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EFL Testing Washback: Assessment of Learning or Assessment for Learning?

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It has long been assumed that assessment exerts a powerful influence on second/ foreign language learning and teaching in a backward direction, and hence is the term language testing 'washback'. Washback, a concept standing for the impact of a test on the teacher and the learner, the educational institution, the educational system, and the society as a whole, can be either beneficial – assessment for learning or harmful – assessment of learning. The present study was designed to explore the relations of testing washback to the learning of English as a foreign language EFL) at the undergraduate level in the Department of English at Jahangirnagar University, and anticipated enriching the existing relevant literature as well as improving the assessment system and instructional strategies in the department and thus EFL education at other identical settings. Four hypotheses consonant with the objectives of the study – Q_1 Assessment impedes the implementation of the EFL syllabus at the undergraduate level in the Department of English at Jahangirnagar University. Q_2 Assessment prevents the EFL students at the undergraduate level in the Department of English at Jahangirnagar University from doing the tasks and activities pertinent to their acquiring communicative skills. Q_3 Assessment negatively impacts upon the materials used for teaching and learning EFL at the undergraduate level. Q_4 Assessment negatively affects the EFL teaching methods and techniques at the undergraduate level. – were formulated to carry out the study. Sixty students learning EFL at the undergraduate level in the Department of English at Jahangirnagar University participated in the study. A valid and reliable questionnaire was administered to collect data from the participant population. Afterward the data were analyzed by employing the descriptive and contextual methods as well as SPSS program module. The analysis of the data revealed harmful testing washback as the students learned EFL for scoring good grades in the examinations, rather than acquiring communicative competence. That is, assessment appeared to be of learning, not for learning EFL at the under-graduate level. Based on the findings, the researcher put forward specific recommendations on rethinking and modifying the syllabus, classroom tasks and activities, language materials, teaching methods and techniques, assessment system, and responsibilities of the authority concerned.

Keywords: *Washback, assessment, learning EFL, undergraduate level, the syllabus, classroom tasks and activities, language materials, teaching methods and techniques.*

Introduction

A test or examination, an indispensably pervasive part of a second/foreign language education system, refers to a formal situation created by the tester to make the testee respond to a stimulus from which desired information could be elicited so as to ascertain the testee's ability or knowledge, that is, communicative competence encompassing grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence and discourse competence, and/or to grade him/her according to a given standard.

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Therefore, it is assumed to be a powerful determiner of what happens in the language classroom, and is claimed to affect teaching and learning activities both directly and indirectly. It has long been asserted in a wide range of contexts that a test exerts a powerful influence on the language learner who is preparing to take the test and on the teacher who tries to help him/her prepare. And the impact a test has on teaching and learning a second/foreign language is commonly used as 'washback' in applied linguistics (see Chen and Curtis, 2004; Alderson and Wall, 1993).

The term 'washback', sometimes referred to as 'backwash' (Biggs, 1995, 1996 in Cheng, 2000), can generally be considered as the impact of an examination or test on teaching and learning (Cheng, 2002, 2003, 20008, 2009; Hughes, 2003). Brown (2000) defines washback as "the connection between testing and learning" (p. 298). Alderson and Wall (1993), however, restrict the use of the term 'washback' to "classroom behaviors of teachers and learners rather than the nature of printed and other pedagogic material" (p. 118). They also regard washback to be what teachers and learners do that "they would not necessarily otherwise do" (p. 117). Messick (1996) states that in order to be considered washback, good or bad, teaching has to be "evidentially linked to the introduction and use of the test" (p. 16). Moreover, Wall (1997) makes a clear distinction between washback and test impact. The latter would refer to the effect of a test on "individuals, policies or practices, within the classroom, the school, the educational system or society as a whole" (cited in Cheng and Curtis, 2004, p.4). Other researchers (Andrews, Fullilove & Wong, 2002) do not make that distinction, and maintain that narrow and wider effects can be included under the term 'washback'.

In general, the term 'washback' refers to any influence that a test may have on the teacher and the learner, either positive or negative, and either at the micro or macro level. At the micro level, the test affects the learner and the teacher while it affects the instructional system of the institution at the macro level. Pierce (1992) specifies classroom pedagogy, curriculum development, and educational policy as the areas on which washback has an effect. On the other hand, Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) take a view of washback which concentrates more on the effect of the test on teaching, and refer to washback as "… the influence that writers of language testing, syllabus design and language teaching believe a test will have on the teaching that precedes it" (p. 280).

Washback is thus a very complex notion, as it appears, and can stand for the effect of a test on the classroom, but also on the school, on the educational system and also on the society as a whole. Further, this effect does not always occur directly but is mediated by a number of factors, such as the teachers' perception of the test, the status of the test as well as that of the subject-matter tested, the macro-context in which the test is used, the purpose of learning the target language in the context, among others. Furthermore, to study the washback effect, it is necessary to look at the people that participate in the educational process, to the actual classroom events and activities, and to the outcomes of these processes.

However, washback can be either positive or negative. The former happens when the testing procedure reflects the skills and abilities that are taught in the language program (Bachman, 1990). As Pearson (1988) contends, good tests can be utilized and designed as beneficial teaching-learning activities so as to encourage a positive teaching-learning process. On the other hand, the latter occurs when a test content or format is based on a narrow definition of language ability and so constrains the teaching-learning context (Brown, 2002), and there is a mismatch between the content and the test.

Hence, the present study was designed and intended to examine whether or not the tests administered in the English as a foreign language (EFL) courses offered at the undergraduate level in the Department of

English at Jahangirnagar University functioned as assessment of learning or assessment for learning the target language.

Literature Review

In second/foreign language education, a large number of studies have been carried out to date so as to investigate influences of tests on teaching and learning. Alderson and Wall (1993) concluded from their Sri Lanka study that the examination had a demonstrable effect on the content of language lessons. This effect was that of the narrowing of the curriculum to those areas most likely to be tested. This finding is similar to that of Lam (1994) who reported an emphasis in teaching on those parts of the examination carrying the most marks. Similarly, Cheng (1997) noted that the content of teaching had changed after the introduction of the revised examination, reading aloud being replaced by role-play and discussion activities, for example, reflecting the new examination content. Read and Hayes (2003) confirmed this in their New Zealand study, as did Cheng (1997, p. 50) in Hong Kong: “By the time the examination syllabus affected teaching in Hong Kong secondary schools … nearly every school had changed their textbooks for the students”.

However, Watanabe’s (1996) findings were different since he spoke of teachers not necessarily teaching listening or writing even though the examination contained these skills. The findings of Read and Hayes (2003) were quite detailed and exhibited variations in washback on the curriculum depending on the course observed. Shohamy et al.’s (1996, p. 309) findings were also somewhat different from Cheng’s (1997) as they found that in relation to the EFL examination “ample new material has been published and marketed since the announcement of the test changes became public”. Tests are sometimes used by schools or school administrations as a “lever” to introduce the innovation of new curricula, but it may change the format of what teachers instruct, not foster an in-depth change of teaching methodologies as a whole. Shohamy et al. (1996) reported on the stability of the washback effect over time as they investigated two national examinations that had been implemented in Israel in the late 1980's. One was a high-stakes test of English as a foreign language (EFL), and the other was a low-stakes examination of Arabic as a second language (ASL). Following Madaus (1990), Shohamy et al. (1996, p. 300) defined a high- stakes test as one used in a context in which decisions about "admission, promotion, placement or graduation are directly dependent on test scores", while low-stakes examinations do not entail these significant decisions. The notion of high-stakes and low-stakes examinations is reflected in Alderson and Wall’s (1993, pp. 120-121) breakdown of the washback hypothesis: "Tests that have important consequences will have washback; and conversely, tests that do not have important consequences will have no washback".

As Hughes (1993) pointed out, the key question about the products of washback was whether or not it led to learning. Shohamy et al. (1996) asked their student respondents whether and how the ASL test and the EFL test had promoted learning. With regard to the high-stakes EFL test, 68% of the students believed that the test promoted learning and 92% said that the goal of the test was to promote learning. But in terms of the impact of the EFL test on their language learning, 46% students believed that it had little or no impact while only 34% of the student respondents reported that their command of English was affected to a large extent by the test. In terms of the low-stakes ASL test's impact on learning, Shohamy et al. (1996, p. 306) said that "both teachers and students express negative feelings toward the test and complain that the test is of no importance and not essential in all course levels."

Wall and Alderson (1996) examined the impact of a new textbook and a corresponding examination on English language teaching (ELT) in the secondary schools in Sri Lanka, and disclosed the evidence of washback on the content of teaching and ways of assessing. Cheng’s (1999) study was intended to

explore washback on teachers' perceptions and actions in the context of Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) in English. The findings of the study revealed that more activity types and student activities could be found in classroom teaching after the change in the HKCEE, but the interaction pattern of teachers' teaching did not change much even after the examination reform.

Appropriate use of tests can evidently promote the teaching and learning of a second/foreign language. Recent research indicates that tests also influence different educational parties, particularly teachers and students in many different ways. In her studies of Arabic as a second language and English as a foreign language for the modified Israeli examinations, Shohamy (2005) indicated that the results obtained from tests could have serious consequences for individuals as well as for programs, since many crucial decisions were made on the basis of test results.

Manjarres (2005) carried out a study to examine washback within a high-stakes test. The general objective of the study was to describe the washback effect of the English national examination held in public schools in Colombia. The study unfolded a positive relationship between the examination and the teachers; that is, the English language teachers adjusted their strategies in order to meet the students' expectations. It was also noticeable when teachers depended on other materials (e. g. previous test formats) to perform better in the classroom. The study also showed that the teachers were not familiar with how to develop the students' communicative competence; one of the teachers admitted that listening and speaking skills were not evaluated in the examination.

Likewise, Tsagari (2007) conducted a study to investigate the washback effect of a high-stakes examination on the teaching and learning process, and interviewed 15 native and non-native EFL teachers actively involved in teaching. The results led to a detailed analysis of the textbook materials using a specially designed instrument. The analysis of the data uncovered that the examination did influence the materials the teachers used while teaching, but it did not show any washback effects upon the teaching methods of the teachers.

Hence, to investigate the impact of the examinations on EFL learning appears to have been indispensable so as to enhance EFL education at the undergraduate level in the Department of English at Jahangirnagar University. And this brief review of the existing relevant literature was supposed to contribute to conducting the present study, especially by lending support to or contradicting its findings that would lead to inferences, implications and constructive recommendations as well.

Research Problems

Tests are often perceived as exerting a conservative force that impedes progress in second/foreign language learning (Andrews and Fullilove, 1994). This is particularly evident in case of the students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) at the undergraduate level in Bangladesh since they terribly suffer from a phobia about tests, which often hampers their acquiring the competence that the course is supposed to offer and their exhibiting the performance expected as an outcome of studying the course. The phobia, synonymous with negative washback, might have impact on the syllabus, the language materials, the teacher and the learner, and hence hinders the teaching and learning process including the basic skills of EFL– listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Previously a learner of EFL and presently a practitioner of EFL teaching, the present researcher himself did not only experience washback in his student life but also observed the phenomenon in teaching and learning EFL especially at the undergraduate level in the Department of English at Jahangirnagar

University. The researcher was then interested to know whether or not tests functioned as assessment of learning or assessment for learning EFL at the undergraduate level.

Research Objectives

The current study was designed to reveal what type of washback– negative or positive was on teaching and learning the EFL skills– listening, speaking, reading and writing at the undergraduate level in the Department of English at Jahangirnagar University. That is, the investigation would first endeavor to examine how tests affected the learners, the teachers, the syllabus and the teaching/learning materials contributing to and constituting the teaching and learning process of the EFL skills, and then, in the light of the findings and implications, postulate some recommendations so as to reduce the harmful effects of tests, if any, and construct tests having beneficial washback on teaching and learning the skills.

Research Hypotheses

The research hypotheses posed here followed on the hypotheses formulated by Alderson and Wall (1993), and were in consonance with the objectives of the current study:

H_1 Assessment impedes the implementation of the EFL syllabus at the undergraduate level in the Department of English at Jahangirnagar University.

H_2 Assessment prevents the EFL students at the undergraduate level in the Department of English at Jahangirnagar University from doing the tasks and activities pertinent to their acquiring communicative skills.

H_3 Assessment negatively impacts upon the materials used for teaching and learning EFL at the undergraduate level.

H_4 Assessment negatively affects the EFL teaching methods and techniques at the undergraduate level.

Methods

Respondents

The current study was conducted with 60 undergraduate students of English as a foreign language randomly selected from the First Year BA (Hons.) program in the Department of English at Jahangirnagar University. All the respondents were Bengali speaking and already studied English as compulsory subject at their primary, secondary and higher secondary levels of education.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

A questionnaire (See the Appendix) being constituted of 16 items was employed to collect data from 60 undergraduate students of English as a foreign language. The items of the questionnaire were concerned with the syllabus (Item Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4), tasks and activities (Item Nos. 5, 6, 7 and 8), materials (Item Nos. 9, 10, 11 1 and 12), and teaching methods and techniques (Item Nos. 13, 14, 15 and 16). That is, they were designed to uncover the relations of the examinations in English to the respondents as regards the syllabus, classroom tasks and activities, language materials, and teaching methods and techniques. The present researcher developed the questionnaire on the model of Cheng (2005) and Shohamy (2005), and used a five-grade Likert Scale (1932) from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'.

Data Analysis

The data collected from 60 undergraduates of English as a foreign language were analyzed by employing the descriptive and contextual methods. In addition, the students' responses to the questionnaire were **computed** and **analyzed** using the SPSS program module. The statistical measurements used here included means and standard deviations for each item of the questionnaire.

The statements assessing the expected responses of the participants were adopted through a five-point Likert Scale. On the scale, the statements were coded as 1 indicating 'Strongly Agree', 2 'Agree', 3 'No Opinion', 4 'Disagree' and 5 indicating 'Strongly Disagree'. The mean scores of each of the items of the questionnaire follow: mean scores 5 – 3.5 suggesting 'strong effect', mean scores 3.49 – 2.5 suggesting 'moderate effect', mean scores 2.49 – 1.5 implying 'little effect', and mean scores 1.49 – 1 indicating 'insignificant effect'.

Results and Discussion

The current study investigated the relations of washback to the EFL learners as regards the effects of the examinations on four crucial factors of EFL education at the undergraduate level in the Department of English, Jahangirnagar University: the syllabus, tasks and activities, language materials, and teaching methods and techniques. The study employed the SPSS program module to analyze the data collected through a questionnaire. Along with the statistical package, the descriptive and contextual methods were used for data analysis. The findings resulted from the detailed analysis of the data are presented in a table and sixteen figures below. The first issue dealt with the impact of the examinations on the syllabus for English language education; the second issue was related to classroom tasks and activities that might affect the students in learning EFL for the preparations for the examinations; the third issue was concerned with the language materials used in the class for the preparations of the students; and the fourth issue was linked to the teaching methods and techniques that the students experienced while learning EFL.

Table 1 below demonstrates the mean scores and standard deviations of each of the items of the questionnaire, and hence the degree of effect that the examinations had on the syllabus, tasks and activities, materials, and teaching methods and techniques as perceived by the EFL students and as exhibited in different figures below:

Table-1

Mean and Standard Deviation

No.	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	I am aware of the objectives of the syllabus for English language education at the undergraduate level.	**3.30**	1.04
2	I learn everything of the materials based on the syllabus although something may not be tested.	**1.98**	1.27
3	I learn some lessons that are less likely to be tested in the examinations.	**4.06**	1.19
4	I study some relevant materials to perform well in the examinations.	**3.60**	1.13
5	I spend more time learning grammar because grammar is more likely to be tested in the examinations.	**3.87**	**0.89**
6	I do my classroom activities according to my needs and abilities.	**3.16**	0.94
7	I learn whatever I think important to learn, no matter whether it is tested or not.	**1.99**	1.08
8	I learn what is tested in the examinations.	**3.21**	1.30
9	I study supplementary materials other than those the teachers suggest to succeed in the examinations.	**3.96**	1.02

10	I practice the questions of the previous examinations for relatively better preparations for the examinations.	**3.90**	1.02
11	I study model questions predicted to be set in the examinations.	**3.44**	1.27
12	I study authentic materials in addition to the teachers' materials to learn English language.	**1.96**	1.12
13	I like the teaching methods and techniques that help me succeed in the examinations.	**4.62**	0.80
14	I prefer learning test-taking strategies when the examinations are near.	**3.44**	1.40
15	My teachers' EFL teaching methods and techniques are influenced by the examinations.	4.34	0.87
16	I try to achieve the test objectives throughout learning English language.	**3.18**	1.10

The Syllabus

No.	Item
1	I am aware of the objectives of the syllabus for English language education at the undergraduate level.
2	I learn everything of the materials based on the syllabus although something may not be tested.

Figure-1
Item-1

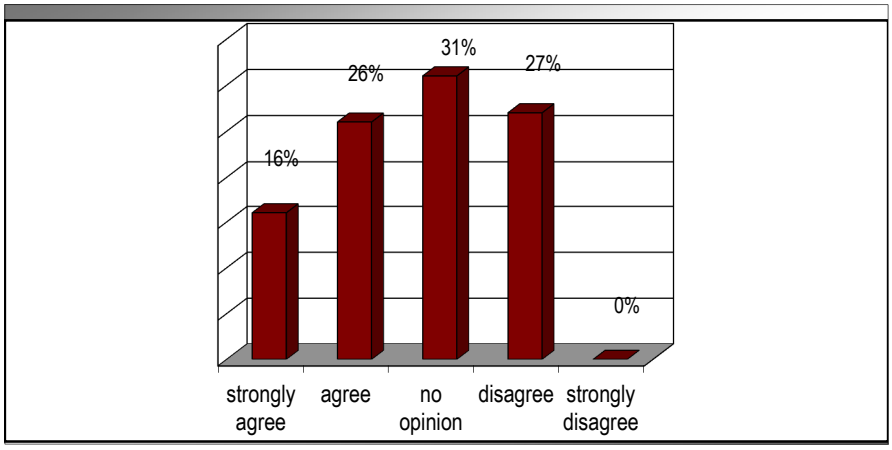
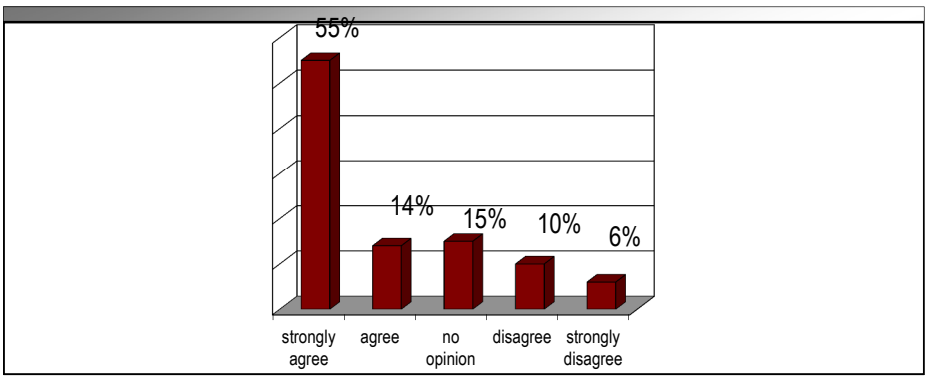


Figure-2
Item-1



It is evident that the contents of a test might have a direct washback effect either positive or negative on the syllabus (Alderson & Wall, 1993). The syllabus plays a vital part in the EFL class. It helps determine the focus of the class, and sets goals for students throughout their study. The mean score of Item No. 1 related to the syllabus and/or curriculum is 3.30 while the standard deviation is 1.04. And Figure-1 shows that only 42% teachers (agree plus strongly agree) claimed they were aware of the objectives of the syllabus. Again, the mean score of Item No. 2 also concerned with the syllabus is 1.98 whereas the standard deviation is 1.27. And Figure-2 displays that 69% teachers (agree plus strongly agree) confirmed they taught everything of the textbook based on the syllabus although something might not be tested in the examinations. The study thus revealed positive attitudes of the students toward learning, and indicated that the classroom instruction and learning were well aligned with the syllabus.

No.	Item
3	I learn some lessons that are less likely to be tested in the examinations.
4	I study some relevant materials to perform well in the examinations.

Figure-3
Item-3

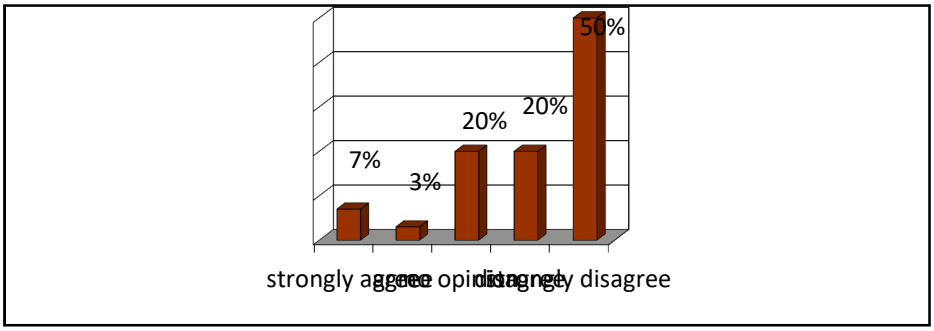
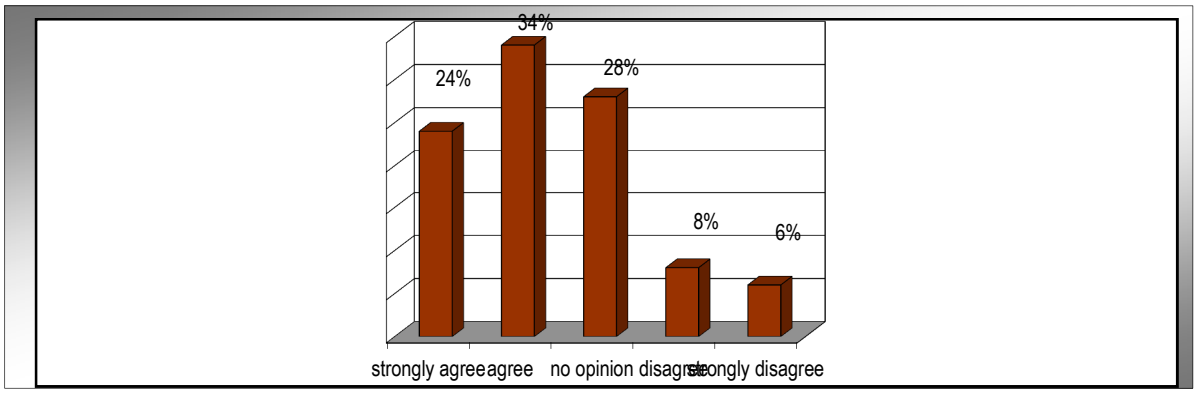


Figure-4
Item-4



Notwithstanding, the findings displayed in Figure-3, 70% respondents supporting disagree plus strongly disagree, and Figure-4, 58% subjects for agree plus strongly agree, indicate that the activities in their classroom were test-oriented, and they concentrated on the lessons and contents pertinent to their examinations. The findings are in consonance with the mean scores of Item No. 3 being 4.06 and Item No. 4 being 3.60, which point out that the EFL students were affected by the examinations. That is, it is then conspicuous that the emphasis is on the contents that would help the students do well in the

examinations. These results support those of the studies carried out by Wall and Alderson (1996), Manjarres (2005) and Tsagari (2007), and may be attributed to the fact that most of the students having good scores in English in the examinations are not that much capable of communicating in English in their real life situations.

Tasks and Activities

No.	Item
5	I spend more time learning grammar because grammar is more likely to be tested in the examinations.
6	I do my classroom activities according to my needs and abilities.

Figure-5
Item-5

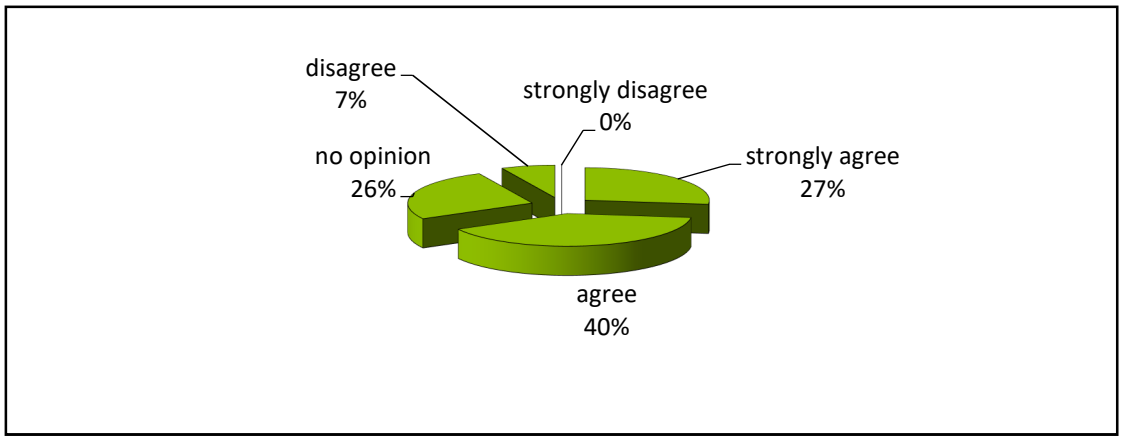
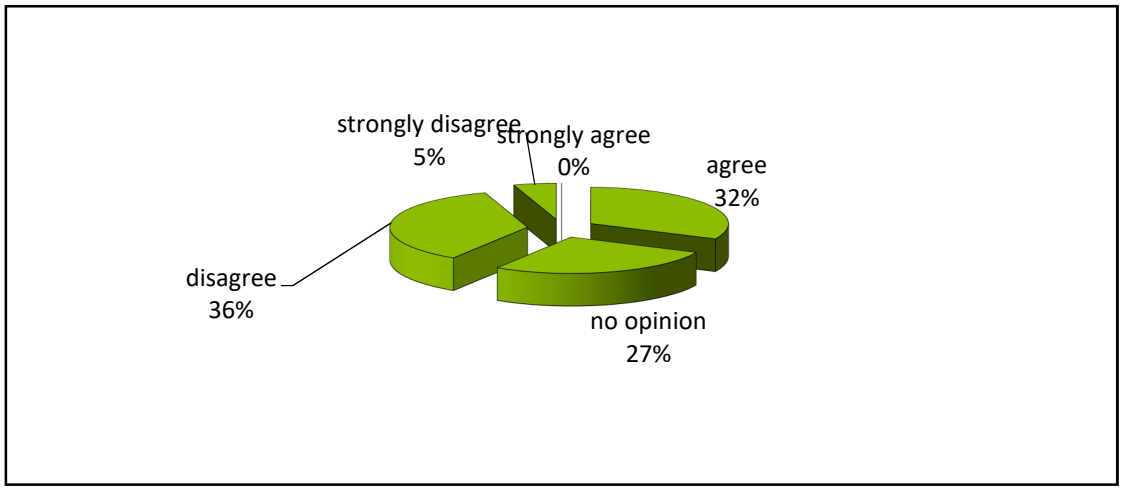


Figure-6
Item-6



As the mean score of Item No. 5 is 3.87 while its standard deviation 0.89, it is clear that the learner perception of classroom activities was related to the contents of the examination. That is, according to Figure-5, 67% students spent more time learning grammar because grammar was more likely to be tested in the examinations. Again, Figure- 6 displays that 59% students were somehow keen on and conscious of

their needs and abilities, and their lessons were designed accordingly. Since the mean score of Item No. 6 is 3.16 and its standard deviation is 0.94, it is indicative of the association of the students' attitudes with their needs and interests.

EFL teaching was test-driven as the findings show that the test affected the classroom tasks and activities. Teaching grammar rather than communication skills had a rather strong effect on EFL learning. Learning test-taking strategies had a strong effect as well. However, there is a general perception among the EFL students that the tasks and activities which are not tested in the examinations are considered as the wastage of time and labor; and this notion is countenanced by the findings of the present study since 67% students agreed that they spent more time studying grammar and grammar-related items because they would be tested in the examinations.

No.	Item
7	I learn whatever I think important to learn, no matter whether it is tested or not.
8	I learn what is tested in the examinations.

Figure-7
Item-7

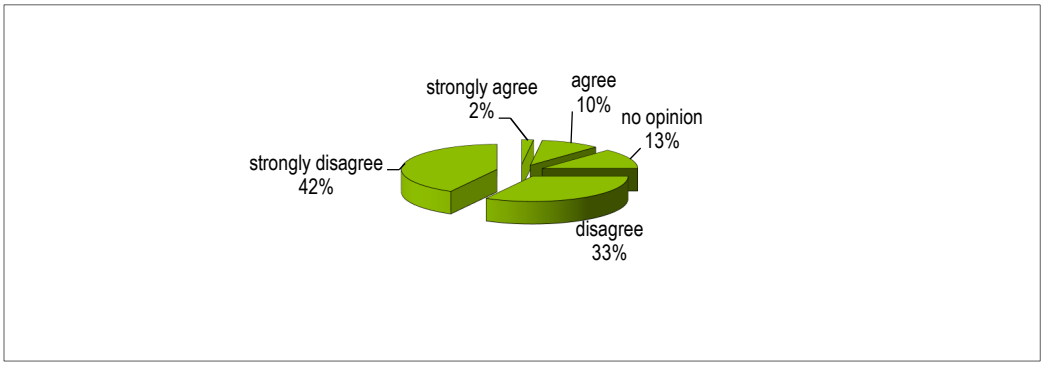
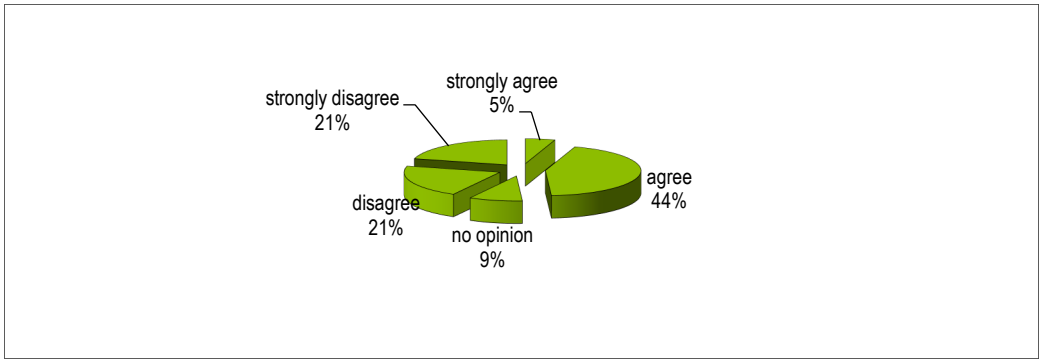


Figure-8
Item-8



It is expected that class activities would be interactive and the students can actively be involved in pair-work, group-work, and individual work as well.

Contrariwise, Figure-7 exhibits that 75% students (disagree plus strongly disagree) did not consider the importance of attaining communicative competence, rather they considered whether or not they learned

the items that would be tested. This result is supported by the mean score of Item No. 7 being 1.99 while its standard deviation is 1.08. Similarly, Item No. 8 having 3.21 as its mean score and 1.30 as its standard deviation also shows learning EFL as being directed to the examinations as 49% students in Figure-8 (agree plus strongly agree) learned what would be tested in the examinations.

Materials

No.	Item
9	I study supplementary materials other than those the teachers suggest to succeed in the examinations.
10	I practice the questions of the previous examinations for relatively better preparations for the examinations.

Figure-9
Item-9

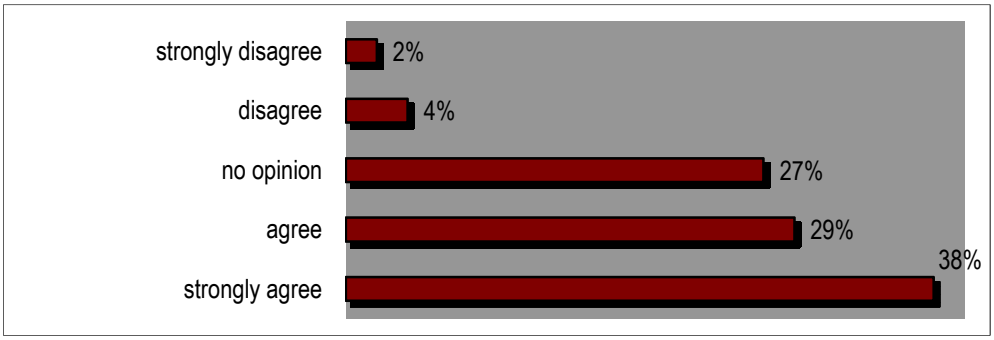


Figure-10
Item-10

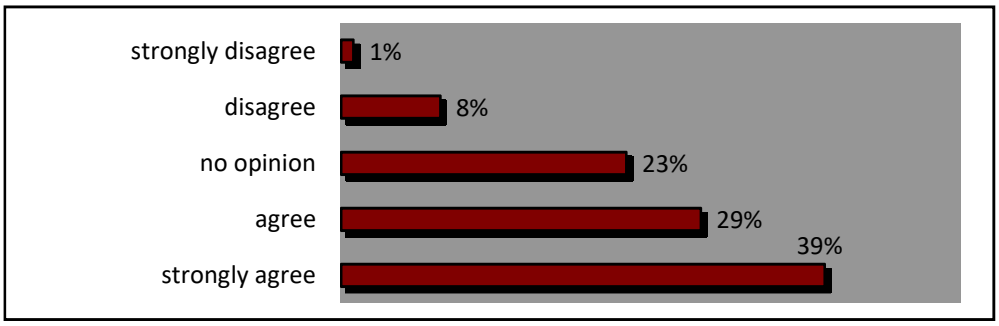


Figure-9 reveals that 6% students studied supplementary materials other than those the teachers suggest to succeed in the examinations. Again, Figure-10 shows that 68% students practiced the questions of the previous examinations for relatively better preparations for the examinations. Besides, Item No. 9 and Item No. 10 have high mean scores, 3.96 and 3.90 respectively, and thus indicate the students' interest in supplementary materials that would help them pass the examination.

The present study is consistent with the study of Caine (2005) in Japan where he found that the students were heavily dependent on test papers, model questions, suggestions/ guidebooks, called 'hidden syllabus' driven by the content of EFL examinations. The findings of this investigation also support those of Cheng (1997) in Hong Kong where she found that test contents dominated the classroom teaching.

No.	Item
11	I study model questions predicted to be set in the examinations.
12	I study authentic materials in addition to the teachers' materials to learn English language.

Figure-11
Item-11

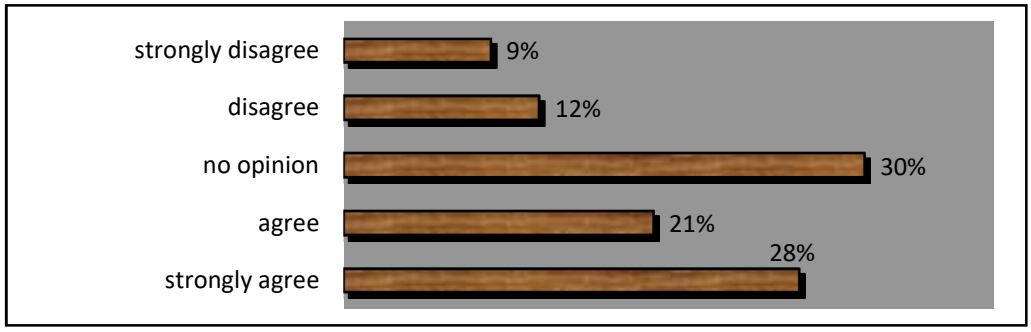
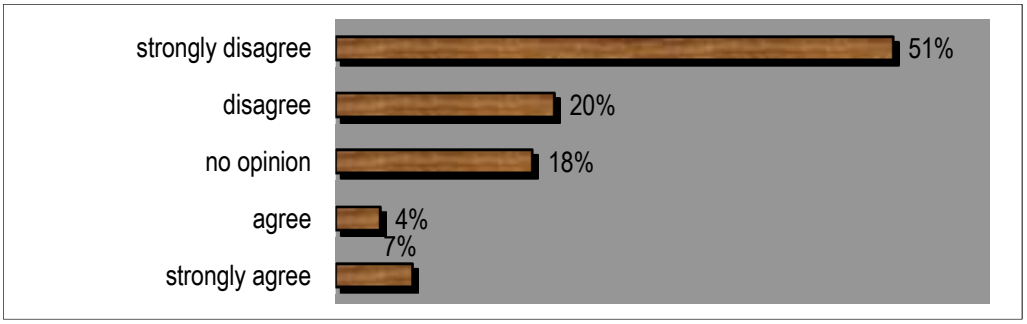


Figure-12
Item-12



Item No. 11 has 3.44 as its mean score and 1.27 as its standard deviation; and Figure-11 discloses that 49% (agree plus strongly agree) students studied model questions predicted to be set in the examinations. Again, Item No. 12 has 1.96 as its mean score and 1.12 as its standard deviation; and Figure-12 unfolds that 71% (disagree plus strongly disagree) students did study supplementary materials that would develop and improve their EFL skills. The findings thus discover that the students would learn EFL to their examinations. That is, the students' study of additional materials and model questions would help them get well prepared for the examinations whereas the use of authentic materials for the development of EFL skills had hardly any relevance to the examinations.

Teaching Methods and Techniques

No.	Item
13	I like the teaching methods and techniques that help me succeed in the examinations.
14	I prefer learning test-taking strategies when the examinations are near.

Figure-13
Item-13

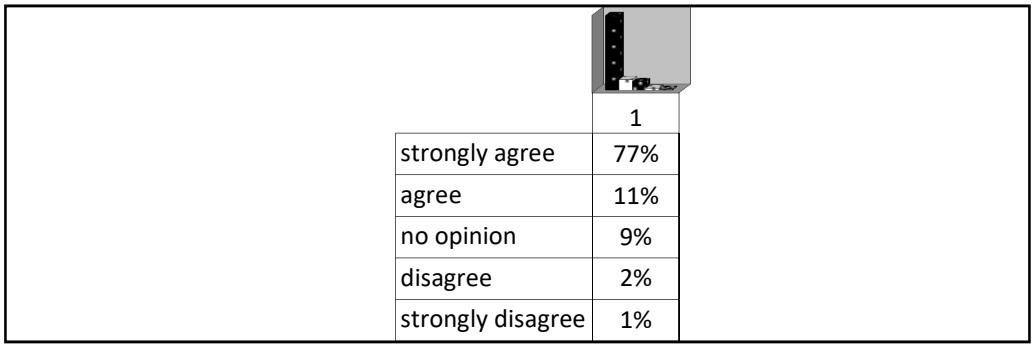
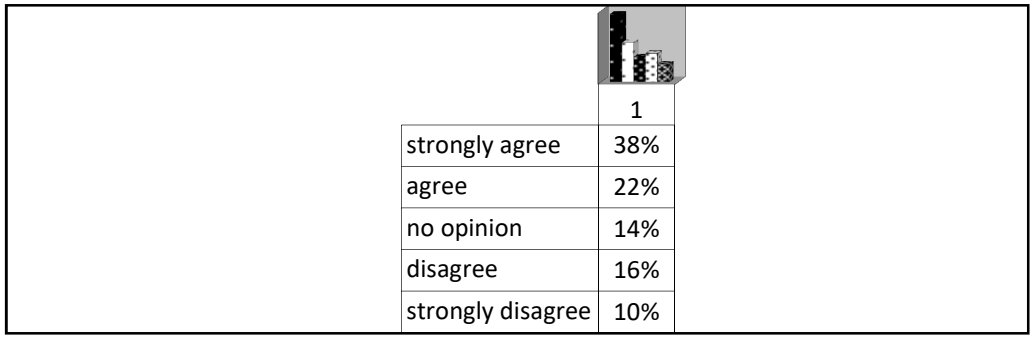


Figure-14
Item-14



Item No. 13 has 4.62 as its mean score and 0.80 as its standard deviation; and Figure-13 exhibits that 88% students (agree plus strongly agree) liked the EFL teaching methods and techniques that helped them succeed in the examinations. Again, Item No. 14 has 3.44 as its mean score and 1.40 as its standard deviation; and Figure-14 demonstrates that 60% students (agree plus strongly agree) preferred learning test-taking strategies when the examinations were near.

The results reveal that the examinations influenced the EFL teaching methods and techniques to a substantial extent. That is to say, the teachers were compelled to change and modify their teaching methods and techniques with a view to helping their students get adequately prepared for the examinations. In addition, learning test-taking strategies had a strong effect on learning EFL since the learning of the strategies, the students felt, would enhance their skills for their tests.

No.	Item
15	My teachers' EFL teaching methods and techniques are influenced by the examinations.
16	I try to achieve the test objectives throughout learning English language.

Figure-15
Item-15

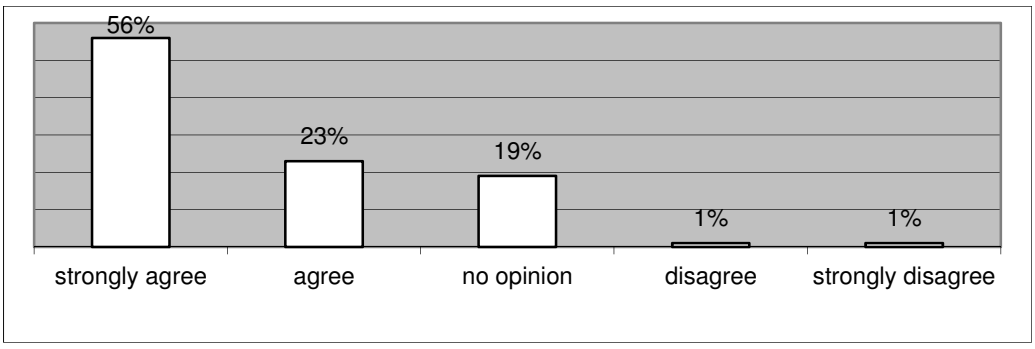
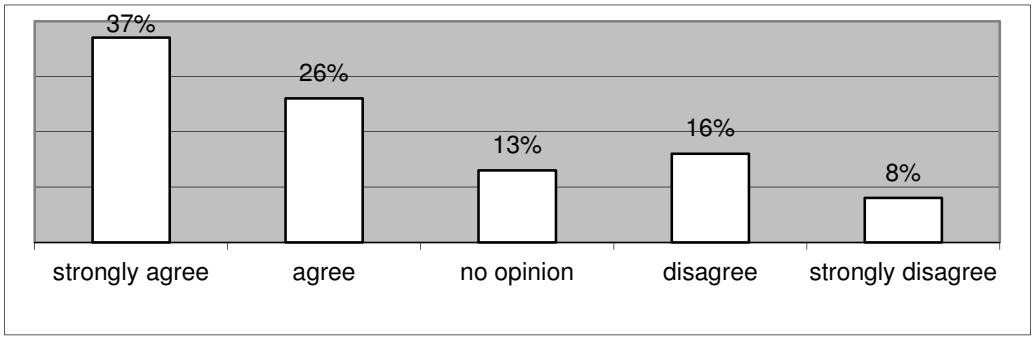


Figure-16
Item-16



As Figure-15 shows, 79% students thought that teaching methods and techniques were influenced by the examinations. Item No. 15 having 4.34 as its mean score and 0.87 as its standard deviation appears to be consistent with the result of Figure-15. That is, the students intended to do well in the examinations, and wanted to get the teaching methods and techniques modified accordingly. Again, Figure-16 displays that 63% students tried to achieve the test objectives throughout learning EFL. It is also in harmony with the finding of Item No. 16 having 3.18 as its mean score and 1.10 as its standard deviation.

It is then clear that the students needed to be aware of the test objectives that should be properly aligned with the syllabus objectives and/or learning outcomes. The objectives of the syllabus are to help the students achieve communicative competence. The communicative competence can be attained through learning the language itself, not learning about the language. Nonetheless, the study revealed that the students used most of their classroom time learning stray linguistic elements including grammar rules, which are in direct contradiction to the spirit of the communicative language teaching approach. This conspicuously shows that negative washback prevailed in EFL teaching and learning at the undergraduate level in the Department of English at Jahangirnagar University. Thus, the findings lend support to all the research hypotheses: H_1 Assessment impedes the implementation of the EFL syllabus at the undergraduate level in the Department of English at Jahangirnagar University; H_2 Assessment prevents the EFL students at the undergraduate level in the Department of English at Jahangirnagar University from doing the tasks and activities pertinent to their acquiring communicative skills; H_3 Assessment negatively impacts upon the materials used for teaching and learning EFL at the undergraduate level; and H_4 Assessment negatively affects the EFL teaching methods and techniques at the undergraduate level.

The results of the current study that washback functioned as an obstacle to EFL education in regard to the syllabus, classroom tasks and activities, language materials, and teaching methods and techniques, appear to lend support to those discovered by Lam (1994), Wall and Anderson (1996), Cheng (1997), Read and Hayes (2003), Manjarres (2005) and Tsagari (2007), and may be attributed to the fact that the students at the undergraduate level were more concerned with scoring good grades in the examinations than acquiring communicative skills as are evident in the students' inadequate ability of using the EFL skills in their real life communication.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The present study was designed to examine how the students at the undergraduate level in the Department of English at Jahangirnagar University perceived and considered their examinations while learning EFL. As the study revealed, the examination had strong impact on the students. Though a good

number of students were found to be aware of the objectives and/or learning outcomes of the syllabus, they appear to have been controlled by the test since they performed their tasks and activities, studied language materials, and took the methods and techniques with a view to scoring good grades in the examinations. As a consequence, most of the students are found to have scored good grades in the examinations, but cannot efficiently use their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills of EFL for communication in their real life situations. That is, it is then conspicuous that the students learned EFL to their examinations since tests functioned as assessment of their learning, not as assessment for their EFL education.

Based on the findings, some recommendations might be made so as to reduce the harmful washback and develop beneficial effects of the examinations.

Firstly, the students should not only be aware of the instructional/learning outcomes as stated in the syllabus, but also be adequately motivated and guided so that their EFL learning is in accord with the syllabus. Therefore, the authority concerned should arrange in-service training programs for the EFL teachers with a view to equipping them with the expertise in appropriately aligning learning outcomes, instruction, and assessment (Killen, 2004 in Burger, 2008) to teach EFL for adequately helping the students achieve the objectives spelled out in the syllabus and hence developing the students' communicative competence in all the basic skills of the target language – listening, speaking, reading and writing needed for communication in their real life situations.

Secondly, the department authority should monitor whether an EFL teacher is teaching to the examination by providing the students with some test-related suggestions, giving them practice in some test-related exercises, skipping some lessons unlikely to be tested in the examination, keeping the students away from practice of communication and so forth or teaching the students in accordance with the objectives mentioned in the syllabus, developing and improving the students' competency and proficiency in the basic skills of EFL for communication in authentic situations, making the students engaged in active learning through peer-work, group-work, role-plays, and simulations, employing those tasks, activities, methods and techniques consonant with the students' needs and interests, and the demands of the reality as well and so on.

Thirdly, the language materials should be consistent with the learning objectives stated in the syllabus, and should cover the teaching/learning items advocated by the syllabus. And the teachers' job has to be to teach EFL to the students so that the students can acquire a good command of the basic skills of the language essential for their every day communication in varied situations. That is, the materials should meet the students' needs and interests as well as the demands of the reality in terms of subject-matters, tasks, linguistic elements, linguistic level, culture, gender, test format and so on.

Finally, the examination system should conform to the spirit and principles of communicative testing and/or alternative assessment, for instances, self-assessment, peer-assessment, task-based assessment, portfolio assessment, projects, presentations and so on (Weir, 1990; NCLRC, 2004a ; NCLRC, 2004b; Coombe et al., 2007; Popham, 2009) measuring the students' communicative competence being constituted of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence and discourse competence. In other words, the test should determine how much the students are able to use what they have learned in their real life situations. Here, all the basic skills encompassing listening, speaking, reading and writing should receive equal importance in the testing system. Thus, assessment should be for learning, not be of learning.

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Appendix

The Student Questionnaire

Following are a number of statements with which some persons agree and others disagree. As different persons possess different opinions, there are not right or wrong answers.

Please indicate your opinion about each statement by putting a tick mark (√) in only one box against each statement which best shows the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement. Your responses will be used for research purposes only.

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

SL	Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
THE SYLLABUS						
1	I am aware of the objectives of the syllabus for English language education at the undergraduate level.					
2	I learn everything of the materials based on the syllabus although something may not be tested.					
3	I learn some lessons that are less likely to be tested in the examinations.					
4	I study some relevant materials to perform well in the examinations.					
TASKS AND ACTIVITIES						
5	I spend more time learning grammar because grammar is more likely to be tested in the examinations.					
6	I do my classroom activities according to my needs and abilities.					
7	I learn whatever I think important to learn, no matter whether it is tested or not.					
8	I learn what is tested in the examinations.					
Materials						
9	I study supplementary materials other than those the teachers suggest to succeed in the examinations.					
10	I practice the questions of the previous examinations for relatively better preparations for the examinations.					
11	I study model questions predicted to be set in the examinations.					
12	I study authentic materials in addition to the teachers' materials to learn English language.					
Teaching Methods and Techniques						
13	I like the teaching methods and techniques that help me succeed in the examinations.					
14	I prefer learning test-taking					

	strategies when the examinations are near.					
15	My teachers' EFL teaching methods and techniques are influenced by the examinations.					
16	I try to achieve the test objectives throughout learning English language.					