

Teaching Methods vis-à-vis Learning Styles under the Influence of an Exit Test: A Washback Perspective

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the interrelationship between the teaching methods and the learning styles under the inevitable washback influence of General Secondary English Examination (GSEE) on Yemeni Secondary school students. GSEE is the highest secondary school exit test that is run by the Ministry of Education. This public exam constituted the cornerstone of the students' future, where both teachers and students were preoccupied with how to get passed with the high marks to be eligible to join the university. Qualitative approach has been applied by using classroom observations, semi-structured interviews and group discussions. Based on the research data, the findings of the three qualitative instruments confirmed equivalent implications. The study contributed obvious evidence of the

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strong influence of the exam washback on English teachers' teaching communicating methodologies and students' learning styles.

Keywords: Exit test, GSEE, Learning styles, Teaching methods, Washback

Introduction

Testing is inseparable from teaching and vice versa as they are unable to operate on their own. Hence, language teaching and testing are the most predominant factors of learning processes. Unlike the new approach, which views testing is for learning; the conventional belief was that testing is just a complementary element which is responsible for determining how teaching is successful in a particular context and to measure at what level learners are and to decide who will pass and who will fail. In short, testing is a necessary evil which has an impact on the stakeholders. This impact is what has been known as the 'washback effect'.

It has been recently demonstrated that assessment for learning (AfL) is the ultimate aim of language examinations (Swaffield, 2011; Black & Wiliam, 2010). However, what is happening in Yemen is nearly the opposite. The General Secondary English Examination (GSEE) is considered as the main goal of Yemeni English teachers and learners though it is supposed to serve the needs for learning the language (Tayeb et al., 2018; 2014). This may be due to the well-known fact that in Yemen, as in almost all Arab countries, the educational system is typically test-driven and examinations, especially the public ones, are of exaggerated importance (Haddadin et al., 2008). Due to its significance for the learners' future, the GSEE is considered as a high-stakes test (Tayeb, 2019).

To define the GSEE, it is a public test administered at the last level of pre-tertiary education in Yemen after completing six years of learning English starting from the seventh level until the twelfth level. The test is exclusively prepared and organized by the High Committee for Examinations (HCE), which is directly under the authority of the department of examinations in the Ministry of Education, Yemen. Commonly, "school leavers take the test

in June after completing the required tasks and exercises in all the examination subjects including English” (Tayeb, et al., 2014, p.83).

Due to the growing concern of the Yemeni teachers and learners at the micro level impact of washback, parents, administrators and other stakeholders on the macro level spend much effort, time and lots of money every year on the examination. Hence, more empirical researches, as Watanabe (1996, pp. 35-36) recommends, will help make the best use of such examination. Since learners consider the GSEE as the platform by means of which they can reach their future goals, they try to exploit all possibilities that can help them overcome the difficulties of the test. Their learning styles and activities are adapted according to needs of the test and they keep looking for any additional materials that may help them understand the content of the curricula.

On the other hand, teachers spend more efforts to summarize the prescribed syllabus into commercial handouts containing several tests of the previous years so that they make it easier for learners to pass the exam. In this way, teachers are trapped in a cycle of examination preparations and they consider the communicative methodologies as unaffordable luxuries. This illustrates that the GSEE is the main obstacle that stands in the way of learners in Yemen. Based on the researchers’ experience, who have a good knowledge of the school inspectorate in Yemen, the GSEE hinders English teachers from developing their traditional teaching methods. They find themselves bound to the conditions and the instructions of the test designers and they have no choice except teaching to the test although they realize that the exam is a grammar-based test which gives no attention to communicative skills.

Literature Review

1. Notion of Washback

Up to date, the term ‘washback’ has defined from different perspectives. It is defined in this way (i.e., washback) by applied linguists such as Alderson

and Wall (1993) and (Bailey, 1996), or ‘backwash’ such as Biggs (1996) and (Hughes, 2020). The term is broadly defined as the influence of testing on teaching and learning (Brown, 2002; Cheng & Curtis, 2004; Tayeb et al., 2018). Many recent researchers cited the definition by Messick (1996) in referring to the notion of washback as “... the extent to which the introduction and use of a test influences language teachers and learners to do things they would not otherwise do that promote or inhibit language learning” (Messick, 1996, p.241). However, the term ‘washback’ has become a predominant phenomenon in the field of education specifically by the start of the third millennium during which the term has gained more consideration from researchers around the world. More recently, the topic of washback has been dealt with as a considerable phenomenon in language education (Baksh et al., 2016; Fulcher & Davidson, 2007:221; Onaiba & Mustafa, 2014).

In sum, following Bailey’s (1999) , the different notions of washback as an educational phenomenon can broadly be extracted into four key definitions of the washback concepts: 1) the concept of ‘washback effect’ which refers to the impact tests have on both teaching and learning; 2) the concept of ‘measurement-driven instruction’ which refers to the idea that learning should be driven by testing; 3) the concept of ‘curriculum alignment’ which focuses on the relationship between the teaching syllabus and testing; and 4) the concept of ‘systemic validity’ which interrelates tests into the educational system.

2. Washback and Teaching-Testing Partnership

Controversially, the comprehensive function of testing is, to some extent, still ambiguous. For instance, one cannot say that test is an obedient servant of teaching, but rather it can be considered as a supportive catalyst that leads to the desired goals. This can obviously be observed through different perspective looking at testing as a vital educational element which cannot be expected as just a ‘servant’ that only follows teaching. For example, Hughes (2020) argues that “the proper relationship between teaching and

testing is surely that of partnership.” (p.2). Supporting the teaching-testing partnership approach may positively influence the quality of teaching. In other words, if the teaching is good and testing is not, this will indicate that negative washback will result. On the other hand, there are some cases where testing is good and teaching is not but here one cannot say that testing must follow the negativity of teaching by obeying it submissively. This reflects the test ability to provide a positive or beneficial washback. Hughes’ comment in this regard is worth quoting:

What we should demand of it, however, is that it (testing) should be supportive of good teaching, and, where necessary, exert a corrective influence on bad teaching. If testing always had a beneficial backwash on teaching, it would have a much better reputation amongst teachers. (Hughes, 2020, p.2).

It is important to mention that most, if not all, of the previous studies deal with the washback phenomenon on a particular aspect on the part of the teachers or the learners. To the best knowledge of the researchers, it is difficult to find a study that encompasses the teachers’ perspectives with those of the learners together. However, the only common factor in most, if not all, of the countries in which washback studies were carried out English is a foreign language (EFL) (Tayeb, 2019). Moreover, the factors investigated dealt with learners or teachers separately. In other words, it is hard to find studies that investigate the two factors as a whole though the two elements are eclectically interrelated in any teaching-learning process. Pan and Newfields (2012) aptly commented on this matter by arguing that if teachers are responsible for assisting student pass the exam, they should try their best to learn more about teaching methodologies and they have to be exposed to more training courses, engaged in peer observations to utilise tests for enhancing students learning. Accordingly, what is needed is a study that considers the real interaction among teachers and their learners to assimilate the content which plays a vital role in protecting the students from the harmful effect of the test washback.

In relation to this, many recent washback studies recommend that further studies need to be carried out on the teachers’ teaching methods and

learners' learning styles. For instance, Pan and Newfields (2012) reported that due to the modest amount of EFL researches on learners' washback, further studies are needed to investigate how tests influence students' learning styles and teachers' teaching methods. Hence, the need for investigating how the classroom environment, the place where teachers and students' interactions can be observed, is predominated by positive or negative washback and this is what the present study aims to do implement (Athiworakun & Adunyarittigun, 2022).

Research Objective

This study aims to investigate the interrelationship between teaching methods and learning styles under the inevitable washback influence of General Secondary English Examination on Yemeni Secondary school students.

Methodology

1. Research Design

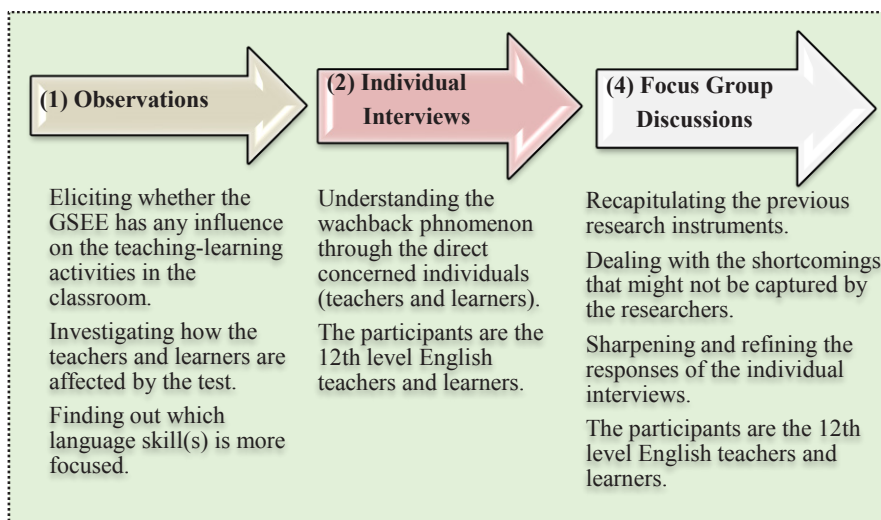
The present study applies the qualitative approach using classroom observations, individual interviews and focus group discussions. For individual interviews, a total of 15 high secondary school English teachers (11 males, 4 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 27.62$, $SD = 0.78$) and eight 3rd-secondary school students (3 males, 5 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 18.20$, $SD = 0.65$) participated in the study. Closer to the exam day, the focus group discussions were carried out with five teachers (2 males and 3 females) and seven students (2 males and 5 females). Both of the focus groups were parts of the participants in individual interviews (more details could be seen in Tables 2, 3 & 4 respectively in the following subsections). The students were all registered to sit for the GSEE and the teachers are the those who were selected to teach English subject for the exit test takers.

For almost the whole period of data collection, observations have been carried out in three rounds - high-standard, mid-standard and non-standard

schools. Simultaneously, individual interviews were carried out with the learners of the same level. The data collected through these procedures ending up with the focus group discussions. The qualitative data were analyzed and correlated to get the final results that reflected the nature of the relationship between the study variables. This is roughly conceptualized in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Instruments utilized for investigating the washback effect of the GSEE TM and LS



2. Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

2.1 Observations

Axiomatically, when talking about classroom observation, the picture which comes into one's mind is that an observer would get two valuable opportunities, optical and auditory. The first is of visual nature including objects and movements that can be seen such as materials used, seats arrangement, number of participants and who mostly/rarely has part in the classroom interaction. This was implemented by developing a coding scheme to suit the Yemeni context based on some previous studies such as

that by Watanabe (1996). The main aim of using classroom observation in this research was to get clear insights about the teaching-learning characteristics that could be elicited through the interaction between the learners and their teachers in the classroom. The focus of the observation was on: 1) skills which are mainly taught and learnt; 2) kinds of activities mainly used; 3) communicative features used in classroom activities; and 4) main and supplementary materials used to prepare for GSEE.

The most well-known scheme coding model for classroom observation is the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) scheme generated by (Fröhlich et al., 1985). Additionally, observation note-taking forms developed by Cheng and Watanabe (2004), in the light of the COLT scheme, were applied for codifying the relative events happening inside classroom. Through the classroom interaction (between the teacher and students) it became clear for the researchers to observe how, or to what extent, the test prediction influences the class different processes. Furthermore, it became easy to elicit students' styles of learning.

The second component of the classroom observation was of audible nature dealing with all that could be heard but not seen. For that, an unobtrusive device was used for recording the classroom audible processes. The most appropriate audible instrument for recording is MP3 recording device for getting good quality sound. The recordings were then transcribed orthographically and thematically categorized representing various classroom activities and then coded schematically using NVivo (version 12) software. To make it clearer, the researchers requested approval from the sampled school administrations and personally requested permission from English teachers to videotape some classroom activities. The collected data sets were subsequently used in frequency analysis.

Due to the time and finance limitations, the researchers could observe only 39 classes, of the third secondary English classes, distributed among seven schools scattered in the urban and rural areas. The estimated time for observation was around 30 hours during the school year 2021. This, however, is very close to several studies carried out on the washback

phenomenon such as the studies by Burrows and Hsu (Burrows, 2004; Hsu, 2010). Each class was observed after getting permission from the school administration and making contacts with English teachers through personal meetings or via phone calls. All classes were of 45 minutes in (both male and female) schools. Table 1 summarizes the schools in which the observations were carried out where (Aⁿ) symbolizes male school, (Bⁿ) for female and (Cⁿ) for male-female school.

Table 1

School Locations, Number of Periods and Length of Observation

No.	School Code	Situation	Standard (e.g., Historical Reputation)	Number of periods	Length of observation
1	A1	Main town	Highly standardized	7	7x45= 315 mins
2	B1	Main town	Highly standardized	5	5x45= 225 mins
3	A2	Secondary town	Semi-standardized	7	7x45= 315 mins
4	B2	Secondary town	Semi-standardized	4	4x45= 180 mins
5	A3	Rural area	Low standardized	6	6x45= 270 mins
6	B3	Rural area	Low standardized	6	6x45= 270 mins
7	C3	Rural area	V. low standardized	4	4x45= 180 mins
Total				39	1755/60= 29.25 hrs.

Accordingly, three main variables were taken into account while classroom observations namely context, process and product to gain a complete picture of washback effect on teaching and learning within the classroom context, (Bailey, 1996; Burrows, 2004; Hsu, 2010). More importantly, the process variables (teachers and learners' interaction in the classroom) were the mostly needed targets in this study.

2.2 Interviews

In this study, interviews were of two types implemented in two different stages. The first, one-to-one interviews with 15 Yemeni English teachers and 8 learners, of males and females, of the secondary schools (the 12th grade) were carried out. The second, two focus-group discussions with five

English teachers and seven learners of both males and females constituted the winding up of data collection procedures.

The individual interview with English teachers and third secondary school students almost constituted the second stage of the current research. Purposively, the teachers were chosen from different schools in the main town, the secondary towns and the rural area. The reason behind that was to discuss the washback effect of the GSEE from different perspectives. The total number of interviewees was 15 English teachers 11 of them were male and four were female and all of them taught students in the third secondary classes who would sit for the GSEE. Table 2 shows the profile of the teachers.

Table 2

Schedule of Interviews with Teachers

No.	Teachers' codename	Gender	Teaching experience (Years)	Locality (Main/Secondary town; Rural)	School 1=Main town 2=Secondary town 3=Rural Area
1	AA	M	13	M. Town	A1
2	AD	M	8	Rural	C3
3	AG	M	13	S. Town	B3
4	AM	M	22	M. Town	A1
5	DH	F	12	S. Town	B1
6	EH	M	22	M. Town	A2
7	GY	M	2	Rural	C3
8	HM	F	13	S. Town	B2
9	HY	M	11	M. Town	A1
10	KT	M	15	S. Town	A2
11	MG	M	8	Rural	B3
12	MO	M	14	S. Town	A2
13	SG	F	8	S. Town	B2
14	SK	F	11	S. Town	B2
15	SZ	M	23	Rural	A3

Throughout the classroom observations, the researchers could find chances to carry out individual interviews with students either in the male or female schools, in the urban or rural areas. The students chosen were those seen to

be very interactive with their teachers and classmates inside the classroom. This made it easy to elicit their acceptance to participate in the study. The total number of participants was eight, five female and three male students. The interviews were conducted concurrently with classroom observation. Answers were recorded verbatim during the interviews. Table 3 shows the profile of the students.

Table 3

Profile of the Students

No.	Students' codenames	Gender	Locality (Main/Secondary town; Rural)	School 1=Main town 2=Secondary town 3=Rural Area
1	RH	F	Rural	C3
2	IM	M	M. Town	A1
3	NdA	F	S. Town	B2
4	HN	F	Rural	C3
5	GM	M	S. Town	A2
6	NgA	F	Rural	C3
7	HD	F	Rural	B1
8	AT	M	S. Town	A2

Consequently, Semi-structured interviews constituted a platform for carrying out two focus group discussions one with five teachers and another with seven students. The reason beyond enclosing the data collection processes with group discussions was to find out the most appropriate volunteers for participation throughout the preceding processes (observations & interviews) for making fruitful discussions. This constituted an overwhelming support to the researchers due to their interest and enthusiasm during the discussion. It was expected that the interaction among the group members would encourage more interactions with the topic and recapitulate what might have been explained or discussed in the previous stages.

Surprisingly, the group members were extremely interested in the discussions especially the students' group because, as they stated, they have

had never participated in such activities before. Before starting the discussion, there was an innovative chart containing the main points along with the leading questions which would be handled during the discussions. The chart was distributed among the participants as a time-saving device and to make the discussion smoother and more active. While conducting the group discussion some impromptu questions were asked when it seemed necessary for eliciting more explanation and clarification.

2.3 Focus Group Discussions

Regarding the procedural steps for carrying out the focus group discussions of the teachers, the main way for informing a participant was face to face either immediately after the classroom observation or after the individual interviews. Those who accepted to participate in the group discussion were requested to provide their contact numbers to be informed of the time and the place of the discussion. The discussion was initiated with the researchers assuring the participants that whatever they said in the meeting would be confidential and would only be used for the research purposes. A brief introduction about the subject matter of the research and the purpose of the discussion for enriching the topic with their own views that emerged from their experience as the direct stakeholders under the influence of the washback effect of the GSEE. For documentation purposes, audio-visual aids were applied using Sony digital voice recorder and a video camera. Almost, the same procedures were applied for students' focus group discussion (see Table 4). As it was promised, codenames were only used when transcribing and analyzing the data.

Table 4

Schedule of Teachers and Students' Focus Group Discussions

Focus group	Number of participants			Length of discussion
	Male	Female	Total	
Teachers focus group	2	3	5	50.49 mins
Students focus group	2	5	7	27.51 ins

3. *Data Analysis*

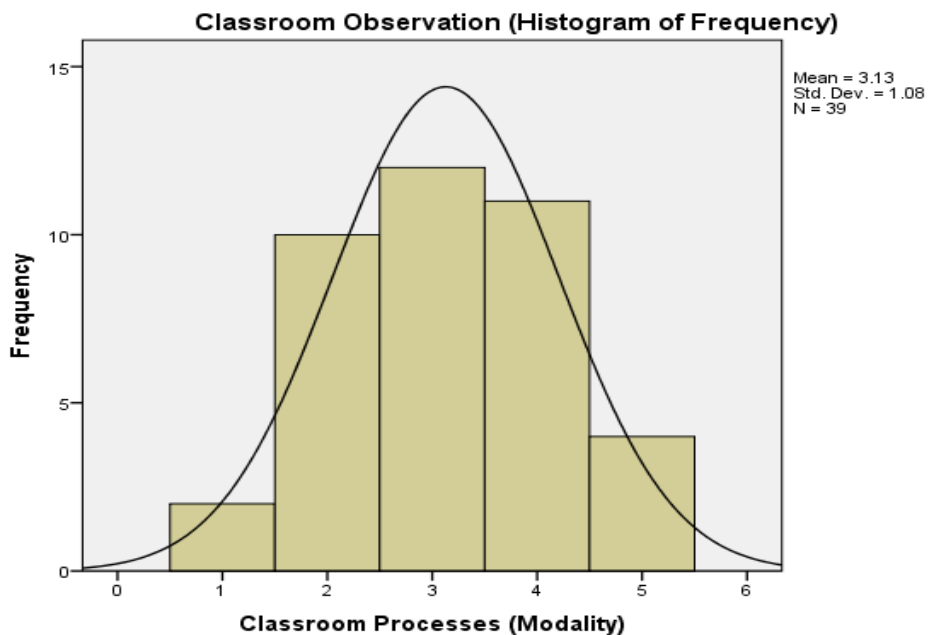
3.1 *Data from Classroom Observations*

As has been mentioned earlier, seven secondary schools were considered for investigation in urban and rural areas. The schools were basically selected based on standards, levels of teachers and students' proficiency, gender and regional location. The main reason beyond choosing different types of school was to elicit how English teachers and 3rd secondary school students would react to the GSEE in different contexts. This appeared to be more appropriate for observing teachers and learners from different types of schools which constituted the baseline for the study. It was supposed that there might be some differences of the washback effect regarding school locations or gender but the results revealed that the difference is not that significant indicating that all students whether in the urban or rural, male or female are influenced by the GSEE.

As a baseline for the study, the classroom observations revealed that almost a third of the classroom activities were devoted for doing mock tests, due to the effect of the test on the teachers and the learners. The data revealed that the oral-aural skills are almost ignored (only 5%) by the teachers. This might be due to the washback effect of the GSEE being a paper-and-pencil test which is the major concern for teachers and learners. Accordingly, the focus was mainly on reading and writing 28% including grammar 25% as the language structure, and vocabulary 10% as the source of answering the multiple-choice questions (MCQs), fill-in-the-blanks and matching questions. Overall, the predomination of the GSEE on the class different procedures was significantly overwhelming 31% from the total classroom procedures. Figure 5 visualizes the above description.

Figure 3

Histogram of Frequency for Mock Examinations Compared to Language Structures/Skills through Classroom Observations



1= Oral; 2= Grammar; 3= Mock Examinations; 4= Reading & Writing; 5= Vocabulary

According to the above Figure 3, column 3 reached the highest point where 12 out of the 39 classes were observed practicing mock examinations. On the other hand, column 1 pointed the lowest frequency, $f=2$, regarding oral activities. This, as has been mentioned earlier, might be due to the inexistence of the oral questions in the GSEE. As paper-and-pencil examination, teachers concentrate more on the reading and writing skills (column 4) where 11 out of the 39 classes were devoted for this purpose. Similarly, as GSEE is a grammar-oriented and language structure exam, 10 classes were specified for Grammar (column 2) followed by vocabulary (column 5) for which only 4 classes were devoted (see Table 5).

Table 5*Frequency and Percentages of the Language Skills and Structure -
Classroom Observation Study of Lessons*

Subject/Topic Taught	Frequency	Percent
Oral	2	5.1%
Grammar	10	25.6%
Mock Examinations	12	30.8%
Reading and Writing	11	28.2%
Vocabulary	4	10.3%
Total	39	100%

3.2 Data from Interviews

The data generated from the individual and focus group interviews was coded and analyzed via the open-ended questions previously recognized and listed in the interviews protocols (Cohen et al., 2007). Miles and Huberman (1994) explained that three concurrent flows of activity need to be conducted before analyzing the interviews data namely: 1) data reduction; 2) data display and conclusion drawing; and 3) verification. Hence, qualitative data was gathered through identifying the categories and themes that match the objectives of the interviews' questions, which were within the scope of the research questions and the limitation of the study.

Using the NVivo12 software, the data was transcribed independently for each identified category, relying on the recordings and the classroom checklists (i.e., field-notes) taken during the interviews. The researchers used what is called 'selective coding' (Charmaz, 2006) and started coding and nodding all the interview transcripts by categorizing the texts according to the research questions and objectives. The transcription was read through several times and specific parts of the text were highlighted in different colours and the participants' names were coded and abbreviated. The aim beyond doing so was to simplify the codes and reduce the number of categories. In a sense, the smaller categories were amalgamated into a larger

category. This process of combining and merging the categories led to data reduction. The study themes and sub-themes were clustered by the NVivo12 software.

As all the interviews were either videotaped or rerecorded, the data collected from the teachers was transcribed (Silverman, 2020) and the data collected from students were translated from Arabic into English in the English Department, Hodeidah University. All the students' interviews were transcribed verbatim via each participant, and then presented in both versions, Arabic and English. Three colleagues at the faculty of education were requested to interpret the interview data in order to compare their interpretations with those by the researchers. A high degree of concordance was perceived between the two types of interpretations.

Results

1. GSEE Washback on the Teachers' Teaching Methods (TM)

Teaching Methods (hereinafter referred to as TM) is the first factor around which the questions were asked. Almost all the interviewees agreed that TM is influenced by the GSEE and teachers teaching English for the sake of the test and not for learning the language. According to AD, the GSEE “*influences the ways the teacher teaches the students because one important thing is that when the teacher teaches the students, their mindsets should be preoccupied with the exam's day*”. Hence, the 3rd secondary class English teacher is obliged to tailor the way of teaching towards the test. AD's comment in this regard is worth quoting:

They (teachers) do not care about the real classroom learning and whether their students have acquired the language or not. They think of how to help the students pass and so there is no real language teaching and learning.

According to most of the interviewees, TM is a very important element that should be adapted according to the test. For example, AM argued that TM “is very important because it makes teachers concentrate only on few points and not on the skill of learning, *“I think they ignore speaking.”* This proves that teaching is not for learning but for testing because speaking skill is

almost ignored albeit “*it is a very important skill to be acquired by students through the teachers*” (AM). Teachers see that there is no need for the aural-oral skills because GSEE is a paper-and-pencil test. For example, AG obviously narrated his own story with the TM in his own class:

It (the GSEE) makes me create new methods to teach my students, to collect more question papers for students and make them try to solve these examinations so that it becomes easy for me to teach, to make these patterns or models (of exams) easy for the students to pass the GSEE.

Hence, it could be stated that the GSEE makes the TM unique in the 3rd secondary level compared to the whole previous levels. DH asserted that particular TM must be used “*to prepare the students to be ready and able to answer the test (questions) at the end of the year.*” When the interviewee was asked why TM should be different in the 3rd level, the answer was “*they are different, because, for example, in the second secondary classes, I myself who make or take the decision and I follow myself in these classes.*” Additionally, EH strongly affirmed that a teacher “*must make his teaching methods suitable for the exam and make the students get familiar with this exam.*” “*We have to change the teaching methods according to the exam,*” EH asserted. GY tried to interpret the reason beyond adopting the TM according to the GSEE and why the teachers teach the students according to the way of the exam in this excerpt.

Their purpose is how to get high marks to be admitted in the university. If our students just get only to pass (grade), they cannot join the university where it accepts only those get 80% and above. So, no department will accept less than this grade.

At this point, the situation seems to be controversial. The teachers were thinking about the most appropriate TM that could attract their students and simplify the subject matter for their students. In contrast, the students viewed teaching as not as helpful as cheating in achieving high marks in the GSEE. Thus, they believed they should think about their own methods to achieve this target which is educationally a harmful phenomenon. Teacher KT recommended that they must “*do all they can do. So, they try to vary*

their methods to involve all students and to introduce examples and media, either visual or audio or anything they can do.”

In relation to the effect of the GSEE on the TM, some teachers believed that all what they should do is making students familiar with the test. They referred to repeating the same style of the GSEE as a reason. In this way, the implication is that there is no necessity to diversify the TM in the class and what they could concentrate on is the test. Teacher HY tried to tackle this point in this excerpt:

While teaching, you find that the exam is repeated as a test every year and you will find the teacher keeps using one to fulfill this purpose. Other thing is the teacher finds that the students, even the smartest ones, are concerned about how to pass the exam, no more no less.

Hence, for most of the 3rd secondary school teachers, the first thing they put in mind is the GSEE. Each teacher has his own TM but in the light of the test and the course lessons are explained according to the test also. Teacher SG narrated a prominent way of teaching in her classes when she said:

Before I teach them or do anything, I read all the questions of the previous years, then, I try to connect between my teaching and these questions. There are lessons that give answers (to these questions). If I find that the students cannot find the answers for difficult exercises I seek the help of the teachers' books; that is why we need teachers' books. We always go to find out a teacher who has a copy for the teachers' book outside the school or get help from experienced teachers... like that.

2. GSEE Washback on Learners' Learning Styles (LS)

Diversity is not only in the TM on the part of the teachers, but also there in the learning styles (LS) on the part of the learners. Though LS is a learning element but it would be more obvious if investigated from the teachers' viewpoints. The majority of the teachers agreed that LS factor is highly affected by the GSEE especially when compared to the previous or lower levels. As the test is the corner stone of the students' future, various styles of learning are followed by the learners to capture the needs of the test.

Hence, LS was a significant element investigated on the learners' side. Teacher KT responded:

Students change their ways in learning. They make hard work with each other. They gather together to do some exercises. It is not like other years when students do not care about the course but in third year, they try to do all their best and they change their styles of learning even they become more active in the class and with other classmates also. They go for evening classes to do more exercises and more practice.

Apparently, Teacher SK differentiated between the LS of the 3rd secondary and the lower classes by arguing that students in the lower levels almost knew what they would be asked about and their teacher would correct the test questions. Therefore, they see that there was no need to diversify the LS. Furthermore, at these levels, they have enough time to study and even to request their teachers to repeat the lessons several times because they were not so concerned about the exam. However, the 3rd secondary situation is different. Learners need to aptly diversify their LS either inside or outside the classes and they could seek the help of their teachers. Hence, the teacher could suggest many aspects of the LS such as competitions and group-discussions. Teacher SK responded about the LS:

It is different because the second secondary is not as the third secondary, all students concentrate more and they are afraid of the test marks. They study the lessons many times because they are afraid from marks...The teachers must make competition with other schools and the best school meets the other best school. I always do this. But, some neglect; they do not take care of anything. This is a good way to motivate students to learn in the third secondary because they will be more active and study more because there are many things which are going to happen.

On the contrary, some teachers viewed that the GSEE negatively affects the LS. They argued that instead of thinking about how to learn the language and trying to diversify their LS, they only concentrated on the exam. Teacher AM looked at this point from two interrelated perspectives. One is that students are not accustomed to diversify their LS. What they are familiar

with is just passing the exam as when they were in the previous lower levels. This makes them unable to manage their time and effort of study when they are in 3rd secondary, the GSEE stage. The second is the GSEE itself. It makes them almost frustrated because they think that whatever they might have done, they would be bound by the decision of the High Committee of Examinations (HCE) and their teachers have no role in the exam preparation and administration. The following excerpt by teacher AM is worth quoting:

Most of the students are getting bored from studying especially English language because they are always afraid of the exams and because they pass the exam unsuccessfully and they are passed randomly giving them marks to pass from second year to third. They have no foundation, the basics to study English further. So, they get bored and frustrated in the class. But, we can find only some students active, who can react with their teachers and try to speak, try to answer, try to find or read... like this.

Similarly, teacher DH stated that the GSEE is a serious problem because it preoccupies the students' minds making them bored and frustrated. As a result, most of their teachers in the class mostly provide details about the exam. Hence, one could say that the LS factor is affected by the GSEE washback but the effect is negative. The problem becomes worse when one knows that they might think about cheating as an ultimate solution they could use to pass the exam. The following excerpt by teacher DH reflected the psychological conflict between teachers and learners:

The students are thinking in the last exam. They are always worried 'what will we study?', 'what can we ignore?', 'what can we omit'? Every day they bring the test with them. They have books for the models of the exam of all the years. Every day, they say 'we see this in a question of the exam.' That is the problem.

Surprisingly, some teachers looked at the effect of the GSEE from different perspectives. For them, the GSEE has no role in changing the LS because many students look at it as an obstacle standing in their way and cheating is the only solution for overcoming all the difficulties. However, to think on how to cheat is a style not of learning but of testing. This obviously reflected

the negative side of the washback which derived cheating from testing. In other words, instead of thinking how to learn the language, students might think how to cheat. Teacher HM introduced the GSEE as the main factor of reducing students' motivation to learn English because the test increases their tendencies for cheating. The interviewee's opinion is worth highlighted:

I do not think they (students) got a lot of information because their minds concentrate on how to cheat, how to make something which may help them answer the questions, cheating papers, cutting their books, and they make or create a lot of ways to cheat.

In sum, the washback effect resulted from the GSEE made the 3rd secondary classes different from the other classes at the lower levels. According to the viewpoints of the majority of the interviewees, the LS factor is considered as a dependent factor which, either directly or indirectly, follows the GSEE. In other words, the learning styles, inside or outside schools are mostly adapted in the light of the GSEE content not the content of the course. Hence, the various learning styles (LS) become subjected to the requirements of the GSEE.

Discussion

This research paper has been devoted to locate the phenomenon of washback within a more specific awareness of impact. It operationalizes washback on teaching methods vis-à-vis learning styles as direct significant constructs related to direct stakeholders (i.e., English teachers & learners). Based on the finding analysed above, it could be elicited that what mostly happens in the 3rd secondary classes is somehow controversial. This is so because, according to the classroom observations and interviews, the teachers seek what could be called as 'testing methods' rather than 'teaching methods.' Throughout the interviews, it seemed that the majority of the respondents agreed that, in the 3rd secondary classes, they teach English for the sake of the GSEE rather than teaching for learning the language. Therefore, they adapted their TM according to the test content where their focus was on the written skills (i.e., reading and writing) rather than the aural-oral skills (i.e.,

listening and speaking). Only a few of participants mentioned that they focus on learning rather than testing where they eclectically taught all the language skills regardless of the test content because they viewed that their teaching should be for learning not for testing. The findings of the current study come in line with the research by Tsang and Isaacs (2022) in Hong Kong where, in both of the study, the impression of learners is directly exposed to the “power and control embedded in test design” (Tsang & Isaacs, 2022, p.233).

Through their viewpoints presented above, one can elicit that the teachers were forced to teach according to the test. This provided a clear answer as to why 31% of the classes were about mock examinations during the classroom observation. The teachers specified around a third of their classes for explaining the exam for two reasons. The first, they felt that it was their role to simplify the GSEE for the students showing them how it was constructed and how questions could be answered. The second, they tried helping students overcome the difficulties of the exam and in case they succeed in making their students attend classes and get interested in learning, then, the students would indirectly be protected from the cheating phenomenon.

Additionally, there is another issue regarding the TM factor and its relation to the GSEE. Some of the participants claimed that no much concern is paid to the TM since many students consider their own ways of how to get high marks. Considering this issue, a serious question might be arisen, such as, what way/s student can follow to get higher marks in the GSEE? Rationally, cheating is the most preferred way especially for lazy students. Again, why does this happen? HM argued that the phenomenon of cheating especially in the far rural area affects the teachers passively. They find themselves in a situation where their efforts on teaching their students almost have no benefits because students find cheating as a ‘weapon’ by which they can face the anxiety of the GSEE. For some students thinking about the ways of cheating is better than attending classes, listening to their teachers and interacting with their active classmates.

Moreover, the teachers viewed the GSEE as a grammar-based test. Accordingly, the students pay their attention towards grammar and tend to neglect the language skills. The matter becomes worse when the teachers encouraged them to memorize the grammar rules and the most relevant words (i.e., vocabulary). Hence, one could anticipate that the LS factor is affected by the GSEE but in a negative way where only grammar becomes the primary concern for the students and the language skills would have a minor concern because the test mainly focuses on grammar. In other words, GSEE encourages students, but in a negative way because students think of how to memorize the grammar rules. They do not study English or the prescribed course to get the skills of language. Rather, the test motivates them to pay their efforts to pass the exam not to learn English. They try to memorize the grammar rules and this is because the test itself is grammar-based. They have models from years before and when these models are grammar-based, they have to study the grammar rules only.

It could also be reported that, in this study, the findings elicited through observation regarding level of schools (starting from highly standardized to low standardized) has no effect on both reducing the washback impact on both teachers' teaching methods and learners' learning styles. This comes in line with the findings of study by Athiworakun and Adunyarittigun (2022) where both the studies focused on teachers rather than schools. Moreover, the findings of the study seem to support the assertion of Onaiba and Mustafa (2014); Naveed-Ur-Rehman Khattak and Sohaib Sultan, (2022), and Tsang and Isaacs (2022) focusing on the partnership between triangulated dimensions of the teaching-learning processes namely: teaching, learning and testing. Hence, it becomes obvious that the differences among schools are not as important as the difference among teachers. Additionally, the findings of the study have revealed that there is a total ignorance for the oral-aural skills and the total concentration is only on reading and writing skills with a special focus on grammar as GSEE is a grammar-based exam. These findings come in line with the results of the study conducted by Naveed-Ur-Rehman Khattak and Sohaib Sultan, (2022) in Pakistan, which such educational procedure has 'wrong pedagogical

practices' than result in negative washback effects on language teaching and learning.

Conclusion

The present study provided empirical evidence for the necessity paying more attention on diversifying teaching approaches as well as learning styles to overcome the negative influences of GSEE as an avoidable public and exit test. Moreover, the findings of the study seem to support the assertion of Onaiba and Mustafa (2014); Naveed-Ur-Rehman Khattak and Sohaib Sultan, (2022), and Tsang and Isaacs (2022) focusing on the partnership between triangulated dimensions of the teaching-learning processes namely: teaching, learning and testing. According to the study findings, either direct stakeholders (i.e., teachers & learners) or indirect stakeholders (i.e., parents, school administrators, policy makers, etc.) should be aware of the test and its own strengths and weaknesses. The research findings have significant implications related to domain triangulation in educational research, where the researchers attempted to overcome the scarcity and 'parochialism' of studies conducted in Yemen. The present study recommends that changing teaching methods and learning styles occur as gradual progress and they are the product of long-term comprehension of various contexts for teaching.

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