Examining Washback in Multi-exam Preparation Classes in Greece: (A Focus on Teachers’ Teaching practices)

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Structure of the Presentation

- Introduction
- Background and Rationale
- Literature Review
- Methodology
- Significance and Contribution
Introduction

• Powerful role of Tests (McNamara & Shohamy, 2008)

• ‘Big business’ (Spolsky, 2008, p. 297)

• More exams are developed and enter the market (Dunkley, 2010)
Long history in EFL examinations – Testing ‘is of special interest’ (Tsagari & Papageorgiou, 2012, p. 4) in Greece

EFL testing certificates have become great industry

15 language examinations for B2 level are approved by ASEP (Civil Service Staffing Council)
The 15 language certificates in Greece

1. First Certificate in English (FCE), University of Cambridge
2. Business Language Testing Service (BULATS)
3. International English Language Testing System score: 4,5–5,5/9, University of Cambridge
4. English Certificate of Competency in English, (ECCE), University of Michigan
5. Pearson Test of English (PTE General), Level 3
6. Certificate in Integrated Skills in English (ISE II), Trinity College London
7. City & Guilds, Level 1 Communicator Certificate
8. Open College of North Wests (OCNW) Certificate in ESOL International Level 1
9. English Speaking Board (ESB) Level 1, Certificate in ESOL International
10. Test Of Interactive English, (TIE), B2 Level
12. Test of English of International Communication (TOEIC) score: 505–780
13. Educational Development International (EDI) Level 1 JETSET Level 5
15. Michigan State University (MSU-CELC): CEF B2
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Privately-owned institutions teaching either school subjects or foreign languages

They are popular because they prepare students for a variety of high-stakes exams

One of the most popular levels is B2 level = 30 credits in job applications

B2 level classes only exam classes
An entire year is set aside for the preparation of exams
Multi-exam classes

- Students enroll at two examinations of the EFL certificates out of the 15 available in the expectation that if they do not succeed in one they may succeed the other.

- Teachers are obliged to teach and prepare students for two or three or even four exams in the same class.
Washback on Language Education

- ‘The effects of testing on teaching and learning’ (Hughes, 1989, in Bailey, 1996)

- Complex phenomenon (Alderson and Wall, 1993; Bailey, 1996; Shohamy et al, 1996; Alderson and Hamp-Lyons, 1996)

- Nature – Scope – Degree i) are shaped by different factors & ii) differ vastly between contexts
Washback Hypothesis and Models

• The complex relationship between exams, teaching and learning is also seen in various models.

• The models focus on different aspects of washback in an attempt to gain a picture of the phenomenon.

• These models of washback provide useful information in order to understand how washback works.
Washback Hypothesis and Models

Models that look at the phenomenon more **holistically**

A test will influence:  
**Teaching**  
• What & how teachers teach  
• Rate / sequence  
• Degree / depth  

**Learning**  
• What & How learners learn  
• Rate / sequence  
• Degree / depth  

Trichotomy of:  
• Participants  
• Process  
• Product  

Hughes (1993)

Alderson and Wall (1993)
Washback Hypothesis and Models

Models that emphasize the **interaction** among the sources

- **Interaction** among the **components**
- **Links** directly **students** learning to the **test**

**Bailey** (1996)

- Adds another **dimension** on participants which incorporates the **stakes** of the **exams**

**Green** (2006)

- **Complex nature** of washback
- **external sources**
- complexity from **both inside** and **outside** the classroom context

**Tsagari** (2009)
Teaching Dimension of Washback

A Revised Model of Washback on How Teachers Teach (Glover, 2006)

Explanatory Model of Washback (Cheng, 2005)

Level 1
Decision making Agencies
CDC
Teaching syllabus
HKEA
Exam syllabus
How do the two syllabuses work? How are the teaching and learning principles behind the exam syllabus realized as manageable tasks?

Level 2
Intervening Agencies
Textbook publishers
Teaching content
Tertiary Institutions
Teaching methods
How do teachers realize the teaching and learning theories behind the exam syllabus and the textbooks? How do teachers arrange their lessons and activities accordingly?

Level 3
Implementing Agencies
Schools
Principals
Teachers
Students
How are the teaching and learning activities carried out in classrooms?
Washback Hypothesis and Models

• The models contribute to the overall picture of washback and offer fundamental frameworks for research agendas.

However

• Models fail to provide more specific information on the washback effect on teachers and teaching.

• They do not provide enough information on teachers’ teaching practices which is the focus of the current study.
Research on Washback

Contradicted Results

- Washback varies from teacher to teacher and the situation
- Different findings regarding Teaching Strategies-Tasks-Activities
- Variation of terminology that exists in the literature

= Confusion regarding the FOCUS of the studies and what each term STANDS FOR
Diverse Findings

• Variation of terminology
  – Methods are not defined properly
  – Tasks and activities are not clearly distinguished

• Investigating terms together
  - Create difficulties in making comparisons
  - Gaps in the literature
Conclusions

• Washback varies in nature (Cheng, 2005) & presents to be a multi-faceted, complex and elusive phenomenon (Tsagari, 2011).

• Studies in washback have raised issues concerning teaching practices, a number of conflicting issues need to be further investigated.

• Little attention has been paid to the teacher’s thought process and perceptions underlying the washback phenomenon.
Research Aim

• Examine the washback effect of multi-exam classes on teachers’ teaching practices, with special reference to ‘teaching strategies’, ‘activities’ and ‘methods’.

• Develop understanding of i) the nature of washback on teaching practices in both terms and ii) the reasons why participants use the specific teaching practices in each term.
Framework of Analysis

- Use of analytical framework of Analysis in order to investigate teaching practices.
- This framework will bring together the contradictions (e.g. variation of terms).
- It will fill the gaps in the literature.
Teaching Strategies

- Laughter, Stress, Anxiety
- Classroom Discipline and other behaviors
- Teacher Talk
- Use of first or and Target Language
- Greek / English
- Instructions-Explanations-Suggestions
- Teacher Questions
- Assessment feedback and Error Correction
- Nature & Function of Assessment & Correction
- Patterns used
- Explanations

University of Cyprus
Teaching Practices

TASKS
PEDAGOGICAL

Essay Writing
Formal Letter Writing
Informal Letter Writing
Story
Article
Report
Review
Email
Blog Entry
Mediation

Sharing Personal Experience
Problem Solving
Comparing & Contrasting
Description
Asking Questions
Role Play
Discussion
Presentation
Collaboration
Mediation

Book / Fiction
Dialogue
Monologue (e.g. lectures, news, talks)
Internet Based Information
Articles
Reports
Advertisements
Correspondence
Messages
Information Materials (e.g. leaflets, brochures)
Interacting Texts (e.g. conversations, interviews, quizzes)

Writing
Speaking
Reading
Listening
Teaching Practices

**TASKS**
EXAM RELATED

- Explain Mock Exams
- Timed Practice Test Writing
- Strategies for Timed Examination Conditions
- Teacher’s Time Allocation to Tasks related to 4 Skills
- Have Students Score Classroom Work
- Review Answers to Test Questions
- Explain Format and Content of Exam Modules
- Practice the Test Situation
- Scoring
- Word Count

Writing
- Speaking
- Listening
- Reading
- Grammar
- Vocabulary
Teaching Practices

**ACTIVITIES**

- Multiple-choice Questions
- Sentence Completion / Gap fill Sentence
- Multiple Matching Questions
- Dictation
- Gapped Text
- Answer Questions
- Multiple-choice Cloze
- Open Cloze
- Word Formation
- Key Word Transformation
- True / False
- Matching
- Ordering
- Read Aloud

- Listening
- Reading
- Grammar
- Vocabulary

- Planning
- Sentence Formation
- Practice Parts of Language (e.g. linkers)
- Write Paragraphs
- Answer Questions
- Memorize

**Writing**

**Speaking**
A Framework of Analysis
Research Questions

• Main Question:
  How does the multi-exam context influence the teaching practices used by teachers?

• Guiding questions:

  • 1. What kind of teaching practices do teachers use in multi-exam classes? Are there any differences between the 1st and 2nd term?

  • 2. Does washback in a multi-exam context exist? If it does, what is its nature and scope on: teaching strategies, activities, and tasks

  • 3. How do teachers decide on the teaching practices they use in multi-exam classes?
Methodology

• **Case Study** (Wallace, 2000, Yin, 2003; Dörnyei, 2007):
  – natural context of the classroom
  – common research design in washback studies
  – suitable for eliciting data in natural contexts

• Qualitative data collection procedures will be used in all the research phases of the study.
Context – Participants

3 Teachers

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Class

One

Province in Greece

B2 level

6 Hours

1st Term: Sep-Jan
2nd Term: Feb – May
3rd Term: May: Intensive Exam Preparation

Reading - Vocabulary Grammar Listening Speaking Writing
Data Collection - Validity

Data Triangulation
Different Participants
(3 teachers)

Data Triangulation
Different Stages
(two terms)

Validity of Findings

Method triangulation

Theoretical triangulation
Washback + Teacher Cognition Theory
**Methods - Interviews**

**Aim**
- To enable the researcher to identify the types of teaching strategies, activities and methods teachers use in both terms
- To confirm the existence or not of washback on teaching practices in a multi-exam context
- To understand why participants had taught in a certain way and gain insights into teachers’ perceptions (Wall and Horak, 2007; Li, 2009; Turner, 2009)

**Questions**
- ‘What kind of teaching practices do teachers use in multi-exam classes?’
- ‘Does washback in a multi-exam context exist?’

**Instrument**
- Structured Interviews with each teacher (3 teachers in total)
- Approximately 60 minutes in length
- It will be conducted face-to-face at the school
- Permission to tape-record each interview
## Methods - Observations

### Aim

- To observe and document the types of teaching strategies, activities and methods teachers use in both terms and to establish the existence or not of washback on teaching practices within the multi-exam context
- To understand the nature of washback in both terms in order to make comparisons between the terms

### Questions

- What kind of teaching practices do teachers use in multi-exam classes? Are there any differences between the 1st and 2nd term?
- ‘Does washback in a multi-exam context exist? If it does, what is its nature and scope on: teaching strategies, activities, and tasks?’

### Instrument

- 3 hours of classroom observation with each participant
- Total = 12 hours of observations per semester, that is 12 hours during November and 12 hours during April
- Observation schedule focusing observations on aspects of the lesson related to teaching
- The observation scheme will focus on the framework of analysis and it will be in the form of a checklist
- The hours of teaching will be video-recorded and transcribed
Methods - Follow Up Interviews

Aim
- To understand why participants use the specific teaching practices in each term
- Are there different factors that influence their choices?
- The focus here is on teacher cognition that is to understand what teachers, think, know, and believe about the teaching practices they use (Borg, 2003)

Question
- How do teachers decide on the teaching practices they use in multi-exam classes?

Instrument
- Use of a stimulated recall procedure with teachers commenting on video recordings in order to elicit teachers’ thoughts, judgments and decisions on the teaching practices they use
- Open-ended questions will be provided to each participant and a semi-structured interviewing format will be adopted (Cheng, 1997)
- Interviews will be tape-recorded with the participants’ permission for later analysis (Yin, 2010)
- The post-observational interviews will be conducted either immediately after the observations or later
Data Collection Process

Step 1: **Obtain permission** (May – Sep 2013)

Step 2: **Design & Pilot the Instruments** (May 2013- Sep 2013)

Step 3: **Interviews with Teachers** (Oct/ Nov 2013 or Jan/ Feb 2014)

Step 4: **Classroom Observations** (Oct/ Nov 2013 or Jan/ Feb 2014)

Step 5: **Follow-up Interviews on Video Recordings** (Oct/ Nov 2013 or Jan/ Feb 2014)

Step 6: **Repeat Steps 3, 4, 5 in the Second Term** (Mar/ Apr 2014)

Step 7: **Interpretation and Comparison of Results** (May-Dec 2014)

- **9 hours of observations (1st term)**
  
  +

- **9 hours of observations (2nd term) = 18 hours**

- **Interviews with 3 teachers**

- **18 Follow-up Interviews**
Analysis

• Transcription and coding of: video-recorded observations, interviews, follow-up interviews

• Qualitative data analysis program probably Atlas.ti (Freeman, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1994)

• **Coding scheme:** Categories based on the framework of analysis and the research questions

• To enhance the validity and reliability of the analysis, *analyst triangulation* will be employed
Importance and Contribution of Study

- New state of affairs which will become more popular in years to come
- Lack of research in Greece - value on multi-exam classes
- Contribute a teacher’s voice which so far has been absent
- Understanding of the washback phenomenon through new empirical evidence

The study is potentially significant in that it offers educators and policymakers in Greece insights into the relationship between teaching practices and high-stakes exams.
The Importance and Contribution of the Study

- It focuses solely and utterly on teaching practices
- It draws a distinction between terms and brings them together
- It will offer a framework of investigating teaching practices
- It will investigate ‘the reasons behind teachers’ actions and teaching practices’ from a teacher cognition point of view
Implications

The results of the study will:

• suggest **new methodologies** to **teachers** to promote learning and possible ways to cope with the demands that exams create

• benefit **training programmes** since they will be able to plan **more effective teacher training programmes**

• make suggestions to **material writers** and **publishers** on how to **balance language skills**
References

Thank You for Listening!

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