scope and motivation relevant to ESL, that is obtaining pass marks, will not permit them to spend more time to promote additional language smartness with soft skills. Most of the additional smartness expected by the employers (particularly in Sri Lanka) from the graduates is spoken and written English language skills with presentation ability in association with other soft skills.

7.4 University Grants Commission’s (UGC) educational policy

In order to maintain an acceptable class of uniformity among university undergraduates the University Grant Commission (UGC), Sri Lanka has introduced University Test of English Language (UTEL) benchmark descriptors recently based on authentic requirements obtained from stakeholders. It is a common examination and any university undergraduates can sit this online examination to obtain band score. The issue here is the mismatching between the UGC aim and the University objective relevant to ESL proficiency level among the undergraduates and the examinations conducted by the UGC (UTEL) and the ELTC. Generally ESL proficiency level of the graduates is expected to satisfy the requirements of the employers, international or locally; although the University of Jaffna agrees with this objective, the examination oriented course does not permit to achieve this objective due to the limitations of the flexibility in teaching and learning processes.

7.5 Text/material/activities – exam/knowledge oriented – past papers

For the first year undergraduates the UGC – Sri Lanka has design a book (English Skills for New Entrants, Higher Education for Twenty First Century (HETC) Publication, Sri Lanka - 2012) based on UTEL benchmark descriptors five and it is supplied free of charge for all the first year undergraduates to encourage to sit the UTEL examination. UTEL examination is a common online examination conducted by the UGC to maintain a universal standard in ESL. However, University undergraduates always concerned about the ESL examination (local examination) conducted by the English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC), University of Jaffna. The material (English Skills for New Entrants) freely supplied by the UGC is not considered as a serious one by the undergraduates because the examination conducted by the ELTC is mostly grammar oriented; the alignment between the above textbook and the examination conducted by the ELTC is somewhat blurred. Therefore, first year undergraduates in the Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna always concentrate on examination oriented classroom activities rather than using the UGC material. On most of the occasions, due to this type of conflict the UGC policy is ignored by the undergraduates and the teachers.
7.6 Language teachers’ view

They frequently speak about varieties of pressures; for example pressures from the Head/ELTC, Vice-Chancellor, undergraduates and employers are some to mention. They have to move from one end that is wider and narrower perspectives of the curriculum; they have to implement the activities approved by the ELTC at the classroom; meanwhile they have to conduct test paper practice classes to satisfy the undergraduates’ requirement. During this time teachers declare that undergraduates’ motivational level is very high compare to the regular classroom activities. Since this is narrow perspective of the curriculum, it is not desired since it is generally not included in curriculum; apart from that it requires additional time for the teachers to prepare the test paper activities.

Table – 7.1 – Washback and some affective areas

| Teachers + Objective setting + Teaching + Testing | ESL Curriculum + Materials + Methods + Motivation + Attitude + Objective + Materials/activities + UGC policy + University policy + Needs of the society + Employers’ needs + International demands | Learners Learning + Test writing |

08. Pedagogical suggestions

At the beginning, it is very important that teachers have to plan their day-to-day curriculum appropriately; this plan should include needs of the institutions, learners, employers, society and test; after recognizing and planning the curriculum, effective awareness programmes have to be organized for the stakeholders; effective awareness is important because lecturers have to construct a better balance among the areas which are given in the Table 7.1. It is also equally important to build up undergraduates’ motivational level. A lecturer is not supposed to present the teaching programme with multiple objectives; because this situation will not support to reach any of the objectives smoothly; thus establishing alignment among these different multiple objectives is vital before implementing the teaching programme.

Lecturers have to implement immensely well-organized management strategies to sort out the washback issues without
developing any contradictory circumstances; either positive or negative effects it is lectures’ responsibility to create a flexible situation among the affected teaching and learning areas as listed above (Table-7.1). Usually the End Semester examination based syllabus coverage in the ESL classroom does not guarantee the undergraduates’ language proficiency level to meet the widened international or local level demands. In order to pacify the situation stakeholders have to consider all the diverse needs and modify the entire ESL teaching and learning system, including curriculum. In order to conduct the teaching and learning programme smoothly and familiarize the effect of washback, teachers have to be provided with appropriate and adequate training programme. When teachers implement teaching and learning programme, considerable level of flexibility in the system has to be accommodated by the stakeholders.

To conclude, language teachers have to consider two perspectives at least; if teachers make the test complete alignment has to be maintained between what is tested and what is taught; this is related to testing. Other major responsibility is associated with learning part. As teachers, they may have limited power to modify the national level expectations, but they can prepare their learners to learn the language and write the tests; may be a big challenge for them. For the successful venture, teachers are supposed to establish a perfect teaching planning with time management. For an internal test, teachers can easily make the situation as feasible but it is difficult and complicated to establish a favourable circumstance relevant to external and national level tests; where policy makers, test paper designers, the Government, and educational planners’ control is extremely high. Therefore, teachers are supposed to deal this situation very cautiously and smartly.

References


Appendix - I

Questionnaire

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PART – I

Please tick the appropriate answer.

(1) Gender: Female ------ Male ------

(2) Age:

(3) Academic qualifications:

(4) Professional qualifications:

(5) Currently teaching for the undergraduates of:
   a) The Faculty of Medicine ----
   b) The Faculty of Arts ----
   c) The Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce ------
   d) The Faculty of Science ----
   e) The Faculty of Agriculture ------
   f) The Faculty of Engineering ----

(6) Medium of instruction in the classroom?
   a) English only ------
   b) English supplemented with Tamil ------
   c) Tamil only ------

PART II

Please tick only one answer

(7) In the University of Jaffna, English as a Second Language is taught:
   a) To train students for their future carrier ------
   b) To assess clever students ------
   c) To obtain pass marks ------
   d) To motivate students to apply all the skills ------
   e) To promote students to play an active role ------
   f) To coach students to communicate and interact with others ------
   g) To complete the prescribed textbooks ------
   h) To complete the syllabus ------
   i) To increase the employability rate ------
   j) To improve the ability relevant to their academic needs ------
   k) To reach the classroom objectives ------
   l) To reach the national aims ------
   m) To write the examination ------

(8) What are the major characteristics of the ESL tests in the University of Jaffna?
   a) Based on Communicative use ------
b) Task based approach ------
c) Real life language use ------
d) Only for reading and writing ------
e) Based on all the four skills ------

PART - III

(9) Mention your suggestions:

a) Modifying some of the existing activities
b) Employing new teaching methods and techniques
c) Establishing new teaching objectives with sub-objectives

Introducing and familiarizing more exam oriented activities practices.