

Washback Effect of the Iranian Concours on Senior High School Students' EFL Learning Activities

Mohammad Reza Ghorbani¹, Malihe Neissari²

Abstract

The effect of testing on teaching and learning is commonly referred to as washback. It is mediated by factors which may be different from context to context. This study focused on school type and location assumed to be closely associated with the washback effect of the nationwide Iranian University Entrance Examination (UEE). To study the impact of the UEE on Iranian students at senior high schools, the researcher reviewed the existing instruments for washback studies and developed his own questionnaire which included 20 items on a six-point Likert scale. Five experts reviewed and assessed the instrument to determine its content and face validity. The internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire was .72 based on Cronbach's coefficient alpha. Stratified random sampling was used to select 120 freshmen from Kosar University of Bojnord (KUB). The questionnaire was given to the randomly-selected students. The descriptive statistics suggested that the majority of the surveyed students perceived the harmful effect of the UEE on their learning activities. However, the independent-samples t-test results indicated that there was no significant difference between students' perceptions of the impact of the UEE in view of the school type or location in which they were studying.

Key words: *The Concours, University Entrance Examination, Washback, Impact, EFL, Teaching and Learning*

1. Introduction

The UEE is called Konkur in Iran. It is probably the changed form of the term 'concour', which refers to the process of sourcing, screening, and selecting people for different purposes. Senior high school graduates, who wish to enter the country's tuition-free public universities, participate in an annual and intense multiple-choice exam, which usually lasts 4.5 hours. Entrance into Iranian tuition-free public universities is very competitive and difficult (Hosseini, 2007). Parents spend a lot of time and money to help their children succeed in the UEE. A very lucrative cram

¹English Department, University of Bojnord (UB), Bojnord, Iran. Email: mrg872@yahoo.com

²English Department, Tabaran Institute of Higher Education, Mashhad, Iran. Email: mng978@gmail.com

industry operating all over the country privately attracts so many enthusiastic students by offering preparatory courses. Although the number of the country's higher education institutes has been increased and the capacity of many universities has been expanded, the fierce and tough competition among senior high-school graduates is still a major concern.

As confirmed by Farhady, Jafarpoor, and Birjandi (1994), very few Iranian students finish high school with the ability to speak English effectively in spite of mastering the prescribed textbooks and passing their examinations with relatively good marks. According to Hosseini (2007), English language teaching (ELT) in most of the Iranian academic situations seems to be ineffective and impractical. Hardly does any real learning occur in the present traditional language classes of the Iranian education system. He confirms his claim by arguing that many Iranian students who are overseas for their studies face major language problems. He also justifies the claim by the fact that most of the Iranian university lecturers cannot communicate in English. Even at the university level, since most of them have managed to pass the UEE by cramming skills, they cannot communicate either orally or in written form to express their basic needs.

Since many students encounter immense problems in terms of using English communicatively after graduating from senior high schools, one might ask where the origin of these problems is. They may arise from different sources and have various reasons. However, it is assumed that the predicament is mainly related to the UEE washback (Farhady, et al., 1994; Ghorbani, 2012a & 2012b; Hosseini, 2007; Jahangard, 2007).

Although numerous washback studies have been done in different contexts, empirical research is still lacking on the washback phenomenon (Andrews, 1994; Alderson & Wall, 1993; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Bailey, 1996; Chen, 2002a & 2002b; Cheng, 2000 & 2005; Spratt, 2005; Watanabe, 2004). Due to the complex nature of the washback phenomenon, which is culturally and contextually bound (Cheng, 2005), the washback effect of the UEE on Iranian students' learning is likely to be different from other contexts. Thus, to shed more light on the washback phenomenon, this study was an attempt to investigate the UEE washback in English education based upon students' perceptions.

2. Review of Literature

Literature has indicated that testing washback is a complex, elusive, and multi-dimensional concept and phenomenon that does not exist automatically in its own right but is the result of teachers, students or others' involvement in the test-taking process (Andrews, 1994; Alderson & Wall, 1993; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Bailey, 1996; Chen, 2002a & 2002b; Cheng, 2000 & 2005; Spratt, 2005; Watanabe, 2004).

Alderson and Wall (1993), who were the first researchers who expressed disapproving comments and judgments about the washback phenomenon, put forward 15 washback hypotheses and called for more empirical research on them, "Clearly, more research is needed in this area" (p. 127). More research studies should be undertaken to examine washback qualitatively and quantitatively (Chen, 2002a; Cheng, 2005).

According to Ghorbani (2012a & 2012b), although the ultimate goal of the ministry of education (ME) concerning EFL education is to improve the communicative competence of learners, it has not yet been able to achieve this objective. With its centralized, measurement-driven system which is, to a great extent, teacher-centered and textbook-oriented, testing impact in Iran is undeniable. However, whether the UEE may hinder or promote creativity and innovation, and whether it may affect students negatively or positively needs to be examined. Due to a limited body of on the impact of the UEE on teaching and learning in the Iranian context research (Eslami-Rasekh & Valizadeh, 2004 & 2008; Hosseini, 2007; Jahangard, 2007; Ostovar Namaghi, 2006; Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006), there is not sufficient evidence to explain whether and how it occurs. In fact, the main focus of these studies is not washback. They just explicitly or implicitly use it as a subsidiary component.

According to Hosseini (2007), the Iranian exam-oriented education system has been suffering from a teacher-dominated and out-dated pedagogy for more than a century. Nationwide and large-scale exams, such as the UEE in Iran, are high-stakes tests which are commonly assumed to have an impact on teaching and learning. Due to the strong competitive atmosphere among students to jot down whatever the teacher says and focus on cramming it to get ready for the exam, they use their short-term memory to disgorge whatever they have crammed in their exam papers. Eckstein and Noah (1993), who conducted studies in eight countries regarding examination impact, indicated the washback effect of such examinations on teaching and learning. Their studies showed that students were less motivated to study the materials and explore the questions which were unlikely to appear on the exam.

According to Chapman and Snyder (2000), high-stakes tests will have a greater influence on teaching and learning if their "primary use is to ration future opportunity as the basis for determining admission to the next layer of education or to employment opportunities" (p. 458). As Cheng (2005) pointed out, "the greater the consequences attached to a test, the more likely it is to have an impact on teaching and learning" (p. 45). She argues that examinations have been used as a means of control and as a way to counter nepotism and favoritism in the allocation of scarce opportunities. They have also been used to encourage the development of talent, upgrade the school performance, and select for education and employment for many years.

According to Cheng (2005), although the washback phenomenon has been frequently discussed in the international testing community, few studies have been done on the effects of

large-scale and high-stakes language tests on teaching and learning. To what extent the UEE affects students' learning activities is open to debate. This study dealt with this shortcoming in research on the Iranian UEE. It was an attempt to examine the impact of the UEE on students' learning activities. The problem of Iranian students' lack of ability to speak English effectively may not be limited to the English language education system only. It may be related to the whole Iranian community at root. However, as long as the UEE plays the role of a gate-keeping test used by higher education institutes for admission purposes, it will exert an influence on teaching and learning atmosphere.

The UEE is an achievement test which is used for predictive purposes. According to Davies (1968), although achievement tests are inevitably used for predictive purposes, their function is not to predict. Therefore, they are inevitable but unreliable. Due to the UEE format and importance, students appear to spend more time on grammatical structures, vocabulary, and reading than writing, pronunciation, speaking, and listening exercises (Farhady, et al., 1994; Ghorbani, 2012a & 2012b; Hosseini, 2007; Jahangard, 2007). Thus, it is greatly needed investigate the UEE washback effect so as to achieve the long-term goals of improving English language education in Iran. In this study, the total score of the survey questionnaire was used to measure the washback impact of the UEE on students' learning activities based on a six-point Likert scale.

2.1 Theories Related to Washback

Generally, three main interrelated theories (innovation, impact, and washback in applied linguistics and language studies or backwash in general education) were involved in this study. Innovation theory (Henrichsen 1989) from which the conceptual framework for the impact studies began and washback theory propose that test-related effects may occur at different points in time, even before a new formal test is introduced (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons 1996; Alderson & Wall 1993; Hamp-Lyons 1999).

In his hybrid model of the diffusion, Henrichsen (1989) divided the process of innovation into three main stages. The first stage is antecedent, which refers to the circumstances of the educational context before the introduction of an innovation. The second stage is process, which refers to the facilitating and impeding factors that impose an effect while the innovation is being put into effect. And the third stage is consequence (impact) which refers to the possible impacts or outcomes of the interaction between the antecedent and the process stages. Based on this theory, the impact of a test is determined by a combination of interrelated factors surrounding it, not by the test alone.

The term 'impact' generally refers to the consequences of testing beyond the classroom (Bachman and Palmer, 1996). Washback is only one dimension of impact which affects the

educational context (Hamp-Lyons, 1997). According to Wall and Horák (2006), the impact of the high-stakes tests on teaching and learning has long been accepted and discussed in the general education literature but the 1990s was the first time that it attracted the attention of language educators. The inclusion of impact in Bachman and Palmer's notion of usefulness (1996) enhanced the importance of studying washback.

Wall and Alderson (1993) were the first testing researchers who questioned the notion of test washback. While expressing disapproving opinions, they created the washback hypothesis. Since then some studies have been carried out on washback (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Andrews, 1994; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Bailey, 1996; Chen, 2002a, 2002b; Cheng, 2005; Hamp-Lyons, 1997; Spratt, 2005; Watanabe, 2004). Washback theory was developed into 15 hypotheses by Alderson and Wall (1993, p. 120-21) as delineated below. The hypotheses related to the learners and learning were explicitly or implicitly addressed in this study in order to understand the perceived washback effect of the UEE on Iranian students' learning activities.

- A test will influence teaching
- A test will influence learning
- A test will influence what teachers teach; and
- A test will influence how teachers teach
- A test will influence what learners learn
- A test will influence how learners learn
- A test will influence the rate and sequence of teaching; and
- A test will influence the rate and sequence of learning
- A test will influence the degree and depth of teaching
- A test will influence the degree and depth of learning
- A test will influence attitudes towards the content, method, etc. of teaching and learning
- Tests that have important consequences will have washback; conversely
- Tests that do not have important consequences will have no washback
- Tests will have washback on all learners and teachers

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

In sum, impact is a general term at the macro level that refers to any of the effects that a test may have on individual test takers, teachers, parents, school administrators, test developers, educational systems or society as a whole. However, washback is a specific term at the micro level which usually refers to the positive or negative effect of a test on classroom teaching or learning (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). According to Andrews (1994), backwash is the term used to describe the testing impact in general education literature, while washback seems to be preferred in language education. One of the most commonly used definitions of washback is the influence of testing on teaching and learning (Gates 1995; Alderson & Wall 1993). In this study, washback is narrowly defined as the impact of the UEE on students' learning activities.

3. Conceptual Framework

In the literature, the effect of testing on teaching and learning is commonly referred to as washback. Some research has already been done about this phenomenon based on which the following conceptual framework was established. This conceptual framework was used to outline an overview of the organized ideas and concepts in a particular way that makes them easy to communicate to others.

In order to investigate the washback impact, it is necessary to focus on the people who are involved in the educational process, on what happens in the classroom, and on the outcomes. In addition, the washback effect is mediated by a number of factors which may be a little different from context to context. School atmosphere is one of those mediating factors (Watanabe, 2000). According to Read and Hayes (2003), school type and location can affect time allocation. This implies that one of the explanations for the level of washback effect may be attributed to various school background variables. In this study, school type (public or private) and school location (suburban or urban) which are assumed to be closely associated with the UEE washback effect were studied. The impact and washback studies may focus on teachers, students, material developers, publishers, or all of them. This study focused on students only as indicated in figure 1.

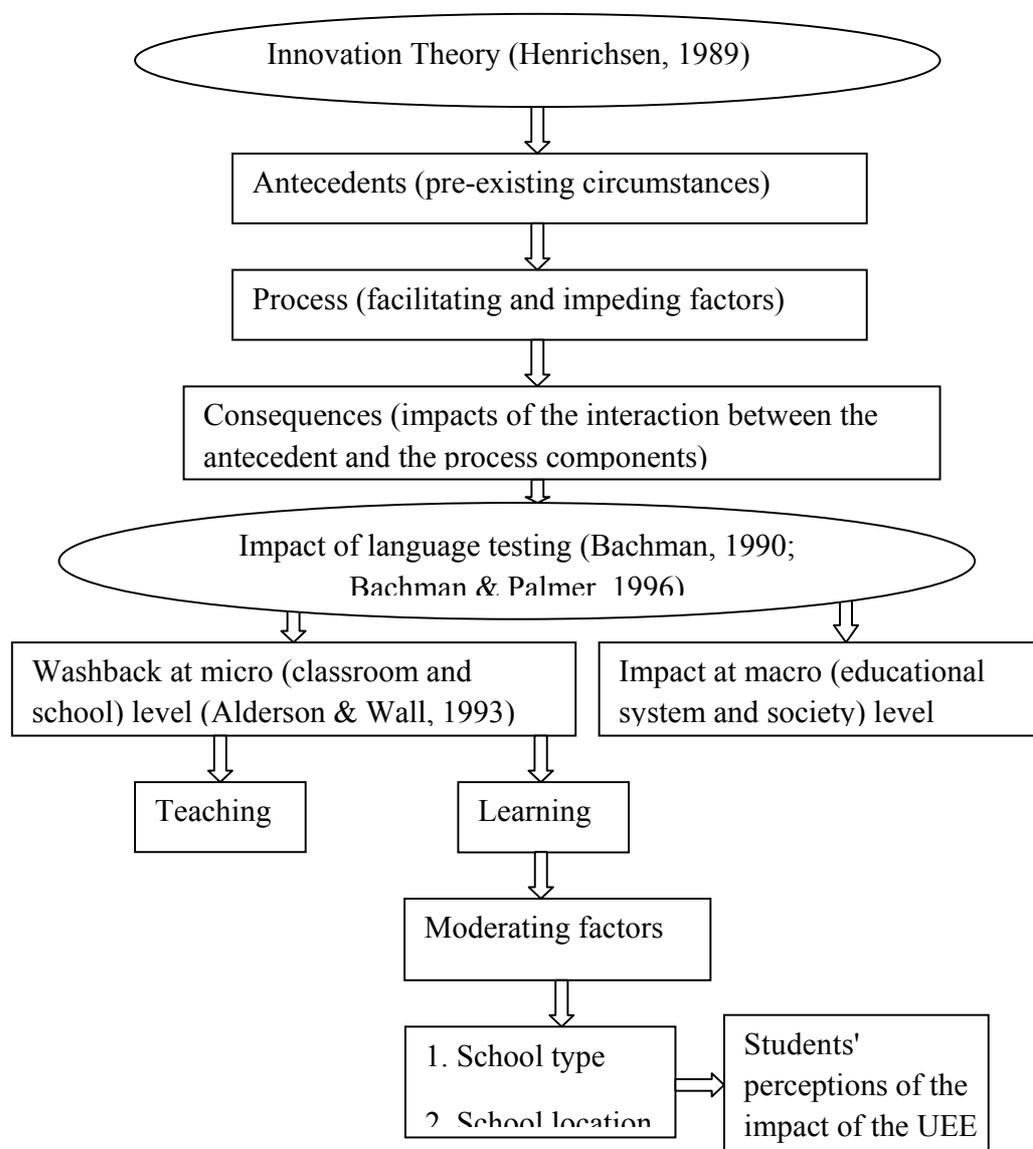


Figure 1. Conceptual framework based on the washback theory (Alderson & Wall, 1993)

Survey research designs, with their many applications, are procedures in quantitative research in which researchers administer a questionnaire to a sample to identify trends in the attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of the population. Survey researchers collect quantitative, numbered data via questionnaires or interviews. Then, they statistically analyze the data to test research questions and hypotheses (Creswell, 2005). Quantitative data, collected via the survey questionnaire, helped the researcher get a general picture of the washback

phenomenon in the Iranian context. The research questions and the corresponding hypotheses addressed by this study are as follows:

- Is there any difference between students' perceptions of the impact of the UEE on their learning activities in view of the school type in which they were studying?
- Is there any difference between students' perceptions of the impact of the UEE on their learning activities in view of the school location in which they were studying?
- H_0 . There is no significant difference between students' perceptions of the impact of the UEE on their learning activities in view of the school type in which they were studying.
- H_0 . There is no significant difference between students' perceptions of the impact of the UEE on their learning activities in view of the school location in which they were studying.

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

In this study, the target population was senior high school students in Iran. But the accessible population was the university students who had just passed the UEE and were studying at Kosar University of Bojnord (KUB). Since KUB is a State university for female students only, its students come from different parts of the country. Stratified random sampling was used to select 120 freshmen from three faculties (humanities, science, and engineering) of KUB proportionately. Out of 120 questionnaires, which were given to the randomly selected sample, 113 completed questionnaires were returned with a response rate of 94.16 percent. Most of the respondents were from urban areas (56.63%) and public schools (66.37%). The Persian questionnaires were given to all of the randomly selected students.

4.2 Instrumentation

After reviewing instruments that had already been developed and used for washback studies, the researcher decided to develop his own questionnaire because, as Bailey (1999) stated, no single uniform questionnaire has been emerged to be used in different contexts. Furthermore the researcher agrees with Cheng (2005) who states that "the study of washback is culturally and socially bound" (p. 68). The internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire was .72.

The following basic guidelines for writing good items recommended by Ary, Jacob, and Razavieh, (2002) and Creswell (2005) were followed with some modifications:

- Items are short, clear, and comprehensible by every respondent.
- To avoid bias, items which may predetermine a respondent's answer are avoided.

- Leading items which imply a desired response are avoided.
- Double-barreled items, which attempt to ask two questions in one, are avoided.
- The items are positively worded.
- The questionnaire is as brief as possible so that it requires a minimum of the respondents' time.

The first part of the questionnaire was about students' school and context characteristics. Items in the second part of the questionnaire measured and assessed students' perceptions of the impact of the UEE on their learning activities. All the items were based on a six-point Likert scale (See Appendix C).

To score the scale, the response categories were weighted. On the scale, following the recommendations by Ary, et al. (2002), the favorable and positive items were coded as 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Slightly Disagree, 4 = Slightly Agree, 5 = Agree, and 6 = Strongly Agree. For unfavorable and negatively stated items, the weighting was reversed when data were entered into the computer for data analysis. As pointed out by Ary, et al. (2002), "disagreement with an unfavorable statement is psychologically equivalent to agreement with a favorable statement" (p. 225). Thus, for unfavorable statements "strongly agree" received a weight of one and "strongly disagree" a weight of six. The scale of measurement, which ranged from one to six, for the second part of the questionnaire was interval.

In this study, content and face validity of the survey questionnaire items were estimated. According to Creswell (2005, p. 164-165), "Researchers evaluate content validity by examining the plan and the procedures used in constructing the instrument. Typically researchers go to a panel of judges or experts and have them identify whether the questions are valid."

According to Gregory (1992), the instrument will have content validity if its items are a representative sample which accurately reflects the theoretical domain of the construct it claims to measure. But, face validity is not an index of validity at all. It is a non-statistical assessment regarding the appearance of a measure. Anyway, "the survey should have face validity. It should appear valid for its intended purpose" (Ary, et al., 2002, p. 409).

Three experts in the field of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), one education scholar, and one measurement and evaluation specialist reviewed and assessed the instrument to determine its content and face validity. In an expert analysis, annotations are given about potential problems in a questionnaire (Brannen, 1992). A sample cover letter, adapted from Chen (2002a), was given to the panel members indicating how to determine face and content validity (See Appendix A). They were requested to use a questionnaire item validation form (See Appendix B), which had also been adapted from Chen (2002a). The items which were deemed and determined to be appropriate but unclear were rewritten. The items which were deemed and assessed to be inappropriate or unclear by two-thirds of the panel members were deleted.

A number of substantial adjustments and modifications were made to the questionnaire items to make it ready for the pilot test. A pilot test is "a procedure in which a researcher makes changes in an instrument based on feedback from a small number of individuals who complete and evaluate the instrument" (Creswell, 2005, p. 307). For the pilot test, 25 students responded to the items and helped the researcher establish the reliability of the of the survey questionnaire. The coefficient alpha is used to test for internal consistency (Cronbach, 1984). So, Cronbach's alpha (set at 0.05) was implemented to establish a coefficient of internal consistency.

Internal consistency measures of reliability indicate the consistency of scores among the items which are a representative sample of a unified basic construct. Low internal consistency is often due to badly written items or wide content areas. The most common method of assessing internal consistency reliability is Cronbach's coefficient alpha (Henson, 2001; Crocker & Algina, 1986). "If the items are scored as continuous variables (e.g., strongly agree to strongly disagree), the alpha provides a coefficient to estimate consistency of scores on an instrument" (Creswell, 2005, p. 164). The internal consistency reliability coefficient for the items of the survey questionnaire was .72.

4.3 Data Collection and Analysis

After the sampling procedures were finalized, data collection was carried out. In this study, survey questionnaire was used as the method of data collection which "has the advantage of guaranteeing confidentiality or anonymity, thus perhaps eliciting more truthful responses than would be obtained with a personal interview" (Ary, et al., 2002, p. 384).

A cover letter was given to the students stating a) the purpose of the study and its social utility, b) professional organization and institution, c) why the respondent is important, d) promise of confidentiality and explanation of identification, e) the discussion of code number on the questionnaire, and f) an appreciation

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the quantitative data from the survey questionnaire. Descriptive statistics helped the researcher to describe the basic features of the data and present quantitative descriptions in a manageable form. After organizing and summarizing the collected data in a sensible way, t-test statistics was then applied to analyze them.

5. Results

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

In Part II, one student did not respond to item five, one student did not respond to item nine, two students did not respond to item 14, and one student did not respond to item 17. Questionnaire items not responded by the respondents have been delineated in the following table.

Table 1. Questionnaire items not responded by the respondents

Questionnaire Item No.	Frequency
5	1
9	1
14	2
17	1
Total: 4	Total: 5

Characteristics of the surveyed students are displayed in the following table.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the surveyed students

School Location	Number	Percentage
Urban	41	36.28
Suburban	72	63.71
Total	113	100
School Type		
Public	93	82.30
Private	20	17.69
Total	113	100

5.2 *T*-test analysis

An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the scores of the public and private school students regarding their perceptions of the impact of the UEE on their learning activities. As indicated in Table 3, there is no significant difference between the perception scores for the public school students ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 0.70$) and the perception scores for the private school students [$M = 4.85$, $SD = 0.93$; $t(111) = -1.28$, $p. > .05$]. This result suggests that almost all students, regardless of the school type in which they had studied, perceived the impact of the UEE on their learning activities similarly. Since there is no significant difference between the means of the two groups, the null hypothesis (There is no significant difference between students' perceptions of the impact of the UEE on their learning activities in view of the school type in which they were studying) fails to be rejected.

Table 3. The *t*-test of students' perceptions of the impact of the UEE on their learning activities based on their school type

School Type	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig.
Public	93	4.61	0.70	111	-1.28	0.20
Private	20	4.85	0.93			

Another independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the scores of the urban and suburban school students regarding their perceptions of the impact of the UEE on their learning activities. As indicated in Table 4, there is no significant difference between the perception scores for the urban school students ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 0.67$) and the perception scores for the suburban school students [$M = 4.75$, $SD = 0.78$; $t(111) = -1.79$, $p. > .05$]. This result suggests that almost all students, regardless of the school location where they had studied, perceived the impact of the UEE on their learning activities similarly. Since there is no significant difference between the means of the two groups, the null hypothesis (There is no significant difference between students' perceptions of the impact of the UEE on their learning activities in view of the school location in which they were studying) fails to be rejected.

Table 4. The *t*-test of students' perceptions of the impact of the UEE on their learning activities based on their school location

School Location	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig.
Urban	41	4.48	0.67	111	-1.79	0.07

Suburban	75	4.75	0.78
----------	----	------	------

6. Conclusion

As the results suggest, the majority of the surveyed students in this study agreed that they perceived the harmful effect of the UEE on their learning activities. However, the independent-samples *t*-test results indicated that there was no significant difference between students' perceptions of the impact of the UEE in view of the school type or location in which they were studying. This result is not in keeping with Read and Hayes's (2003) suggestion that one of the explanations for the level of washback effect may be attributed to various school background variables. This finding indicates that the UEE exerts its influence regardless of school location or type.

7. Implications and Suggestions

According to Hughes (1989), positive washback should be the first priority of tests. To generate needed support for strengthening and reforming assessment so that it can play a more productive role in English education improvement, the UEE needs to be reformed. But as Henrichsen (1989, p.179) points out, "proposing that the examinations be changed is easy, and many have done it". However, "overcoming the barriers to change and actually modifying the exams is a far more difficult task". It is essential, then, to keep track of future changes in the UEE and of the ways in which schools and teachers react to them, for which more observational and longitudinal studies will be required.

To bring about a positive washback effect in an EFL context like Iran, all parties within the education system should be involved. As Cheng (2005) stated "only when all these organizations (participants) work together can substantial change in teaching and learning eventually be realized" (p. 246). It is not fair to blame English teachers and learners for their teaching methods and learning activities because as Spratt (2005) points out, "it should not be forgotten that the teacher in the classroom operates within an ideological, historical, economic and political context" (p. 23).

Since the UEE items are based on the content of the prescribed textbooks which lack any listening activities and put much less emphasis on speaking and even writing skills than reading skill, the textbook contents may explain, to some extent, why students neglect some learning activities. That is, the UEE, which is used only for selection and admission purposes, dominates classroom activities and so distorts teaching and learning. It has detrimental effects on creative and innovative learning activities. This trend rewards only those students who work in the narrowly constrained ways that lead to test success.

Since the UEE functions as a high-stakes gate-keeping test which has serious consequences for the future careers and lives of test takers, its impact on student behaviour is inevitable. Therefore, it can be used as a feasible means of English language education reform. By providing the UEE authorities with helpful information, the findings of this study can be used as one of the related information sources to reform the current UEE system so that it can foster positive washback effect on Iranian EFL learners. It is hoped that the findings of this study will potentially contribute to a general understanding of the washback phenomenon in other similar countries as well.

References

- Alderson, J. C., & Hamp-Lyons, L. (1996). TOEFL preparation courses: A study of washback. *Language Testing*, 13(3), 280-297.
- Alderson, J. C. & Wall, D. (1993). Does washback exist? *Applied Linguistics*, 14(2), 115-129.
- Andrews, S. (1994). Washback or washout? The relationship between examination reform and curriculum innovation. In D. Nunan, V. Berry & R. Berry (Eds.), *Bringing about change in language education* (pp. 67-81). Hong Kong: Department of Curriculum Studies, University of Hong Kong.
- Ary, D., Jacob, L. C., & Razavieh, A. (2002). *Introduction to research in education*. 6th ed. Belmont CA : Wadsworth.
- Bachman, L. F., & Palmer, A. S. (1996). *Language testing in practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bailey, K. (1996). Working for washback: A review of the washback concept in language testing. *Language Testing*, 13(3), 241–256.
- Bailey, K.M. (1999). *Washback in language testing*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
- Brannen, J. (1992). Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches: An overview. In J. Brannen (Ed.), *Mixing methods: Qualitative and quantitative research* (pp. 3-37). Brookfield, VT: Ashgate.
- Chapman D. W., & Snyder, C. W. Jr. (2000). Can high stakes national testing improve instruction?: Reexamining conventional wisdom. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 20(6), 457-474.
- Chen, L. (2002a). Taiwanese junior high school English teachers' perceptions of the washback effect of the basic competence test in English. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, the Ohio State University, the United States.
- Chen, L. (2002b). *Washback of a public exam on English teaching*. Educational Resources Information Center on Assessment and Evaluation (ERIC/AE) ERIC Number: ED 472167.
- Cheng, L. (2000). Washback or backwash: A review of the impact of testing on teaching and learning. (ERIC Opinion papers ED 442280).

- Cheng, L. (2005). *Changing language teaching through language testing: A washback study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational research – Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. New Jersey: Pearson.
- Crocker, L., & Algina, J. (1986). *Introduction to classical and modern test theory*. Philadelphia: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.
- Cronbach, L. J. (1984). *Essentials of psychological testing (4th ed.)*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Davies, A. (1968). *Language testing symposium: A psycholinguistic approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Eckstein, M. A., & Noah, H. J. (Eds.) (1993). *Examinations: Comparative and international studies*. Pergamon Comparative & International Education Series. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Eslami-Rasekh, Z. & Valizadeh, K. (2004). Classroom activities viewed from different perspectives: Learners' voice vs. teachers' voice. *TESL EJ*, 8(3), 1-13. Retrieved October 9, 2008, from <http://tesl-ej.org/ej31/a2.html>
- Eslami-Rasekh, Z. & Valizadeh, K. (2008). Teachers' sense of self-efficacy, English proficiency, and instructional strategies: A study of nonnative EFL teachers in Iran. *TESL EJ*, 11(4), 1-19. Retrieved October 9, 2008 from <http://tesl-ej.org/ej44/a1.pdf>
- Farhady, H., Jafarpoor, A., & Birjandi, P. (1994). *Testing language skills: From theory to practice*. Tehran: SAMT Publications.
- Gates, S. (1995). Exploiting washback from standardized tests. In J. D. Brown & S. O. Yamashita (Eds.), *Language testing in Japan* (pp. 101-106). Tokyo: Japan Association for Language Teaching.
- Ghorbani, M. R. (2012a). *Washback effect of the university entrance examination: Iranian case*. Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing (LAP).
- Ghorbani, M. R. (2012b). Controversy over abolishing Iranian university entrance examination. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, 1(2), 139 – 152.
- Gregory, R.J. (1992). *Psychological testing: History, principles and applications*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Hamp-Lyons, L. (1997). *Washback, impact and validity: Ethical concerns*. *Language Testing*, 14(3), 295-303.
- Hamp-Lyons, L. (1999). Implications of the "examination culture" for (English language) education in Hong Kong. In V. Crew, V. Berry & J. Hung (Eds.), *Exploring diversity in the language curriculum* (pp. 133-141). Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Education.
- Henrichsen, L. E. (1989). *Diffusion of innovations in English language teaching: The ELEC effort in Japan, 1956–1968*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Henson, R.K. (2001). Understanding internal consistency reliability estimates: conceptual primers on coefficient alpha. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, 34, 177-188.
- Hosseini, S. M. H. (2007). ELT in higher education in Iran and India – A critical view. *Language in India*, 7, 1-11. Retrieved October 9, 2008, from <http://www.languageinindia.com/dec2007/eltinindiaandiran.pdf>
- Hughes, A. (1989). *Testing for language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Jahangard, A. (2007). Evaluation of EFL Materials Taught at Iranian Public High Schools. *The Asian EFL Journal*, 9 (2), 130-150.
- Ostovar Namaghi, S. A. (2006). Forces steering Iranian language teachers' work: A grounded theory. *The Reading Matrix*, 6(2), 90-105.
- Razmjoo, S. A. & Riazi, M. (2006). Is communicative language teaching practical in the expanding circle? A case study of teachers of Shiraz high schools and institutes. *Journal of Language and Learning*, 4 (2), 144-171.
- Read, J. and Hayes, B. (2003). The impact of IELTS on preparation for academic study in New Zealand. *IELTS International English Language Testing System Research Reports*, 4, 153-206.
- Richards, J. C., & Schmidt, R. (2002). *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics* (3rd ed.). London: Longman (Pearson Education).
- Spratt, M (2005). Washback and the classroom: the implications for teaching and learning of studies of washback from exams. *Language Teaching Research*, 9, 5-29.
- Wall, D. (1996). Introducing new tests into traditional systems: Insights from general education and from innovation theory. *Language Testing*, 13 (3), 334 - 354.
- Wall, D. (1998). Impact and washback in language testing. In Corson, D and Clapham, C. (Eds.) *Language Testing and Assessment*. Vol. 7 of the Encyclopedia of Language and Education. Amsterdam: Kluwer Academic Publishers. 291-302.
- Wall, D. & Horák, T. (2006). *The impact of changes in the TOEFL examination on teaching and learning in central and eastern Europe Phase I: The baseline study*. (TOEFL Monograph No. MS-34). Princeton, NJ : ETS.
- Watanabe, Y. (2000). Washback effects of the English section of Japanese entrance examinations on instruction in pre-college level EFL. *Language Testing Update*, 27 (Summer), 42-47.
- Watanabe, Y. (2004). Methodology in washback studies. In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe & A. Curtis (Eds.), *Washback in language testing: Research contexts and methods* (pp.19-36). Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Appendix A

Cover Letter to Panel of Experts

Dear Professor,

I am currently in the process of ascertaining the face and content validity of a survey instrument I am going to use for collecting data for my research. My topic is "**Washback Effect of the University Entrance Examination on Iranian Students.**" I really appreciate your serving on my panel of experts to help determine the face and content validity of my survey instrument.

The questionnaire and interview questions will be administered to the freshman students at Kosar University of Bojnord. The purpose of this study is to investigate how they perceive the impact of the University Entrance Exam (UEE).

The survey questionnaire consists of two parts. Part I is related to students' school/context characteristics. Part II contains statements about their perceptions regarding the impact of the UEE

I have developed a special form for your use in commenting on the items I have developed for the instrument. As you review the proposed items, please feel free to comment based upon the following criteria:

Face validity: Does the instrument "look like" it is measuring what it is supposed to measure?

Content validity: Are the items representative of concepts related to the research topic?

Clarity: Is each item in the instrument clear? Is the language/wording appropriate?

Other: Please make any additional suggestions as warranted.

The scaling technique being used for the survey questionnaire is based on Likert-type scale method. Subjects will be asked to indicate the level of their certainty of their agreement or disagreement by placing their response to the item on a six-point scale. Please delete those items you feel inappropriate.

Thank you in advance for your great help.



Appendix B

Survey Questionnaire Item Content Validation Form

The Washback Effect of the University Entrance Examination on Iranian Students

Directions: On the following pages are listed 20 items intended to investigate students' perceptions of the impact of the University Entrance Exam (UEE). Please rate each item based on two criteria: 1) the appropriateness of the item in representing the topic, and 2) the clarity of the meaning of the item. Please circle your response.

1. Is the item appropriate?

Yes = Appropriate

No = Not Appropriate

2. Is the item clear?

Yes = Meaning Clear

No = Meaning Unclear

If the item is appropriate but unclear, please reword the item on the blank lines below the item. If the item is not appropriate and not clear, please indicate the item should be deleted from the questionnaire by writing the word "Delete" on the blank lines.

Part I: Students' School/Context Characteristics

1. Location of the school you attended:

1) Urban

2) Suburban

Are the choices listed appropriate? Yes No

Is the question clear? Yes No

.....



2. School type:

1) Public

2) Private

Are the choices listed appropriate?

Yes

No

Is the question clear?

Yes

No

.....

Part II: The Washback Effect of the University Entrance Exam (UEE) on Iranian Students.

1. I focused on learning activities which could promote my English test-taking skill for the UEE.

Appropriate?

Yes

No

Clear?

Yes

No

.....

2. I gave little attention to the UEE while studying my English textbook.

Appropriate?

Yes

No

Clear?

Yes

No

.....

3. I spent more time learning vocabulary than communication skills because it is more likely to be tested in the UEE.

Appropriate?

Yes

No

Clear?

Yes

No

.....



4. I spent certain time learning test-taking strategies for the UEE.

Appropriate? Yes No Clear? Yes No

.....

5. I arranged my learning activities mostly based upon the objectives of the UEE.

Appropriate? Yes No Clear? Yes No

.....

6. I changed my language learning strategies to succeed in the UEE.

Appropriate? Yes No Clear? Yes No

.....

7. I spent less time on oral activities because they were unlikely to be tested in the UEE.

Appropriate? Yes No Clear? Yes No

.....

8. I neglected some aspects of learning such as speaking and listening that were not important for the UEE.

Appropriate? Yes No Clear? Yes No

.....



.....

9. The UEE had little impact on how I studied.

Appropriate? Yes No Clear? Yes No

.....

10. I used some supplementary materials other than the English textbook to succeed in the UEE.

Appropriate? Yes No Clear? Yes No

.....

11. I practiced the most updated mock tests to get ready for the UEE.

Appropriate? Yes No Clear? Yes No

.....

12. I rarely used specific learning activities to promote my English test-taking skill just for the UEE.

Appropriate? Yes No Clear? Yes No

.....

13. I adjusted the sequence of my learning objectives based on the UEE.

Appropriate? Yes No Clear? Yes No



.....

14. I focused more on certain parts of the English textbook because it was more likely to be tested in the UEE.

Appropriate? Yes No Clear? Yes No

.....

15. The UEE had little impact on what I studied.

Appropriate? Yes No Clear? Yes No

.....

16. I used listening and speaking activities to promote my daily life communication regardless of the UEE.

Appropriate? Yes No Clear? Yes No

.....

17. I rarely changed my language learning strategies just to succeed in the UEE.

Appropriate? Yes No Clear? Yes No

.....



18. I felt pressure from my parents to pass the UEE.

Appropriate? Yes No Clear? Yes No

.....

19. I spent a large amount of time and energy on the UEE.

Appropriate? Yes No Clear? Yes No

.....

20. I spent a large amount of money on the UEE.

Appropriate? Yes No Clear? Yes No

.....



Appendix C

Survey Questionnaire

Code Number:

Washback Effect of the University Entrance Examination on Iranian Students

Dear Student,

The purpose of this research is to collect information concerning your perceptions on the impact of the University Entrance Exam (UEE). This research will help the involved educational parties of English education in Iran, particularly the examination policy makers, to improve the portion of the UEE in the future. So, your contribution is very important.

The survey questionnaire consists of two parts. Part I is related to students' school/context characteristics. Part II contains statements about their perceptions regarding the impact of the UEE

The usefulness of this questionnaire depends entirely on your honesty, candor, and care with which you respond to each of the items. All information you provide will be treated with confidentiality. The code number is used only for data analysis.

Finally, I would like to offer my sincere thanks to your participation and contribution to this study.

Thank you in advance for your great help.

Part I: Students' School/Context Characteristics

1. Location of the school you attended:

1) Urban

2) Suburban

2. School type:

1) Public

2) Private

Part II: The Washback Effect of the University Entrance Exam (UEE) on Iranian Students.

Directions: In this questionnaire, the term "UEE" refers to the **University Entrance Exam**. Please read each of the following statements and write down the number that best describes your perceptions. Please place your response in the blank right after the item.

KEY

6 = Strongly Agree	5 = Agree	4 = Slightly Agree
3 = Slightly Disagree	2 = Disagree	1 = Strongly Disagree

For example, I like to watch TV. ...5.... If you place 5 on this statement, it means you **agree** that you like to watch TV.

Part II: Washback Effect of the University Entrance Exam (UEE) on Iranian Students.

1. I focused on learning activities which could promote my English test-taking skill for the UEE.
.....
2. I gave little attention to the UEE while studying my English textbook.
3. I spent more time learning vocabulary than communication skills because it is more likely to be tested in the UEE.
4. I spent certain time learning test-taking strategies for the UEE.
5. I arranged my learning activities mostly based upon the objectives of the UEE.
6. I changed my language learning strategies to succeed in the UEE.
7. I spent less time on oral activities because they were unlikely to be tested in the UEE.
.....
8. I neglected some aspects of learning such as speaking and listening that were not important for the UEE.



-
9. The UEE had little impact on how I studied.
 10. I used some supplementary materials other than the English textbook to succeed in the UEE.
.....
 11. I practiced the most updated mock tests to get ready for the UEE.
 12. I rarely used specific learning activities to promote my English test-taking skill just for the UEE.
 13. I adjusted the sequence of my learning objectives based on the UEE.
 14. I focused more on certain parts of the English textbook because it was more likely to be tested in the UEE.
 15. The UEE had little impact on what I studied.
 16. I used listening and speaking activities to promote my daily life communication regardless of the UEE.
 17. I rarely changed my language learning strategies just to succeed in the UEE.
 18. I felt pressure from my parents to pass the UEE.
 19. I spent a large amount of time and energy on the UEE.
 20. I spent a large amount of money on the UEE.

پرسشنامه

کد:

تاثیر کنکور بر دانش آموزان دبیرستان

دانشجوی عزیز

هدف از این تحقیق جمع آوری اطلاعاتی درباره درک شما از تاثیر کنکور می باشد. این تحقیق به مسئولین آموزش زبان انگلیسی و سازمان سنجش کمک خواهد کرد تا جایگاه کنکور را در آینده ارتقاء بخشند. لذا کمک شما بسیار مهم است. پرسشنامه دو بخش دارد. بخش اول مربوط به ویژگی محیط و مدرسه شما و بخش دوم مربوط به درک شما از تاثیر کنکور است. فایده این پرسشنامه وابسته به صداقت شما در پاسخگویی به سوالات است. این اطلاعات محرمانه است و کد فوق صرفاً برای تجزیه و تحلیل داده هاست.

از مشارکت و همکاری شما بی نهایت سپاسگزارم.

بخش اول: ویژگیهای محیط و مدرسه

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> منطقه ۱ و ۲ | <input type="checkbox"/> منطقه ۳ | ۱. محل مدرسه شما |
| <input type="checkbox"/> دولتی | <input type="checkbox"/> غیر دولتی | ۲. نوع مدرسه شما |

بخش دوم: تاثیر کنکور بر دانش آموزان دبیرستان

لطفا جملات زیر را بخوانید و شماره ای که نظر شما را منعکس می کند در محل نقطه چین بنویسید.

۶. خیلی موافقم ۵. موافقم ۴. کمی موافقم ۳. کمی مخالفم ۲. مخالفم ۱. خیلی مخالفم

۱. من برای یادگیری انگلیسی بر فعالیت هایی تمرکز می کردم که می توانست مهارت تست زنی من را برای کنکور افزایش دهد.....
۲. هنگام مطالعه کتاب انگلیسی توجه چندانی به کنکور نداشتم.....
۳. من بیشتر وقتم را صرف یادگیری لغات می کردم نه مهارتهای برقراری ارتباط، چون سوالات کنکور بیشتر لغات را مورد سنجش قرار می دهد.....
۴. من زمان خاصی را صرف یادگیری فنون تست زنی برای کنکور می کردم.....
۵. من بیشتر فعالیت های یادگیری خود را با اهداف کنکور تنظیم می کردم.....
۶. من فنون یادگیری زبانم را تغییر دادم تا در کنکور موفق شوم.....
۷. من وقت کمتری صرف فعالیتهای شفاهی می کردم چون در کنکور تاثیر اندکی دارد.....
۸. من بعضی از جنبه های یادگیری مثل گفت و شنود که در کنکور حائز اهمیت نبودند را نادیده می گرفتم.....

۹. کنکور تأثیری روی نحوه مطالعه من نداشت.....
۱۰. من بجز کتاب درسی منابع مکمل دیگری نیز برای موفقیت در کنکور استفاده می کردم.....
۱۱. من از جدیدترین تستها برای آمادگی کنکور استفاده می کردم.....
۱۲. من برای یادگیری بندرت بر فعالیت های خاصی تمرکز می کردم که صرفا می توانست مهارت تست زنی را برای کنکور افزایش دهد.....
۱۳. من اهداف مطالعه ام را به تبعیت از کنکور تنظیم می کردم.....
۱۴. من روی بخشهای خاصی از کتاب انگلیسی تمرکز می کردم که در کنکور نقش بیشتری داشت.....
۱۵. کنکور تأثیری روی محتوای مطالعه من نداشت.....
۱۶. من بدون توجه به کنکور از فعالیتهای گفت و شنود برای بهبود ارتباطات روزمره به زبان انگلیسی استفاده می کردم.....
۱۷. من بندرت فنون یادگیری زبانم را تغییر می دادم تا صرفا در کنکور موفق شوم.....
۱۸. من از طرف والدینم برای قبولی در کنکور تحت فشار بودم.....
۱۹. من وقت و انرژی زیادی صرف قبولی در کنکور کردم.....
۲۰. من پول زیادی صرف قبولی در کنکور کردم.....