

**THE WASHBACK EFFECT OF THE IRANIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY  
ENTRANCE EXAM (INUEE) ON PRE-UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ENGLISH  
LEARNING PROCESS**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Washback effect of the tests on learners was one of the seldom discussed topics until 1990s; however, it has increasingly ascended to a level of prime issue in washback studies of late. A review of literature shows that majority of the existing studies are largely focused on the influence of the test on teachers' teaching process, and the research on learners and the learning side is still conspicuously scant, and educational context of Iran being no exception. This paper purported to investigate the washback effect of Iranian National University Entrance Exam (hereafter, INUEE) on English learning process of 218 female students at two pre-university schools in the city of Ahwaz, Iran. The relevant data were collected through student's questionnaire, adopted from Hwang's (2003) study, as well as the researchers' observations in the context of English classes. The findings of the study revealed that students' learning process was affected by the INUEE and the teachers' teaching method. The INUEE affected learners' learning content and learning strategies negatively, while teachers' teaching method affected their learning in both positive and negative ways.*

**KEYWORDS:** Washback; High-stakes Tests; INUEE; English Learning Process.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Washback or backwash refers to the influence of testing on teaching and learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993). Washback effect might be positive, negative, or mixed (i.e., both positive and negative). Alderson and Wall (1993) defined negative washback as the undesirable influence of a test on teaching and learning, and simply "something that the teacher or learner does not wish to teach or learn" (p.5). According to Shohamy (1992), in negative washback the test normally leads to narrowing of content in the curriculum, and what students learn is not the expected understanding but rather the test language instead. In contrast, positive washback refers to the beneficial influence of tests and examinations on teaching and learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993). As far as the washback effect of high-stakes tests on learners is concerned, the review of related studies indicates that overall the number of washback studies addressing the learners (e.g., Watanabe, 1990; Gosa, 2004; Stoneman, 2006) is limited despite the fact that "learners are the key participants whose lives are most directly influenced by language testing

washback” (Bailey, 1999, p. 14). A review of a number of washback studies on learners in different countries is made below.

Watanabe (1990) investigated the washback effect of a university entrance exam on language learning strategies used by Japanese EFL learners. The study indicated that those students who were admitted by means of university entrance examination tended to use a greater variety of learning strategies than those students who were admitted through recommendation letters from their previous supervisors. Hwang (2003) examined the washback effect of the high-stakes College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) on the teaching and learning of EFL in Korean secondary schools. The results indicated that the curriculum corresponded to the textbooks, while the CSAT did not represent the curriculum because the CSAT did not measure all the skills mentioned by the curriculum. Therefore, there was a negative washback effect of the CSAT on EFL teaching and learning. Gosa (2004) studied the washback effect of the English section of the Romanian School-leaving exam (i.e., Bac) on secondary students. The study was qualitative and included ten students who were keeping learning diaries over various periods. Based on her findings through analysis of the diary data, Gosa found out that although students expected their teachers would teach towards the Bac, they experienced very little practice for the tests in class. It was also revealed that Bac affected students’ choices of the task types and practiced language skills considerably and students were different in the ways they experienced the Bac washback. Stoneman (2006) looked into the washback effect of English tests on the way students got prepared for the test. Two different tests (the Graduating Students’ Language Proficiency Assessment or GSLPA and the IELTS-Common English Proficiency Assessment Scheme or CEPAS) with different status were adopted as an exit test. Stoneman found out that IELTS-CEPAS respondents engaged themselves in more test preparation activities than the GSLPA-English sample and students’ test preparation behavior was affected by test’s status. Stoneman stated that there were no considerable differences in the nature of the test preparation activities reported by the respondents in the two samples because both groups chose activities mainly intended for test preparation. Shih (2006; 2007) investigated the washback effect of the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT) on the students’ learning in the context of Taiwan. The findings of the study indicated that the test had various degrees of washback effect on the learning. It was found that under the influence of the GEPT students paid more attention to listening and reading skills than speaking and writing skills in practice and often used the GEPT-preparation books and its past papers as their learning materials. As for the learning strategies, students were found to use a variety of strategies (e.g., going to preparatory schools, reading aloud, and test-taking strategies) to prepare for the exam. Students also used more types of learning strategies in preparing themselves for speaking skills than for any other language skills.

The review of existing literature indicates that the number of washback studies on learners and learning is overall limited. As for Iranian educational context, it could be stated that there is still a gap in the literature with regard to the study of the washback effect of high-stakes

tests on the learners' learning process. The present study aims to investigate the washback effect of the English component of the Iranian National University Entrance Exam (INUEE), as the most important high-stakes test in the country, on pre-university students' English learning process. The following section provides a short introduction of the INUEE in the context of Iran.

### **Iranian National University Entrance Exam (INUEE)**

Iranian National University Entrance Exam (INUEE) is a nationwide gate-keeping test. Admission into universities on is based on the candidates' performance on the INUEE. This 4 to 5 hour multiple-choice exam covers all subjects taught in Iranian high schools—from math and science to Islamic studies and the foreign language (English). The INUEE questions are different for the three high school branches of natural sciences, mathematical sciences, and humanities. Based on the course contents of the three educational branches, the content of the INUEE is designed differently. It consists of 200 questions and is basically divided into two different parts: general subject matters (English language, Arabic language, Persian literature, and theology), as well as special subject matters (e.g., mathematics, physics, biology, psychology, etc.). The general subject matters' questions are similar in all branches, while the special subject matters are different for each branch. The English section of the INUEE includes 25 multiple-choice items which are purported to gauge the candidates' lexicogrammatical knowledge and reading comprehension ability. The 25 multiple-choice items need to be answered within 20 minutes. The other skills like listening, speaking, and writing are not tested on the INUEE. It should be mentioned that in this high-stakes test, English does not have the same weighting for all the fields of study. It has different value for the students of different subject fields. For example, a student who wants to study foreign languages at universities has to exclusively sit for the test of general subject matters in which English has the highest weighting of four. However, English has the weighting of two for other fields of study.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The participants of the study were 218 pre-university female students whose ages ranged from 17 to 19. The study was carried out in the city of Ahwaz, Iran. Two pre-university schools were selected from among the four female pre-university schools of the city. The main reason behind choosing these two schools was the willingness of the staff to cooperate in conducting the study. Six classes were finally selected from the two schools on a voluntary basis. The instrument used in the study was a student's questionnaire and an observation checklist. Students' class activities were observed and audio-video recorded for six consecutive sessions.

At the very beginning of the data collection, the validity and reliability of the student's questionnaire were taken into consideration. In order to ascertain the validity of the student's

questionnaire, a panel of experts (two university lecturers and three PhD candidates in TESL) was requested to review and evaluate the questionnaire in terms of its content validity. The reviewers evaluated the content of questionnaire as appropriate in terms of addressing the objectives of the study adequately; however, they unanimously envisaged that the students might encounter problems with understanding and responding to the questions of the questionnaire in English. They, therefore, suggested that the questionnaire be translated from English into the students' mother tongue. The English version was translated into Persian. In order to preserve the validity of the original questionnaire, the back-translation procedure (from Persian into English) was done by two PhD students of TESL. The translated version of the questionnaire was administered to a class with 34 pre-university students as a pilot study. The pilot study was, in fact, conducted in order to establish the feasibility of the research and face any probable challenges earlier than the main study, as well as to examine the reliability of the student's questionnaire. For internal consistency reliability for each subscale of the student questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha was also calculated.

The ethical issues concerning the study were also given the highest priority and significance. Students were assured of the confidentiality of the identities and all the information to be provided by them. A Consent Form was signed by the participants. As for the analysis of the data, the students' responses obtained from their questionnaires were examined through the application of frequency counts, and were presented in percentages. In order to identify a total student response, a total answer for each question across the student's questionnaire was calculated. Quantification was restricted to describing the frequency and percentage of the responses (descriptive statistics). Quantification was not utilized for verification or rejection of hypotheses, the way it is normally done in quantitative studies.

## **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

### **Washback Effect of the INUEE on Content of Learning**

In their questionnaire (Q24, Q25, Q26, & Q34), students were asked about their content of learning. Their responses to these items of the questionnaire along with a few of their additional comments provided on designated spaces of the questionnaire are presented below.

Table 1 Content of Learning

		YES		NO	
		frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage
24	Do you learn the whole textbook?	36	0%	7	0%
25	Is the content of the textbook modified because of the INUEE?	71	8%	7	2%
26	Does your teacher skip over parts of the textbook?	79	2%	9	8%
34	Do you often have self-study, relevant to the INUEE, not assigned by the teacher?	96	0%	2	0%

As seen from Table 1, the majority of the students answered the four questions of the questionnaire (Q24, Q25, Q26, & Q34) in the affirmative. For example, from among 218 students, 136 students reported that they learnt the whole textbook and 57 students stated that they did not learn the whole textbook. The remaining 25 students left the question unanswered. Such a high percentage of learners wanting to learn the whole textbook could be an indication to the significance of the textbook from the students' perspectives. It is worth mentioning that the textbook serves as the only source for designing all the formative and summative tests administered during the pre-university period. Besides, the scores obtained on these tests affect the students' CGPA, which is in turn utilized as one of the parameters determining the ranks of the candidates on the INUEE and their admission into the universities.

In response to an item of the questionnaire concerning students' self-studying for the INUEE, 90% of the students reported that their practicing for the test was not limited to English classes at schools or preparatory schools, and they themselves had their own self-study for the exam as well. They mentioned that they ventured a lot of time into mastering test-taking strategies and tricks.

In order to find out the areas of focus in their English classes, students were asked through Q27 and Q28 in the questionnaire to rank the language skills and other points of focus in the order of priority. They were also asked which language areas they learnt most as the INUEE date was approaching. Based on the students' responses as shown by Table 2, there was no balance in teaching the language skills and components at English classes; whereas grammar, vocabulary, and reading, with 39%, 27% and 22% respectively, were ranked as the most practiced areas by the students, writing (7%), speaking (4%) and listening (1%) were ranked as being the least practiced skills. The students' responses to these questions are provided as below.

Table 2 Areas Learnt the Most in Classes

A	rank 1	rank 2	rank 3	rank 4	rank 5	rank 6
Reading			2%			
Writing				%		
Listening						%
Speaking					%	
Grammar	9%					
Vocabulary		7%				

Couple of students' additional comments collected from their questionnaires are provided below. We learn vocabulary and grammar formulas, but we don't know how to use them. This makes it very boring and pointless to attend the classes...I believe that it is good for us to practice vocabulary and grammar because they would be tested on the INUEE, but sometimes I feel I should learn other language skills as well...

Another student mentioned that:

English classes in our schools are really the INUEE-preparation classes because what we mostly learn is about grammar and how to answer the questions on the test. We don't learn language, but rather we acquire test tricks. Our class activities center on reading, grammar, and vocabulary only...

About 68% of the students chose the item "Yes" for question 28 of the questionnaire which asked the students whether they intensified their efforts to study and learn more as the INUEE test date was getting closer. They ranked the language skills in the order of intensity of focus as follows.

Table 3 Areas Learnt the Most as the INUEE Date Gets Closer

	ank 1	ank 2	ank 3	ank 4	ank 5	ank 6
Reading			5%			
Writing				%		
Listening						
Speaking						
Grammar		2%				
Vocabulary	0%					

According to Table 3, vocabulary, grammar and reading, with about 40%, 32% and 25% of the respondents respectively, received the highest ranking and writing skill with almost 3% of the students received the lowest ranking of the students. Speaking and listening were not ranked by the students at all.

Question 31 of the questionnaire enquired as to whether any extra classes beside the regular school hours were held by the teachers. Students' responses to these questions are provided as follows.

Table 4 Extra Teaching Hours by the Teachers

	YES		NO	
	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage
Q31 Does your teacher give extra classes beside regular school hours?	86	5%	2	5%

Some of the students' further comments are presented as follows.

We usually have extra classes in addition to our regular classes. In our extra classes we usually practice multiple-choice tests for the INUEE and for our final exams. I think these classes are helpful but they are very crowded and noisy...sometimes some of our questions are ignored by our teacher because of shortage of time... We have extra classes but I prefer not to go because I believe going there equals waste of time and energy. I prefer to study at home and finish my supplementary books...in these books all the answers of the questions are provided so why should I make myself tire to go and sit in those classes?

Usually due to some reasons we need to have some extra classes besides our regular classes. For example, sometimes we face public holidays during a semester and we miss our regular school hours...there is no choice for us but to go and sit in those extra classes...if we don't go, we will lose the chance of learning those missed lessons...the more important reason is that in those sessions our teacher practices the INUEE and sample questions of previous final exams...



Overall, with the juxtaposition and comparison of the students' responses, it could be inferred that students' content of language learning was negatively affected by the INUEE.

### Washback Effect of the INUEE on Students' Learning Strategy

The questionnaire's item 38 asked them about their learning strategies. Their responses are provided as follows.

Table 5 Adjustment of Learning Strategies for the Test

	YES		NO	
	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage
Q38 Did you adjust your learning strategies appropriate to the INUEE?	91	8%	7	2%

Some of the students' further explanations are provided as follows.

Yes, of course we do change our techniques of learning because at the end of the day it is the INUEE which counts...Life of most of the pre-university students depends on this test...

I adjust my learning strategies for the INUEE. We need to practice more sample tests and we must learn how to manage our time when we answer the sample tests. I think the more we practice, the better and more quickly we can answer the tests...

I usually practice the INUEE sample tests at home but I would change my learning strategies when the date of the INUEE gets closer. For example, I would record the time while I want to answer the multiple choice tests. I would try to learn how to control the time because on the INUEE it is very important to learn how to answer the INUEE questions within the limited amount of time which has been allocated to answer each test.

I need to register for test-preparations classes at least for a few sessions because I am so slow in answering multiple-choice questions. I think I need to learn some test-taking strategies to pass the test.

Majority of the students reported that they adjusted their English learning strategies appropriate to the INUEE. Drawing on the students' comments that as they got closer to the test date, they intensified their test-oriented efforts and became further obsessed with acquiring test-tackling strategies, it seems plausible to assume that their learning strategies might have been affected negatively by the test. In the questionnaire (Q30), students were asked whether they changed their class activities as the INUEE approached. The students' responses are provided below.

Table 6 Adjustment of Class Activities for the Test

	YES		NO	
	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage
Q30 Class activities change as the INUEE test date get closer.	83	4%	5	6%

Some of the students provided some additional comments as coming below.

Since the INUEE determines our future and its result is very important for the candidates, teachers usually try to help them to get prepared for this very competitive test. For example, my teacher provides us with sample tests and compels us to respond to the questions within the time limits which are similar to the real test. As the date of the test gets closer, our teacher teaches us more vocabulary items. Sometimes, she also teaches us a lot of grammar...sometimes she teaches us the easiest and shortest ways of answering multiple-choice questions...

When the date of the INUEE gets closer, we practice more supplementary books than the textbook because they include more sample tests. Our teacher writes the important sample questions on the board and we write them down in our notebooks or we underline them as important questions to be given further thought and care later at home...

Students also reported that their teachers usually maneuvered around those parts of the textbook which were relevant to the INUEE, in one way or another. They also reported that they practiced the INUEE sample tests from the beginning of the semester and these practices became more and more intense as the date of the test got closer.

Question 40 of the questionnaire asked the students about what they studied for their mid-term (formative) and final (summative) exams. The participants' responses are presented as follows.

Table 7 The Material to be Practiced for the Mid-term and Final Exams

	frequency	percentage
I review what I learned in class, focusing on the textbook	36	2%
I study the past exam papers like the practice kit of the past INUEE	5	2%
I study both (1) and (2)	7	6%

Comparing the data provided in Table 7 shows that whereas an overwhelming majority of the students tended to use supplementary materials and sample tests along with the textbook for their self-studies for the INUEE, a huge percentage of them reported that their major source of studying and practice for the 'formative tests' during the semester and the 'summative test' at the end of the semester was only the textbook itself. A number of sample reasons provided by the students as further comments in the questionnaire are presented below.

I think the textbook is enough for the mid-term and final exams, because the questions of these tests are mainly designed from the textbook itself and besides this the teachers have been using the series of the same tests each year and we have access to these tests... We don't feel any need to work on extra materials.

Comparing the mid-term and final exams with the INUEE, you may find that they are very different in terms of level of difficulty. For the INUEE the textbook cannot help you pass the test but in mid-term or final tests if you practice and learn the textbook, you can be sure that you will pass the exam successfully.

Passing or failing the INUEE determines our future life, job, and so on. In contrast, passing, or failing a mid-term or final test does not affect our life that much. Therefore, naturally for

passing the mid-term and final tests we do not devote as much energy and time as we do for the INUEE.

The reasons provided by students could overall fall into three major categories: typology of the test, the population size of the test-takers, and the standing of the test (high-stakes vs. low-stakes). As far as the typology of the test is concerned, the INUEE can be categorized as a norm-referenced test which imposes intense competition. When it comes to the norm-referenced nature of the INUEE, the examinee's performance on the test is not evaluated with a predetermined criterion but rather in comparison with other examinees; therefore, competitiveness is heightened, which in turn amplifies their need to go for supplementary materials and sample tests. In addition, for the INUEE the competition is among more than a million students, but in mid-term or final tests the competition is among students of a class. As for the standing of the test, it was mentioned that the scores of the mid-term or final test do not count too much, but a lower score on the INUEE could affect their future educational and career lives.

Questions 42, 43, & 44) asked the participants about the effect of the INUEE on their learning. Their responses are provided below.

Table 8 The Influence of the INUEE on Learners' Language Learning

	Strongly disagree F **P	S D *	Disagree F P	Agree P	Strongly agree P
Q 42 INUEE has the most influence on my learning.	4 7%	1	7 12%	9 36%	8 45%

Some of the students' further comments collected from their questionnaires are presented below.

The INUEE has affected my English learning very much...I always memorize vocabulary to help on the INUEE...the problem is that when I review them, it seems that I have never memorized them...learning vocabulary is very difficult. I don't know how to keep them in my memory till the day of the test.

I used to watch English movies to improve my English but since I came to university level, I stopped watching movies because I feel I am wasting my time because my other classmates spend their time to go to preparatory schools and learn more for the INUEE...learning or not learning to speak in English does not change anything in my future life, but failing this competitive test means losing everything in the future...

I have learnt many grammatical structures since I have started learning English but finally I did not understand what it is used for...but to be honest the INUEE is one of the main reasons that I practice grammar because grammar is not interesting at all for me...it is very boring and tiresome but I know it would be very important for passing the INUEE which is very important for my future life...

Based on the findings, it could be claimed that the students' learning might have been both negatively and positively affected by the test. The test's effect could be viewed as positive because it serves as a factor which compels them to intensify their efforts to study English. On the other hand, the INUEE and the teachers' teaching were found to have a negative influence on the learners' language learning. Based on the students' explanations in their questionnaire, these two factors (i.e., the INUEE and the teachers' teaching) shifted their attention from learning English to learning test tricks.

### **The effect of the INUEE on Students' Learning as Observed by the Researcher**

During the six class observations it was revealed that the students preemptively sought the coaching of their teachers about the INUEE. For example, they asked the teachers questions such as "How can this grammar point in the textbook be tested or asked on the INUEE?" or "What is the shortest possible way to answer this question?". Sometimes the researcher felt that some of the students were not satisfied with talking about the INUEE in their class, as it gave them some kind of stress and anxiety. For instance, in one of the sessions a student raised her hand and imploringly addressed her teacher and the classmates to not talk about the INUEE any more, she complained that by talking about the INUEE all the time, she could not concentrate on the lesson. She said "when I hear about the INUEE, I feel stressed and it seems all of a sudden everything is wiped off my mind..."

Based on the findings, it could be claimed that the students' learning might have been both negatively and positively affected by the test. The test's effect could be viewed as positive because it serves as a factor which compels them to intensify their efforts to study English. On the other hand, the INUEE was found to have a negative influence on the learners' language learning. Based on the students' explanations in their questionnaire, and what was observed by the researcher during the six sessions of class observations, it might be assumed that practicing the INUEE in English classes, shifted the students' attention from learning English

to learning test tricks and gave them stress and anxiety while they had been trying to learn English.

## **DISCUSSION**

Based on what the students reported in the questionnaires, their learning content and learning strategies were affected by the INUEE and their teachers' teaching method. As far as the content of learning was concerned, it was found that the students gave utmost priority to those language areas which were to be tested on the INUEE. Since vocabulary and grammar were the two essentials of the INUEE as well as the teachers' major areas of focus during their teaching, the students accordingly devoted most of their time both in class and at home to practice and memorize lists of isolated vocabulary items and formulaic grammar rules.

As for the students' learning strategies, the analysis of the students' responses on the questionnaire revealed that the INUEE and the teachers' teaching methodology had overshadowed their learning strategies. The INUEE negatively affected the learning and learning strategies through pushing the students towards mastering the test-tackling strategies rather than pursuing English for the sake of genuine learning. The capacity and function of the high-stakes tests in directing the learners away from learning to mastering the test tricks and strategies has been reported in other studies as well (Shih, 2007; Sukyadi & Mardiani, 2011)

Teachers' teaching methods and classroom practices apparently affected the students' English learning. Students held both positive and negative feelings about their teachers' teaching methods and practices. Students with positive views believed that their teachers usually supported them to pass the test through spending a good amount of class times on practicing the INUEE-related sample tests, and through teaching them a set of short-cut methods in order to answer the INUEE questions easily, while the students with negative views believed that besides the test itself, their teachers' teaching had also negatively affected their language learning. Two negative perceptions about the teachers were identified: 1. Teachers themselves were regarded as source of stress and anxiety, and 2. Teachers were sometimes not attentive enough to those questions of the students which were not related to the INUEE (e.g., questions about pronunciation). With respect to the teachers' being so-called source of anxiety in the classes and their inattentiveness to certain types of questions, one possible explanation might be the strong influence of the INUEE on the teachers and their teaching process. Under the socio-cultural context of Iran, teachers' societal reputation and even professional promotion are very much dependent on the success of their students on the INUEE. Therefore, the teachers are automatically placed under a heavy burden of stress and anxiety to fulfill their 'obligations' of preparing their students for the contest of the INUEE. According to Dornyei (1998), teachers' attitudes and feelings are contagious in classrooms. This sense of anxiety is contagious and can be communicated to the learners. Whatever they say and however they think can have an impact on the students. If the teacher feels stress towards the test, this

negative feeling of stress and anxiety could be spread among the students, and if the teacher feels secure, the students may feel secure in the classroom as well.

Students reported that in the English classes they expected to develop a functional command of English in listening, speaking, and writing skills so that they could manage to meet their real life communicative needs (e.g., understanding English movies and programs, conversing in English with tourists, and letter writing). However, they complained that their expectation was never fulfilled in the classes. Some of the respondents commented that they knew a great deal of grammar and vocabulary by heart but were unable to use them for communication. For example, one of the students wrote that “We learn vocabulary and grammar formulas, but we don’t know how to use them. This makes it very boring and pointless to attend the classes.” Another student believed that “English classes in our schools are really the INUEE-preparation classes because what we mostly learn is about grammar and how to answer the questions on the test. We don’t learn language, but rather we acquire test tricks.”

There was a clear lack of interest and motivation to attend the classes, which was basically caused by the fact that the students saw no linkage between what the classes offered to them and their real life communicative needs. According to Jones, Jones, and Hargrove (2003), students are more likely to be motivated to choose an activity and persist at it if they enjoy the activity and are interested in it. Furthermore, other scholars have reported similar findings regarding their participants’ attitudes to teaching procedures and language activities. For example, the participants in Kabayashi et al’s (1992, cited in Norris-Holt, 2002) study expressed dissatisfaction with large class sizes, English grammar points being explained over and over in Japanese and a lack of focus on speaking skill.

Teacher-centeredness seemed to be another cause of student passivity and de-motivation. Teachers were almost the only ‘voices’ in the classes and the students were rarely given the opportunity to be actively engaged in the classes. Despite the fact that teacher-centeredness has been recognized as one of the chronic maladies in Iran’s educational system (Hosseini, 2007), one possible explanation for the teacher-centeredness of the classes in the present study could be the variation in the level of difficulty of the textbook and the INUEE. Perceiving the textbook not resourceful enough for the test, the teachers felt compelled to tailor their teaching to the level of the test rather than that of the textbook. To this end, they resorted to supplementary materials and test samples so that they could transmit the level of content required by the INUEE. Coping with new materials with a higher level of difficulty obviously required more of teacher’s talk and effort in the classes. Au (2008) similarly attributed US teachers’ regression to more teacher-centered instructional approaches to their intention to tailor the level of the content to the level required by the tests.

Furthermore, the fact that the teachers were focusing on exactly the same language components and there was more teacher talking time compared to the student talking time

could be an indication that the classes were test-oriented and the major goal of the teachers was to prepare the students for the test. Cheng (1997) found similar instances of teacher domination and teaching to the test, which was an indication to the occurrence of negative washback effect. In her study students complained that their teachers did not give them more practice opportunities and their teaching activities were towards the test Hong Kong Certificate Education Examination (HKCEE) only.

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