

**REPUBLIC OF TURKEY**  
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**INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
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**WASHBACK EFFECT OF KET EXAM IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

**THESIS BY**

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## ÖZET

### KET SINAVININ İNGİLİZCE YABANCI DİLİ ÖĞRENİMİNE ETKİSİ

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Günümüzde bir yabancı dil öğrenimi günlük hayatın gereklerinden biri olduğu için, bu öğrenme sürecinde öğrenciyi değerlendirmek için yapılan testler önemli bir rol oynar. Testlerin, bir dili öğretme ve öğrenme sürecindeki sınav etkisi büyük bir yer teşkil etmektedir. Bu sınav etkisi olumlu ya da olumsuz olabilir. İngiliz dili dünyada kullanılan en yaygın dillerden biri olduğu için bu dildeki testlerin sayısı ve çeşitliliği çok fazladır. Bu yüzden de sınav etkisi testlerin yapısına göre farklılıklar gösterir.

Bu çalışma, Adana Özel Çukurova Bilfen Ortaokulunda çalışan bir İngilizce öğretmeniyle ve okulun 7.sınıfında okuyan 20 öğrencisiyle yapılmıştır. Gerekli olan veriyi toplamak için, KET sınavına hazırlık dersleri ve genel İngilizce dersleri videoya alındı, öğretmenlerle mülakat yapıldı ve öğrencilere anket uygulandı.

Bu çalışmanın sonuçları uluslararası bir dil sınavına hazırlanma sürecinin sınıf içi çalışmalara ve sınıf içi etkileşime yaptığı sınav etkisinin yapısını ve kapsamını göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sınav Etkisi, KET Sınavı, Test Hazırlığı

## **ABSTRACT**

### **WASHBACK EFFECT OF KET EXAM IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

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As learning a foreign language has become one of the necessities in our daily life, tests to assess the learner during the learning process take the major role in this period. The influence of tests on teaching and learning practices is called "washback". This washback effect whether positive or negative has an important place in the language learning period. During the preparation process for a test, this washback effect either positive or negative occurs. There are different types of tests in the English language as it is one of the most used lingua francas in the world. Therefore, washback effect varies according to the type of the tests.

The study was conducted on an English teacher and 20 participants from 7th grade students in Őukurova Bilfen College in Adana. Video recordings of the KET exam preparation classes and general English classes, interviews with the teachers and a questionnaire with the students were done to collect the data.

The results of this study aimed to show the nature and the scope of washback effects of the KET preparation program on classroom practices and interactions including the teachers' and students' thoughts about this preparation process.

**Keywords:** Washback, KET Exam, Test Preparation

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>KET</b>	: Key English Test
<b>IELTS</b>	: International English Language Testing System
<b>YLE</b>	: Young Learners of English
<b>PET</b>	: Preliminary English Test
<b>A2</b>	: Waystage or elementary level in CEFR
<b>CEFR</b>	: Common European Framework of Reference
<b>ESOL</b>	: English for Speakers of Other Languages
<b>TOEFL</b>	: Test of English as a Foreign Language
<b>ELT</b>	: English Language Teaching
<b>FCE</b>	: First Certificate in English
<b>BA</b>	: Bachelor of Arts
<b>MA</b>	: Masters of Arts

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## CHAPTER I

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, statement of the problem and the purpose of the study. The purpose of the study focuses on the washback effect of international exams in learning English as a foreign language.

#### 1.1. Background of the Study

It is generally agreed today that learning a foreign language and being able to use it effectively has become a must as international business affairs have gained significant importance because of the globalization and going abroad for the education has become popular. In addition to these factors, speaking a foreign language has been a prestige among the members of the society. While the learning process takes place, the learners have to sit for various tests to show how much they have learnt or to see how their progress is. That is why tests or examinations have gained important roles in our educational system.

In Turkey, students at private schools start learning English at a very early age – like 5 or 6 and the learning process takes place till they finish high-school at the age of 18. But in the state schools, this process starts at the age of 10 when they are 4<sup>th</sup> graders and finishes by graduating from the high school at the age of 18. There is also a big difference between the numbers of English lessons studied at state schools and private schools. Since teaching a foreign language is one of the major aims at the private schools, the numbers of English lessons show intensity and the number of the lessons may change between 8 lessons and 12 lessons in a week. When we look at the state schools, the students have 4 English lessons in week and this number is really inadequate for the students to learn a foreign language. The students at the private schools have more chances to sit for an international test while the state school students do not unless they prefer studying foreign languages at a university.

Knowing a foreign language becomes popular and necessary during the university education and afterwards in Turkey. The students have to take a test in the target language for passing the preparation class or after the graduation they sit for a test to get a certificate that shows the language competence of the candidate.

Tests are everywhere in our life and taking a test and to get a good score is very prominent. There are various reasons for using the language tests. One of the major reasons is making predictions about test taker's ability to learn a language and to be able to use that language in real life situations. The other one is that employing the test taker according to the test score or placing the test taker to a school.

As the English language is one of the most used lingua francas, this language and the tests in this language play significant role in today's world. The performance of the learner's on tests whether they are high-stakes or low-stakes, may have serious implications in the test taker's life. As taking the tests in the target language has a decisive role in the candidate's life, the preparation process for the tests has gained much more importance as well. The result of the test has the power to change the present situation of the candidate so it can be said that "testing is never a neutral process and always has consequences" (Stobart, 2003, p.140).

When tests are considered, the effect of the tests in the language learning process needs to be mentioned. Washback is a term generally used in language testing. Washback, commonly used in the field of applied linguistics, refers to "the impact of a test on teaching" (Wall & Alderson, 1993). It refers to the extent to which a test influences language teachers and learners to do things "they would not necessarily otherwise do because of the test" (Alderson& Wall, 1993). As G.Buck wrote:

There is a natural tendency for both teachers and students to tailor their classroom activities to the demands of the test, especially when the test is very important to the future of the students, and pass rates are used as a measure of teacher success. This influence of the test on the classroom (referred to as washback by language testers) is, of course, very important; this washback effect can be either beneficial or harmful. (Buck, 1988).

There are worldwide known English exams such as: TOEFL, IELTS and Cambridge ESOL exams. These tests are applied to the language learners all around the world. Cambridge ESOL Examinations are one of them. Learners all around the world take these exams during the year. Cambridge ESOL examinations provide a reflection of a candidate's reading, writing, listening and speaking skills at a particular level.

Key English Test (KET) -as one of the Cambridge ESOL exams- is a basic level qualification that shows someone can use English to communicate in simple situations and has achieved a good foundation in learning English. KET is A2 level in CEFR (Common European Framework). It is the first level of Main Suite Exams in Cambridge ESOL exams. To sit for one of these tests leads the learner to an intensive preparation process and to see the washback effect on this preparation process is likely to happen.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

As I have been working at Çukurova Bilfen College for a long time, I've seen that the students are used to taking quizzes or exams in English lessons as we-teachers- give them to assess the learners' progress. They start learning English when they are at the age of five as a kindergarten student. When they are 3<sup>rd</sup> graders, they start taking international English exams in addition to routine quizzes and exams. English is the main target language at the college although they start learning German in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Beginning from the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, students have the opportunity to take an international English exam that is suitable for their level till they finish the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

Previously, when the students took one of the international Cambridge ESOL exams (YLE, KET and PET), there was no preparation for the exams during the general English lessons. The preparation took place after the school finished as a separate course and lasted for an hour once or twice a week.

Then, the head of the English Department and all my colleagues at the school decided that the preparation lessons for the exam should be a part of general English

lessons and the preparation process should take place regularly. By doing this, the students would spend much more time on studying for the exam.

For two years, the books and the preparation for the exams have been integrated into the main course lessons. Students started getting prepared for the tests in two English lessons in a week. This integration caused the English lessons to be different from the usual ones because preparation for the exam made us change our teaching style and adapt the syllabus according to the format of the exam. Apart from teaching English as a foreign language, we started dealing with the exam and its requirements.

### **1.3. Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this particular study is to see the role of specific test preparation on the teaching and learning process after the integration of the preparation for an international test into the English lesson syllabus.

Also, I wanted to see the change in classroom interactions and the teacher's attitude during this process. I also wanted to find out what the teachers who had the experience of preparing the students for an international exam thought about the process. In addition to searching the teachers' thoughts, I wondered what the students' thoughts were as well.

With the help of this research, it is aimed to show the washback effect of international exams in learning English as a foreign language and to seek answers for the questions that will be mentioned in section 1.4.

#### **1.4. Research Questions**

1. What is the nature and the scope of washback effects of the KET preparation program on classroom practices?
2. What differences can be seen in KET preparation programs regarding classroom interactions?
3. What do the teachers think about preparing the students for an international exam?
4. What do the students think about getting prepared for an international exam?

## CHAPTER II

### 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### 2.1. Introduction

Tests –especially standardized tests- have become so important in language learning and teaching that testing, assessment and washback have been popular subjects in the field of education.

Testing in a language learning process has caused the term ‘washback’ to be used frequently in the field of linguistics. Although, the term ‘washback’ has been used since the early/mid-1990s, there exists an extensive literature on washback. In this chapter, the literature about testing and assessment will be mentioned briefly and then washback - one of the testing principals- will be reviewed and it will be discussed from various aspects.

#### 2.2. Testing and Assessment

It is agreed that tests or examinations are applied to assess the test taker in various subjects. Tests can vary in style, it can be a written or an oral test or a computer based test, but no matter what kind of a test it is, testing takes place almost in every field in our life. Tests in language learning to assess the language learner’s knowledge of the target language have become very significant. We can classify the tests as standardized and non-standardized tests. Standardized tests are scored consistently and they can be applied anytime and anywhere. Non-standardized tests are usually prepared by individual instructors and cannot be used somebody else. "Assessment is the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving learning and development ". (Palomba, C.A. & Banta, T.W. 1999, p. 4)

It would be beneficial to mention that there are two types of assessment: Formative assessment and summative assessment. Formative assessment is often done at the beginning or during a program to be able to gather information about the learner’s knowledge level. In this way the teaching syllabus or the program is organized



according to the needs of the learners. Classroom assessment is one of the most common formative assessment techniques which are used to see the students' competence.

Summative assessment is often done at the end of the process and is used to check the level of learning at the end of the program. Whether summative or formative, assessment is done to see the accomplishment of the test taker and to get an idea about the

Assessment is a means for focusing our collective attention, examining our assumptions and creating a shared culture dedicated to continuously improving the quality of learning. Assessment requires setting of expectations and standards for quality that are both explicit and public. It involves systematically gathering evidence on how well performance matches those expectations and standards; analyzing and interpreting the evidence; and using the resulting information to document, explain and improve performance. (Angelo, 1995, p.11)

### **2.3. Principles of Testing:**

Since testing has become so significant, to be able to provide a standardized test, there should be some principles as well. Some major principles of testing will be mentioned here.

#### **2.3.1. Reliability:**

Reliability is a quality of test scores and a perfectly reliable score, or measure, would be one which is free from errors of measurement (American Psychological Association, 1985).

There are lots of different factors that can affect performance on tests and cause error in measurement. Some of these factors might be: testing environment and the mood and the level of the anxiety of the test taker. For instance, if a student gets a low score on a test and sometime later he gets a high mark on the same test, this shows that the reliability of the test is low. For test reliability, stability is important. If you give

the same test to the same subject on two different occasions, the test should yield similar results; it should have test reliability.

As Bachman (1990: 25) states: "If test scores are strongly affected by errors of measurement, they will not be meaningful, and cannot, therefore, provide the basis for valid interpretation or use. A test score that is not reliable, therefore, cannot be valid."

There are three (3) ways to measure the reliability of a test: Test-retest, split-half and alternate forms.

### **2.3.2. Practicality**

Practicality in a test refers to the extent to which an assessment or assessment procedure is easy to administer and score. When the practicality of a test is questioned, we should consider the cost of the assessment materials, how long it will take to develop and administer the assessment and how much time the assessment will take away from instruction.

It refers to the economy of time, effort and money in testing. In other words, a test should be easy to design, easy to administer, easy to mark, and easy to interpret the results (Bachman and Palmer, 1996). Moreover, according to Brown (2004) the test that is practical needs to be economical, easy to administrate, scored, and interpreted.

The extent to which a test is practical may depend on whether it is designed to be norm-referenced or criterion-referenced. In norm-referenced tests, each test-taker's score is interpreted in relation to a mean, standard deviation, and/or percentile rank. TOEFL is an example to the norm –referenced test as it is administered to large audiences and the results are quickly disseminated to test-takers.

Criterion-referenced tests, on the other hand, are designed to give test-takers feedback on specific course or lesson objectives (i.e. the "criteria"). Classroom tests connected to a curriculum are typical of c-r testing..

It could be said that c-r testing considers practicality as a secondary issue in the design of the test; teachers sacrifice time and effort in order to offer students appropriate and useful feedback. That is, the instructional value of c-r testing is high.

### **2.3. 3.Validity**

It is the central concept in testing and assessment. ‘Validity’ in testing and assessment has traditionally been understood to mean discovering whether a test ‘measures accurately what it is intended to measure’(Hughes, 1989: 22), or revealing the ‘appropriateness of a given test or any of its component parts as a measure of what it is purposed to measure’ (Henning, 1987:170). This view of validity means that we have an intention when we write a test and validity questions whether a test measures what is intended. Messick defined validity as follows:

Validity is an integrated evaluative judgment of the degree to which empirical evidence and theoretical rationales support the adequacy and appropriateness of inferences and actions based on test scores or other modes of assessment. (Messick, 1989: 11)

The validity of a language proficiency test can partially be estimated by examining its fundamental statistical properties: internal consistency, subtest inter-correlations and correlations with other related test variables (e.g., native language background, formal schooling).

There is a strong connection between reliability of a test and validity. As Bachman (1990: 25) states: ‘If test scores are strongly affected by errors of measurement, they will not be meaningful, and cannot, therefore, provide the basis for valid interpretation or use. A test score that is not reliable, therefore, cannot be valid.’

#### **2.3.3.1. Construct Validity**

Construct validity refers to the validity of inferences that observations measurement tools actually represent or measure the construct being investigated. According to Bachman and Palmer (1996) it implies using the construct correctly

(concepts, ideas, notions). Construct validity seeks agreement between a theoretical concept and a specific measuring device or procedure.

According to Messick (1988), the unified validity of a test is best revealed through an overall evaluative judgment of the measure. This comprehensive judgment is based on the empirical evidence and theoretical rationales that support the adequacy and appropriateness of inferences and actions made, based on the test-takers' test scores.

Six aspects of construct validity can be mentioned in the notion of validity as a unified concept. These are content, substantive, structural, generalizability, external and consequential aspects of construct validity. These six aspects function as general validity criteria (Messick, 1989).

#### **2.3.3.2. Content Validity**

A test has content validity if it measures knowledge of the content domain of which it was designed to measure knowledge. In other words, content validity is an important issue in educational tests because the content of the test the students are given should measure the knowledge that is taught to the students otherwise there would be no content validity of the test.

#### **2.3.3.3. Instructional Validity**

The instructional validity of a test is an aspect of its larger 'consequential validity'. As the validity of a test refers to measure what is intended to, it is possible that some intended and unintended results might occur at the end of this measurement. Since these results appear consequently, they are defined as 'consequential validity'.

Messick (1989) originally introduced consequences to the validity argument. Later, Shepard (1993) broadened the definition by arguing one must investigate both positive/negative and intended/unintended consequences of score-based inferences to properly evaluate the validity of the assessment system.

Consequential validity (Messick, 1995) is defined as “the appraisal of social consequences of testing.” Establishing consequential validity requires the accumulation of evidence and rational argument that students who take the test are benefited and not harmed as a result of.

When the validity is discussed, washback is considered as an instance of the consequential aspect of construct validity. Washback validity deals directly with the extent to which the test meets the needs of students, educators, researchers, administrators of tests, and anyone who uses the test results in the future. In addition, washback validity refers to the value of the relationship between the test and any associated teaching. “In essence, an examination of washback validity would take testing researchers into the classroom in order to observe the effect of their tests in action.” (Morrow, 1986)

In terms of complexity and validity, Alderson and Wall (1993) argued that washback is “likely to be a complex phenomenon which cannot be related directly to a test’s validity” (p.116). The washback effect should, therefore, refer to the effects of the test itself on aspects of teaching and learning.

Some writers suggested that a test's validity should be measured by the degree to which it has had a beneficial influence on teaching. Morrow (1986) made up the term 'washback validity' to refer to the quality of the relationship between a test and associated teaching. Fredericksen and Collins (1989) introduce a concept similar to 'washback validity'. They use the term 'systemic validity', which they define as follows:

A systemically valid test is one that induces in the education system curricular and instructional changes that foster the development of the cognitive skills that the test is designed to measure. Evidence for systemic validity would be an improvement in those skills after the test has been in place within the educational system for a period of time (1989:27).

## 2.4. Washback

As tests and testing in language learning have gained much more importance than ever, washback has been used widely in language testing and applied linguistics. *Washback* (Alderson and Wall, 1993), with other similar terms such as backwash (Biggs, 1995, 1996), *test impact* (Bachman and Palmer, 1996), *systemic validity* (Fredericksen and Collins, 1989), *consequential validity* (Messick, 1989, 1996), *measurement-driven instruction* (Popham, 1983, 1987), and other possible terms refer to the influence of testing on teaching and learning.

*Washback* has been the most frequently used one among the others. As Pearson (1988) points out that ‘public examinations influence the attitudes, behaviors, and motivation of teachers, learners and parents. And as examinations often come at the end of a course, this influence is seen working in a backward direction, hence the term ‘washback’.

Although the number of studies on washback have increased considerably since the seminal work of Alderson and Wall (1993) it is still not clear how testing influences teaching and learning. When we look at the history of empirical studies on washback, as a first study the seminal work of Alderson and Wall (1993) which took place in Sri-Lankan secondary schools for the Sri-Lankan O-Level Evaluation exam is seen. The effects of changing the O-level examinations had been searched in this study.

Alderson and Wall (1993), in their Sri Lankan study, dealt with the aspects of teaching and learning and came up with 15 hypotheses thinking that this process may be influenced by the examinations. These hypotheses, regarding washback are listed below:

1. A test will influence teaching.
2. A test will influence learning
3. A test will influence what teachers teach;
4. A test will influence how teachers teach;

5. A test will influence what learners learn;
6. A test will influence how learners learn
7. A test will influence the rate and sequence of teaching; and
8. A test will influence the rate and sequence of learning.
9. A test will influence the degree and depth of teaching;
10. A test will influence the degree and depth of learning.
11. A test will influence attitudes to the content, method, etc. of teaching and learning.
12. Tests that have important consequences will have washback; and conversely
13. Tests that do not have important consequences will have no washback
14. Tests will have washback on all learners and teachers.
15. Tests will have washback effects for some learners and some teachers, but not for others.

After this study and the hypothesis, Alderson and Wall concluded that further research on washback is needed to be able to understand the washback better. And then, Shohamy (1996) in secondary schools in Israel researched English foreign language test and Arabic second language test to see the impact of the tests on teaching and learning. She wrote in her report that these tests served as "an effective tool for changing the behaviours of teachers and students because of their power and high stakes".

The same year Alderson and Hamp Lyons did some researches in a language school where TOEFL was studied for university entrants. And Watanabe, (1996; 2000) did a research in private institutions where the students were being prepared for the university entrance exams in Japan.

The term 'washback' refers to the impact that tests have on teaching and learning. If the test is a high-stake one, the impact of the test and the changes can be better seen on the curriculum and teaching methods. High-stakes tests are so called because their results "are seen—rightly or wrongly—by students, teachers, administrators, parents, or the general public, as being used to make important decisions that immediately and directly affect them" (Madaus, 1988, p. 87). The primary use of such tests is "to ration

future opportunity as the basis for determining admission to the next layer of education or to employment opportunities” (Chapman & Snyder, 2000, p. 458).

Washback is sometimes considered to be the synonym of impact but washback is commonly used to refer to the effects of tests on teaching and learning. Impact has a broader meaning than washback and it deals with wider influences.

As suggested by Bachman & Palmer (1996), washback, at a macro level, refers to the extent to which a test influences within the society, ranging from government policymaking, school administration, publishing, and general opportunities, to parents’ expectations of their children.

At a micro level, washback refers to the extent to which a test influences within the classroom, mainly in the change or innovation of curricula and teachers’ methodologies and the influence of students’ learning. Wall (1997) distinguished between test impact and test washback in terms of the scope of the effects. According to Wall, *impact* refers to “any of the effects that a test may have on individuals, policies or practices, within the classroom, the school, the educational system or society as a whole” whereas *washback* (or *backwash*) is defined as “the effects of tests on teaching and learning” (Wall, 1997, p. 291).

It can be easily seen that tests not only affect the teaching and learning process but also the school, the status of the individual in the society and so on. McNamara (2000) claimed that “Tests can also have effects beyond the classroom. The wider effect of tests on the community as a whole, including the school, is referred to as test impact”. Andrews (2004) used “test impact” to describe “the effects of tests on teaching and learning, the educational system, and the various stake holders in the education process”.

Messick (1996), who defined washback as the “extent to which a test influences language teachers and learners to do things they would not necessarily otherwise do that *promote or inhibit* language learning” (p. 241, as cited in Alderson & Wall, 1993, p. 117).



Whether the effect of tests is called ‘washback’ or ‘impact’, it can be asserted that tests are powerful instruments.

As it is known that there are two common types of tests: Traditional multiple choice tests and the ones that are based on to assess the four-skills of the test-taker. And washback studies that are related to traditional multiple choice tests have shown that this kind of tests has negative influences on the quality of teaching and learning (Madaus & Kellaghan, 1992; Shepard, 1990), and the studies where a specific test or examination has been modified and improved upon (e.g., performance-based assessment), in order to exert a positive influence on teaching and learning (Linn & Herman, 1997; Sanders & Horn, 1995) have shown, however, positive, negative, or no influence on teaching and learning. Wall and Alderson also noted that “tests can be powerful determiners, *both positively and negatively*, of what happens in classrooms” (Alderson & Wall, 1993, p. 117; Wall & Alderson, 1993, p. 41).

The effect of the test –positive or negative –changes according to some factors that affect the intensity of washback such as test factors (test methods, test contents, skills tested, purpose(s) of the test), prestige factors (stakes of the test, status of the test), personal factors (teachers’ educational backgrounds and their beliefs), micro-context factors (the school/ university setting), and macro-context factors (the specific society in which the tests are used) (Cheng, Watanabe, and Curtis, 2004).

If we consider the historical development of the tests and when the first test or exam was given in the history, we will probably see that tests have been used for different purposes for a long time. The relationship between teaching and testing, the effects of testing on teaching-although it has been identified recently- have been occurring for a long time as well. As tests and test results have the power to change everything in the society, tests have been always popular in the field of education. Generally, washback can be analysed according to two major types: positive and negative, depending on whether it has a beneficial or harmful impact on educational practices (Hughes, 1989).

### **2.4.1. Positive Washback**

If the effects of the tests on teaching and learning process can be considered as 'positive' then we can talk about 'positive washback'. The reasons for positive washback or what kind of a test causes positive washback has been the topic of many discussions. Good tests can be utilized and designed as beneficial teaching-learning activities so as to encourage a positive teaching-learning process (Pearson, 1988:107).

Since 'washback' is the influence of testing on teaching and learning a language, if we are not influenced by the test and if we do not change our teaching methods and go on teaching what is on the syllabus, can we mention the positive washback? According to Messick (1996), "for optimal positive washback there should be little, if any, difference between activities involved in learning the language and activities involved in preparing for the test" (pp. 241–242).

Whether the test is good or poor does not guarantee us that the washback effect will be positive or negative, the effects of the test in the teaching and learning process is significant. Messick (1996): "A poor test may be associated with positive effects and a good test with negative effects because of other things that are done or not done in the education system" (p. 242).

### **2.4.2. Negative Washback**

It is usually thought that language tests have negative influence on teaching and learning that's why this influence is called negative washback. This has been considered as a potential problem.

It is thought that - as Vernon (1956) claimed nearly 60 years ago- teachers showed tendency in ignoring the subjects and activities that did not help passing the exam and that examinations or tests 'distort the curriculum' (p.166).

When the aim of the lesson becomes to pass the exam by getting a good score, in fact it becomes necessary to change the curriculum and to focus on the exam format. Wiseman (1961) stated that special classes that were paid for preparing students for

exams were not helpful to the learning process as students were practicing exam techniques instead of the language learning activities (p.159).

Davies (1968) believed that testing devices took place of teaching devices and by doing the past examination papers in the lessons, the educational experience was narrowed down and made less interesting (p.125).

Alderson and Wall (1993) referred to negative washback as the undesirable effect on teaching and learning of a particular test deemed to be “poor” (p. 5). Alderson and Wall meant by saying *poor* “something that the teacher or learner does not wish to teach or learn.”

Noble and Smith (1994a) also found that high-stake testing could affect teachers directly and negatively (p. 3), and that “teaching test-taking skills and drilling on multiple-choice worksheets is likely to boost the scores but unlikely to promote general understanding” (1994b, p. 6).

According to Pearson (1988), a test’s washback effect will be negative if it fails to reflect the learning principles and course objectives to which the test supposedly relates, and it will be positive if the effects are beneficial and “encourage the whole range of desired changes” (p. 101).

Alderson and Wall (1993), on the other hand, stressed that the quality of the washback effect might be independent of the quality of a test (pp. 117–118). Any test, good or bad, may result in beneficial or detrimental washback effects.

As Heyneman (1987) put it: “Testing is a profession, but it is highly susceptible to political interference. To a large extent, the quality of tests relies on the ability of a test agency to pursue professional ends autonomous” (p. 262). Chapman and Snyder’s (2000) observation that: “teachers’ tendencies to teach to the test are often cited as an impediment to introducing new instructional practices” (p. 460).

It is usually believed by some educators that the source of negative washback is standardized testing, especially the multiple choice test format. Some testers on the other hand believe that the test design does not affect the nature of washback it is the misuse or abuse of test results that triggers negative washback.

Bailey (1996) claimed that more empirical research needed to be carried out in order to document its exact nature and mechanisms, while also identifying “concerns about what constitutes both positive and negative washback, as well as about how to promote the former and inhibit the latter” (p. 259).

## **2.5. Test Preparation Program**

Whilst tests are so prominent and valuable, then there should be some preparations for them. Test preparation is usually accepted as part of the more general issue of washback (Cheng 1997). It is argued that to start a specific test preparation practices depend on the test type whether it is a high stake or a low stake test. (Alderson and Hamp-Lyons, 1996).

The time that the teacher and the students have ahead of them till the test will take place should be used so effectively that, the results should meet the expectancy. That is why necessary changes for the preparation for the test are in a way obligatory. To prepare for a test requires special teaching activities, arrangement of teaching materials according to the exam format, special time is allotted and awareness of the test is high (Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt and Ferman, 1996).

If we want to see what kind of changes occur in a test preparation class, we can look at the literature (Lumley and Stoneman, 2000) of test washback, and see some generalized assertions about the nature and effectiveness of language test preparation:

- Larger classes may be formed for language test preparation
- Teachers may not deal with communicative activities in language test preparation courses unless the test requires.
- Teachers may have difficulty in finding ways to make the content interesting or using the test preparation material in a stimulating way that could create learning opportunities
- During the test preparation activities, learners are concentrated on practicing and improving their language skills for the tests and thus neglect the real business of learning the language; and only deal with the language that is necessary for the test.

- Test preparation class is score –oriented, thus far from the knowledge creation and critical thinking. All the studies are done according to the requirements of the test.

### **2.5.1 Teacher’s Role in Test Preparation Programs**

It is a fact that teachers play a significant role in the exam preparation process. That is why teacher’s experience, personal beliefs and academic background determine how this process will take place and what methodology will be preferred. "Tests have impact on *what* teachers teach but not on *how* they teach". (Wall & Alderson, 1993, p.68)

The washback effect of the tests is not the same for teachers and learners all the time. "the existence of a test by itself does not guarantee washback...tests will have different amounts and types of washback on some teachers and learners than on other teachers and learners" (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996, pp295-296).

Spratt –concerning washback- notes that "the teacher is constantly mentioned as playing a pivotal role in determining whether washback occurs, how and to what degree" (Spratt 2005:21).

Teachers actually take a big responsibility in this process because they have to use the most effective teaching techniques to make their students pass the exam and at the same time provide the chances to develop language skills usable in real life situations. To achieve this, they have to do some changes in their teaching methods and even in the curriculum. "What would an examination have to look like to encourage teachers to change their way of teaching" (Wall, 1999, p.724) also called ‘face validity by appearance’ in the sense defined by Mosier (1947).

Chapman and Snyder (2000) concluded that changing national exams *can* shape teachers’ instructional practices, but that success is by no means assured: “It depends on the government’s political will in the face of potentially stiff opposition and the strategies used to help teachers make the transition to meet the new demands” (p. 462). They put forward three other important propositions:

(a) The connection between changing tests and teachers' changing instructional practices is not a technical relationship, where a change of test format automatically leads to changes in the dynamic patterns of classroom behavior.

(b) Changing the behavior of individual teachers does not automatically lead to changes in student learning.

(c) Well-intentioned changes to tests may generate considerable opposition, often among those with seemingly most to gain from improving educational quality (i.e., teachers, parents, and students). (pp. 462–463)

### **2.5.2 Students' Role in Test Preparation Programs**

Learning a new language is a complex process which requires learners' full attention, motivation and efforts to be able to understand the structure of the target language and to use it effectively in order to communicate. While the students are busy with learning the target language, they have to prove how much they have learnt and they have to take various exams and tests. When the test is an international one, the responsibility they have becomes much more than the usual tests.

Like the teacher who prepares the students for the international exam, the students who are prepared for the exam share the responsibility. The teacher has to teach them and give those tactics for the exam to make the students to get the ultimate result whereas the students have to do very well in the exam and get a good result. The exam in the target language is a real challenge for the students since they are trying to learn a totally new language and also they will see that how their learning process is by taking the exam.

## CHAPTER III

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Introduction:

In this chapter, context of the study, the research design, participants and the data sources will be given in details.

#### 3.2. Context of the Study

Çukurova Bilfen is a private school complex in the center of Adana. It was founded in 1989. It consists of a pre-school, primary school, secondary school, and a high school. It has a population of almost 2000 students. It has also a crowded teaching staff and it has nearly 200 teachers. There are 30 English teachers in the English language teaching department. Students' social and economic standards are high and the physical conditions of the school are pretty good regarding to be a private school. It is rich enough in terms of equipment or materials. The researcher is also one of the English teachers of the school and has been teaching there for sixteen years.

The students at this school have been taking Cambridge ESOL exams since 2000. The certificate of the exams are given to the students with a ceremony that is held at the conference hall of the school at the beginning of the academic year.

#### 3.3. Research Design

In this particular research both a descriptive study and a case study are conducted. It is a descriptive study in design because it aims to identify the teachers' opinions about washback effect of international exams in teaching English as a foreign language by interviewing them. Also, with the help of a questionnaire it aims to find out the students' opinions about the preparation process.

It is a case study in design because the English teacher who is preparing her students for an international exam in the target language has been selected and observed

also her classes have been recorded. In addition to preparation lessons also daily English lessons have been recorded too.

Thomas (2011) offers the following definition of case study: "Case studies are analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the *subject* of the inquiry will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytical frame — an *object* — within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explicates. "

Yin (1984:23) defines the case study research method “as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.”

In this study, English teaching lessons –both daily English and preparation – lessons for the exams are inquired empirically in the real –life context. That is why it is considered to be a case study.

### **3.4. Participants**

The major participant in this study is the teacher who is teaching the 7<sup>th</sup> graders. She has been teaching English for fourteen years and has been a teacher at the college for three years. She has usually taught English to teenagers and high school students so far. She mostly uses communicative approach in her lessons. Because she believes that using the target language is the best way to learn. She prefers creating real-life situations and wants her students to act during the lessons as she is fond of drama.

She finds studying for a specific exam such as: KET, PET or FCE can sometimes be motivating for the students as they see that the level of their English knowledge is approved by an international authority. She also believes that exams or tests should not be the main target in language learning, the main target should be to learn the language well and to use it properly.



The other participants of the study are twenty teenagers who are at the age of twelve or thirteen and they form a class. They are the 7<sup>th</sup> graders and have been studying English for seven years and they speak Turkish as their mother tongue. Also, the English teachers of that school who have some experience of teaching for an international exam have been interviewed as a third group of participants.

As it was mentioned above, the research was conducted at the secondary school of Çukurova Bilfen Private School that is located in Adana, Turkey. Since the target group taking place in the study is already an existing group, there was no need to implement any sampling methods.

### **3.5. Data Sources**

The instruments of this study are: video recordings of the lessons, interviews with English teachers and a questionnaire with students.

#### **3.5.1. Video Recording**

The data were collected with the help of recording KET preparation classes for four weeks. Each week, two lessons out of 8 English lessons were for the preparation lessons. Each lesson was 45 minutes. Then, daily English classes were recorded for a month to be able to see the differences. The researcher was the observer of each classroom. The goal was to see the nature and the scope of the KET preparation classes and to find out the differences between daily English classes and preparation classes.

#### **3.5.2. Interview**

Some of the English teachers have volunteered to join the interview about preparing the students for an international exam. They were asked six questions and they were recorded during the interview (see Appendix 1). In the interview, the teachers' ideas about the preparation process for an international exam were asked. Two of the questions that were directed to the teachers were about giving reasons for their answers.

#### **3.5.3. Questionnaire**

The questionnaire which was given to the students included six questions (see Appendix 2). Three of them were yes-no questions, one was an open-ended question and two of them were explain why questions.

### **3.6. Data Analysis**

After the questionnaire session with the students was over, the researcher started analyzing the video recordings. First, the recordings of the preparation for the exam lessons were watched and then the recording of the daily English lessons. Content analysis was used during this process. Then, the interviews with the teachers and the questionnaire with the students were analyzed. After analyzing all the data, there were inferences and implications that were supposed to be helpful for teachers as well as the researchers.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter will focus on the analysis of the data gathered by the video recordings of both exam preparation lessons in English and daily English lessons, interviews with the teachers, questionnaires with the students in an order determined by the research questions. The analysis of each data collection tool will be mentioned in different sections supported by the excerpts taken from the data collection tools. In the end the results of the findings will be discussed. Video recordings, interviews and questionnaires led to more reliable and valid results in the study.

#### **4.2. Nature and Scope of KET Preparation Classes**

The KET preparation lessons were recorded for four weeks and each week two KET preparation lessons were recorded. Totally, 8 lessons were recorded. These recordings were content analyzed considering these headings: Classroom practice and interaction, teacher's attitude and classroom material.

##### **4.2.1. Classroom Practice and Interaction**

When the video recordings are watched to analyze, it was seen that in KET preparation lessons, there is a continuous teacher to student interaction most of the time but there is no student to student interaction. The teacher is 'the manager of the class' (Brown, 2004) she gives the instructions and tasks and then waits for them to be fulfilled. Some excerpts from the video recordings:

Teacher: You have three minutes to complete the dialogue. (The students are busy with dialogue completion)

Teacher: There are 4 short conversations and there is one question for each conversation. Ready? Look at the pictures first. Are you ready?

The lessons are teacher-centered and the teacher teaches for the test in the preparation lessons. The students and teachers are focused on their aims during the

lessons, to comprehend the format of the exam well and do the exam well. The teacher as an authority does not let anything spoil the concentration and keeps on teaching.

During the preparation lessons, the teacher does not use different reinforcing activities such as: pair work, group work, and dramatization and so on. Instead the teacher prefers the students to answer the questions or do the exercises individually most of the time. As the students will sit for the test alone, the teacher prefers students working alone and answering questions alone. This can be clearly seen when the recordings are watched:

Teacher: Let's go on. Gülseren, have you seen this new video about the English artist?

Gülseren: I've heard about it but I haven't seen it.

Teacher: Right, agree?

Students: Yes.

Teacher: Kaan, are you free now?

Kaan : ( a ) I've got a class in five minutes. Can I watch it at home?

During the preparation process, as the aim is to make the students familiar with the exam format, they continuously practice the question types. That means not teaching the language but teaching to the test. Practicing the structures that is necessary for the exam may not reflect the real –life English situations totally.

Target language is usually used in the lessons. Although some students showed tendency in using the mother tongue, the teacher kept talking in the target language. When the students got confused and couldn't understand the drill, the teacher used mother tongue to clarify the situation.

Student: Hocam, cevap 'h' (eyç) değil miydi? (in mother tongue)  
(Teacher, was not 'h' the correct answer?).

Teacher: You must cook this before you eat it. Bakalım. (mother tongue) (Let's see). This area and grill open between 10 a.m. and 10 p.m. This is a restaurant honey.

Here it said ‘you must cook’. Restoranda biz mi pişiririz? (mother tongue). (Do we cook at a restaurant?)

The students do not know how to answer the question while doing a listening drill. So the teacher explains it like this:

Teacher: Spelling yoksa ismi yazmak için yormayın kendinizi (mother tongue). (If there is no spelling, do not bother yourself to write the name) Just write down the job. (giving tactics for the exam)

The students are highly motivated because they have an aim and they want to see their accomplishments. One lesson is 45 minutes long and the students participate in the lesson for 35 minutes. They are focused on the lesson for a long time as their attention span is very long because of being teenagers.

#### **4.2.2. Teacher’s Attitude**

The teacher, as she has experienced of preparing the students for an international exam, looks very confident and being aware of the responsibility she has, she is very strict. The students rarely have fun during these lessons because the teacher does not want them to be distracted and focused on anything else but the exam practice. She is always busy with dealing with the lesson and doing the exercises because she wants to use the time effectively.

#### **4.2.3. Classroom Materials**

As a classroom material, the book which was written according to the format of the exam is used and by doing the exercises in the book, the students got used to exam format. In addition to the exam practice book, the old exam booklets were used as well.

The influence of testing on teaching and learning that is ‘washback effect’ is seen during the preparation process. If there was no test, the teacher and the students would not focus on the exercises they did during the lesson and the book they study would not be used. The exercises were chosen to practice the exam format. The teaching methods and materials have been changed according to the requirements of the

test. Because of these changes, washback effect was seen. On the other hand, the test – being a skill based one- requires the practice of four skills that are listening, speaking, reading and writing so the washback effect seen here is ‘positive’.

### **4.3. General English Classes**

The students in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade of the school have 6 general English lessons in a week. Each week two daily English lessons were recorded for 3 weeks. The six recordings were content analyzed considering the three headings that are: classroom practice and interaction, classroom material and teacher’s attitude.

#### **4.3.1. Classroom Practice and Interaction**

In daily English classes, the interaction is between the teacher and the students most of the time. But the teacher wants the students to be active during the lesson that is why she asks them to work in pairs. She wants student to student interaction so that the students use the target language more.

Teacher: What do you think? Which crimes are the most serious? Which crimes are the least serious? You can work with a partner. Work in pairs. OK?

She walks around and listens to the pairs. She goes on:

Teacher: Which criminals are the most dangerous? Talk with your partner.

The teacher does not want quiet students in the class; on the contrary she encourages them to join the lesson to be more active. For example, when it is time to read a text, she allocates the text paragraph by paragraph among the students and asks them to read it aloud:

Teacher: Egemen, you’re reading the beginning part of the text, first paragraph Turan, second paragraph Mustafa, third paragraph Merve, fourth paragraph Dilşat, fifth paragraph Yağmur and the last paragraph Meriç.

Teacher uses different teaching methods such as: dramatization, act-out and role play during the lesson to draw the students' attention and to keep them motivated. The teacher is trying to explain the meaning of a word and the topic is 'film'. They are dealing with the words related to the film making and the people who work in this business. She chooses a student and asks him to come to the board and says:

Teacher: He is a star. We are the extras. Ok? Thank you. (The student pretends to be a famous film star).

After the student sits down, the teacher asks one of the students to read the situation on the worksheet that the teacher has given. The student reads the situation loudly.

Student: Your grandmother gives you a watch. You don't like it.

What do you say?

Grandmother: Happy birthday, I got this for you.

You: Thank you, I really like it or Thank you, it's not my style.

Teacher: I need two people here. Ege, it's your birthday. Yağmur, you're grandma. The students –by telling the same sentences- dramatize the situation.

Grandma: Happy birthday to you and I bought this for you

Grandson: That is not my style but I'll use it because if I wouldn't use it you behave me badly.

Teacher: Give her a hug. (the class laughs)

By using different teaching techniques, the teacher wants to draw the students' attention all the time and wants them to be active during the lesson.

The teacher lets the students use the mother tongue during the lessons while she never speaks in the mother tongue. Whenever the teacher explains something or asks something, she wants to be sure that it is understood by the students, so she waits for the students to tell its meaning in the mother tongue and she approves it by using the target language, mimics and gestures.

Teacher: Tom took part in a talent show in New York so ‘took part’ means.....

Students: yer almak (in their mother tongue)

The teacher and the students are relaxed during the lessons and a relaxed classroom atmosphere exists. The teacher makes a joke:

Teacher: Runner is the person who runs. (The students laugh)

I’m joking.

Here, they are still dealing with the words related to the film industry.

When she realized that some students lost their interest, she started singing: ‘Are you sleeping Brother John?’ to draw the students’ attention to the lesson again.

#### **4.3.2. Teacher’s Attitude**

When the video recordings of the daily English lessons are watched, it is observed that the teacher is relaxed and the anxiety level is low. She is usually friendly and understanding towards the students. As there is no exam –except the routine quizzes or exams- ahead of them, the anxiety level of both the teacher and the students is low.

#### **4.3.3. Classroom Materials**

Daily English lesson materials consist of a course book and a workbook which are chosen by the English teachers at the end of the previous academic year. In addition to these books, teacher made materials –worksheets for grammar practice and vocabulary list –are used. By giving the grammar worksheets, the students practiced the structure that was taught. The words that were studied during the topic based unit are given at the end of the unit and by looking at the definitions of the words in the target language and the sentences the students practice the vocabulary.

It can be said that general English classes are mainly based on teaching the language and giving the students the chance to use the language communicatively. There are various activities during the lesson and students learn by doing and they have fun. There is no washback effect during these lessons as there is no exam ahead of them.



#### **4.4. Differences between General English and KET Preparation Classes**

KET preparation class differs from the daily English class in terms of the nature of classroom practices and interactions. To find out the differences and the similarities between general English classes and KET preparation classes, the categorization has been done according to the themes that were found during the analysis. Although the content analysis was done under the three headings, these are a priori:

##### **4.4.1. Use of Mother Tongue versus Target Language**

The students showed tendency in using the mother tongue in both exam preparation classes and the general English classes. The teacher –aiming her students to get the best results in the exam- wanted to clarify the drills so she used the mother tongue in a limited way. She did not want the students to be confused and she provided them with the necessary explanation to be able to do the exercises. Whenever the students used the mother tongue, she replied them in the target language.

In general English classes, the teacher did not use the mother tongue; she always used the target language while teaching but she let the students use the mother tongue during the lessons.

As it can be clearly seen, the teacher –although she did not approve of using the mother tongue during the lessons- had to use the mother tongue because her main purpose during the preparation classes was to make the students ready for the exam.

##### **4.4.2. Exam Specific Drills versus General English Practices**

In KET preparation lessons, the lesson plan was made taking the needs of the exam into consideration and all drills were based on the exam format. The exercises were adapted according to the format of the exam that is going to be taken. Listening, reading, writing and speaking drills were all done to make the students' progress better. Each skill is studied as much as students needed.

In general English classes, a wide range of activities such as pair work, dramatization and role-play were observed apart from the activities in the textbook and the workbook. A wide range of the activities were done during the lessons. The teacher apart from the listening and reading exercises dealt with the activities that required the students' participation in the lesson a lot.

#### **4.4.3. Positive Classroom Climate versus Negative Classroom Climate**

Feeling the responsibility they have, both the teacher and the students showed a very determined and highly motivated attitude in KET preparation lessons. They were much disciplined and being aware of the fact that they are going to sit for an exam, they did not have a minute to waste. This made the classroom climate serious and tense.

In general English classes, it was easy to feel the positive climate while watching the video recordings. Both the teacher and the students were relaxed and practicing the different drills and using the appropriate methods, the process of learning the target language took place.

These differences are caused by the washback effects of the international test. Whether it is positive or negative, if there is a kind of testing then the effect of this testing is inevitably seen. The first thing that is affected by the test is the syllabus of the lesson, the teacher's attitude and the lesson materials.

#### **4.5. Similarities between General English and KET Preparation Classes**

After having mentioned the differences between two English classes, it would be better to talk about the similarities between two English lessons. The similarities can be listed as follows:

##### **4.5.1 Material**

In both classes, a text book is followed. In KET preparation class, the text book that was written according to the exam format was used, on the other hand, in the

general English class a text book and a workbook is used that is a course book written for the English language learners.

#### **4.5.2. Students' Participation**

The teacher wants all the students to participate in the lesson and she wants them to be active during the class. The teacher pays attention to the participation of the students both in preparation for the exam classes and general English classes.

#### **4.5.3. Error Correction**

By correcting the errors, students are given feedback about what they have done. The feedback can be about the process of the task or self –regulation. There are six types of error correction as listed below.

I listed all the error correction types here but the teacher used some of them during the lesson that is why examples are given as the teacher used them during the classes. The same methods are used to correct the students' errors, thus the way she corrected the errors is similar in the exam preparation lessons and general English lessons.

1. Explicit correction: It refers to telling the correct form explicitly. As the teacher provides the correct form, she clearly indicates that what the student had said was incorrect.

A listening drill to practice the 'reported speech' is being done.

Tape recorder: Are you 11 years old?

Teacher: She asked..... (calls out one of the students)

Student: If am 11 years old.

Teacher: If I was 11 years old.

2. Recasts: The teacher reformulates all or part of a student's utterance, minus the error.

Recasts are generally implicit in that they are not introduced by phrases such as 'You mean,' and 'You should say.'

3. Clarification indicates to students that their utterance has been misunderstood or the utterance was incorrect so a clarification is needed. The phrases like "Pardon me" or "What do you mean by *X*?" are used to clarify.
4. Metalinguistic feedback contains either comments, information, or questions related to the well-formedness of the student's utterance, without explicitly providing the correct form. Metalinguistic comments generally indicate that there is an error somewhere. (Can you find your error?)
5. Elicitation refers to at least three techniques that teachers use to directly elicit the correct form from the student. First, teachers elicit completion of their own utterance by strategically pausing to allow students to "fill in the blank" as it were. Second, teachers use questions to elicit correct forms (how do we say in English?) Third, teachers occasionally ask students to reformulate their utterance.

Student: They usually spend the first break of each day.....

Teacher: Can we say the first break of each day **or** can we say the first part of each day?

Student: Part of each day

Teacher: Ok

6. Repetition refers to the teacher's repetition, in isolation, of the student's erroneous utterance. In most cases, teachers adjust their intonation so as to highlight errors.

Student: George goes running on the farm.

Teacher: On the farm? How do you know that? Look at the paragraph. Sometimes I go for a run along the river.

Student: (after checking the passage) OK, near some water.

It is clearly seen that the way the teacher corrected the students' errors did not show any differences though the syllabus of the lessons differed from each other.

#### **4.6. Teachers' Opinions about Exam Preparation**

Five of the English teachers who work at the private school where the study was conducted were interviewed. The teachers were asked to answer 6 questions in the interview. First, they were asked if they had prepared the students for KET exam before and if the answer was 'yes', they were asked how long they had prepared the students for this exam. Then, the next question was if they enjoyed this preparation process and if they thought that this preparation put too much burden on their shoulders.

They were also asked what their thoughts about preparing the students for the exam were, if they felt themselves more responsible while preparing the students for the exam and finally what the strengths and weaknesses of preparing students for KET were.

To start with, if the teachers had prepared the students for KET exam before is analyzed, it is seen that five of them have prepared the students for an international exam before and they have had the experience of the preparation process. Two of the teachers have the experience for two years, one of them has had this experience for six years, and the other teacher has had it for three years while the fifth teacher has had it for four years. As it is understood, all the teachers who were interviewed have had the experience of this kind of preparation.

When the teachers were asked if they enjoyed preparing the students for KET exam or not, all of them agreed on the idea that they enjoyed this process. Four of the teachers mentioned that this preparation helped the students improve their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills as the exam is a skill based one. One teacher mentioned that students are highly motivated and they are eager to learn because they have an aim. Here are some excerpts from teachers' interviews:

T1: Yes, I do enjoy it. Students get the chance of improving 4 skills. This preparation enables them to communicate in the target language in daily life.

T3: Yes, I do. Cambridge ESOL exams are based on skills so as we work on basic skills in English, I mean- writing, reading, listening and speaking- teaching language becomes satisfying and enjoyable for us.

As a third question, the teachers were asked if this preparation put too much burden on their shoulders. None of them think that this kind of preparation put too much burden on their shoulders on the contrary they think that it is fun and as long as the appropriate materials are used the teacher does not have to deal with lots of things but only gives the instructions and coordinates the students. Here are some excerpts from the teachers' interviews:

T2: It is not a burden, it is fun.

T4: It is not because the teacher only gives the instruction and coordinates the students.

T5: It is not because the materials are ready to use.

The teachers were asked what their thoughts were about the preparation period, taking the time, materials and teacher behavior into the consideration. All of the teachers think that this process is advantageous for both teachers and students. Students enhance their receptive and productive skills which are very important. As for

teachers it gives them a lot of ideas about the exam format and how to improve the students' skills to get good results. One of the teachers talked about the negative effect of the multiple choice tests but then she added that as the KET exam format evaluates the candidate's 4 skills to use the language effectively there is not such a negative effect during this process. They find the materials satisfying and two –hour preparation in a week satisfactory. Here are some excerpts:

T2: This exam evaluates the students very well so I feel good when I 'm preparing them students get used to the format of the exam and do better day by day.

T3: Actually, focusing on a specific exam makes the students ignore the real usage of the language and conceive of the language an exam especially if it is a multiple choice exam. But KET exams and the preparation for this exam make the students use the language effectively.

As a next question, the teachers were asked if they felt themselves responsible for the students' success. Five of them told that they felt big responsibility as the results are considered to be their success and as they are working at a private school, there is a big expectation about the success and all of them want their students to get good grades. Some excerpts from the interview:

T4: I feel responsible to a certain extent because I want my students to get good results.

T5: I feel big responsibility because I'm working at a private school.

As a final question, the teachers were asked the strengths and weaknesses of this exam preparation. As strengths, teachers told that this kind of preparation helps the students to be self-confident learners and creates a good chance to talk about different subjects. It is also a good chance to practice four skills in the target language.

As weaknesses, they told that during this process they do not teach anything new, they just revise what the students have already known. In addition to this, they

added that if the exam results are not as good as expected, students may be disappointed and discouraged.

T1: This preparation makes the students self-confident learners and provides a good chance to talk about various subjects. The weakness part is they may feel disappointed if they get a bad result.

T4. However, the students do not learn anything, and they just revise what they have already known.

T5: Skill –based activities are helpful but the students who are not well-prepared may get bored.

Consequently, when the things that the researcher has mentioned are taken into consideration, it is seen that teachers who have prepared their students for an international exam are happy with this process. They find this kind of preparation satisfying and useful because the exam format makes them practice the four skills of a language which are reading, writing, listening and speaking. In this respect, positive washback is worth mentioning because the influence of testing on teaching and learning that is washback has been positive in the teachers' point of views.

#### **4.7. Students' Thoughts about Exam Preparation**

The students in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade of the school where the study was conducted were given a questionnaire .Twenty students answered the questionnaire and there were 6 questions in the questionnaire. In the questionnaire, they were asked if they had taken such an exam before, if they had done such a preparation and if this preparation affected their performance and how their performance was affected. Next, they were asked if they enjoyed preparing for KET exam or not, if they were stressed while studying, if KET preparation influenced their feelings about learning English. Final questions were: if they believed preparing for an international exam help them develop the target language and what made them take such an international exam.



When the answers of the first question which was if they had taken such an exam before were analyzed, it was seen that six students out of twenty had never taken such an international exam before while sixteen of them had. The students who had taken such an exam before had done a preparation for the test before. And if this preparation affected their performance in the exam was asked them the answers showed variations like:

Student 1: It improved my performance.

Student 3: It affected well.

Student 5: I can talk better

Student 9: We studied well and it helped a lot.

One student out of twenty answered that his performance was not affected whereas the others answered that this preparation affected their performance in a positive way and it improved their performance in the exam and in the daily English both lessons and during the use of it.

As a second question, the students were asked if they enjoyed preparing for KET exam and 4 of the students said 'no' because they thought that the exam was hard and the preparation process was boring. The other 16 students thought that it was fun and preparation for the exam was playing like games and two of them added that they loved their teacher.

The next question in the questionnaire was if they were stressed or not while studying. Eighteen students out of twenty replied that they were not stressed while one of them said 'yes' and the other one said 'sometimes'.

The students were asked if the exam preparation influenced their feelings about learning English as the fourth question in the questionnaire. Six students out of twenty answered 'no' and one of them added this explanation:

Student: I like learning English since I was a child.

Fourteen students replied this question 'yes' meaning that their feelings about learning English were influenced positively during this process.

The students were asked if they believed preparing for an international exam helped them develop the target language and seventeen of them answered 'yes' and three of them answered 'no'.

The last question in the questionnaire was to find out what made the students take such an exam. Here are some answers:

Student 1: It helps me improve my English and this will help me in the future.

Student 7: I love English.

Student 9: I want to improve my English knowledge.

Student 10: I want it.

Hence, the students are –like the teachers- happy with this process and they believe that this kind of preparation provides a good opportunity to enhance their language knowledge and that's why it is worth mentioning the positive washback.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

The goal of this study is to seek for the answers of four research questions about washback effect of KET exam in learning English as a foreign language. It has been conducted to find out the nature and the scope of washback effects of the exam preparation on classroom practices and the differences that can be seen in this process.

In addition to these, the teachers' and the students' thoughts were asked and analyzed. While dealing with these, during the analysis of the recordings some differences were observed as well. These are: Use of mother tongue versus target language, exam specific drills versus daily English practices, positive classroom climate versus negative classroom climate.

In order to collect the relevant data, the researcher has video recordings, interview with teachers and a questionnaire applied to the students.

#### **5.2. Discussion and Conclusion**

The number of studies on washback effect in language testing literature has been increasing recently due to its important place in education. As the roles of standardized tests have gained significant roles in the students' lives, the present study has tried to show the influence of testing on teaching and learning.

As a response to the first question that is related to the nature and the scope of washback effects of the KET preparation program on classroom practices, it is found that the washback effect vary in different situations. The washback effect on classroom interactions and practices is observed because the teacher changed her teaching method taking the exam format into consideration. And as the exam format was based on the communicative skills, this effect can be considered as positive.

The way she taught the target language turned into teaching to the test. By using the English knowledge the students have already had, they practiced the exam format.

As Bailey said "Washback can either be positive or negative to the extent that it either promotes or impedes the accomplishment of educational goals held by learners and / or programme personnel' (Bailey, 1996: 269).

On the other hand, dealing with the all skills and doing exercises to improve them can be considered as positive washback. But this is because of the test format that is going to be taken. The teacher took the preparation process seriously as she believed that it is an international exam and the students' knowledge would be approved internationally.

Research question two was about the differences that can be seen in KET preparation programs regarding classroom interactions. When the video recordings of KET preparation classes were analyzed, it was seen that there was a 90% of change in classroom interactions and practices. Teaching the language techniques turned into teaching to the test which was totally different from teaching general English to the students.

Research question three was what the teachers think about preparing the students for an international exam. Surprisingly, the teachers were very happy and satisfied with this preparation process as I mentioned before in section 4.6. Although they had to deal with different teaching techniques and big responsibilities, they were pleased with this preparation process.

Research question four was what the students think about getting prepared for an international exam. As it was mentioned in section 4.7, the students –being under pressure – were also happy while preparing for an international exam.

To be able to see the learners' language competence, tests are the essential instruments. Especially the high-stake tests are really important among the learners. Under these circumstances, the washback effect of the exams naturally occurs because

people have to do some kind of preparations for passing the tests in order to prove that they have learnt English.

### **5.3. Suggestions for Further Studies**

This research was conducted with one teacher and the seventh grade students of a private school. I suggest that further studies should be done by observing different teachers who teach English to the seventh graders. So that different teachers can be observed during the preparation process. The participants of this study were the seventh grade students and this study should be done with the young learners or with the sixth or eighth graders as well. By doing this, the washback effect of the international exams can be studied in different levels. This study took for a month, and if it were longitudinal, what the washback effects of the exam preparation would be? So, this study should take place for a longer time.

### **5.4. Implications**

English teachers' main responsibility is to teach the language and help the students use the target language efficiently, thus instead of preparing them for the exams they should make the learners be exposed to the target language as much as possible. In fact, teaching the language process should be programmed in a way that whenever there is an exam to be taken, no changes should be done.

### **5.5. Limitations**

As the washback effects of an international exam in learning English as a foreign language was the main aim of this study, what the students' parents think about the exams or what the students' socio-cultural environments were not examined. Also, during this process, by doing the classroom practices what the students learnt were not studied either.

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## **7. APPENDICES**

### **7.1. APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS**

1. Have you prepared students for KET before?

a) If yes, how long have you prepared for this exam?

b) If no, why did you decide to prepare the students for KET?

2. Do you enjoy preparing the students for a specific exam?

If yes / no, why?

3. Do you think this preparation puts too much burden on your shoulders?

4. What are your thoughts about preparing the students for the exam?

5. Do you feel more responsible while preparing the kids for this exam? Why?

6. What are the strengths and weaknesses of preparing students for KET?

## **7.2. APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS**

1. Have you ever taken such an exam before?
  - a) If yes, have you done such a preparation before the test?
  - b) If yes, do you think it affected your performance in the exam? And how is your performance affected?
2. Do you enjoy preparing for KET exam? If yes / no, why?
3. Are you stressed while studying?
4. Does KET preparation influence your feelings about learning English?
5. Do you believe preparing for an international exam help you develop the target language?
6. What makes you take such an international exam?