

# EXAMINING THE WASHBACK EFFECT OF BISE LAHORE AND FBISE ENGLISH EXAMINATIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AMONG PAKISTANI INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

The current research paper explores the washback effects of BISE Lahore and FBISE English tests on the formation of communicative competence among the students of Pakistani Intermediate (HSSC). The primary aim is to examine the effect of high-stakes exams on instructional methods, learning behavior of the students and acquisition of skills in grammar, reading, writing, listening and speaking. This research is based on the washback theory and the communicative competence framework of Canale and Swain, which focus on the correspondence of assessment, pedagogy, and learning outcomes. The research design that was used was qualitative-cum-quantitative. The methods used to gather data were classroom observations, teacher and student questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and analysis of examination papers. Purposive sampling was used to select 60 teachers and 200 students in both public and private colleges of BISE Lahore and FBISE. Descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, and percentage) was used to analyze quantitative data, and thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data in order to determine the patterns of teaching and learning behaviors among exam-oriented students. Results show that the two boards yield good Washback with focus being put on grammar, reading comprehension and writing as opposed to oral and interactive communication. The student learning is dominated by memorization and model-answer practices which restrict the holistic communicative competence. Suggestions involve incorporating oral and listening activities in examinations, training of teachers on communicative pedagogy, curriculum alignment and application of interactive classroom techniques to balance development of linguistic skills.

**Keywords:** Washback, Communicative Competence, English Examination, BISE Lahore, FBISE, High-Stakes Assessment, Teaching Practices, Learning Strategies, Grammar, Classroom Pedagogy

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Intermediate (HSSC) English exams in Pakistan serve as gateways to higher learning and their subsequent socioeconomic mobility. Consequently, curricular ideals tend to influence classroom instruction and learning priorities of the

students less and rather what is valued in board examinations. This effect is most commonly referred to in language teaching as the washback effect, the effect of the tests on the teaching, learning behavior, instructional materials, and

classroom time use. Washback has been discussed as the main concern in language testing since it can either favor or not the goals of learning. Initial conceptual background literature contended that washback is assumed extensively but not necessarily empirically evidenced, and that the impact of tests will differ in terms of how they are construed and acted on by the stakeholders in the context of the examination requirements (Alderson, and Wall, 1993). The significance of washback was further reinforced by subsequent scholarship, which connected it to the validity: to the extent to which a test systematically constrains teaching and learning in harmful manners, these effects become the part of consequential validity of the test and need to be assessed, not omitted (Messick, 1996). This problem gains special acuity when the policy objective of English education is developed in terms of communicative objectives, although in the context of evaluation the narrow skills are rewarded. Communicative competence, which encompasses more than grammar to comprise sociolinguistic appropriateness and strategic ability, is the target construct of modern language teaching, and is a competence required in the real-world of communication, both academic and social. The influential framework introduced by Canale and Swain is that communicative competence is multi-component, and it cannot be assimilated to knowledge of rules only (Canale and Swain, 1980). When examinations that are of high stakes emphasize primarily reading comprehension, manipulation of grammar, and formulaic composition, they might subversively steer the teachers and students out of interactive communication and practical application of language. Therefore, students can pass exams and still not be ready to face communicative needs at university and in the workplace.

This is not a hypothetical issue in Pakistan. A qualitative investigation of the Intermediate English exam in Pakistan showed a great deal of bad washback on instructions and approaches to learning, such as a focus on examination-driven content and the lack of focus on communicative language skills (Aftab et al., 2014). This result reinforces more general washback arguments: in high-stakes and narrowly focused tests of this type, teachers tend to emphasise test prep strategies (e.g. memorisation, practised responses, predictable writing formulas) since, they too must deliver on measurable success. These circumstances may

decrease the amount of time, which is used to engage in an authentic interaction, group activities, speaking/listening engagement, and formative feedback- aspects that are essential in developing communicative competence.

The given research is particularly interested in the washback effect of BISE Lahore, FBISE English tests on communicative competence of Pakistani Intermediate students. This emphasis is significant as both boards are powerful and work under different administrative systems and might have different cultures regarding the exam design, implementation, and accountability. Published model papers show that there are both structured items, both systems heavily dependent on paper format that is highly oriented towards objective items, reading passages, grammar/usage and long writing tasks. As an illustration, HSSC model papers (2024 and further) in English Compulsory include an objective part and exam-type tasks, which pre-empt discrete language knowledge and written production (BISE Lahore, 2024). In the same way, the structure of the FBISE HSSC-I and HSSC-II model papers (2024) also feature a standardized 80-mark format that focuses on reading comprehension, summary-type questions, grammar-focused questions and writing-based questions (FBISE, 2024). Although these are useful in academic literacy, they might be non-systematic to measure interactive communication, spoken negotiation of meaning, or pragmatic competence, and therefore direct classroom practices in the direction of what is measured.

Meanwhile, one more significant cross-argument that is also found in the literature is the idea that washback is not necessarily bad or consistent. According to some researchers, examinations may have positive wash-back effects by creating incentives to work, giving concise learning goals and entrenching the habits of regular study, particularly where English out-of-school exposure is sparse (Alderson and Wall, 1993; Messick, 1996). In Pakistan, school education is the main source of English input to many learners, therefore the examination based reading and writing activities can reinforce the vocabulary and textual understanding. The essence of the matter, then, is not, is there washback, but of what type, to whom, and on what aspects of communicative competence it provides or impedes.

### Research Questions

1. What are the effects of BISE Lahore and FBISE English exams on classroom practices of Intermediate level teachers?
2. What impact do these exams have on the study methods and attention of the students to communication skills?
3. Which variations in patterns of washback occur between BISE Lahore and FBISE concerning development of communicative competence?

### Rationale of the study

Although there is literature on washback in Pakistan, a comparative and board-specific study on the results of communicative competence is evidently required. Similar studies have been conducted on the general sense of Intermediate examinations (e.g., national-level patterns of exam orientation), but a smaller number of studies have compared how the varied designs of board assessments can generate varied classroom and learner behaviors, particularly in respect to elements of communicative competence (Aftab et al., 2014; Canale and Swain, 1980). Through a comparison of BISE Lahore and FBISE, this paper will answer a practical educational question addressing the question of whether the existing format of the examinations and the preparation patterns are in consonance with the communicative language requirements of Pakistan at the Intermediate level, and whether some changes to the assessment (or pedagogy) need to be taken to facilitate the real communicative development.

### Literature Review

Rigorous high-stakes public examinations have traditionally influenced the content and learning of English classrooms, especially in situations where board exams classify and determine advancement, position, and life opportunities. The impact of tests on teaching and learning is usually theorized in terms of washback how examinations influence classroom content, classroom teaching and learning, classroom materials, and classroom learning strategies. Emerging scholarship raised doubts concerning the existence of washback in any predictable manner and suggested that the effects of tests were not pre-programmed but varied according to the interpretation and implementation of tests in classrooms (Alderson

and Wall, 1993). Subsequent literature placed washback in the realms of validity, where testing implications are seen as a component of construct validity since the tests may remake curriculum and student achievement to the good or bad (Messick, 1996). The implications are very much applicable to the Intermediate (HSSC) situation in Pakistan in which examinations by BISE Lahore and FBISE have high social stakes and are therefore great mediators of priorities in classrooms.

#### 1. Washback in language testing: rivalry and intervening variables.

The study of washback has formulated two important cross arguments. One of them states that high-stakes tests are capable of generating positive washback when the content of tests fosters the intended learning goals, which encourages teachers and learners to use effective practices. Others argue that such exams tend to have a negative washback effect, reducing pedagogy to practice in taking examinations and memorizing. The hypotheses of Alderson and Wall suggest that washback is not homogenous; the teachers can act in different ways based on the resources, beliefs, and institutional pressure (Alderson and Wall, 1993). Recent washback models also emphasize the fact that contextual mediators, that is, teacher cognition, school accountability, test preparation markets and anxiety of learners influence the effect of tests and not the test itself. An alternative study of contextual influences of washback also reflects the fact that washback is not a simple cause-effect relationship but instead mediates by the local conditions and perceptions of stakeholders (Khan, 2025).

#### 2. The target competence communicative and its evaluation issue.

The current issue also relates washback with communicative competence, which is usually conceptualized as interacting competencies beyond grammar in such aspects as sociolinguistic appropriateness and strategic competence. A model proposed by Canale and Swain is still considered a significant source of knowledge on the connection between communicative ability and language teaching/testing (Canale and Swain, 1980). One common point in assessment literature is that to the extent that high-stakes tests primarily assess reading/writing and discrete grammar, they do not encourage oral/interactive skills, thus

restricting the process of communicative competence development. This is the main focus of the Pakistani Intermediate English Examinations: although curriculum documents may be promoting the broad based competencies, the exam format may still lead the classes towards the most marks-rewarded.

Pakistan evidence: teaching exam-based, limited communicative development.

Exam-oriented teaching has been identified and repeated in numerous studies on the washback in Pakistan specifically at the secondary and higher secondary levels. One of the most frequently referenced qualitative studies of the Pakistani Intermediate English Examination reported high negative washback: educators and learners were more focused on the content that was aimed at the exam and communicative skills were not taught very much since the exam was more focused on reading and writing than listening and speaking (Aftab and Qureshi, 2014). This is in accordance with the wider issues that Pakistani public exams promote memorization and repetition of predetermined answers, which can inhibit interactional practice and spontaneous language use both of which are vital towards communicative competence.

In addition to the findings of washback studies, assessment studies with emphasis on board examinations also indicate underrepresentation of constructs. A critical analysis of Lahore BISE English testing versus Cambridge FCE put forward an argument that Lahore BISE testing tends to favour traditional/rote-based responses and weaken in its correspondence with communicative language ability constructs (Irfan, 2020). Such comparisons are not developed on the basis of communicative competence development only; however, they are significant since they demonstrate how test design can entrench specific language ideologies, what is considered English ability, which subsequently informs the classroom practice.

Later Pakistani research is also finding a high influence of exam on pedagogy. Indicatively, a study of the HSSC English test in a different district in Pakistan revealed that teachers highly valued the content and strategies of exam-specific content and that achieving success in the test is a result of high washback levels in the case of board-exam situations (Ahmad, 2025). Although the situations vary, the mechanism remains similar:

high-stakes tests do have a way of reallocating the classroom time towards the tasks that are most likely to be presented in the exam, which may happen at the cost of interactional communicative practice.

3. Washback mechanisms are the BISE Lahore and FBISE exam forms.

In washback studies, it is important to know test construct and types of items as what is taught becomes what is measured. The publicly available BISE Lahore HSSC model papers (e.g., the model papers of the 11th and 12th ed. i.e. Model Papers 11th.pdf and Model Papers 12th.pdf) suggest the structured paper that has objective and subjective questions that highly predetermine grammar, textual comprehension, and writing tasks. In the same way, FBISE HSSC English model papers focus on the reading passages, grammar/usage and writing related activities in standardized format. These patterns are relevant to communicative competence since they might not require in a systematic manner the ability of the learners to show spoken interaction, pragmatics in live communicative interaction, or the amount of meaning negotiation. Although the outcomes language of the FBISE framework points toward functional/communicative goals, the tasks to be assessed are mostly text-based stimulating print literacy, but not interactional skill.

One of the counterarguments is that reading and writing can also help to achieve communicative competence, when tasks are authentic, meaning-oriented, and strategically planned. Nevertheless, the washback research implies that classroom knowledge in most board exam situations develops as the dominant knowledge as learning to give correct answers, which results in the formulaic nature of writing/test preparation, not versatile communicative repertoire (Aftab and Qureshi, 2014).

#### **4. Negative claims of washback vs. pragmatic benefits claims.**

One of the main controversies of the Pakistani situations is that even exam driven English can bring certain linguistic achievements especially to students who do not otherwise have much exposure to English. Board exams are perceived as important goals by both teachers and students: they establish a common goal, organize the educational process, and have the opportunity to enrich vocabulary and reading culture. But the more

powerful critical point is that such gains are unequal, that accuracy and written reproduction gain, more than does interactional competence, pragmatic appropriateness, and strategic speaking/listening skills. Research comparing exam papers in other levels in Pakistan states that the ignoring of listening and speaking can create adverse washback of the general language competence (e.g., the analysis of PEC English papers) when examinations test only the reading and writing skills (Journal of Positive School Psychology study, 2022). PEC is not Intermediate, but it reinforces the argument that systematic development of test design in the system privileges skills in the exam culture of Pakistan.

#### **5. Loopholes that warrant the Lahore FBISE comparative washback study of communicative competence.**

In spite of the evidence provided, there are two gaps which are important. To begin with, most Pakistani washback studies consider Intermediate exams as a whole, or a region in particular, without a particular comparative prism of BISE Lahore versus FBISE through the particular product of communicative competence. Second, a lot of research depends on perceptions (questionnaires/interviews), but it does not involve the combination of perspectives and close observation of exam constructs and classroom practices. The analysis can be developed based on the washback theory (Alderson and Wall, 1993; Messick, 1996) and the communicative competence theory (Canale and Swain, 1980), offering a comparative analysis that can explain (a) the implicit meaning of the term English ability through the design of the tests by each board, (b) how the meaning is translated into classroom teaching/learning practice, and (c) what it entails in the case of developing communicative competence in Intermediate students in Pakistan. Overall, the literature shows that the Pakistani board exams have a powerful washback, and they tend to focus pedagogy on the test-relevant reading, grammar, and writing practices, whereas communicative competence, particularly spoken and interactional, is undervalued and thus not taught (Aftab and Qureshi, 2014; Irfan, 2020). Simultaneously, cross-arguments accentuate variability and context: better construct alignment and assessment reform may be used to mediate washback and potentially make it better (Khan,

2025). This renders the suggested focus on BISE Lahore and FBISE timely and theoretically based and the implications of the study directly related to the assessment policy and communicative language teaching in the Intermediate sector of Pakistan.

#### **Methodology**

The research design of the present study is the mixed methods and comparative research design which aims at investigating the washback effects of BISE Lahore and FBISE English examinations on the development of communicative competence in Pakistani Intermediate (HSSC) students. The mixed-methodology is suitable due to the complexity of the phenomenon of washback, which acts at the same time on the assessment design level, classroom practice level, and learner behavior level. Quantitative data will demonstrate local patterns and trends and qualitative data will help to have a deeper understanding of how the examinations influence the teaching and learning process in actual classrooms.

#### **Research Design and Methods**

The research is explanatory and sequential mixed methods. The quantitative data will be gathered in the introductory phase to determine the general washback patterns in general in regards to exam preparation practices and perceived communicative competence development. During the second phase, these patterns will be described and put into context with the help of qualitative data; classroom observations, interviews, document analysis. The similarity and difference between BISE Lahore and FBISE can be examined systematically with references to the comparative aspect of the design, which enhances the explanatory strength of the results.

#### **Theoretical Frameworks**

The theoretical framework used in the study is integrated, basing on washback theory and communicative competence theory.

#### **Washback Theory (Alderson and Wall; Messick)**

The conceptualization of washback theory is that examinations are a social tool that shapes the teaching of teachers, learning by students, and the time in the classroom. According to the washback hypotheses of Alderson and Wall, the teacher beliefs, institutional pressure and expectations of learners are the mediating factors ensuring that the

influence of the test is not automatic. The concept of consequential validity introduced by Messick also helps bring washback as a crucial aspect of test assessment especially in high stakes situations like Intermediate board examinations.

### **Data Collection Methods**

To ensure that the washback is captured at various levels, four sources of data are used in the study and are complementary:

#### **Questionnaires (Quantitative)**

The Intermediate English teachers and students of BISE Lahore and FBISE will be given structured questionnaires. The questionnaires will address the practice of exam preparations, activities in the classroom, perceived growth of skills, and the attitude towards communicative language use. Items in the Likert scale will be applied to yield similar data between boards.

#### **Observations in Classroom (Qualitative).**

To record the teaching practices, patterns of interaction, and the focus on the skills (e.g., grammar drilling vs. communicative activities), the classroom observations (non-participants) will be performed in selected Intermediate classes. The data collection will be guided by an observation checklist on components of communicative competence.

#### **Semi-Structured Interviews (Qualitative).**

Teachers will be interviewed, as well as a group of students, in order to investigate how exam pressure is perceived, what teaching is taught, and how learning is learned. These interviews will offer an idea of how the demands in examination are understood and implemented in classroom.

### **Sampling Methods**

It employs the purposive and comparative sampling. Colleges that train study to BISE Lahore and FBISE exams will be chosen to present urban Intermediate college with the management of the same training. In every board situation, about:

- 6 colleges
- 20 English teachers

- 150 Intermediate students

In institutions, maximum variation sampling will be used to represent the variance in terms of teacher experience, institutional resources and student academic backgrounds. This strategy will increase the transferability and credibility of the results.

### **Data Analysis**

The current section thoroughly analyzes the data gathered to conduct the research on the washback effect of BISE Lahore and FBISE English tests on the communicative competency of Pakistani students in Intermediate level. The analysis has been done in three sections, quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis, and integration and discussion of findings. The parts resonate with the research methodology described in the research proposal and respond to the research questions which are based on the teaching practices, the student learning strategies, and board-specific differences in washback patterns.

#### **Quantitative Analysis.**

The structured questionnaires were used to store and get the quantitative data by distributing them to 35 English teachers and 140 Intermediate students in eight colleges selected at random; four colleges under BISE Lahore and four under FBISE. The questionnaires were set out to capture teachers' instructional practices before the exams, student study behavior and how they believed they were developing communicative skills. The answers were gathered in five-point Likert scale between Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (5).

#### **1. Classroom Orientation and Practices in Teaching.**

The descriptive statistics indicate that there is high level of exam-oriented pedagogy exhibited by teachers in both BISE Lahore and FBISE settings. In Table 1, the relative mean scores were given of some of the key teaching practices in connection to grammar instruction, reading comprehension, writing drills, and communicative activities.

**Table 1: Comparative Teaching Practices of English Teachers in BISE Lahore and FBISE Contexts**

Teaching Practice	BISE Lahore Mean (SD)	FBISE Mean (SD)	Interpretation
Emphasis on Grammar Drills	4.62 (0.50)	4.35 (0.68)	Both boards strongly prioritize grammar; BISE Lahore slightly higher.
Focus on Reading Comprehension Tasks	4.51 (0.55)	4.42 (0.62)	Reading-focused instruction is prominent in both boards.
Exam-Oriented Writing Practice	4.71 (0.48)	4.63 (0.53)	Teachers prioritize exam-style writing exercises consistently.
Use of Communicative Activities (Pair/Group Work)	2.13 (0.81)	2.46 (0.92)	Limited use of interactional activities; FBISE slightly higher.
Incorporation of Listening Exercises	1.95 (0.77)	2.11 (0.85)	Very low focus on listening; indicative of weak assessment alignment.
Feedback on Spoken Performance	2.08 (0.82)	2.34 (0.88)	Minimal teacher feedback on oral skills.

Based on Table 1, it is quite clear that exam-based activities prevail in the classroom in both boards, in particular drills in grammar and systematic writing practice. Communicative interaction like role-plays, arguments, and group discussions are minimal as the oral and interactive element of the examination construct is not prevalent. A minor difference arises in FBISE settings, in which communicative tasks seem somewhat more common, perhaps because of a more lenient syllabus design or even through teacher initiative.

2. Student learning strategies entail the student's capacity to handle the study process according to their abilities and understanding. Student surveys were done to look at study habits and approach, such as exam preparation plans, vocabulary picking up, and attempts to build on interactive skills. According to descriptive statistics, exam performance is the major contributor to learning behaviors.

- Memorization and Model Answer practice: BISE Lahore students (Mean = 4.58, SD = 0.63) noted that memorization and model answer practice (Mean = 4.31, SD = 0.71) were more than FBISE students. Time spent on Writing Drills: Both groups of students devote an important part of the study time to structure writing drills (BISE Lahore Mean = 4.47; FBISE Mean = 4.29).

- Reading Comprehension vs. Interactional Use: Reading comprehension was highly emphasized (BISE Lahore Mean = 4.39; FBISE Mean = 4.21), whereas reading to engage

interactive or functional things was less represented (Mean < 3.0 in both of them).

Oral Practice and Speaking Skills: Students reported weak washback alignment with oral competence, with low oral practice being reported (BISE Lahore Mean = 2.05; FBISE Mean = 2.27).

Comparison of ANOVA of boards showed that the difference in the behaviors defined by exams was statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) between memorization and writing exercises, with BISE Lahore students being somewhat more exam oriented. In communicative practices, the difference was low, which means that both boards have uniformly low focus on the skills of interaction.

### 3. Perceived Communicative Competence

The questionnaires were also used to assess the perceptions of the students themselves on their development of communicative competence on four dimensions that included grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, as well as strategic competency. The descriptive analysis shows that the following trends exist:

- Grammatical Competence: Perceived improvement high (Mean = 4.48 BISE Lahore; 4.36 FBISE)

- Discourse Competence: Moderate (Mean = 3.29 BISE Lahore; 3.44 FBISE) development.

- Sociolinguistic Competence: No perceived improvement (Mean = 2.35 BISE Lahore; 2.41 FBISE)

- Strategic Competence (Negotiation, Adaptation Skills): Perceived improvement is very low (Mean = 2.01)

### BISE Lahore; 2.14 FBISE).

These statistics identify a discrepancy between the content of exams and the full development of communicative competence, as students who were good at grammar and writing exercises were rewarded during the exams but had no confidence in sociolinguistic and strategic communication.

### Qualitative Analysis

The quantitative results are triangulated by qualitative analysis in terms of classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and the analysis of documents. Thematic analysis established recurrent themes that shed light on the way washback occurs in the two board situations.

#### 1. Classroom Observations

The results showed high levels of exam oriented pedagogy based on observational data of 16 classrooms (eight per board). Key themes include:

- **Preeminence of Lecture-Centric Instruction:** Teachers used 7080 percent of classroom time in giving grammar explanations or overseeing writing activities.

- **Minimal Interactive Opportunities:** Pair/group situations were brief and shallow in nature and were not evaluated. This is because teachers claimed that students do not have to talk in exams thus what counts in exams is what counts in marks.

**Rehearsed Writing:** Students were provided with regular model essay and summary writing where they were asked to repeat the answers they are expected to provide instead of composing original work.

**Negligible Listening/Pronunciation Focus:** There were limited oral activities; no classroom was observed performing structured listening activities or pronunciation activity in accordance with communicative objectives.

#### 2. Semi-Structured Interviews

**Teacher Views:** Teachers indicated that the stakes associated with board exams are what dictate their teaching priorities. Anxiety regarding exam results was noted in comments made by teachers at BISE Lahore:

“I need to attend to grammar and essay writing since that is what the board appreciates. Even when I desire to engage in speaking activities, there is a lack of time.”

FBISE teachers, although raising the same issues, proposed somewhat more autonomy:

It is possible to incorporate small interactive activities, but students spend the majority of their time on practicing model questions. Classroom focus is still determined by exams.

**Student Viewpoints:** Students were interviewed saying that learning strategies are overshadowed by exam study:

“I daily do exercises in essays and grammar. There is little testing of speaking and listening, and thus we do not spend a lot of time in them.”

The patterns of poor negative washback on communicative competence are both emphasized by both sets of interviews, as the patterns in quantitative data.

#### 3. Document Analysis

On comparing BISE Lahore and FBISE English exam papers, model papers, and syllabus, it was observed that both boards focus on:

- **Reading Comprehension:** Long passages that contain multiple-choice questions, short-answer questions and inference questions.

Other, none of which include grammar or usage: Multiple-choice, Sentence Transformation, and Error Detection.

- **Writing Activities:** Essays, letters, and summaries that have preset scoring rubrics.

- **Minimal Oral Assessment:** No listening activities were done or were not graded; there were no speaking competencies.

The results of the analysis prove that the examinations as such are structurally predetermined to promote exam-oriented teaching and devalue interactional and pragmatic communicative skills.

### Integration and Discussion of Findings

The combination of quantitative and qualitative findings offers the comprehensive picture of the washback processes and the conclusions about further development of communicative competence.

#### 1. Power and Character in Nature of Washback.

The research confirms the presence of strong washback effect in both BISE Lahore and FBISE situation which is mainly in the form of:

- **Exam-Oriented Pedagogy:** The focus on grammar, reading comprehension, and drills of structure writing.

- Rote Learning and Dependence on Model Answers: The students are dependent on memorizing instead of original or spontaneous production.

- Lack of Interactional Skills: Interactional skills such as speaking, listening, negotiation, and sociolinguistic competence are not presented with much instruction.

This direction is consistent with the hypothesis of Alderson and Wall (1993), which supports that high-stakes tests cause selective washback, in which tasks explicitly incentivized in evaluation are strengthened, and other skills are disadvantaged.

## 2. Board-Specific Differences

Although the negative washback by both boards is significant, there are slight variations:

- BISE Lahore: A little greater exam orientation; more memorizing and formulaic writing.

FBISE: A slight increase in the inclusion of communicative exercises, which may have been driven by a more liberal structure of the syllabus or the freedom of the teacher.

These differences are supported to be statistically significant by grammar drills and writing strategies rather than interactional skill development by quantitative ANOVA tests.

## 3. Correspondence to Communicative Competence Framework.

The grammatical competence of the resultant washback is completely supported with the failure of the cultivation:

- Sociolinguistic Competence: Minimal attention to language and register adaptation to the contexts.
- Discourse Competence: The students are unable to generate a genuine textual coherence, although they are able to write formulaic statements.
- Strategic Competence: Low training on negotiation, paraphrasing or repair communications.

This indicates that there is an underrepresentation issue in the two examination systems, in that the

tests do not reward or assess the main elements of communicative competence, thus informing the teaching and learning processes.

## 4. Practical Implications

The results have a number of educational practice and policy implications:

- Curriculum-Assessment fit: Board tests should have oral and interactive elements to align instruction with communicative competence objectives.

- Professional Development of teachers: Teachers need to be trained on how to combine communicative activities with the preparation of exams.

- Development of Balanced Skills: Schools must foster balanced development of literacy which is exam-oriented and development of authentic interactional practice which will guarantee the holistic learning of language.

## 5. Triangulated Insights

The combination of the results of the questionnaire, data of observation, interviews, and the analysis of documents gives the study a multi-layered image of washback:

1. Research revealed that there is high dependency on exam-related behaviors and poor development of communicative skills.

2. The qualitative understanding explains the cause of these tendencies, and focuses on the beliefs of the teachers, the pressure of the examinations, and time limitation.

3. The analysis of documents proves that the very structure of the exams is an active business in designing what is being taught and practiced in the classrooms.

Cumulatively, these results highlight the fact that washback is not an illusion, but is a structural and behavioral reality, which influences the development of communicative competence among Intermediate students.

**Summary Table for Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings**

Dimension	Quantitative Patterns	Qualitative Insights	Implication for Communicative Competence
Grammar & Writing	High mean scores (BISE 4.62-4.71; FBISE 4.35-4.63)	Teachers focus on drills; model essay practice dominates	Strong grammatical competence; exam skills prioritized
Reading Comprehension	High mean scores (BISE 4.51; FBISE 4.42)	Reading tasks dominate classroom instruction	Supports textual comprehension; interactional reading neglected
Speaking & Oral Skills	Low mean scores (BISE 2.05; FBISE 2.27)	Oral exercises minimal; teacher feedback limited	Weak strategic & sociolinguistic competence
Listening Skills	Low mean scores (BISE 1.95; FBISE 2.11)	No structured listening; classroom focus on writing	Neglect of real-time auditory processing and comprehension
Exam-Oriented Behavior	High emphasis on memorization, model answers	Students study mainly for exams; oral practice neglected	Reinforces negative washback; exam performance over interaction
Classroom Activities	Few communicative tasks; pair/group work low	Observed interaction minimal; teacher remarks indicate exam pressure	Limited development of discourse and strategic competence
Board Differences	BISE slightly higher exam focus; FBISE slightly higher communication inclusion	Teacher interviews confirm minor flexibility in FBISE	Some variation in washback intensity; structural influence dominant

### Quantitative Data Analysis: Descriptive Statistical Processes.

The quantitative data collected through questionnaires were measured with the help of the descriptive statistics (frequency, percentages, and the mean score). The reason why these statistical tools are selected is that in most cases the main objective of the research was to discover patterns but not to prove the existence of causal relationships. As an example, items that concerned the emphasis on grammar drills, use of model answers, and oral communication practice were assessed using a Likert scale, with the strongly agree and strongly disagree being the endpoint.

The frequency analysis indicated that a considerable percentage of teachers (about 72 percent) had indicated that their priority was more focused on grammar and writing practice according to the pattern of board exams. In the same way, more than 80 percent of the students admitted to memorizing essays, letters and answers to comprehensions in guide books. Average scores

of items pertaining to speaking and listening activities were considerably low and so there was a lack of emphasis on communicative interaction in the classroom. Such statistical results indicate that high-stakes exams are very impactful in terms of setting instructional priorities that result into exam-focused teaching methods.

### Comparison of Quantitative Analysis of Boards.

A comparative analysis was drawn out between those respondents' affiliated BISE Lahore and Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education and sample whether there was a difference in the degree of washback. Both boards showed the same trends in the percentage distributions with increased focus on reading comprehension, translations as well as structured writing tasks. Nonetheless, the respondents of FBISE indicated a little bit more exposure to questions of analysis and unseen passages than the participants of BISE Lahore. In spite of this difference, both systems had poor integration of

oral assessment elements. The fact that statistical trends are similar strengthens the conclusion that exam structure is a dominant factor in the process of influencing pedagogical behavior among boards.

#### **Teaching Practices Survey Analysis.**

The responses to the surveys by teachers showed a strong correlation between planning of the lessons and the type of examination. About 68 percent of teachers stated that they prepare classroom examinations based on the previous papers and model paper patterns. The average scores of questions like practice of past paper questions were also significantly greater than the average score of activities like communicative activities like role-play or group discussion.

This statistical data proves a definite trend of negative washback, according to which the requirements of examinations reduce the breadth of the language teaching. Teachers seem to be bound by testing provisions, leaving them with less room in interactive language application.

#### **Student Learning Strategies: Statistical Interpretation.**

Strong learning strategies that were pointed out by the student questionnaire were affected by examination requirements. More than three quarters of the students indicated that they used memorization strategies such as guidebooks and guess papers. The proportion of learners who were involved in spontaneous speaking or peer discussion was less than 30 percent.

The statistical data also showed that grammar and written expression were the most significant talents among students that could make them successful in exams. Listening and speaking were considered to be not essential since they are not tested. These results statistically prove that the content of examinations has a direct influence on the cognitive priorities of students and the way they study.

#### **Qualitative Data Analysis: Thematic Coding Process.**

Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data based on interviews and classroom observations. The researcher transcribed the interviews and coded the responses into common themes which included; exam pressure, culture of memorization, limited communicative practice and curriculum-exam mismatch. Indicatively, the

teachers would often say things such as “we must prepare students to write papers on boards and there is no time to speak”. These repetitions were categorized as the theme of exam-driven pedagogy. Field notes through observation also supported the same idea that interaction in the classroom was teacher centered and the student interaction was very little in classroom communicative activities. Thematic coding helped to spell out the underlying attitudes and beliefs that could not have been obtained through quantitative numbers only.

#### **The findings of the classroom observation.**

Qualitative data to support survey findings were received through classroom observations. The basic lessons were more of the explanation of grammar rules, translation, and organized writing. Students used to be requested to repeat memorized essays instead of coming up with original answers. Interactive methods like debates, role playing and presentations were hardly witnessed. In some of the sessions observed, the student talk time was restricted to reading aloud on textbooks. This qualitative evidence shows how washback manifests in the day-to-day routine in a classroom. The observational data prove that the communicative competence, especially sociolinguistic and strategic elements are not developed because of the lack of the opportunities to use the language in real life.

#### **Examination Paper Analysis Documents.**

The findings were further confirmed by document analysis of model papers of BISE Lahore and Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education. The grammar correction, translation, comprehension question and guided writing were highly emphasized in examination papers. There was no specific part that evaluated speaking or listening abilities. Essays were usually patterned and not very creative. This structural orientation can be used to explain why teachers and students align their practices with the elements of written exams.

This imbalance in achievement of communicative competence is supported by the lack of oral skill testing.

#### **Triangulation of Qualitative and Quantitative Results.**

There is a high convergence in the integration of the two sets of data. Quantitative statistics depicted

high percentages of grammar-based teaching and memorizing practices, whereas qualitative interviews revealed such orientations as the reaction to the pressure of the system exams. The use of triangulation enhanced the credibility of the study as the similar conclusions were reached with the use of various data sources. Where those quantitative data showed some trends (e.g., low speaking practice), there was some contextual explanation presented in qualitative data (e.g., no marks were given to oral skills).

This complementary nature of methods increases the validity of analysis and gives a comprehensive interpretation of washback effects.

#### **Data Analysis Interpretation and Implications.**

The long analysis has indicated that high-stakes English examinations in BISE Lahore and Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education cause high negative washback. Quantitative evidence shows that grammar and writing-oriented teaching is predominant and qualitative results reveal that teacher beliefs, systemic barriers, and the culture of memorization are intermediary variables. Students also excel in the written parts, but they are still lacking communicative competence especially in the speaking and listening aspects. The discrepancy between communicative fluency and the accuracy of the language demonstrates the structural mismatch between the goals and the practices of examinations in curriculum. On the whole, the analysis of the data shows that the kind of examination used greatly determines the pedagogy and the course of actions of the learners. The elements of sustainable reform are needed to integrate the components of oral assessment, foster the training of communicative teaching, and harmonize the aims of the curriculum on the overall evaluation of language skills.

#### **Conclusion**

The current research question explored the washback effects of BISE Lahore and FBISE English tests on the emergence of communicative capabilities among students of Pakistani Intermediate (HSSC) exams. Based on the washback theory (Alderson and Wall, 1993; Messick, 1996) and the communicative competency model by Canale and Swain (1980), the study aimed at determining the influence of high stakes examination systems on the teaching

practices, learning strategies and the overall performance of the students in terms of language proficiency. The results of the quantitative and qualitative studies all suggest that such examinations have a major washback effect, affecting the priorities in the classroom, study behaviors and acquisition of skills in ways that facilitate and limit the development of communicative competence.

The quantitative data indicated that teachers working in both the BISE Lahore and FBISE situations focus on exam-oriented pedagogy, namely grammar drills, reading comprehension, and drilled writing activities. The mean score in grammar instruction and exam based writing practice was very high in both boards (BISE Lahore: 4.624.71; FBISE: 4.354.63), which means that the extent of correspondence between classroom activities and assessment prerequisites is very high. On the other hand, the levels of communicative activities, oral feedback, listening exercises, and interactive tasks were low as was the mean score (BISE Lahore: 1.952.13; FBISE: 2.112.46). These trends were supported by classroom observations and interviews, which showed that 7080 percent of the instructional time was spent on duplication of exam questions and answers, model answers, and practised writing. The teachers complained that board examinations are of high stakes and thus the need to be able to concentrate on these high stakes in spite of realizing the merits of interactive or communicative activities.

The student survey reports also indicated that the learning strategies are more exam-focused. Study routines were dominated by memorization of model answers, repeated writing drills, focused reading to understand and little attention was paid to oral practice, listening and functional communication. There was also a similar trend in self-perceived communicative competence: the grammatical competence was the highest with the discourse and sociolinguistic and strategic competence being equally low in all cases. The statistical analysis showed that, BISE Lahore students showed a little higher exam-oriented behaviors compared to FBISE students, which showed accountability pressure and variable emphasizing standardized model responses. Although FBISE students were also equally constrained, the opportunities of interactive or communicative exercises were slightly higher,

which implies that there was a slight flexibility in the way the pedagogy was applied.

The findings of the qualitative study enhanced the insights into the mechanisms underlying such patterns. According to the teachers, the congruence between classroom teaching and the assessment blueprint was necessary in order to help students succeed. This view was echoed by students who stressed that oral and interactional practice was not well-assessed because, despite a lack of weight, it was not considered important. These observations were supported by document analysis of BISE Lahore and FBISE English examination papers which indicated that much attention was paid to reading comprehension, grammar, and written production, little attention was paid to listening and speaking aspects. These data, combined, demonstrate a systemic lack of fit between the communicative objectives of the curriculum and the assessment constructs, a phenomenon generated by the study, which it refers to as negative washback.

The combined analysis can verify that the two boards produce a powerful washback, albeit with minor variations. BISE Lahore is a little more strict in following exam assignments and model answers and makes the students more dependent on memorization and formulaic text. The room in communicative tasks offered by FBSE is slightly more, which is an indicator of more teacher freedom and a more versatile structure of syllabus. However, the overall pattern is also the same on both the boards: exams influence teaching and learning practices in such a manner that they place greater emphasis on grammatical and written skills and limit oral, sociolinguistic, and strategic skills. This highlights a chronic problem with underrepresentation of construct, such that important aspects of communicative competence, specifically interactive and pragmatic skills, are not valued and are not adequately measured in high-stakes Intermediate English tests.

Simultaneously, the research does not overlook the fact that there is some partial positive washback. Students are exposed to better grammatical accuracy, vocabulary development and reading comprehension which can be transferred to academic literacy. These advantages fail to counter the shortcomings of interactional competence which is vital in genuine communication in higher education and working life situations. Contextual mediators are also suggested in the findings:

teacher agency, institutional culture, and flexibility of the syllabus have a limited impact to negative washback as observed in the small percentage of communicative exercises use during some FBISE classrooms.

To sum up, this research has presented strong evidence that high-stakes board examinations in Pakistan namely BISE Lahore and FBISE have a powerful influence on classroom teaching and learning, which supports exam-centric activities that limit the attainment of holistic communicative competence. Students have good grammar and textual skills, but they are not ready to communicate with each other in real life and at a strategic level. The results are highlighted by the dire need that assessment, curriculum and pedagogy be aligned to promote balanced English language proficiency among Intermediate students.

### Recommendations

Judging by the results of the research, the following suggestions are offered to improve the communicative ability of Pakistani Intermediate students and at the same time ensure that they comply with examination standards:

1. Assessment Reform:
  - Reduce BISE Lahore and FBISE English tests to include oral and interactive elements, including forms of structured oral speaking, listening comprehension with applied questions, and role-play activities.
  - Change marking criteria to encourage discourse, sociolinguistic and strategic competence so that the students are motivated to attain full communicative competence.
2. Curriculum Alignment:
  - Make sure that syllabi provide the explicit connection of learning objectives to communicative competence paradigms and give the instructions to the teachers on the manner in which grammar, reading, and writing should be balanced with interactive skills.
  - Promote the use of real, contextually relevant resources (e.g., news, conversations, multimedia) to facilitate pragmatic and sociolinguistic skill building.
3. Professional Development of teachers:
  - Carry out workshops and in-service trainings to empower teachers with strategies of incorporating communicative activities with exam preparation.

- Support assessment literacy, so that teachers can make sense of the exam constructs as well as promoting equal developmental skills.
- 4. Classroom Pedagogy:
  - Promote pair/group work, debates, discussions and presentations as a normal practice in the classroom.
  - Create listening and speaking tasks in the lesson plans, and formative feedback will encourage strategic competence.
- 5. Monitoring and Research:
  - Undertake longitudinal research to determine the effects of exam reforms on development of communicative competence.
  - Compare research across boards in order to determine the best practices and strategies that can be scaled to enhance English teaching throughout the country.

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