

Assessing the Relationship between Teachers' Beliefs about Exam Preparation and their Teaching Behaviour among Tunisian English Language Teachers: Empirical Evidence from Tunisia

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Abstract

Teachers' beliefs have triggered a lot of research interest, especially in high-stakes examination contexts. It is widely acknowledged that the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices is complex. Hence, this article presents an empirical study to investigate teachers' perceptions, i.e. attitudes towards the English Baccalaureate Exam (EBE) and their beliefs about exam preparation (BEP), as well as the relationships between their AE, BEP and their teaching practices (TP). In other words, this research explores the impact of teachers' perceptions on what and how they teach English in the context of the EBE. While the majority of research studies are qualitative and based on case studies, the current study used a mixed methods approach, drawing on both (i) quantitative data (questionnaire, 364 English language teachers (ELTs) from 6 governorates selected following systematic random sampling) and qualitative data (classroom observations and interviewees, 4 ELTs). Pearson correlation coefficients and linear regression were used. Results revealed that ELTs showed mixed attitudes and they extensively prepared their students for the EBE to familiarize them with the exam content and format, to prepare them psychologically, and to increase their scores. Owing to the importance of the issue, much focus should be given to teachers' beliefs.

Keywords: perceptions; high-stakes EBE; washback; exam preparation; High scores; teaching practices.

I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of testing has increased tremendously and changed significantly to impact what is taught and how it is taught (Madaus 1988). Different studies have investigated several factors in different educational contexts and yielded conflicting conclusions about the washback, as well as its scope and nature. Hence, the washback issue or Measurement-Driven Instruction (MDI) is a highly controversial topic in social, educational, and political settings. Various stakeholders are involved and concerned by this issue, because

tests, particularly high-stakes tests, determine the future of many people including students, teachers, and administrators. Consequently, teachers have a tendency to personalize their classroom activities, teaching practices to the specifications of the examination (Buck, 1988, p. 17).

Meeting exam requirements resulted in preparing students for the exam which usually involves Teaching To the Test (TTT) to ensure high scores by having them practice items, activities, content, and form similar to those of the test from previous exam papers administered

the previous years. Two opposing views emerged as a result to exam preparation: opponents and supporters of TTT or MDI. Proponents of Teaching To The test not only recommend MDI, but they also offer evidence in favour of MDI, claiming that high-stakes tests "serve as a powerful curricular magnet" (Popham, 1987), implying a correspondence between the content and format of a test and that of the curriculum (Popham, 1987; Shepard, 1990). Some critics (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Cheng & Curtis, 2004; Madaus, 1988; Moore, 1994) argue that MDI has a harmful effect, comprising curriculum narrowing, teaching towards an identical exam or exam skill, overt teaching to the test, and a loss of creativity. As a result, different studies conclude that the washback concept has multiple and contradictory implications. Madaus disagrees with the view that tests are "a valid indicator of the knowledge or skill it was originally intended to measure" (1988, p.30). Instead, he summarises the main adverse effects of MDI and explains how a high-stakes test influences all stakeholders' understandings. Generally, the grades and results become the primary goal of education. Hence, the test will misrepresent the social processes it seeks to assess. Besides, teachers will teach to the test, focusing on previous tests as well as the form and format of the questions. These practices stifle creativity and imagination. Likewise, Mehrens and Lehmann refuse to teach specific exam questions in advance, referring to this practice as coaching or cramming sessions. Despite being an MDI supporter, Popham invites teachers to refrain from teaching to the test, comparing this practice to a high crime, for teaching to the test refers to teaching practices and activities centered either on the actual items found on a test or on a set of look-alike items. According to Popham, they should rather teach the curriculum by focusing on a specific body of content knowledge or a specific set of cognitive skills included within a test (2001).

1.1. Context of the Study

The field of language testing is a burgeoning field in Tunisia. Only recently has there been a growing concern-- among local researchers in applied linguistics and language testing-- about the issue of teachers' language assessment literacy (Hidri, 2015; Maaoui, 2020; Mattoussi, 2018; Naimi, 2018; Toujani & Hermessi, 2019).

However, the washback effect of the EBE has not received the attention it deserves.

Previously, English, as a foreign language (FL), had been taught in the sixth grade of primary school. Very recently in 2019, the Ministry of Education (MOE) introduced the teaching of English in the 4th form of primary school. Summative in nature, the educational system in Tunisia is primarily used to measure the learning outcomes and make important educational decisions. Instead of diagnosing and identifying deficiencies and problems, students are graded based on whether they pass or fail (Hidri, 2015). Students' communicative proficiency in English remains low, despite the MOE efforts to adhere to international quality standards and, as a result, improve English language teaching (Dhaoui, 2015; Yaagoubi et al., 2013).

Influenced by the French education system, the Tunisian Baccalaureate exam (BE) is used to assess students and to serve two purposes: it is a school exit and a higher education entrance exam. Unlike English proficiency tests, the EBE is a national standardized exam based on a national English language curriculum. Every June, thousands of students take the exam across the country. As one of the core subjects tested on BE, English is a high-stakes exam. The education board, the examinations council, and regional examining boards are in charge of administering the BE. External MOE agencies anonymously review, administer, and score the exam to ensure that all candidates have equal opportunities. For the sake of transparency, all the exam scripts in each region are, first, gathered under strict security measures, then sent to be graded in a different region, by teachers belonging to a different regional examining board.

The EBE exam is divided into three parts: reading comprehension, language, and writing. The reading comprehension test consists of seven questions. Part 2 of the exam is devoted to writing which is divided into two sections that assess students' writing abilities. The third component is the language section which consists of three tasks. The EBE contains different types of questions (i) open-ended; (ii) multiple choice questions; and (iii) gap filling questions. Regardless of the intended goal of implementing the communicative approach by introducing the EBE, the exam fails to evaluate

two essential skills for practical purposes: listening and speaking.

Given the competitive nature of this exam, the teachers are involved in a variety of exam preparation activities. The results of the BE continue to have a significant impact on the future lives of thousands of students. "Even though they have their individual, societal, economic, political and educational impingements, test impacts and uses have been overlooked in the Tunisian context" (Hidri, 2015, p.21). In other words, although teaching to the test is not a recent issue, there is little research around teachers' view on Teaching To the Test (TTT) or exam preparation and teachers' practices in the context of the EBE. As a result, the current study aims to fill a void in existing literature by looking into exam preparation in the context of the BE. As mentioned previously, it is expected that such research would have significant implications on various stakeholders. The study could add to the limited body of literature on exam preparation that seeks to fully understand the nature of the problem and its impact on classroom teaching practices.

1.2. Research Questions

The goal of this research is to investigate Tunisian teachers' beliefs and practices regarding exam preparation in the context of the BE. The study specifically addresses the following questions:

1. What are the ELTs' views on exam preparation (BEP)?
2. What are the most common exam preparation activities reported by ELTs?
3. Is there a relationship between ELTs' BEP and their TP?

2. Literature Review

This research delves into two major fields: language teacher cognition and language teaching and testing.

Washback has become a topic of considerable interest, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as Second Language (ESL) contexts. Despite the fact that several research studies have examined the test

impact in different educational contexts and revealed interesting, but conflicting results, they all agreed that washback is an unavoidable phenomenon (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Cheng, & Curtis, 2004; Tsagari & Cheng, 2017; Tsagari, 2006). Washback is regarded as an essential quality of any type of assessment, particularly when the results are used to make critical decisions (Cheng 2014; Shohamy, 2005; Tsagari 2009). High-stakes exams influenced different aspects of the classroom, teachers, students, attitudes, feelings, the curriculum, the teaching methods, and the content. Cheng (2005) examined the effects of the high-stakes Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination in English (HKCEE) on English classroom teaching and learning in Hong Kong secondary schools. Her results indicated that the exam appeared to have little washback effect on teachers in Hong Kong as their methods remained unchanged and continued to use the traditional methods of teaching contrary to the communicative spirit of the test. Hence, washback "seems to be a phenomenon that does not exist automatically in its own right but is rather one that can be brought into existence through the agency of teachers, students or others involved in the test-taking process" (Spratt, 2005, p.21).

Based on the results of empirical research studies from different educational contexts, researchers concluded that several factors may play a role in students arriving with a level of English that falls short of what is required for them to perform academically to their full potential. "Factors beyond the exam itself come into play in determining the amount and kind of washback" (Spratt, 2005, p.18). The teacher plays an influential and important role in generating washback (Spratt, 2005; Watanabe, 2000, 2004). Teachers' beliefs or personal parameters rank among the multiple factors that influence their teaching practices. Borg (2005, p. 192) provided a model of the elements and processes in language teacher cognition and identified the different constructs of language teacher cognition such as beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, assumptions, and conceptions.

Spratt (2005) reviewed several empirical studies and explained how important the role of the teacher variable is in determining the washback effect. Teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs have a significant impact on their

instructional planning, teaching methods, content, targeted skills and approaches.

Different research studies examined the different attitudes, beliefs and perceptions; however, the present review summarises the findings in relation to teachers' views on exam preparations.

Another important teacher-related variable is their views on test preparation. Their views on exam preparation to help students score high may aggravate the situation and generate unavoidable severe washback effects. Washback studies (Gebril & Eid, 2017; Lai & Waltman, 2008; Xie, 2013, 2015; Wisdom 2018) were also interested in teachers' opinions on exam preparation. Some studies have been conducted in different educational contexts to determine how teachers' views on test preparation affect their teaching practices.

In an attempt to survey the claims that the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOFEL) has a negative impact on language teaching, Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) examined two different types of classes: a language proficiency class and a class intended to prepare students for the TOFEL taught by the same teachers. Using interviews and classroom observations, they considered how preparation classes and English classes are taught. They observed two teachers to check if the TOEFL test has a different impact on different teachers and if differences in teachers' teaching behaviours are due to personal preference or are influenced by the test. The outcome of their study indicated that the observed teachers' teaching practices were clearly influenced by their individual teaching styles. Both teachers approached each class with different methodological goals and targeted specific learning outcomes. Their instructional planning, their teaching attitudes and beliefs affect their teaching practices. Hence, the effect varied in degree and type from teacher to teacher.

Similarly, Smith conducted a longitudinal qualitative research in two schools in the Phoenix metropolitan area to examine teachers' perceptions of testing and test preparation, as well as how their perceptions were reflected in their teaching practices. The findings revealed that teachers engaged in different test preparation practices and ended up teaching to the test with the ultimate goal of having their

students achieve high scores. She explained it this way

Whatever the actual consequences of test results might be, teachers act according to their beliefs that low-test scores contribute to negative evaluations of their efforts on the part of the public and school administrators and lead to decreased teacher autonomy over curriculum and teaching methods. For teachers, the stakes are high, and they react by doing what is necessary to prepare children to take the external tests (1991, p.525).

Using both questionnaires and interviews, Lai and Waltman (2008) conducted a study to examine teachers' perceptions and practices when preparing for exams. Teachers were asked to share their opinions and practices on two main themes: Ethics and Appropriateness. The results show that both practices and perceptions varied from one participant to another. Similarly, using different research methods, Erfani (2012) conducted a research study in Iran to examine IELTS and iBT preparation courses. Research methods included both student and teacher questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations to check if teachers changed their teaching practices and decided to teach activities similar to those in the tests to encourage the required communicative competence and language skills. She reports that there were similarities between the IELTS and TOEFL iBT preparation courses. The results also show that teachers teaching the IELTS preparation courses were much more affected by the test than those teaching iBT preparation courses. Additionally, an unexpected finding is that teachers in IELTS classes spent more time on test assignments, interacting in English, and using pair and group work than teachers in iBT classes using Farsi, and the class was largely teacher-centered. Similarly, Chappell et al. (2015) conducted a quantitative-qualitative research to examine the relationship between Australian ELICOS teachers' knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and thinking about IELTS and their teaching behaviours in IELTS Test preparation courses. The findings revealed that the teachers showed a variety of positive and negative attitudes toward the test and their teaching practices for the IELTS course, as well as their teaching methodology, were found to vary significantly.

In a recent washback study in Vietnam, Barnes (2017) conducted a qualitative case study with

four teachers who taught both TOEFL iBT preparation courses and general English courses. She examined their perceptions and teaching practices in relation to exam preparation and teaching general English courses. The research showed that teachers' perceptions of what constitutes good teaching practices vary greatly depending on the teaching context and the role and purpose of the course, be it an exam preparation course or general English. Another worth-noting study related to language testing is the research study conducted in Egypt by Gebril & Eid (2017), which examines teachers' beliefs and practices regarding test preparation for Thanaweya Amma. They collected data from 200 teachers from 22 Egyptian governorates using a mixed-methods approach and reported that the high-stakes Thanaweya Amma test has both negative and positive effects on beliefs and teaching practices. Their research confirms previous washback studies proving that teachers spend more time on skills that are included on the test and ignore untested skills and therefore limit the scope of the curriculum (Gebril & Eid, 2017, p. 372). Therefore, practices follow beliefs.

Likewise, Wisdom (2018) examined the experiences and perceptions of high school English and maths teachers in preparing students for high-stakes tests. According to the findings, these teachers stated that it was their responsibility to prepare students for high-stakes tests and that they needed appropriate professional development to increase their knowledge and know how to deal with specific test preparation practices to prepare students for high-stakes tests.

In a strictly exam-oriented context, Papakammenou (2018) conducted a research [investigation] study comparing a multi-exam and a one-exam contexts to investigate teachers' practices and to gain a better understanding of their beliefs and practices regarding a set of 21 different exams in one single class in Greece. The findings indicate that the washback impact varies among the teachers, the skills taught, the material utilized during different terms, and the nature of classes. They report that many factors such as pressure from parents, the material used, and the format of the exams influenced teachers' decisions about what to teach, how to teach and when to teach. What is more significant is that teachers' beliefs are the factors that affected

their teaching practices mostly in exam preparation classes.

Ma and Chong (2022) recently conducted a study to examine the perspectives of Chinese students on the preparation for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). The findings revealed that students found test preparation to be useful and beneficial and that it had a number of positive outcomes. It can help them figure out what is expected of them, as well as familiarize them with question formats and structures, test-taking techniques, materials, and, most importantly, how to improve their scores since the teaching is just severely restricted as teachers will teach only the exam-related topics, skills, materials and activities.

Research on beliefs and practices related to exam preparation (Abrams et al., 2003; Gebril & Eid, 2017; Lai & Waltman, 2008; Pedulla et al., 2003; Xie, 2013, 2015) revealed that the nature and intensity of washback on teaching methods appears to differ from one context to another and from one teacher to another. It ranges from no washback to a significant amount of washback. The teacher, rather than the exam, appears to be the variable in these differences. They also agree that exam preparation has some negative downsides as well. However, the benefits outweigh the detrimental effects of exam preparation. Teachers believe that the benefits of exam preparation include familiarizing students with the exam, teaching them strategies for taking exams, reducing their anxiety, boosting their self-esteem, and improving their scores.

3. Methodology

In an effort to expose teachers' understandings about EBE and exam preparation and their instructional behavior, the current study used a sequential mixed-methods approach (Creswell & Plano, 2018). It is "multiphase, multimethod and longitudinal," including a questionnaire, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews (Cheng, 2008, p.359). A self-report questionnaire was used to investigate teachers' views on (i) EBE and (ii) exam preparation and (iii) their teaching practices. In a second phase and as a follow-up study, 4 ELTs were observed over 4 months and then interviewed.

The present exploratory study aimed to test the main hypotheses: 1) there is a correlation

between the ELTs' attitudes towards the EBE (AE) and their teaching practices (TP); 2) there is a correlation between the teachers' beliefs about exam preparation (BEP) and their teaching practices (TP).

Participants

This study included a sample of 364 ELTs of 4th form of secondary school from 6 randomly selected governorates. 4 ELTs, 3 female and 1 male teacher, volunteered to participate in the follow-up study. The ELTs had a diversified range of teaching experience teaching 4th form of secondary school ranging from 3 to 25 years.

27.8% of the participants were males, and 72.2% were females. They had approximately similar teaching experiences, and academic and professional qualifications. 78.4% hold a Bachelor degree of English, 21.3% hold a Masters' degree and .3% holds a PhD. In addition, 54% have no further professional qualifications namely: TKT, DELTA, and CELTA.

Data Collection Procedure

The study used an exploratory sequential data collection method in two stages. During the first phase, the ELTs were given a questionnaire. 356 valid cases were retained for further analysis after thorough data cleansing and review. The sample size was deemed adequate and suitable for this study. To gain a comprehensive understanding of teachers' views and actual practices in real-world contexts, classroom observations and semi-structured interviews were used. For practical and time constraints, only four ELTs were observed and interviewed.

Instruments

A cross-sectional survey questionnaire was adopted, adapted, tested, and retested to assess its validity and internal reliability. Five experts from the area of language teaching and testing accepted to assess the instruments in terms of their face validity, content validity, and construct validity, and give their feedback. Besides, thirty ELTs with similar backgrounds in language teaching were invited to answer the questionnaire, give additional comments in terms of the wording, and the time required to answer the questionnaire.

The questionnaire went through a testing and retesting process to ensure the internal reliability

of the survey items. As a result, some items were rewritten while others were removed. Cronbach's alpha for the total scale was .705 and hence considered satisfactory.

The participants were informed about the purpose of the study before agreeing to complete the questionnaire, which focused on two major themes: their perceptions and practices. The questionnaire was divided into 6 sections. Section one elicited the most important demographic information, such as age, gender, teaching experience, and educational background. Section two investigated teachers' views on EBE. Section three used a five-Likert scale to examine their beliefs about exam preparation BEP. Section four used a ratio scale in which participants were asked to rate how frequently they engaged in certain activities on a scale of one to five to gain a better understanding of the common practices that teachers employ in their classrooms. Section five examined the common practices that teachers used in their classrooms to prepare their students for the EBE. Section six used a scale on which the respondents indicate when they typically used some of the activities to prepare students for the EBE along with a scale rating 1 to 5. Statements were coded as 1 = Never (N), 2 = Before each test during the year (BT), 3 = Before the Bac Blanc (BBB), 4 = Before the Bac Exam (BBE), and 5 = During Lessons throughout the year (DL).

Data analysis

To identify the common factors that explain the order and structure of measured variables, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), along with Principal Components Analysis (PCA), was used (Fabrigar & Wegener, 2012, Watkins, 2018).

In the extraction of factors, three main criteria were used: (i) at least three items in one factor with an eigenvalue of one or greater; (ii) factor loadings less than .4 were excluded and not counted in any factor; and (iii) items with double loadings were deleted. The criteria variables within a single component are highly connected, and there are no significant cross-loadings between factors-- the factor extraction procedure ensures both convergent and discriminant validity.

A PCA was conducted on items QAE1 through QAE9 to determine whether they represented a

single construct. This analysis yielded two factors: factor one with an eigenvalue of 2.377, accounting for 29.718%, factor two with an eigenvalue of 1.787, accounting for 22.342% of the total variance. Two factors were retained for further analysis. All items loaded higher than .60, except AE4 and AE8. Their loading factors are .519 and .517 respectively.

A PCA was performed on BEP1 through BEP4 and TP1 through TP10 to investigate teachers' BEP and TP. This analysis for BEP produced a single factor with an eigenvalue of 1.955 that accounted for 48.869 % variance. In terms of TP, the analysis yielded three factors: factor one with an eigenvalue of 2.784, accounting for 27.836 % variance, factor two with an eigenvalue of 1.604, accounting for 16.038 %, and factor three with an eigenvalue of 1.445, accounting for 14.452 % variance.

All items loaded higher than .60, except BEP4 is .541. The results of the factor analysis revealed that different survey questions clustered together around teachers' BEP and TP.

Besides, A PCP was performed on items TP1 through TP10 to determine whether they represent a single construct. This analysis yielded three factors; factor one with an eigenvalue of 2.784, accounting for 27.836%, factor two with an eigenvalue of 1.604, accounting for 16.038%, and factor three with an eigenvalue of 1.445, accounting for 14.452% of the total variance. All items loaded higher than .60.

Table 1 provides a summary of the factors retained, their scores, KMO, and internal reliability.

Table 1. Summary of All Factors: Loading Factors, KMO and Internal Reliability.

	Variables	Components	Items	Loading Factors	KMO	Cronbach's Alpha	Nb Items
Independent variables	Attitudes towards the English Baccalaureate Exam AE	AE1	AE2	.822	.703	.683	3
			AE3	.801			
			AE1	.669			
		AE2	AE6	.778		.676	5
			AE5	.736			
			AE7	.702			
			AE8	.519			
				Overall			.654
	Beliefs about Exam Preparation	BEP	BEP2	.811	.596	.626	4
			BEP1	.717			
BEP3			.701				
BEP4			.541				
Dependent variable Teaching to the Exam	TP	TP9	.852	.651	.780	4	
		TP10	.772				
		TP5	.747				
		TP4	.701				
		TP7	.812		.632	3	

			TP8	.732			
			TP6	.686			
			TP2	.761			
			TP3	.749			
			TP1	.658			
		Overall				.551	3
		Overall				.678	10
	Overall Cronbach's alpha					.705	22

4. Results

This section summarizes the findings of quantitative and qualitative data analyses.

The mean of the responses for items QAE1 through QAE8 is nearly four. This shows that the majority of the participants agreed that the EBE determines what and how they teach. They also agreed that EBE reduces the amount of time spent on speaking and listening while increasing the amount of time spent on grammar and vocabulary and that their tests must cover the same material as the EBE.

QAE1 asked the participants to express their views on the EBE in terms of the exam's intended purpose, specifically whether the exam measures the knowledge of the English language and skills that 4th form students should have learned. 76.1 % believed that the EBE is an adequate tool for assessing English knowledge and skills that 4th formers should have learned.

In QAE2 and QAE3, participants were asked to express their own thoughts on the impact of the EBE on their teaching practices in terms of WHAT and HOW they teach. 59.3% and 58.4% reported that the EBE determined what they taught and how they taught respectively. Besides, when answering to QAE4, 69.9% stated that the EBE requires teachers to teach to the exam.

75.3 % reported that they would have allocated time differently to teach each skill (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) if the EBE had been cancelled. 77.1 % agreed that the EBE reduced the amount of time spent on listening and speaking; and 76.1% agreed that the EBE increased the amount of time spent on grammar and vocabulary. When responding to QAE8, the majority of respondents (90.2 %) said their tests

must be comparable to the EBE and that the content of their tests had to match the EBE.

QBEP1 to QBEP4 report the results on teachers' beliefs about exam preparation (BEP). Items were formulated positively and negatively; negatively worded items were then reverse-coded to ensure consistent interpretation of assessment results. The mean responses for all four items are approximately equal to two, except item BEP4 (mean = 3.32). This suggests that respondents tended to disagree, that exam preparation does not help students achieve higher exam scores, that exam preparation has a negative impact on language learning, and that exam preparation wastes teachers' time. However, they agreed that exam preparation familiarizes students with the exam format.

83.1% expressed disapproval saying that exam preparation wastes time and negatively impacts language learning. Additionally, 67.1% of the respondents generally agreed that exam preparation familiarizes students with the exam format. Asked specifically about the negative effects of exam preparation on language teaching, 80.6% disagreed with the statement that exam preparation had a negative impact on language teaching. 76.4% disagreed that exam preparation does not help students get a higher score on the exam.

Teachers were asked to report the common teaching practices they engaged in when teaching the 4th form of secondary school in order for the researcher to gain an understanding of these teaching practices. The mean of all items is close to about 4. The participants said that they always provided exercises and activities using those of the EBE conducted in previous years. They generally taught students strategies for answering multiple-choice

questions, as well as some guessing and exam strategies.

In order to check whether the teaching practices, the materials used, the intensity, and the focus of exam preparation remain the same or change as the test date approaches, the respondents were given several practices (QTP1- QTP5) and were required to rate their teaching practices on a frequency scale ranging from NEVER to ALWAYS and to report whether their TP adheres to the fundamental principles of the CLT and TBLT framework of EFL teaching.

In reporting and interpreting the results, the frequency and percentage of "Never" and "Occasionally" were grouped and calculated to refer to teachers who spend 0 to 30% of the class time teaching a specific skill or activity, compared to "Often", "Usually", and "Always" as another group to refer to teachers who spend 60 to 100% of the class time teaching a specific skill or activity. The most common teaching practices stated by the respondents consisted of providing practice and activities using those of the EBE and teaching students' strategies to answer multiple-choice questions and teaching exam-taking skills. 91.6% of the participants stated that they always taught to the exam, compared with 8.4% who acknowledged that they occasionally engaged in preparing the students for the exam by teaching them to the exam. 66% and about 76 % of the teachers stated that they regularly provided and used practice and activities using those of the BEB that were

administered the previous years. Similarly, 80% specified that they provided samples of written productions to prepare their students for the writing section. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, 90% admitted that they taught their students strategies to answer multiple-choice questions.

QTP6 and QTP10 questioned the participants about the best time to provide and use activities and practice from previous exam papers. 30.3% stated that they provided and 43% used past exam activities during lessons throughout the year. Almost 57 % of the respondents reported they provided samples of written productions to prepare their students for the writing. 62% claimed to have taught their students strategies for answering multiple-choice questions and 64.6% claimed to have taught some exam-taking strategies based on guessing during the lessons throughout the year.

Pearson correlation coefficient and Simple Linear Regression (SLR) were computed to examine the relationship between teachers' attitudes towards the EBE and their teaching practices. The current study takes into account the hypothesis that there is a substantial association between AE and TP.

To summarise, the outcome of the SLR revealed that there is a statistically significant relationship between AE and TP.

$$Y=31.752+.356(AE)$$

Table 2: Model Summary Linear Regression Output: Prediction of TP from AE.

Model Summary ^b									
Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R ² Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.242 ^a	.059	.056	5.65297	.059	22.073	1	354	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), AE

b. Dependent Variable: TP

Table 3: Regression Coefficient for Prediction of TP from AE.

Coefficients ^a											
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	Constant	31.752	1.603		19,805	.000					
	AE	.356	.076	.242	4,698	.000	.242	.242	.242	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: TP

Pearson correlation coefficient and SLR were used to investigate the relationship between teachers' beliefs about exam preparation and their teaching practices. The current study aims to investigate the hypothesis that there is a substantial association between BEP and TP.

Ha: There is a significant relationship between BEP and TP.

First, Pearson correlation was used to examine the relationship between BEP and TP. The findings revealed that there was no significant relationship between BEP and TP (r is .017). As a result, there is no correlation between teachers' BEP and TP. SLR was used to assess the significance and strength of the impact of BEP on TP. Table 2 summarises the modal summary of linear regression output.

Table 4. *Model Summary Linear Regression Output: Prediction of TP from BEP.*

Model Summary ^b									
Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R ² Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.023 ^a	.001	-.002	5.82505	.001	.182	1	354	.670

a. Predictors: (Constant), BEP

b. Dependent Variable: TP

Table 4 displays the regression coefficient for Prediction of TP from BEP and the prediction equation.

Table 5. *Regression Coefficient for Prediction of TP from BEP.*

Coefficients ^a											
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	Constant	38.789	.906		42.794	.000					
	BEP	.060	.141	.023	.426	.670	.023	.023	.023	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: TP

To summarise, the outcome of the simple linear regression revealed that there is no relationship between BEP and TP.

$$Y = 38.789 + .060(\text{BEP})$$

Ha: There is NO significant relationship between BEP and TP.

Teachers' stated beliefs about exam preparation have no relationship with their teaching

practices. Hence, a discrepancy between teachers' BEP and their teaching practices are not a "very reliable guide to reality" (Pajares, 1992: 326).

To put the hypothesis to the test, Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression (MLR) were used to examine the relationships between AE, BEP and TP.

Table 6. *Regression Coefficient for Prediction of TP from AE and BEP.*

Coefficients ^a											
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	Constant	31.819	1.732		18.367	.000				31.819	1.732
	BEP	-.014	.138	-.005	-.103	.918	.987	1.013	-.014	.138	-.005
	AE	.357	.076	.243	4.672	.000	.987	1.013	.357	.076	.243

a. Dependent Variable: TP

Unlike the relationship between AE and TP, the results revealed the absence of relationship between BEP and TP.

To get a better understanding of the phenomenon and to cross-check the quantitative findings, qualitative data and quantitative data were compared and synthesized.

Qualitative analysis

The study revealed that the EBE washback to individual teachers varied widely. In terms of their views and practices, the four ELTs had diverging standpoints. Their views on EBE were found to be mixed, ranging from favourable to unfavourable. The majority of the teachers showed a mixed feeling of "yes-but". While the EBE is a good tool for assessing students' knowledge and learning, it puts a lot of pressure on them. They also claimed they were no longer able to be creative or to use authentic materials. Nevertheless, they expressed high confidence in their ability to strike a balance between the syllabus' main objectives and exam preparation. Hence, they requested the MOE to revise and edit the exam, the curriculum, and the syllabus. Though T1, T2, and T4 stated clearly and unequivocally that teaching English is no longer relevant, and that teaching writing as a process is no longer feasible, they devoted different amounts of class time for exam preparation.

The study found that the EBE influenced various aspects of the classroom to varying degrees. In all of the observed classes, only one of the four teachers used the textbook once. T3 occasionally used the students' textbook as teaching material or created her own from various sources in accordance with the scope of the textbook and the curriculum. She used activities and focused on skills that were primarily related to the EBE. On the whole, the teachers did not use the students' textbook. They either created their own worksheets based on the EBE or exposed their students to materials prepared by colleague teachers. The four observed teachers focused primarily on language form (vocabulary, grammar) and content, i.e. statements, to be used in the writing section when designing their worksheets. They ignored tasks and activities that had little to do with EBE. They tailored their worksheets and activities to the exam's specifications. All teachers taught grammar deductively, followed by an activity adapted from a previous exam paper. They assigned a

writing activity as homework in the majority of the cases. They gave students ideas, classified them, and required them to develop their notes into a specific subgenre of writing based on past exam paper questions.

Teaching different language components

Classroom observations revealed that the four teachers made no distinction between exam preparation and teaching to the exam. They admitted that exam preparation was their primary concern. They placed much more emphasis on language form (grammar, new vocabulary, collocations) and writing than on reading, speaking, and listening. T1 put less weight on reading and when he assigned previous exams to students, they were requested to answer the reading comprehension questions under examination conditions. The teachers did not demonstrate reading or question-answering strategies to them. Listening and speaking skills, which would not be tested, were ignored. There wasn't enough time to teach reading, speaking, or listening. T1 overtly encouraged the students to memorize model answers rather than teaching them how to construct knowledge and create their own answers to similar questions. He explained in a subsequent interview that "they have everything in the handouts, and when they need to write about any topic, they have what they need."

Interaction Pattern & feedback

Classroom observations showed that Teachers' Talking Time (TTT) exceeded students' Talking Time (STT), indicating that the classes were primarily teacher-centered. Throughout the observations, the participant teachers read the instructions and then gave students time to complete the tasks under exam conditions. The most common type of interaction that happened during the observed classes was Teacher—Students/Teacher—whole class. The teacher had complete control over the content in all of these classes. Depending on the type of course, there was little variation in participant organization, content control, and encouraging students to memorize formulaic phrases. Classes were first and foremost designed to help students pass their exams. T1 and T2 gave the correct answer without further explanation. Within teacher-dominated classes, students grew into passive recipients and had fewer opportunities to work in pairs or groups.

Time devoted to teaching different skills

One of the principles of the learner-centered approach is to maximize STT. The teacher's main role is to plan not only the main objectives, but also the skills to focus on and the time devoted to each skill, the sequencing, and techniques used to teach the different objectives, in addition to controlling the learning process by gradually and regularly involving the learners in this process. However, when comparing what the teachers did to what they should have done, it was clear that they favoured some skills over others, and devoted more time to language form (vocabulary and grammar), writing, and speaking. Most of the time, writing came as a post-task activity and was assigned as homework.

Exam-Related Activities and Discourse

Another significant amount of time was spent on activities from previous exam papers, such as language form and writing questions. Almost all four teachers trained their students on exam-taking and guessing strategies for multiple-choice questions. T1 appeared to be very concerned about the EBE, as he kept reminding his students of the exam dates regularly. Unlike T1, T3 occasionally showed her students exam-taking strategies and tips on how to deal with specific types of questions if they were to appear on the EBE. They devoted a significant amount of class time to teaching grammar and exhaustive exam preparation, to coaching on how to read instructions and answer questions, and, most importantly, to working out strategies liable to lead to high scores, while ignoring the harm of deviation from teaching the language for the sake of learning.

T1 asserted that coaching students and training them on exam questions would result in high test scores, saying that "Memorising the intended structures, vocabulary and knowing the right forms would be the best teaching strategy to prepare students for the national exam."

Teaching Methodology and Practices

The findings from the qualitative data revealed that teachers openly identified the negative impact of the EBE on their teaching practices.

T4 remarked:

Well, teaching English to 4th form classes is not like teaching year one or other levels. I may even

say that from year one, we should prepare students for the 4th form, to pave the ground for the Bac exam which [EBE] targets specific areas especially in language and grammar but can never give an accurate assessment of the students' level.

T1 explained:

I personally focus more on test-taking strategies, like guessing, answering through a process of elimination, using the Bac Exam format so as to expose students to the types of practice actually included in the exam, and, thus, I focus more on the skills that are tested in the exam.

T2 said:

To be honest, I develop my own worksheets. I regularly use old exam questions in reality. Bac classes have a lot of oral presentations, but unfortunately, we cannot deal with any of them. This is frustrating even to us as teachers. Students are creative especially when you give them the opportunity, yet we don't do so. This is always missing.

T4 stated:

My tests have the same content and format as the Bac Exam. So, my students will be familiar with the exam. About 90% of teachers no longer test listening; we used to have listening comprehension in the mid-term exam. This year we decided not to test listening. Instead, we tested them on writing. Even our students were not ready to sit for listening because this skill is not to be tested on in the EBE.

T3, however, expressed concern when teaching Bac classes. She stated:

I have to admit that my students (levels other than Bac classes) and I have fun! Games, songs, a lot of drilling... I also feel rather free in my teaching. If I feel a lesson or a part of a lesson is redundant or doesn't target what it says it does, I just skip it or exchange it or do something about it wholeheartedly without feeling bad about it. But when it comes to Bac classes, I feel I somehow have to abide by the book. And I have to think of several "what ifs"....what if something like this comes up on the exam, etc.

Activities and skills taught

The teachers stated that they were fully aware that their teaching practices were geared toward

exam preparation; they explicitly taught to the exam, using activities from previous exam papers, and focusing on weighing components to familiarize their students with exam format and content.

T1 and T2 confirmed that they had to prepare their students for the national exam from day one so that even low achievers would have a chance to score high. T1 said:

I am aware that I am teaching to the exam. I plan all my lessons in a way so as to ask my students to drill, train them on exam-preparation strategies, and narrowly focus on topics and questions that are on the exam. From my own experience, I teach only what is going to be on the exam. I work on increasing low achievers' exam scores by focusing on what helps them get high grades.

T3 stated that she did not allocate any specific time for exam preparation as she incorporated it in her teaching. Furthermore, she admitted:

Most of what I do is part and parcel of my teaching. I integrate preparation in my teaching without letting them 'know'. As a teacher, obviously, I know about the examiner's mindset. Therefore, I am a step ahead of my students and act from that perspective. In other words, I somehow 'implicitly' tackle issues before and when they arise. More exercises and tasks that target specific grammar and/or vocabulary items that are at the heart of their curriculum.

The participants also reported an increase in the time allocated to preparing students for the exam and teaching language form and writing while disregarding skills like listening. Teachers were more likely to teach to the exam, "integrate exam preparation within teaching and activities of the class," begin exam preparation earlier in the school year, invest extra time on exam skills, dedicate more time to intense preparation, use exam-conforming materials, and teach more exam-taking strategies. They acknowledged that incorporating exam preparation into their teaching is "more effective and fruitful" (T4) because it aims to "boost the students' self-confidence and diminish their fear of exams" (T3), assuming no negative consequences (T2). T1 also reported teaching his students tactics on how to eliminate irrelevant information that is obviously wrong before guessing about items they do not really know with certainty.

T3 expressed her frustration with the exam preparation process. She was a firm believer in communicative language teaching which entailed integrating skills and engaging and empowering students. She asserted:

The target language loses its 'soul'. It becomes void, worse than a math formula being applied to get certain results. Because even Math problems occur in a context. Instead of enjoying the language and its use (orally and in writing), the students will only perceive 'cues' to find answers.

The study yielded mixed results, but it did provide a more complete framework and a better understanding of the washback effect of teachers' perceptions and practices. The quantitative and qualitative data analyses revealed inconsistencies between ELTs' perspectives on exam preparation and their teaching practices. Results of teachers' self-report data, i.e., questionnaires, revealed an insignificant relationship between BEP and TP. However, classroom observations indicated instances of little correspondence between what teachers reported and what they actually did. Along with this conclusion, the present study, which involves classroom observation, revealed other significant findings. It illustrated the varying degrees to which the teachers were influenced by exam-oriented strategies. Therefore, ELTs' perceived effects of the EBE have an impact on their teaching practices.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gather evidence for the hypotheses that teachers' views on EBE and beliefs about exam preparation (BEP) led them to Teach To the Test (TTT), ignoring the communicative aspect of English teaching and focusing mainly on skills and components on the exam and aligning their teaching to the requirements of the exam.

To accept or reject the hypotheses that there are relationships between teachers' AE, BEP and their TP, Pearson correlation coefficients and SLR and MLR were computed. The results of the quantitative analysis provided evidence that there is a significant relationship between AE and TP and insignificant relationships between teachers' BEP and their TP.

To determine whether actions correspond to beliefs and, as a result, whether teachers "do what they say" (Smith et al., 1991, p.71) and to get a deeper understanding of teachers' beliefs, 4 teachers were observed and interviewed. Comparing and synthesizing results from both quantitative and qualitative data, the findings from qualitative data analysis were incongruent with the findings from the questionnaire. There was a mismatch between quantitative and qualitative analyses; classroom observations and semi-structured interviews revealed that teachers' stated beliefs about exam preparation and reported practices did not match their actual teaching practices. Hence their instructional behaviours mirrored their beliefs. The teachers predominantly used the traditional method of teaching, focusing on the language form-grammar and vocabulary-as a final product, and their classes were primarily teacher-centered. The participants reported that it was important to prepare students for the exam and that there was a clear relationship between their beliefs and their teaching behaviour. Teachers followed a similar pattern in that they aligned their teaching practices with the spirit of the exam, emphasized exam skills, ignored listening, and relied heavily on exam-related materials and past exam papers. In other words, teachers were affected by the EBE and were driven to Teach To the Test, ignoring the syllabus, focusing on weighted components, and ignoring some skills. They also prioritized preparing students for the exam at the expense of teaching English.

Confirming the ideas of Smith (1991) and Gebril and Eid (2017), the teachers' general discourse in the qualitative data reflected their beliefs about the importance of preparing their students for the EBE and a general state of frustration associated with EBE-related decisions. This type of high-stakes tests reduces teaching time, constrains curricular offerings and methods of teaching, and focuses more on reading and writing at the expense of oral skills while overlooking the listening skill because the exam does not test it.

The findings of the present study support the claims made by Gebril and Eid (2017) and Xie (2013, 2015) who claim that teaching replicates the exam in the classroom. Teachers state that, in order to avoid feeling embarrassed or sanctioned due to low scores, they focused their students' efforts on the specific items that would

be tested, thus narrowing the curriculum and encouraging them to memorise rather than to be productive.

To varying degrees, the participants prepared their students for the exam from day one, all year long, at the expense of real language learning. Teachers typically began their lessons with vocabulary and clichés, followed by explanations of several statements related to the theme of the day, language forms relevant to the same theme, and concluded with a writing assignment as homework. They used a knowledge transmission strategy and served as a source of knowledge by providing information.

While the teachers generally had positive attitudes toward exam preparation and demonstrated awareness of the assessment demands in the EBE context, some of the findings clearly illustrate a state of uncertainty regarding reasons for preparing students for the EBE. While some of them did not hesitate to Teach To the Test, others were quite critical of some exam preparation practices because they were concerned with language teaching and assessment quality.

6. Conclusion

As Washback is inevitable, teachers prepare their students for the exam and teach to the exam for several reasons, including familiarizing their students with the content and format of the exam, their accountability, and their students' success. However, teachers must strike a balance between teaching for the exam and teaching for learning. Exam preparation should not come at the expense of learning. Furthermore, washback requires the MOE to acknowledge that the EBE has an impact on different stakeholders mainly students and teachers, and that it is the responsibility of the MOE to make that impact as beneficial and positive as possible. Because the field of language testing is changing and developing, it is critical to plan regular, motivating, and mandatory workshops to change and modify teachers' beliefs. Professional development workshops should place a greater emphasis not only on teaching methodologies, approaches, technology-integrated teaching, skills, and activities, but also on the beliefs that teachers hold.

As the study was exploratory in nature and a base line, further research is needed to examine exam preparation beliefs and practices, while assessing the appropriateness and ethicality of these practices as teachers engage in a wide range of appropriate and inappropriate practices to avoid feelings of shame, embarrassment, anxiety, and guilt.

The absence of any correlations between teachers' BEP and their teaching practices in the context of the EBE could indicate, first, that teachers' teaching practices were not solely dependent on teacher factors such as their BEP; second, that other factors may have mediated the relationship between their BEP and their teaching practices. Equally important, learner-related factors, the educational context, and the assessment culture and conditions may have played a role and contributed to the complexity of the washback phenomenon. Learner-related factors as well as other contextual factors are also crucial enough to be addressed as the object of further research.

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