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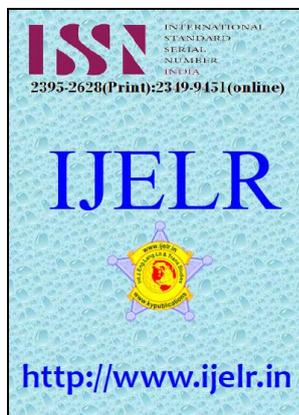
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WASHBACK EFFECTS ON TEACHING & LEARNING: A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED  
TECHNICAL UNIVERSITIES IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT



A great deal of study has been taking place on second language testing and evaluation by linguists. Owing to the result of their studies, radical changes have brought into the procedure and method of second language testing and evaluation. Over the past decade, research studies have been led particularly within English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) context to investigate Washback effects on language teaching, testing, and evaluation.

Second language testing doesn't mean the scores awarded to the students. Language testing cannot be valid and standard unless it is measured. To drive the point home, the researcher has considered how functional English is tested in the three Jawaharlal Nehru Technological Universities in Andhra Pradesh, India. The Bachelor of Technology (B. Tech) I year (freshman) question paper contains functional English as part of testing in these universities' semester-end examinations.

Key words: Washback, teaching, testing

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1. INTRODUCTION

A great deal of study has been taking place on second language testing and evaluation by linguists. Owing to the result of their studies, radical changes have brought into the procedure and method of second language testing and evaluation. Researches have been conducted to authenticate these procedures and methods and to find out the validity of language testing. The current linguists have recommended the methods to be taken into consideration while creating a language test.

Second language testing doesn't mean the scores awarded to the students. Language testing cannot be valid and standard unless it is measured. To drive the point home, the researcher has considered how functional English is tested in the three Jawaharlal Nehru Technological Universities in Andhra Pradesh, India. The Bachelor of Technology (B. Tech) I year (freshman) question paper contains functional English as part of testing in these universities' semester-end examinations.

## 2. Review of Literature

### 2.1 Washback

Over the past decade, research studies have been led particularly within English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) context to investigate Washback effects on language teaching, testing, and evaluation. Andrews & Fullilove opines that “There is convincing evidence to suggest that examinations have significant washback effects on teaching and learning within different educational contexts (1997)”. Specifically, “language tests are seen to have a more direct washback effect on teaching content rather than teaching methodology” (Cheng 268)).

According to Alderson & Wall “Washback or backwash, a term now commonly used in applied linguistics, refers to the influence of testing on teaching and learning and has become an increasingly prevalent and prominent phenomenon in education” (115), —“what is assessed becomes what is valued, which becomes what is taught” (McEwen, 42). According to Madaus & Kellaghan, “the reseems to beat least two major types or areas of washback or backwash studies—those relating to traditional, multiple-choice, large-scale tests, which are perceived to have had mainly negative influences on the quality of teaching and learning (n. p), and those studies where a specific test or examination has been modified and improved upon (e.g., performance-based assessment), in order to exert a positive influence on teaching and learning” (qtd. in Linn & Herman, 7). The other type of studies has revealed teaching and learning free from influence. The concept is rooted in the notion that tests or examinations can and should drive teaching, and hence learning, and is also referred to as measurement-driven instruction (Popham, 682).

### 2.2 Washback Impact on Teaching and Testing

Studies in language testing focus on assessing particular features of test takers are done and how the instructors integrate those features while designing language tests. It has been noticed in the most important academic advances during the past thirty years that the scores of language tests signify complicated effects of language testing and teaching on students and instructors respectively. The scores that we see are not the accurate measurement of language content of the test takers. We measure the test taker’s ability of his/her memory. Test tasks, test takers’ characteristics, methods, and approaches towards the tests can affect the scores. Most of the time, we consider the test scores as reliable, ignoring the factors that influenced the test takers. These influences have to be taken into consideration as the test takers and the testers have Washback effect on them.

Linguistics defines testing as an instrument that measures the language competency and the knowledge of the learners. It is an assessing technique. “A test is defined as a measuring device. Measurement is the process of assigning numerical value to the response for a given task to each of the members or a set of objects or group of persons normally examinees” (Rahman and Gautam, 434).

Ingram is of the view that “tests, like examinations, invite candidates to display their knowledge or skills in a concentrated fashion, so that the result can be graded, and inferences made from the standard of performance that can be expected from the candidate, either at the time of the test or at some future time” (313). So, test takers knowledge is measured in a test and it further identifies how many students are in the same categories that possess equal knowledge.

Thus, language testing is an established practice to question and observe language learning methods and approaches. Testing categorizes if the test takers followed the instructor during their lectures. It further labels the comprehending ability of the test takers. It can classify the test takers based on their comprehending ability. That could certainly support the instructor to differentiate the learner from the other and know his/her needs.

### 2.3 Test Characteristics:

As Bachman suggests, “a language test can be classified in terms of five characteristics, which are as follows:

- I. Test can be distinguished according to their intended use, such as selection, entrance, readiness, placement, diagnosis, progress, attainment and mastery.
- II. Tests can differ in content; Achievement tests are based on syllabus, while a proficiency test derives a theory of language ability.

- III. Different frames of reference can provide the basis for test development and score interpretation norm referenced tests are developed to maximize differences among individual test takers and a test score is interpreted in relation to the score of the test takers.
- IV. Tests can be classified according to the scoring procedure (the act or process of evaluating responses to test situations or evaluating characteristics of whomever or whatever is being rated. It consists of checking the student's response to each item to see if it is correct. Scoring objective tests is purely mechanical process which requires no special skills); objective tests require no judgment on the part of the scorer but in subjective tests, the scorer must judge the correctness of the test taker's response.
- V. Tests may employ different testing methods, such as dictation, cloze, multiple-choice, completion, composition and interview(119)".

These points are not fundamentally related or autonomous of each other. A test may be valid for more than one reason, like entrance examinations and campus placement recruitment tests and either a proficiency test may be utilized for position relying upon situations.

#### 2.4 Testing Process

All the three Jawaharlal Nehru Technological Universities (Ananthapur, Hyderabad, and Kakinada) have functional English in their respective question papers. However, the question is not a compulsory one to answer in the examination. A student can choose another question instead of answering this question.

To illustrate:

- (a) JNTU-Ananthapur I/IV B.Tech English question paper contains eight questions out of which five has to be answered by the student. So, a student can leave the question on functional English in choice. Ironically, various types of questions on functional English are under one question.
- (b) JNTU-Hyderabad I/IV B.Tech English question paper follows the same pattern of JNTU-Ananthapur
- (c) JNTU-Kakinada I/IV B.Tech English question paper contains six questions out of which three questions has to be answered.

The majority of the students' ultimate aim, who study B.Tech in these universities, is to get placed in any of the multinational companies. However the focus of testing is more on literature and less importance is given to functional English. This syllabus makes students rely on rote method. It doesn't really test students' needs.

Owing to these testing patterns, the faculty are forced to deliver content that can easily make the student gain marks. However, the students lose the employability skills. They will be handicapped in oral and written communication as emphasis is less on language testing.

#### Conclusion

In this connection the researcher truly believes that testing plays a significant role in the production of teaching resources and their effect on the language learners. When learning, testing and evaluation go hand in glove, it results in candidates' acquiring the necessary skills required for the job market. Hence, the researcher concludes that language teaching can be efficient and effective if it follows Washback in these respective universities.

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