

# The Washback Effect of the Undergraduate English Placement Examination on Language Teaching from the Perspectives of the Teachers<sup>1</sup>

Bekir CANLI<sup>2</sup> & İsmail ÇAKIR<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>PhD., Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University, Kahramanmaraş, TURKIYE  
bekircanli@ksu.edu.tr

ORCID: 0000-0001-6648-4691

<sup>3</sup>Prof. Dr., Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Ankara, TURKIYE  
ismail.cakir@asbu.edu.tr

ORCID: 0000-0002-7497-3249

## Article information

Submission	18/08/2021	Revision received	13/08/2022
Acceptance	09/09/2022	Publication date	24/10/2022

## Keywords:

Language testing,  
Washback effect,  
high-stakes tests,  
language teaching

**Abstract:** This study aims to present the washback effect of the undergraduate English placement examination in Türkiye on teachers who are considered one of the highest stakeholders of the test. The data were collected through questionnaires from 110 participants and follow-up face-to-face interviews with 24 English language teachers having teaching experiences in language preparation classes at high schools in Türkiye. The results showed that the undergraduate English placement examination creates a significant amount of negative washback on their teaching activities in language preparation classes. The qualitative results also strengthen the quantitative results, indicating that the test produces a harmful influence on teachers' English teaching approaches. The findings suggest that the negative washback effect of the test needs to be decreased; however, its positive washback effect should be increased for better English language education in Türkiye. Conclusively, the study highlights a significant need for a language testing system that will expectedly enhance language testing and improve language proficiency in the Turkish context. In order to succeed in this aim, the examining bodies should take equal responsibility in the development of such kind of a testing system.

## Anahtar Sözcükler:

Dil sınavı, ket vurma etkisi, merkezi sınavlar, dil öğretimi

**Lisans İngilizce Yerleştirme Sınavının Dil Öğretimine Ket Vurma Etkisi: Öğretmenlerin Bakış Açılarında**

**Özet:** Bu çalışma Türkiye'deki yabancı dil sınavlarının en önemli paydaşlarından biri olarak kabul edilen öğretmenler üzerindeki ket vurma etkisini araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Veriler, 110 katılımcıdan alınan anketler ve Türkiye'deki liselerde üniversiteye hazırlık sınıflarında öğretmenlik deneyimi olan 24 İngilizce öğretmeni ile yapılan yüz yüze görüşmeler sonucunda toplanmıştır. Sonuçlar lisans İngilizce yerleştirme sınavının, hazırlık sınıflarındaki öğretim faaliyetlerine önemli miktarda olumsuz ket vurma etkisi gösterdiğini kanıtlamaktadır. Nitel sonuçlar, sınavın öğretmenlerin İngilizce öğretim yaklaşımları üzerinde zararlı etki yarattığını gösteren nicel sonuçları da güçlendirmektedir. Bulgular, sınavın negatif ket vurma etkisinin azaltılması gerektiğini, aynı zamanda Türkiye'de daha iyi bir İngilizce eğitimi için olumlu ket vurma etkisinin artırılması gerektiğini göstermektedir. Sonuç olarak, çalışma, dil sınavını geliştirecek ve Türkiye bağlamında dil yeterliliğinin iyileştirecek bir dil sınav sistemine önemli bir ihtiyaç olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. Bu amaca ulaşabilmek için, bu tür bir sınav sisteminin geliştirilmesinde tüm paydaşların eşit sorumluluk alması gerekmektedir.

**To Cite This Article:** Canlı, B., & Çakır, İ. (2022). The washback effect of the undergraduate English placement examination on language teaching from the perspectives of the teachers *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)*, 16(2), 1–15.

<sup>1</sup>This article is produced from a PhD dissertation a part of which was presented at ICRAL 2019 The 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference Research in Applied Linguistics, Selçuk University, Konya, Turkey.

## 1. Introduction

Since standardized nationwide and international high-stakes tests have been used increasingly in recent years, language assessment has begun to play a crucial role in many educational settings throughout the world. The growth of studies in language testing has led researchers to investigate the influences of tests on language teaching and learning. The term backwash (Bigs, 1995; Hughes, 1989) or washback (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Thu, 2020; Wall & Alderson, 1993) is defined as the influences of the test on teaching and learning in the field of applied linguistics. Also, washback may be accepted as a term that describes the effects of the tests, the outcomes of which may influence test-takers, educational approaches, guidelines of the institutes, and nations (Polat, 2019). Cheng, Sun, and Ma (2015) claimed that washback studies had been conducted worldwide more than any other language assessment research area for the last 20 years. The majority of these studies have investigated the influences of high-stakes language tests on test-takers and other stakeholders such as teachers, instructors, parents, and school administrators (Çakır, 2017; Hayes & Read, 2004; Külekçi, 2016; Saif, 2006; Yeşilyurt, 2016; Wall & Horak, 2008). In her comprehensive study, Tsagari (2011) emphasized that the results of a large body of washback studies have documented the connection between high-stakes language testing, language teaching, and learning activities, and these studies concluded by suggesting a number of ways to achieve positive effects and how to diminish unintended negative effects of high-stakes language tests.

Considering the educational system in Türkiye, it could be noted that students attending the 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades have to prepare for nationwide standardized high-stakes exams (Çakır, 2017; Hatipoğlu, 2016; Karabulut, 2007), and the policymakers utilize these tests to select and place the candidates at universities, public institutions, and so forth. Therefore, such tests have a great impact on students in many schools in Türkiye, from primary to postgraduate education. Simply put, it could be seen that these tests play an essential role on almost all the students at various periods of their lifetime in the country so that they can carry out their education or business. More specifically, the university entrance system in Türkiye is based on nationwide standardized large-scale tests. Accordingly, the students have to be successful in a series of high-stakes tests. Despite the fact that the university entrance examination has been criticized consistently for being transformed repeatedly and continuously, The Foreign Language Test (LYS-5) English test remains to be the main part of the Transition to Higher Education Examination (YGS), which is a public test prepared and administered by the Student Selection, and Placement Center (ÖSYM) every year in Türkiye.

Thousands of language learners have to take the LYS-5 English test to be able to attend language and related studies/programs at Turkish universities. The test consists of 80 multiple-choice questions in a number of parts, such as cloze tests of grammar and vocabulary, sentence completion, English-Turkish, and Turkish-English translation, reading comprehension, and dialogue completion items. In the LYS-5 English test, grammar, vocabulary, and reading skills are tested, but other basic language skills, such as listening, writing, and speaking, are not tested directly. Although the high school curriculum is developed based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and promotes communicative language learning, this policy is ignored by the LYS-5 decision makers. Therefore, the LYS-5 English test has been especially criticized due to untested skills (Karabulut, 2007; Sevimli, 2007). Because of the test content, both students and teachers tend to concentrate merely on tested skills such as grammar, vocabulary, and

reading. A further criticism of the test is that it is considered to be producing harmful influences on language teaching and learning (Cinkara & Tosun, 2017; Özmen; 2011b; Yıldırım, 2010). Once the students are enrolled at the universities, they suffer from insufficient language skills in speaking, writing, and listening (Sayın & Aslan, 2016). Moreover, it can also be seen that getting a high score from the LYS-5 English test does not necessarily help many test-wise students pass the proficiency exams composed of the questions testing basic language skills equally and conducted by many universities where the medium of instruction is English.

In spite of remarkable changes and developments in language teaching, language examinations in Türkiye in general and the LYS-5 English test, in particular, seem to have remained unchanged in regards to their format and content. On the one hand, the students need to expend a great effort to pass the test since it is the only way to enter language-related departments at universities in Türkiye. On the other hand, most suffer from inadequate language skills once they enter universities. Furthermore, university professors are challenged with learners' poor level of English language skills at the tertiary level. In light of the developments in the language assessment field, examining bodies suggest that the content of the language exams needs to be considered. As the LYS-5 English test seems to be out-of-date regarding educational requirements of the age, the present research is an effort to investigate its washback effect on language teaching and discuss its potential consequences in the Turkish setting.

### **1.1. Literature Review**

The concept of washback has received several definitions based on its scope and conceptual frameworks. The effect of tests on teaching and learning was earlier identified as the backwash effect by some authorities (e.g., Hughes, 1989; Prodromou, 1995; Spolsky, 1994). For example, Hughes (1989) asserted that “the effect of testing on teaching and learning is known as backwash” (p. 1). Similarly, Prodromou (1995) stated that “the backwash effect can be defined as the direct or indirect effect of examinations on teaching methods” (p. 13). Likewise, Curtis and Cheng (2004) stated that the term backwash has negative connotations in language testing.

Later, the test effect was named the washback effect by many researchers in the language testing field (Alderson & Banerjee, 2002; Alderson & Wall, 1993; Davies et al., 1999). Alderson and Wall (1993) confirmed that “the notion that testing influences teaching is known as ‘washback’ in British applied linguistics” (p. 15). According to Bachman and Palmer (1996), washback is one element of test impact on teaching and learning, which has a broader concept in the language testing field. According to Taylor (2005), the washback effect could be either harmful or beneficial. In the same way, Loumbourdi (2014) attempted to clarify the term washback by dividing it into two types of influences on learning and teaching activities depending on its quality. She calls the term washback positive or beneficial when it creates the intended influence, and negative or harmful when it causes unintended effects on language teaching and learning activities. More recently, Nguyen (2019) confessed that washback had a complex nature and could be challenging to researchers because of its multi-faceted structure. Taylor (2005) took up the term more comprehensively by pointing out its effect not only on the micro but also macro level.

### *1.1.1. Washback Studies on Teachers and Teaching*

Teaching methods and teaching practices are one of the major fields influenced by the content of high-stakes tests, and some studies have recently been conducted to get the perceptions of the testees about the high-stake tests (e.g., Dong, Fan & Xu, 2021; Ma & Chong, 2022; Tsang & Isaacs, 2022). Alderson and Wall (1993) hypothesize that a test affects both what and how teachers teach. Likewise, Wall and Alderson (1993) conducted an experimental study on the washback effect of a new version of an English Test in the Sri Lankan context, the O-Level English Exam, to discover its possible impact on a language course. The hypothesis suggested that the new test improves test preparation materials and teacher instruction. The researchers made observations to explore the intended effects of the test for two years. Findings revealed that the test had an impact on what to teach, but it did not have an impact on how to teach. The researchers found that changes in a test do not essentially guarantee the desired impact in terms of teaching methodology and explored a number of micro traits of teaching areas that were influenced by the washback effect of the test. Finally, they proposed 15 washback hypotheses in a broad sense and six on teaching specifically. Those related to teaching are noted by Anderson and Wall (1993) as follows:

A test will influence teaching, what teachers teach, how teachers teach, the rate and sequences of teaching, the degree and depth of teaching, and attitudes and to the content, method, etc. of teaching (pp. 120-121).

In a similar vein, Shohamy (1993) investigated the influence of three newly launched nationwide language tests on teaching and learning particularly focusing on the teaching dimension. Observations, questionnaires, interviews, and analysis of documents were used as data collection instruments. The results of the study revealed that the tests have a different kind of impact that had a complex nature, and it caused a considerable amount of harmful influence by making teaching for testing.

Furthermore, Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) implemented a research study to explore the micro-level effect of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) on classroom instruction and learning activities. The study intended to find out whether the high-stake tests can be utilized as a lever in educational contexts or not. They purposely wanted to use observations as data collection instruments to gain insight into the preparation classes. Also, the researchers conducted group and individual interviews with both the teachers and students. The study results showed that the TOEFL test has a certain influence on teaching content and activities and that this effect is not the same for all teachers. The studies on teachers and teaching affirmed that teachers' teaching methodologies differ from each other significantly (Çelik, 2017; Qi, 2004). As the literature proved, implementing language tests as an agent of innovations in the curriculum does not always end up with the intended aims of policymakers.

### *1.1.2. Washback Studies on Teachers' Perceptions and Attitudes*

The high-stakes language tests may end up with the intended or unintended aims of test developers (Wall, 2005). As a matter of fact, teachers, one of the most important stakeholders, can have positive or negative attitudes towards language teaching in that they feel obliged to cover everything in the syllabus or focus on designing a test-oriented class. Wall (2005) examined the impact of a high-stake English examination in Sri Lanka in order to explore the intended effects of the test in terms of teaching content, teachers' methodology, teachers' opinions, and teacher-made assessment. The results proved that the

test influenced teaching and learning practices in favor of tested skills in the new test. On the other hand, the results showed that the test's effect on teachers' teaching style or methodology was limited. The study concluded that a test itself should not be assumed to be enough to change the education system in the desired direction.

Besides, Wall and Horák (2006) investigated the beneficial washback effect of the TOEFL Internet-based Test (iBT). The results of the study showed that the majority of the instructors greatly depended on commercial materials for teaching in TOEFL preparation classes. Accordingly, the washback studies on teachers' perceptions and attitudes showed that the teachers developed different reactions towards language tests, and they were not consistent with each other.

Recently, there has been a considerable demand for high-stake tests all around the world, and this request has increased the interest in washback studies in Türkiye, too. Numerous nationwide and international high-stakes language tests have been implemented in Türkiye, such as TOEFL, IELTS, SBS, LYS, KPDS, and so forth. In his study, Canlı (2010) conducted research with 30 instructors about the impact of an international high stake test. The results revealed that the test did not cause the intended changes in terms of teaching methodology, and the participating instructors' teaching practices were not in line with the test content as intended by the test producers. The study concluded that utilizing tests as a lever in education systems does not always produce the intended aims of test producers. Therefore, the effect of the test on the instructors should be reduced so that they can develop various teaching activities.

Further studies on the washback effects of tests in the Turkish context suggest that tests produce harmful influences such as stress, depression, and anxiety among both teachers and students (Dağtan, 2012; Yavuzer & Göver, 2012). It was indicated that poor language tests which ignored communicative skills caused mostly harmful effects on stakeholders in the Turkish setting, and that there is a need to convert these effects into positive ones, such as teaching four skills and increasing the use of L2 (Hatipoğlu, 2016; Karabulut, 2007; Özmen, 2011a; Sevimli, 2007; Yıldırım, 2010).

It can be deduced that there is an ample need for further research in different contexts to acknowledge the influence of high-stakes language tests better and recognize the modifications that need to be carried out over these tests for beneficial washback effects. Türkiye is an exam-oriented country, and in light of the developments in the language assessment field, there is an urgent need for renovation of the LYS-5 English test. In this regard, the present study aims to give teachers an opportunity of considering their perceptions and attitudes towards the LYS-5 English test in the Turkish setting, and intends to find answers to the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the LYS-5 English test influence teachers' perception of teaching English?
2. What are teachers' attitudes to the LYS-5 English test?

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Research Design**

The washback studies predominantly prefer survey methods in order to contribute to understanding the complex nature of washback. Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010) agree that in

social sciences, the use of the questionnaire has become one of the fundamental research tools for data collection. With regard to achieving the purpose of the study, a mixed methods research design was implemented. The study followed the explanatory sequential design. Questionnaires were utilized to collect the quantitative data, and semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data.

## 2.2. Participants

The study employed a purposeful sampling procedure to collect the data from the target group. Nunan (1992) acknowledged that it is essential to select participants based on “typicality” for purposeful sampling. Accordingly, the participants of the survey were chosen among English teachers who had the experience of preparing students for the LYS-5 English test at high schools’ language departments located in 26 cities in seven regions of Türkiye.

Table 1.

### *Characteristics of the participants*

	Gender		Type of School
Male	49	State	96
Female	61	Private	14
Total	110		110

Of the 110 participants, 72 hold an English Language Teaching degree. In addition, the most frequently reported degree was English Language and Literature (23.6%), and the least reported degrees were English Translation and Interpretation (8.2%), English Linguistics (1.8%), and American Culture and Literature (0.9%). More than half of the teachers (53.6%) had 1-3 years of teaching experience in the LYS-5 English test language preparation classes. Some of them (32.7%) had 4-6 years, and a small number of the participants (8.2%) had 7-9 years of teaching experience in the LYS-5 English test language preparation classes. Finally, a number of participants (15.5%) had ten or more years of teaching experience in the LYS-5 English test language preparation classes.

## 2.3. Data Collection

The questionnaire was adapted from Hwang (2003) and Takagi (2010), and it consists of two sections, including personal information (seven items) and information on the LYS-5 English Test (19 items). A pilot study was conducted with 20 participants, and the questionnaire items were revised based on participants’ responses. The interviews include seven questions to collect in-depth qualitative data. Purposeful sampling was employed while conducting interviews.

Following the permission from regarding schools to conduct the research was granted, the data collection procedure started. First, the researchers contacted the teachers face-to-face or by phone call and explained the details of the study. After the consent of the participant, the researchers distributed the questionnaire. In total, 110 teachers completed the questionnaires. After administering the questionnaires, 24 of the teachers who completed the questionnaires agreed to participate in the semi-structured follow-up face-to-face interviews. An interview protocol was followed by the researchers.

## 2.4. Data Analysis

IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 24 was used to analyze the data obtained from the questionnaire. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was 0.753. Since the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was 0.753, the questionnaire is considered reliable for the 5 Likert-scale questionnaire items (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001). Next, two experts were consulted to ensure the validity of the items in the questionnaires (Dörnyei, 2007). After that, the mean, frequency, and standard deviations were calculated through the SPSS program. The analyzed statistical data results were presented using a descriptive technique. Later, the interview responses were carefully analyzed to explore critical points. To this end, content analysis was used, and data were transcribed and transferred into word format. "With qualitative content analysis, fairly large quantities of data can normally be processed" (Mayring, 2004, p. 269). Then, a coding system was applied to make sense of the data. An expert's thoughts were taken to provide the reliability, and direct excerpts were presented in the study to provide the validity of the study (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). Major categories and sub-categories were defined at this stage by combining all related data into the same categories.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Quantitative results

The participants taking part in the questionnaire consisted of 110 high school English language teachers who either taught at the LYS-5 English test preparation language classes or had such an experience previously. To collect the data about the influence of the LYS-5 English test, the language teachers were chosen as one of the highest stakeholders. More than half of the participants (55.5%) were female, and the rest of them (44.5%) were male.

The themes determined to be investigated for research question one were the washback effect of the LYS-5 English test on English language teaching, the test's effect on the teachers' teaching practices, the students' pressure on teaching for the content of the test, its influence on schools' English curriculum, and its impact on in-class assessment. In order to seek the teachers' perceptions of the LYS-5 English test, the statistical data is provided in Table 2 below:

Table 2.

#### *Teachers' Perceptions of the LYS-5 English Test*

Item	Number	Mean	Sd.
1. I consider the LYS-5 English test, as I teach English in language classes.	110	4.35	.981
2. My students have additional demands in English classes to prepare for the LYS-5 English test. (e.g., ask that paragraph questions should be more emphasized).	110	4.32	.777
3. The LYS-5 English test influences the way I teach.	110	4.15	.947
4. The LYS-5 English test influences the English curriculum in my school.	110	4.14	.903
5. I give regular English exams in line with the LYS-5 English test at school.	110	3.63	1.164
6. The LYS-5 English test is a valid examination that evaluates students' communicative competencies promoted by the curriculum.	110	2.90	.938

Item 1 ( $\bar{x}=4.35$ ) indicated that the teachers had to consider the LYS-5 English examination as they taught in language preparation classes. Likewise, item 2 ( $\bar{x} = 4.32$ ) showed that their students made extra requests to be able to prepare for the test. As item 3 ( $\bar{x} = 4.15$ ) demonstrated, the teachers generally agreed that the LYS-5 English test created an impact on their English teaching methodology. Similarly, item 4 ( $\bar{x} = 4.14$ ) revealed that the LYS-5 English test affected the school curriculum. Likewise, item 5 ( $\bar{x} = 3.63$ ) showed that the LYS-5 English test influenced in-class testing. Finally, item 6 ( $\bar{x}=2.90$ ) showed that the teachers had doubts about the validity of the LYS-5 English test regarding the evaluation of the test-takers' communicative skills.

In order to seek the teachers' attitudes to the LYS-5 English test, six items were utilized to investigate two main themes; the appropriateness of the LYS-5 English test as a testing tool and the requisite of the test. The data related to teachers' attitudes towards the LYS-5 English test is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3.

*Teachers' Attitudes towards the LYS-5 English Test*

Item	Number	Mean	Sd.
7. I enjoy teaching the practice tests in preparation for the LYS-5 English test.	110	4.27	.918
8. I think there should be some improvement in the LYS-5 English test.	110	4.05	1.065
9. I think the LYS-5 English test is necessary for university entrance.	110	3.70	1.071
10. The LYS-5 English test is contrary to my teaching style and philosophy.	110	3.12	1.311
11. I feel myself under pressure as I teach English classes because of the LYS-5 English test.	110	2.93	1.311
12. I think the LYS-5 English test assesses my students' English ability appropriately.	110	2.42	1.053

The teaching of practice tests in preparation for the LYS-5 English test was implemented significantly in item 7 ( $\bar{x}=4.27$ ). However, as indicated in item 8, the teachers agreed that there should have been an enhancement of the test. According to the teachers, the LYS-5 English test was necessary for university entrance, as can be seen in item 9. Item 10 revealed that the teachers were not sure in terms of considering the LYS-5 English test as contrary to their teaching philosophy. On the other hand, item 11 showed that the teachers were neutral in terms of feeling themselves under pressure as they taught English classes because of the LYS-5 English test. Finally, based on the results of item 12, it can be stated that most of the participants disagreed that the LYS-5 English test assessed their students' abilities in English appropriately.

### 3.2. Qualitative results

A qualitative content analysis was utilized to analyze the data obtained by interviews. Furthermore, the categorical content analysis technique was carried out to explore interview results in detail. First, the collected data was transcribed and translated by the researchers. Each participant was encoded as T (for teachers) to provide anonymity. The responses to the interview questions were coded thematically, and the collected data were sub-categorized through themes.



The first theme that emerged from the qualitative analysis of the interviews was found to be *the effect of the LYS-5 English test on teaching*. In the interviews, the majority of the informants (n=23) asserted that they considered the test in English language preparation classes in their classroom instruction. The aim of Theme 1 was to seek the influence of the test on teachers' teaching in language preparation classes. The vast majority of the informants (96%) asserted that they had to consider the test in English language preparation classes. As indicated in the following selected excerpts, preparing for the test dominated the ideal language teaching.

T14: *Our ultimate goal is to educate our students to achieve the LYS-5 English test.*

T19: *I have to consider the test as an important step because the students' aim is to get a job therefore, they need to enter the university. To be able to enter the university, they need to pass the LYS-5 English test; for this reason, test preparation dominates the classes in language preparation process.*

In the interviews, a second theme was *the effect of the LYS-5 English test on teachers' methodology*. The results showed that the teachers' English teaching methodology was highly affected by the LYS-5 English test. In this sense, T24 asserted that:

T24: *Of course, my teaching methodology is affected by the test, instead of using communicative language teaching, I have to use the Grammar Translation Method for the sake of successfully teaching test content.*

The third theme that emerged from the qualitative analysis of the interview was *the demands on teachers about the LYS-5 English test*. The results revealed that all participants were challenged with a number of test-related requests by students in the English language preparation classes. Therefore, teachers had to conduct their classes in accordance with test preparation instead of teaching the school curriculum, which was based on four language skills. Surprisingly, teachers were criticized when they tended to teach communicative skills by their students, as T14 noted that:

T14: *The students ask us to focus on the test related practices. When we start to teach speaking or listening based activities, the students warn us to do exam-related practices instead.*

The qualitative analysis of the interviews further displayed that the participating teachers claimed the curriculum was not in line with the exam content, and they did not follow the school curriculum in language preparation classes. T19 contended that she followed exam-oriented lessons in reality, but she followed the school curriculum officially. Since the stakeholders, such as students, parents, and school administrators, asked the teachers to prepare their students for the LYS-5 English test, the teachers had to follow an exam-oriented curriculum. In this respect, some of the teachers stated that the school curriculum was inadequate to prepare students since it did not include the LYS-5 English test content.

A fifth theme that emerged from the qualitative analysis of the interviews was *the effect of the LYS-5 English test on class assessment*. According to the results, most of the teachers indicated that they conducted their in-class English exams in line with the LYS-5 English test to contribute to the students' test success. In this context, T14 explained that:

T14: *The students enforced teachers ask a similar question with the LYS-5 English test otherwise, they were dissatisfied with teachers.*

T3 justified the situation as follows:

*T3: A teacher should ask what he teaches in the class. According to the majority of the teachers, it is useful to ask questions similar to the LYS-5 English test.*

The qualitative analysis of the interview also revealed that for the majority of the informants (63%), the LYS-5 English test was not an appropriate test to assess learners' English ability properly. According to the teachers, the untested skill of speaking was especially reported as the greatest deficiency of the LYS-5 English test. T23 stated that:

*T23: I do not think the LYS-5 English test assesses the learners' English ability properly because it does not contribute to the most vital part of a language speaking skill.*

The last theme that emerged from the qualitative analysis of the interviews was *the necessity of the LYS-5 English test*. For (92%) of the participants, the LYS-5 English test was essential to enter the university, while 12 informants (50%) believed that the test was required to select students. For example, T16 noted that:

*T16: I certainly believe that the LYS-5 English test is required to select the students for universities. Since it is not possible for all students to enter the university, this test is required to enter the universities in our country.*

Although the participants accepted that there was a need for a test to enter university for candidates, they also emphasized that the test needed to be revised in recognition of missing skills of speaking, listening, and writing. For instance, T19 claimed that:

*T19: Knowing a language is not just based on vocabulary, grammar, and reading. Listening, speaking, and writing skills should be integrated into the test as soon as possible.*

The qualitative results of the study revealed that the LYS-5 English test dominated what to teach and how to teach in high school language preparation classes. Furthermore, the teachers needed to adopt their in-class tests in line with the test and do test-like classroom activities.

#### **4. Discussion and Conclusion**

Results obtained from the quantitative and qualitative findings of the current research inquiry suggest that the LYS-5 English test caused a significant amount of negative washback on teachers of the test preparation. These results confirmed that a test considerably affects what to teach (Hayes & Read, 2004). Another important finding was that the teachers expressed that they would prefer to teach communicative skills instead of teaching inefficient test content based merely on grammar, vocabulary, and reading skills. Results also revealed that the students' demands to pass the examination significantly influenced teachers' teaching methodology. The teachers needed to skip the communicative language skills promoted by the English language curriculum and had to merely focus on teaching for the test, and these findings are consistent with the results of Çakır's (2017) previous study.

Another result that emerged from the findings of the study was that the teachers adopted examination-oriented instruction in high schools' language preparation classes. It can be concluded that such kind of methodology carried out in language classes produced harmful influences on teaching activities as the teachers did not utilize any authentic or practical language activities, but taught isolated exam content items instead. Although the teachers

adopted their teaching methodology according to the LYS-5 English test, this influence was not the same for all teachers, as Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) stated that the influence of tests may not be stable and might differ from one teacher to another.

Furthermore, the test content of the LYS-5 English test promoted the use of exam-driven materials instead of communicative textbooks of English in language preparation classes. Both the teachers and learners had to skip them, even ignore them completely. Furthermore, they had to concentrate mostly on commercial test preparation materials. It was deduced that teachers rarely used authentic materials or communicative tasks to improve language abilities in the test preparation classes. This finding supported the assumption that the LYS-5 English test produced a significant amount of harmful influences considering the teaching materials.

When scrutinizing the quantitative and qualitative results of the present study in regards to exploring the teachers' attitudes toward the test, it was found that although the teachers did not believe that the test was an appropriate testing tool to assess the students' language ability appropriately, some of them indicated that they enjoyed teaching at the language preparation classes. On the one hand, despite the fact that the teachers expressed that they did not find their teaching method ideal, the examination's negative washback effect forced them to teach for the test. On the other hand, it seemed that some of the teachers would not be willing to change their fixed methodology.

The qualitative data also revealed that the participating teachers believed a test was necessary to assess students, although they strongly believed that the missing skills needed to be integrated in order to test basic language skills properly. In addition, the teachers expressed that they felt uncomfortable while teaching the LYS-5 English test preparation classes. The findings of this study added further evidence to the findings of the previous studies (Cheng, 1999; Çelik, 2017; Ferman, 2004; Kılıçkaya, 2016), indicating the negative washback effect of the tests on teaching methodology as the test content limited the teachers to merely the tested skills and it caused harmful influence on their teaching.

Lastly, another point emphasized by the teachers taking part in the present study is that they strongly believe that the test should be redesigned and particularly the essential language skills should be integrated into the test so as to achieve the desired language teaching in Türkiye and to fulfill the students' needs at tertiary level. In a similar vein, Polat (2017) highlighted the importance of including communicative language skills to facilitate academicians' language needs in Turkey. Based on the views of the participants in the present study, it can be remarked that the inadequate and old-fashioned large-scale language tests in Türkiye need to be revised along with the lines of the well-developed worldwide large-scale language tests such as TOEFL, IELTS, the Michigan English Test (MET), so forth.

It can be concluded that the findings related to the teachers' attitudes towards the LYS-5 English test indicate that the teachers have both positive and negative feelings towards the test. However, negative feelings are more emphasized. Although most of the international high-stakes language tests aim for positive washback, most of the teachers in Türkiye seem to be struggling with limited tested skills, which causes mostly negative washback effects. Therefore, all stakeholders need to take responsibility for providing the desired language testing system to improve language testing and foster the language proficiency level in Türkiye.

However, this study has some limitations. This study was conducted with a limited number of participants. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized. Multi-faceted and longitudinal

research design might be utilized in order to understand the nature of the washback over time.

### Note on Ethical Issues

The authors confirm that the study does not need ethics committee approval according to the research integrity rules in their country (Date of Confirmation: 18/08/2021).

### References

- Alderson, J. C., & Banerjee, J. (2002). Language testing and assessment. *Language Teaching*, 35(2), 79–113. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444802001751>
- Alderson, J. C., & Hamp-Lyons, L. (1996). TOEFL preparation courses: A study of washback. *Language Testing*, 13(3), 280–297. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026553229601300304>
- Alderson, J. C., & Wall, D. (1993). Does washback exist? *Applied Linguistics*, 14(2), 115–129. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/14.2.115>
- Bachman, L. F., & Palmer, A. S. (1996). *Language testing in practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Biggs, J. (1995). Assessing for learning: some dimensions underlying new approaches to educational assessment. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 41(1), 1–17.
- Canlı, B. (2010) *The impact of changes in the TOEFL iBT on instructors who teach TOEFL preparation courses in Turkey* (Unpublished Master's thesis). Minnesota State University, Mankato, Minnesota.
- Cheng, L. (1999). Changing assessment: Washback on teacher perceptions and actions. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 15(3), 253–271. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(98\)00046-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(98)00046-8)
- Cheng, L., Sun, Y., & Ma, J. (2015) Review of washback research literature within Kane's argument-based validation framework. *Language Teaching*, 48(4), 436–470. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444815000233>
- Cinkara, E., & Tosun, Ö. (2017). Face validity study of a small-scale test in a tertiary level intensive EFL program. *Bartın University Journal of Faculty of Education*, 6(2), 395–410. <https://doi.org/10.14686/buefad.281870>
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education*. London: Routledge.
- Curtis, A., & Cheng, L. (2004). Washback or backwash: A review of the impact of testing on teaching and learning. In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe, & A. Curtis (Eds.), *Washback in language testing: Research contexts and methods* (pp. 25–40). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Çakır, İ. (2017). The washback effects of secondary education placement examination on teachers, school administrators and parents with specific reference to teaching English as a foreign language. *Turkish Journal of Teacher Education* 6(2), 62–73.
- Çelik, Ö. (2017). *Turkish EFL teachers' perceptions regarding washback effects of the English language section of TEOG exam on their instructional planning and practices*. Retrieved from National Thesis Center. (471000)
- Dağtan, E. (2012). *An examination on the Washback effect of the Interuniversity Board Foreign Language Test*. Retrieved from National Thesis Center. (357644)
- Davies, A., Brown, A., Elder, C., Hill, K., Lumley, T. & McNamara, T. (1999). *Dictionary of language testing. Studies in language testing Vol.7*. Cambridge University Press.

- Dong, M., Fan, J., & Xu, J. (2021). Differential washback effects of a high-stakes test on students' English learning process: Evidence from a large-scale stratified survey in China. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2021.1918057>
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Taguchi, N. (2010). *Questionnaires in second language research: Construction, administration, and processing* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Ferman, I. (2004). The washback of an EFL national oral matriculation. In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe, & A. Curtis (Eds.), *Washback in language testing: Research contexts and methods* (pp. 191–210). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hatipoğlu, Ç. (2016). The impact of the university entrance exam on EFL education in Turkey: Pre-service English language teachers' perspective. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 232, 136–144. <https://doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.10.038>
- Hayes, B., & Read, J. (2004). IELTS test preparation in New Zealand: Preparing students for the IELTS academic module. In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe, & A. Curtis (Eds.), *Washback in language testing: Research contexts and methods* (pp. 97–111). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hughes, A. (1989). *Testing for language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hwang, H. J. (2003). *The impact of high-stakes exams on teachers and students: A washback study of the university entrance exam at the secondary school level in South Korea*. Retrieved from McGill University's Institutional Digital Repository.
- Karabulut, A. (2007). *Micro level impacts of foreign language test (university entrance examination) in Turkey: A washback study*. Retrieved from Iowa State University Digital Repository. <https://doi.org/10.31274/rtd-180813-16032>
- Kılıçkaya, F. (2016). Washback effects of a high-stakes exam on lower secondary school English teachers' practices in the classroom. *Lublin Studies in Modern Languages and Literature*. 40(1), 116–134. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17951/lsmll.2016.40.1.116>
- Külekcı, E. (2016). A concise analysis of the foreign language examination (YDS) in Turkey and its possible washback effects. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching*, 3(4), 303–315.
- Loumbourdi, L. (2014). *The power and impact of standardised tests: Investigating the washback of language exams in Greece*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH.
- Ma, H., & Chong, S. W. (2022). Predictability of IELTS in a high-stakes context: a mixed methods study of Chinese students' perspectives on test preparation. *Language Testing in Asia*, 12(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org.10.1186/s40468-021-00152-3>
- Mayring, P. (2004). Qualitative content analysis. In U. Flick, E. Von Kadorff, & I. Steinke (Eds.), *A companion to qualitative research*, (pp. 266–270). London: Sage.
- Nunan, D. (1992). *Research methods in language learning*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Nguyen, H. T. T. (2019). A literature review of washback effects of assessment on language learning. *Journal of Science Ho Chi Minh City Open University Social Sciences*, 9(2), 3–16. <https://doi.org/10.46223/HCMCOUJS.soci.en.9.2.257.2019>
- Özmen, K. S. (2011a). Washback effects of the inter-university foreign language examination on foreign language competences of candidate academics. *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)*, 5(2), 215–228.
- Özmen, K. S. (2011b). Analyzing washback effect of SEPPPO on prospective English teachers. *The Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 7(2), 24–52.
- Polat, M. (2017). *Attitudes of academicians towards the content and washback effect of foreign language placement exam (YDS)*. Retrieved from National Thesis Center. (469676)

- Polat, M. (2019). Washback effect of Turkish foreign language proficiency exam YDS: A scale development study. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 15(4), 1252–1268. <https://doi.org/10.17263/jlls.668404>
- Prodromou, L. (1995). The backwash effect: From testing to teaching. *ELT Journal*, 49(1), 13–25. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/49.1.13>
- Qi, L. (2004). Has a high-stakes test produced the intended changes? In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe, & A. Curtis (Eds.), *Washback in language testing: Research contexts and methods* (pp. 171–190). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Saif, S. (2006). Aiming for positive washback: A case study of international teaching assistants. *Language Testing* 23(1), 1–34. <https://doi.org/10.1191/0265532206lt322oa>
- Sayın, B. A., & Aslan, M. M. (2016). The negative effects of undergraduate placement examination of English (LYS-5) on ELT students in Turkey. *Participatory Educational Research*, 3(1), 30–39. <https://doi.org/10.17275/per.16.02.3.1>
- Sevimli, S. E. (2007). *The washback effects of foreign language component of the university entrance examination on the teaching and learning context of English language groups in secondary education: A case study*. Retrieved from National Thesis Center. (219813)
- Shohamy, E. (1993). *The power of tests: The impact of language tests on teaching and learning*. NFLC Occasional Papers.
- Spolsky, B. (1994). The examination-classroom backwash cycle: Some historical cases. In R. Berry, V. Berry, & D. Nunan (Eds.), *Bringing about change in language education* (pp. 55–66). Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong.
- Takagi, A. (2010). *A critical analysis of English language entrance examinations at Japanese universities*. Retrieved from University of Exeter Repository. <http://hdl.handle.net/10036/117893>
- Taylor, L. (2005). Washback and impact. *ELT Journal*, 59(2), 154–155. <https://doi.org/10.1093/eltj/ccj030>
- Thu, D. M. (2020). Washback of an English achievement test on teachers' perceptions at a Vietnamese university. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, 36(3), 178–194. <https://doi.org/10.25073/2525-2445/vnufs.4564>
- Tsagari, D. (2011). Washback of a high-stakes English exam on teachers' perceptions and practices. *Selected papers on theoretical and applied linguistics*, 19, 431–445.
- Tsang, C. L., & Isaacs, T. (2022). Hong Kong secondary students' perspectives on selecting test difficulty level and learner washback: Effects of a graded approach to assessment. *Language Testing*, 39(2), 212–238. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02655322211050600>
- Wall, D. (2005). *The impact of high-stakes examinations on classroom teaching: A case study using insights from testing and innovation theory*. *Studies in language testing: Volume 22*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wall, D., & Alderson, J. C. (1993). Examining washback: The Sri Lankan impact study. *Language Testing*, 10(1), 41–69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026553229301000103>
- Wall, D., & Horák, T. (2006). *The impact of changes in the TOEFL examination on teaching and learning in Central and Eastern Europe: Phase 1, The baseline study*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
- Wall, D., & Horák, T. (2008). *The impact of changes in the TOEFL examination on teaching and learning in Central and Eastern Europe: Phase 2, coping with change*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
- Wallen, N. E., & Fraenkel, J. R. (2001). *Educational research: A guide to the process*. (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Yavuzer, H., & Göver, İ. (2012). The foreign language level of academic staff and their attitudes toward foreign language exams: Nevşehir University case. *Nevşehir University Journal of Social Sciences*, 1(2), 136–158.
- Yeşilyurt, S. (2016). An attempt for the exploration of academicians' experiences of the standard foreign language tests held in Turkey through metaphors. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 5(2), 263–274. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v5n2p263>
- Yıldırım, A., & Şimşek, H. (2011). *Sosyal bilimlerde nitel araştırma yöntemleri*. Ankara: Seçkin Yayınları.
- Yıldırım, Ö. (2010). Washback effects of a high-stakes university entrance exam: Effects of the English section of the university entrance exam on future English language teachers in Turkey. *The Asian EFL Journal Quarterly*, 12(2), 92–116.