

SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL CERTIFICATE ENGLISH
PAPER EXAMINATION WASHBACK IN GAMBIA

By

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20203029

A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts in English

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
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Approval

The thesis/project titled “SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL CERTIFICATE ENGLISH PAPER EXAMINATION WASHBACK IN GAMBIA” submitted by

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Ethics Statement

I, Sheriffo S Ceesay ,attest that during the research , I seek permission from all the participants to use their insights and real life situations in my study. The findings included in the study are original work as a result of my own little knowledge. I conveyed only important information by ensuring none of those are participants personal information thus, by maintaining ethical consideration by mentioning pseudonyms. I checked all my members one on one before finalizing my work. Therefore, there is little or no space for my own 4-5 misinterpretation of the data that has been collected for the study purposes. Also, I have strictly made sure the participants and my own interpretation did not overlap each other to affect their statements.

Abstract

Washback is a phenomenon in applied linguistics which sometimes refers to activities which language tutors involve themselves in because of a test. These activities ordinarily would not have taken place but because of the test at hand the teachers and learners are seen to participate in such teaching and learning activities. And as such these activities may promote or negatively affect the goal of language learning. The main purpose of this research was to find out the effects Senior Secondary School Certificate (SSCE) has on teaching and learning, in the limelight of its effects too on students, in the West Coast Region, Brikama, The Gambia. The SSCE English paper is a compulsory paper for all the test takers and it is so powerful that it determines who gains admission into tertiary institutions of learning or not. A student who has nine A's in other subjects but fails the English paper is seen to have failed the entire exam because of not passing the English paper. This research paper used mixed methods approaches, which are qualitative and quantitative designs. The participants here consist of ninety- four students and ten teachers. The methods of data collection included questionnaires and structured interviews.

The research studies revealed that, both teachers and students put more focus on tests, which makes them to be specific in only test taking strategies and approaches. It appears both students and teachers ignored communication language skills rather they focus on testing taking skills, which alluded to the reasons of mass failures ever recorded. . In light of the results, this study recommended that the English paper exam questions should be made to reflect the objectives of the curriculum, so that even if teachers continue to teach to the test the major goal of language learning (proficiency) can still be attained.

Keywords: Senior Secondary School Certificate, English paper examination, Washback in Gambia, Washback of Senior Secondary School Certificate, Washback of English paper examination.

Dedication

I dedicate this to God who keeps me healthy through this difficult journey.

Acknowledgement

I thank Dr. Asifa Sultana Ma'am for her excellent guidance, kind patience, critical feedback, and tremendous encouragement throughout this work. My love and gratitude also go to my Brac International Scholarship Office for the scholarship opportunity. I also thank my family and friends.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

This study investigates how the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE) English paper has a lot of influences on language teaching and learning. Also, on the welfare of students post exams period, in West Coast region Brikama, the Gambia. This exam which is commonly referred as West African Examination Council (WAEC) is the final exam taken by students at the end of their 12 years schooling journey, with the hope of pursuing further studies, if the results obtained here are good enough. . Testing has been used for centuries, but concern about its influence has recently increased. The concern has increased because questions are being asked about validity, reliability and a host of other factors that affect high-stakes tests. “Washback or backwash, a term now commonly used in applied linguistics, refers to the influence of testing on teaching and learning (Alderson and Wall, 1993). Washback has become synonymous with tests in Education.

1.2 Background of the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE)\ (WAEC)

The Gambia educational system is a result driven industry one, this is because results are the ones that determine which career or admission one needs to make. In the case of getting access to further studies. The Senior Secondary School Examination is one of the tests which is highly considered for this purpose. This exam is taken by all students in Grade 12, which is why it is an obligation for all the students leaving the school and its certificate is pretty significant for further studies and obtaining a job. However, as the study is focused on the English paper which is compulsory for all the students is a major decision in shaping the journeys of students. English paper is important to an extent that if a student passes all the subjects but failed in English paper, it will practically appear he or she has failed in all other subjects and will never be given admission in tertiary institutions and to be able to get a job. All tertiary institutions demand that the English paper must be passed, hence the SSCE English paper is a high stakes test.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

For the past decades, the influence of a high-stakes test has become a focal point and has thus received considerable attention in educational and practical testing communities. Empirical study has been carried out by quite a huge number of scholars on washback effects on test learning and teaching. (Burrow, 1999; Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Watanabe, 1996; Cheng 1999, 2004). Not much has been done on washback effects on learners who are a major player in the testing domain. However, (Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt, and Ferman, 1996; Watanabe, 2002; Bailey, 1996) put more focus on washback to the learner. The findings which are discovered above explain washback in different categories in language teaching and learning process. To my surprise quite a volume of empirical studies on backwash focus on

language teaching test, in other words, washback on teachers, very little studies has been conducted on washback on learners in particular. Spratt (2005) asserts: “does washback from exams affect learning, and, if so, how? Unfortunately, there is little empirical evidence available to provide a basis for answers to these questions” (p 18). In this context more studies and findings need to be done. To exactly find out how exactly and to extend washback effects has on learners. Even though the studies discovered from empirical research reveal little findings on backwash to learners (Green, 2006), suggests that more studies need to be carried out in this area. This is because only “he who wears the shoes knows where it pinches”. In any given situation, in issues like text, in my opinion the test takers are key participants , therefore it is deemed fitting to investigate the influence of washback on them. Why is this the case? Language exams have in many cases raised so much “dust” in so many areas, both negatives and positives aspects , testing in language has been questioned for its authenticity, reliability, and validity. For instance, a doctor might not make a prescription until he is able to diagnose what the patient is suffering from. In due time if more studies are practical done, it will reveal the right treatment for improving language testing as it affects learners. Studies on washback cannot be overarching on this, whether it is this or another, the sole aim of this study was to investigate the language learning that takes place in senior schools prior before WAEC exams. Studies on washback to the learner cannot be over flogged; more studies need to be carried out on this.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The main objectives of this study was to find out what the effects of the WEST African Senior School Certificate Exams has on students and also language teaching in West Coast Region Brikama. The three broad objectives are as follows :

1. To make an identification of the nature and scope of teaching and learning that the learners participate in, while preparing for WAEC exams.
2. To identify skills and content of the language that are emphasized by the teacher in the sessions as he prepares the learners for WAEC exams.
3. To identify the positives and negatives of the exam on test takers in more broader aspects.

1.5 Research Questions

This study will be guided by the following research questions, which are:

1. What are some of the learning and teaching activities that occur in the classroom before the WAEC exams?
2. What are some of the nature and scope of teaching and learning activities that are implore in the classroom before the exam?
3. What are the positive washback extents of WAEC exams on students and stakeholders?
4. What are the negative washback extents of the WAEC exams on students and stakeholders?

1.6 Significance of the study

The study was marked as being pretty significant to all the stakeholders and so many policy makers in specifics. This is simply due to the fact that it can open a path for effective and efficient professionalism in the domain, in this regard teachers can engage learners in more realistic outcomes of the exams and also the use of authentic language learning processes. It is also lucid that findings that are discovered in this study could be of significant importance to all the curriculum developers and policy makers. This is due to the mere facts that , findings that are discovered here could be of need to policy makers to take more points and implore it in their curriculum which contribute to better learning conditions. Furthermore the outcomes

or the results of this study can be a significant eyeopener for all the teachers, students, exam constructors and all other significant stakeholders in the educational sectors for them to take the drawbacks of WAEC and tail language learning significantly.

1.7 Definition of Terms

The terms listed below are defined according to how they were used and operationalized in the research work. The following terms will mean the following as in the context of the research.

1. SSCE- Senior Secondary Certificate Examination
2. WAEC- refers to the West African Examination Council.
3. Washback- the term washback in this study refers to the influence of WAEC exams on students and stakeholders to a large extent. .
4. Effects- the word effects in this study refers to the impact of WAEC exams on language teaching and learning in the classroom.
5. Teaching- In this study teaching refers to focus taken by teachers in the classroom, as it is influenced by the curriculum. .
6. Learning- in this study refers to specific methods employed by all learners to prepare for WAEC exams.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter provides in depth paths in the review of the literature in this study. As many scholars have alluded, literature review is the overall historical content of a research document and a study paper. As a result this document will not be an exception ,as it will explain all the historical ideas pertaining to this research paper. First , the definition of washback from an ordinary point of view. Waschback could significantly mean feedback that is taken from a particular course or path. In linguistics, it means, the after mark impact of a lesson, high stake exams or any other exercise that has taken place. In this regard, the drawbacks could either be positive or negative impacts. Both could be an outcome for any test given , so in situations like this, we will definitely look at what is the backwash on all the stakeholders that have taken path in that. In this respect, the document has gathered all the backwash of the high stake exams, in the Gambia, which is taken annually by students. This is referred to as the West African Examination Council, WAEC. This is the last stage of senior school examination in the Gambia. So due to the nature and expectations of the exams, we definitely do expect positive and negative outcomes of the exams, which in this subject of the discussion is called the washback. In this domain, all the impacts of washback are explained down adequately.

As this exam is the final stage of senior school, it therefore creates lots of negative and positive effects on the wellbeing of learners and educators involved in the process. For instance, the education ministry will be judged at the end of the day, as to how their policies are shaping the life of students educationally in the schools. In a situation where students do well, sometimes the ministry will be given credit for what they have achieved due the course of their tenure.

This happens when students graduate with flying colours. Not only the educators are given praise, teachers will also be praised for their brilliant teaching approaches, which allows students to definitely do well in the exams. Also, in the same vein, some school principals will be given prizes for what they have achieved in the exams. Students on the other hand will be the center of focus, when they achieve a lot, they will be praised by teachers, parents and society at large. Some of the students could be given scholarships to study in universities and colleges. Therefore, there are positive washbacks like this in the exams, that are annually rewarded after the exams. So all these positive rewards show how serious the exam is. In some instances certain schools even give opportunities to their students to teach a particular subject they have performed pretty well. For instance when a student scores A's in all their subjects amicably they could be given a teaching position in that particular. So that is a very important move as far as washbacks on this subject is concerned.

For the negative aspects of washbacks on this subject, it is more intriguing to that of the positives, that is because it is mostly on how it impacts the life of students, who are eager to make ends meet, as a result the fear that, life will become wicked to them if they fail to make good scores in this exams is quite disturbing mentally on them. Some of the students commits suicides, others adventure into illegal journey to Europe to make ends meet, due to that unfaithful journey many lose their lives on the journey, this used to boys who normally used the illegal journey to reach to Europe but due to high rate of failures and unemployment in the country. Recent studies have indicated that girls are also adventuring into this journey to Europe, which also leads to high rates of unexpected deaths among girls in the country. So all these happens immediately after the exams, most especially to students who do well and to them they are left with no option in life, so the only thing they think they could do is to take a illegal journey in Europe even though most of them know it could lead to fatality among them regardless of their gender. Aside from this nature of washback students normally witness

or face immediately conducting these exams , female students mostly do engage in marriage, most especially if their results are not good enough they are forced to get married by their parents. Because most of the parents still have the traditional beliefs and norms that a female person's education can just stop at high school, because at this stage they will be able to read and write , which to them is the fundamentals of education. As a result of that, they will not hesitate to send their female students to marriage. All these happen immediately after the WAEC exams. Sometimes a student could do very well in the exams and still be sent to marriage as that is the norm of certain families. So this precaution leads many to mental depression as they will not be willing to go and get married at the end of the duration, which many will not like and it can usually lead to depression and mental health. In such situations, it is not safe to even allow such person to get into matrimonial life as it is detrimental , they could harm their spouse, just because they are forced to get into marry it is not their consent, in this situations, it will be necessary to take the effects of negative effects of washback to ensure better policies are brought in to cap this kind of situations in all spheres of life. In narration like this washback or backwash are very important whether it has merits or demerits. One might think that exams cannot be avoided, but policies like any girl who graduates with better results must be allowed to complete her studies at any level she wants, that is to say she should not be forced to go into any marital affairs if she is not ready to go. If these kinds of policies are part of educational settings . In my opinion parents will be mindful and students will be able to sit the exam peacefully without having any fear of getting into unwanted marital affairs.

2.1 Definitions of Washback

Washbacks or drawbacks as it is referred to in Linguistics and from narration of many educationists and scholars , is the feedback which is driven from a particular exercise and test. In this regard that particular backwash must be given a significant concentration. As all the feedback is there for a purpose and they cannot be ignored , regardless of what situations. That

is why as students of knowledge it is a requirement for all to take heed to all the feedback we might receive whether in the classroom or from our professors. As far as this subject is concerned, washbacks are the outcomes of WAEC exams, that is what students and educators all experience after the main exams. And how that shapes and influences their lives after school. That is the definition of washback this study is trying to establish. Within the context of WAEC exams in the Gambia in connection to English language papers in the classroom and also, outside the society what they might experience out there. This study worked on those types of washbacks in all corners. Taken into considerations of expert definition of washbacks . For instance, Cheng et al, (2004), make a brief definition and description in his study of the influence of tests on teaching and learning. This is how he described washbacks. That is why this said study has also collected data which demonstrates how this is mainly done in classroom settings and how students deal with each other in this context of study. Other scholars like Shohamy et al (1996) have different features of washbacks, according to him washback is the connection between testing and learning, he in this context puts more elaboration on its dual format which are the positive and negative of washbacks. Also another scholar brings a different version of washback Buck (1998) assumes and connects it to the tendency of classroom activities to be able to march the demand of the test which might be conducted. So from these two definitions on the subjects of washback one can argue washback can depend on different context , that is why this study has taken in the context of WAEC, which is how it affects students in the aftermath of the exams. So this to me is the brief definition of washback as far as this subject is very well concerned.

All these definitions all pontificate how the importance of washback can be known if it is taken into a specific context, it will elaborate lots of merits and demerits due to that. Many will be able to figure out its nature and space within the context of this study paper. Many scholars have made a point that tests are not in isolation , as they reflect on the critical drivers of the

attitude and behaviours of student pre and post exams, like in this situation of these exams. They also contribute to decision making of students in their real life situations. By taking all these into perspective stakeholders can also be given better understanding and feedback as to how to address the nature and issues of high stake exams in spheres of exams. Especially in the broader aspects of Gambia educational settings where these exams are pretty much important and all significant in all areas of society.

2.2 Washback on Learners

As it is mentioned in the introduction sections of impact of washback or backwash on students . In this section it elaborates more extensive notions of washback on all the students in the country, regardless of their years of graduation. This part shows broader aspects of washbacks on students and teachers. It is clear in the Gambia , WAEC exams brought important motivation to students, as many believe after these exams they can finally pursue their dreams of higher education in the country, or some occasions even outside the country. Due to this unbearable higher expectations students as well as teachers put more effort into these exams as it will be an opportunity for all the parties , moreso the students who are mostly the products of the exams. But recent studies in the country have indicated, this exam has more negative effects to that of positives. And in many situations that could be the possible scenario of all the tests. When tests have more negative impacts then that's the point of taking all the washbacks and that's where washbacks will have more significant outcomes. As in this , this paper has discussed more negative washbacks to that of positives, this mainly collected from female students who are mostly victims of such situations, due to norms in the traditional settings. As this study is conducted in the countryside of the country. So therefore, even if a student performs pretty well in the exam, she still can face an uncertain future, as in this case he or she might not continue her education further. The norm in many rural areas is that, when a girl child reaches senior school and does this exam she has now obtained higher education

regardless of the outcome of the exams she could be lured to go and get married. And in these situations it is done by the application of force on the students. The student is forced to go and get married thereby causing mental and physical pain to the said person. Many students have become victims of this case. This is why the study has said there are more negative aspects of feedback of this exam to that of the positives. In most cases positives are experienced in the urban schools, this is due to different norms and values. In this aspect it is very key for the ministry of education to kindly come up with new policies to bridge this gap so as students will not be forced into marriage immediately after the exam, in every school in the Gambia there are Parents Teachers Association, so in their gathering moments they could discuss all these important feedbacks, so that in the future situations like this and many other negative feedbacks can be combated and students will be able to focus on the exam and produce better results without having the fear of getting married at the end of the day. This is not only on students and teachers too, they are also scrutinized after the exams. If a huge percentage of students perform badly in a particular subject that belongs to teacher X, there is a high chance such teacher might lose his or her position in the teacher path in that school. I remember very well in my senior school, after a mock exam which is like a pre- WAEC exam, a French teacher loses his job, this is because most of the students perform badly in his subject. So due to that, the school principal has to relocate him to another school. So this is an effect as to the definition of wash back , because it has an effect on teaching and learning for the teachers too. Washbacks also portrays how teachers focus on a narrow syllabus when exams are approaching, as some of the teachers will not want to concentrate on a few areas in the syllabus to test students , in this regard students might not come out with good results as expected. This sometimes leads to teachers losing their jobs when failure is too high in their areas of concentration. Washbacks also have its effects on the preparation of exams which is coming for all the parties involved in this context. Which is the teachers, students and parents, sometimes the ministry responsible for

conducting the exam. Teachers might only focus on narrow curriculum as mentioned above, this to limit the time of the exam and to ensure all the topics are covered, however this might not go well as some of the topics which are important and can pop up in exams might not be covered. And in most cases scenarios like this do occur in WAEC exams, later in the discussion section of the study interview will reveal how teachers deal with manners like this. Also on the path of students. When exams are fast approaching, many students will very well conduct study extra lessons at other locations.

Most students do go to ex - students who helped them about what to expect in the exam. In this regard an ex-student might just say to just focus on a few areas, this manner can also prevent a student from doing extensive reading. This could be considered a short cut towards the exam to make progress, so if it did not work during the exam it could lead to massive failures and a huge reparcuation. Sometimes students also focus more on memorization when exams are fast approaching rather than engaging in critical thinking to ensure safety in exams. When this happens there could be massive failure as it is discovered in the study. However, all these methods or skills done by students are recommended and good manners to set up for external exams like such, but it will fail students to be critical thinkers so as to enable them to solve more open questions. Scholars like BUCK (1988) have not agreed to memorization and dictations when exams are approaching or as a method of teaching, he argues that this leads to more negative outcomes of washbacks , as it is not good for students. In another sense he did prefer to train students to be more of critical thinkers than simply memorization just to pass a certain exam. Which might be pretty ineffective in the latter stage of their careers. As mentioned earlier in the introduction part of the study.

So, in all essence what the study has discovered so far in this context, that many students will only focus on the tiny parts of the syllabus to prepare for exams, this method later leads to failures and possible outcomes and depressions and mental health. To eradicate all these

unfortunate situations, the education ministry should come up with better policies that dismiss the negative effects of washback, in my opinion the purpose of washback is to remedy and adjust the situations that have been seen. For example to ensure all the negative aspects are not witnessed and all the positive parts are adjusted so that formidable teaching and learning can take place. In this regard teaching and learning will be adjusted every time to meet the needs and expectations of learners. In my view if washbacks are not taken into consideration then there is a higher chance that the same situations will be repeated and in this regard washback ideas in the field of education will not be significant as far as citations like this are concerned.

2.3 Positive and Negative Washback

As it is simply mentioned above the merits and demerits of washback in exams in the Gambia, especially WAEC which has far more damaging consequences. It also has far more rewarding ramifications on the subject of discussion. As this section is particularly on positives and negative washback and how they shape our educational settings and impact the wellbeing of students in this regard. This is because students are the focus of any exam which is to be conducted in any situation. The success of any exam can be determined if students do very well, on the other hand it can also be considered unsuccessful if it causes more massive failures than expected. Due to this there will be more demanding washbacks, as a result of this, the positive and negative washback are elaborated here to create more enriching understanding of the subject matter and how it can be tackled to ensure success in education, especially teaching and learning. As the previous section indicates above, washback is not only about students, but it also influences teaching and learning in the classroom settings. A positive washback will lead to better teaching and learning between teachers and students and a negative washback could be adjusted to meet the needs and demands of students in the classroom. Now, it is understood from layman's definition that positives are good effects and negatives are bad effects.

Now the positives of Washbacks. Positive washbacks most eager students to take more extra lessons in order to improve their performance in a broader aspect. Some of the students will retake what is referred to as private WAEC in the Gambia, they are encouraged to do this , due to positive drawbacks they have received from their friends and teachers. Many students do this, even though they might somehow not do well in the first exam. In many cases , studies have shown that all the students who retake usually have more satisfactory results . approximately 75% of the students have far better results then the previous ones. So this is an indication that many public schools in the Gambia need a far better learning facility to ensure more progress for students. When students decide to resit the exam in the hope of getting better results this is significant positive washbacks , because now they have belief in themselves that they can do well in the next exam.

On the other hand, the negative washback has far more challenging sides. This normally occurs in the study that teachers normally narrow their lessons to quickly run down the whole syllabus. Thus, not being able to cover all the syllabus. Thereby leading to a high number of failures in exams. This approach also undermines learners' critical thinking as they will only focus on memorization rather than making extensive reading. When this happens it is difficult to make amendments. Sometimes when tests are not designed very well, it could lead to more negative washbacks and the study has revealed many situations like this. To cope with this, better policies need to be introduced to ensure all these unfortunate occurrences are not repeated again. As it is noted above, washback is very important in all situations, in educational settings, teachers, students and parents ideas and experience must be rewind by educators to make adjustments in the curriculum. Because that is the purpose of any feedback in any settings as a result this study is not an exception in any meter.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

The major aim of this study was to examine the effects of washback on students after completing WAEC examination in the Gambia. This study was conducted in schools within the WEST Coast Region in the administrative area of Brikama. Teenagers often sit this exam, this is what the study examined how that affects their lives afterwards. Also, the research had connected to the English Language Paper , given that English is a compulsory subject for all the students during exams. Also, English has been the medium of instructions across all schools in the region. This subject holds significant importance to students, teachers, stakeholders and parents in particular. So, based on this importance, the study had made findings to examine the washbacks effects of this exam on the social and mental life of students and all the stakeholders involved.

Failing in this exam has far more reaching consequences, as it can literally stop students from accessing tertiary institutions in the country. In some instances a student can repeat this exam until they are able to produce decent results which will enable them to get access to higher education. This examination high -stake creates lots of pressure in which students and teachers deem it as do or die affairs. This is because to many it is a decisive moment in their lives, when they fail, it could mean to them they fail in life, as mentioned earlier girls can be forced into marriage, whilst boys can venture into illegal journeys into Europe in search of greener pastures. Which sometimes can lead to death in the ocean. Past scenarios have indicated the exam's effect on the social lives of stakeholders, which includes a dismissal of the board of directors due to poor results and emotional distress of students which in some instances leads

to student committing suicides. These factors relate to the WAEC exam and how it shapes the lives of students in the Gambia.

3.1 Research Design

This study implores a mixed-method approach, by joining qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. The reason for choosing this approach lies in its flexible nature of washback, which allowed the researcher to map out detailed and well-supported conclusions. By using a mixed method it will allow the researcher to triangulate , a process which allows to validate findings through combination of multiple perspectives and data sources. According to Cheng et al. (2004), the washback is not a similar idea but rather a more complicated interplay of factors which do require different methodologies to unpack effectively. These scholars emphasize that using interviews alongside questionnaires can yield deeper insights, providing a holistic understanding of the subject.

In line with these recommendations, this study makes a combination of structured questionnaires, open - ended questions and interviews. The inclusion of these tools was to ensure the study does not only capture qualitative trends but also dwell into qualitative matters of teaching practice and language behaviour influenced by WAEC examination. The combination of these methods provides a robust yardstick for exploring research objectives in depth.

3.2 Participants

This study consisted of the population of Senior Secondary School , the students are from three Secondary Schools in Brikama. The age of these students range from 16 and 17 , and were preparing for their exam. To enable representation of different perspectives. Additionally, ten of the English language teachers who taught Both male and female students were participants,

this to ensure more balanced representation of different points of views. Ten of the teachers who taught these learners in English were involved in the research. .

A cluster technique of sampling was implored to select the participants. This, of course, involves randomly picking schools from public schools in Brikama, followed by all the students in G12 within these schools. The schools that were chosen represent different backgrounds , thus making them a representative target of the population. The inclusion of multiple schools and perspectives enhanced the reliability and generalizability of the findings within the Brikama region.

3.3 Instruments for Data Collection

To gather the data, the study utilized two basic instruments: questionnaires and interviews. These tools were used to get best information from students and teachers, about their experiences in the classroom for students and teaching practices for teachers. And how they both prepared for the WAEC exam.

3.4 Questionnaires

The researcher developed structured and semi-structured questionnaires for both students and teachers. For students, the questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section assessed the overall teaching practices in their schools, while the second focused on identifying the language skills and content areas emphasized during instruction. The third section comprised open-ended questions that allowed students to express their opinions freely. Responses in the structured sections were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always).

The teachers' questionnaire, which contained 48 questions, mirrored the structure of the student questionnaire but was adapted to reflect instructional practices and challenges. It included a combination of open- and closed-ended questions designed to uncover teachers' instructional priorities, focus areas, and perceptions of the washback effect.

3.5 Interviews

Interviews were conducted with selected students and teachers to complement the questionnaire data. Five students (three girls and two boys) participated in focus-group interviews, representing a range of academic abilities and experiences. The interviews were structured around pre-prepared questions and took place in the students' classrooms, creating a relaxed and familiar environment conducive to open dialogue. Teachers participated in one-on-one interviews during their free periods. These interviews explored their teaching methodologies, challenges, and the adjustments made in preparation for the WAEC exam.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data collected through questionnaires and interviews were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were processed using descriptive statistics, which provided insights into patterns and trends in teaching practices and student experiences. Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed and thematically analyzed to identify recurring themes and unique perspectives.

To ensure accuracy and clarity, interviews were audio-recorded, and detailed notes were taken during the sessions. In some cases, student interviews were conducted in local languages to facilitate better communication and comprehension. For students who were at home, interviews were conducted using online platforms like WhatsApp, demonstrating the researcher's flexibility and adaptability in overcoming logistical challenges.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The privacy of the participants were all respected at the beginning of the process. A circular was distributed to all participants to seek their consents. Also, participants' details were not collected in the questionnaires and surveys to ensure anonymity. The questions did not in any way invade the privacy of the participants. I inform them about the purpose of the study and its importance to all the stakeholders in academics. And how it will shape the notion of future generations on the impacts of WAEC on students and the community at large. The Instruments used were at their preferences as some of the participants are not familiar with online meetings.

3.8 Limitations

One of the limitations of the research is that it cannot be generalized across the whole country. This is due to the fact that it has only been focused on one region in the Gambia out of 7 regions in the Gambia. As schools vary in teachings and other practices, it can be implied that what happens in this particular region will be the same in all the schools. Also, teaching methodology varies from teacher to teacher so as wasback from student to student in different schools. As a result of that, the study is open for replications.

Another limitation of the study is the methodology implore , which are the qualitative and quantitative research methods. From the responses from the participants regarding the survey questions it could be noticed that the participants did not understand some of the questions. Therefore, it is recommended that if any researcher wants to replicate the documents, the person has to do a pilot test before adopting the questions. Also, the researcher could do classroom observations and physically interact with all the teachers and students due to distance. As the researcher could not go to natural settings to carry out certain practices.

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Chapter 4

Results and Discussion

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents analysis of data that were collected from surveys , interviews and other viable methods of collection of the data. The responses from individuals and groups, basically all the participants are diagrams in a tabular below in the subsequent paragraphs, explaining the core of the data. And how participants were triggered by the subject of the discussion. As in the early chapter discussed, the basic aim of the document was to find out the effects of washback on students, after the WAEC exam. Due to this the results from the survey have been illustrated to provide significant interpretation of the topic at hand, this by looking at all what the participants have said. All these interpretations are all geared towards the research question, this is to ensure a more exclusive context of the study. All the findings that were very well taken from the students all all looked at by their teachers, to ensure there is little bit of sanity and it is within the scope of the research topic.

4.1. Student Data

4.1.1 Time Allotment

This table below indicates the time spent by students while preparing for the exams, from the table one could figure out the importance of the exam to students. Usually when something is important, people tend to spend more time on them. These higher levels of exams , mostly WAEC, demand significant preparation from both the students and the teachers. Therefore lets take a close look at table one below.

Table 1

Below indicates the time students spend on practices among themselves; it reveals their dedication and commitment as the exam approaches.

	Never/Seldom	Sometimes	Often/Always
How do you deal with your time, while an exam is approaching ?	Frequency %	Frequency %	Frequency %
I spend 4-5 hours daily studying for the exam.	20 21.3	35 37.2	39 41.5
I usually spend extra periods in class taking a look at past papers.	20 21.3	34 36.2	40 42.6

From these responses it can be noticed that a large chunk of students spend their time on doing something , when the exam is approaching. That is 50% of learners do spend significant space of their time to prepare for the exam. Which is all spent on reading and other forms of exercise for the purpose of the exam. Also 78.7% of the learners spend their 4-5 hours time preparing for exams on daily hours. While from the table, it is understood, 78.8% of the learners assert that they spend more extra hours revising past papers immediately after the normal class sessions. On the other hand, only a small number of learners, approximately 21.3%, indicate they seldom or never engaged in these activities. That is to say, maybe they will be doing other forms of activities to enhance their preparation for the exam.

It is clear that the WAEC exam consumes lots of time. Some of the papers could possibly take 4-5 hours, that is in my opinion I am not surprised learners are taking that huge amount of time to make revision. Papers like English Language are divided into 3-4 parts, based on this, students do take more time in the exam hall answering questions. So, basically it can be made clear the manner in which the exam is designed shapes how students prepare and allocate their time for it. As it is more mentioned in earlier chapters, that designation of exams or tests reflects on the washback of students. In essence the washback can be seen from the time students spend on reading their notes, due to the way the exam paper is designed. In many cases parents have raised their concerns over the time duration of these exams, especially the time that is allocated for some of the papers, like Literature, English Language and Geography. These papers have so many parts that it could take students an entire day before they could be done with it and return home. During this time, some of them fainted , exhausted on their way to home, which gave a worrying face to parents. Also, as this setting is in the rural area of the country where schools are far from home, so before students could reached it , it is already dark in the night, so this is not safe, as some of them faced attacks from petty animals and even raped on their home. However, recent studies have shown that, due to this concerns from parents the examination board have reduce time allocated for this papers like Literature , Language , now instead of a day, they have now divided into space of two days. For instance, the Audio aspects of English papers are done on different days. This measure is to ensure safety of students and teachers at large. Many scholars such as Yildirim (2010) makes a study on the time students spend on preparing for the exams, at a higher level regardless of the location. He said the period the student and teachers prepare for exams. This is a portrayal of how important that particular exam is for the students and teachers at essence. And in this case that is evident from the time spent by students and teachers and their efforts can be seen and noticed. Therefore, in this

regard, high stakes exams in an environment gives both teachers and students higher intensity which makes them signify their efforts towards the importance of the exams.

4.1.2 Teaching and Learning Activities Prior to the WAEC Exams

This table outlines the learning and teaching activities that learners and teachers engage in. Before the WAEC exam, this indicates a change in direction to more exam preparation focus than just the general manners of preparing for any high stake exams. These approaches and techniques are more focused on enhancing the performance of students rather than holistic learning outcomes.

This table 2 makes an outline of how ceratina activities are conducted in English Language Classes in preparation for the WAEC exam. .

How often did you participate in the following activities in your English class	Never/Seldom Frequency %	Sometimes Frequency %	Often/Always Frequency %
. I take practice tests in clas	9 9.5	13 13.5	75 75.9
. I answer mock exam questions from different past question papers of SSCE	16 17.9	35 35.8	67 67.8
3. I study techniques on how to answer SSCE English paper accurately in class	9 9.6	45 45.6	56 56.3

4. I do complete exams, assignments and tests similar to SSCE English paper in class	23 21.3	55 56.2	64 78.4
6. I ask my English teacher about test taking strategies	67.9 98.2	34 35.1	54 36.1
7. My friends and I discuss answers to mock exam questions in class	88 81.4	32 32.2	40 42.5
9. I practice test taking strategies in class	76 44.4	54 32.6	99 56.4
10. After each class I get take homework assignments from past SSCE questions to	66 45.3	84 34.2	34 70.3

From the data and responses from learners, it can be noticed that, when exams are approaching teachers and learners both focus on certain aspects which guarantee them to excel pretty well in the exam. In these instances, they have focused on test-taking approaches and techniques. For instance, an important chunk of the learners 72.5% reported have participated in practice tests during class and 67% of those have indicated another approach which is studying a specific technique to answer questions during exams.

In this regard, it is clear the topic of test preparation has hugely aligned with Messick's (1996) deliberation and findings, which makes a point that, for a learner to familiarize themselves with formatting of the test may alleviate anxiety , which then can lead to improvement in performance.

Here is a testimony of a participant which agrees with what is said above: :

“Our teacher usually assigns us to bring forward any past papers we have. After that, we spent the whole session reviewing them. After the teacher's explanation, we answered questions about our ability for hours. This is the best to ensure we pass well.”

In this response above, it can be said that, there is shared dedication and commitment among teachers and students towards exams and their preparation towards it. It is so lucid that it has come into context of broader education objectives. Here both parties engaged in meaningful activities towards a single goal. On the other hand , it is noticed, due to heavy reliance on past papers, this highlights the merits of mastering test formats rather than a way of impacting a language skill which is authentic and can upgrade learners' critical thinking in dealing with complex matters. It is noticed that learners and teachers have value in this method to which they stated it is the best way for them to produce brilliant results. This approach might not be significant to examiners as it is narrow.

4.1.3 The language skills that are emphasized in the classroom.

From the survey it can be noticed that there is a huge focus on language learning as the exam is timely approaching. On many occasions, the language learning should be more centered on real life issues, so as to prepare students for the real world in the area of communication. This will be significant for their higher education and daily interaction with peers and friends.

Table 3

Gives an insight on the language skills that are taught in the class.

How many times did you take part in the following exercise in your class?	Never/Seldom		Sometimes		Often/Always	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
I completed the crossword puzzles in the class.	87	96.8	76	98.6	45	45.7
I was taught past tense.	87	92.4	93	45.6	55	23.5
I engaged in extensive writing on various topics of my choice.	40	41.5	20	34.1	40	4.2

Respondents (N=94)

From this table it can be understood that many of the class activities do not actually center on the main themes of teaching English Language for instance, many curriculums do put focus on practical language activities. Such as spelling, speaking, punctuation , grammar and many more. But from this data , it indicates a lack of practical language practices in the classroom. For instance 92.6% of the learners reported never or seldom have completed crossword puzzles. This is an exercise that fosters the growth of vocabulary and problem solving skills. In the same vein, a significant portion of learners 88.3% indicated that they were never taught about past tense. This could be because teachers do not focus on such areas intensively. Moreover,

89.4% of the learners make a revelation that they were not engaged in essay writing activities , despite essay writing being tested in the exam.

A student share his thoughts

“our teachers do not focus on essay writings, rather past papers and memorization techniques”

This response is a reflection of how curriculum and classroom activities are never practically in the same line. Sometimes teachers do not go by what is actually written down, they do use their own methods to facilitate understanding. When teachers focus only on specific skills for a test, this can undermine students' overall performance. Thus, by undermining language proficiency and affecting their readiness in the real world challenges for better advance and more diverse communication.

4.1.4 Other Language Activities Emphasized in the Classroom

This table shows a wider understanding of learning activities that were done in the class. Learners were assigned to evaluate other promises of activities while trying to prepare for the exam.

Table 4 indicates the frequency of the activities.

How often did you participate in the following activities in your English class	Never/Seldom Frequency %		Sometimes Frequency %	Often/Always Frequency %	
4. practice 10 new words in class every week	87	92.6	7	7.4	0 0

5. I read loud in my English class	38	40.4	56	59.6	0	0
6. I read essay questions and draw mind maps in class	86	91.5	8	8.5	0	0
7. I practice Listening in my English class	92	97.9	2	2.1	0	0
8. I participate in group discussions in class	90	95.7	4	4.3	0	0
9. I role-play in class	93	98.9	1	1.1	0	0
10. I read stories from my literature texts in class	90	95.7	4.	4.3	0	0

Respondents (n=94)

This data reveals how it was overwhelming that there was a significant lack of engagements in communicative and collaborative language activities. For instance 92.6% of students never or seldom practiced any new words per week. Which indicates lack of communication interaction. On the other hand 91/5% of the learners stipulate that they were never in any time to try and draw new maps in mind after reading essay questions. Moreover, nearly, almost all the learners 97.9% indicate they never practice listening in classroom sessions. And a further 98.9% reported they never practiced or participated in any role play in the classroom. All these still leave a vacuum for communicating language in the classroom.

A finding like this, reveals the actual ambition and essence of a curriculum and an actual teaching practice implored by teachers in the classroom. It also indicates that teachers only in

many instances prepare test preparation approaches over the actual purpose of education , which is preparing students for real life challenges. It also suggests the higher tendency of the WAEC exam in the country. Also, it is a testimony that many Gambia schools still are practicing traditional methods of teaching which are formerly based on few teaching skills. Which is memorization rather than student centric. In essence it's all about the teacher's center. More policies need to be introduced to breach this gap. So, everything will be student centric.

A student shared his thoughts.

“Our teacher assigned us to focus on past papers as much as we can, and also memorize vocabulary. We hardly do practice speaking, or listening. In essence its all geared towards past tests,,.

This point of view from the student , underscores how learning activities are limited in this environment. There should be a need for more comprehensive language approaches that can be extended beyond just test preparation.

4.2 Teacher Data

4.2.1 Time Allotment

Teachers play a significant role in determining how time should be allocated for exam preparation.

Table 5

Gives an insight into the amount of time teachers give to specific activities leading up to the main exam.

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How do you manage your time in the following activities in your English class	Never/Seldom Frequency %	Sometimes Frequency%	Often/Always Frequency %
1. I spend 2-3 hrs daily teaching my students as the SSCE exam approaches	4 40.0	3 30.0	3. 30.0
2. I spend extra hours in class reviewing only past question papers with my students in class	1 10.0	8 80.0	1 10.0

Respondents (n=10)

From this data, it is noted that a huge portion of teachers, in essence , 60% spend 3-4 hours on their daily routine to prepare for the exam. This is a sample of dedication and commitment students and teachers implore and it shows how significant this exam is to both parties. Hence , that is the reason they spend a huge amount of time on preparation. Notwithstanding, 90% of teachers did spend another extra hour taking a look at past papers together with students. Thus, by putting more emphasis on the merit of test preparation.

In this regard, the focus on extended teaching hours have aligned with Shohamy et al's (1996), findings which indicate that upper level teachers spent 1.5.3 hours per week for two years preparing for exams. This study also asserts the nature of high-stake exams of WAEC and how it influences classroom teaching.

4.2.2 Teaching Activities in the Classroom

This table indicates what teachers engage in when exams are approaching, they focus on certain elements which will make it very simple and open the overall capacity of learners to ensure they understand the content.

Table 6

Illustrates the level of specific teaching activities reported by teachers.

How usually do you teach the following activities in the class	Never/Seldom Frequency %	Sometimes Frequency %	Often/Always Frequency %
3. I teach learners how to answer past papers.	0 0	4 40.0	6 60.0
4. I teach my students writing strategies that they need for the exam	0 0	2 20.0	8 80.0
5. I give my students take home assignments from past SSCE questions to submit in the next class	0 0	5 50.0	5 50.0
6. I teach techniques of answering SSCE English essay questions	0 0	2 20.0	8 80.0

In this data, it can be figured out that it stipulates the nature of the exam and its similar activities from teachers to students. For instance the usage of past papers, most of the students used past papers to get an overall idea of the exams, as well as teachers also used past pacers to show guidelines to students in the sessions, which helps students to have an idea about what is expected in the exams. These to ensure students are familiarized to the nature of exams and its

model of questioning, noting the fact that it's an international exam, in that regard it will be written by outside teachers that are not in the jurisdiction of the schools. sometimes schools, in the Gambia, do conduct what we call mock exams, this is consider as second WAEC, students who do pretty well thin this mini- exams are likely to do well in the main exams, in the same way around, students who do not perform well in this exams, are instructed to do well in the next exams. In other words it is just meant for students to prepare very well for the main exams.

An interview with a senior teacher in the school, share his thoughts. Teacher 1

“Sometimes we do try to bring some past papers into the discussion, as certain topics in the subject could be repeated. In other words it is quite predictable. This is why we assign our learners to focus on past papers.”

Sometimes, this approach could be meritorious and demerits, as it will not allow students to read outside the content to make their own findings. Some of the students will just focus on some little part of the syllabus, so if the area they focus on did not appear in exams, it could lead to massive failures, so what we assign our students to do, is to sometimes not to fully focus on past papers but to read all the entire syllabus, as exams question can be driven from any part of the syllabus regardless of the page number in the book

Teacher Two

No I do not teach that, negotiation skills, I have never heard of negotiation skills. Am just hearing it from you now.

The above thoughts are an example that teachers in the Gambia need to be trained to get familiar with the current syllabus. Teachers measure and determine what needs to be taught; this is why they are major stakeholders in any educational process. Spratt(2005) makes a point, that teachers are always the focal point that teachers play a significant part in determining whether washbacks occur as to how and to what extent (p.21). She further elaborates that

washback is more complex and elusive. It seems to be a phenomenon that does not exist automatically in its own right...brought into existence through the agency of teachers... (21). Teachers initiate learning activities in the class, and what they initiate depends to a large extent on what Spratt (2005) classified into “four main teacher related factors...their beliefs, their attitudes, their educational level and experience, and their personalities” (p.21). This is confirming that there is always a cause and effect in the issues of washback as washback does not occur on its own.

4.2.3 Other learning activities that the teachers emphasized in the classroom

The nature of teaching and learning activities are of utmost importance in any language learning classroom and particularly when a high stakes exam as the one under study is approaching. The table below reveals the data on other learning activities that the teachers emphasized most in the classroom as the SSCE examination approached

Table 4.7 Other teaching activities emphasized by teachers in the classroom

How often you did the following activities in your English class	Never/Seldom		Sometimes		Often/Always	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
7. I use previous years' SSCE exam papers as drills and practice exercises in class						
8. I give my students SSCE practice tests in class						
9. I make my students memorize vocabulary items in class						
10. I make my students argue over answers Mock exam questions in clas						

Respondents(N=10)

Taking a deep look at items 1 and 3 on the table above. It manifests that all the teachers (100%) have reported that they used previous years exam past papers as part of drills and exercise. It appears the studies in these documents look similar to that of Read and Hayes (2003) , they make assertions that it is teachers who used past papers as part of test practice and they also test practice approaches. Messick (1996) is of the assumption that teachers do practice tests as a way of making their learners familiarize with testing formats that might decrease anxiety. Couple of teachers also engage their learners in memorizing vocabulary as it is very significant. It symbolizes teachers' persistence of learners ‘‘ linguistics competence instead of their communicative competence. As language learning cannot be practiced in isolation, teachers insisting on memorization will only improve test scores, but are ineffective in overall language proficiency. This method will also help teachers to make a prediction of objective questions because they motivate their learners to memorize so they will be able to tackle objective questions, but suffer in theory questions. This scenario is similar to Raana’s (2009) study who discovered that washback studies in pakistan , that the materials that were used were not revised for the past 30 years, therefore learners just memorize a passage, because they are sure it will appear in exams. It indicates that the objective questions were hardly reviewed which makes it pretty easy for students to predict and get it right, hence the focus on memorization.

Notwithstanding , as it is above 30% of the teachers manifest that they never or seldom made their learners memorize vocabularies. This indicates the intensity of washbacks may differ for some teachers as pointed out by Wall and Anderson (1993), Cheng (2005), and Watanabe (1996). The studies also showed that 80% of the teachers often/always spent time making their students argue over mock exam questions, 20% indicated that they never/seldom did. It is significant to mentioned here that the emphasis on mock question papers and test taking strategies as a result of the format of the exam become useless to the students after the exam has passed

4.2.4 Language skills the teacher emphasizes in the classroom

Washback studies manifest that exams portray what is being taught and what is acquired , this is the reason in many high stake exams many teachers do more of coaching and drilling as the exam nears (Cheng et al, 2004). This is not well supported from studies, because it will reduce the actual objectives of learning.

The table below reveals the language skills that teachers do buttress on.

Table 4.8

How often did you participate in the following activities in your English class	Never/Seldom Frequency %	Sometimes Frequency %	Often/Always Frequency %	
1. I make my students practice speaking in class				
2. I give my students topics to write on in class				
3. I teach grammar in class				

Although, speaking is not tested explicitly in the exam, the teachers (90%) reported that they sometimes made their students practice speaking in class. Speaking is a communicative language skill that must be developed if proficiency is to be achieved in using a language effectively. It is quite encouraging that even if speaking was not tested the teachers saw the need to teach speaking. However, none of the teachers admitted that they often/always made their students practice speaking. Some of the teachers (10%) revealed that they never or seldom taught speaking. A significant majority of the teachers (80%) reported that they sometimes gave students topics to write on in class, while 20% of the teachers said they never/seldom gave topics to students to write on. Writing is tested explicitly in the SSCE English paper exam (essay writing) and it is surprising that the teachers said they only sometimes made their

students write on various topics. This may explain why the majority of the students (89.4%) reported that they were not engaged in writing because students only come to identify what teachers often and always emphasize in the classroom. This may explain the contradiction between the students and the teachers' reported results. Also, 70% of the teachers admitted that they sometimes taught grammar, while 20% said they never/seldom did teach grammar in class. The above results reveal that the teachers rather than conduct language activities that build language skills, their concern was to review past question papers as the exams approached.

4.2.5 Other teaching activities the teacher emphasizes in class

As the SSCE English language paper is a high-stakes test, teachers and students certainly must engage in teaching and learning activities that would get them prepared for the exam. Therefore, the data as seen on the table below reveals other teaching activities that the teachers emphasized in the classroom.

Table 4.9

other teaching activities the teacher emphasizes in the classroom.

How often did you participate in the following activities in your English class			
4. I encourage my students to discuss topics of interest in class			
5. I organize pair and group interactions in class			
6. I make my students read aloud in class			
7. I make my students practice 10 new words each week			
8. I make my students to read essay questions and draw mind maps			
9. I get my students to complete English crossword puzzle in class			
10. I make my students role play			

Respondents (N=10)

To encourage learners to discuss their own topics that they are interested in, is a very significant communication language learning activity, therefore teachers should motivate students to be that always. As it will quickly build their competence, in speaking and problem solving skills. However, the data on the above table reveals that 50% of the teachers say in most cases they do engage their students to openly discuss their topics of interest in the classroom. While, the other 50% says they never/ seldom engage their learners on such kinds of activities. Empirical studies have manifested couples of factors that affect washbacks, one of them being identified is the teacher. The teacher to the larger degree formulates what is to be taught, and these approaches of teaching impact many couples of factors which might include their beliefs, attitudes, educational levels and perhaps their experiences and personalities (Spratt 2005). As revealed by the results some of the teachers made their students discuss issues of interest in class, while also a significant majority did not, these differences in what the teachers taught can be attributed to the individual differences in teachers as already mentioned above. It is more likely that couples of the teachers already figured out the importance of engaging their learners in discussing different topics in class while, huge chunk of them did not in any way engage, maybe due to their educational levels. Moreover, 60% of the teachers said that they never/seldom organized group and pair interactions in class, while,, 40% of the teachers said they sometimes did. This is another manifestation of the intensity of washback varies from teacher to teacher (Watanabe, 1996), and the teachers in a bid to see that their students pass the exam abandoned “authentic skills” for test taking strategies. Also, half of the teachers (50%) reported that they sometimes made their students read aloud and another half (50%) reported that they did not engage their students in reading aloud in class. Spratt (2005) in her review article illustrates that under teacher’s beliefs issues such as test fairness, reliability, and usefulness of the test must be taken into consideration. Observing from the results in this

section, it is very clear that most teachers' factors do breath positive and negative washbacks in the domain of selecting language activities that could engage their students. Couple of the teachers (70%) said that they did not make their learners practice 10 new words each week, while 30% of the teachers said that they sometimes did. Couple of teachers do focus on scores and items that are taught will only be tested, while the other party knows as much as scores are significant, but proficiency is the utmost significant in real life narrations. Most teachers, in a bid to help students pass their exams, teach only items that will be tested, concerning drawing mind maps after reading essay questions. 60% of the teachers manifest that they never/seldom did , but 40% of the teacher indicated that they sometimes did.

Teacher 3

Culture of reading literature texts should be of a must in class and at home. It appears most of the students are not even reading which makes them have less understanding of passages. There are cases where a student could not even read an exam paper, not to mention answering it. In my humble opinion I believe more reading activities should be practically involved in language learning in that regard teachers should be given more time for that.

In any situation , this interview indicates that teachers were not that satisfied with what they were teaching to the students; it indicates teachers are more in favour of real authentic learning approaches. That could deal with real life situations. One of the teachers went farther to state beyond exams, with a scattering assessment. Following is an extract from his interview with the teacher.

Teacher 4

I am not that much glad, I am kind of sad with teaching. Regardless of our efforts, a huge chunk of students failed badly. It will be a shock to know that in 2022 80% of students failed . the

highest in the history of Gambia. Some of the factors are many, but I think inadequate textbooks, lack of maximum commitment from the government and so on leads to this disaster.

These responses from the school teacher manifest a feeling that washbacks are sometimes not driven by what teachers might teach and how the learners responded to that. The factors that do mediate backwash are many. Spratt⁷³ (2005) manifests that “Degrees and Kinds of washback occur through agency of various intervening bodies and are shaped by them” (p.27). It indicates teachers cannot operate in a vacuum, in any classroom situations, that teachers are influenced by “ideological, historical, economic, and political context” (Spratt; 2005:25).

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

5.1 Introduction

The basic aim of this study was to investigate effects of washback of the WAEC Senior Secondary school Examination. This instance includes all the academic and non-academics effects of washback in this study. Such as mental health, and many other social cultural stigmas attached to the exam. Many scholars such as Green (2006) have mentioned a gap, stating that learners' focused washbacks have still not been explored. In order to explore this and address this, 94 Senior School students have taken part in this study and 10 teachers have also participated, in this document, through questionnaires and interviews. From the findings and results, it is noticed that both positives and negatives influenced tests on teaching and learning. In all aspects of it, methods, approaches and other significant ingredients that make teaching a success.

However, the issues in this regard is the concentration on students having a test score, and teachers not paying much attention to the overall language proficiency. So as to prepare students for the outside world and real situations and a long term language proficiency at all levels for the students. It is widely known that many classroom practices prioritize test-taking formats than practicing natural usage of language to students. For instance, speaking and listening, these are skills that students have to deal with daily. Nonetheless, the interviews have significantly revealed inadequate training for the majority of the teachers. This underscores the need for more resources for training teachers, so that they will be able to cope with modern demands of language teaching in communication. In this regard, curriculum needs to be upgraded to be along with communicative language teaching practices. The curriculum

should be focused on practical language teaching , rather than multiple -choice formats, which is not quite enough at this rate. .

Messick (1996) indicated several studies that, both a good and bad test, can influence outcomes depending on the context of the test. Notwithstanding, this systematic challenge is significant for teacher motivation, as it has been an issue in the Gambia. This boils down to inadequate learning materials, limited professional support and harsh working conditions. Situations like this contribute to poor results in the academic education sectors, when teachers are not motivated , they certainly do not give their best or even engage in research where they could obtain a lot and share it with students. Furthermore, if these issues are addressed with better policies, then the education will be a better place and students will produce good results thereby, causing negative drawbacks.

In support of these findings it is crucial to recognize the connection between the curriculum design, teacher training and how assessments are practiced. When one of these components are addressed pretty well without affecting the other, it is difficult, but will give positive feedback and an improvement. In my opinion this should be a training programme that fully equipped teachers to be trained in a professional way that will enable them to face the challenges and in line their teaching approaches with the objectives of the curriculum. In light of these findings, it is essential to recognize the interconnectedness of curriculum design, teacher training, and assessment practices. Addressing any one of these components without considering the others risks perpetuating existing challenges. For example, a revised curriculum must be supported by training programs that equip teachers with the skills to implement changes effectively. Similarly, assessment must be redesigned to reflect the sole aim of educational goals, to ensure it is aligned with what is being taught and tested in the classrooms. . Furthermore, there should be a collaboration between stakeholders and government bodies and educational institutions to ensure good educational practices and sustainability in the educational fraternity.

5.2 Implications for Language Learning

As usual for many institutions, a high stake-stakes test such as WAEC produces and shapes educational outcomes. It gives momentum to educational officials to determine if teaching is in line with their curriculum thus, by taking a look at the washback, after the maker of the exams. Although, this study reflects the reform and redesigned the language learning methods to practice communicative learning rather than test and single focus just the aim of passing a text. Rather it guides learners to prepare for real world issues and the ability to challenge the status core in the language a world . This can be achieved by revising the WAEC syllabus, but inducting problem solving tasks and many activities that reflect real world situations. This will enable smooth transition from real world language practices by abandoning multiple choice formats to more holistic approaches. This will also, effectively produce positive washback and foster language efficiency . Recent studies such as Cheng (1997,2005) and Qi (2005) confirmed that when tests are conducted in communication it encourages more meaningful outcomes and classroom practices.

Moreover,teacher training programs must be a priority that will strengthen all the teachers and they will be equipped effectively to deliver correctly in modern approaches of communicating teaching, thus by doing away with traditional approaches like memorization. This training must be done oftenly in forms of workshops, symposiums and other methods to assist teachers in doing well in the classroom to foster language ability. Those doing well in making policies, must try to improve on infrastructures, this by addressing teachers grievances to foster innovation and motivation, in my opinion motivation for teachers is one of the core reasons for

poor results and negative washbacks. . classrooms should be filled with enough materials, test books and teaching

aids to ensure teachers do not lack anything. Also, the usage of technologies should now be at the center of decision making to improve leanings in modern approaches. This will create a better learning environment and foster significant improvement. Teacher training programs should be strengthened to ensure educators are equipped to deliver effective language instruction. Comprehensive training sessions and workshops can introduce teachers to innovative methods for teaching communication skills.

Additionally, Sometimes picking up direct methods of testing , assessment of special skills like listening, reading and writing through relevant tasks, such as role plays or presentation can be aligned with learning goals as suggested by Hughes (1989). For instance, instead of taking a test on oral proficiency through multiple choice questions, learners can be assigned to participate in role plays and short presentations. Nonetheless, some of these changes can strongly enhance the reliability and validity of the outcome of the test results. Thus, by encouraging teachers and learners to practically focus on meaningful learning experiences.

Lastly, a change in teaching methods and approaches is demanded to bahlance test preparation with genuine language skills development. Teachers must be encouraged to input activities that promote critical thinking, creativity, and solving of problems, even within the difficulties of high-stake testing climates. When teachers introduce collaborative tasks such as open group discussions, or perhaps project based assessment , they can significantly assist learners to gain skills that are beyond exam duties only. As group discussions are meant for learners to assist teachers, just like peer works. Also, there should be an urgent need for digital learning tools, studies have indicated in many rural schools in the Gambia, digital learning is a nightmare, as many schools do not incorporate technologies in their teaching aids. This digital learning

should be introduced in the curriculum as it helps students to gain valuable skills, when they interact with apps that are meant for online learning platforms. This will help students in self-learning at any time of the day, even in the comfort of their homes.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

The study is mainly in a few schools in the West Coast region, therefore it is limited in this context. The data collected here do replicate what is happening across the entire country. Although all schools are under the eyes of the ministry of basic education, in that regard one will assume one curriculum and indeed there is one curriculum for all. But it must be said teaching methods and approaches done by different teachers can be different from school to school. That is why everything recorded here is significantly based on the west coast region. Furthermore, the methods of collecting the data which are in the form of dual methods interviews and questionnaires may have limitations. This limitation can be from participants as their understanding of the topic and its purpose is not well fully equipped. So , in that regard, learners might not have figured out all the questions posted to them. In that essence, future researchers must deal very well in this area to enhance clarity and reliability.

Observations of classrooms were also not included due to time frame and location in nutshell. This could have given a richer insight into different dynamics in the classroom activities. Observational studies as highlighted by Morrow (1986), this most indicates real time data and many effects of wahback in educational settings. But hence , due to logistical constraints such minutes were not available to physically experience these situations. Nevertheless, when future studies have been conducted on this subject matter it could reveal real time data between what is being reported and what is actually happening in the classroom. This is said, because future research can be physical therefore, a researcher will have to be in the classroom to collect these data and bring the actual classroom activities through intense observations. Such studies can

also identify specific teaching attitudes that contribute to positive and negative washback effects.

In addition, this document has basically focused only on the learners point of view of drawbacks without going much into what teachers think or what their perceptions are. This is because teachers' views can be complicated and complex and it will not be simple to answer the research question. As teachers might not have too much washback possibly, their views will only be on teaching strategies and outcomes of the exam. when this topic is further expanded it can help to make effective recommendations and overall increase in language performance.

Furthermore, this study contains biases from participants who took part in interviews, as participants' feelings differ and some of their responses connect with societal experience and pressure pre and post WAEC exam. When this self-reliant resort is combined with more objective measures, such as interpretation of teacher's lesson plans or the recording of classroom activities, such analysis of the lesson plans and activities can enhance the validity of the findings. Also, longitudinal outcomes of washbacks can provide deeper into how these effects evolve from time to time. When the research is also expanded to include educators , administrators and parents can provide a more holistics point of view on the dynamics, challenges and chances in the educational ecosystem.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

The possible future research should dwell into the beliefs and attitudes of teachers towards the WAEC exam and how those beliefs can influence classroom practices knowing the individual teachers philosophies and how they deliver their instructional methods can reveal approaches that can potentially foster desirable washbacks. Moreover, when the next possible research is extended beyond the West Coast Region and touching different regions across the country.

This can definitely incorporate different classroom practices and this observation from different regions can provide more holistic effects of washback. Additionally, adding systematic methods allocating resources to teachers and providing them with significant training , can improve education in education sectors and in any similar context, gear towards national development. .

Moreover, future studies could dwell into how socio-cultural and economic factors influence washbacks effects in many Gambia schools. This is most especially those in the rural areas, where cultural practices and monetary assistance hinder learners' education. As discussed in the early sections, marriages, farming and many others. These elements mentioned can hinder students motivation , teachers attitudes and most importantly, overall educational outcomes. When issues like these are addressed strongly, there is a hope researchers can develop more connections between systematic challenges and educational practices. Some of these insights could make an impact on policies that are aimed at creating equitable and effective learning environments.

Also , longitudinal studies that will track the impact of test reforms on teaching and learning outcomes will be very important . These outcomes can be used as a yardstick to determine the changes in design, curriculum, and the training of teachers that influence student's language abilities and also overall educational quality all the time. When efforts and recommendations are taken from this research , effect in the future can contribute to creating a more robust and equitable education system in the Gambia.

Another significant area that could be explored in the same context, could involve comparison between various regions in The Gambia, to try to establish best practices in mitigating negative washback effects. There are more chances that such research can unveil innovative approaches or policies that can be proven effective in the same context, which can offer significant lessons

for the Gambians. Additionally, taking into consideration the point of view from other stakeholders , such as parents, policy makers , their views can provide a more in depth understanding of the complex nature of high stake testing. . Future studies could also investigate the role of emerging technologies in mitigating the challenges associated with high-stakes exams. For instance, the inclusion of artificial intelligence tools can be useful in assignment design which can offer fresh opportunities to measure the learners proficiency in a comprehensive and equitable manner.

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Appendix A1

Teacher questionnaire Respondents:

Dear Teachers,

This study is carried out to assess the impact of WAEC exams on teaching and learning , with particular emphasis on washback of English paper. This researcher will be glad if you can freely complete the questionnaires. All given feedback will be treated with strict confidence.

Thank you so much for your kind cooperation.

All the statements in part 1 and 2 of the questionnaire require you to tick a response applicable to you. The responses are as follows

: 1=Never, 2=Seldom, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always

Part 1 Instruction: For each statement tick one colon applicable to you.

The following statements aim at assessing the overall practice in teaching English language in your school.

NO	Statements	Responses					
no#	How usually do you teach the following activities in the class		1	2	3	4	5
1	I teach my students SSCE papers						
2	I spend 2-3 hours daily teaching my students as the SSCE exam approaches						
3	I spend extra hours in class reviewing only past questions papers with my students in class						
4	I teach learners how to answer past papers						
5	I teach my students writing strategies that they need for the exam						
6	I give my students take home assignments from past SSCE questions to submit in the next class.						
7	I teach techniques of answering questions						
8	I use previous years SSCE exam papers as drills and practice tests in class						
9	I make my students memorize vocabulary items in class						
10	I make my students argue over answers , mock exams in clas						

Part 11

The following statements aim at identifying the language skills and contents the teacher emphasizes in the classroom

	Statement	Response s				
1	I make my students practice speaking in class	1	2	3	4	5
2	I give my students topics to write on in class					
3	I teach grammar in class					
4	I encourage my students to discuss topics of interest in class					
5	I organize pair and group interactions in class					
6	I make my students read aloud in class					
7	I make my students practice 10 new words each week					
8	I make my students to read essay questions and draw mind maps					
9	I get my students to complete English crossword puzzle in class					
10	I make my students role play					

Part 111

The frame of the question here is about your expectations of the SSCE exams . There are no right or wrong answers here, feel free to express yourself as much as you can.

1. My teaching always centers on the SSCE English paper exam ? Yes or NO ? Explain

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2. In what specific approaches have you taught your students workplace skills in language in the frame of your teaching?

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3. Do you feel comfortable with your approaches in teaching in terms of getting your learners prepare for workplace or higher institutions of learning?

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Thank you for your cooperation and patience!

Appendix A2

Teacher interview questions. Questions will address teaching methods and approaches that take place as the exam is approaching.

1. How early do you prepare your learners for the exams?
2. What does your teaching centre on in particular?
3. What are the activities you engage your learners in, while teaching in class?
4. How often do you give homework to your students?
5. How do you usually give assignments to your learners prior to exams?
6. How will this assist your learners?
7. How many times do you spare to teach vocabulary?
8. Do you by any chance teach your students negotiation skills required in the workplace?
9. Are you happy with your teaching in class?
10. What are the forms of language you teach?
11. Can you explain to me what a typical lesson in your class seems like?
12. In your assessment what are the kinds of activities you think should be involved in language teaching?

Thank You so much for your assistance.

Appendix B1

Students' questionnaire Student Questionnaire Respondents:

Senior Secondary school students in SS3

Dear Students

This research is carried out to assess the impact of WAEC exams on language testing on learning, with particular emphasis on the English paper. The researcher will be glad if you can freely complete the questionnaire. All given feedback will be treated in strict confidence.

Thank you so much for your kind cooperation.

All the statements in part 1 and 2 of the questionnaire require you to tick a response applicable to you.

The responses are as follows:

1=Never 2=Seldom 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=always

Part 1 Instruction:

For each statement, tick one column applicable to you.

The following statements aim at assessing the overall practice in teaching English language in your school.

	Statement	Responses					
1	. I take practice tests in clas		1	2	3	4	5
2	. I answer mock exam questions from different past question papers of SSCE						
4	3. I study techniques on how to answer SSCE English paper accurately in class						
5	4. I do complete exams, assignments and tests similar to SSCE English paper in class						
6	6. I ask my English teacher about test taking strategies						
7	7. My friends and I discuss answers to mock exam questions in class						
8	9. I practice test taking strategies in class						
9	10. After each class I get take homework assignments from past SSCE questions to						

Part 11

The following statements aim at identifying the language skills and contents your teacher emphasizes in the classroom.

	Statement	Responses					
1	I completed the crossword puzzles in the class.		1	2	3	4	5
2	I was taught past tense.						
3	I engaged in extensive writing on various topics of my choice.						
4	practice 10 new words in class every week						
5	I read loud in my English class						
6	I read essay questions and draw mind maps in class						
7	I practice Listening in my English class						
8	I participate in group discussions in class						
9	I role-play in class						
10	I read stories from my literature texts in class						

Part 111

What are you expecting in the coming exam, please feel free to express yourself , no answer is right or wrong.

1. Do you have any feelings that what you have been taught in your English will have any reflection in your workplace? If YES explain why, if NO explain why? .

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- 2 Are you sure the exercise you practice in your class will prepare you for your further studies?

YES or NO

explain?.....

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.....

.....

Appendix B2:

Student Interview Questions: Some of the learning activities that occur prior before the exam.

1. Make a description of a typical English lesson in your classroom?
2. Are you glad with what you are taught?
3. Do you think your teachers are that much concerned about your English learning process?
4. What do you think should be done more to improve your classroom?
5. Can you make an explanation of your learning activities in your classroom?