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## Washback Effects of High-Stakes Examinations on Teachers' Perceptions of their Instructional Practices

**Chahrazed Mirza** 

University of Nizwa, Oman

**Hossein Teymoori** 

University of Nizwa, Oman

**Hajder Mirza** 

University Lamine Debaghine, Setif, Algeria

**Abstract.** Educational reforms often need help in practical implementation. One noted challenge in Algeria is the under-implementation of the competency-based approach (CBA). While the current literature has attempted to identify the causes of the frequently highlighted under-implementation of the CBA in Algeria, the potential washback effects of high-stakes examinations, particularly the baccalaureate examinations (BAC), still need to be explored. Teachers' perceptions about the misalignment between examination prerequisites and the competency-based curriculum objectives were overlooked. This study examined the possible washback effects of the high-stakes baccalaureate examinations (BAC) on teachers' perceptions about their instructional practices and the inefficacious implementation of the CBA. An explanatory quantitative design was adopted. Online questionnaires were administered to 85 English language teachers across diverse Algerian high schools. Using descriptive statistics, the results revealed that BAC examinations were not competency driven. The teachers perceived a clear misalignment between the BAC examinations' objectives, which emphasized measuring language knowledge and skills, and the CBA's integration pedagogy, which emphasized teaching and measuring competencies. Further, the BAC examination prerequisites induced a marked negative washback effect on teachers' instructional practices, driving them towards traditional methods aligning with examination content, thereby sidelining the CBA objectives. This consequential misalignment was a pivotal deterrent to the desired educational reforms. Given the influence of examinations such as BAC on instructional strategies, there is an urgent need to synchronize BAC examination objectives with competency-based curriculum objectives to foster genuine and effective implementation of the CBA in classrooms.

**Keywords:** Competency-based approach (CBA); washback effects; educational reform; baccalaureate examinations (BAC)

## 1. Background and Statement of the Problem

In 2002, the competency-based approach (CBA) was introduced across Algeria's primary, middle, and secondary schools. Aouine (2011), Bader (2015), Bellour (2017), Boukhentache (2019), Cherairia (2021), Djermoune (2022), Krimat (2022), Mansour (2023), and Mirza (2023) reported a prevailing dissatisfaction among teachers with the CBA, which they ineffectively implemented. These studies have sought to identify the reasons behind teachers' dissatisfaction and subsequent ineffective implementation of the CBA. Most of this research has focused on the quality of professional development training workshops, teachers' attitudes towards these workshops, and teachers' understanding of the key principles of the CBA. The studies showed that lack of practical training and absence of clear competency performance criteria negatively affected the effective implementation of the CBA by English language teachers.

Moreover, Mansour (2023) and Mirza (2023) reported that despite significant investment from the Ministry of Education in professional development seminars and in-service training, the desired outcomes for a better understanding and implementation of the CBA have yet to be achieved. Notably, despite the extensive efforts of educational stakeholders to understand the reasons behind the CBA's ineffective implementation, there has been a research gap concerning the washback effects on teachers' perceptions of the high-stakes BAC examination. Pearson (1988) posited that "Public examinations influence the attitudes, behaviors, and motivations of teachers, learners, and parents" (p. 7). Sadighi (2018), Thu (2020), Mitsiaki (2021), Baidoo-Anu (2022), Canli (2022) and Shah Toti (2022) highlighted that high-stakes examinations often adversely influenced teachers' perceptions, leading many to adopt a 'teach to the test' approach. However, pertaining to the Algerian educational context, the existing literature did not examine the washback effects of high-stakes examinations on teachers' implementation of the CBA. A handful of studies that addressed the Algerian CBA assessment framework (Aouine, 2011; Boukhnetache, 2019; Miliiani (n.d.), Djerouane, 2022; Mansour, 2023) concluded that the high-stakes examinations in Algeria remained rooted in a traditional assessment of grammar and vocabulary, focusing on reading comprehension and a narrow spectrum of writing skills. Boukhentache (2019) and Mansoor (2023) reported that the advocated shift has been from merely evaluating isolated grammar and vocabulary knowledge to a more holistic assessment of competencies encompassing knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Considering the significance of the influence of teachers' perceptions on their teaching practices (Al Abri, 2022), this study sought to illuminate the potential washback effect of the BAC examination on teachers' perceptions about the curriculum and their instructional choices. The focal point of this paper revolved around the washback associated with the high-stakes BAC examination, a pivotal determinant in deciding a student's eligibility for university admission. The study

posited that, given the importance of this examination, it undoubtedly influenced teachers' pedagogical practices. Additionally, the study hypothesized that if examination requirements did not resonate with curriculum objectives, such examinations could inadvertently contribute to the curriculum's ineffective execution and influence their perceptions about the curriculum and instructional decisions. This study aimed to address the following research questions: (a) How do teachers perceive the BAC examinations? and (b) What are the washback effects of high-stakes examinations on teachers' perceptions of the curriculum and their instructional practices?

## **2. Review of the Literature**

### **2.1 Definition of Washback**

The existing literature has offered varied definitions for the concept of washback. Pearson (1988), Bailey (1999), Hughes (2003), Green (2013), Cheng (2014) and Bullock (2017) defined it as the influence of an examination's content and structure on stakeholders, the curriculum, and the teaching-learning processes. Pierce (1992) described washback as "the impact a test has on classroom pedagogy as well as the educational policy". Pearson (1988) and Hughes (2003) emphasized the psychological ramifications induced by the stress of high-stakes examinations, not just within educational settings but also in the broader community. They posited that high-stakes examinations influenced the attitudes of teachers, students, and parents. Given that these examinations often conclude a course, this influence is perceived to work retrospectively, thereby coining the term 'washback'. Hughes (2003) proposed that washback can potentially influence three primary domains: participants such as learners, teachers, and parents; processes such as the actions executed by these participants such as the crafting of instructional resources, syllabus design, adjustments in teaching techniques and learning content; and product such as the knowledge and skills acquired.

### **2.2 Washback Studies**

Washback can be either positive, leading to beneficial outcomes, or negative, resulting in detrimental outcomes for the teaching and learning processes. Cholis (2018) argued that washback can positively influence teachers' instructional practices when curriculum objectives align with examination objectives. In contrast, washback can have adverse effects on curriculum implementation and teaching methods, thereby hindering the attainment of educational goals. Hughes (2003) posited that negative washback often narrows the curriculum's content, causing teachers to focus primarily on tasks and skills anticipated to appear on the test. However, Kiliçkaya (2016) found that high-stakes English examinations produced both harmful and beneficial effects on teachers' practices. The primary detrimental effect was the omission of specific skills, such as listening, speaking, and writing, as these were not evaluated. Furthermore, Shah Toti (2022) highlighted that a misalignment between examination objectives and curriculum objectives increased students' examination anxiety and decreased their performance, pushing teachers to teach exclusively to the examination. Baidoo-Anu (2022) suggested that while large-scale testing accountability could motivate teachers, it also pressured them to focus heavily on examination preparation. Hughes (2003), Cholis (2018), Canli (2022) and Shah Toti (2022) reported that

high-stakes examinations play a pivotal role in shaping the attitudes and perceptions of participants towards their teaching practices. They further added that these perceptions steer the actions of the participants, influencing the implementation of the curriculum, selection of pedagogical techniques, and the type of content that aligns with the examination. This, in turn, determines the learning outcomes or the product.

Sadighi et al. (2018) reported that despite the design of English textbooks aligning with communicative teaching objectives, teachers were dissatisfied with examinations that contradicted the curriculum's objectives. These examinations and supplementary resources affected students' learning objectives detrimentally, as well as teachers' classroom approaches. Canli (2022) similarly found that such tests negatively impacted teachers' instructional strategies. Additionally, several studies (Salehi & Yunus, 2012; Azadi & Gholami, 2013; Korkmazgil & Seferoğlu, 2013; Zhan & Andrews, 2014; Hatipoğlu, 2015) revealed that teachers frequently "taught to the test", limiting the curriculum to the anticipated assessed content. Azzadi and Gholami (2013) emphasized that high-stakes examinations adversely influenced curriculum content, as these examinations often did not represent the curriculum accurately, thereby pressuring teachers to focus on probable test topics. Pizarro (2010) found that teachers relied significantly on examination-related resources, dedicating roughly two-thirds of their teaching time to them, thereby aiming to enhance students' test scores. Maddus (1988) warned, "Measurement-driven instruction will result in cramming, narrowing the curriculum, focusing on those skills most relevant to testing, and placing constraints on teachers' and students' creativity and spontaneity" (p.22).

In addition, Green (2013) noted that teachers tend to prioritize the test format over the construct of knowledge, skills, or abilities being assessed, which might not genuinely improve the evaluated skills. Rahman (2014) asserted that high-stakes examinations negatively influenced English teachers, causing them to adhere to prior examination patterns and overlook unevaluated language skills. In addition, several researchers, including Pizzaro (2010), Salehi (2012), Azadi and Gholami (2013), Kennedy and Lui (2013), Tayeb (2014), and Kilickaya (2016), reported widespread teacher attitudes of dissatisfaction regarding examination impacts, feeling that examinations curtailed their instructional freedom. Furthermore, studies by Ahmed (2012), Dikilitas (2018) and Thu (2020) demonstrated that examination-driven methodologies influenced teachers heavily, indicating a strong washback effect on their perceptions and practices. Finally, some studies focused on the psychological implications. Tsagari (2011) and Cheng (2014) argued that high-stakes examinations introduced anxiety among teachers, pushing them towards traditional teaching methods owing to performance evaluations based on students' test scores.

### **2.3 Competency-based Assessment and the BAC Examinations**

One of the core principles of the integration of pedagogy is the accreditation of the learner through the accomplishment of daily tasks rather than mere knowledge measurement, as noted by Roegiers (2005). Gerard (2006) contended that assessments should ensure that the measurement of fragmented knowledge and

skills should be at most 25% of the overall test. Boukhentache (2019) offered a comprehensive review of the foundational principles of CBA. He detailed that CBA mandates examinations to prioritize authentic problem-solving tasks. These tasks should prompt students to harness various resources, competencies, and critical thinking abilities to address a given problem situation, as supported by both Roegiers (2005) and Gerard (2006). Boukhentache further elucidated the “three out of four” rule central to competency-based examination design. As introduced by De Ketele (2010), this rule posits that three-quarters of the overall grade should assess foundational learning objectives, such as language knowledge and skills evaluation. The residual grade should evaluate advanced objectives. Boukhentache also championed using an assessment grid, highlighting a task's intricacy and complexity. Typically, this grid encompassed various assessment standards, each paired with potential performance values, emphasizing form, content, originality, pertinence, balance, and relevance.

Focusing on the Algerian educational landscape, Boukhentache (2019) explored the alignment of the BAC examinations with the key principles of the CBA. He determined that these examinations were not competency-driven, as they largely mirrored the traditional examinations of the pre-reform phase. Echoing this sentiment, Aouine (2011) contended that the BAC test overlooked the assessment of higher-order thinking skills, a cornerstone of Algeria's competency-based teaching paradigm. Furthermore, Miliani (n.d.) discerned a disconnection between the teaching and learning goals promoted by competency-based textbooks and the objectives underscored by the BAC examination; hence, the need to examine the potential washback effects on the ineffective implementation of the CBA.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

An explanatory quantitative design is used to investigate why a specific phenomenon occurs. Since this study's main aim was a deeper understanding of why the CBA is failing, an explanatory quantitative design was employed. The current explanatory quantitative study utilized quantitative methods for data collection and analysis. Through an interpretive lens, the study aimed to produce a thorough understanding of the issue of washback, furnishing quantitative justifications.

#### **3.2 Setting and Participants**

High-stakes examinations are those where the outcomes have significant implications for test-takers' futures. In the context of this paper, the high-stakes test under consideration is the BAC examination, an entrance examination for universities in Algeria. The outcome of this examination determines whether students qualify for university admission. For this study, the participants were final-year English teachers from various secondary schools throughout Algeria. More than 120 teachers were invited to participate. However, only 85 gave their consent. The sample encompassed 85 English teachers who were purposefully selected based on distinct criteria: (a) their willingness to participate, (b) at least 18 years of teaching experience enabling them to provide feedback on past and current examinations and offer an in-depth perspective on the BAC examinations

and the CBA, and (c) the necessary competencies for the proficient execution of the CBA, having engaged in multiple professional development training (PDT) sessions. All participants gave their informed consent and actively contributed to the research as member participants. As Mirza et al. (2023) recommended, informed consent by the respective participants must be established in conducting research.

### 3.3 Research Instrument, Data Collection and Analysis

Onaiba (2013) ascribes the concept of perception washback to feelings, beliefs, and attitudes toward the test. The primary objective of this study was to examine the perspectives of English language teachers regarding their experiences associated with competency-based instruction and the BAC examinations. To facilitate this, a descriptive online Likert scale questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was utilized for data collection. The questionnaire's items were derived from Hughes' (2003) trichotomy as it sheds light on participants, the process, and the products. In addition, the items were also derived from Boukhentache's study (2019), as it offered a comprehensive review of the foundational principles of CBA and the Algerian Guide of Competencies and Assessment Rubrics. The focal point of the questions was to gauge teachers' understanding and awareness of the BAC examination components and their perceptions concerning the alignment of the examinations with the curriculum, as well as determining whether the examinations' content and structure influenced their pedagogical choices concerning the implementation of the CBA and the curriculum. The instrument underwent a pilot test to ensure its reliability and validity. It was administered to 40 teachers. The Cronbach's alpha value was found to be 0.889, signifying satisfactory internal reliability. The participants were sent an email, including a link to the online survey. After data collection, all data were analyzed using the statistical software SPSS to compute frequencies and the chi-square test to ascertain the statistical significance of the results.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Teachers' Perceptions of BAC Examinations

This research was anchored in two facets of the washback trichotomy proposed by Hughes (1993): the washback effect on participants' perceptions of teaching methodologies and of the curriculum. Teachers' knowledge of the BAC examination prerequisites is crucial as their perceptions could significantly shape their instructional decisions related to the execution of the CBA.

**Table 1: Knowledge of the BAC Exam Format and Content/Competency-based Assessment**

	SA	A	N	D	SD
The BAC exam is competency-driven	0%	0%	0%	30%	70%
New activities were added	35%	65%	0%	0%	0%
True and false activities were added	35%	65%	0%	0%	0%

Multiple-choice questions were added	35%	65%	0%	0%	0%
The content of the BAC examinations is different from the content of examinations from the pre-reform era	0%	0%	0%	15%	85%
The current BAC examinations are similar to the BAC examinations from the pre-reform era	85%	15%	0%	0%	0%
The BAC examination tests grammar knowledge	85%	15%	0%	0%	0%
It tests fragments of vocabulary knowledge	85%	15%	0%	0%	0%
It tests the restitution of reading comprehension skills	75%	25%	0%	0%	0%
It tests the restitution of writing skills	75%	25%	0%	0%	0%
This examination assesses competencies	0%	0%	0%	5%	95%
70 % of the examination questions are devoted to assessing learners' knowledge about the language	90%	10%	0%	0%	0%
Part One of the examination measures language knowledge and language skills	90%	10%	0%	0%	0%
Part Two tasks are decontextualized and do not require skills integration	95%	5%	0%	0%	0%
Part Two tasks are authentic and meaningful	0%	0%	0%	5%	95%
Part Two tasks are triggered by realistic conditions	0%	0%	0%	5%	95%
Part Two tasks are similar to traditional and conventional problem-solving activities	90%	10%	0%	0%	0%
Part Two tasks assess disciplinary objectives	0%	0%	0%	15%	85%
Part Two tasks assess interdisciplinary objectives	0%	0%	0%	15%	85%
Part Two tasks assess cognitive objectives	0%	0%	0%	15%	85%
Part Two tasks assess life-skills objectives	0%	0%	0%	15%	85%
Critical thinking, analytic reasoning, and problem-solving are assessed	90%	10%	0%	0%	0%
The BAC examination assesses students' critical thinking abilities	90%	10%	0%	0%	0%
Assessment activities assess students' memories (acquired knowledge)	85%	15%	0%	0%	0%
The marking criteria are objective	0%	0%	0%	15%	85%
The marking criteria of tasks are limited to Form and Content	80%	20%	0%	0%	0%
The marking criteria of tasks include 'Pertinence'	0%	0%	0%	20%	80%
The marking criteria of tasks include 'Reasoning'	0%	0%	0%	20%	85%

The marking criteria of tasks include 'Originality'	0%	0%	0%	20%	80%
The marking criteria of tasks include 'Balance'	0%	0%	0%	20%	80%
The marking criteria apply the rule of two-thirds that allows checking the assessment criteria three times	0%	0%	0%	10%	90%
The examination provides learners with three independent opportunities to demonstrate their mastery of each assessment criterion	0%	0%	0%	15%	85%
I am satisfied with the BAC examinations	0%	0%	0%	5%	95%

Teachers unanimously observed that since the introduction of the CBA, only minimal adjustments have been made to the BAC examination's question format. They noted the reduction and condensation of texts and the introduction of True/False and multiple-choice questions to the reading comprehension section. Nevertheless, they emphasized that the examination needed to embody the key principles of competency-based assessment as it did not evaluate 'competencies', continuing to mirror traditional examinations prior to the reform. Their insights revealed no distinguishable differences between the preceding examinations and the one instituted by the most recent reform.

All teachers agreed that, contrary to the Algerian CBA assessment framework's directives, the BAC examinations continued to evaluate language knowledge (comprising grammar and vocabulary), reading comprehension abilities, and restricted writing skills. Teachers further reported that the BAC examination overlooked *savoir-faire* and *savoir-être* competencies, with both listening and speaking skills being omitted.

Regarding the first section of the examination, which constituted 70% of the content, a significant majority (over 85%) of the teachers strongly felt it was linguistically motivated rather than driven by competencies. The predominant emphasis, they observed, lay in assessing language proficiency and reading comprehension, not critical thinking skills. They unanimously agreed that this section evaluated reading abilities, grammar, and vocabulary, focusing more on recalling knowledge than critical thinking.

The written expression section, making up roughly 30% of the examination, was also a topic of unanimous agreement among the teachers. They viewed it as a primary, decontextualized writing task that did not resonate with the tenets of competency-based assessment. These conventional tasks did not prompt students to tackle real-world problems, lacking any representation of disciplinary, interdisciplinary, cognitive, or life-skills objectives—hallmarks of competency assessment tasks. Further agreement was found in the evaluation criteria, which they believed to be overly focused on form and content while sidestepping competency-based criteria. They underscored the absence of originality, balance, reasoning, and pertinence criteria in the examination's grading rubric. Echoing Boukhentache (2019), teachers felt the sway of the halo effect (De Ketele, 2010),

struggling to adhere strictly to form/content criteria and often gravitating more towards content at the expense of form.

#### 4.2 Washback Effects of High-stakes Examinations on Teachers' Perceptions of their Instructional Practices

The findings of this study highlighted the adverse washback effects of the BAC examinations on teachers. Notably, all teachers expressed unfavorable opinions regarding the BAC examinations. Based on the data, it was evident that the examination's washback influenced various aspects of teachers' instructional practices. This included the selection of materials, the implementation of a competency-based curriculum, and the overall execution of the CBA.

**Table 2: Washback Effects of High-stakes Examinations on Teachers' Perceptions of their Instructional Practices**

	SA	A	N	D	SD
The long-term goal of English language courses is to develop competencies	15%	85%	0%	0%	0%
The long-term goal of the English language courses is to teach for the BAC examination	0%	0%	0%	15%	85%
The BAC examinations are not aligned with the curriculum	90%	10%	0%	0%	0%
The BAC examinations are aligned with the textbook	0%	0%	0%	10%	90%
The examinations increased my workload	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
I teach to familiarize students with the content and format of the BAC examinations	85%	15%	0%	0%	0%
I prepare additional materials which are aligned with the examination content and format	95%	5%	0%	0%	0%
I prepare extra lessons to teach the content and the structure of the BAC examinations	95%	5%	0%	0%	0%
The textbooks prepare students well for the BAC examination	70%	30%	0%	0%	0%
I implement the CBA to teach the BAC examination	95%	5%	0%	0%	0%
The CBA is not a good fit to teach the examination	95%	5%	0%	0%	0%
I use traditional methods to prepare students for the examinations	90%	10%	0%	0%	0%
My teaching is directly affected by the BAC examinations	95%	5%	0%	0%	0%
My selection of teaching methodology is related to students' preparation for examinations	95%	5%	0%	0%	0%
The BAC examination has little impact on how I teach	0%	0%	0%	10%	90%

I rarely adapt my instructional methods to the content of the final examination	0%	0%	0%	20%	80%
I cover the entire curriculum	0%	5%	0%	15%	80%
I teach less than half of the target competencies	0%	5%	0%	15%	80%
Emphasis is placed solely on the competencies that are typically included in BAC examinations	0%	0%	0%	5%	95%
Competencies that are never evaluated are disregarded	0%	0%	0%	5%	95%
Owing to time constraints in preparing for the examination, the curriculum is narrowed and condensed	0%	0%	0%	5%	95%
I pay close attention to the textbooks because the BAC examination could assess any competencies.	0%	0%	0%	35%	65%
I emphasize reading comprehension activities	85%	15%	0%	0%	0%
I emphasize conventional and decontextualized task practice	85%	15%	0%	0%	0%
I teach grammar and vocabulary knowledge	85%	15%	0%	0%	0%
Over fifty percent of class time is devoted to examination preparation	70%	30%	0%	0%	0%
I devote more time to examination preparation than to teaching the curriculum	70%	30%	0%	0%	0%
I teach each week to the test	85%	15%	0%	0%	0%
Priority is given to completing the curriculum rather than obtaining a high score and passing the BAC examination	85%	15%	0%	0%	0%
Students exert pressure on me to prepare them for examinations	95%	5%	0%	0%	0%
The school requires me to teach for the examination	85%	15%	0%	0%	0%
Parents exerted pressure on me to prepare students for the examination	90%	10%	0%	0%	0%
I feel anxious about students' success or failure in the examination	90%	10%	0%	0%	0%
The school and parents hold me accountable for students' success or failure on the BAC examination	90%	10%	0%	0%	0%

The findings underlined a stark disconnect between the content and structure of the BAC examinations and the stipulated curriculum. Every teacher in the study concurred that there was a misalignment, resulting in a significantly augmented workload. They found themselves caught between teaching the prescribed curriculum and ensuring students were adequately prepared for the examinations.

Over 90% of the teachers believed that students would underperform in the BAC examination if their teaching adhered strictly to the competency-based textbooks and curriculum. Consequently, these teachers reported devising supplementary lessons and crafting additional materials in line with the examinations' content and structure. In this process, a considerable amount of the competency-based curriculum should have been addressed, notably up to 50% of the competencies and skills such as speaking and listening (not assessed in the BAC).

Most teachers reported that the true essence of the CBA needed to be realized in teaching practices as it conflicted with the examination's focus. Teachers felt pressured to employ more traditional and deductive teaching methodologies because the examinations were skewed towards grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing skills. A prominent trend emerged where teachers were "teaching to the test", emphasizing the elements most likely to feature in the examination.

The weight of the examinations' outcomes compounded teachers' stress. A resounding 90% of them shared their reluctance to adhere strictly to the curriculum. They felt the pressure from multiple stakeholders: schools, parents, and even students. Their professional performance was often gauged by their students' success or failure in these examinations. This influenced them into molding the content and teaching techniques to suit the high-stakes BAC examination rather than staying true to the competency-based ethos. Faced with the dual challenges of an exhaustive curriculum and limited time, they often had to choose between equipping students for the test or teaching unassessed competencies.

Moreover, the necessity of imparting time-intensive test-taking strategies meant delving into past papers and materials that mirrored the examination format. In an alarming revelation, over 90% of teachers confirmed that they introduced their students to examination-styled tasks on a weekly basis, ensuring they became acquainted with the examination's style and format. Consequently, a significant portion of instructional time, sometimes more than half, was redirected towards honing test-taking strategies and teaching material relevant to the BAC, sidelining the official curriculum.

To determine whether these results were statistically significant, the chi-square test was conducted.

**Table 3: Teachers' Perceptions of the Relationship between the BAC Examinations and the Ineffective Implementation of the CBA**

	Value	Asymp. Sig.
Pearson chi-square	160.625a	.000
Likelihood ratio	169.028	.000

The results revealed a significant relationship ( $X^2 = 160.625$ ) at  $p < 0.00$  between teachers' attitudes towards the BAC examination and the ineffective implementation of the competency-driven syllabus as well as the CBA. Most

teachers modified their instructional strategies by shifting from the CBA to more traditional teaching methods to meet the BAC examination requirements.

**Table 4: Teachers' Perceptions of the Relationship between the BAC Examinations and the Selection of Extra-Materials/Ineffective Implementation of the Competency-based Curriculum**

	Value	Asymp. Sig.
Pearson chi-square	40.429a	.000
Likelihood ratio	42.270	.000

The results revealed a significant relationship ( $\chi^2 = 40.429$ ) at  $p < 0.00$  between teachers' attitudes towards the BAC examination and the ineffective implementation of the competency-driven curriculum by selecting and using extra materials more aligned with the examination content and format than the textbook.

## 5. Discussion

The study's results showed a significant divergence between the intent CBA and the traditional rote learning in BAC. Both the present study and a host of prior studies unanimously identified the negative influence of such high-stakes examinations, leading teachers to adopt a 'teach-to-the-test' methodology, sidelining the broader, more comprehensive objectives of a competency-based curriculum (Kiliçkaya, 2016; Cholis, 2018; Sadighi et al., 2018; Thu, 2020; Baidoo-Anu, 2022; Canli, 2022; Shah Toti, 2022).

Teachers appeared well-versed in the principles of CBA and were fully aware of the discrepancies between BAC examinations and the main principles of the CBA. Their adherence to older methodologies was not rooted in ignorance but was instead a calculated response to the demands of the BAC examination. As illustrated in Boukhentache's (2019) research, the nature of the BAC examination gravitated more towards assessing memory recall and specific language knowledge and skillsets rather than a holistic competency-based assessment. It continued to measure discrete bits of knowledge in contrast to the competency-focused pedagogy which has championed the integration of diverse skills and knowledge in real-life problem-solving situations.

Roegiers (2005) and other scholars have warned about this narrow scope of assessment, which they term "disguised restitution of knowledge". The emphasis on assessing fragmented knowledge rather than comprehensive competencies undermined the foundational tenets of the integration pedagogy. In essence, the BAC examination, as it stood, failed to evaluate students genuinely on the integration of their competencies, instead focusing mainly on specific skill sets and knowledge bits, while bypassing more complex and meaningful assessments. This assessment form inadvertently diminished its validity, particularly when potential answers were hinted at within the examination, making it less challenging, as Aouine (2011) noted. This continued misalignment between high-stakes examinations and the competency-based curriculum has substantial

implications for educational outcomes, with teachers feeling forced to alter their teaching strategies in ways potentially detrimental to implementing the CBA.

The results indicated that teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the content and structure of the examination due to its misalignment with the competency-based curriculum. This misalignment significantly increased their workload. Consequently, the examination negatively impacted their teaching practices, compelling them to modify their methods to align with the BAC examinations' demands (Kiliçkaya, 2016; Cholis, 2018; Sadighi et al., 2018; Thu, 2020; Baidoo-Anu, 2022; Canli, 2022; Shah Toti, 2022). Specifically, teachers felt obliged to substitute the CBA with methodologies more congruent with the content and format underscored by the BAC examinations. Additionally, they found it necessary to devise non-competency-based lessons and generate new materials that closely mirrored the examination specifications (Azadi & Gholami, 2013; Korkmazgil & Seferoğlu, 2013). This shift suggested that teachers prioritized preparing students for high-stakes examinations, often at the expense of broader competencies, emphasizing language knowledge expected to be assessed (Salehi et al., 2012; Azadi & Gholami, 2013; Hatipoğlu, 2015). Weir (2005) echoed this sentiment, stating, "Teachers may simply not teach certain important skills if they are not in the test" (p. 18).

The phenomenon of examination washback significantly shaped teachers' perceptions and teaching approaches, as corroborated by prior research (Cholis, 2018; Sadighi et al., 2018; Thu, 2020; Mitsiaki, 2021; Baidoo-Anu, 2022; Canli, 2022; Shah Toti, 2022). The BAC examinations detrimentally influenced the effective deployment of the CBA and broader educational reforms. Cheng (2014) opined that high-stakes testing could directly and adversely affect teachers, reasoning that teaching narrowly to a test did not foster comprehensive understanding, even if it enhances examination performance. Aligning with Onaiba's (2015) findings, this study highlighted that negative washback compelled certain teachers to lean on the 'hidden' syllabi, whereas others adjusted the curriculum to mirror the examination content. This trend is consistent with Kiliçkaya's (2016) finding that teachers focused on materials and skills resonating with the objectives of English tests. Bailey (1996) aptly remarked that stakeholders' critical views on learners' examination outcomes intensified teachers' anxiety, further amplifying the negative washback effect on the successful execution of the CBA and the competency-based English language curriculum.

## 6. Conclusion

The current study explored the potential washback effects of the high-stakes BAC examination on teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices. Results revealed that teachers possessed a comprehensive understanding of the prerequisites of the BAC examinations. However, their attitudes towards the examination were predominantly negative, citing a lack of alignment with the established syllabus and the principles of CBA. The BAC examinations were criticized for their traditional approach, which prioritized the measurement of rote learning and assessed students' abilities to recall isolated fragments of knowledge and linguistic skills. As a result, the holistic assessment of competencies was relegated

to the background. Further, the study's findings highlighted that the BAC examinations negatively influenced teachers' perceptions, leading to challenges in effectively deploying the CBA and the overall educational reform. Notably, teachers exhibited negative attitudes towards the high-stakes examinations. Their dissatisfaction stemmed from these examinations' lacking a competency-based focus, creating a rift between the curriculum they were mandated to deliver and the examination-centric preparations they felt pressured to undertake. Such extensive washback repercussions from high-stakes tests potentially obstruct educational reforms and the evolution of language teaching methodologies. Considering these findings, this study calls upon educational authorities to ensure that the BAC examination aligns seamlessly with the curriculum. Such an alignment is pivotal to counteract the adverse washback effects and facilitate the effective realization of the curriculum and CBA initiatives.

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## Appendix 1

### Questionnaire

Dear Teachers,

Please fill out the following questionnaire designed for a study on the BAC examinations. The questionnaire is anonymous, and your responses will be kept strictly confidential and used for research purposes only.

Your contribution is highly appreciated.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The BAC examination is competency-driven					
New activities were added					
True and false activities were added					
Multiple-choice questions were added					
The content of the BAC examinations is different from the content of examinations from the pre-reform era					
The current BAC examinations are similar to the BAC examinations from the pre-reform era					
The BAC examination tests grammar knowledge					
It tests fragments of vocabulary knowledge					
It tests the restitution of reading comprehension skills					
It tests the restitution of writing skills.					
This examination assesses competencies.					
70 % of the examination questions are devoted to assessing learners' knowledge about the language					
Part One of the examination measures language knowledge and language skills					
Part Two tasks are decontextualized and do not require skills integration					
Part Two tasks are authentic and meaningful					

Part Two tasks are triggered by realistic conditions					
Part Two tasks are similar to traditional and conventional problem-solving activities					
Part Two tasks assess disciplinary objectives					
Part Two tasks assess interdisciplinary objectives					
Part Two tasks assess cognitive objective					
Part Two tasks assess life-skills objectives					
Critical thinking, analytic reasoning, and problem-solving are assessed					
The BAC examination assesses students' critical thinking abilities					
Assessment activities assess students' memories (acquired knowledge)					
The marking criteria are objective					
The marking criteria of tasks are limited to 'Form and Content'					
The marking criteria of tasks include 'Pertinence'					
The marking criteria of tasks include 'Reasoning'					
The marking criteria of tasks include 'Originality'					
The marking criteria of tasks include 'Balance'					
The marking criteria apply the rule of two-thirds that allows checking the assessment criteria three times					
The examination provides learners with three independent opportunities to demonstrate their mastery of each assessment criterion					
I am satisfied with the BAC examinations					
The long-term goal of English language courses is to develop competencies					
The long-term goal of the English language courses is to teach for the BAC examination					

The BAC examinations are not aligned with the curriculum					
The BAC examinations are aligned with the textbook					
The examinations increased my workload					
I teach to familiarize students with the content and format of the BAC examinations					
I prepare additional materials which are aligned with the examination content and format					
I prepare extra lessons to teach the content and the structure of the BAC examinations					
The textbooks prepare students well for the BAC examination					
I implement the CBA to teach the BAC examination					
The CBA is not a good fit to teach the examination					
I use traditional methods to prepare students for the examinations					
My teaching is directly affected by the BAC examinations					
My selection of teaching methodology is related to students' preparation for examinations					
The BAC examination has little impact on how I teach					
I rarely adapt my instructional methods to the content of the final examination					
I cover the entire curriculum					
I teach less than half of the target competencies					
Emphasis is placed solely on the competencies that are typically included in BAC examinations					
Competencies that are never evaluated are disregarded					
Owing to time constraints in preparing for the examination, the curriculum is narrowed and condensed					
I pay close attention to the textbooks because the BAC examination could assess any of the competencies					

I emphasize reading comprehension activities					
I emphasize conventional and decontextualized task practice					
I teach grammar and vocabulary knowledge					
Over fifty percent of class time is devoted to examination preparation					
I devote more time to examination preparation than to teaching the curriculum					
I teach each week to the test					
Priority is given to completing the curriculum rather than obtaining a high score and passing the BAC examination					
Students exert pressure on me to prepare them for examinations					
The school requires me to teach for the examination					
Parents exerted pressure on me to prepare students for the examination					
I feel anxious about students' success or failure in the examination					
The school and parents hold me accountable for students' success or failure on the BAC examination					