

# AUS Repository

## Exploring Washback Effects on IELTS Teachers' Cognition and Teaching Practices

Item Type	Thesis
Authors	Afzal, Sobia
Download date	2026-06-08 16:55:03
Link to Item	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/11073/8786">http://hdl.handle.net/11073/8786</a>

EXPLORING WASHBACK EFFECTS ON IELTS TEACHERS' COGNITION  
AND TEACHING PRACTICES

by

Sobia Afzal

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the

American University of Sharjah

College of Arts and Sciences

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

December 2016



We, the undersigned, approve the Master's Thesis of Sobia Afzal.

Thesis Title: Exploring Washback Effects on IELTS Teachers' Cognition and Teaching Practices

**Signature**

**Date of Signature**  
(dd/mm/yyyy)

---

Dr. Betty Lanteigne  
Associate Professor  
Thesis Advisor

---

Dr. Peter Crompton  
Associate Professor  
Thesis Committee Member

---

Dr. Victor Parra-Guinaldo  
Assistant Professor  
Thesis Committee Member

---

Dr. Gary Linebaugh  
Program Coordinator

---

Dr. James Griffin  
CAS Graduate Programs Director

---

Dr. Mahmoud Anabtawi  
Dean of College/School

---

Dr. Khaled Assaleh  
Interim Vice Provost for Research and Graduate Studies

## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis advisor, Dr. Betty Lanteigne, for her honest and continuous support throughout the research and writing of this thesis, and her patience, encouragement, and immense knowledge. Working with her closely during the thesis allowed me to know how hard working and committed person she is. Without her guidance, this thesis would not have been possible. I would also like to thank all my professors who taught me in the MA TESOL program for their guidance and support throughout the program.

I am also grateful to my committee members, Dr. Peter Crompton and Dr. Víctor Parra-Guinaldo, for their valuable and insightful feedback that helped me to improve the quality of this thesis.

My deepest thanks are extended to my husband, Afzal, who has been my greatest strength throughout my MA TESOL study. His unconditional support was a driving force for me during the program. Special thanks to my children, Maryam, Fahad, and Ahad for enduring with me the difficult times throughout my study, and not having enough time for them. Special thanks go to my responsible daughter, Maryam, for her continuous assistance at home, and for taking care of her brothers while I was not home. Last but not least, I am deeply grateful to my mother for her prayers and support in my life.

## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this humble research to my late father, Riaz Ahmed, who has been a great source of inspiration and role model for me throughout my life, and who taught me the value of education and hard work in life.

## **Abstract**

Examining the washback effects of high-stakes tests, such as the IELTS, on teachers' cognition and their teaching practices could provide deeper insight into the process of teaching and learning in test preparation courses. Moreover, understanding IELTS teachers' cognition and their teaching practices in relation to washback effects of the IELTS test is significant in examining the success of IELTS preparation courses. This research explores the effects of the IELTS test on IELTS teachers' cognition (knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes) and, in turn, on their teaching practices in IELTS preparation courses in the UAE. The study highlights the factors that contribute to the negative or positive influences of the IELTS test on IELTS teachers' cognition as well as on their teaching practices in IELTS classes. In this research, 42 IELTS teachers were surveyed to gain insight into their knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes about the IELTS test, in addition to their teaching practices in IELTS preparation courses. Out of the 42 survey participants, six teachers were observed in their IELTS classes, and later interviewed using stimulated recall through semi-structured interviews to evaluate the washback effects of the IELTS test on teachers' cognition and their teaching practices in IELTS preparation courses. In addition, the study examined the accuracy of teachers' cognition (specifically their knowledge) about the IELTS test, and explored congruency between teachers' cognition and their teaching practices in IELTS courses. The findings revealed both positive (teaching of language elements and the use of communicative activities) and negative washback effects of the IELTS test on teachers' cognition and their teaching practices. The findings also reported the inaccuracy of some teachers' cognition (knowledge) about the IELTS and incongruence between their cognition and teaching practices in IELTS classes. Furthermore, the findings highlighted the different teacher variables and contextual factors that play a significant role in having positive and negative washback effects of the IELTS test on teachers' cognition and their teaching practices. The study suggests the value of more professional training of IELTS teachers for self-exploration of their cognition to enhance the positive washback effects of the IELTS test and minimize its negative effects.

*Keywords:* IELTS teachers' cognition, IELTS washback effects, IELTS preparation courses, IELTS teaching practices.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	6
List of Figures.....	10
List of Tables.....	11
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....	13
Background to the Study .....	13
Problem Statement .....	17
Purpose of the Study .....	19
Significance of the Research .....	19
Organization of the Study.....	20
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	22
Overview of High-Stakes Tests.....	22
What Is the Washback Effect in Testing? .....	23
Washback Effects on Teaching and Learning .....	25
Positive Washback.....	27
Negative Washback .....	29
Empirical Research on Washback .....	31
Studies on Washback Effects of Tests Aimed to Improve Teaching and Learning .....	31
Studies on Washback Effects of High-Stakes Exams .....	33
The IELTS Test.....	35
Aspects of Test Usefulness.....	36
Overview of IELTS Washback Research.....	37
IELTS Research in the UAE .....	39
IELTS Washback .....	40
Cultural Bias in IELTS .....	40
IELTS as a Predictor of Academic Success.....	41

IELTS Preparation Program .....	41
Teachers' Cognition and Its Relationship to Their Classroom Practices.....	42
Factors Affecting Teachers' Cognition.....	43
Impact of Washback on Teachers' Cognition and Their Classroom Practices .....	46
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....	51
Context of the Study .....	51
Methodological Rationale .....	52
Data Collection Methods.....	53
Questionnaire .....	53
Classroom Observations .....	54
Semi-Structured Stimulated Recall Interviews .....	55
Participants .....	57
Questionnaire Participants .....	57
Interview Participants.....	60
Data Analysis.....	61
Analysis of the Questionnaire Data.....	61
Analysis of Classroom Observation Data.....	62
Analysis of Interview Data .....	62
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS .....	64
Research Question One .....	64
IELTS Teachers' Knowledge About the Content and Format of the IELTS Test .....	64
IELTS Teachers' Beliefs and Perceptions About the IELTS Test.....	69
IELTS Teachers' Attitudes Toward the IELTS Test.....	76
Research Question Two .....	80
Research Question Three.....	85
Reflection of IELTS Teachers' Knowledge in Their Classroom Practices .....	85

Reflection of IELTS Teachers' Claims about Teaching Approaches .....	87
Reflection of IELTS Teachers' Beliefs and Perceptions in Their Classroom Practices .....	89
Reflection of IELTS Teachers' Attitudes in Their Classroom Practices.....	98
Research Question Four .....	100
Washback Effects on IELTS Teachers' Cognition .....	100
Washback on Teaching Practices in IELTS Classes.....	110
Washback on the choice of content.....	115
Washback on the choice of methodology.....	116
Washback on the choice of activities.....	118
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS.....</b>	<b>120</b>
Discussion of IELTS Teachers' Cognition and Its Accuracy .....	120
Discussion of the Reflection of IELTS Teachers' Cognition in Their Teaching Practices.....	122
Discussion of the Washback Effects on IELTS Teachers' Cognition and Their Teaching Practices .....	124
<b>CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH.....</b>	<b>128</b>
First Research Question .....	128
Second Research Question .....	129
Third Research Question.....	130
Fourth Research Question .....	131
Implications of the Study .....	132
Limitations of the Study.....	134
Suggestions for Further Research.....	135
References.....	137

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1: Elements and processes in teacher cognition.....	44
Figure 2: Comparison of teacher views of the level of difficulty of the four IELTS test sections.....	74
Figure 3: Comparison of skills required for a good score in IELTS.....	76
Figure 4: Comparison of time spent on teaching different language components in IELTS classes.....	96

## List of Tables

Table 1: Demographic Details of Questionnaire Participants.....	59
Table 2: Demographic Details of Interview Participants.....	60
Table 3: IELTS Teachers' Knowledge about the Content and Format of the IELTS Test.....	65
Table 4: IELTS Teachers' Beliefs and Perceptions about the IELTS Test.....	69
Table 5: Teacher Ranking of the Level of Difficulty of the Four IELTS Test Sections.....	73
Table 6: IELTS Teachers' Beliefs about Skills Required for a Good Score in IELTS.....	75
Table 7: Questionnaire Participants' Positive Attitudes toward the IELTS Test.....	77
Table 8: Interview Participants' Positive Attitudes toward the IELTS Test.....	78
Table 9: Questionnaire Participants' Negative Attitudes toward the IELTS Test.....	79
Table 10: Questionnaire Participants' Accuracy of Knowledge about the IELTS Test.....	82
Table 11: Interview Participant's Accuracy of Knowledge about the IELTS Test.....	84
Table 12: IELTS Teachers' Claimed Knowledge Vs Practices.....	87
Table 13: IELTS Teachers' Claims about Teaching Approaches Vs Practices.....	89
Table 14: IELTS Teachers' Beliefs about Effective Methods of Teaching in IELTS and Non-IELTS classes.....	89
Table 15: IELTS Teachers' Claimed Beliefs about Effective Methods of Teaching Vs Practices.....	93
Table 16: IELTS Teachers' Claimed Beliefs about Teaching Test-taking Strategies Vs Practices.....	94

Table 17: Time Allocated for Teaching Different Language Components in IELTS Classes.....	95
Table 18: IELTS Teachers’ Reported Attitudes Vs Observed Attitudes.....	100
Table 19: IELTS Teachers’ Beliefs about IELTS Preparation Courses.....	101
Table 20: IELTS Teachers’ Beliefs about Teaching Test-Taking Strategies in IELTS Courses.....	102
Table 21: Questionnaire Participants’ Positive Attitudes toward IELTS Preparation Courses.....	105
Table 22: Interview Participants’ Positive Attitudes toward IELTS Preparation Courses.....	106
Table 23: Questionnaire Participants’ Negative Attitudes toward IELTS Preparation Courses.....	107
Table 24: Washback Effects of the IELTS Test on Teachers’ Cognition.....	110
Table 25: IELTS Teachers’ Teaching Methodology in IELTS Classes.....	110
Table 26: Reasons for Differences in Teaching Reading in IELTS and Non-IELTS Classes.....	111
Table 27: Washback Effects of the IELTS Test on Teaching Practices.....	119

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

This chapter introduces the study and describes the significance of the IELTS test in the UAE's educational context. The chapter then discusses the purpose of the study followed by the research questions. In addition, the chapter describes the significance of this study in the UAE context.

### **Background to the Study**

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test is one of the most commonly used high-stakes English language proficiency test for non-native speakers of English. High-stakes tests are defined as tests “whose 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, as cited in Tsagari, 2009, p. 9). Thus, the IELTS test serves as a gate-keeping examination in the UAE for students entering universities, people applying for immigration to English-speaking countries, or employees seeking promotion or progress in their professions. The IELTS test assesses candidates' English language proficiency in all the four language skills, namely listening, reading, writing, and speaking, on a scale of 0 (non-user) to 9 (expert user) (see “The IELTS 9-Band Scale,” n.d). According to Erfani (2012), the IELTS test claims to measure communicative competency in all four language skills through task-based test items “to predict one's ability to use English in genuine contexts” (p. 185). The two versions of the IELTS test, Academic and General, are used for different purposes. The Academic module is a requirement for post-secondary education in universities in the UAE, whereas the General module is used as a prerequisite for people applying for immigration to English-speaking countries.

Over the past decade, IELTS has gained a “strong foothold in the Gulf nations” (Garinger & Schoepp, 2013, p. 7) as the academic English exam for students who want to study in an English-medium university, since the majority of universities in the UAE use English as the medium of instruction (Nickerson, 2015). Every year, a huge number of candidates globally and in the UAE take the IELTS test. According to a report published on the British Council's website (see “Two million IELTS Tests in the Last Year,” 2013), two million test takers sat IELTS in the year 2013. The report also claims that the demand for IELTS in the United Arab Emirates has remained high, as in other countries, with students taking the test for entry to educational

institutions in English-speaking countries as well as local institutions in the UAE. The magnitude of the stakes associated with the IELTS test and its wide-spread use clearly reflect the importance of the IELTS test both globally and in the UAE.

According to Gitsaki, Robby, and Bourini (2014), performing well on international standardized tests, such as the IELTS, is of primary importance “in preparing non-English speaking learners for higher education delivered through the medium of English” (p.167) in the UAE. Nonetheless, the proficiency levels of English needed for standardized English proficiency tests are still lacking for the UAE students. A report by Swan (2012) reveals that almost 9 in 10 students in the UAE are not ready for university education in English, where almost all courses are taught in English. The lack of preparedness of the students for higher education could be attributed to their low proficiency in English by the time they graduate from schools. This implies that a large proportion of the “high school graduates (80 per cent in 2013) are still unable to enter directly into undergraduate study programs delivered through the medium of English” (Gitsaki, Robby, & Bourini, 2014, p.171). The reason for the students’ inability to enroll in undergraduate programs is evident from *The Research and Survey Report 2014*, according to which 46% of students’ applications at tertiary educational institutions were rejected in the year 2013 due to “poor performance of them [students] in eligibility examinations” (p. 26). Consequently, students who cannot enter their majors in the universities directly have to take remedial intensive English classes at foundation or bridge programs in universities to raise their level of English proficiency.

A related phenomenon has been the introduction and development of IELTS preparation courses in the UAE. IELTS preparation courses have rapidly expanded and gained popularity amongst students in recent years in the UAE, since most students struggle to achieve the required band scores in the IELTS test. As a result, the IELTS preparation courses are nowadays offered not only as an important component of English programs in the language centers of many tertiary institutions in the UAE but also in private language schools. Recently, some secondary schools have also started integrating teaching of some components of the IELTS as part of their curriculum for preparing high school students to take the test. The IELTS courses offered in different educational sectors can be full-time, intensive, or part-time.

The significance of the IELTS test for gate-keeping purposes, in turn, raises the significance of the preparation courses for this test. Since the IELTS test preparation courses are usually focused toward getting the desired band scores in the test, the IELTS test inadvertently seems to affect both teachers and learners in addition to the teaching and learning process, positively and/or negatively (see Erfani, 2012, 2014; Ferman, 2004; Green, 2006a, 2006b, 2007; Hawkey, 2006; Hayes & Read, 2004; Salehi, Yunus, & Salehi, 2012; Wall, 2005; Zafarghandi & Nemati, 2015). Such an effect is commonly referred to as the *washback* or *backwash* effect (Alderson & Wall, 1993). Alderson and Wall (1993) maintain that “washback is often introduced in language testing courses as a powerful concept that all test designers need to pay attention to, and which most classroom teachers are all too aware of” (p. 2). Washback is said to be positive if the goals of teaching for the test are in alignment with the objectives of the curriculum or test under study, and authentic tasks with communicative teaching methods are utilized in class (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Messick, 1996; Wall, 2012). However, washback is said to be negative if it is associated with narrowing of the curriculum with greater focus on teaching isolated test items at the expense of the development of other academic skills with more time spent on test content practice (Madaus, 1988; Volante, 2006). Washback, therefore, seems inevitable in IELTS preparation classes, and thus requires appropriate investigation to enhance the beneficial effects of the test and minimize the negative effects.

Although teachers and students are the two major stake holders affected by standardized tests, teachers in test preparation courses are the main focus of this research because these teachers play an essential role in the washback effect of a test. As highlighted by Spratt (2005), the role teachers play in test preparation courses puts the teachers in the driving seat. Teachers have tremendous power to inspire students to learn, to teach them language skills, and to model how to work with tests and test results (Bailey, 1999; Spratt, 2005). In other words, teachers can teach students preparing for a test in ways that enhance teaching and learning in test preparation courses.

Since teachers are a driving force in test preparation courses, another important consideration in washback is teachers’ cognition (knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes) about high-stakes tests such as IELTS. Although different

researchers have presented different views of cognition, this research study focuses on teachers' knowledge, beliefs, perceptions about, and attitudes toward the IELTS test. It is well researched now that teachers' cognitive dimensions have a powerful influence on their pedagogy, and are manifested in their classroom practices (Borg, 1999a, 2003, 2006; Chappell, Bodis, & Jackson, 2015; Cheng, 2004; Salehi, Yunus, & Salehi, 2011; Watanabe, 2004). In test preparation courses, the influence on teachers' pedagogy could also be due to the test design itself, or other contextual factors (Messick, 1996). These contextual factors include teachers' level of education and training in teaching a particular test, and teachers' perceptions about and attitudes toward the test, in addition to learners' motivational influences and affective factors (Bailey, 1999). In addition to the contextual factors, the subsequent impact of teachers' cognition on the teaching and learning process in test preparation courses is commonly believed to be a consequence of the washback effects of tests on teachers' thought processes, especially high-stakes examinations such as IELTS (Chappell, Bodis, & Jackson, 2015). The relationship between teachers' practices in test preparation courses and the effects of tests is summarized by Green (2013) as follows:

Teachers may decide to focus only on the skills and knowledge required for the test, giving practice in test-like activities to the exclusion of anything that does not appear on the test. Construct-irrelevance can encourage training in test taking skills that may have little value for any other purpose. The greater the differences between test taking processes and real-world language use, the greater the risk of damaging washback. (p. 41)

*Construct-irrelevance* could result in negative washback effects. Messick (1996) explains construct-irrelevant variance as the irrelevance of the test tasks/test items to the construct of the test. The *construct* of a test is defined as "an ability or set of abilities" (Davies et al., 1999, p. 31), such as language ability, being measured by a test, and *irrelevant variance* refers to "factors other than the construct in question" (Davies et al., 1999, p. 32) that affect test taker's performance and scores, which could include aspects such as test content, test format, or administrative conditions. In other words, a test might claim to assess real-life language use, but the test tasks do not represent the communicative construct of the test. Such a scenario could result in an overemphasis by teachers on teaching test-taking strategies. For instance, "if the test employs unfamiliar item formats or stresses knowledge of grammar to the detriment of communicative competence, teachers might pay undue attention to

overcoming the irrelevant difficulty as opposed to fostering communicative proficiency” (Messick, 1996, p. 14).

Being the authorities in the classroom for guiding students towards success in high-stakes exams, teachers’ self-awareness of their knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and their attitude toward the IELTS test could entail positive outcomes for IELTS preparation classes, and eventually better results for the learners. Yet, research has revealed negative effects in general of tests on teachers’ cognition, and consequently on their classroom practices in test preparation courses (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Hayes & Read, 2004; Qi, 2004; Wall, 2005; Wall & Alderson, 1993). Hence, the need arises to determine the interaction of UAE IELTS teachers’ cognition, their classroom practices, and any washback, in order to minimize the differences, if any, between teachers’ cognition and their classroom practices in test-preparation courses. As Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) point out, teacher variables, for example, their belief systems and their attitudes toward certain tests (e.g., TOEFL and IELTS), need investigation to further understand any differences in teachers’ teaching methodologies, which are not necessarily influenced by a test’s design itself. Identifying why teachers teach as they do might help in attaining positive washback effects and minimizing the negative washback on teaching and learning in IELTS preparation classes.

### **Problem Statement**

The English language level of the students in the UAE is quite low and their reading abilities in English have also shown to be weaker as compared to students in other parts of the world. According to Gitsaki, Robby, and Bourini (2014), despite the efforts of the UAE’s Ministry of Education to improve the teaching of English in UAE schools (particularly public schools), majority of the high school students’ English language competence is unsatisfactory (below intermediate), and has not reached sufficient levels for them to obtain band 5 or above in the IELTS. Gitsaki, Robby, and Bourini argue that traditional pedagogical practices, such as rote learning and over-reliance on textbooks, have led to the unsatisfactory English language attainment by the UAE students. In addition, *The Research and Survey Report 2014* states that 15-year-old students in the UAE rank far behind their counterparts globally in reading proficiency test in English conducted by PISA (Programs for International Students Assessment).

The IELTS test analysis data (see “Test Taker Performance 2015,” n.d.) further reveals that UAE candidates are among the lowest band achievers (average band score of 4.9 in Academic IELTS and 4.7 in General IELTS) as compared to other countries such as Egypt (average band score 6.4), Iran (average band score 6.2), and Germany (average band score 7.3). These lower scores are definitely of concern for English language teaching and test preparation courses in the UAE, and thus warrant further investigation. While acknowledging the importance of washback in general language teaching, the focus of this research is to explore educational practices in IELTS preparation classes in the UAE. Because “tests can be powerful determiners, both positively and negatively, of what happens in classrooms” (Alderson & Wall, 1993, p. 117), it, therefore, becomes essential to observe whether the IELTS test can enhance (positive washback) or hinder (negative washback) the teaching and learning process in test preparation courses. In particular, examining how teachers approach teaching IELTS would be beneficial in underpinning the teaching and learning process in IELTS preparation courses.

Teaching IELTS entails teachers making informed choices when teaching IELTS preparation courses. These choices applied in classrooms are strongly tied to teachers’ cognition about the IELTS test, and are shaped largely by their knowledge of the test content, pedagogical knowledge applied in classrooms, and their own language learning experiences, whether beneficial or detrimental (Chappell, Bodis, & Jackson, 2015). These teacher choices and perceptions about the IELTS eventually lead to IELTS teachers’ particular ways of teaching in IELTS preparation courses. Systematic investigation of these aspects of cognition is crucial to gain a more complete understanding of the relationship between teachers’ cognition, washback, and teachers’ teaching practices in IELTS preparation classes (Chappell, Bodis, & Jackson, 2015). Therefore, researchers emphasize that more attention should be directed to how teachers teach and the reasons why teachers teach the way they do in high-stakes test preparation courses in order to understand any possible washback effects, as the test developers cannot do much to influence teachers’ pedagogy in preparing students for a test (Alderson, 2004).

## **Purpose of the Study**

The aim of the present study is to explore IELTS teachers' cognition about the IELTS test and evaluate the accuracy of their cognition in the UAE context. Another related issue that this study seeks to highlight is the relationship of the IELTS teachers' cognition to their classroom practices and the extent to which teachers' cognition guides their practices in IELTS preparation courses with regards to the washback effects of the IELTS. As Cheng and Curtis (2004) argue that research on washback of a test should be conducted considering all the contextual factors where the test is used, therefore the washback effects of the IELTS test in IELTS test preparation courses, either positive or negative, would be highlighted considering the context of the UAE.

This research study aims to explore the following research questions:

1. What is IELTS teachers' cognition (knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes) about IELTS?
2. How accurate is IELTS teachers' cognition about IELTS?
3. To what extent is IELTS teachers' cognition about IELTS reflected in their IELTS classroom practices?
4. What evidence of washback from the IELTS is present in IELTS teachers' cognition and their teaching practices?

## **Significance of the Research**

Although the phenomenon of IELTS test washback and teachers' cognition in relation to teachers' classroom practices has been researched by numerous researchers, most studies have researched the two constructs in isolation, and only a few have examined the two concepts with regards to the IELTS test. Moreover, most of the studies are conducted outside the Arab world, and research on IELTS test washback and teachers' cognition in the UAE has not been previously carried out. Therefore, the significance of this study stems from the fact that it is the first research study that investigates IELTS washback as well as IELTS teachers' cognition in relation to their teaching practices in the UAE context. Hence, this study would add a perspective from the UAE while enriching the literature on washback and teachers'

cognition about the IELTS. The significance of this study also lies in the fact that it collected data from different educational institutions, whereas earlier research studies have focused mostly on one kind of institution or one educational sector, researching washback effects of exams in either schools, colleges, or universities.

In the past, many studies have employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches to study the washback effects and teachers' cognition, but the use of stimulated recall interviews are only employed in a few research studies on IELTS washback to date. Thus, the use of stimulated recall interviews might contribute to a deeper understanding of the washback effects of the IELTS test on individual teachers' cognition and their classroom practices in IELTS preparation courses.

Above all, this study could contribute positively to an in-depth understanding of the relationship between IELTS teachers' teaching practices and their underlying cognition (knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes) about the teaching of the IELTS test in IELTS preparatory courses in the context of the UAE. It is also expected that this research would highlight the extent to which such a relationship exists between the IELTS teachers' cognition and their classroom practices, and whether there is a positive and/or negative washback effect on teaching of IELTS preparation courses. In addition, the study could also provide useful information about how IELTS teachers' own language learning and teaching experiences influence their knowledge of, as well as mold their beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes about the IELTS in the UAE context.

### **Organization of the Study**

This thesis consists of six chapters. This first chapter has provided an introduction to the study including an introduction to the IELTS test and IELTS preparation courses. Additionally, the purpose of the study and its significance are presented in the chapter.

The second chapter presents a theoretical account of the phenomenon of washback and teachers' cognition as well as their effect on teachers' teaching practices in test preparation courses, as discussed in the literature. Moreover, the chapter provides an overview of empirical research studies conducted in the related

fields of washback and teachers' cognition with respect to teachers' teaching practices. The chapter ends with a conclusion drawn from earlier research.

The third chapter describes the methodology used in this research by first describing the context of the study, the research tools utilized for data collection, and the participants. The various approaches used for analysis of the data are also outlined in this chapter.

The fourth chapter reports the findings from the questionnaire, classroom observations, and interviews.

The fifth chapter analyzes the results obtained from the data collected from the three different sources and presents the discussion of the results in light of prior research.

The sixth chapter draws conclusions based on the findings and the implications of the research findings for IELTS teachers and educators in the UAE. The limitations of the present study and suggestions for further research are also discussed in the chapter.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter provides an overview of theoretical and empirical framework that elucidates the various facets of washback of the IELTS test by first presenting a historical background to the washback effect of high-stakes tests, and then by reviewing various research studies on washback effects of high-stake examinations, particularly IELTS, conducted in different contexts. The chapter also presents studies conducted in the UAE on the IELTS test, and the washback effects of other language tests on teachers and their teaching practices in test preparation courses. Moreover, studies carried out in the past to explore language teachers' cognition and how teachers' cognition is related to their classroom practices are also delineated in the chapter. Finally, a synthesis of research studies in different contexts is presented at the end of the chapter.

### **Overview of High-Stakes Tests**

Standardized high-stakes tests such as the TOEFL and IELTS have gained popularity in recent years, and are extensively used for assessing candidates' English language proficiency for multiple purposes, for instance, work, study, and migration in environments where English is used as a language of communication (see "IELTS Introduction," n.d.). Their use is introduced in educational systems for the reason that high-stakes tests could be powerful "levers for change" (Wall & Alderson, 1993; Cheng & Curtis, 2004). In the context of the UAE, the IELTS test was also introduced in the educational system to instigate educational reforms to make students proficient in English language and prepare them for academic study in universities across the country (Gitsaki, Robby, & Bourini, 2014).

Extensive research has been conducted to explore the influence of high-stakes tests on teaching and learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Chappell, Bodis, & Jackson, 2015; Cheng, 1999, 2005; Cheng & Curtis, 2004; Cheng, Sun & Ma, 2015; Read & Hayes, 2004; Wall, 2000, 2005). Thus, testing programs that have the greatest impact on "instruction and learning are those that students, teachers, administrators, parents, or the general public believe, rightly or wrongly, are used to make important decisions that immediately and directly affect them" (Madaus, 1988, p. 35). As a result, teaching becomes focused on test preparation, and teachers will teach to the test. According to Madaus (1988), a high-stakes test can have a powerful impact on "how

teachers teach and students learn...this process corrupts the test's ability to serve as a valid indicator of the knowledge or skill it was originally intended to measure” (p.30).

The next section describes *washback* and issues pertinent to washback effects of tests, how washback impacts teachers’ cognition, and how it is manifested in their teaching practices.

### **What Is the Washback Effect in Testing?**

The phenomenon of “washback” or “backwash” is relatively well researched, and is defined in applied linguistics as the effects of tests on teaching and learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Cheng & Curtis, 2004; Cheng, Sun, & Ma, 2015; McNamara, 2000; Messick, 1996). McNamara (2000) and Wall (1997) use two terms to distinguish between two levels of test effects: 1) “*Impact*” is the effects of tests on the macro-levels of education and society beyond the classroom context, i.e., wider effects on the society, the school community, universities, the test score interpreters, and parents; 2) “*washback*” is the effects of language tests on micro-levels of language teaching and learning inside the classroom. Tests with important consequences will have washback, while tests that do not have high stakes will have minimal washback effects (Alderson & Wall, 1993).

According to Cheng and Curtis (2004), the concept of washback stems from the fact that tests “can and should drive teaching, and hence learning” (p.4). That is to say tests can be designed to have a positive washback effect on the teaching of a curriculum (effects of a test that enhance learning) (McNamara, 2000). In other words, tests are responsible for “*measurement-driven instruction*”, a term used by Popham (1987 as cited in Cheng & Curtis, 2004) to explain that there should be an alignment of the content and format of the test to the content and format of the curriculum to achieve beneficial effects of a test in teaching and learning. Washback is seen as a link between testing, teaching and learning (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996), as well as a potential instrument for educational reform (Cheng & Curtis, 2004), and can be either intended or unintended (Cheng, 2008).

However, the notion of washback is complex in nature. According to Chappell, Bodis, and Jackson (2015) and Alderson and Wall (1993), the phenomenon of washback is highly complex, due to a myriad of factors involved. McNamara (2000) states that washback is unpredictable because the achievement of the desired

effects of a test depends on the different contextual variables, including “the local conditions in classrooms, the established traditions of teaching, the immediate motivation of learners, and the frequently unpredictable ways in which classroom interaction develops” (p. 74). Andrews, Fullilove, and Wong (2002) assert that washback is largely indirect and unpredictable: indirect, because it depends on the mediation of teachers, publishers and materials developers, and unpredictable because of individual differences among teachers and students.

Similarly, Wall (2012) believes that washback is complex in nature due to the following reasons:

- It can be positive (enhance learning of academic skills) or negative (hinder learning of academic skills).
- It can be delayed or immediate – i.e. it can be seen soon after the introduction or modification of a test or after sometime of its introduction in an educational system.
- It can be direct, as a direct influence of a test, or indirect, due to other contextual factors.
- It can be predictable or unpredictable – because of the differences among individual teachers and students.
- It can have methodological challenges in determining whether washback has occurred – i.e., deciding on procedures that could reveal whether the washback effect on classroom practices is due to the test itself or other contextual factors.

Cheng and Curtis (2004) classified the factors that are responsible for washback as follows:

- The test factors (e.g., test methods, test contents, skills tested, purpose of the test, decisions that will be made on the basis of test results, etc.)
- Prestige factors (e.g., stakes of the test, status of the test within the entire educational system, etc.)
- Personal factors (e.g., teachers’ educational backgrounds, their beliefs about the best methods of teaching/learning, etc.)

- Contextual factors; micro-context factors (e.g., the school setting in which the test preparation is being carried out); and macro-context factors, that is, the society where the test is used. (p. 22)

Hence, it can be concluded that washback is not simply the effects of tests on teaching and learning. Rather washback involves a plethora of variables that are responsible for modification of teaching and learning in test preparation courses, and these factors are inextricably entwined with the process of teaching and learning. Moreover, in order to understand the phenomenon of washback, it is important to understand the stakes associated with the test, the different stake holders involved, and the teaching and learning context.

The next section discusses how washback affects teaching and learning at various levels, as well as positive and negative washback effects. Furthermore, various research studies conducted in different parts of the world and in the UAE are presented in the following section.

### **Washback Effects on Teaching and Learning**

Hughes' trichotomy (1993, as cited in Cheng & Curtis, 2004) is effective in illustrating the complex mechanisms through which washback occurs in actual teaching and learning environments. Hughes proposes that teaching and learning are affected at three levels: participants, processes, and products. According to him, the nature of a test may first affect the perceptions and attitudes of the participants towards their teaching and learning tasks. These perceptions and attitudes in turn may affect what the participants do in carrying out their work (process), including practicing the kind of items that are to be found in the test, which will affect the learning outcomes, the product of the work.

Alderson and Wall (1993) list the effects of a test on teaching and learning, effects which resemble Hughes' (1993) trichotomy (as cited in Cheng & Curtis, 2004). They state that a test will influence teachers and learners, in addition to teaching and learning, by affecting what teachers teach and learners learn. A test also affects the rate, sequence, degree, and depth of teaching and learning as well as the content and methodology of teaching and the content that is learnt. In addition, Alderson and Wall (1993) point out that tests may have washback effects for all or some teachers and learners but not for others.

Washback on teaching and learning can have varied consequences. Messick (1996) claims that washback, i.e., the influence of tests on language teachers and learners compels them to do things that they did not intend to do, either promoting or hindering language learning. He further clarifies the washback effect on teaching and learning by stating that it is "not simply good or bad teaching or learning practice that might occur with or without the test, but rather good or bad practice that is evidentially linked to the introduction and use of the test" (p. 254). Test preparation courses are then an indication of washback as a result of a test itself. Wall and Alderson (1993) also suggest that tests determine classroom activities. They further elaborate that tests can be conceived to influence teachers' attitudes towards tests as well as their teaching, and this might lead to "teaching to the test with an undesirable narrowing of the curriculum" (p. 6). Therefore, the quality of washback might be independent of the quality of the test (Wall & Alderson, 1993), and the test design itself might not compel teachers to avoid skills that do not appear on the test. Chapman and Snyder (2000) affirm that "teachers' tendencies to teach to the test are often cited as an impediment to introducing new instructional practices" (p. 460), and prevent beneficial washback of tests on teaching and learning. According to Chapman and Snyder (2000), the reason is that teachers may not understand the need for required changes in teaching practices to affect students' overall test scores, which could be attributed to the differences between their beliefs about how to teach a test and their classroom practices. In addition, teachers may lack content knowledge or pedagogical skills to teach a test resulting in misalignment between how students are taught and how they are tested (Chapman & Snyder, 2000), preventing beneficial washback effects.

Contextual variables are important when considering the washback effects of tests on teaching and learning, too. Many factors could contribute towards the achievement of the intended or unintended positive washback or the unintended negative washback, or a mix of both. These factors include the curriculum and its objectives, the value placed on a test, the educational and social consequences of tests and test scores, the students and teachers' behaviors and actions in the classrooms (Madaus, 1988; Volante, 2006; Wall, 2005; Wall & Alderson, 1993). Of these contextual factors, teachers' attitudes towards a test and their use of different activities to teach the test are major determiners for positive or negative washback

(Lewthwaite, 2007). According to Alderson (2004), “it is at least as much the teacher who brings about washback, be it positive or negative, as it is the test” (p. x). That is to say that the teacher is equally as responsible for positive or negative washback as the test itself. Additionally, teachers have been found to be employing classroom practices that result in negative consequences of the tests in test preparation courses (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Salehi, Yunus, & Salehi, 2012). Brown (2004) calls such an effect leading to “cram” courses and “teaching to the test” an example of negative washback (p.29).

Research has identified both positive and negative effects of washback on the teaching and learning process (Chappell, Bodis, & Jackson, 2015; Erfani, 2012, 2014; Wall & Alderson, 1993). Despite a number of research studies conducted to discover the relationship of washback with teaching and learning, there is no overall consensus between researchers as to what factors affect the intensity of washback and which factors are responsible for promoting positive or negative washback (Cheng, 2008).

### **Positive Washback**

Wall (2005) refers to washback as “inevitable” (p. 12); that is, high-stakes examinations do cause positive or negative or both kinds of washback effects. In the *Dictionary of Language Testing*, positive washback is defined as the effects of “a testing procedure which encourages ‘good’ teaching practice” (Davies et al., 1999, p. 225). Wall and Alderson (1993) suggest that positive washback can occur when there are “no conflicts in the aims, activities or the marking criteria of the textbook and the exam, and if teachers accepted these and worked towards them” (p. 199). Similarly, Messick (1996) insists that “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). This implies that washback is positive if the teachers’ practices are guided by both the curriculum and the examination, and the examinations reflect the content of the curriculum/textbook (Wall, 2005).

In order to achieve beneficial effects from a test, Hughes (2003) outlines certain principles. Hughes proposes that it is essential that authentic texts and tasks are utilized, and direct testing methods are employed in tests. Also, criterion-referenced tests should be used, and tests should be based on the broader objectives of the

curriculum or the course rather than basing them on textbook content or the pedagogy of teachers; and teachers and students should understand the rationale of the test and, its specifications, and be familiar with test items. In addition, Hughes (2003) suggests that teachers should be guided and given professional training in teaching using the communicative methods if the test design requires so. For example, if a test is designed to evaluate communicative learning in classrooms through the use of activities in pairs or groups, then teachers should be given appropriate training in using these communicative methods of teaching to prepare for the test. Wall (2005) also maintains that a criterion-referenced test with clear guidelines and support for the teachers could result in positive washback.

Messick (1996) asserted a similar view by making a case for direct testing to achieve beneficial effects from a test. Messick claims that positive washback can result from avoiding two sources of error: *construct-irrelevance*, i.e., testing what is taught and not including content beyond what is taught, or introducing factors unrelated to curricular content; and *construct-underrepresentation*, i.e., avoiding making the test too narrow by not including important skills presented in the course of study. If tests directly assess the skills that teachers are interested in fostering, then practice for the test represents practice in those skills (Hughes, 2003). Nevertheless, tests may well fail to reflect the learning principles or the course objectives to which they are supposedly related. In reality, teachers and learners may end up teaching and learning toward the test, regardless of whether or not they support the test or fully understand its rationale or aims (Cheng & Curtis, 2004), which can be a result of negative washback. Thus, it cannot be assumed that direct and authentic performance assessment would always yield positive washback because of the influence of contextual factors, such as teacher/student factors, classroom context, stakes associated with a test, and the educational consequences of a test as well as its scores.

On the other hand, Brown (2004) declares that washback manifested in the case of classroom assessments can be positive if teachers provide feedback to students, which provides valuable insights into students' strengths and weaknesses after the performance evaluation. Brown claims that such washback could be beneficial for students, and leads to future improvements in students' language learning abilities. Furthermore, Brown identifies some language learning aspects that might yield positive outcomes of washback, which are "intrinsic motivation,

autonomy, self-confidence, language ego, interlanguage, and strategic investment” (p. 29). Hence, if teachers could pay attention to these language learning aspects, then washback could be said to have a positive influence on teaching and learning. Adopting similar practices in test preparation courses for high-stakes test may result in positive washback as well.

Wall (2005) highlighted a number of factors that could result in positive washback effects on teachers. According to her, these positive effects include “inducing...[teachers] to cover their subjects thoroughly, making them complete their syllabi within the prescribed time limits, compelling them to pay as much attention to weak pupils as to strong ones, and making them familiar with the standards which other teachers and other schools were able to achieve” (p. 34). Consequently, teaching and learning in test preparation courses could be geared towards achieving more beneficial effects of a test.

### **Negative Washback**

Cheng and Curtis (2004), on the contrary, argue that having positive effects of tests seems “idealistic” (p.10). They point out that teaching and learning involve complex situations, and a number of constraints, such as time constraints, schools and curricular constraints, making it highly unlikely to have positive washback. Hence, it is frequently claimed that tests, especially high-stakes examinations, cause unwanted negative effects on the process of teaching and learning. Teachers tend to ignore topics and activities that have no direct influence on test scores, resulting in distortion of the curriculum (Cheng & Curtis, 2004), which suggests that teachers do not follow the curriculum and teach to the test only. Alderson and Wall (1993) state that teaching to the test results in undesirable negative effects of the tests. They refer to the negative effects of a test as “poor,” resulting in “something that the teacher or learner does not wish to teach or learn” (p. 5) but are forced to teach or learn to enhance scores on high-stakes tests. Madaus (1988) claims that tests always result in negative washback if they are considered the primary force for driving the curriculum and the educational process, resulting in narrowing of the curriculum, and constraining teachers’ and students’ creativity.

Researchers have pointed out various reasons for the undesirable washback effects of tests. According to Davies et al. (1999), negative washback occurs when

test items have little or no relationship to the teaching curriculum. Moreover, if the influence of a test “prevents the desired changes in the teaching towards a more communicative methodology” (p. 225), then again it has negative washback. Cheng (2004) and Qi (2004) state that one of the negative influences of testing on teaching and learning is excessive practice of test papers, which leads to narrowing of the curriculum and downplaying the goal of improving language ability. As a consequence, test preparation practices would increase test scores “without correspondingly improving the skills measured by the test” (Messick, 1996, p. 6). Likewise, Madaus (1988) say that teaching to the test results in raising the test scores of learners without any evidence of improvement in the skills of interest or the ones intended by the test developers. Instruction will eventually focus on skills and material that are tested and neglect what is not made part of the test.

Many factors contribute to the detrimental effects of a test. Madaus (1988) claims that “when faced with a choice between objectives which are explicit in the curriculum and a different set of objectives that are implicit in the test, teachers and students generally choose to focus on the latter” (p. 39). According to Madaus, teachers see the kind of intellectual activity required by previous test questions and prepare the students to meet these demands. The reason behind this practice is that when the teacher's professional worth is estimated in terms of test success, “teachers will corrupt the measured skills by reducing them to the level of strategies in which the examinee is drilled” (Madaus, 1988, p. 40). Furthermore, the expectations and pressures from students and their parents for test success will further corrupt the process.

The use of test material for instruction might also lead to negative washback depending on the educational practices of teachers and students for test preparation. Although the test material is designed to familiarize students with the test format and provide them information about the scoring rules and test anxiety reduction techniques, if the test practice material resembles the original test (used for assessing students) more closely, then it can have negative consequences. According to Madaus (1988), “apart from distorting instruction and destroying the validity of the test, the use of test preparation materials, whether commercial or prepared by school districts, has a network of consequences associated with it” (p. 43). Indeed, such practices have a negative impact on the teaching and learning process, since they compromise

authentic forms of teaching and learning and corrupt the inferences drawn from such assessments (Volante, 2006). Again, in such cases, improvements in test scores do not necessarily represent improvements in the required or intended skills.

### **Empirical Research on Washback**

Reviewing the literature on washback studies reveals that washback studies could be classified into two types: 1) those related to traditional, multiple-choice large scale standardized tests which are perceived to have had mainly negative washback effects (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Green, 2006a, 2006b, 2007; Hayes & Read, 2004; Read & Hayes, 2003; Saville & Hawkey, 2004); 2) studies done to explore the washback effects of particular tests in specific contexts which have been modified and improved upon to enhance the teaching and learning or affect the curriculum, i.e., to have a positive washback effect (Cheng, 2004, 2005; Wall, 2005; Wall & Alderson, 1993). Yet, such studies are inconclusive showing positive, negative and/or no effect on teaching and learning (Cheng, 2008; Cheng & Curtis, 2004; Wall, 2005).

### **Studies on Washback Effects of Tests Aimed to Improve Teaching and Learning**

A longitudinal study done by Wall (2005) investigated the effects of a new Sri Lankan O Level examination of English to determine the effects of the test on classroom teaching according to its designers' intentions. The test was designed by a team of international test developers through insights from the local Sri Lankan Team (funded by British Overseas Development Administration) to introduce changes in the curriculum and the teaching and learning process. Wall (2005) analyzed the data collected in 1991 during the final phase of the Sri Lankan O Level evaluation project. The research methodology involved the use of questionnaires, observations, and later group interviews. The outcomes of the test design were intended to result in either positive or negative washback. The washback effect was hypothesized to be positive if the teacher would pay attention to all parts of the textbook (since any text type or task might appear in the exam with the same general methodological approach for developing skills assessed in the exam), and write classroom tests that would reflect the content of the textbook. On the contrary, negative washback would mean that teachers would only practice certain skills that were assessed in the exam, neglecting the skills that were not assessed in the Sri Lankan O Level exam. Moreover, negative washback would be seen if teachers were to employ any methodology to help students prepare for the exam, such as excessive focus on test practice, and write classroom

tests that would mirror the content of the past examination papers rather than the content of the textbook.

The findings of the study revealed that the new examination had a powerful negative impact on the teachers' choice of content, with more attention being paid to reading and writing skills while listening and speaking were ignored, as they were not included in the exam. Nevertheless, the effects of the test were found to be minimal on the methodology used by teachers in classrooms. Individual teacher and student factors, such as teachers' and students' perceptions about the new exam, their attitudes towards test practice in class, the students' motivational levels, the difficulty level of the exam for the students, also played an important role in determining the rationale for teachers' teaching practices and the washback effects of the test. The findings supported Alderson and Wall's (1993) notion that washback is highly complex in nature and that the positive and negative effects cannot be necessarily associated with the design of a test, i.e., a good test may result in negative effects and a bad test may result in positive washback effects. Rather a number of other contextual factors, such as teacher and student variables, curricular objectives versus the objectives of a test, intended and unintended uses of a test, should be taken into consideration when scrutinizing the washback of a new or redesigned test on the teaching and learning process.

A similar study was conducted by Cheng (2005), which focused on identifying and explaining the washback phenomenon and its intensity in the light of measurement-driven instruction by bringing a change in language teaching through making changes in language testing in Hong Kong secondary schools. The study examined the impact of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination in English (HCEEE), a public high-stakes test, on classroom teaching and learning. The washback effects of this test were first examined on different stake-holders within the Hong Kong educational system and later on in the teaching in classrooms. The findings reported no or limited washback effect from the test, although the test was designed to have a positive impact on teaching and learning in secondary schools. Furthermore, the study – similar to Wall and Alderson's (1993) study – showed that the test influenced what teachers were teaching but not how they were teaching, and the methods of teaching remained identical when compared with teaching in the previous years. This showed that the exam did not change the way teachers taught but

surely what they taught. Not much significant washback effect of the new test in Hong Kong was observed in this study.

### **Studies on Washback Effects of High-Stakes Exams**

High-stakes exams have always been the focus of empirical scrutiny. A study by Tsagari (2009) of the washback effect of a high-stakes language test, that is, the First Certificate in English (FCE) examination by Cambridge (UCLES), on teaching and learning in EFL classes was carried out in the context of Greek foreign language schools. Although the test constructors claimed that the exam was aimed at providing “positive educational impact” (p.205), the teachers in this study adjusted their teaching to the exam demands, resulting in negative impact of the test. The teachers used exam preparatory material extensively, placing more value on the skills and activities/tasks assessed in the exam rather than the ones which were not assessed. The FCE had a distorting effect on teachers’ beliefs about the exam, and hence their teaching methodology, which was against the claims made by UCLES of positive impact.

Moreover, Tsagari (2009) concluded that the teachers’ negative attitudes toward the test may have also influenced their teaching in classrooms. However, she declared that the test design is not responsible for the negative effects of the test on teaching. Misconceptions about the requirements of the exams may have also contributed to negative washback in classrooms. Although the teachers were familiar with the content and format of the exam, they lacked knowledge about the underlying principles of the exam, the micro-skills tested, and the marking criteria. In addition, Tsagari indicates that individual teacher differences played a significant role in determining the intensity of the washback effect. Some teachers were geared towards teaching to the exam, while others were unaffected by the exam and used the same methodology for teaching, making it difficult to draw conclusions about the responsibility of the test in causing negative washback.

A comparative study of TOEFL and non-TOEFL preparation courses was conducted by Alderson and Hamp-Lyons’ (1996) in a specialized language institute in the USA using teacher and student interviews and classroom observation of two teachers, both in TOEFL and non-TOEFL classes. The results of the study unveiled negative washback effects with teachers emphasizing test-taking skills and neglecting

language development. Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) concluded that the TOEFL affects what and how teachers teach, but this effect varied from teacher to teacher. They suggested that the relationship between the test and washback effects is not straightforward, but rather is highly complex and needs further exploration of why teachers teach the way they do in TOEFL preparation courses and non-TOEFL courses. Additionally, Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) found some teachers having a negative attitude about the test, calling it “inauthentic” and “non-communicative” (p. 285), in addition to saying the TOEFL preparation classes are “boring and fragmentary” (p. 285).

Another study conducted by Pan (2013) in Taiwan, using questionnaires, interviews and observations, found no significant differences in the teaching of teachers in universities for preparing for high-stakes tests, such as TOEFL, or IELTS, for graduation requirements (exit requirements) and other courses at the universities. However, the teachers at schools with exit requirements were highly cognizant of the test factors and utilized classroom activities that were more geared toward test preparation focusing more on teaching test-related skills, than did the teachers at schools without exit requirements for the high-stakes English proficiency exams. Therefore, Pan (2013) concluded that test preparation classes were dominated by:

- 1) the adoption of test-preparation materials as the main source for instruction;
- 2) the encouragement of memorization of vocabulary, phrases, sentence structures, and key answers to questions often appearing on the test;
- 3) the practice of mock tests in a timed condition; and
- 4) the explanation of test-taking strategies and the preferences and expectations of raters. (p.201)

In the context of Iran, a study conducted by Erfani (2012) explored the washback effect of IELTS and TOEFL iBT on teaching and learning activities in preparation courses employing questionnaires, class observations, and interviews. Erfani found that IELTS and TOEFL iBT tests had both negative and positive washback effects on classroom activities in preparation courses. The negative effects included teachers focusing more on teaching the test format, test content using past papers, and test taking strategies instead of teaching academic language skills. The positive washback effects included teacher use of communicative activities to some extent to teach certain skills, promotion and development of skills through test-related activities, integration of skills, and use of pairs and groups.

In comparison, a case study done by Saif (2006) revealed a direct relationship of an oral proficiency test for the ITA (International Teaching Assistants) program in Iran with the teaching and learning process. The teachers' choices of content, methodology, and class activities were adapted to the goals and objectives of the test. As a consequence, positive washback effects were observed on teaching and learning at the classroom level to a large extent, as intended by the designers of the test. Saif (2006) concluded that, although the washback effect was positive, it was a complex phenomenon and the effect could not be directly attributed to a change in the larger educational system. However, the effect was positive for teaching and learning because the teacher was involved in the process of test design and had acquaintance with the format and construct of the test

In contrast, Salehi, Yunus, and Salehi (2012) reported high school English teachers teaching to the test for university entrance exams in Iran, resulting in narrowing of the curriculum which involved teachers focusing on the content for the test only, and uninteresting experiences on test preparation courses for students.

Hence, it can be assumed from the findings of the above research studies that due to the pressure of raising test scores, teachers use instructional methods which reflect the test format and content and devote a large amount of class time to test preparation activities (Abrams, Pedulla, & Madaus, 2003).

### **The IELTS Test**

The IELTS test is a task-based English proficiency test that assesses candidates' communicative competence in all four language skills, that is, listening, reading, writing, and speaking (*IELTS Guide for Teachers*, 2015). IELTS is designed to provide "fair, accurate and relevant assessment of language skills, based on well-established standards, and covers full range of proficiency levels, from non-user [0] to expert user [9]" (*IELTS Guide for Teachers*, 2015, p. 1). Each band corresponds to a level of competence in English. The test questions are based on authentic material. Although the IELTS test focuses on testing the four skills individually, there is also an element of integration of skills in each component of the test (*IELTS Guide for Teachers*, 2015), and therefore, "test tasks often entail the use of other skills" (*IELTS Guide for Teachers*, 2015, p. 5).

The IELTS test, according to Hayes and Read (2004), is “intended to have a positive washback effect” (p. 98) by encouraging candidates to develop their English language proficiency to assist their study through the medium of English. Test preparation classes are a manifestation of washback from IELTS, which can be positive or negative. Therefore, in test preparation classes “teachers are encouraged to facilitate English learning that helps to improve students' general English language skills, as well as prepare them to take the test” (see “IELTS for Teachers,” n.d.). As a result, teaching techniques in IELTS classes should include teaching of language elements, such as grammar and vocabulary, in a wider context (*IELTS Guide for Teachers*, 2015). The *IELTS Guide for Teachers* (2015) also suggests the use of authentic material in IELTS classes, in addition to familiarizing students with the structure of the test and teaching test-taking strategies.

### **Aspects of Test Usefulness**

The usefulness of a test is defined on the basis of various aspects, including reliability, authenticity, validity and consequential validity (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). These aspects of a test’s quality determine its effectiveness in measuring the intended abilities for which a test is designed. Reliability of a test is defined as the consistency of measurement of one test with itself or with another test (Davies et al., 1999) if there are no measurement errors. Authenticity, on the other hand, refers to the quality of a test when the test-tasks mirror the real-life target language tasks (Brown, 2004).

The validity of a test is an indication of how accurately the test measures the ability, knowledge, or skill which it is designed to assess (Brown, 2004), as well as the accuracy of interpretation of test scores (Messick, 1996). In other words, a test is valid if it measures what it claims to measure. Consequential validity, according to Brown & Abeywickrama (2010), encompasses all the consequences of a test, such as a test’s impact on the preparation of test takers, its effects (either intended or unintended) on teachers and learners, as well as the social consequences of its interpretation and use. All these aspects of a test’s usefulness might influence teachers’ thought processes, and consequently their actions in class, especially in the case of high-stakes tests.

## **Overview of IELTS Washback Research**

After the seminal work of Wall and Alderson (1993) on washback research, many studies have explored the impact of high-stakes tests as well as classroom assessment on teachers and learners. Washback in the case of the IELTS examination is also reported frequently (Chappell, Bodis, & Jackson, 2015; Green, 2006a, 2006b, 2007; Hayes & Read, 2004; Read & Hayes, 2003). Many studies have investigated the washback effects of IELTS on teachers (e.g., Chappell, Bodis, & Jackson, 2015) and learners (e.g., Zafarghandi & Nemati, 2015). In addition, some studies have also examined the effects of the IELTS test on university policies when used as a requirement for entering universities (Shih, 2010), and the effects of the IELTS test on exam preparation materials (Saville & Hawkey, 2004).

A comparative study of IELTS and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses done by Hayes and Read (2004) investigated the washback effects of the IELTS test in IELTS preparation classes in New Zealand. The methodology involved the use of questionnaires for IELTS preparation courses in institutes, and interviews of teachers teaching IELTS preparation courses and EAP courses. Later, teachers were observed while teaching IELTS and EAP courses. The comparison of the two types of courses revealed that the teachers in IELTS preparation courses were focusing more on practicing the test tasks in comparison to the other courses in which more attention was paid to developing the students' language skills.

Similar findings were reported by Zafarghandi and Nemati (2015) in a comparative study of IELTS and non-IELTS courses, and TOEFL and non-TOEFL courses in an Iranian context. Zafarghandi and Nemati used pre-test and post-test methodology, i.e., learners were tested before and after giving instructions in both types of tests, IELTS and TOEFL, and later were surveyed and interviewed. The teachers in the study were found to be teaching to the test with greater focus on practicing test taking tasks, neglecting the construct of the test which reflected a more communicative approach in teaching and the development of academic skills. The learners were also found to have negative attitudes towards the test, and they were studying to get passing scores on the test without considering the development of academic skills important to them. This study confirmed the negative washback effects of the IELTS and TOEFL tests on teaching and learning to some extent,

although IELTS preparation courses were found to prepare students for the IELTS exam comparatively more effectively than the TOEFL courses for the TOEFL exam.

Investigating the writing component of the IELTS test and EAP writing classes, two research studies conducted by Green (2006a, 2006b) in the UK further documented that IELTS test design features lead to narrowing of the focus to certain writing features (test content), which could cause negative washback on teaching and learning in writing classes. His findings, additionally, showed that teachers' prior beliefs about language teaching and their perceptions of the IELTS test also led to particular and narrow approaches in IELTS classes, such as practicing to write short texts under timed conditions with more focus on grammar and vocabulary, as compared to EAP classes in which more attention was paid to teaching how to incorporate sources in academic writing, and using varied texts in preparing students for entrance to universities in UK. Green (2006a, 2006b) used questionnaires to explore the influence of teachers' priorities on learners preparing for the IELTS Academic Writing test. He suggested the need for more sensitive instruments, such as in-depth interviews and classroom observations, to take account of different perspectives on washback.

Another study by Mician and Motteram (2008) examined the classroom pedagogy in IELTS classes in ELICOS (English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students) sector in Australia. The research methodology included audio and video recording of selected lessons, interviews with teachers and students, and examination of the material used for instruction. The analysis of classroom instruction showed that diverse teaching approaches were used by the teachers, including "information about the test format, practicing the test tasks, awareness-raising of the constituent parts of the tasks, hints and strategies for doing the test tasks and recommendations for independent learning" (p. 2). All four language skills were taught separately, as in the IELTS test, with a focus on test practice and models of texts provided by the teacher with scaffolding techniques. The study showed the complexity of test washback in test preparation classes as students were engaged in multidimensional social practices. In addition, "the pedagogy was teacher directed and IELTS focused" (p.8), with teachers having authoritative roles in class. The influence of the IELTS test on the teaching approach was "evident in the separate treatment of skills, the talk about the test and the test techniques, and the nature of

classroom activities” (p. 20), which included test practice mostly. The instruction in the class consisted of teaching test-taking behaviors and was focused on “the values or priorities embodied in the test” (p. 23).

Rashidi and Javanmardi (2011) also investigated the washback effect of the IELTS test in IELTS preparation courses in Iran, and examined whether the construct of the test affected the methodology in teaching or not. The results indicated that teachers taught the test content/exam format and test-taking strategies to improve students’ performance on the IELTS test and their teaching methodology was based on the communicative construct of the exam. The teachers in their study allocated more time to familiarize students with the exam format, resulting in more positive than negative washback effects in IELTS classes.

More recently, another study carried out by Chappell, Bodis, and Jackson (2015) found some positive and negative washback effects of the IELTS tests on teachers and the teaching and learning process in the Australian ELICOS sector. The study involved the use of questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. Chappell, Bodis, and Jackson (2015) verified that the IELTS teachers had sound knowledge of the test format. They, however, pointed out that the IELTS teachers’ teaching practices were affected by their beliefs about test preparation courses, lack of knowledge about the principles behind the test design and the test items, and the lack of professional training for teaching IELTS test courses, causing undesirable washback effects, such as excessive focus on test practice and test-taking strategies to the exclusion of language development in IELTS classes.

This overview of the IELTS washback research leads to two conclusions: (1) The IELTS test definitely affects teachers, learners, and the teaching and learning process, and (2) its effects on teachers’ cognition are varied, with differences in teaching practices in IELTS test preparation courses, which could be attributed to the effects of the test on individual teachers, in addition to other contextual factors.

### **IELTS Research in the UAE**

Research on the IELTS test in the UAE has focused on different dimensions. These dimensions include washback effects of the IELTS writing module on teachers’ and students’ perceptions (Lewthwaite, 2007), cultural bias in the IELTS test (Freimuth, 2014, 2015), IELTS as a predictor of academic success (Garinger &

Schoepp, 2013), and using IELTS preparation program to increase scores (Gitsaki, Robby, & Bourini, 2014). A summary of these studies is presented in the following section.

### **IELTS Washback**

Lewthwaite (2007) did an exploratory washback study on the IELTS Writing Tasks 1 and 2, finding both positive and negative washback effects. Positive effects involved teachers' and students' positive attitudes towards the IELTS writing tasks, which motivated them in preparing for the exam. However, there were also negative effects of the exam as teachers had to teach graphs and topics that might not have been relevant to what the students were going to write about in universities in the UAE. Students studying Law and Business Studies at UAEU were also of the opinion that IELTS writing tasks were not relevant to their majors. Moreover, some Sharia students in the UAE University reported that they might not need English or even graph writing in their major. Teachers in the study further commented on the differences between the writing tasks in the IELTS and the university writing tasks and topics, despite the similarity of the writing genres. Time constraint was another factor in the IELTS writing that contributed toward the negative feelings about the exam.

### **Cultural Bias in IELTS**

Research on cultural bias in the writing component of IELTS was done by Freimuth (2014), who found that IELTS writing prompts were either culturally sensitive or culturally unfamiliar for the Emirati students and thus were problematic for them, resulting in lowering their band scores, an aspect of consequential validity of the IELTS test. She concluded that having culturally familiar topics might raise the band scores of students on the IELTS Writing Task 2.

Freimuth (2015) conducted another study on IELTS and compared the cultural content in the IELTS and TOEFL reading exams to identify which exam is more pertinent to the Emirati culture and more suitable for Emirati students in terms of the background knowledge required for reading. For the purpose of comparison, official IELTS and TOEFL reading exams were analyzed to determine the existence of culturally unfamiliar (cultural bias) items in the reading passages by looking at the social structures, proverbs and expressions, political or historical settings,

superstitions or beliefs, objects, products or things, as well as customs and traditions. The results of the study revealed that the cultural content in TOEFL reading examination was much higher in Western bias than in the IELTS reading passages which impacted students' performance on the reading exam. Freimuth (2015) declared that the reading passages in TOEFL would be difficult for students to process in terms of the background knowledge. The reason for these differences in cultural content is the differences in the construct of the two tests. The IELTS test measures test takers' overall academic English ability for international communication, whereas the TOEFL is measuring English proficiency for study in American universities.

### **IELTS as a Predictor of Academic Success**

A research project by Garinger and Schoepp (2013) at Zayed University highlighted that IELTS scores (and sub-scores) are not predictors of academic success of students at universities. Garinger and Schoepp compared the students' IELTS scores to their institutional GPAs (Grade Point Average) in the early stages of a baccalaureate program. Approximately 300 students' IELTS scores at entry-level from the foundation program were compared to the GPA of their English language classes. They found that the IELTS test scores do not necessarily reflect the success of students in an academic setting. It was evident that even students who had an IELTS band score of 5 were able to succeed.

### **IELTS Preparation Program**

An experimental study done by Gitsaki, Robby, and Bourini (2014) revealed the effects of an intensive IELTS preparatory program on secondary school Emirati students' band score gains on the IELTS test, using a pre/post-test method. The preparatory program was focused on individual students' needs and was designed to "focus exclusively on IELTS examination instruction" (Gitsaki, Robby, & Bourini, 2014, p. 173) for eight weeks. Later, teachers and students were also interviewed to record their attitudes towards the test, which were found to be positive as they responded well to the program. The fact that it was deemed imperative to have an IELTS preparation program is itself an indication of washback.

## **Teachers' Cognition and Its Relationship to Their Classroom Practices**

Teachers' cognition has been defined and investigated by many researchers (e.g., Bailey, 1999; Basturkmen, 2012; Borg, 1999a, 1999b, 2003, 2006, 2011; Burns, Edwards, & Freeman, 2015; Kuzborska, 2011; Yigitoglu & Belcher, 2014, Yin, 2010), and has been found to play a pivotal role in what teachers do in classrooms. Cognition is defined as a "tacit, personally-held, practical system of mental constructs held by teachers and which are dynamic [sic]-i.e. defined and redefined on the basis of educational and professional experiences throughout teachers' lives" (Borg, 2006, p. 35). Cognition has also been referred to as knowledge, beliefs, theories, assumptions, and attitudes that teachers hold about various aspects of their work (Borg, 1999b). In other words, cognition is the teachers' knowledge, either content knowledge or practical pedagogical knowledge (Borg, 2006), perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about language and language teaching which are affected by their own language learning experiences (Yigitoglu & Belcher, 2014), and undergo change with teachers' experiences over time (Burns, Edwards, & Freeman, 2015).

The various aspects of teacher cognition have been defined by many researchers. One aspect of cognition, content knowledge, is referred to as factual information, organizing principles, and central concepts about a discipline (Grossman, Wilson, & Shulman, 1989). However, Chappell, Bodis, and Jackson (2015) argue that knowledge of teachers is not limited to simply knowing their subject matter. Rather it also involves their beliefs about how they can best design lessons for particular groups of students that support their learning. Beliefs, as described by Borg (2011) are "propositions individuals consider to be true and which are often tacit, have a strong evaluative and affective component, provide a basis for action, and are resistant to change" (p. 371). According to Kuzborska (2011), "teachers' beliefs influence their goals, procedures, materials, classroom interaction patterns, their roles, their students, and the schools they work in" (p. 102). Attitudes, on the other hand, are "reinforced by beliefs (the cognitive component) and often attract strong feelings (the emotional component) which may lead to particular behavioral intents (the action tendency component)" (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 75).

Many research studies on second language teaching have identified knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes as the main aspects of cognition that affect teachers' teaching practices. Furthermore, since this research is following

Chappell, Bodis, and Jackson (2015) study about IELTS teachers' cognition and their teaching practices, therefore, only these four aspects of cognition, that is, knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes are explored in the present study.

While there are many possible classifications of attitude, the attitudes of teachers in the present study are categorized into negative and positive attitudes. In the study by Chappell, Bodis, and Jackson (2015), these categories are based on the concept of test usefulness and its elements (reliability, validity, and authenticity) as presented in Bachman and Palmer (1996). Washback is also mentioned by Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) as an aspect of consequential validity, which is part of overall validity. Moreover, Spratt (2005) and Oppenheim (1992) define attitude as reflective of feelings and behavior. Thus, in this research indication of teacher attitude includes teacher comments about test usefulness as well as indications of feelings and behavioral intent, which can be positive or negative.

Teachers' choices of teaching material and decisions made in the classroom are governed by their "cognitive capacity," according to Burns, Edwards, and Freeman, (2015, p. 587). Since exams affect teachers' feelings and behaviors, teachers' attitude toward an exam would seem to play an important role in determining the choice of methods used to teach exam classes (Spratt, 2005). Spratt (2005) claims that "it is the teacher who can determine to a greater or lesser extent whether to allow washback to operate, what areas it should operate in and how" (p.24). Therefore, teachers make pedagogical decisions concerning classroom teaching based on their cognitive capacities. Hence, it should not be forgotten that the teacher in the classroom operates within an ideological, historical, economical, and political context that influences teacher decision-making while teaching.

### **Factors Affecting Teachers' Cognition**

Impacting teachers' cognition, Burns et al. (2015) argue that contextual factors, such as teacher-student interactions, and learners' behavior are significant in determining a teacher's actions and thought processes during the teaching process. Similarly, Borg (1999a) acknowledges that contextual factors have a powerful influence on teachers' classroom practices. According to Borg (2006), "teacher cognition and practices are mutually informing, with contextual factors playing an important role in mediating the extent to which teachers are able to implement

instruction congruent with their cognition” (p. 284). Figure 1 clearly illustrates the complexity of teacher cognition.

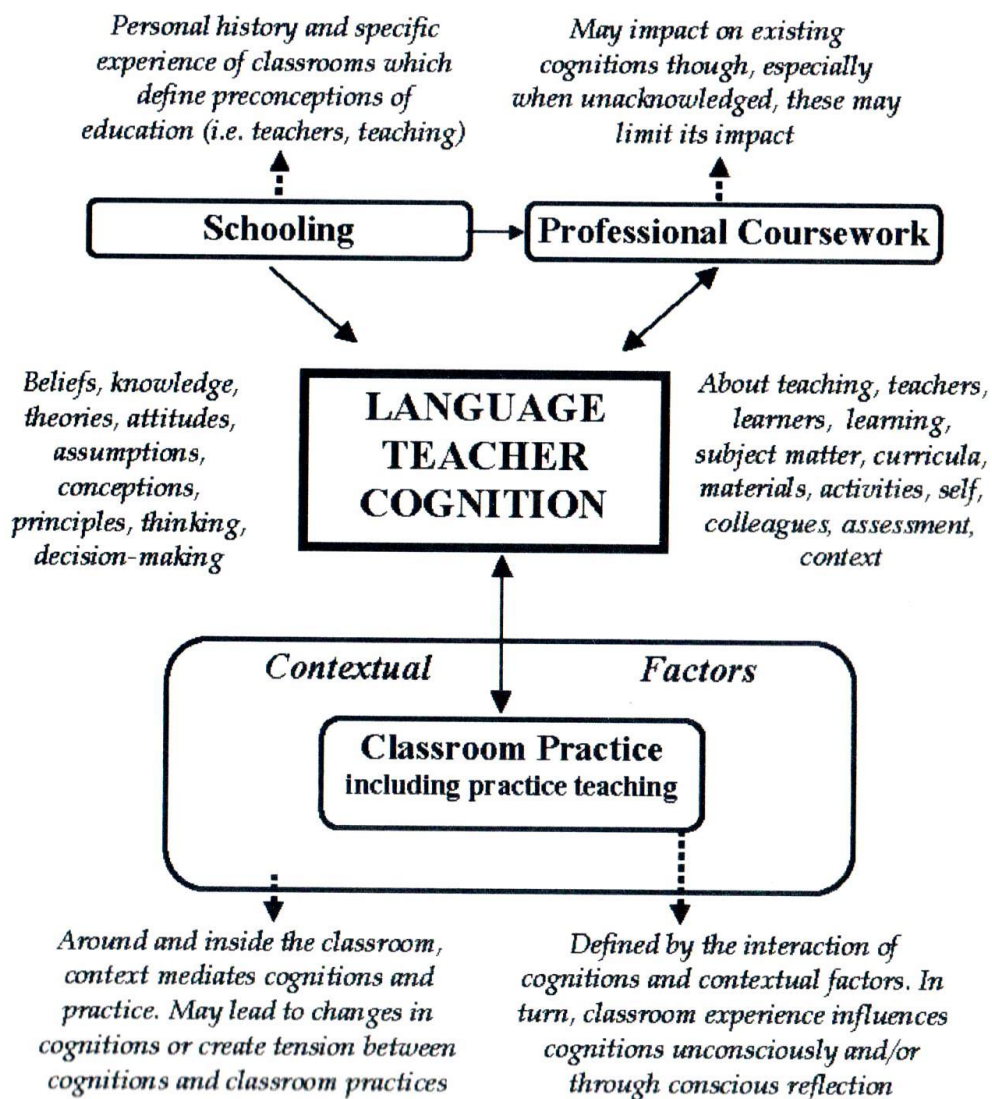


Figure 1: Elements and processes in teacher cognition (Borg, 2006, p. 283)

Considering the complex relationship between teachers’ cognition and their classroom practices, it is difficult to attain congruency between teachers’ cognition and their classroom practices. A study done by Phipps and Borg (2009) revealed divergences in English teachers’ beliefs about teaching grammar and their actual classroom practices. Phipps and Borg proposed that tensions between what teachers say and do are a reflection of their belief sub-systems, and of the different forces which influence their thinking and behavior. They concluded that studying the

thought processes behind such tensions can help both researchers and teacher educators in understanding the teaching process.

Farrell and Ives (2015), in their study of a reading teacher's beliefs and their relationship to the teacher's classroom practices, also found a few differences between the teacher's beliefs and actual classroom practices. For instance, the teacher in the study believed that it was important to activate students' background knowledge of a topic in reading; however, this belief was not in congruence with the teacher's classroom practices where no such background knowledge was made part of teaching.

In addition to the aforementioned factors, the interaction between teachers' cognition and their classroom practices is affected by whether a teacher is a veteran or novice in the field of second language teaching. Basturkmen (2012) suggests that experienced teachers show more convergence between their stated beliefs and actual classroom practices because "deeply held principles by experienced teachers would be applied more consistently than principles acquired more recently" (p. 287). In contrast, novice teachers tend to have a partial disconnect between their beliefs and classroom practices, due to the fact that changes in their belief systems occur with time. A comprehensive review by Basturkmen (2012) of literature about the connection between teachers' stated beliefs and their classroom practices outlines many contextual factors that play a pivotal role in mediating the congruency between teachers' stated beliefs and their classroom practices. Such contextual factors include time constraints, situational constraints, the need to cover the prescribed curriculum, institutional and classroom context, planned and unplanned aspects of teaching including task design, as well as instructional approaches. These external factors mediate the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices, and prevent teachers from putting their beliefs into practice (Basturkmen, 2012).

Nonetheless, a few studies have reported some consistency between teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and thought processes and their classroom practices. One such finding was reported by Kuzborska (2011) who studied the relationship between EAP reading teachers' beliefs and practices in a university in Lithuania, and found evidence of a strong convergence. For example, the teachers believed that a focus on vocabulary, translation, reading aloud, and whole class work played a crucial role in English language learning for their advanced level students, and classroom

observations and interviews revealed that the teachers' classroom practices were guided by these beliefs.

Hence, it can be assumed that studying teacher cognition provides the benefit of bridging "the links between teachers' inner worlds, their practices, and their students' language learning experiences" (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015, p. 445). Moreover, contextual factors including teacher-student relationship, curriculum and resources, as well as teachers' individual characteristics are also critical in determining language teachers' cognition and specific decision-making processes during teaching and learning.

### **Impact of Washback on Teachers' Cognition and Their Classroom Practices**

As evident from the aforementioned research studies, the relationship between teachers' cognition and their classroom practices is not a linear one, and its relevance to high-stakes tests and test preparation courses is even more complex (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Cheng & Curtis, 2004; Wall, 2012; Wall & Alderson, 1993). High-stakes examinations influence how well teachers' actions relate to their beliefs (Phipps & Borg, 2009). Therefore, teachers' cognitive dimensions in relation to their classroom practices have also been observed in teaching preparation courses for high-stakes examinations, such as IELTS and TOEFL. According to Erfani (2014), in washback studies four main teacher-related factors are explored: "their beliefs, their attitudes, their educational level and experience, and their personalities" (p. 90).

Research has revealed the significance of researching teachers' cognition. Yin (2010) explored teachers' thought processes in classroom assessment, which he calls "the hidden side of classroom assessment" (p.175), and discovered that various cognitive dimensions interact during assessment processes in the classrooms. He concluded that it is beneficial to investigate teachers' thought processes during assessment, since such an investigation might lead to reforms in teachers' assessment practices. Likewise, Wall and Alderson (1993) also pointed out that identifying the abilities of the teachers and their understanding of the test and its purpose could help in understanding particular decisions made by the teachers in test preparation courses, which result in washback effects.

A study by Mendoza and Arandia (2009) in Colombia showed significant differences in teachers' perceptions about language assessment and their use of

language assessment in their classrooms. Teachers who were trained in language assessment tended to view assessment as an integral part of instruction, which guided the teaching and learning in classrooms and vice versa. Mendoza and Arandia (2009) concluded that teachers' level of training in language assessment was the major cause of negative washback on teaching and learning. Mendoza and Arandia also found that teachers had a negative view about assessment due to their personal experiences with tests.

Many studies have unveiled negative washback effects on teaching and learning in relation to teachers' cognition and their knowledge of assessments. For example, Kiomrs, Abdolmehdi, and Rashidi (2011) studied EFL secondary school teachers' cognition, and found a connection between teachers' teaching to the test and their assessment literacy levels, leading to negative washback in the case of a high-stakes examination in Iran. Kiomrs et al. suggested that teachers' perceptions and belief about high-stakes tests, in addition to their low assessment literacy levels, were likely the cause for the negative washback effects. Another study by Salehi, Yunus, and Salehi (2012) also revealed negative washback of the Entrance Exam of the Universities (EEU) in Iran where teachers were teaching to the test, as the exam was significant for admission to the universities in Iran. Again, teachers' cognitive dimensions, that is, their beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes toward the test and their knowledge about the test were found to be involved in exerting the negative washback effect.

In relation to standardized tests such as IELTS and TOEFL, it has been proven that they exert a powerful influence on teachers' and learners' behavior, as affirmed by Green (2006a), due to their gate-keeping nature. The teachers' and learners' attitudes and beliefs, in turn, influence the teaching and learning process. This is principally true for teachers of test preparation courses, as "individual teacher's cognition has a significant influence on the way s/he perceives a test, and how that perception influences pedagogic decision-making" (Chappell, Bodis, & Jackson, p. 7). While Chappell, Bodis, and Jackson (2015) reported that teachers involved in IELTS preparation courses were well-informed and well-qualified with a sound knowledge of the format and requirements of the test, they found that the teachers "demonstrate[d] a lack of understanding of the principles of test design, and how test tasks and test items are written, edited, and trialed with reliability, validity and authenticity in mind" (p.

40). The teachers, in their study, had negative views about the usefulness of the IELTS test, leading to the negative washback effect in IELTS preparation classes, such as excessive focus on teaching test-taking strategies.

Watanabe's (2004) study for investigating the washback effects of university entrance examinations in Japan revealed that although teachers' familiarity with and knowledge of different pedagogies resulted in positive washback, their perceptions and attitudes toward the test resulted in negative washback. This negative washback consisted of teachers heavily relying on grammar-translation methods, teaching test-taking strategies, and neglecting aural/oral aspects of English. In addition, some of the teachers thought the test was responsible for what they were doing in the classrooms.

Another study that highlighted the interaction between teachers' cognition and the intensity of washback was conducted by Cheng (2004) in Hong Kong. Cheng investigated the effects of the changes made in a secondary school examination on teaching and learning process. The findings of the study confirmed that teachers' perceptions of, knowledge and attitudes about changes in the exam mediated the washback effect in the classrooms on their teaching and learning. The washback effect was found to be negative for certain aspects in teaching including teaching pedagogy, whereas it was positive in case of the content to be taught to students, based on how teachers viewed the exam.

The complex relationship between the tests and their washback effects on teachers' beliefs and attitudes, and consequently, on test preparation in class was further clarified by Qi (2004) through investigation of the changes made in the matriculation exam "National Matriculation English Test" (NMET) in China. The teachers' beliefs and their negative attitudes toward the test led to classroom practices with an increased emphasis on test format questions and drilling of skills that were tested on the exam (oral language skills), resulting in a few teachers not focusing on the listening skills (narrowing of the scope), since it was not made part of the test, a finding similar to Hayes' and Read's (2004) study. In addition, the test created a feeling of anxiety among teachers and students. Some of the teachers reported that they would not teach oral skills once the test is over. Some teachers were concerned about the effectiveness of the test in developing reading skills of students, although the latter is what was intended by the test designers. Qi (2004) acknowledged that

teachers' perceptions and beliefs about the test and its usefulness guided their classroom practices.

A study conducted in Iran by Erfani (2014) investigated IELTS and TOEFL iBT teachers' attitudes towards the two tests by employing questionnaires, classroom observations, and teacher interviews. The study investigated the washback effect on teachers' attitudes, and revealed that teachers have a more negative than positive attitude toward the tests. However, the IELTS test was found to have more negative impact on teachers' attitudes than that of the TOEFL iBT. The factors that contributed to the negative washback included teachers' lack of understanding of the test construct, and beliefs that teaching test-taking strategies and test content is more important than teaching language proficiency. In fact, teachers were found to be unaware of the underlying test construct and principles. Erfani (2014) reported that teachers in his study thought that communicative competence was not what students needed, rather considered test-taking strategies and practice of the test content more important to achieve the required scores. Given that IELTS claims to assess candidates' language ability using communicative tasks, Erfani concluded that the test washback on teachers' attitudes does not necessarily always correspond to the effects intended by the test designers,

Similarly, a study of the washback effect of the writing component of the College English Test (CET) in China by Li (2009) revealed that the washback effect was not very significant and was indirect. The teachers' training level for teaching the test, their teaching philosophy, and personal preferences played a significant role in mediating their classroom practices, resulting in undesirable effects of the CET test not intended by the test designers. The teachers were not attempting to the test "due to the lower priority of the writing component among the four language skills [in the CET], the constraints of time, and large number of students, besides CET's ceiling effect and [sic] too restrictive testing format" (p.34).

Cheng (1999) did a study to gain insight into the teachers' attitudes towards the introduction of a new test in Hong Kong (HKCEE) and found that the test did affect their choice of content and even the classroom activities, but was not able to change teachers' fundamental beliefs about language teaching and learning, the role

of the teachers and students in classrooms and the way teaching and learning should be carried out. These teachers' beliefs guided their classroom practices.

Overall, it can be concluded from the research to date that there is a strong connection between washback, teachers' thinking and their actual classroom practices. However, this relationship is extremely complicated because in test-preparation courses a number of contextual factors, including the school settings, curriculum, teachers' qualification and training, interact during teaching and learning.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter outlines the methodology used for data collection for the present study, and the rationale underpinning the methodological choices made to collect data from different sources. The chapter begins with a description of the context of the study, followed by a description of the research participants, the instruments used for data collection, and finally the data analysis techniques utilized to find out the different themes and patterns in the data gathered.

### **Context of the Study**

In the UAE's diverse educational setting, teaching and learning English is one of the prime goals because of its global significance, mainly in university settings. Learners, after completion of their high school studies, are required to take the TOEFL or the IELTS test to prove their eligibility for university admission. However, the required scores established by each institution vary based on the program requirements. In order to achieve the required score in the IELTS exam, a large majority of the UAE high school students take IELTS preparation courses, either in colleges, universities, private language schools, or official IELTS approved training centers (IELTS exam centers) in the UAE. The IELTS test preparation courses in different institutions offer a rich source of data from different contexts about the washback effects of the IELTS test, and opportunity to observe the similarities or differences in the cognition and teaching practices of IELTS teachers from different cultural backgrounds.

The IELTS preparation courses in different language schools and training centers, as well as official IELTS training centers in different Emirates of the UAE, are either "intensive courses" where the duration of the courses is only two weeks with a three hours class every day, or "regular IELTS courses" covering 30-36 hours of IELTS training, usually within one to two months. The IELTS preparation courses with 30-36 hours of training usually have two time slots: a one-and-half-hour class every day or three hours of classes three times per week. The primary aim of the IELTS preparation courses in language schools is to enhance learners' English proficiency levels, familiarize students with the exam format and different test contents, and consequently improve their band scores in the test. In universities and colleges, IELTS training is done over a period of one semester with usually three-four classes per week that are 40-45 minutes each class. The goal of the IELTS training in

colleges or universities is to prepare students for their IELTS test as well as their bachelor's degree programs.

The teachers who teach in universities, language centers, and IELTS training centers (IELTS exam centers) across the UAE come from different countries and they have varied educational backgrounds. Therefore, it was decided in this research to collect data from all the different available sources (universities, language schools, and IELTS training centers) to capture the full complexity of the washback effects of the IELTS. Later, this would help in finding similarities and differences among the different teachers from various institutions while exploring the multifaceted nature of the washback effect.

### **Methodological Rationale**

The present research study utilized a mixed methods research approach with both quantitative and qualitative methods including surveys, classroom observations, and semi-structured stimulated recall interviews to examine the effect of the IELTS test on IELTS teachers' knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes as well as their classroom practices. The "mixed methods research" approach, as described by Ivankova and Creswell (2009), focuses on the "meaningful integration of both quantitative and qualitative data, [and thus] can provide a depth and breadth that a single approach may lack by itself" (p. 136). Such an approach can better answer research questions involving complex constructs. The term "mixing" implies that the data collected in a single study is "integrated and/or connected at one or several points within the study" (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009, p. 137). Such an approach was chosen because the data collected from different sources could be used to triangulate the findings, and as a result could help in gaining a more complete understanding of the research problem. In other words, the different types of data complement each other rather for an "in-depth understanding of trends and patterns;...studying diverse perspectives; or understanding the relationship between variables" (Ivankova and Creswell, 2009, p. 145). Later, data collected through these different methods was analyzed and triangulated.

Earlier studies have indicated the value of employing qualitative methods in researching teachers' cognition and washback effects of tests on teaching practices. According to Bailey (1999), it is significant to employ qualitative procedures in

investigating the washback effects of a test, and the teachers' and learners' perceptions and attitudes due to their dynamic nature. Phipps and Borg (2009) suggest that studies which employ qualitative strategies to explore the connection between language teachers' classroom practices and their beliefs will be more productive, since they can assist in enhancing our understanding of the complex relationships between teachers' cognition and their classroom practices.

Therefore, the current study involves both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The data was collected over a period of six months, from March 2016 to August 2016. The quantitative data was collected using an online questionnaire, with mostly closed-ended questions. However, the questionnaire also included three open-ended questions for the purpose of collecting qualitative data. In addition, qualitative data collection methods for this study were classroom observations of the IELTS teachers followed by semi-structured stimulated recall interviews of the participants who were observed. All these data collection methods are explained in the section below.

## **Data Collection Methods**

### **Questionnaire**

To answer the first two research questions, an online questionnaire (see Appendix A), adapted from Chappell, Bodis, and Jackson (2015), with 19 closed-ended items and three open-ended questions, was administered initially through Survey Monkey to get baseline data about teachers' knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes toward the IELTS test and IELTS preparation courses. As highlighted by Borg (2005), questionnaires have been "widely used to study teachers' beliefs about language learning and teaching" (p. 169). The use of a questionnaire was essential to include a large population of IELTS teachers in the UAE, since questionnaires "are designed for efficiency to collect data from a larger number of participants easily" (Wagner, 2010, p. 26). The reason for using an online questionnaire was to include a large number of participants from the different Emirates of the UAE. However, the participants' responses were mainly restricted to the emirates of Dubai and Sharjah, perhaps partly due to the large number of IELTS training centers in these two emirates. In addition to the online questionnaire, 33 hard copies of the questionnaire

were also distributed to IELTS teachers in different institutions in Dubai and Sharjah. Out of these 33, only 15 questionnaires were received back.

The questionnaire has three distinct sections. The first section of the questionnaire was designed to collect demographic information about the participants which included information about the participants' first language, type of institution, qualification, number of years of teaching English as well as number of years of teaching IELTS, and whether they had received any training in teaching IELTS. The second section of the questionnaire asked for participants' responses about their knowledge of, attitudes towards, and beliefs/perceptions about the IELTS test, while the third section was aimed at getting information about participants' IELTS preparation classes. The researcher decided to include both closed-ended and open-ended items in the questionnaire, since they usually complement each other (Brown, 2009). Likert scale items were used in the questionnaire due to their usefulness in assessing the same construct through multiple items (Wagner, 2010). The number of scaled items was proportionately higher (16 in total) because the greater the number of items that are used to measure a particular concept, the more reliable and accurate the overall scale would be (Wagner, 2010).

The data obtained from the questionnaire was then used to plan focused classroom observations, followed by audio recorded, semi-structured stimulated recall interviews.

### **Classroom Observations**

An essential feature of this research is the inclusion of observations of teachers' actual classroom practices, as ESL classrooms serve as a meeting place where both teaching and learning take place, and where teachers' knowledge and beliefs interact with students' behavior (Baker, 2014). Cowie (2009) defines class observations as the "conscious noticing and detailed examination of participants' behavior in a naturalistic setting" (p. 166). Moreover, observations provide "preliminary information about participants' external behavior" (Cowie, 2009, p. 166) which can later be used to explore the participants' inner beliefs and values or other complex constructs through interviews or questionnaires. Hence, observations provide firsthand knowledge of the participants and their setting, give important insights into

the external aspects of language teaching and learning, and can help obtain a more holistic perspective of the participants' behavior in their naturalistic setting.

Observations were meant to answer the third research question, i.e., the extent to which the IELTS teachers' practices corresponded to their cognition about the IELTS test. Wall and Alderson's (1993) study was the first of its kind where the authors investigated the impact of tests through actual classroom observations as "direct observation of behavior in the classroom is also needed to inform interview and questionnaire design and contextualize otherwise incomprehensible responses" (p. 65). Bailey (1999), too, stresses the need for classroom observations as they can yield a better picture of how teachers teach and what evidence of washback effects could be found in test preparation courses. Therefore, the classroom observations of the IELTS preparation courses with audio recording and field notes, used a checklist (see Appendix B) having a predetermined analytical coding system (systematic observational approach to a certain extent) to document observed specific behavior in order to give exclusive attention to the categories predefined to fully understand the teachers' cognition about the IELTS test in relation to the washback effect. The classroom observations were carried out after the administration of the questionnaire. The audio recordings were done using two means, i.e., on a computer and a cell phone.

The role of the researcher during the observations was a passive one, being a complete observer (Cowie, 2009). That is, the researcher was a non-participating observer to ensure that the participating teachers felt relaxed during the lesson and the data could be collected under as naturalistic circumstances as possible. The data from classroom observations was combined with data from interviews to relate teachers' classroom practices to their cognition about the IELTS test, as Borg (2006) says that observations are never the sole form of data collection in the study of language teacher cognition, since they provide an inadequate basis for studying "what teachers think, know and believe" (p. 247).

### **Semi-Structured Stimulated Recall Interviews**

Following the class observations, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the observed participants (IELTS teachers), using questions adapted from Chappell, Bodis, and Jackson (2015) (see Appendix C). The interviews were aimed at

finding answers to all the research questions to some extent, but particularly the fourth question, which probed the evidence of washback from the IELTS in IELTS teachers' cognition and their teaching practices. Each of the six participating teachers was interviewed once, and each interview lasted 30-40 minutes.

A stimulated recall technique was used in the interviews, as it is a valuable tool to investigate cognitive processes, particularly the ones which are relevant to teachers' knowledge, attributes, and attitudes (Lyle, 2003). Baker (2014) describes stimulated recall as "a type of retrospective verbal report in which a participant receives a stimulus (e.g., a video of teaching) and then recounts her or his cognitions at the time the event took place" (p. 142). According to Talmy (2010), the primary goal of interviews is to investigate participants' identities, experiences, beliefs, and orientations toward a range of phenomena. Thus, they could provide an in-depth knowledge about the IELTS teachers' beliefs, their knowledge and conception of the IELTS test, and any associated washback effect on teaching practices. Although interviews are time-consuming and tend to involve fewer participants than questionnaires, they have the possibility of providing extensive information about the participants (Wagner, 2010). In addition, interviews could also contribute to other research methods, as in the case of the present study.

Prior to conducting the interviews, parts of the classroom audio-recordings (relevant to the interview questions) were selected and transcribed, and then either the transcript was shown to, or recordings were played for the teachers during the interviews to enable them to refer to any classroom events, and possibly explain the rationale behind the activities used in class. In some instances, the researcher prepared the questions for the interviews during the classroom observations, and later referred to the activities that took place during the class observations. This was intended to help in finding out the relationship between these IELTS teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes about the IELTS and IELTS preparation courses, and their actual teaching demonstrations in IELTS classrooms for the reason that beliefs elicited through the discussion of actual classroom practices provide a clear and holistic picture of the reality of the classrooms and what happens in classrooms (Phipps & Borg, 2009).

A semi-structured format for the interviews was chosen, as semi-structured interviews have the flexibility to probe some aspects in depth and, where necessary, to let the respondent lead the interview as in the case of open interviews (Richards, 2009). Therefore, they provided the researcher with the opportunity of covering some topics in detail and even obtaining unexpected responses from the participants, opening up important new areas to ask about. In addition, successful interviews should develop naturally, and there should be a “conversation with a purpose” (Richards, 2009, p. 186), which was clearly the aim for the present study.

The role of the interviewer during the interviews was limited to asking questions, as in a conversation and responding to the interviewees’ responses with short phrases, allowing the interviewees to respond to questions in detail. Where necessary, the questions were modified or probes were provided for the participants to obtain further responses in specific areas.

These three methods (questionnaire, observations, and stimulated recall interviews) were utilized in triangulation of the data obtained in the study, as suggested by Bailey (1999) who says that “triangulation should be incorporated as a methodological cornerstone in any serious investigation of washback” (p. 39).

### **Participants**

There were two groups of participants, questionnaire participants and interview participants, who were all IELTS teachers, either part time or full time. Although the researcher aimed to collect data from IELTS teachers in institutions across all the Emirates of the UAE, the majority of the participants participating in the study were from Sharjah and Dubai. The interview participants were all from Sharjah because only IELTS teachers in Sharjah agreed to be observed and interviewed.

#### **Questionnaire Participants**

There were 42 IELTS teachers from different educational backgrounds who participated in the questionnaire. Demographic information about the IELTS teachers was collected in order to analyze the data according to independent teacher variables, that is, their position, type of institution, experience in teaching IELTS, and training in teaching IELTS, on teachers’ cognition and their teaching practices in relation to the washback effect of the IELTS test. Since the questionnaire was anonymous, age,

gender, and nationality of the participating teachers were not included in the questionnaire.

The demographic information about the questionnaire participants shows considerable variation. The majority of teachers who completed the survey were native speakers of English (20) (see Table 1), followed by 12 Arabic speakers. The remaining 10 teachers included speakers of Persian, Bengali, Telugu, Urdu, Malayalam, Georgian, and Russian. A total of 23 teachers from various language centers completed the questionnaire, whereas only 13 teachers from universities participated in the questionnaire, in addition to five school teachers and one teacher from the Ministry of Education. The teachers hold different positions in their institutions, with 21 teachers designated as English teachers, eight as IELTS teachers, six as both English and IELTS teachers, three as foundation teachers, and four having administrative positions in different institutes. An equal number of participants (25) have bachelor's and master's degrees, while 15 and 11 teachers are CELTA and DELTA qualified, respectively, and only 2 have Ph.D. degrees. This shows the considerable variation in the qualifications of the participants. Moreover, the teachers varied in their teaching experience for both English and IELTS. The majority of teachers (30) have experience in teaching English ranging from 11 to 16 years or above. However, the number of years for the majority of teachers teaching IELTS range from 0 to 10 years (34 teachers) and only 7 teachers have experience in teaching IELTS from 11 to 16 years or above. This again points to the variation in teachers' experience with the IELTS test and the general English courses. Of the 42 questionnaire participants, 17 teachers are trained as IELTS examiners, while 12 teachers are not trained for any standardized exams. In addition, 22 teachers have received formal training in teaching IELTS, followed by 18 who have received teacher training, while 8 teachers have not received any kind of training in teaching IELTS. Details of the demographic information about the questionnaire participants are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographic Details of Questionnaire Participants

Demographics	No. of participants
<b>First language</b>	
1- English	1- 20
2- Arabic	2- 12
3- Persian	3- 2
4- Hindi/Urdu	4- 1
5- Other	5- 7
<b>Type of institution</b>	
1- University	1- 13
2- Language center	2- 23
3- School	3- 5
4- Other	4- 1
<b>Position</b>	
1- English teacher	1- 21
2- IELTS teacher	2- 8
3- English and IELTS teacher	3- 6
4- Foundation teacher	4- 3
5- Other	5- 4
<b>Qualifications</b>	
1- Bachelor's	1- 25
2- Master's	2- 25
3- Ph.D.	3- 2
4- CELTA	4- 15
5- DELTA	5- 11
<b>Years teaching English</b>	
1- 0-2	1- 1
2- 3-5	2- 2
3- 6-10	3- 8
4- 11-15	4- 13
5- 16+	5- 17
<b>Years teaching IELTS</b>	
1- 0-2	1- 10
2- 3-5	2- 9
3- 6-10	3- 15
4- 11-15	4- 5
5- 16+	5- 2
<b>Training as an examiner for</b>	
1- IELTS	1- 17
2- TOEFL	2- 2
3- CEPA	3- 4
4- CFE/	4- 2
5- Other	5- 4
6- No training	6- 12
<b>Training in teaching IELTS</b>	
1- IELTS training	1- 22
2- TOEFL training	2- 4
3- Teacher training	3- 18
4- No training	4- 8

## Interview Participants

Initially, 12 participants consented to participate in classroom observations and interviews, but 6 participants withdrew from the follow up study, and only 6 participants agreed to do both the class observations and interviews. The demographic information of the six interview participants is outlined in Table 2 below. For the purpose of anonymity, participants are numbered as P1 to P6.

Table 2: Demographic Details of Interview Participants

Participants	Gender	First language/ Nationality	Qualification	Position	Institution	Years teaching English	Years teaching IELTS	Training as an IELTS examiner	Training in teaching IELTS
<b>P1</b>	Female	Arabic/ Syrian	Bachelor's	IELTS teacher/ English teacher	Language center/ school	6-10	3-5	As an observer and corrector for IELTS/reading and listening modules only	No
<b>P2</b>	Female	English/ Britain	Master's /DELTA	English Teacher	University	16+	6-10	IELTS examiner	IELTS Teacher training
<b>P3</b>	Male	English/ Britain	Bachelor's Master's CELTA DELTA Ph.D.	English/ IELTS and TOEFL teacher	University	16+	16+	IELTS/ CEPA/CFE /PET	IELTS Teacher training
<b>P4</b>	Female	English/ USA	Master's CELTA DELTA	English teacher	Language Center (official IELTS center)	6-10	6-10	No	IELTS TOEFL Teacher training
<b>P5</b>	Male	Arabic/ Palestine	Master's	IELTS teacher	Language center	16+	6-10	No	No
<b>P6</b>	Male	English/ Canada	Master's	IELTS teacher	Language center (official IELTS center)	11-15	6-10	IELTS/ CFE	IELTS

It is obvious from Table 2 that the interview participants are equal in terms of gender: three males and three females. There are four native English speakers, two from Britain, one from Canada, and one from the USA, while there are two Arabic speakers, one from Syria and the other from Palestine. Two of the participants are teaching IELTS in universities, whereas the other four teach IELTS in language centers, including two teachers from official IELTS training centers. The majority of them (5) have a master's degree, in addition to two participants having CELTA and DELTA, as well as one participant having a Ph.D. degree. These credentials indicate that these six teachers are well qualified. Moreover, they are experienced teachers, with four teachers having experience teaching English ranging from 11 to 16 years, with the majority ranging in experience teaching IELTS from 6 to 10 years. Only one participant, P1, is a novice teacher (3-5 years of IELTS teaching experience). Of the six teachers, three (P2, P3, and P6) are IELTS examiners while three of them (P1, P4, and P5) are not, with four teachers (P2, P3, P4, and P6) having training in teaching IELTS.

### **Data Analysis**

Three sources of data were analyzed for this study: online questionnaire, classroom observations, and semi-structured stimulated recall interviews.

#### **Analysis of the Questionnaire Data**

The questionnaire data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The first section of the questionnaire gathered demographic information about the research subjects; therefore, it contained nominal data which was collected for the purpose of comparison between the participants based on the individual variables, and did not have a "mathematical property" (Phakiti, 2010, p. 40). The second section of the questionnaire consisted of ordinal data on a Likert Scale with a rank-ordered data, which tells us that "an individual is greater or less than others in a characteristic or aspect being measured" (Phakiti, 2010, p. 40). The closed-ended items in the questionnaires were analyzed statistically using quantitative methods through Survey Monkey's website, which automatically analyzed the closed-ended items, converting them into tables and figures. On the other hand, the three open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively by first coding the data and then by noticing any emerging themes and patterns from these questions about IELTS teachers' cognition of the

IELTS test and their classroom practices. Later, the key themes from the questionnaires were collapsed into themes that appeared from the classroom observations and interview data in the form of a thematic table.

### **Analysis of Classroom Observation Data**

Data collected during classroom observations using the checklist (see Appendix B) were analyzed qualitatively by first listening to the class recordings and reading the field notes repeatedly. Later, the patterns/ themes that emerged from the questionnaire and interview responses were outlined in a table and compared with the classroom observation checklist and field notes to find out the relationship of the IELTS test washback on teachers' cognition and their classroom practices, as well as the relationship of IELTS teachers' cognition to their classroom practices. As Holliday (2010) observes, qualitative data collected from classroom observations and interviews can be analyzed through "holistic thematic analysis" (p. 101) and through attending to details of what happens in the classroom. The data from classroom observations were categorized according to salient or recurring themes in the six observations of the teachers. Further coding of the themes led to development of subthemes in the classroom observation data. Moreover, each participant's way of teaching was classified and their decision-making in the classes were analyzed according to the themes that emerged from the questionnaire data.

### **Analysis of Interview Data**

The interview data were also analyzed qualitatively. First, the interviews were transcribed and proofread by the researcher to observe any differences in the recordings and the interview transcriptions. Once the transcriptions matched with the audio-recordings, then the interview transcriptions were reviewed, and different and pertinent parts of the transcriptions (based on the research questions) were coded using key words and phrases from the interview questions, since coding helps in observing "how each code is distributed throughout the data" (Holliday, 2010, p. 102). To find any emerging themes and patterns in the interview transcriptions of the six interviewees, the codes which occurred with significant frequency were then grouped within themes. The themes and patterns were initially placed into a thematic table/map according to the interview questions with the representative quotes from each of the six interview participants, which allows for the respondents' voices to be made part of the research (Richards, 2009). Later, the different themes or patterns

were collapsed to reveal the key themes in the interview data. The key themes were then compared with themes from the questionnaire data and the patterns observed during classroom observations to find out the relationship between the data and triangulate the data for validation of the research findings. According to Holliday (2010), the themes from qualitative data can be used as “the headings and subheadings for constructing an argument about what can be learnt from the data” (pp. 102-103), with extracts from the data exemplifying the theme and providing “evidence for the points made in the argument” (p. 103). As in every qualitative research analysis procedure, the researcher went back to the data many times to reassess the codes and refine the themes.

This chapter has discussed the methods utilized for collecting data for the study and the rationale for selection of these methods. The chapter has also provided information on how the data were analyzed from the three research instruments. Findings from the data are reported in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

This chapter delineates the findings from the data collected from the three different sources, i.e., questionnaire, classroom observations, and interviews. The findings are reported in order of the research questions as well as the themes and patterns that emerged during the analysis of the data. The four research questions identified in the beginning of the study are as follows:

1. What is IELTS teachers' cognition (knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes) about IELTS?
2. How accurate is IELTS teachers' cognition about IELTS?
3. To what extent is IELTS teachers' cognition about IELTS reflected in their IELTS classroom practices?
4. What evidence of washback from the IELTS is present in IELTS teachers' cognition and their teaching practices?

The findings for all four questions are discussed separately below.

### **Research Question One**

What is IELTS teachers' cognition (knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes) about IELTS?

Research question one explored three subcategories of teachers' cognition: teachers' knowledge about the content and format of the IELTS test, their beliefs and perceptions about it, and their attitudes towards the IELTS test. The findings are reported according to the three subcategories below.

#### **IELTS Teachers' Knowledge About the Content and Format of the IELTS Test**

In order to survey the knowledge of the IELTS teachers about the content and format of the IELTS test, the following statements were used in the questionnaire as shown in Table 3, with the number of participants' responses. The accuracy of their knowledge will be discussed in response to research question 2.

Table 3: IELTS Teachers' Knowledge about the Content and Format of the IELTS Test

No.	Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5	The IELTS test has a section on vocabulary and grammar.	3	4	2	11	22
6	In the IELTS speaking test, candidates have to both ask and answer questions.	3	0	1	9	29
7	Candidates have two opportunities to hear the voice recordings in the listening module.	3	1	1	7	30
8	Candidates have to write at least 150 words for the first task in the writing module.	37	4	0	0	1
10	The purposes of IELTS Academic and General Training are different.	23	14	3	1	1

N=42

As seen in Table 3, out of all 42 questionnaire participants, 32 teachers (76%) disagreed/strongly disagreed with statement # 5 saying that the IELTS test has a section on vocabulary and grammar, whereas 7 teachers (16%) said they strongly agree/agree that IELTS test has a section on vocabulary and grammar. This contradiction might have resulted from individual teacher variables. Upon examination of the demographic data, it was revealed that 4 of these teachers who strongly agreed/ agreed with this statement are novice teachers having 0-2 years of experience in teaching IELTS, while 3 teachers are experienced teachers having 6-10 years of experience. Moreover, none of these 7 participants are IELTS examiners,

with only 1 teacher trained to teach IELTS. Hence, these personal variables might have affected these IELTS teachers' knowledge about the IELTS test.

In addition, 2 teachers chose the neutral option for statement # 5. This might show that the two teachers are either uncertain about how vocabulary and grammar are assessed in the IELTS test, or they think there is no distinct section on vocabulary and grammar. One of these 2 teachers who chose the neutral option is an experienced IELTS examiner having 11-15 years of experience in teaching IELTS with a master's degree, CELTA certificate and training in teaching IELTS, whereas the other teacher has 6-10 years of experience in teaching IELTS.

The idea of integration of vocabulary and grammar with skills was highlighted by some of the questionnaire and interview participants. Responding to statement # 5, 6 questionnaire participants (14%) stated that vocabulary and grammar are tested through all four skills in the IELTS test. In addition, one of the interview participants, P1, stated that students are not going to be assessed through direct grammar testing. Rather, P1 said, "I am trying to tell them [students] that examiner is trying to test your grammar throughout your speaking, they are trying to feel your awareness of grammar...as well the writing the same case." Another interview participant, P2, stated that vocabulary and grammar are integrated in reading, listening, speaking, and writing in IELTS. Again, demographic details reveal that both P1 and P2 have done IELTS exam training, and their experience in teaching IELTS ranges from 3 to 10 years. This shows that teachers' experience and training in teaching IELTS, and their educational background (most teachers have a bachelor's degree or CELTA and DELTA) may affect their knowledge about the format and content of the IELTS test.

Teachers' knowledge about the IELTS test was also examined using other statements in the questionnaire. Regarding statement # 6 about whether IELTS test takers can both ask and answer questions in the speaking interview, 38 teachers (90%) reported disagreement/strong disagreement, while 3 teachers (7%) showed strong agreement and one teacher (2%) chose the neutral option. Again, the teachers who agreed with the statement were found to be novice teachers, with no training in teaching IELTS. When asked (statement #7) about whether candidates have two opportunities to listen to the recording in the listening module, 37 teachers (88%) showed disagreement/strong disagreement, while 4 teachers (9%) showed strong

agreement/agreement with this statement. These four teachers range in experience in teaching IELTS from 0 to 2 years. Only one teacher (2%) gave no opinion on this statement by choosing the neutral option. Similarly, when asked about the writing section of the IELTS test (statement # 8), 41 teachers (98%) strongly agreed/agreed that candidates have to write a minimum of 150 words in Writing Task 1, which reflects accurate knowledge about the IELTS test. However, one teacher (2%) strongly disagreed with this statement, showing lack of knowledge about the Writing Task 1 of the IELTS exam. This teacher was found to be a novice with 0-2 years of experience and had not been trained to teach IELTS.

In order to assess teachers' knowledge about the purpose of the IELTS, the teachers were asked if the IELTS Academic and General sections are used for different purposes (statement #10). Amongst the 42 questionnaire participants, 37 teachers (88%) strongly agreed/agreed that the two sections of the IELTS, i.e., Academic and General, have different uses. Only 2 teachers (5%) disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement, although they are experienced teachers with one teacher having 6-10 years and the other 11-15 years of experience in teaching IELTS, and both having received training in teaching IELTS.

On the other hand, 3 teachers (7%) chose the neutral option about the purposes of the Academic and General IELTS exams. These three range in experience from 0 to 10 years. Even one of the interview participants, P4, strongly disagreed with this statement about the Academic vs. General versions. Although P4 has 6-10 years of experience in teaching IELTS and had received training in teaching IELTS, she is not an IELTS examiner. When asked in the interview whether she would like to be an IELTS examiner, she insisted that she would not like to be an IELTS examiner because it is not beneficial in teaching IELTS.

In the interviews, the six participants showed knowledge of the IELTS test while outlining the overall purpose of the IELTS test in general. All six participants pointed out that the IELTS test assesses candidates' English language ability in all four skills, which conforms to the claims made by IELTS test developers (see "IELTS Introduction," n.d.). Highlighting the overall purpose of the IELTS test, P2 stated that the IELTS test examines "language ability for students to achieve their overall score within an academic environment, but [she] also understand[s] that it's sometimes a

means to an end of getting into a particular place.” Adding further to this view, P6 asserted that the IELTS test is just assessing “your ability to communicate in speaking, your ability to communicate effectively and how effectively in writing, [to] communicate...in reading, understanding that’s mean being communicating in listening...that’s it.”

However, some of the interview participants also reported other purposes of the IELTS test. For instance, P1 stated that the IELTS test also examines candidates’ ability to predict, while P4 said it is also about mentality, and “people who are more open-minded are the ones who are [going to] get the upper bands. So it’s also eloquence...how eloquently they can speak.” Yet another interview participant, P5, believes that making students confident might also be one of the objectives of the IELTS test, since they “speak a different language.”

On the other hand, when asked about the purpose of the IELTS test in the UAE society, 5 of the 6 interviewees said the IELTS test is mainly used for academic and immigration purposes in the UAE. Furthermore, the interview participants believed that the IELTS is used in the UAE to improve English language abilities of students, as well as for teachers and people seeking better jobs. According to P3, it is “the ultimate gate-keeper.” P3 added that “the government has decided here that they do want the population bilingual, they want them to be able to use English.” P6 stated that IELTS is used a lot in the UAE, since “it is a trusted benchmark.” Adding further to his view, P6 said, “you can’t trust school marks here, they mean nothing. They’re benchmarked to nothing. So this [IELTS] has a specific meaning....So when they say a band, it’s linked to a specific level.” However, P3 seemed concerned about the use of the IELTS test for all professions/disciplines. Discussing the purpose of the IELTS test in the UAE, P3 argued that “if you [want to] be a Quranic scholar or you want to be a historian studying...Arabic history, do you really need to speak English? Do you need this IELTS test? I think its blanket use is perhaps...dubious.” This concern raised by P3 reflects that in some cases, the use of the IELTS test as a gate-keeper in all contexts in the UAE might not be justified.

The accuracy of teachers’ knowledge will be discussed in the section addressing research question 2.

## IELTS Teachers' Beliefs and Perceptions About the IELTS Test

To understand teachers' teaching approaches in IELTS test preparation courses, it is useful to discern teachers' beliefs and perceptions about the IELTS, as mentioned by Chappell, Bodis, and Jackson (2015). Table 4 shows the statements that were used in the questionnaire to obtain data about teachers' beliefs and perceptions about the IELTS test, with participant responses.

Table 4: IELTS Teachers' Beliefs and Perceptions about the IELTS Test

No.	Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	IELTS is an appropriate test to assess candidates' future English language performance for study or immigration purposes.	11	19	8	4	0
3	The IELTS test influences my choice of material (i.e., what I teach).	13	24	3	1	1
4	The IELTS test influences my choice of methodology in the IELTS classes.	18	12	5	7	0
11	The IELTS test provides positive motivation for my students.	6	11	16	5	4
12	The IELTS test causes unhelpful stress for my students.	6	14	14	6	2

N=42

As seen in Table 4, about teachers' views of the appropriateness of the IELTS test for measuring candidates English language ability, 30 teachers (71%) strongly agreed/agreed, a view which is in accordance with the claims made by the IELTS organization (see "IELTS Introduction," n.d.). However, 4 teachers (9%) who disagreed with this statement do not perceive IELTS as an appropriate test for measuring candidates' English language proficiency for study or immigration purposes. This shows that these four teachers have negative beliefs about the usefulness of the IELTS test. In addition, 8 teachers (19%) chose the neutral option, which could mean they are uncertain about the usefulness of the IELTS test in

measuring candidates' language ability for the intended purposes. This belief could stem from the teachers' lack of professional training in teaching IELTS or their experiences with the IELTS test or other tests or other reasons. As mentioned earlier, examination of these 8 teachers' personal details reveals that most of them are novice teachers with only 0-5 years of experience in teaching IELTS.

When IELTS teachers were asked about whether the IELTS test affects their choice of content in IELTS preparation classes or not (statement # 3), 37 teachers (88%), strongly agreed/agreed that their choice of content is influenced by the IELTS test itself. Only 2 teachers (5%) disagreed/strongly disagreed that IELTS affects their choice of content, while 3 teachers (7%) gave no opinion about this statement. The majority of teachers think that the IELTS test affects their teaching practices in IELTS preparation courses. This view was raised by all the 6 interview participants as well, who stated that because they are teaching IELTS preparation courses, therefore they choose material based on the format of the IELTS test.

In addition to teachers' reported beliefs about the influence of the IELTS test on their choice of content in the questionnaire and interviews, observations of the six interviewees' classes revealed that all six observed teachers used material that was either taken from IELTS books or adopted to the test format.

This evidence from the three data sources show that teachers' reported choice of material is strongly affected by the IELTS test itself. In the official online *IELTS Guide for Teachers* (2015) by IELTS organization, it is stated that "the topics in IELTS are both interesting and contemporary, and are based in the real world. This means teachers can bring the outside world into their IELTS classes by using a range of authentic source materials adapted to test preparation" (p. 12). Therefore, it can be concluded that even the *IELTS Guide for Teachers* suggests that the preparation material should be suitable for preparing the students for the IELTS test. Hence, the majority of the teachers' beliefs could be considered as conforming to the IELTS test's preparation requirements.

Likewise, as seen in Table 4, when teachers were asked whether the IELTS test influences their choice of methodology in IELTS preparation courses (statement # 4), 30 teachers (71%) said they strongly agree/agree with this. In comparison, only 7

teachers (17%) stated they disagree/strongly disagree that the IELTS test influences their choice of methodology in IELTS preparation classes.

Even the majority of the interview participants (five teachers, P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5) agreed that their methodology is influenced by the IELTS test. In his interview, P3 stated that of course the IELTS test influences the choice of methodology “because...I have to make sure that the students are ready to take the test.... So yes, I’ve to come up with a methodology to get the idea across to the students so they internalize it and they’re able to apply it when they take the exam.” Another interviewee, P5, said “you base your methods based on the test itself.”

In contrast, one interview participant (P6) stated that he approaches both types of courses in a similar manner. In describing the methodology for the IELTS and non-IELTS courses, P6 said, “I teach [IELTS courses] in the same manner as I taught in the past [the non-IELTS courses].” Nevertheless, P6 said that the knowledge about the IELTS, such as “how the test functions, what’s actually being tested” does affect the way he teaches in IELTS courses. Therefore, it can be said that teachers’ choice of methodology is based on their knowledge and beliefs about the IELTS test.

Teachers’ views of whether or not the IELTS test provides positive motivation depends on what they think about, and how they perceive the test. With regards to providing positive motivation (statement # 11), out of 42 questionnaire respondents, 17 teachers (40%) believed that it has a positive effect on students. In addition to teachers’ responses to closed-ended items, teachers’ open-ended responses (questions 20, 21, and 22 in the questionnaire) showed that 11 teachers (26%) consider the IELTS test to be motivating for both teachers and students. One of these 11 questionnaire participants responded saying that “the level of difficulty [in academic reading] challenges me and turns me from a teacher to a learner.” Another teacher added, “I, myself, try to be very organized and focused on students’ success. It motivates.” Describing students’ motivation, one of the questionnaire participants said, “Students are usually very engaged in practice tests” and “Their motivation can be a really positive force in the classroom.” However, 16 teachers (38%) chose the neutral option for the statement about the test providing positive motivation, which reflects having no opinion in this regard. Moreover, 9 teachers (21%) disagreed/strongly disagreed that the IELTS test provides positive motivation for their

students. Hence, it is seen that teachers seem to have both positive and negative beliefs about the IELTS test's ability to motivate students in IELTS preparation courses.

In contrast, when teachers were asked whether the IELTS test causes stress for their students (statement # 12), 20 teachers (48%) strongly agreed/agreed that it does. On the other hand, only 8 teachers disagreed/strongly disagreed that the IELTS test causes stress for their students, while 14 teachers (33%) chose the neutral option, providing no explicit viewpoint. Nevertheless, when responding to open-ended questions, 4 questionnaire respondents (10%) said the IELTS test is stressful for their students. One of these 4 questionnaire respondents pointed out that "students are not motivated because they feel it [IELTS] is forced on them." In addition, one of the interview participants, P2, also showed concern about the stress caused by the IELTS test in IELTS preparation courses.

Thus, it can be said that there are more teachers (48%) who regard IELTS as stressful than there are teachers (40%) who think it is motivating for their students.

Highlighting the reasons for students' demotivation and stress, 13 questionnaire respondents (31%) blamed the type of questions/tasks in the IELTS test for causing stress, in addition to 5 teachers (12%) who maintained that time constraints result in stress for both teachers and students. Regarding the type of questions/tasks, one of these 18 questionnaire participants stated that "students get bored easily and the [reading] passages are often hard or on topics the students are not interested in." A similar view was expressed by another questionnaire participant who said that "topics [in IELTS reading section] are not of interest to my students; level of difficulty of the reading tasks is a put-off for many students." Furthermore, 5 out of the 18 teachers said Writing Task 1 is uninteresting for their students. One of the questionnaire respondents stated that the IELTS test forces "all academic test module test takers to analyze graphs and learn some statistics." With respect to the time constraints, one of the participating teachers stated "there are always time restraints in most IELTS training courses which puts pressure on the teacher as well as the students." Therefore, it could be concluded that the majority of the IELTS teachers perceive the IELTS test to be stressful for their students due to the material utilized

for assessing candidates' reading and writing skills in particular, and the level of difficulty for the students in the exam, in general.

In addition, the questionnaire participants were asked to disclose their perceptions about the level of difficulty of the four IELTS test sections for their students. Statement # 17 from the questionnaire is presented below followed by Table 5 and Figure 1. Table 5 displays the number of participants who ranked the different IELTS test sections in response to statement # 17, while Figure 1 compares the level of difficulty of each section in IELTS test, according to the questionnaire participants' beliefs.

17- Please rank the IELTS Test sections in order of difficulty for most of your students (1 = most difficult ... 4 = least difficult)

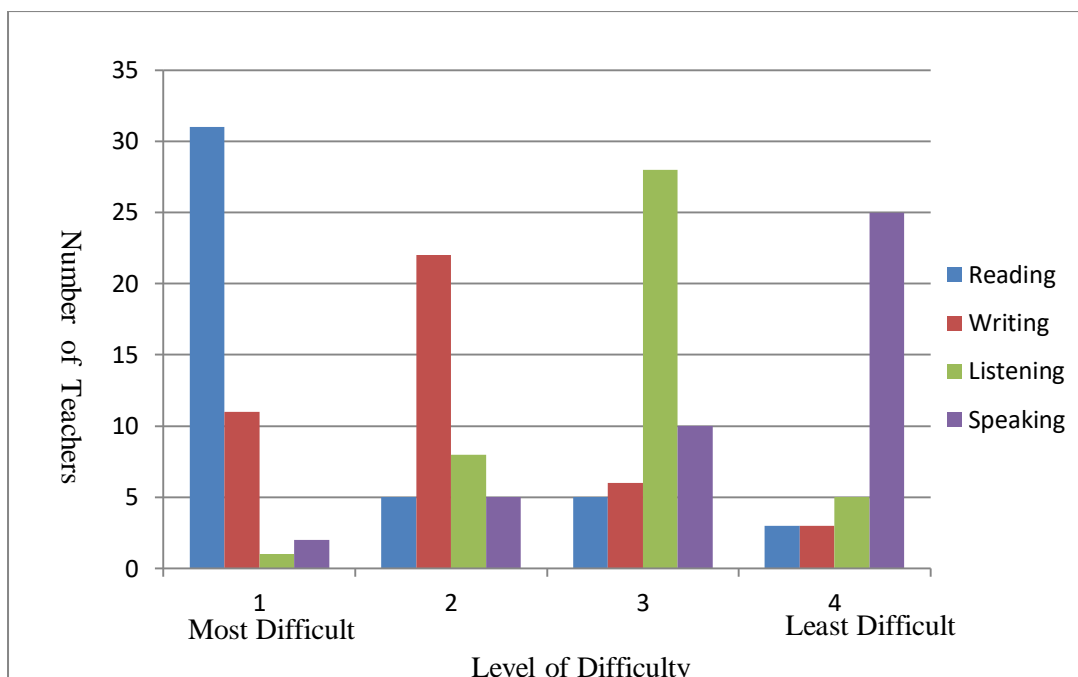
Reading	1	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
Writing	1	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listening	1	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
Speaking	1	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

Table 5: Teacher Ranking of the Level of Difficulty of the Four IELTS Test Sections

Skills	1	2	3	4
Reading	31	5	3	3
Writing	11	22	6	3
Listening	1	8	28	5
Speaking	2	5	10	25

N=42

\*Note: 1= most difficult and 4= least difficult.



N=42

Figure 2: Comparison of teacher views of the level of difficulty of the four IELTS test sections

It can be seen in Table 5 that when IELTS teachers were asked to rate the level of difficulty of the four test sections in IELTS, 31 teachers (74%) reported that reading is the most difficult for their students. Writing was considered the second most difficult section in IELTS test with 22 teachers (52%) rating writing at number 2, whereas 28 teachers (67%) believed that listening is the third most difficult section for their students. Speaking was regarded as the least difficult with 25 teachers (60%) rating it at number 4.

Figure 2 shows the comparison of the level of difficulty of the four IELTS test sections according to the teachers' views. Reading is rated as the most difficult by the majority of the teachers, while it can be seen in Figure 2 that speaking is rated as the least difficult by the majority of the teachers.

The interviewees all believed that reading is the most difficult for their students. Describing the level of difficulty for her students, P2 said that students in the UAE are very weak in reading because they are not familiar with international reading topics. She added that "it's daunting to give them a very difficult reading. So sometimes you have to start off with readings that are at a lower level or contextualized readings about an area from a local paper with your own type

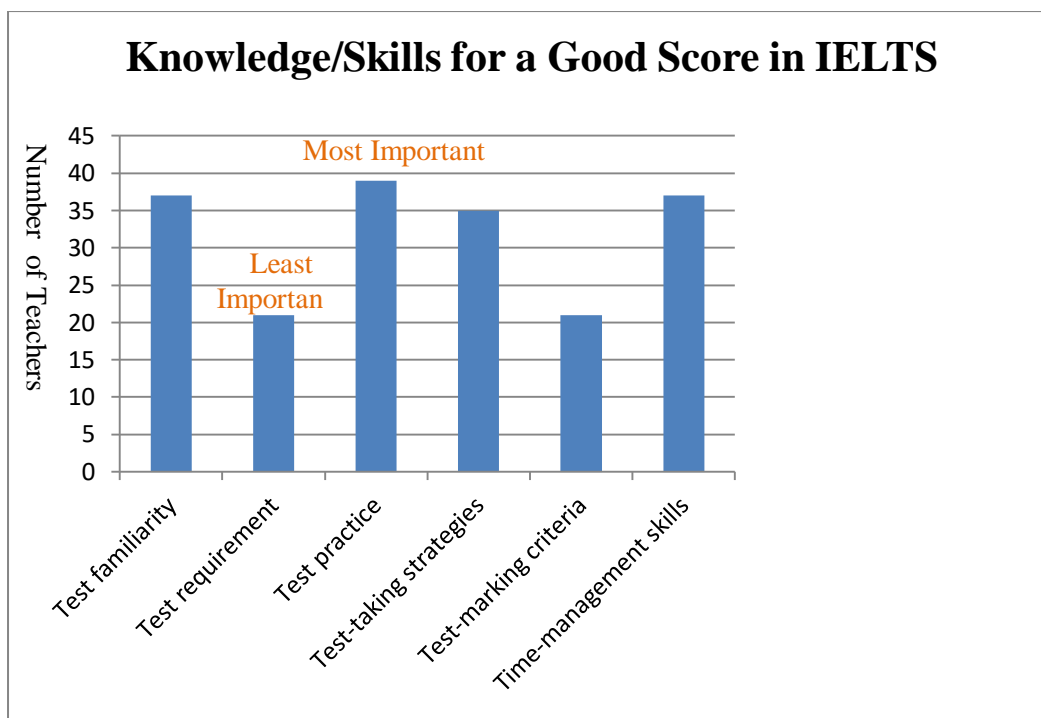
questions and I think this encourages learning.” Similarly, P5 stated that “reading among Arab students is almost always the lowest. It’s lower than writing, that’s where they get the lowest scores in IELTS.” Commenting on the speed of reading, P6 stated that “the vast majority [of students] in this class read at a rate of about maybe 80 words a minute, taking 15 minutes just to read the text [in IELTS].” Indeed, these views of the interviewees about the reading skills of their students reveal these teachers believe reading in IELTS to be the most difficult for their students. It is noted that these beliefs are based on individual teachers’ perceptions about the IELTS reading and their experiences with teaching IELTS reading.

In addition to exploring IELTS teachers’ beliefs and perceptions about the content and methodology in IELTS preparation courses, the questionnaire and interview participants were asked what knowledge and/or skills they perceive as helpful to achieve a good IELTS score. Question # 13 followed by the answer choices and number of participants’ responses is presented in Table 6 below, while Figure 2 compares the most important and least important skills required for achieving a good score in the IELTS test, according to teachers’ beliefs.

Q13: Apart from actual English language proficiency, what knowledge and/or skills do you think help students achieve a good IELTS grade? (Check all that apply)

Table 6: IELTS Teachers’ Beliefs about Skills Required for a Good Score in IELTS

Answer choices	Number of participant responses
Test familiarity	37
Test requirements	21
Test practice	39
Test-taking strategies	35
Test-marking criteria	21
Time-management skills	37
N=42	



N=42

Figure 3: Comparison of skills required for a good score in IELTS

As seen in Table 6, 39 teachers (93%) regarded test practice as important for obtaining a good IELTS score. Test familiarity and time-management were considered important by 37 teachers (88%), followed by test-taking strategies, with 35 teachers (83%) considering test-taking strategies as significant in obtaining good IELTS scores.

Figure 3 shows that these teachers deemed test practice to be most important for achieving a better score in IELTS test. Figure 3 also reveals that after test practice, time-management skills, and test familiarity, knowing test-taking strategies was the fourth most important skill that teachers consider significant for gaining a good score in the IELTS exam, while knowing test requirements was viewed as least important.

### **IELTS Teachers' Attitudes Toward the IELTS Test**

In addition to teachers' knowledge and beliefs, their attitudes about the IELTS test were also explored. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the attitudes of teachers in the present study are classified as positive or negative, based on teachers' comments about the usefulness of the IELTS test, their feelings and behavioral intent with regard to the test.

Teachers' responses to open-ended questions, i.e., questions 20, 21, and 22 in the questionnaire revealed positive and negative attitudes about the IELTS test. These questions asked the teachers what they liked/disliked about the IELTS test, asking them to provide indication of feelings (attitude). However, out of the 42 questionnaire participants, 39 responded to questions 20 and 21, while only 17 teachers responded to open-ended question # 22. Table 7 presents positive attitudes of the questionnaire participants, categorized by different themes.

Table 7: Questionnaire Participants' Positive Attitudes toward the IELTS Test

Themes	Quotes
Test with a purpose	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. It serves a purpose.</li> <li>2. The very clear goal of the exam.</li> <li>3. Objectives are clear.</li> <li>4. Being result-oriented.</li> <li>5. It tests all 4 skills.</li> </ol>
Structured nature of the IELTS test	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Structured nature of the test.</li> <li>2. I enjoy the structured nature of the test.</li> </ol>
Variety in tasks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I like the question types, although I know the students don't. I like the variety. Some of the passages are interesting.</li> <li>2. It feels different with every class, not like teaching the same thing.</li> </ol>
Motivating for both teachers and students	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Seeing students overcome a stumbling block and pursuing their education.</li> <li>2. The level of difficulty challenges me and turns me from a teacher to a learner. (Academic reading)</li> <li>3. It develops my own knowledge.</li> <li>4. It motivates...</li> <li>5. I like working with students that have a goal and an objective. If their expectations are managed well, their motivation can be a really positive force in the classroom.</li> <li>6. Learners have clear goals.</li> <li>7. Generally motivated students.</li> <li>8. Sometimes it helps students focus on a task when you mention 'it's important for the IELTS'. It serves as a hook.</li> <li>9. It's a nice, easy and helpful for me. It adds information and knowledge in English.</li> </ol>
Language and skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. It also teaches students they need in the future, e.g. analysis of data.</li> </ol>

---

improvement	2. I like the exam and how the four skills will help students achieve better results in their overall journey in education.
-------------	---

---

Table 7 shows that 5 (12%) out of the questionnaire respondents perceive the IELTS test as a test with a purpose, while 2 teachers (5%) have a positive attitude towards IELTS due to its structured nature, followed by 2 teachers (5%) who like the question types and teaching different things for the IELTS test. Moreover, 9 teachers (21%) said that they liked that IELTS test is motivating for both teachers and students in different ways. With regards to the language development, 2 teachers (5%) believed that the test helps to enhance students’ language skills for the future.

In addition to the survey participants, the interview participants also revealed their positive attitudes toward the IELTS test, indicating their feelings about the test. Positive attitudes of the six interviewees are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Interview Participants’ Positive Attitudes toward the IELTS Test

Participants	Quotes
P1	I love IELTS test because it assesses all the four skills.
P2	I like it in general. Even though sometimes I do have mixed feelings about it but I think if this is a piece of paper that helps students to achieve their academic goal while at the time learning and improving their language and feeling a sense of achievement, I think it’s good because we through...like we all have to do exams and it brings us to the next step in life.
P3	The IELTS...is very useful. I think it’s very positive and it’s good for employers, it’s good for universities and I think it’s good for the people who do it.
P4	I love the IELTS test.
P5	I think it is a good one. I mean the idea of... this test is very original.
P6	It’s a trusted benchmark in an area where you can’t trust assessments.

---

As evident from Table 8, the interview participants believed that the IELTS test assesses all four skills and helps in improving students’ language skills, as also mentioned by the questionnaire participants. According to P5, the IELTS test, due to

its paper-based nature, is authentic and good, whereas P6 considers IELTS to be a trusted benchmark for assessing candidates' language proficiency.

Regarding negative attitudes, the questionnaire participants, who responded to the open-ended questions 20, 21, and 22, reported different negative attitudes toward the IELTS test. However, the interview participants did not state any negative comments about the IELTS test. The negative attitudes of the questionnaire participants are presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Questionnaire Participants' Negative Attitudes toward the IELTS Test

Themes	Quotes
Types of questions/tasks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I dislike some of the reading questions like paragraph headings.</li> <li>2. I don't like paragraph headings (Types of questions/tasks).</li> <li>3. Dry and boring texts and task.</li> <li>4. Long texts in Rg.</li> <li>5. Forcing all academic test module test takers to analyze graphs and learn some statistics.</li> <li>6. very dry material; topics are not of interest to my students; level of difficulty of the reading tasks is a put-off for many students.</li> <li>7. The short-writing section questions (charts/ graphs analysis) tend to hold no interest for the students.</li> <li>8. [IELTS test] can be further improved if its speaking topics are checked for cultural appropriateness.</li> <li>9. It would be good if the test contained an integrated reading/ writing task.</li> </ol>
Stressful for students and teachers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. It can be stressful for students.</li> <li>2. Students are not motivated because they feel it is forced on them.</li> <li>3. Students get bored easily and the passages are often hard or on topics the students are not interested in.</li> <li>4. It's boring.</li> <li>5. It's hard to hear that students were not able to achieve the band score they wanted. We can prep them as much as possible but have no control over test day.</li> </ol>

Lack of language improvement/Not beneficial	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lack of real improvement in English language itself as the test only focuses on doing well in the IELTS test.</li> <li>2. I don't always like teaching to the test but IELTS and at times can be prescriptive.</li> <li>3. Not very useful in everyday life.</li> <li>4. It's a money making business. Unfortunately, students only realize they need English, not IELTS, when they get to their major. Teaching students to the test does not help students. They remember strategies of test taking, not so much the language in itself.</li> </ol>
Unreflective of real level of students	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. It does not always reflect the real level of the candidate.</li> </ol>

It is observed in Table 9 that 9 teachers (21%) considered the type of questions, tasks, and texts as dull, monotonous, and tedious for their students. Moreover, 5 teachers (10%) believed that IELTS is stressful and boring for students as well as teachers, followed by 4 teachers (10%) who thought that the test does not lead to language improvement and involves teaching to the test. Only one teacher (2%) reported that the IELTS test is not reflective of the real language level of learners.

Overall, it is seen that IELTS teachers have both negative and positive attitudes about the IELTS test. These attitudes are very likely shaped by these teachers' knowledge about the test and their personal experiences with tests, in addition to their experience in teaching IELTS and training in IELTS.

### **Research Question Two**

How accurate is IELTS teachers' cognition about IELTS?

The aim of the second research question was to examine the accuracy of these IELTS teachers' cognition, that is, their knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes. The accuracy of IELTS teachers' knowledge can be investigated and verified by reference to the various official IELTS documents. However, the accuracy of IELTS teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes cannot be determined, since these aspects of cognition are held individually and vary from one teacher to the other.

With respect to the accuracy of IELTS teachers' knowledge about the content and format of the IELTS test, it can be concluded from the findings in the previous section that the majority of the teachers have accurate knowledge about the different sections of the IELTS test. As seen in the previous section, 32 (76%) out of 42 questionnaire respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed that the IELTS test has a section on vocabulary and grammar, which is in line with the format of the IELTS test (see "Test Format," n.d.). Additionally, 6 questionnaire respondents (14%) and 2 interview participants (33%) reported that vocabulary and grammar is tested through all the four skills in the IELTS test, showing their knowledge to be accurate. Nevertheless, 7 questionnaire participants (16%) strongly agreed/agreed that the IELTS test has a section on vocabulary and grammar, showing that the knowledge of these teachers about the content and format of the IELTS test is inaccurate.

Teachers' accuracy of knowledge about the content and format of the IELTS test was also confirmed through their responses to questionnaire statements # 6, 7, and 8 about the speaking, listening, and writing sections, respectively. In the speaking section of the IELTS test, candidates are required to answer the questions by the examiner but they do not have to ask questions (see "Test Format," n.d.). With regards to the speaking section, 38 teachers (90%) disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement that candidates have to both ask and answer questions. Yet, 3 teachers (7%) agreed with this statement and showed incorrect knowledge about the speaking section of the IELTS test. In the listening section of the IELTS test, candidates listen to the recordings once only (see "IELTS Listening Description," n.d.). Regarding the listening section, 37 questionnaire respondents (88%) disagreed/strongly disagreed giving an indication of precise knowledge about the IELTS test. However, 4 teachers (9%) agreed/strongly agreed that students have two opportunities of listening to the recordings in the IELTS listening section, showing lack of knowledge about the listening section. The writing section of the IELTS test consists of two tasks (see "Test Format," n.d.); Task 1 and Task 2. In Task 1, candidates have to write a minimum of 150 words. Teachers' knowledge about the writing section of the IELTS was also found to be accurate, where 41 teachers (98%) strongly agreed/agreed that candidates have to write at least 150 words in Task 1. Only 1 teacher (2%) showed a lack of knowledge about the writing section by strongly disagreeing with statement # 8.

When it came to teachers' knowledge about the different purposes of the Academic and General IELTS modules in the questionnaire (statement # 10), 37 teachers (88%) showed accuracy of knowledge, strongly agreeing/agreeing with this statement. According to the IELTS organization, the Academic IELTS test is for "people applying for higher education or professional registration in an English speaking environment" (see "Which IELTS Test is Right for Me," n.d.), while the IELTS General Training test is for people "going to English speaking countries for secondary education, work experience or training programs" or migration to English speaking countries (see "Which IELTS Test is Right for Me?" n.d.). Only 2 teachers (5%) were found to have imprecise knowledge about the two modules of the IELTS test, disagreeing with this statement.

Table 10 summarizes the findings about the questionnaire participants' accuracy of knowledge about the IELTS test.

Table 10: Questionnaire Participants' Accuracy of Knowledge about the IELTS Test

Statements in the survey	Number of teachers having accurate knowledge	Number of teachers having inaccurate knowledge
5-Knowledge about vocabulary and grammar.	32 (76%)	7 (16%)
6-Knowledge about the speaking section	38 (90%)	3 (7%)
7-Knowledge about the listening section	37 (88%)	4 (9%)
8-Knowledge about the writing section	41 (98%)	1 (2%)
10-Knowledge about the purposes of Academic and General IELTS modules	37 (88%)	2 (5%)

In addition to the questionnaire participants, the interview participants also showed accurate knowledge about the purpose of the IELTS test in general, and its specific uses in the UAE. Discussing the overall purpose of the IELTS test, all six interview participants stated that the IELTS test measures candidates' English language proficiency in all the four language skills, which is in line with the IELTS claims that it "provides a valid and accurate assessment of the four language skills:

listening, reading, writing and speaking” (see “Ensuring Quality and Fairness,” n.d.). Other purposes of the IELTS test reported by the interview participants included the use of the IELTS for getting jobs and examining test takers’ language ability in an academic environment. One of the interview participants, P6, reported that the IELTS test assesses test takers’ ability to communicate in English, which agrees with the IELTS claim that IELTS “is focused on assessing practical communication ability” (see “Ensuring Quality and Fairness,” n.d.), and hence is accurate.

Nonetheless, lack of accuracy about the purposes of the IELTS test was observed in the case of some interview participants, namely P1, P4, and P5. In her questionnaire response, P4 disagreed with the statement about the differences in the purposes of the Academic and General IELTS test (statement # 10), showing inaccuracy in her knowledge about the purposes of the two modules of the IELTS test. Additionally, these three interviewees (P1, P4, and P5) stated that the IELTS test is also used to assess the ability of test takers to predict, their mentality, as well as their confidence. These teacher-stated views of purposes of the IELTS test do not conform to the claims made by the IELTS test developers. It can be said that these three teachers probably have only basic knowledge about the purpose of the IELTS test, which could be attributed to their educational background and lack of training in teaching IELTS, since all three of them (P1, P4, and P5) are not trained as IELTS examiners, and P1 and P5 are not trained to teach IELTS courses as well.

Regarding teachers’ knowledge about the purpose of the IELTS test in the UAE, 5 out of 6 interviewees reported the use of IELTS being mainly for entrance to universities and immigration purposes. One of the interview participants, P3, also stated that the IELTS test is used as a gate-keeping examination in the UAE. The use of IELTS for entrance into universities in the UAE has also been stated by Gitsaki, Robby, and Bourini (2014). Moreover, P1 and P4 stated that it is used to evaluate teachers in the UAE. The requirement of IELTS for teachers is also mentioned on British Council’s Website (English teachers require a minimum band score of 7 while content teachers need a minimum of 5.5) (see “Ministry of Education UAE,” n.d.). All these purposes of the IELTS test reported by the interview participants reveal their knowledge about the uses of the IELTS test in the UAE to be accurate.

Table 11 summarizes the findings about the accuracy of interviewees' knowledge about the IELTS test in general and its uses in the UAE.

Table 11: Interview Participant's Accuracy of Knowledge about the IELTS Test

Interview participants	Accurate knowledge	Inaccurate knowledge
P1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measures proficiency in all the four language skills</li> <li>• Used for getting jobs</li> <li>• For college/university admission in the UAE</li> <li>• To evaluate teachers in the UAE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To predict</li> </ul>
P2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measures proficiency in all the four language skills</li> <li>• Used for getting jobs</li> <li>• For college/university admission in the UAE</li> <li>• Examines test takers' language ability in academic environment</li> </ul>	
P3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measures proficiency in all the four language skills</li> <li>• For immigration</li> <li>• For college/university admission in the UAE</li> <li>• As a gate-keeping examination in the UAE</li> </ul>	
P4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measures proficiency in all the four language skills</li> <li>• For immigration</li> <li>• For college/university admission</li> <li>• Examines test takers' language ability in academic environment</li> <li>• To evaluate teachers in the UAE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assesses test takers' mentality</li> </ul>
P5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measures proficiency in all the four language skills</li> <li>• For college/university</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To develop confidence</li> </ul>

---

P6	admission <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measures proficiency in all the four language skills</li> <li>• Assesses test takers' ability to communicate</li> </ul>
----	--

---

### **Research Question Three**

To what extent is IELTS teachers' cognition about IELTS reflected in their IELTS classroom practices?

The third research question explored the relationship of IELTS teachers' cognition with their classroom practices. The findings from the questionnaire, observations, and interview data about knowledge, beliefs/perceptions, and attitudes according to the main themes are reported and discussed below.

#### **Reflection of IELTS Teachers' Knowledge in Their Classroom Practices**

Teachers' knowledge about the various sections in the IELTS test, the overall purpose as well as the specific uses of IELTS in the UAE, and various question types were explored using the questionnaire, interviews, and observations. When the six teachers' classroom practices were appraised through observations of their classes, it was observed that these teachers do reflect their knowledge of the IELTS test regarding theoretical aspects of the test, grading criteria, and tasks in their teaching practices to a large extent, albeit with inaccuracies in a few cases.

The classroom observation of the six participants revealed that all six teachers discussed the theoretical aspects of the skills they taught either at the beginning of each lesson or during the lesson. For instance, P5 began the lesson with a discussion of section 3 of the listening test. When asked in the interview what was the rationale for discussion of the theory, P2 replied, "we need to first discuss the theoretical part, I mean the background of this section, what students found in common and then we start the practice, that's what we do. So we do that for every section, 1, 2, 3, 4." Explaining further, P2 asserted the importance of discussing the contents of every section and the different questions types, and that by doing so "you bring them closer to that section."

Similarly, P1 discussed the theoretical aspects of Writing Task 1 of IELTS, followed by some practice activities, involving vocabulary and grammar, for describing the graphs/charts. P2 and P3 also explained the differences in the different reading question types, such as the differences between yes/no/not given and true/false/not given questions that were the focus of the lesson. In addition, while teaching the sign post words for all the sections of the IELTS test, P4 explained to students how these words help in finding the key information in the listening or reading sections, and how these sign post words could be utilized in speaking and writing to convey the intended message. These explanations of the IELTS test's different sections and question types show teachers' knowledge about the IELTS test. Moreover, this also reflects that teachers deemed familiarity with the test and its different sections to be very important for their students. Test familiarity was also seen as one of the important aspect in teaching for the IELTS test in the questionnaire responses of the participants, where 35 teachers (83%) reported test familiarity to be helpful in gaining a good score in IELTS. The *IELTS Guide for Teachers* (2015) also suggests that students should be familiarized with all the different sections of the test and test tasks.

However, P6 did not explain the theory in detail. Rather, during the practice of different reading questions, he discussed the question types and which sections of the reading test are likely to have certain types of questions. This might be because of P6's belief that language is best learnt by being immersed in it and practicing the tasks instead of discussing test theory. In his interview, P6 stated that practice is the only effective method for teaching in IELTS classes. He further added:

So in this [IELTS] class, I focus on the doing. I'm not communicating the information necessarily...it's my key goal to getting them to do stuff...So we immerse in the reading, immerse in the writing, immerse in the speaking. I try to reduce the amount of time on the talk and make them do because it's not about you know learning the correct way, it's about doing it and in gaining their own confidence.

Furthermore, some interview participants introduced the students to the marking criteria about the writing section of the IELTS test. For instance, P1 briefly presented the marking criteria for Writing Task 1 (see "IELTS TASK 1 Writing Band Descriptors [public version]," n.d.) and explained how students can achieve higher band scores in Writing Task 1 by using a variety of lexical range and variety of

grammatical structures with accuracy. Later, P1 provided students with some practice exercises for using different vocabulary and structures in Writing Task 1. This practice perhaps reflects P1’s belief (mentioned in her questionnaire response), that knowing the test-marking criteria helps in achieving good scores on IELTS. Likewise, P4 also described the significance and use of different signpost words in writing to achieve better scores in writing, though neither her questionnaire responses nor her interview responses showed that she regards familiarity with scoring as important for students.

In addition to the explanation of the different sections of the test, some of the interview participants’ (P2 and P3) knowledge about the IELTS test was also reflected in their teaching through the use of authentic tasks, since the *IELTS Guide for Teachers* (2015) do mention that teachers can bring in authentic tasks to be used in IELTS classrooms. P2 and P3 used reading passages that were adopted from local UAE newspapers, with question types to suit the context of the IELTS reading section.

Findings related to reflection of teachers’ knowledge about the IELTS test in their classroom practices are summarized in Table 12.

Table 12: IELTS Teachers’ Claimed Knowledge Vs Practices

Participants	IELTS test the format of the	Claimed knowledge of	Observed claimed knowledge	Claimed knowledge of marking criteria	Observed claimed knowledge	Claimed knowledge about authentic tasks	Observed claimed knowledge
P1	Yes	Observed	Yes	Observed	Yes	No	
P2	Yes	Observed	No	No	Yes	Observed	
P3	Yes	Observed	Yes	No	Yes	Observed	
P4	Yes	Observed	No	Observed	Yes	No	
P5	Yes	Observed	No	No	No	No	
P6	Yes	Observed	Yes	No	No	No	

### Reflection of IELTS Teachers’ Claims about Teaching Approaches

The interview participants discussed the activities that they employ in both IELTS and non-IELTS courses. Careful comparison of what teachers reported in the

questionnaire and interview responses with teachers' classroom practices revealed incongruence between teachers' claims about teaching approaches in IELTS classes and what they actually did during their IELTS classes during observations. Although teachers stated that they use communicative and collaborative methods of teaching in IELTS classes, their classroom practices showed the use of mostly teacher-centered methods, except for P6 who used communicative methods in the second half of the class observation for the Speaking Part 2 of IELTS.

When asked about the types of activities, all of the teachers maintained that they very commonly use pair and group work in their classes, and presentations. Nevertheless, classroom observations of P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 showed that these teachers' claims about teaching different activities did not correspond to their teaching practices in class. None of the above-mentioned participants used pair or group work in class, and the activities were mostly repetitious and teacher-led, focusing on practice of different test questions. Although P2 and P3 are IELTS examiners, and P2, P3, and P4 had been trained in teaching IELTS, the way they approached IELTS preparation showed a disconnect between their claims and their teaching practices. This could be attributed to individual teacher beliefs and attitudes, and the language level of their students, as well as contextual factors, such as time for each class, and the relationship of IELTS courses to the university's curriculum (in the case of P2 and P3). However, it should also be noted that the inconsistency of these teachers' stated beliefs with their teaching practices could be due to the presence of the observer in their IELTS classes.

However, P6's knowledge about teaching approaches was relevant to his teaching practices in class to a large extent. P6 stated that he approaches the IELTS courses the same way he does non-IELTS classes, and makes students perform the tasks. Discussing the teaching approach for speaking skills in IELTS, P6 said that "when I'm teaching speaking, I want them to speak, and speak, and speak and speak. I limit my instructions and I force them to struggle." P6's claim about his teaching approach was clearly reflected in his classroom observation while teaching IELTS Speaking Part 2. He just provided a model talk for Part 2 of speaking and then let the students talk in pairs and groups for about one hour, giving them different topics each time while ensuring that students are managing the time limit very well in class. This

congruence of P6's claims with his teaching practices could be due to his training in teaching IELTS and his status as an IELTS examiner.

Table 13 below presents a summary of teachers' claims about teaching approaches compared with their teaching practices in IELTS classes.

Table 13: IELTS Teachers' Claims about Teaching Approaches Vs Practices

Participants	Claimed about communicative methods	Observed practices	Claimed about the use of pair work/group work	Observed practices	Claimed about the use of variety of activities	Observed practices
P1	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
P2	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
P3	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
P4	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
P5	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
P6	Yes	Observed	Yes	Observed	Yes	Observed

### Reflection of IELTS Teachers' Beliefs and Perceptions in Their Classroom Practices

The way these six teachers teach in IELTS preparation courses could be reflective of their beliefs and perceptions about language learning in general, and about the IELTS test, in particular. The interview participants were asked what they think are effective ways of learning a language and teaching in IELTS preparation classes, and almost all of them believed that communicative approaches are effective in teaching English in IELTS as well as in non-IELTS classes. Detailed participants' responses are shown in Table 14.

Table 14: IELTS Teachers' Beliefs about Effective Methods of Teaching in IELTS and Non-IELTS classes

Participants	Quotes
P1	Search a lot to surf the net and to go for resources such as You tubes, activities, games, make field trips sometimes, projects...handicraft activities...for small ages. For older ages, it will be better to take them for field trips, surf the net, show them movies....For example, they can

---

	draw something and explain so this one...this would be very good speaking lesson.
P2	I think that should all skills integrated. I don't think it's a good idea to teach only grammar, only vocab. I think if we can find as many ways for students to integrate the language/ obviously do a lot of readings, and listenings and writings to pretty much get all the language together so that you feel that language learning is going on without isolating each element of it.
P3	The best way is immersion but in this part of the world it's difficult to achieve that...although that's the best way, it's not necessarily the most effective way for students...from this part of the world...What I try to do is to make things relevant and interesting which is a difficult thing to do but I find, for example, we're talking about IELTS, if I'm doing an IELTS reading, what I like to do, to get them used to the format of the examination is to find subjects that potentially might be more relevant to their own lives and more interesting for them.
P4	Being immersed in English all the time. Make sure that the classroom is only speaking English, reading English, writing English, speaking in English, being immersed all the time. Creating an environment where everything is basically in English and...using authentic texts (journals, BBC, CNN for listening, documentaries) in the speaking and the reading, listening actually...and when they're practicing it at home to give them things that are authentic.
P5	I would say practice is the best way to learn. , I think the person has to practice like ...every language we have, it requires a lot of practice.
P6	Well, it's just practice. It's immersion. It's the only effective method. You can teach a language without anyone even understanding that language....So in this class, I focus on doing. So we immerse in the reading, immerse in the writing, immerse in the speaking. I try to reduce the amount of time on the talk and make them do because it's not about you know learning the correct way, it's about doing it and in gaining their own confidence. On the other hand, part of the goal is so that they all get to know each other and they are all relaxed and they want to study...and find connections.

---

Discrepancies in teachers' stated beliefs and their actions in class were noticed during class observations of the six participants. Although it can be seen in Table 14 that P1 believes in employing communicative, collaborative activities in class, her observed actual classroom teaching was not reflective of this belief. The classroom activities were teacher-centered, and most of them were whole-class activities. Similarly, P2 said she believes in integration of language skills, even in IELTS

classes. However, her observed class was not representative of integration of skills but was focused solely on the teaching of reading skills to answer the questions. She also carried out almost all activities as a whole class, and the interactions were mainly between the teacher and the students. Yet, she did teach some vocabulary in her class, which she had said could not be isolated from skills teaching. Moreover, although P4's class was conducted throughout in English, she did not use authentic texts for teaching reading. Rather the reading tasks were previous IELTS practice tests. Hence, her belief about the use of authentic texts was not in congruence with her teaching practices. Additionally, in P4's class, the students were not motivated, and the teacher herself provided answers to most of the questions while practicing the IELTS reading, giving minimal chances for students to think about and answer the questions. The students also seemed confused about some sign post words at times. However, P4 did not clarify those sign post words, nor did she check students' understanding of those words.

In contrast, P3's, P5's, and P6's beliefs about language teaching and teaching in IELTS classes were reflected in their teaching practices. For instance, for P3, students' motivation was highly significant. It can be seen in Table 14 that he believes in making things relevant to the students' culture. The reading texts used by P3 were reflective of his belief in making things more relevant. When asked in the interview what was the rationale of using culturally relevant texts, P3 stated:

At early levels absolutely....despite what's IELTS say, it's a very culturally biased exam, especially I found for Arab students. They're gonna come in, sit down and now be faced with subject matter they have no knowledge about. So what do you do? Do you teach them all the cultural information and start right from the beginning with authentic IELTS material? I'd say no. At the beginning, hit them with familiar content and the structure of the exam. So my purpose in doing that is to get them familiarized with how the test looks, what kind of questions they're gonna be asked, what tasks they're going to have to do. Then, once that becomes familiar and automatic, then you start introducing more authentic IELTS material with culturally foreign things that you can contextualize and talk about and get them ready for it.

In a similar manner, P5 and P6 stated that they perceive practice as the best method for learning a language and this belief was reflected in their class observation in practice of the test tasks. However, P5's class observation showed that the students were not very engaged or motivated in doing class activities and only two students

(out of the 10 students) were answering the questions. Furthermore, P5 was very authoritative in class, leading all the teacher-student interactions despite his claims in the interview that he posed less control in IELTS classes and had discussions of tasks with his students to get them involved in the lesson. This shows a disconnect between what P5 stated in the interview about his teaching approach and his actual observed classroom actions. It must be noted that P5 stated in the interview that he was taught in a “very traditional way, just sitting in a class, listening to the teacher,” and this was the practice in his class as well.

The discrepancies between P4’s and P5’s beliefs and their teaching practices could partly be due to the effects of the IELTS test or their past experiences with tests and teaching in general. Moreover, the incongruence P4’s and P5’s beliefs with their teaching actions could also be due to their lack of training as IELTS examiners (P4) or training in teaching IELTS (P5), because in their interviews both P4 and P5 stated that they do not require training in teaching IELTS. When asked whether they would like to be trained in teaching IELTS, P4 stated that because of being a native speaker and because of her educational background, she is okay and better than others. Likewise, P5 stated that he does not need training in teaching IELTS. He added:

I don’t think we need training to teach the IELTS test because you have the book, you just read it. You know the question types you have based on your experience. It’s not like inventing the wheel after all, it’s a book you can gain from it...it is [a] language test.

Therefore, in addition to the effects of the IELTS test on teachers’ beliefs and perceptions, the personal experiences of teachers could also result in inconsistency between teachers’ claims and their practices in IELTS classes, as seen in the case of P4 and P5. Additionally, the presence of the observer in their classes could also result in disparity between what these teachers stated and what they did in their IELTS classes.

Findings related to interview participants’ claims about the use of effective methods for teaching IELTS classes and their actual classroom practices are summarized in Table 15.

Table 15: IELTS Teachers' Claimed Beliefs about Effective Methods of Teaching Vs Practices

Participants	Claims about effective methods	Observed practices
P1	Communicative/collaborative activities	Teacher-centered/whole class activities
P2	Integration of skills/collaborative activities	Teaching of only reading skills/vocabulary/whole class activities
P3	Use of culturally relevant material	Culturally relevant reading texts
P4	Use of authentic texts	No authentic texts used/practicing old tests
P5	Practising language/ doing tasks Communicative approach/ student-centered	Students practiced the <b>test</b> tasks Teacher-centered/non-communicative
P6	Immersion/doing tasks/not so much teacher explanation	Students performed <b>test</b> tasks/ occasional teacher explanation

Regarding the teaching of test-taking strategies, all six teachers in the interviews stated that teaching test-taking strategies is very important in IELTS preparation classes. Nonetheless, this was not seen in class observations of all the six participants. Although P1 reported that teaching time management is the most important strategy, her classroom observation was not in agreement with what she stated she believes in. She used different activities to teach Writing Task 1; however, she timed just one activity at the beginning of the lesson and later did the activities without timing them. In her interview, she stated:

The most important strategy is to let them aware of the time because...there's no mercy there. I put them in the same atmosphere and I ask them whenever I give them...anything or any task to do...to put themselves in the same atmosphere. For example, when I ask them to write IELTS task 1, I tell them put the alarm next to you and countdown from 20 minutes to 0.

In contrast to what P1 stated in the interview, her practices in the class did not reflect her stated beliefs about test-taking strategies. This discrepancy in her beliefs and her teaching practices could be attributed to the fact that she is a novice IELTS teacher, with only 3-5 years of experience in teaching IELTS, and her lack of training in teaching IELTS. Also, the presence of the researcher (as an observer) in her class could have affected her consistency in her practices vs her stated beliefs.

On the contrary, P2's, P3's, P4's, P5's, and P6's teaching practices were a true reflection of their beliefs about teaching test-taking strategies. Regarding the teaching of test-taking strategies, P2 stated that teaching test-taking strategies ensures success in the IELTS exam because "you may have very good English, but if you can't understand how the test works, then I think you're not allowing yourself to see the real picture." Therefore, P2 ascertained that her students knew how to approach each type of question in the reading section of the IELTS exam. For instance, when discussing the matching headings questions, she highlighted the key words in the list of headings and then asked the students to find the key words or their synonyms in every paragraph in the passage to match the headings with the paragraphs. This shows congruence of her beliefs about test-strategies with her teaching practices.

Likewise, P6 presented a model talk for IELTS Speaking Part 2 by first writing only six words on the board in one minute (provided before the talk in the exam), and then telling students how to expand ideas on those six words by modelling a talk. This helped students understand the idea that they do not have to write sentences in the allocated time before the talk. Rather they can just write a few words and expand their ideas on those words. This congruence of P2's and P6's beliefs with their practices could be attributed to their experience in teaching IELTS, both having 6-10 years of experience, and their status as IELTS examiners, in addition to their training in teaching IELTS.

Table 16 summarizes the findings regarding teachers' stated beliefs about test-taking strategies and their actions in IELTS classes.

Table 16: IELTS Teachers' Claimed Beliefs about Teaching Test-taking Strategies Vs Practices

Participants	Claimed about teaching test-taking strategies	Observed Practices
P1	Yes	Not observed
P2	Yes	Observed
P3	Yes	Observed
P4	Yes	Observed
P5	Yes	Observed
P6	Yes	Observed

Furthermore, the relationship between teachers' beliefs about the level of difficulty of the different IELTS sections and their teaching practices were explored through questions 17 and 18 in the questionnaire. It was discussed in the previous section that the teachers believed reading and writing components to be the most difficult for their students. However, when the questionnaire respondents were asked about the amount of time they would spend on working on different language components in their IELTS classes (using question # 18), discrepancies were observed in their responses. Presented below is question # 18 from the questionnaire, followed by Table 17 and Figure 3. Table 17 displays the number of teachers who reported allocation of time percentage for teaching different language components in IELTS classes, whereas Figure 3 compares the amount of time spent for teaching different language elements in IELTS classes, according to participants' responses.

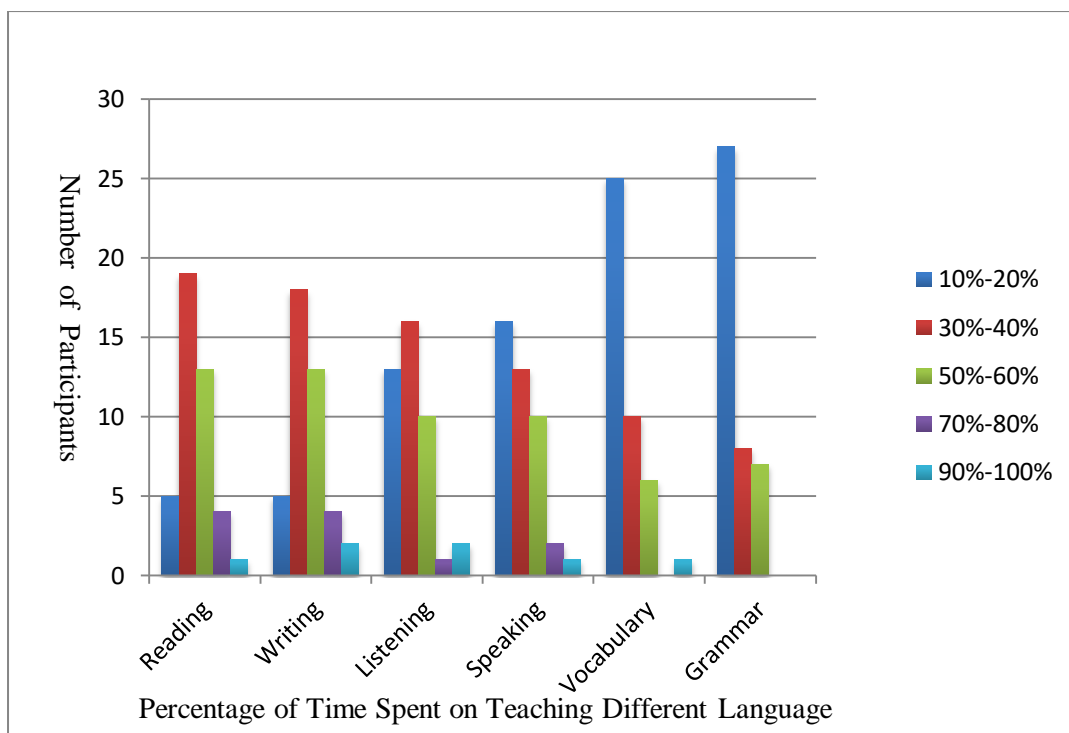
Question 18- What percentage of class time would you spend working on the following? Please rank between 10% and 100%:

Reading	10-20%	30-40%	50-60%	70-80%	90-100%
Writing	10-20%	30-40%	50-60%	70-80%	90-100%
Listening	10-20%	30-40%	50-60%	70-80%	90-100%
Speaking	10-20%	30-40%	50-60%	70-80%	90-100%
Vocabulary	10-20%	30-40%	50-60%	70-80%	90-100%
Grammar	10-20%	30-40%	50-60%	70-80%	90-100%

Table 17: Time Allocated for Teaching Different Language Components in IELTS Classes

Skills	10%-20%	30%-40%	50%-60%	70%-80%	90%-100%
Reading	5	19	13	4	1
Writing	5	18	13	4	2
Listening	13	16	10	1	2
Speaking	16	13	10	2	1
Vocabulary	25	10	6	0	1
Grammar	27	8	7	0	0

N=42



N=42

Figure 4: Comparison of time spent on teaching different language components in IELTS classes

Although 31 teachers (74%) regarded reading as the most difficult section for their students (statement # 17 in the questionnaire, as discussed in previous section), it can be seen in Table 17 that only 19 teachers (45%) reported spending 30-40 % and 13 teachers (31%) reported spending 50-60% of their class time in teaching the reading skills. This difference shows discrepancies in teachers' beliefs about the level of difficulty of the reading section and their teaching practices in IELTS courses.

Similarly, writing was regarded as the second most difficult section for students by 22 teachers (52%). However, less than half of the participants, 18 teachers (43%), reported spending 30-40% while only 13 teachers (31%) spend 50-60% of class time on practicing writing skills, again showing incongruence between teachers' stated beliefs and their teaching practices in IELTS classes.

Interestingly, despite listening being rated number 3 by 28 teachers (68%) for the level of difficulty, 16 teachers (38%) stated they spend 30-40%, and 10 teachers (24%) spend 50-60% of their class time in practicing listening in class. Figure 4 clearly illustrates that most teachers spend 30-40% of their class time in teaching reading, writing, and listening. Hence, it can be said that the reported teaching

practices of the majority of teachers do not correspond to their reported beliefs about the level of difficulty of the four language components. In other words, teachers are not spending much time on areas that they said are the most difficult for their students.

However, when it came to speaking, 16 teachers (38%), stated they spend 10-20% of their class time for teaching speaking skills, conforming to their stated belief that speaking is the least difficult for their students. It is evident from Figure 4 that the majority of the teachers spend the least amount of time teaching speaking, which is in accordance with their stated beliefs about the speaking skills. Similarly, for the teaching of vocabulary and grammar, 25 teachers (60%) and 27 teachers (64%), respectively, reported spending 10-20% of their class time teaching these language elements.

The incongruence between teachers' beliefs and their choice to spend certain amounts of class time on particular language elements would depend on what areas of language development teachers perceive to be necessary for their students. It is mentioned in the *IELTS Guide for Teachers* (2015) that teachers can decide what areas of learners' language abilities need to be developed for preparing for the IELTS test. Therefore, it can be said that teachers' teaching approaches in teaching different language elements in IELTS classes are heterogeneous to a large extent, depending on teacher variables and students' levels of language ability.

Nevertheless, variation in the time allocated to different skills could also depend on teachers' attitudes towards a particular skill. For instance, one of the questionnaire participants stated that she dislikes teaching writing because it is demanding, and requires a lot of marking of drafts to help students improve their writing. Another questionnaire participant said he dislikes teaching Writing Task 1 and teaching reading because the reading texts are beyond the students' reading competence. These views were expressed by 10 other questionnaire participants (24%) as well who think that teaching Writing Task 1 is uninteresting and that reading texts are difficult and boring for students. Thus, teaching of different skills in IELTS courses may vary according to IELTS teachers' perceptions of and attitudes toward them, resulting in discrepancies between IELTS teachers' reported teaching practices and their stated beliefs.

## **Reflection of IELTS Teachers' Attitudes in Their Classroom Practices**

Apart from IELTS teachers' beliefs and perceptions, IELTS teachers' attitudes are also manifested in their classroom practices and play an important role in the overall success of IELTS preparation classes (Chappell, Bodis, & Jackson, 2015). In the interviews, all six interviewees reported overall positive comments about the IELTS test. Five (P1, P3, P4, P5, P6) were positive about IELTS preparation courses. However, one interviewee, P2, made negative comments about IELTS preparation courses. The attitudes of the participants about the IELTS courses were classified according to their negative or positive comments about the usefulness of these courses, as well as their feelings and behavioral intent regarding the IELTS preparation courses, since Oppenheim (1992) states that attitudes are manifested through feelings.

The classroom practices of all six interviewees were not in congruence with their stated attitudes. For example, in his interview, P5 stated that IELTS preparation courses represent the test in a good way and that he has a positive attitude towards them. Nevertheless, his class observation showed stressful environment in the class, and the students were not very engaged or motivated in doing class activities. The negative attitude of P5 could be due to the effects of the IELTS test on teacher's emotions, or his past experiences with tests and teaching in general. Likewise, P4 stated in the interview that she loves IELTS classes, and her students. However, this was not reflected in her IELTS class. Similar to P5, P4's class observation showed a somewhat stressful environment in her IELTS class. The students in P4's class were not motivated because they were not participating in the class. However, again, these mismatches between teachers' statements and their actions in classrooms could be due to the possible observer effect.

In contrast, the positive attitudes of P1, P2, P3, and P6 were seen in their classes as well. Although P2 reported a negative attitude in her interview, saying that she has a sense of frustration about the IELTS preparation courses because of the timing factor, her class observation did not show signs of stress by the teacher or the students. However, the teacher did try to complete the tasks faster than what students expected, perhaps caused by the shorter time of the class (only 40 minutes). Moreover, she did one type of reading task once only, again because of the time factor, as mentioned in her interview. P1's, P3's, and P6's class observations also

revealed a relaxed environment in the classes, and the students were motivated and engaged in doing the different tasks. In P3's class, the teacher was highly motivated, and in order to motivate his students throughout the class, he used personal examples, jokes, and even fun activities. For example, for one of the reading passages he used in the class, he read it aloud for students and asked the meaning of some words while reading it aloud. When P3 was asked about the rationale for such an activity, he stated:

When they're doing yes/no/ not given questions, they need to be able to recognize a writer's opinion and a way of doing that is by highlighting specific lexis and grammar, especially the use of adjectives, modal verbs things like that. By reading it aloud, and stressing...also this is 001, they are quite low level....So the reason I read it out like that is highlight...look, look here, this shows what the writer thinks...the writer didn't like the car because it was too slow. So that was my purpose. Again, it's raising awareness of text, raising awareness of how you can work a writer's opinion.

When asked about the use of personal examples, P3 said that "one of my big things is motivation. I want students to want to come to class. I want students to enjoy the time at class." Adding further to his view, he stated, "for EFL, personalization, humor, fun...it is an important part of learning a language. I tell them stories about myself...I want them to be able to use the language naturally and I think that's learning."

The highly positive attitude of P3 could be partly attributed to his training in teaching IELTS and his experience as an IELTS examiner. Moreover, P3 is qualified with a Ph.D. degree and more than 16 years of experience in teaching IELTS. Similarly, P2 and P6 have also received training in teaching IELTS and are IELTS examiners, which could partly explain their positive attitudes towards the IELTS preparation courses, in addition to their positive attitude towards the IELTS test itself.

A summary of the results about teachers' reported attitudes and their observed attitudes in IELTS classes is presented in Table 18.

Table 18: IELTS Teachers' Reported Attitudes Vs Observed Attitudes

Participants	Reported attitudes toward IELTS preparation courses	Observed attitudes
P1	Positive	Positive
P2	Negative	Positive
P3	Positive	Positive
P4	Positive	Negative
P5	Positive	Negative
P6	Positive	Positive

#### **Research Question Four**

What evidence of washback from the IELTS is present in IELTS teachers' cognition and their teaching practices?

Since for the current research washback is defined as the effects of the IELTS test on teachers' cognition and teaching and learning in IELTS preparation courses, the fourth research question examined the evidence of washback on teachers' cognition and their teaching practices in IELTS preparation courses. Therefore, the three sources of data collection (questionnaire, classroom observations, and semi-structured stimulated recall interviews) were analyzed to find the effects of the IELTS test (whether positive and/or negative) on teachers' knowledge, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes first, and in turn, on teachers' teaching practices in IELTS preparation courses.

#### **Washback Effects on IELTS Teachers' Cognition**

The effects of the IELTS test on teachers' teaching practices could be revealed through awareness of teachers' beliefs and perceptions about IELTS and IELTS preparation courses. Table 19 lists the statements on the questionnaire that were used to investigate how IELTS teachers' perceive their IELTS preparation classes and the washback effects of the IELTS test on these beliefs.

Table 19: IELTS Teachers' Beliefs about IELTS Preparation Courses

No.	Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2	My IELTS classes are more successful as compared to other courses I teach.	11	7	17	6	1
14	It is important to teach test-taking strategies in IELTS classes.	30	12	0	0	0
15	It is important to integrate language skills in IELTS classes (e.g. integrating speaking with listening skills).	18	17	4	2	1
16	The IELTS preparation course is a good way of learning English even for students who are not taking the IELTS exam.	10	8	11	7	6

Regarding statement # 2, it is evident from Table 19 that 18 teachers (43%) perceive their IELTS preparation classes to be more successful than other courses they teach. However, 7 teachers (17%) disagreed/strongly disagreed that their IELTS classes are more successful than other courses they teach. In addition, 17 teachers (40%) chose the neutral option, giving no opinion about their IELTS classes. The reason for choosing the neutral option by a large number of teachers might be that teachers see no differences in teaching IELTS and non-IELTS classes, a view which was stated by two of the interview participants. Commenting on the differences between IELTS and non-IELTS classes, P3 said that there are no particular differences in both types of courses, since “it is English” that is taught. When asked about whether there are any differences in IELTS and non-IELTS classes, P6 strongly disagreed and said “they [IELTS and non-IELTS courses] are not different.” Most of the teachers who agreed with statement # 2 are veterans, while the ones who disagreed are mostly novices. Above all, whether or not teachers were trained in

teaching IELTS was reflected in their beliefs about IELTS preparation courses, a consequential washback effect on teacher beliefs, since training for test preparation courses also manifests washback from the test. One manifestation of washback is when actions are taken as a result of a test, which would not have taken place apart from the test. Thus test preparation courses themselves are an instance of washback, and a further washback effect can be seen in a decision on the part of a teacher to participate in training for test preparation courses or not, because of views about the test and teaching test preparation.

In addition, the questionnaire and interview participants were asked about what they think of teaching test-taking strategies in IELTS preparation courses (statement # 14). As seen in Table 19, all 42 participants (100%) strongly agreed/agreed that it is important to teach test-taking strategies in IELTS classes. This finding was also observed in question #13 of the survey where teachers were asked what knowledge and/or skills they perceive as helpful to achieve a good IELTS score. In response, 35 teachers (83%) stated that test-taking strategies are significant in achieving better scores in the IELTS test.

When the interview participants were asked about their perceptions about teaching test-taking strategies in IELTS preparation classes, all six participants acknowledged that teaching test-taking strategies is very important. The responses of the interview participants about test-taking strategies are presented in Table 20 below.

Table 20: IELTS Teachers' Beliefs about Teaching Test-Taking Strategies in IELTS Preparation Courses

Interview participants	Quotes
P1	It is the most important thing.
P2	I think they're really important....you may have very good English, but if you can't understand how the test works, then I think you're not allowing yourself to see the real picture and it is an exam and it is...time-oriented, and it is goal-oriented and you need to understand that and once you do, then the language will come into play....So I would like in the future to see more emphasis on test-taking strategies at a higher level.
P3	It is absolutely essential.
P4	Just do the strategies, get your grade and...at the same time work on

---

	trying to do better.
P5	You must do that. You have to teach them skimming and scanning for reading, you have to teach them how to build paragraphs... definitely you need to do so. Focusing on meaning similarity in the listening...that is a very important.
P6	Well, that's the only way to teach it. It's not a language development course. If I was doing a language development course, I would teach...language.

---

It is clear from Table 20 that test-taking strategies are deemed by these teachers to be pivotal for success in the IELTS test. Even in the *IELTS Guide for Teachers* (2015), some of the “Tips from Teachers” (p. 13) suggest teachers teach skimming and scanning skills for students to be able to answer all questions in one hour in the reading section, in addition to teaching how to approach each type of task. In the listening section, it is suggested that teachers make sure that their students identify the type of information they will need to listen for, and in the writing section, it is proposed that teachers ascertain that their students are able to analyze the questions and plan before starting to write. All these tips in the *IELTS Guide for Teachers* (2015) value the teaching of test-taking strategies in IELTS classes (since they are stated in official *IELTS Guide for Teachers*).

Additionally, these IELTS teachers’ beliefs that test-taking strategies are highly important seem to be affected by the stakes associated with the test as well as the level of the students taking IELTS courses in the UAE. Both the questionnaire and interview participants (100%) deemed test-taking strategies as highly significant in achieving a good score in the IELTS test. Moreover, the classroom observations showed teachers mainly teaching test-taking strategies. However, the *IELTS Guide for Teachers* does not encourage exclusively teaching of test-taking strategies but suggests teaching of language also. Yet, teachers in the present study emphasized test-taking strategies above the teaching of language, which shows the influence of the test on teachers’ thinking, leading them to believe that teaching test-taking strategies is more important than developing language ability.

Such a negative washback effect might also arise from teachers’ own experiences with tests and lack of knowledge about the IELTS test’s communicative construct. Moreover, the pressure on teachers to raise the test scores of the students

might make it inevitable for teachers to emphasize the teaching of test-taking strategies, and not so much language development. This viewpoint was expressed by some of the questionnaire participants who reported that in IELTS preparation courses, more time is spent on teaching to the test and test-taking strategies for success in the exam, than on language skill. One questionnaire participant stated that “too much of it [IELTS preparation course] is about understanding the test and learning the strategies. Even many native speakers would need to take a quick course to get a high grade.” Furthermore, the questionnaire participants said that students have unrealistic expectations of the scores they are going to get in the IELTS exam, forcing teachers to pay undue attention to teaching test-taking skills rather than developing the language levels of the learners. Consequently, as stated by one of the questionnaire participant, students remember strategies of test taking, and not so much the language.

Table 20 shows that in response to statement # 15 about integration of skills in IELTS classes, 35 teachers (83%) strongly agreed/agreed that it is important to integrate language skills in IELTS classes, while 4 teachers (10%) were neutral and gave no opinion in this regard. The belief about integration of skills seems to conform to the IELTS claims that “while IELTS focuses on testing the four skills individually, there is inevitably an element of integration in each component, in the same way that language skills are integrated in the real world. Test tasks often entail the use of other skills and are therefore ‘integrated’ to some degree” (see *IELTS Guide for Teachers*, p. 4). One of the interview participants, P2, stated that integration of skills is essential in IELTS preparation courses, revealing a positive washback effect of the IELTS test. In contrast, 3 surveyed teachers (7%) disagreed/strongly disagreed that integration of skills is necessary in IELTS classes, a belief not in agreement with the IELTS claims, and hence revealing negative washback on these 3 teachers’ beliefs. One reason for not believing in integration of skills might be teachers’ lack of knowledge about the IELTS test and their lack of understanding of the IELTS test requirements. Moreover, it can also be attributed to their lack of training in teaching IELTS.

It should also be acknowledged that it is not the test itself but the implementation of the IELTS test in this UAE context, which results in washback, either positive or negative.

Statement #16 in the questionnaire sought to determine IELTS teachers' overall attitude toward IELTS preparation courses. In this question, the teachers reported about the usefulness of the IELTS preparation courses. In response to this statement, 18 teachers (43%) strongly agreed/agreed that IELTS preparation courses are a good way of learning English.

IELTS teachers' responses to open-ended questions in the survey (questions # 20, 21, and 22) also inquired what these teachers liked and disliked about teaching the IELTS test. The responses of the teachers were categorized as positive or negative attitudes, based on their negative or positive comments about the usefulness of IELTS preparation courses, in addition to an indication of their feelings and behavioral intent with respect to IELTS preparation classes. The positive attitudes of the questionnaire respondents according to the main themes in the open-ended answers are displayed in Table 21.

Table 21: Questionnaire Participants' Positive Attitudes toward IELTS Preparation Courses

Themes	Quotes
Structured nature of the test preparation courses	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Structured nature of the test prep.</li> <li>2. Structured lessons.</li> <li>3. The course is well-structured and contains interesting and educational reading material and challenging writing topics.</li> </ol>
Motivating for both teachers and students	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I am happy that almost all of my students pass the test.</li> <li>2. The thing that I like the most about teaching IELTS is to help the students pass and improve their English language.</li> <li>3. Helping others to achieve their goals.</li> <li>4. Seeing students overcome a stumbling block and pursuing their education.</li> <li>5. Being in a helper position, academically I mean. Most learners come to class expecting to a fight with the test or even they are going to struggle to pass the test. However, both psychological and academic support make the preparation phase much easier.</li> <li>6. Learners tend to work hard and come to classes regularly as there are high stakes with getting their required scores.</li> </ol>

Skills improvement	<p>7. Students are usually very engaged in practice tests.</p> <p>1. When taught correctly, IELTS courses are particularly good at helping students gain the ability to self-assess, and understand the structures of communication.</p>
--------------------	--

As seen in Table 21, the questionnaire participants reported different positive attitudes towards IELTS preparation courses. Of all the open-ended response participants, 3 teachers (7%) believed that IELTS courses are well structured. In addition, 7 teachers (17%) considered IELTS courses to be motivating for teachers as well as students, since teachers can help students achieve their desired scores while students are usually engaged in doing the test tasks. One teacher (2%) stated that the IELTS test can enhance students' communicative competence, showing this teacher's positive attitude towards IELTS courses.

The interview participants' responses further reflect IELTS teachers' positive attitudes towards the IELTS preparation courses, and beneficial washback effects. Among the six interview participants, four (P1, P3, P4, P5, P6) stated that they have a very positive attitude toward IELTS preparation courses, while one interviewee (P2) reported negative attitude toward IELTS courses, which is discussed under the negative attitudes. The responses of the five interview participants are outlined in Table 22 below.

Table 22: Interview Participants' Positive Attitudes toward IELTS Preparation Courses

Participants	Quotes
P1	I like training others on this test and every time I go through a course, I myself...get benefit.
P3	I have a very positive view because I wrote them. It depends....I've seen places where it is just to take as many tests as you can and I don't think that's a good test preparation course, just sitting there, doing test after test. I think the better way is....to highlight certain skills and techniques and ideas and then do the practice on it, and then of course after they've done practice...you focus on errors and use them as a learning activity.
P4	For me, I love them. I love the classes, I love my students.
P5	The preparation course...represents the test in a good way. So students when they finish, they feel more confident, they feel like

	they can do it.
P6	IELTS courses are particularly good at helping students understand the structures of communication.

As seen in Table 22, these participants have a positive attitude towards IELTS test preparation courses, and thus they approach these courses in a positive manner. The positive attitude of the five interview participants could be due to their positive attitude towards the IELTS test, which was discernable during the classroom observations and interviews.

Nevertheless, negative attitudes by some of the participating teachers were also reported. Contrary to the positive attitude of the majority of the questionnaire participants in response to statement # 16, 13 teachers (31%) disagreed/strongly disagreed that IELTS preparation courses are effective in improving English. This negative attitude might have stemmed from teachers' negative beliefs about the IELTS test itself. In addition, 11 (26%) teachers' chose the neutral option. The open-ended questionnaire responses showing negative attitude of IELTS teachers towards IELTS preparation courses are presented in Table 23. In response to question # 21, the teachers reported what they disliked about teaching IELTS.

Table 23: Questionnaire Participants' Negative Attitudes toward IELTS Preparation Courses

Themes	Quotes
Time constraints	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students not finishing tasks in time which makes it harder for them on the exam day.</li> <li>2. Short period, intensive too much to cover in a short time</li> <li>3. There are always time restraints in most IELTS training courses which puts pressure on the teacher as well as the students.</li> <li>4. There is never enough time to cover the material that you wish to cover.</li> <li>5. Students' misconception of the duration of the course; they believe it is a couple of days.</li> </ol>
Unrealistic expectations from preparation courses	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students have unrealistic expectations.</li> <li>2. Dealing with students that think you have a magic wand! Proof! They get what band they want!</li> <li>3. Unrealistic expectations from learners.</li> </ol>

---

Teaching of certain tasks/ Monotonous nature of the test prep. courses	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Learners have unrealistic expectations of their score or what they can achieve.</li> <li>5. Student demands on instructor. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Marking the writing!</li> <li>2. Teaching Task 1 Writing Teaching reading using texts beyond the students' reading competence</li> <li>3. I dislike teaching writing because it so demanding, and requires a lot of marking of drafts to help them sculpt their writing.</li> <li>4. Not enough vocabulary words given to practice</li> <li>5. Like anything, teaching the same topic over and over again can get tiresome.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
Teaching to the test/ lack of language improvement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Courses are often book bound and so the learners expect that they will use (and most likely finish) the book. Quite often, it would be better to use alternatives or no book at all.</li> <li>2. I like to teach language, not test-taking strategies. Students need to prepare for writing &amp; reading in English at AUS. Too much time is given to teaching IELTS. There is so much misalignment when students get to their major. We should be helping them in reading and writing, and some listening and speaking. These will help students. Knowing how to take an English language test doesn't prepare students for the major. Too much investment is given in teaching tests, instead of focusing on language learning. More time spent on test preparation</li> <li>3. Teaching "to the test".</li> <li>4. It involves too much talking and requires plenty of practice time</li> <li>5. If a student is not ready to pass the exam, he/she is weak in general English, then too much to do.....</li> <li>6. Teaching students to the test does not help students. They remember strategies of test taking, not so much the language in itself.</li> </ol>
Number and level of students in IELTS classes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Classes with students of mixed strengths and weaknesses - some stronger in listening, while some stronger in speaking etc. It can be difficult to provide students with individual feedback.</li> <li>2. Candidates who insist on taking my preparation course though they are far from the IELTS test caliber.</li> </ol>

---

- 
3. Most low level courses aren't fit for purpose.
  4. Have to teach both exams in one lesson (Gen + Academic).
- 

It can be seen in Table 23 that 5 teachers (12%) said IELTS courses have time constraints and are intensive, showing negative attitudes of these teachers. Additionally, 5 teachers (12%) stated that students have unrealistic expectation of IELTS courses, while 5 teachers (12%) said they dislike teaching certain skills, such as Writing Task 1 and Reading. With respect to teaching to the test, 6 teachers (14%) stated that IELTS courses are focused on teaching of test tasks and not much attention is paid to language development. Also, 4 teachers (10%) showed negative attitudes due to the number and level of students in IELTS classes. One of these five teachers said there should be fewer students in IELTS classes, whereas another teacher stated it is not feasible to provide individual feedback to all students due to having mixed ability students in one class.

One interview participant, namely P2, also expressed some concerns about the effectiveness of the IELTS courses in developing students' language. When P2 was asked about her attitude towards IELTS preparation courses, she responded by saying:

I feel there's a bit of sense of frustration here because I'd like more hours put in because of students...45 minutes is not enough three times a week to do test strategies, particularly when students' language level is weak, so I'd like to do a lot more language as well as strategies. So there's a bit of frustration there because of the timing issue and the...language level of the students.

Since the IELTS organization does not make any claims about the effectiveness of IELTS preparation courses, teachers' positive or negative attitudes toward IELTS preparation courses can be said to have originated from their positive or negative perceptions about the IELTS test, their experiences in teaching IELTS courses, or other personal factors, such as their own language learning experiences. However, the effectiveness of IELTS preparation courses has been questioned in research and has been shown to depend on the positive or negative attitudes of teachers towards test preparation courses (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Chappell, Bodis, & Jackson, 2015), causing positive or negative washback in IELTS classes.

Table 24 summarizes the findings about the washback effects of the IELTS on teachers' cognition.

Table 24: Washback Effects of the IELTS Test on Teachers' Cognition

Positive washback effects on teachers' beliefs and attitudes	Negative washback effects on teachers' beliefs and attitudes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IELTS classes are more successful than other courses.</li> <li>• Integration of language skills in IELTS classes is important.</li> <li>• IELTS courses help improve language skills.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on teaching test-taking strategies is considered pivotal in IELTS classes.</li> <li>• Time constraints and students' unrealistic expectations force teachers to focus on test-taking skills.</li> <li>• IELTS courses are not beneficial in improving language skills.</li> </ul>

### Washback on Teaching Practices in IELTS Classes

The way teachers teach in IELTS preparation courses is also reflective of their cognition about the IELTS test, and reveals washback effects of the IELTS test in conjunction with other teacher variables. This dimension of teachers' cognition and the washback effects on it were explored using the questionnaire and interviews, as well as class observations. Table 24 shows responses to questionnaire statements about IELTS teachers' pedagogy in IELTS classes.

Table 25: IELTS Teachers' Teaching Methodology in IELTS Classes

No.	Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
9	Teaching reading comprehension in IELTS classes is different from the non-IELTS classes.	11	20	8	2	1
13	I use previous IELTS tests for practice in the IELTS classes.	24	15	2	1	0

Table 25 shows that when teachers were asked about teaching reading in IELTS and non-IELTS classes, 31 teachers (74%) said they strongly agree/agree that

teaching reading in IELTS classes is different than in non-IELTS classes, whereas 3 teachers (7%) teachers said they disagree/strongly disagree with this statement. Interestingly, 8 teachers (19%) also chose the neutral option. When their demographic information was examined, it was found that 6 of these 8 neutral teachers range in experience from 0 to 10 years. However, 2 of the 8 teachers have experience of 11-16+ years in teaching IELTS. Of these 8 teachers, 3 are IELTS examiners, and 4 of them have received training in teaching IELTS. These discrepancies in teachers' responses might be due to the differences in individual teacher variables, such as their education, their training, and experience in teaching IELTS.

When the interview participants were asked if there are differences in teaching reading in IELTS and non-IELTS classes, the teachers reported the following reasons, as outlined in Table 26.

Table 26: Reasons for Differences in Teaching Reading in IELTS and Non-IELTS Classes

No.	Reasons
1	There are differences in question types in a normal reading class.
2	The length of the reading passages is different from the texts normally utilized in non-IELTS classes. In the IELTS, it's completely different. You have 3 long reading passages....while in the regular courses, could be 150 words only.
3	The specific objective in IELTS reading is to read faster and answer the questions, whereas in non-IELTS reading classes, overall comprehension of reading texts is usually the goal.
4	There are time constraints, since it is an exam preparation.
5	Students do not enjoy reading in IELTS classes while in non-IELTS classes, students are more relaxed. In IELTS classes, reading is not for pleasure but for a purpose.

It can be observed in Table 26 that the interviewees consider differences in teaching of reading in IELTS and non-IELTS to be due to the types of questions used in the passages, the length of the reading passages, as well as the objectives of reading in two types of courses. Moreover, one of the interviewees said that students do not enjoy reading in IELTS classes.

Additionally, the interview participants stated that teaching reading is different in IELTS classes because various strategies, such as skimming and scanning, are taught to answer the questions in the IELTS reading section. P2 added that “most reading books tend to look at overall comprehension whereas IELTS tends to look at not just comprehension but different reading strategies that are not common in most of the books.” Discussing one of the reading strategies, P2 stated that “we [are] just reading...the first line, last line to find the answers very quickly, that’s not comprehension, that’s a strategy.” Therefore, teachers’ knowledge about the differences in teaching reading can be said to be affected by the IELTS test itself, since the online *IELTS Guide for Teachers* (2015) also suggests teaching skimming and scanning strategies for preparing the students for the reading section of the IELTS test. However, the guide does not suggest reading the first and second lines as a reading strategy, thus making it a test-taking strategy altogether. Hence, teachers’ teaching practices in this regard seem to be negatively affected by their own cognition about the test, as seen in the findings for the first research question that the IELTS test influences teachers’ beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes, which in turn affect teachers’ decision-making in IELTS classes .

The next statement in the questionnaire that investigated teachers’ teaching practices in IELTS preparation courses and the washback effects was about the use of previous IELTS tests for practice (statement # 13). Table 26 shows that 39 teachers (93%) strongly agreed/agreed that they used old IELTS tests for practice in IELTS classes, while only 1 teacher (2%) showed disagreement, and 2 teachers (5%) gave no opinion. The use of previous IELTS tests by the large majority of the teachers reveals teachers’ negative teaching practices in IELTS preparation classes, which could be based on their beliefs about and their attitudes towards IELTS courses. Although the *IELTS Guide for Teachers* (2015) recommends “timed practice in class” (p. 13), it does not encourage or discourage the use of previous IELTS tests for practicing the test skills in class. However, it does promote a balance between teaching language and test-taking skills.

In addition to the responses in the questionnaire and interviews, in the classroom observations it was seen that test practice was the focus of all the lessons that were observed, showing a negative influence of the IELTS test on teaching and learning in IELTS preparation courses. The teachers utilized old practice tests from

the internet or the books published by Cambridge. Therefore, it could be possible that the high-stakes nature of the IELTS test, and its implementation in the UAE context are at least partially responsible for such negative washback effect on teaching. Not only were the interview participants observed using old practice tests, the majority of the questionnaire participants (93%) also reported that they use previous IELTS test for practice in IELTS classes. This suggests a highly negative effect of the pressure felt by students and teachers about the IELTS test in IELTS preparation classes, which mainly focus on test practice and not language development. If there is language development, it is kept to the minimum. These teachers also believe that test practice is more important than language development. This might be because of teachers' beliefs that it is a test preparation course and not a language development course, as mentioned by P5 and P6, who argued that IELTS preparation courses are time oriented and there is no time to develop language in such courses.

Regarding the time constraints, P6's view seemed strongly influenced by the IELTS test. Discussing the effectiveness of IELTS preparation courses, he said:

I feel most IELTS preparation courses focus on correctness, and they focus on language development and that's not proper because when someone is taking a prep course that means they have an exam. It is imminent. There's no time to develop language, there's only time to practice and understand the test.

This concern was also raised by other interview and questionnaire participants as well. For instance, P5 stated:

IELTS is not a course because you know we don't have much time. It's not a course to improve English as a major objective. So you need to meet with the requirements here, and the demand is that we need to pass our test.

In addition to teaching test practice, P5's class observation showed the teaching of test tricks that might help raise students' scores in the IELTS test. While teaching Listening Section 3, P5 highlighted how changes in stress and intonation could help students identify the answers in the listening section. Although teaching of stress and intonation in IELTS classes could be useful, P5's response to the rationale for teaching stress and intonation suggests negative washback effects of the IELTS test on teaching and learning in his class. In his response to what was the rationale for teaching stress and intonation in the listening section, P5 said:

It helps a lot because based on the exams that I practiced myself, the trick is very simple...when there is an answer and when there is a key word, intonation normally changes and you just find the test targeting that word that you need. So intonation normally and stress, they definitely help in knowing the answers in the listening test because those who designed the test, I think the design goes this way, when there's something important, they just like change their voice plus the linking word... I mean the signpost word that you might use.

P5's rationale for using such an activity suggests a negative washback effect in IELTS preparation classes, trying to teach tricks to the students which might raise their scores on the test but not students' language levels.

Furthermore, some teachers in this study indicated that they think that teaching of English language elements, such as vocabulary and grammar, is not beneficial in IELTS preparation courses or they are not taught in such courses. One such view was observed by P6, who said:

I have developed and honed my own particular course over many years. In doing so, I have found that the most effective way to improve a student's level is to forego the English language elements, and simply focus on a combination of test knowledge, and practical activities, with a goal of developing a level of familiarity with the test that allows the test takers focus more fully on their performance.

P6's viewpoint about the teaching of vocabulary and grammar shows he prefers to focus on test-taking skills over language development in IELTS preparation courses. The excessive focus on teaching test-taking skills could be due to the IELTS test design being unfamiliar to students, the stakes associated with the IELTS test in the UAE, teachers' or students' aim to focus on raising the test scores rather than developing the language skills, or teachers' beliefs that the teaching of test-taking skills could raise the scores, given the limited time durations in IELTS preparation courses.

In contrast, some interviewees considered teaching of vocabulary and grammar to be significant in IELTS classes. In her interview, P4 stated that grammar is the "glue" to language and therefore, it is important to teach it in IELTS preparation classes. Her classroom observation also revealed that she focused considerably on vocabulary and grammar in her class. P2 also stated that she teaches vocabulary in her

IELTS classes, and it was observed in her class observation. Thus, such approaches by these teachers showed potentially positive effects of the IELTS test on these teachers' pedagogy in IELTS preparation classes, reflecting the integration of vocabulary in all sections of IELTS, as mentioned in the *IELTS Guide for Teachers* (2015) that there is an element of integration in all sections of IELTS.

Positive effects on teaching practices were also observed in teaching of language elements in context, such as vocabulary and grammar in reading and writing in the classes of P1, P2, P3, and P4, as suggested in the *IELTS Guide for Teachers* (2015). These participants, when observed, clarified the meaning of different words by explaining the meanings of some of the words in the reading texts, by highlighting their use in sentences for writing, or by reading aloud the text, as seen in the case of P3's class observation. Moreover, positive washback effects were also observed in the use of eliciting and scaffolding techniques by the interview participants in their classroom observations. When P4 was asked about the reasons for using eliciting and scaffolding techniques, she said that "scaffolding and eliciting is to make them think on their own...I don't have to do it all the time for them but it is difficult for them because they're not the society that does this." This shows that this teacher is cognizant of the level of her students and attempts to build their knowledge of the English language. Therefore, it can be said that the IELTS test partially contributes in positive washback due to its communicative nature and integration of vocabulary and grammar in all four sections (listening, reading, writing, and speaking).

**Washback on the choice of content.** Teachers in this research reported that the choice of content in IELTS preparation courses is strongly influenced by the IELTS test format, as mentioned earlier. The responses of questionnaire participants as well as the interview participants reveal that the IELTS test inadvertently affects the choice of content by the teachers in IELTS preparation courses. Regarding the choice of content (see Table 4), 37 (88%) of the questionnaire participants stated that the IELTS test influences their choice of content. This phenomenon was also observed during the class observations of all the six teachers who used either the IELTS practice tests or online activities which were based on the content and format of the IELTS test, demonstrating negative effects of the IELTS test on teaching in IELTS preparation courses, despite the suggested use of authentic material in *IELTS Guide for Teachers* (2015).

Additionally, when the interview participants were asked about their choice of content in IELTS preparation courses, they all agreed that the IELTS test strongly influences their choice of material because they have to prepare students for the test and ascertain that students are familiar with the test content. However, the use of authentic material by P2 and P3 in their teaching of reading implies positive washback effects on these teachers' teaching practices in IELTS classes.

**Washback on the choice of methodology.** Similar to comments about the effects of the IELTS test on choice of content, both questionnaire and interview participants reported that their choice of methodology is influenced by the IELTS test. Among 42 questionnaire participants (see Table 4), 30 participants (71%) stated that their choice of pedagogy is based on the IELTS test. When the interview participants were asked about the reasons why they think the IELTS test influences their choice of methodology, different responses were encountered. For example, P1 said, "Of course, it's very different because with IELTS you specify, you have to teach the strategies, you don't teach English. With other courses, no, you teach English." Another interview participant, P3, stated that the test definitely affects his methodology in IELTS preparation courses. Explaining his method, he stated:

In a general English course, I would do...specific grammar or vocab classes. In IELTS you cannot do that. You know I'm doing a speaking class and I'll say ok part 3 of the interview if you speak using conditionals or modal verbs, that's gonna get you higher band so today let's have a look at the conditional and I'll do a grammar lesson but always related to the specific part of the test where it might be useful.

P2 stated that familiarity with the IELTS test affects her methodology. When asked about the reasons, she said:

Of course because you have more knowledge and more background and more ideas of ...how it's [IELTS test] been written? Have you understood what is the goal of a reading multiple choice or true/false//not given? And what they should do? Then of course you reinforce that skill through lots of practice in class, knowing how important that is.

Discussing the effects of IELTS test on teaching methodology in IELTS classes, P5 stated:

In the IELTS exam, it's a different world. You have no grammar part even though you need to show them that grammar is important for writing. So you just give them extra sheets for that to review.... I mean while in the class, you diagnose areas of weakness. If you find some learners have issues with past, present perfect, you just give them worksheets while in the regular class, you need to explain those to them.

Commenting on the reasons why there is a difference in methodology in IELTS classes, P5 stated it was "because you have the test." P5 further added:

I don't want to have the feeling that we're teaching to test but for IELTS, we do. I mean for regular English classes, no...we just teach them to have fun...but for IELTS, you have a book, you have like 30 hours or 36 hours. You have a lot of tasks to finish and I think learners are not very into the idea of having fun, they want to finish [the course] at that stage into their lives.

However, P6, consistent with his beliefs about language teaching, said that the test does not influence his methodology in IELTS preparation courses, approaching both IELTS and non-IELTS courses in a similar manner. Still, P6 did mention that he views these courses "from the perspective of an examiner, examinee and so...when I wasn't an official IELTS examiner, I still approached [the IELTS courses] like I was an examiner." P6 added:

[The IELTS test] does affect [your methodology] in terms of your insight into the exam unless.... It has to do with test knowledge. Do you know how the test functions? What's actually being tested? When you know all these details, then you can properly approach it in the classroom. For example, while students do Task 1 Writing, the teachers will teach them how to describe data, increase, decrease.. .whatever, but they don't ever teach them how to interpret the data, how to develop an overview, to describe... so they can see what's the chart is about, but they can't say what the chart shows.

Regarding the methodology for IELTS preparation, the *IELTS Guide for Teachers* (2015) does not suggest a particular method for teaching in IELTS preparation courses. However, the guide does state that "teaching techniques for IELTS include presenting language elements such as grammar and vocabulary in a wider context" (p. 12). Moreover, it is stated in the *IELTS Guide for Teachers* that "the way IELTS results are reported makes it easy for teachers [to] see which areas of a learner's language skills need to be developed, and helps them set learners clear goals and objectives" (p. 12). Hence, it can be said that the teaching methods in IELTS classes may rely on approaches which teachers perceive as appropriate for

teaching in IELTS classes based on the demands of the IELTS test courses, but would be suited to the context of the IELTS test preparation courses. Consequently, the methodology used by teachers in IELTS preparation classes may reflect what and how teachers perceive their students' language abilities as well as their attitude towards IELTS preparation courses.

In general, the responses of the questionnaire and interview participants reveal both positive and negative effects of the IELTS test on teachers' pedagogy in IELTS preparation courses. Nonetheless, the IELTS test itself may not be solely responsible for such positive or negative effects. Rather, teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the IELTS test, their experiences in teaching IELTS, and their training in teaching IELTS, or lack of thereof, might be responsible for positive or negative washback effects on teachers' methodology in IELTS classes.

**Washback on the choice of activities.** The six interview participants were asked about what kind of activities they employ in IELTS and non-IELTS classes. Similar responses were observed, and almost all participants stated that they use a variety of activities in both types of courses. P1, for example, said she prefers presentations by the students about the different sections of the IELTS test, use of a dictionary to find the meaning of words or playing the game of "hangman" for vocabulary. However, P1 did say that since she is more relaxed in non-IELTS classes, therefore she can give students "more jigsaws and drilling for the grammar." P2 said that she would prefer to use a variety of activities, but it depends on the skills being taught at the time of teaching. An example activity described by P2 is as follows:

If we're looking at Writing Task 1, I would like to obviously introduce the whole language of trends, and then we'll look at samples that are there at the moment in newspapers or there is an app you can download where they make their own graphs, looking at male-female ratio in the class, where they are from...and then be able to explain it using either comparative language if it's a bar chart, pie using percentages or a line graph with trends.

Contrasting the activities in non-IELTS classes, P2 said that "when you have a language class, there has to be a goal...Sometimes it's just awareness of the world, sometimes it is language, sometimes it's a specific skill." P3, P4, P5, and P6 all mentioned that they use communicative, collaborative activities in both types of courses, such as group work, pair work, use of videos, and games. Hence, it could be

inferred that these teachers attempt to employ a wide range of activities in IELTS courses for teaching for the test. The use of certain activities might be reflective of teachers' belief systems and their attitudes towards the IELTS test, though, as discussed in the previous sections.

Although all the interviewees reported that they use collaborative, communicative activities in class, their observed class activities were mainly focused on the practice of the test. There were no student-student interactions in the classes of P1, P4 and P5, with minimal student-student interactions in the classes of P2 and P3. This suggests a negative influence of the IELTS test on the use of activities by these teachers, since they used non-communicative activities with minimal focus on language development. Only in the class observation of P6, was there interaction between students observed in the use of communicative activities for teaching Speaking Part 2. Although the IELTS test is designed on communicative functions of the English language, not employing collaborative activities in IELTS preparation classes influences the effectiveness of the IELTS preparation classes in promoting language development.

Table 27 summarizes the findings about the washback effects of the IELTS test on teachers' reported and observed teaching practices in IELTS classes.

Table 27: Washback Effects of the IELTS Test on Teaching Practices

Positive washback on teaching	Negative washback on teaching
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching of grammar and vocabulary in IELTS classes.</li> <li>• Teaching of language elements in context (reading and writing).</li> <li>• Use of communicative activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching of grammar and vocabulary considered insignificant.</li> <li>• Focus on practicing the previous IELTS tests and test tasks.</li> <li>• Choice of content is strongly influenced by the IELTS test.</li> <li>• Material used in IELTS classes is mainly based on previous IELTS tests and test tasks.</li> <li>• Choice of methodology is based on the IELTS test preparation.</li> <li>• Use of non-communicative activities in IELTS courses.</li> </ul>

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

This chapter analyzes the findings from Chapter Four and discusses these findings according to the main recurrent themes that were highlighted during the data analysis process as well as previous research studies discussed in Chapter Two. The discussion of the results is presented according to the research questions, as were the findings in Chapter Four.

### **Discussion of IELTS Teachers' Cognition and Its Accuracy**

The results for the first two research questions reveal that the majority of the teachers have adequate and accurate knowledge about the different sections of the IELTS test and the various question types that are included in those sections of the tests. These findings are in line with the findings reported in earlier studies (Chappell, Bodis, & Jackson, 2015; Saif, 2006; Tsagari, 2009). Moreover, IELTS teachers' knowledge about the content and format of the test is mostly in agreement with the design of the test and the claims made by the IELTS test developers. Nevertheless, some of these teachers seem to have incorrect knowledge about the content and format of the IELTS test, which might be due to individual teacher variables, such as their level of education, lack of training in teaching IELTS, and years of experience in teaching IELTS, as also pointed out by Chappell, Bodis, and Jackson (2015) in their study of IELTS teachers' cognition. Lack of knowledge about the IELTS test in the case of experienced teachers could be influenced by their beliefs and attitudes towards the IELTS test.

Furthermore, it was observed in the findings section that both questionnaire and interview participants have good knowledge about the overall purpose of the IELTS test, and its particular purposes in the UAE. However, inaccuracies in teachers' knowledge about the purpose of the IELTS test in general, such as use for prediction of skills and its specific purposes in the UAE (its use for making the UAE population bilingual) were also noticed. Again, the inaccuracies in the knowledge about the purposes of the IELTS test might be due in part to teachers' lack of knowledge about the underlying principles of the IELTS test design and their beliefs about the IELTS. This finding was also highlighted by Chappell, Bodis, and Jackson (2015) in their study of IELTS teachers' cognition.

With respect to teachers' beliefs and perceptions, teachers have different belief systems, and their perceptions of IELTS test and teaching in IELTS preparation courses are based on these belief systems, as maintained by Chappell, Bodis, and Jackson (2015) and Kiomrs et al. (2011). Teachers in this present study believed that their choice of content is affected by the IELTS test, which was also reported in research studies done in the past (Chappell, Bodis, & Jackson, 2015; Cheng, 2004; Erfani, 2012, 2014; Green, 2006a, 2006b; Wall, 2005). Additionally, both questionnaire and interview participants in the present research further reported that their choice of methodology is influenced by the IELTS test. However, the IELTS test was not found to affect the methodology of IELTS teachers to a great extent in the case of findings reported by Chappell, Bodis, and Jackson (2015) or Cheng (2005).

With respect to motivational influences, less than half of the questionnaire participants (17 teachers) believed that the IELTS test motivates both students and teachers in different ways, such as enhancing students' as well as teachers' knowledge, and learners having clear goals and objectives. On the other hand, almost half of the questionnaire participants (20 teachers) perceived the IELTS test to be stressful for their students because of the type of materials/tasks utilized in the test. These findings also concur with prior research on washback effects of IELTS test (Chappell, Bodis, & Jackson, 2015)

Furthermore, the questionnaire and interview responses indicate that these 42 IELTS teachers seem to have both positive and negative attitudes towards the IELTS test, a finding that concurs with the results of other studies (Chappell, Bodis, & Jackson, 2015; Lewthwaite, 2007; Salehi, Yunus, & Salehi, 2012; Watanabe, 2004). These positive and negative attitudes of teachers might be due to the effects of the IELTS test, since high-stakes exams influence teachers' feelings (Spratt, 2005), as well as due to teachers' educational qualifications and their level of training in teaching the IELTS test (Li, 2009). Hence, these beliefs and attitudes vary depending on teachers' experiences in teaching IELTS and their past experiences with tests in particular, and teaching and learning in general.

## **Discussion of the Reflection of IELTS Teachers' Cognition in Their Teaching Practices**

The results for the third research question demonstrate the relationship of IELTS teachers' cognition with their teaching practices. Despite a high level of convergence between teachers' cognition and their classroom practices, there were also significant divergences in what teachers said they do and what they actually do in IELTS preparation classes, as also reported by Chappell, Bodis, and Jackson (2015) in their study of IELTS teachers' cognition and their teaching practices.

Regarding knowledge about the IELTS test, the results of the present research revealed that these teachers' knowledge about the test was reflected in their classroom observations through the discussion of theory of the different IELTS sections and question types in IELTS classes to a large extent. This finding was also reported by Mickan and Motteram (2008) in their study of teachers' pedagogy in IELTS preparation classes, where teachers provided information about the IELTS test's format to students.

However, in the current study the six IELTS teachers' claimed teaching approaches were not very well reflected in their class observations. Out of the six participants who were observed and interviewed, only P6 showed convergence of his reported methodology used in IELTS classes with his classroom practices while P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 showed incongruence between their claimed teaching approaches and their actual observed practices in their IELTS classes. This might be attributed to teachers' beliefs about the usefulness of the IELTS test, as Qi (2004) and Chappell, Bodis, and Jackson (2015) maintain that teachers' beliefs about the usefulness of a test guide their classroom practices. In addition, teachers' attitudes towards test preparation courses could also result in teaching practices that are incongruent with their beliefs, since teachers' cognition guided teachers' practices (Burns, Edwards, & Freeman, 2015).

With regards to teacher beliefs about the IELTS test and IELTS preparation courses, significant differences were observed between these 42 teachers' beliefs and perceptions about the IELTS test and the test preparation courses, and their teaching practices in IELTS classes, a finding also revealed by Chappell, Bodis, and Jackson (2015). Such differences between teachers' beliefs and practices could be because of

the effect of the IELTS test on teachers' beliefs, since high-stakes tests mediate the congruency of teachers' beliefs to their teaching practices (Kiomrs et al., 2011; Mendoza & Arandia, 2009; Phipps & Borg, 2009).

In addition, the results revealed that various external contextual factors, such as students' language levels, time constraints, teacher-student interactions, situational constraints, and classroom context affected the level of congruity between teachers' beliefs and their actions in class. Similar findings were reported by Basturkmen (2012), and Borg (2006). Phips and Borg (2009) and Farrell and Ives (2015) in their studies also revealed divergences in teachers' beliefs and their teaching practices, which they argued were the result of teachers' belief sub-systems and the different forces influencing teachers' thinking and behavior in class.

The results of classroom observations and interviews demonstrate that the current study's IELTS teachers' beliefs about effective methods of teaching in IELTS preparation courses were not according to what they mentioned in the interviews, which also concurs with the findings reported by Chappell, Bodis, and Jackson (2015). This might be because of the varied understandings of teachers about the IELTS test and its purpose, as observed in these 42 teachers' questionnaire and interview responses. Wall and Alderson (1993) also maintain that teachers' understanding of the test and its purpose guide their practices in test preparation courses.

However, in the present study the majority of observed teachers' beliefs (5 out of 6) about teaching test-taking strategies were reflected in their classroom practices. The conformity of these teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices in this respect could be attributed to their experience in teaching IELTS (five out of the six participants had experience ranging from 6 to 16+ years), since congruence between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices vary based on whether a teacher is a veteran or a novice (Basturkmen, 2012).

As with these IELTS teachers' beliefs and perceptions, their reported attitudes were also not very well demonstrated in their classroom practices. Most of the interview participants reported having positive attitudes toward IELTS and IELTS preparation courses but showed a disparity between what they said and what they did during class observations. P4 and P5 said they love IELTS and IELTS preparation

courses, yet showed more negative attitudes in their IELTS preparation classes, since their classroom observations showed a stressful environment, which could be due to their lack of training in teaching IELTS, a possibility suggested by Chappell, Bodis, and Jackson (2015). It should be acknowledged, however, that the observer effect could also be a possible factor, resulting in lack of consistency between teachers' reported attitudes and observed attitudes.

Contrary to the incongruence between P4's and P5's attitudes and their classroom practices, the other four participants' (P1, P2, P3, and P6) classroom practices were reflective of their positive attitudes towards the IELTS test and IELTS preparation courses, which could be because of their training in teaching IELTS as well as their experience in teaching IELTS courses, as teachers' level of training for teaching the test, their teaching philosophy and personal preferences mediate their classroom practices (Li, 2009).

### **Discussion of the Washback Effects on IELTS Teachers' Cognition and Their Teaching Practices**

The findings for the fourth research question indicate more negative than positive washback effects of the IELTS test on teachers' cognition and teaching practices. This finding is in line with the results of research studies done in the past (Chappell, Bodis, & Jackson, 2015; Erfani, 2012, 2014; Green, 2006a, 2006b; Mickan & Motteram, 2008; Read & Hayes, 2004; Zafarhandi & Nemati, 2015). As far as the washback on teachers' use of various teaching approaches in the present study is concerned, teaching methodology was negatively influenced by the IELTS test, which was evident in their use of non-communicative approaches for teaching for the IELTS test. These results agree with the findings by Mickan and Motteram (2008), who studied IELTS teachers' pedagogy in IELTS preparation courses in the Australian ELICOS sector. Mickan and Motteram reported that teachers were teaching the four skills separately, and the nature of the classroom activities resembled test tasks and were non-communicative, similar to the findings in the present study. However, it must be recognized that it is unknown what these teachers' practices in the current study would be apart from IELTS.

Regarding this study's findings about these IELTS teachers' beliefs about the effectiveness of IELTS courses, it is seen that these teachers have mixed beliefs about

the usefulness of the IELTS courses. Qi (2004) also mentioned that beliefs about a test's usefulness guide teachers' teaching practices in test preparation courses, and thus may lead to either positive or negative washback in test preparation classes.

The results of this study also demonstrated that teachers' teaching approaches used in IELTS preparation courses rely on IELTS teachers' knowledge about the IELTS and their level of familiarity with the test design and its underlying principles. This finding was also reported in studies done by Chappell, Bodis, and Jackson (2015) and Tsagari (2009).

Additionally, teachers' teaching approaches in this study were found to be tied to their beliefs and attitudes towards the IELTS and IELTS preparation courses, which concurs with the findings of earlier studies (Chappell, Bodis, & Jackson, 2015; Green, 2006a, 2006b, Kiomrs et al., 2011; Salehi, Yunus, & Salehi, 2012). The results of present research show that teachers utilized a wide variety of approaches. Similarly, variation in teacher knowledge about the teaching methods, and the time allocated to different skills in IELTS classes was also reported by Chapell, Bodis, and Jackson (2015) and Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) in their studies of washback of high-stakes tests.

In addition, the results of the present research demonstrate that these teachers primarily focused on teaching test-taking strategies, further evidence of negative washback identified by different researchers in the past (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Chappell, Bodis & Jackson, 2015; Erfani, 2012, 2014; Pan, 2013; Rashidi & Javanmardi, 2011; Tsagari, 2009; Wall & Alderson, 1993) in their studies of high-stakes tests. In the current study, the teachers' teaching of test-taking strategies in IELTS preparation classes was to raise the students' IELTS test scores. However, Madaus (1988) maintains that such practices would not help in developing students' language abilities, even if increasing scores. The overemphasis on teaching of test-taking skills might also be because of these 42 IELTS teachers' beliefs about the significance of teaching these strategies, a view also reported by Tsagari (2009), Wall (2005), and Zafarghandi and Nemati (2015). The importance given to teaching test-taking strategies in the present research could also be due to teachers' attitudes (positive or negative) toward the IELTS test, as highlighted by Burns, Edwards, and

Freeman (2015) and Spratt (2005) who say that teachers' attitudes mediate the positive or negative washback in test preparation courses.

Regarding the use of old practice tests in IELTS preparation courses, the results of this study demonstrate that these IELTS teachers seem to believe that the use of practice tests could enhance the scores of the students in the IELTS exam. The use of practice tests by a large majority of these IELTS teachers (93%) seems to reflect Madaus's (1988) claim that teachers use previous test questions to prepare the students to meet the demands of a test, and the examinees are drilled in the use of strategies to practice for the exam. Erfani's (2014) comparative study on IELTS and TOEFL iBT also showed that test practice and test-taking strategies were highly valued by the teachers in preparing students to achieve the required scores in both tests.

The use of old practice tests (in the current study), with a focus on test-type items, again reveals negative washback effects of the IELTS test, since the *IELTS Guide for Teachers* (2015) suggests teaching a combination of language skills and test taking skills without over-emphasis on test practice. Similar findings were reported by Hayes and Read (2004), Rashidi and Javanmardi (2011), and Zafarghandi and Nemati (2015) in their washback studies of the IELTS test, all of whom showed that teachers were focusing more on practicing the test tasks. Tsagari's (2009) and Pan's (2013) washback studies also revealed negative washback effects, where teachers extensively utilized exam preparatory material, resulting in negative washback.

Furthermore, the results of this study show that the teachers seemed to have both positive and negative attitudes towards IELTS preparation courses, as reflected in their classroom practices. However, more negative attitudes were reported and observed in the IELTS classes, demonstrating undesirable washback effects in the IELTS classes. This finding concurs with the findings of the previous studies (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Chappell, Bodis, & Jackson, 2015; Lewthwaite, 2007). For example, P5 stated that IELTS preparation courses should not focus on language development, but rather on teaching to the test. This reported negative attitude could be due to the influence of the IELTS test on P5's beliefs and attitudes, his previous language learning experiences, and his experience with the IELTS test. In contrast, the very positive attitude of P3 could again be attributed to his experience in

writing the material for such preparation courses and his experience in teaching IELTS, as well as his past learning experiences. Such negative or positive attitudes, factors affecting teachers' attitudes, and the subsequent positive or negative washback effects have been reported in earlier research studies as well (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Chappell, Bodis, & Jackson; Green 2006a, 2006b; Li, 2009).

The use of repetitious activities with minimal student-student interaction was seen in the classroom observations to the detriment of language development, revealing undesirable negative washback effect due to the high-stakes nature of the IELTS test, and subsequent emphasis on increasing test scores. This same effect has also been shown by Mickan and Motteram's (2008) study of teachers' teaching methods, indicating the use of monotonous activities with a focus on test practice and test talk by the teachers, with minimal student participation.

However, a few positive washback effects were observed in the case of the teaching of vocabulary and grammar by some of the interview participants. This finding concurs with the findings reported by Chappell, Bodis, and Jackson (2015). The use of eliciting and scaffolding techniques by some of the interview participants to help build students' knowledge in IELTS classes was also a positive influence of the IELTS test on teaching and learning in IELTS classes, as was also observed in Mickan and Motteram's (2008) study.

In conclusion, the results of the present research are mostly in line with the research findings discussed in Chapter Two. The findings of this study reveal a strong connection between teachers' cognition and their IELTS teaching practices, and the phenomenon of washback in IELTS preparation courses. Therefore, it can be inferred that the IELTS test has a strong influence on teachers' knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes, and in turn, on their teaching practices in IELTS preparation courses. However, it is recognized that in addition to the influence of the IELTS test, other external factors could also have affected these teachers' cognition and their teaching practices, such as time constraints and students' language levels, as well as their prior language teaching/learning experiences.

## **CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

This chapter presents the conclusion of this research with an overview of the major findings, according to the four research questions. Moreover, implications of these findings are discussed, followed by limitations of the research and suggestions for further research.

### **First Research Question**

What is IELTS teachers' cognition (knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes) about IELTS?

The purpose of the first research question was to examine the cognition (knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes) IELTS teachers in the present study possess toward the IELTS test. The results for the first research question showed that these IELTS teachers have varied cognition about the IELTS test. Regarding the teachers' knowledge about the content and format of the IELTS test, the data indicate that the majority of these IELTS teachers have satisfactory knowledge about the various IELTS test sections and question types, i.e., 32 teachers (76%) about vocabulary and grammar in IELTS, 38 teachers (90%) about the speaking section, 37 teachers (88%) about the listening section, and 41 teachers (98%) about the writing section in IELTS test. Nevertheless, some IELTS teachers (5 teachers [2 questionnaire participants and 3 interview respondents], 12%) have inadequate knowledge about the purpose of the IELTS test.

Regarding these IELTS teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes, they have varying beliefs about and attitudes toward the IELTS test. It was found that the majority of the questionnaire (30 teachers) and all six interview participants believe that the IELTS test is appropriate for measuring the English language proficiency of candidates. However, more teachers (20 teachers) perceive IELTS test to be stressful than motivating (17 teachers) for their students. These results reveal that they believe the IELTS test content and difficulty level are challenging for students. In particular, reading and writing are deemed highly strenuous for students in the UAE, thus causing unwanted stress to students.

In addition, these teachers have both negative and positive attitudes toward the IELTS test. On one hand, positive attitudes included the perceptions that IELTS is a

goal-oriented and result-oriented test, serves a purpose in the UAE, and is a fair reflection of students' overall English abilities. On the other hand, negative perceptions and attitudes involved teachers criticizing the IELTS test, saying that it is ineffective in everyday life and fails to reflect the real language level of the candidates, and the tasks in the Reading section and Writing Task 1 tend to hold no interest for students.

Examination of these IELTS teachers' beliefs and attitudes about the effects of the IELTS on IELTS preparation courses demonstrated that a large proportion of the teachers (37 teachers) consider that the IELTS test strongly influences their choice of content. The six interview participants also reported that the IELTS test influences their choice of content in IELTS classes. Furthermore, out of the 42 survey participants, 30 teachers stated that the IELTS test affects their methodology in IELTS preparation courses. A large majority of IELTS teachers in the study were also found to have negative beliefs about the significance of test-taking strategies and test practice (35 and 39 teachers, respectively), considering teaching test-taking skills and doing test tasks to be more important than teaching communicative functions of the English language which might enhance students' band scores in the IELTS test.

Overall, the findings explored various dimensions of teachers' cognition (knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes) about the IELTS test. It is evident that there are dissimilarities in these IELTS teachers' cognition about the IELTS test in the UAE, resulting in disparities in teaching approaches in IELTS preparation courses.

### **Second Research Question**

How accurate is IELTS teachers' cognition about IELTS?

The second research question was aimed at establishing the accuracy of IELTS teachers' cognition about the IELTS test. It was found that the majority of IELTS teachers (ranging between 32 and 41) have quite precise knowledge about the different IELTS test sections. However, knowledge about the purpose of the IELTS test was not accurate in the case of three teachers. Moreover, teachers' teaching approaches in IELTS preparation courses were not according to the communicative approach of the IELTS exam, and thus seemed incorrect.

With respect to beliefs and perceptions about the IELTS test and IELTS preparation courses, the accuracy of the beliefs could not be determined, since beliefs and perceptions of IELTS teachers vary based on individual teachers' thought processes. Nonetheless, it can be said that teachers have more negative beliefs and perceptions about the IELTS test, which could be said to stem from their personal experiences with the IELTS test and IELTS preparation courses.

These IELTS teachers' attitudes towards the IELTS test were found to be both positive and negative, as reported in interviews and seen in their teaching practices in IELTS classes. Having a positive attitude could lead to better teaching practices, such as the use of more communicative approaches in class, as seen in the case of P6. On the other hand, having a negative attitude might lead to teaching to the test only and narrowing of teaching to test tasks practice, as observed in the class of P4.

### **Third Research Question**

To what extent is IELTS teachers' cognition about IELTS reflected in their IELTS classroom practices?

The analysis of the data in this research reveals that there is a considerable lack of correspondence between teachers' cognition and their actions in IELTS classes. While these IELTS teachers' knowledge about the IELTS test content was reflected in their teaching practices in IELTS classes, their teaching practices did not reflect the communicative approach of the IELTS test. Rather an inconsistency was observed between the observed IELTS teachers' stated beliefs and their classroom practices in IELTS courses. Their stated beliefs about effective methods of language teaching and teaching in IELTS classes were not observed during their class observations. However, these six teachers' beliefs about test-taking strategies were clearly seen in action in their IELTS classes.

Furthermore, the observed IELTS teachers' classroom practices did not reflect their stated attitudes towards IELTS and teaching in IELTS preparation courses. Although all the six interviewees reported they have a very positive attitude towards IELTS and IELTS preparation courses, yet it was not observed in the case of two interviewees, namely P4 and P5, in their IELTS classes.

A number of factors can influence the congruence of teachers' cognition and their teaching practices in IELTS classes, as highlighted by Borg (2006), who says that contextual factors mediate conformity of teachers' cognition to their teaching practices. It was found that contextual factors, such as time constraints, students' language levels in IELTS classes, and students' unrealistic expectations from IELTS preparation courses (in terms of raising their band scores) also led to incongruence between observed teachers' cognition and their actions in IELTS classes to a certain extent.

Hence, it can be concluded that these IELTS teachers showed conformity in their cognition in terms of their knowledge about the test. However, for the majority, their stated beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes were not consistent with their teaching practices in IELTS preparation courses.

#### **Fourth Research Question**

What evidence of washback from the IELTS is present in IELTS teachers' cognition and their teaching practices?

High-stakes tests, such as IELTS, are said to affect teachers' cognitive capacities and as a consequence, their actions in test preparation classes. After the analysis of the data, it is evident that these IELTS teachers' cognition and their teaching practices are strongly influenced by the IELTS test. In practice, the negative washback effects of the IELTS test were more obvious in IELTS courses, compared to the positive effects.

It was found that the IELTS test influenced teachers' knowledge about the teaching approaches employed in IELTS courses, as well as their beliefs and attitudes, which were found to be both negative and positive. However, negative influence of the IELTS test on IELTS teachers' knowledge about pedagogy, their beliefs and attitudes was more pronounced than the positive effects of the IELTS test.

Not only did these teachers have negative beliefs about the IELTS test, they also expressed positive and negative attitudes toward IELTS preparation courses. The positive attitudes were that they considered IELTS courses to be structured in nature, and useful for learning the English language. However, teachers having negative attitudes stated that IELTS courses are not beneficial in enhancing the language

abilities of learners, since they focus on doing test tasks, leading to monotony of activities in IELTS classes, in addition to the time constraints that prevent developing communicative competence amongst learners. All these views of the participants unveil more negative than positive washback effects on these teachers' cognition and their IELTS teaching practices.

Despite the claims made by the IELTS test developers that the IELTS test assesses communicative competence of test takers, these teachers tend to teach test-taking skills and practice test tasks in IELTS classes. It was found that the IELTS test negatively influenced these teachers' teaching practices in IELTS preparation courses, leading to narrowing of teaching approaches to teaching for the IELTS test only. Even the class activities were more geared towards the practice of test tasks instead of language development.

In contrast, positive washback effects were observed in the case of some IELTS teachers who taught vocabulary and grammar and used scaffolding techniques as well as communicative approaches to help improve students' English language capabilities.

To conclude, this study has gained significant insights into these IELTS teachers' various cognitive dimensions and their teaching practices in IELTS courses in the UAE. The complexity of the notion of washback with respect to teachers' cognition and IELTS preparation courses is documented in the present research. Moreover, it is evident that washback of the IELTS test is inevitable and can be more negative than positive, due to the educational and social consequences of the IELTS test in the UAE. Therefore, IELTS teachers and IELTS course developers cannot deny the washback effects of IELTS in the UAE, and they need to consider how more positive washback can be achieved and negative washback minimized.

### **Implications of the Study**

This research study is the first of its kind in the UAE that explores IELTS teachers' cognition and its accuracy, as well as the relationship of IELTS teachers' cognition to their IELTS classroom practices with respect to the washback effects of the IELTS test. The findings of this study have shown that the IELTS test has a strong influence, both positive and negative, on these teachers' cognition and their teaching

practices in IELTS preparation courses, and thus has important implications for IELTS teachers, IELTS preparation course developers, and administrators.

While IELTS teachers in the present research have well-grounded knowledge about the content and format of the IELTS test, their teaching pedagogy in IELTS classes varies considerably. Therefore, teachers should be provided with more professional training in teaching IELTS courses. In addition, teachers should be acquainted with the IELTS test design construct in order to enhance their knowledge about the underlying principles of IELTS test design, and as a result, improve pedagogy for teaching in IELTS classes.

Moreover, teachers should be given the opportunity to explore their own cognitive dimensions through teacher training programs in order for them to become aware of their own beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes. As a result, IELTS teachers could become more mindful of their cognition, and hence develop more consistency in the relationship of their cognition to their teaching practices in IELTS classes. This would allow for more positive washback in IELTS courses in the UAE. In some cases, personalized professional training programs could also be designed and provided for the IELTS teachers, since every teacher has unique cognitive abilities.

To achieve beneficial washback effects of the IELTS test, a test preparation course curriculum should be designed to provide instruction in test-taking strategies and communicative language functions. Furthermore, IELTS teachers should be given more training in how to incorporate more authentic material and teaching methods in IELTS courses instead of using old practice tests and traditional methods of teaching to the test. Moreover, the content used for teaching IELTS preparation courses should reinforce critical thinking amongst students through analysis and explanation of the language skills, and not just foster test-taking skills.

Time constraints in IELTS preparation courses were pointed out to be partially responsible for the negative washback effects in IELTS courses. Therefore, IELTS course developers and administrators in the UAE should consider making more time available for teachers, to provide them with the opportunity of employing a wide range of communicative activities in IELTS classes to develop learners' test-taking skills as well as language abilities.

## **Limitations of the Study**

Although the study has explored significant cognitive dimensions of IELTS teachers and their classroom practices in IELTS preparation courses, it has certain limitations. The first obvious limitation is the relatively small number of participants for the questionnaire, and particularly the class observations and interviews. Despite the fact that this study included IELTS teachers from different institutions in the UAE, only six teachers participated in the class observations and interviews. Hence, the findings of this study are specific to the 42 participants and not to be generalized to IELTS teachers across the UAE.

Another limitation is that the IELTS teachers were observed and interviewed once only, thus making it difficult to discern any changes or differences in teachers' cognition and their teaching practices in IELTS preparation courses over an extended period of time. Furthermore, the contextual factors that interact with teachers' cognition and their teaching practices could not be verified through the single observation and interview of these teachers. Also, the teachers' practices in IELTS classes could be influenced by the presence of the researcher as an observer. Therefore, more classroom observations and interviews need to be conducted in future studies.

One final limitation is with respect to the methodological tools. It was observed that the last question in the questionnaire (question # 22) was answered by only 17 participants out of the 42 respondents. Therefore, this question needs to be replaced with another open-response or closed-response question that could yield more responses. Furthermore, the neutral option in section two of the questionnaire was not very effective in yielding useful responses by the questionnaire participants. Thus it also needs to be replaced with an option that could yield definite responses by the participants to enhance the effectiveness of the results. The use of a 4-point scale with no neutral option could yield better results.

In addition to the above limitations, the phenomenon of washback and cognition are a limitation of this research, since these two notions are difficult to research. Also, it is difficult to determine the accuracy of teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes.

## **Suggestions for Further Research**

The relationship of IELTS washback to IELTS teachers' cognition and their classroom actions is significant, and warrants further investigation in the UAE. Therefore, more research studies with a larger sample size should be carried out in the UAE in the future for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of washback in IELTS preparation courses in relation to IELTS teachers' cognitive dimensions.

This study set out to explore the cognitive dimensions of IELTS teachers in IELTS preparation courses only. It would be interesting to examine and compare teachers' teaching practices in IELTS and non-IELTS classes to observe any differences in their teaching approaches and the washback effects in IELTS and non-IELTS courses. Moreover, further research could also examine the differences in IELTS teachers' cognition in terms of gender differences.

In addition, further studies could determine contextual factors that could result in washback effects in IELTS preparation courses and the outcomes of IELTS preparation courses in the UAE. Hughes (1993 as cited in Cheng & Curtis, 2004) proposes that teaching and learning are affected at three different levels: participants, processes, and products. The present study has investigated washback effects at the level of participants (teachers) and processes (teaching practices). However, future research could include the examination at the level of the product, i.e., the outcomes of such IELTS preparation courses, to reveal whether the negative and positive washback impacts the outcomes of IELTS preparation courses in terms of students' score gains and their language development.

For the purpose of comparison, further research could be done to compare teachers' cognition to students' cognition about the IELTS test and IELTS preparation courses, to highlight any differences in teachers' and students' cognitive dimensions about the IELTS test washback.

Finally, further research can be directed towards exploration of washback on IELTS teachers' cognition using a longitudinal study design. This would allow researchers to observe any changes in teachers' cognition, and thus the washback effects in IELTS preparation courses over an extended period of time, since cognitive capacities of teachers are thought to be reshaped with time. This approach would also

allow for more class observations and interviews to be carried out, and might result in more in-depth analysis of IELTS teachers' cognition and their classroom practices with respect to the washback effects of the IELTS test.

## References

- Abrams, L.M., Pedulla, J.J., & Madaus, G. F. (2003). Views from the classroom: Teachers' opinions of statewide testing programs. *Theory into Practice*, 42(1), 18-29. Retrieved from <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/41406/pdf>
- Alderson, J. C. (2004). Foreword. In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe, & A. Curtis (Eds.), *Washback in language testing: Research contexts and methods* (pp. ix-xii). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Alderson, C., & Hamp-Lyons, L. (1996). TOEFL preparation courses: A study of washback. *Language Testing*, 13(3), 280-297.
- Alderson, J. C., & Wall, D. (1993). Does washback exist? *Applied Linguistics*, 14(2), 115-129.
- Andrews, S., Fullilove, J., & Wong, Y. (2002). Targeting washback—a case-study. *System*, 30(2), 207-223. doi:10.1016/S0346-251X(02)00005-2
- Bachman, L. F., & Palmer, A. S. (1996). *Language testing in practice: Designing and developing useful language tests*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Baker, A. (2014). Exploring teachers' knowledge of second language pronunciation techniques: Teacher cognitions, observed classroom practices, and student perceptions. *TESOL Quarterly*, 48, 136–163. doi:10.1002/tesq.99
- Bailey, K., M. (1999). Washback in language testing, *TOEFL Monograph Series*, 1-46. Retrieved from <https://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/RM-99-04.pdf>
- Basturkmen, H. (2012). Review of research into the correspondence between language teachers' stated beliefs and practices. *System*, 40(2), 282-295. doi:10.1016/j.system.2012.05.001
- Borg, S. (1999a). Studying teacher cognition in second language grammar teaching. *System*, 27(1), 19–31. doi:10.1016/S0346-251X(98)00047-5
- Borg, S. (1999b). Teachers' theories in grammar teaching. *ELT Journal*, 53(3), 157-167. doi:10.1093/elt/53.3.157

- Borg, S. (2003). Teacher cognition in language teaching: A review of research on what language teachers think, know, believe and do. *Language Teaching*, 36(2), 81-109. doi:10.1017/s0261444803001903.
- Borg, S. (2005). Teacher cognition in language teaching. In K. Johnson (Ed.), *Expertise in second language learning and teaching* (190-209). UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Borg, S. (2006). *Teacher cognition and language education: Research and practice*. London: Continuum.
- Borg, S. (2011). The impact of in-service teacher education on language teachers' beliefs. *System*, 39(3), 370-380. doi:10.1016/j.system.2011.07.009
- Brown, H. D. (2004). *Language assessment: Principles and classroom practices*. New York: Longman.
- Brown, H. D., & Abeywickrama, P. (2010). *Language assessment: Principles and classroom practices*. New York: Pearson Education.
- Brown, J. D. (2009). Open-response items in questionnaires. In J. Heigham & R. A. Croker (Eds.), *Qualitative research in applied linguistics: A practical introduction* (pp. 200-219). Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Burns, A., Edwards, E., & Freeman, D. (2015). Theorizing and studying the language-teaching mind: Mapping research on language teacher cognition. *The Modern Language Journal*, 99, 585–601. doi:10.1111/modl.12245
- Chapman, D.W., & Snyder, C.W. (2000). Can high stakes national testing improve instruction: Reexamining conventional wisdom. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 20(6), 457–474. Retrieved from <http://www.sciencedirect.com.ezproxy.aus.edu//article/pii/S0738059300000201>
- Chappell, P., Bodis, A., & Jackson, H. (2015). The impact of teacher cognition and classroom practices on IELTS test preparation courses in the Australian ELICOS sector. *IELTS Research Report Series*, 6, 1-61. Retrieved from <http://www.ielts.org/researchers/research.aspx>

- Cheng, L. (1999). Changing assessment: Washback on teacher perceptions and actions. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 15*(3), 253-271.  
doi:10.1016/S0742-051X(98)00046-8
- Cheng, L. (2004). The washback effect of a public examination change on teachers' perceptions toward their classroom teaching. In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe, & A. Curtis (Eds.), *Washback in language testing: Research contexts and methods* (pp. 147-170). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Cheng, L. (2005). *Studies in language testing: Changing language teaching through language testing*. UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Cheng, L. (2008). Washback, impact and consequences. In E. Shohamy & N. H. Hornberger (Eds.) *Language testing and assessment: Encyclopedia of language and education* (pp. 349-364). New York: Springer.
- Cheng, L., & Curtis, A. (2004). Washback or backwash: A review of the impact of testing on teaching and learning. In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe, & A. Curtis (Eds.), *Washback in language testing: Research contexts and methods* (pp. 3-17). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Cheng, L., Sun, Y., & Ma, J. (2015). Review of washback research literature within Kane's argument-based validation framework. *Language Teaching, 48*, 436-470. doi:10.1017/S0261444815000233.
- Cowie, N. (2009). Observation. In J. Heigham & R. A. Croker (Eds.), *Qualitative research in applied linguistics: A practical introduction* (pp. 165- 181). Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Crowe Horwath™. (n.d.). Education in the UAE: Research and survey report 2014. Retrieved from <https://www.crowehorwath.net/AE/insights/Research.aspx?terms=research%20and%20survey%20report%202014>
- Davies, A., Brown, A., Elder, C., Hill, K, Lumley, T, & McNamara, T. (1999). *Dictionary of language testing*. UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Ensuring quality and fairness. (n.d.). *IELTS*. Retrieved (September 29, 2016) from <https://www.ielts.org/about-the-test/ensuring-quality-and-fairness>

- Erfani, S. S. (2012). A comparative washback study of IELTS and TOEFL iBT on teaching and learning activities in preparation courses in the Iranian context. *English Language Teaching*, 5(8), 185-195. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.aus.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1032659435?accountid=16946>
- Erfani, S. S. (2014). Investigation on the attitudes of IELTS and TOEFL iBT teachers: A quantitative and qualitative washback study. *British Journal of Education, Society & Behavioural Science*, 4(1), 88-102. Retrieved from <http://science.domain.org/abstract/2276>
- Farrell, T. S. C., & Ives, J. (2015). Exploring teacher beliefs and classroom practices through reflective practice: A case study. *Language Teaching Research*, 19(5), 594-610. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1362168814541722>
- Ferman, I. (2004). The washback of an EFL national oral matriculation test to teaching and learning. In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe, & A. Curtis (Eds.), *Washback in language testing: Research contexts and methods* (pp. 191-210). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Freimuth, H. (2014). The influence of culturally unfamiliar IELTS writing prompts on student band scores: A case study. *Perspectives*, 22(3), 5-10.
- Freimuth, H. (2015). A comparative cultural content analysis of the TOEFL and IELTS: Which reading exam is better for Emirati students? *Perspectives*, 23(3), 5-10. Retrieved from <https://www.icedxb.com/tesol-mms/index.php>
- Garinger, D. & Schoepp, K. (2013). IELTS and academic achievement: A UAE case study. *Perspectives*, 21(3), 7-13. Retrieved from <https://www.icedxb.com/tesol-mms/perspectives.php>
- Gitsaki, C., Robby, M. A., & Bourini, A. (2014). Preparing Emirati students to meet the English language requirements for higher education: A pilot study. *Education, Business and Society: Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues*, 7(2/3), 167-184. doi:10.1108/EBS-10-2013-0037

- Green, A. (2006a). Washback to the learner: Learner and teacher perspectives on IELTS preparation course expectations and outcomes. *Assessing Writing*, 11(2), 113–134. doi:10.1016/j.asw.2006.07.002
- Green, A. (2006b). Watching for washback: Observing the influence of the International English Language Testing System academic writing test in the classroom. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 3(4), 333-368. doi:10.1080/15434300701333152
- Green, A (2007). *IELTS washback in context: Preparation for academic writing in higher education*. UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Grossman, P. L., Wilson, S. M., & Shulman, L. S. (1989). Teachers of substance: Subject matter knowledge for teaching. In M. C. Reynolds (Ed.), *Knowledge base for the beginning teacher* (pp. 23-36). Oxford: Pergamon.
- Green, A. (2013). Washback in language assessment. *International Journal of English Studies*, 13(2), 39-51. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.aus.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1466538027?accountid=16946>
- Hawkey, R. (2006). *Impact theory and practice: Studies of the IELTS test and Progetto Lingue2000*. UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Hayes, B. & Read, J. (2004). IELTS test preparation in New Zealand: Preparing students for the IELTS academic module. In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe, & A. Curtis (Eds.), *Washback in language testing: Research contexts and methods* (pp. 97-111). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Holliday, A. (2010). Analysing qualitative data. In B. Paltridge & Phakiti, A. (Eds.), *Continuum companion to research methods in applied linguistics* (pp. 98-110). London: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Hughes, A. (2003). *Testing for language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- IELTS for teachers (n.d.). *IELTS*. Retrieved (December 11, 2016) from <https://www.ielts.org/teaching-and-research/ielts-for-teachers>

- IELTS guide for teachers (2015). *IELTS*. Retrieved (November 21, 2016) from <https://www.ielts.org/~media/publications/guide-for-teachers/ielts-guide-for-teachers-2015-uk.ashx>
- IELTS introduction. (n.d.). *IELTS*. Retrieved (August 31, 2016) from <https://www.ielts.org/what-is-ielts/ielts-introduction>.
- IELTS listening description. (n.d.). *IELTS*. Retrieved (November 16, 2016) from <https://www.ielts.org/about-the-test/test-format-in-detail>
- IELTS task 1 writing band descriptors (public version). (n.d.). *IELTS*. Retrieved (October 18, 2016) from [https://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/IELTS\\_task\\_1\\_Writing\\_band\\_descriptors.pdf](https://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/IELTS_task_1_Writing_band_descriptors.pdf)
- Ivankova, N. V. & Cresswell, J. W. (2009). Mixed methods. In J. Heigham & R. A. Croker (Eds.), *Qualitative research in applied linguistics: A practical introduction* (pp. 135-161). Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kiomrs, R., Abdolmehdi, R., & Rashidi, N. (2011). On the interaction of test washback and teacher assessment literacy: The case of Iranian EFL secondary school teachers. *English Language Teaching*, 4(1), 156-161. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.aus.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/858828111?accountid=16946>
- Kubanyiova, M. & Feryok, A. (2015). Language teacher cognition in applied linguistics research: Revisiting the territory, redrawing the boundaries, reclaiming the relevance. *The Modern Language Journal*, 99, 435–449. doi: 10.1111/modl.12239
- Kuzborska, I. (2011). Links between teachers' beliefs and practices and research on reading. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 23(1), 102-128. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.aus.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1705666936?accountid=16946>
- Lewthwaite, M. D. (2007). Teacher and student attitudes to IELTS writing tasks: Positive or negative washback? *UGRU Journal*, 5, 1-16. Retrieved from [http://www.ugru.uaeu.ac.ae/UGRUJournal/UGRUJournal\\_files/SR5/TSA.pdf](http://www.ugru.uaeu.ac.ae/UGRUJournal/UGRUJournal_files/SR5/TSA.pdf)

- Li, H. (2009). Are teachers teaching to the test? A case study of the college English test (CET) in China. *International Journal of Pedagogies & Learning*, 5(1), 25-36. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.aus.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/215865428?accountid=16946>
- Lyle, J. (2003). Stimulated recall: A report on its use in naturalistic research. *British Educational Research Journal*, 29(6), 861-878. Retrieved from [http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.aus.edu/stable/1502138?pq-origsite=summon&seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.aus.edu/stable/1502138?pq-origsite=summon&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)
- Madaus, G. F. (1988). The distortion of teaching and testing: High-stakes testing and instruction. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 65(3), 29-46. Retrieved from <http://jwilson.coe.uga.edu/EMAT7050/articles/Madaus.pdf>
- McNamara, T. (2000). *Language testing*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mendoza, A. A. L., & Arandia, R. B. (2009). Language testing in Colombia: A call for more teacher education and teacher training in language assessment. *Profile*, 11(2), 55-70. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.aus.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1677626635?accountid=16946>
- Messick, S. (1996). Validity and washback in language testing. *Language Testing*, 13(3), 241-256. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/j.2333-8504.1996.tb01695.x/pdf>
- Mickan, P. & Motteram, J. (2008). An ethnographic study of classroom instruction in an IELTS preparation program. *IELTS Research Reports*, 8, 1-26. Retrieved from [https://www.ielts.org/~media/researchreports/ielts\\_rr\\_volume08\\_report1.ashx](https://www.ielts.org/~media/researchreports/ielts_rr_volume08_report1.ashx)
- Ministry of education UAE (n.d.). *Take IELTS with British Council*. Retrieved (December 13, 2016) from <http://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/recognising-organisation/ministry-education-uae>
- Nickerson, C. (2015). Unity in diversity: The view from the (UAE) classroom. *Language Teaching*, 48(2), 1-15. doi:10.1017/S0261444812000237

- Oppenheim, A., N. (1992). *Questionnaire design, interviewing and attitude measurement*. New York: Basic Books, Inc.
- Pan, Y. (2013). Does teaching to the test exist? A case study of teacher washback in Taiwan. *The Journal of Asia EFL*, 10(4), 185-213. Retrieved from [https://www.google.ae/?gfe\\_rd=cr&ei=04vMV4eDBaTA8gfLyLugAg&gws\\_rd=ssl#q=Does+Teaching+to+the+Test+Exist%3F](https://www.google.ae/?gfe_rd=cr&ei=04vMV4eDBaTA8gfLyLugAg&gws_rd=ssl#q=Does+Teaching+to+the+Test+Exist%3F)
- Phakiti, A. (2010). Analysing quantitative data. In B. Paltridge & Phakiti, A. (Eds.), *Continuum companion to research methods in applied linguistics* (pp. 39-49). London: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Phipps, S., & Borg, S. (2009). Exploring tensions between teachers' grammar teaching beliefs and practices. *System (Linköping)*, 37(3), 380-390. doi:10.1016/j.system.009.03.002.
- Qi, L. (2004). Has a high-stakes test produced the intended change? In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe, & A. Curtis (Eds.), *Washback in language testing: Research contexts and methods* (pp. 171-190). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Rashidi, N. & Javanmardi, F. (2011). The IELTS preparation washback on learning and teaching outcomes. *Cross-cultural Communication*, 7(3), 132-144 doi:10.3968/j.ccc.1923670020110703.162
- Read, J. & Hayes, B. (2003). The impact of IELTS on preparation for academic study in New Zealand. *IELTS Research Reports*, 4. Retrieved from [https://www.ielts.org/~media/research-reports/ielts\\_rr\\_volume04\\_report5.ashx](https://www.ielts.org/~media/research-reports/ielts_rr_volume04_report5.ashx)
- Richards, K. (2009). Interviews. In J. Heigham & R. A. Croker (Eds.), *Qualitative research in applied linguistics: A practical introduction* (pp. 182-199). Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Saif, S. (2006). Aiming for positive washback: A case study of international teaching assistants. *Language Testing*, 23(1), 1-34. doi:10.1191/0265532206lt322oa

- Salehi, H., Yunus, M. M., & Salehi, Z. (2012). Teachers' perceptions of high-stakes tests: A washback study. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, 2(1), 70-n/a. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7763/IJSSH.2012.V2.71>
- Saville, N. & Hawkey, R. (2004). The IELTS impact study: Investigating washback on teaching materials. In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe, & A. Curtis (Eds.), *Washback in language testing: Research contexts and methods* (pp. 73-96). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Shih, C. (2010). The washback of the general English proficiency test on university policies: A Taiwan case study. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 7(3), 234-254. doi:10.1080/15434301003664196
- Spratt, M. (2005). Washback and the classroom: The implications for teaching and learning of studies of washback from exams. *Language Teaching Research*, 9(1), 5-29. doi:10.1191/1362168805lr152oa
- Swan, M. (2012, May 25). Almost 9 in 10 students not ready for university in English. *The National: UAE*. Retrieved from <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/almost-9-in-10-students-not-ready-for-university-in-english>
- Talmy, S. (2010). Qualitative interviews in applied linguistics: From research instrument to social practice. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 30, 128-148. doi:10.1017/S0267190510000085. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.aus.edu/docview/723768973/fulltextPDF?accountid=16946>
- Test taker performance 2015. *IELTS*. Retrieved (September 7, 2016) from <https://www.ielts.org/teaching-and-research/test-taker-performance>
- Test format. (n.d.). *IELTS*. Retrieved (November 16, 2016) from <https://www.ielts.org/about-the-test/test-format>
- The IELTS 9-band scale. (n.d.). *IELTS*. Retrieved (February 28, 2016) from <https://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/find-out-about-results/understand-your-ielts-scores>
- Tsagari, D. (2009). *The complexity of test washback*. Germany: Peter Lang.

- Two million IELTS tests in the last year. (2013, April 29). *British Council*. Retrieved (September 10, 2016) from <http://www.britishcouncil.org/en/about/press/two-million-ielts-tests-last-year>
- Volante, L. (2006). Toward appropriate preparation for standardized achievement testing. *The Journal of Educational Thought* 40(2), 129-144. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23767164>
- Wagner, E. (2010). Survey research. In B. Paltridge & A. Phakiti (Eds.), *Continuum companion to research methods in applied linguistics* (pp. 22-38). Great Britain: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Wall, D., & Alderson, J. C. (1993). Examining washback: The Sri Lankan impact study. *Language Testing*, 10(1), 41–69.
- Wall, D. (1997). Test impact and washback. In C. Clapham & D. Corson (Eds.), *Language testing and assessment* (pp. 291-302). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Wall, D. (2000). The impact of high-stakes testing on teaching and learning: Can this be predicted or controlled? *System*, 28(4), 499-509. doi:10.1016/S0346-251X(00)00035-X
- Wall, D. (2005). *The impact of high-stakes examinations on classroom teaching: A case study using insights from testing and innovation theory*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Wall, D. (2012). Washback. In G. Fulcher & F. Davidson (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of language testing* (pp. 79-92). Oxon: Routledge.
- Watanabe, Y. (2004). Teacher factors mediating washback. In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe, & A. Curtis (Eds.), *Washback in language testing: Research contexts and methods* (pp. 129-143). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Which IELTS test is right for me? (n.d.). *IELTS*. Retrieved (November 16, 2016) from <https://www.ielts.org/about-the-test/two-types-of-ielts-test>

Writing band descriptors. (n.d.) *British Council*. Retrieved (October 4, 2016) from [http://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/IELTS\\_task\\_1\\_Writing\\_band\\_descriptors.pdf](http://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/IELTS_task_1_Writing_band_descriptors.pdf)

Yigitoglu, N. & Belcher, D. (2014). Exploring L2 writing teacher cognition from an experiential perspective: The role learning to write may play in professional beliefs and practices. *System (Linkoping)*, 47, 116-124. doi: 10.1016/j.system.2014.09.021

Yin, M. (2010). Understanding classroom language assessment through teacher thinking research. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 7(2), 175-194. doi: 10.1080/15434300903447736

Zafarghandi, A. M., & Nemati, M. J. (2015). A comparative analysis of IELTS and TOEFL in an Iranian context: A case study of washback of standard tests. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 5(1), 154-163. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.aus.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1686396335?accountid=16946>

## Appendix A

### Questionnaire for the IELTS Teachers

Dear IELTS Teacher,

I am an MA TESOL student at the American University of Sharjah currently working on my thesis titled “Exploring IELTS Teachers’ Cognition and Their Classroom Practices.” The aim of the study is to gain insight into IELTS teachers’ understanding of the IELTS test and its impact on their classroom practices.

This study might be beneficial in raising your awareness of your knowledge, perceptions, beliefs and attitudes about IELTS preparation courses, and could provide valuable insight into your own teaching practices. However, no compensation or monies will be offered for participation in the study.

This study poses no risks to you greater than ordinary daily life. This online questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes of your time.

In addition, at the end of this questionnaire, you will be given the opportunity to volunteer for an audio recorded classroom observation followed by an audio recorded interview of about 30-40 minutes.

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary. Your responses to this questionnaire will be kept confidential, and will be used only for the stated purposes of the study.

If you are willing to participate in a classroom observation and an interview following the questionnaire, please tick the consent option at the end of the questionnaire. I greatly appreciate your participation.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Dr. Betty Lanteigne at blanteigne@aus.edu or +971-6-515-2523, or the Office of Research and Graduate Studies at research@aus.edu.

Yours sincerely,

Sobia Afzal

Email: g00061658@aus.edu

Mobile: 050-3871231

I have read the above stated information, and I consent to participate in the study.

Yes, I agree.

No, thank you.

## Section 1: About you

Please check the appropriate response:

Your first language/mother tongue:

English  Arabic  Hindi/Urdu  French  Spanish  Other, please specify

Type of institution where you work:

University  Language Centre  School  Other, please specify

Your position:

English teacher  IELTS teacher  Foundations teacher  Other, please specify

Your qualifications (Check all that apply):

Bachelor's  Master's  PhD.  CELTA  DELTA  Other, please specify

Number of years you have been teaching English:

0-2  3-5  6-10  11-15  16+

Number of years you have been teaching IELTS:

0-2  3-5  6-10  11-15  16+

Have you been trained as an examiner for \_\_\_\_? (Check all that apply.)

IELTS  TOEFL  CEPA  SAT  CFE  Other, Please specify

Have you received any training in how to teach IELTS preparation courses? (Check all that apply.)

IELTS training  TOEFL training  Teacher training  Other, Please specify

## Section 2: Your knowledge of, attitudes toward and beliefs about IELTS

Please indicate your dis/agreement with the following statements:

No.	Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	IELTS is an appropriate test to assess candidates' future English language performance for study or immigration purposes.					
2	My IELTS classes are more successful as compared to other courses I teach.					
3	The IELTS test influences my choice of material (i.e., what I teach).					
4	The IELTS test influences my choice of methodology in the IELTS classes.					
5	The IELTS test has a section on vocabulary and grammar.					
6	In the IELTS speaking test, candidates have to both ask and answer questions.					
7	Candidates have two opportunities to hear the voice recordings in the listening module.					
8	Candidates have to write at least 150 words for the first task in the writing module.					
9	Teaching reading comprehension in IELTS classes is different from the non-IELTS classes.					
10	The purposes of IELTS Academic					

	and General Training are different.					
11	The IELTS test provides positive motivation for my students.					
12	The IELTS test causes unhelpful stress for my students.					
13	I use previous IELTS tests for practice in the IELTS classes.					
14	It is important to teach test-taking strategies in IELTS classes.					
15	It is important to integrate language skills in IELTS classes (e.g. integrating speaking with listening skills)					
16	The IELTS preparation course is a good way of learning English even for students who are not taking the IELTS exam.					

**Section 3: Please answer the following questions about your IELTS preparation classes:**

17- Please rank the IELTS Test sections in order of difficulty for most of your students (1 = most difficult ... 4 = least difficult)

Reading      1         2         3         4  

Writing      1         2         3         4  

Listening      1         2         3         4  

Speaking      1         2         3         4  

18- What percentage of class time would you spend working on the following? Please rank between 10% and 100%:

Reading      10-20%       30-40%       50-60%       70-80%       90-100%

Writing      10-20%       30-40%       50-60%       70-80%       90-100%

Listening	10-20%	<input type="checkbox"/>	30-40%	<input type="checkbox"/>	50-60%	<input type="checkbox"/>	70-80%	<input type="checkbox"/>	90-100%	<input type="checkbox"/>
Speaking	10-20%	<input type="checkbox"/>	30-40%	<input type="checkbox"/>	50-60%	<input type="checkbox"/>	70-80%	<input type="checkbox"/>	90-100%	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vocabulary	10-20%	<input type="checkbox"/>	30-40%	<input type="checkbox"/>	50-60%	<input type="checkbox"/>	70-80%	<input type="checkbox"/>	90-100%	<input type="checkbox"/>
Grammar	10-20%	<input type="checkbox"/>	30-40%	<input type="checkbox"/>	50-60%	<input type="checkbox"/>	70-80%	<input type="checkbox"/>	90-100%	<input type="checkbox"/>

19- Apart from actual English language proficiency, what knowledge and/or skills do you think help students achieve a good IELTS grade? (Check all that apply)

Test familiarity	<input type="checkbox"/>	Test-taking strategies	<input type="checkbox"/>
Test requirements	<input type="checkbox"/>	Test-marking criteria	<input type="checkbox"/>
Test practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other, please specify	<input type="text"/>

20- What do you like about teaching IELTS?

21- What do you dislike about teaching IELTS?

22- Please note here anything else you wish to say about your IELTS preparation course:

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

If you are willing to be observed and interviewed, please provide your consent and email address below:

Yes, I agree to participate in a classroom observation and an interview.

Name:

Email:

No, thank you.

## Appendix B

### Observation Checklist Sheet

Date of observation:  
observed:

Teacher's name:

Class

No. of students in class:

Focus of the lesson:

Starts at:

Ends at:

Activities observed	YES	Somewhat	No
Teaching of grammar			
Teaching of vocabulary			
Teaching of language functions			
Focus on specific language skills (e.g., reading, listening)			
<b>Integration of skills</b>			
<b>Teaching techniques and methods</b>			
Eliciting techniques to activate students' prior knowledge			
Differentiated instructions (for specific learner' needs)			
Use of groups / Varied grouping			
Whole class activities			
<b>Use of varied activities</b>			
IELTS tips and strategies			
Minimal teacher guidance			
Greater teacher guidance			
Time-management (e.g., time allocation for activities)			
<b>Various topics for a skill</b>			
One topic for a skill			
Student-centered activities			
Teacher-centered activities			
<b>Scaffolding techniques</b>			
Authentic tasks (e.g., group discussions)			
Communicative tasks (e.g., students interviewing each other)			
Clear goal-directed tasks			
Provision of examples, models			
<b>Explicit instructions</b>			
<b>Material used</b>			
IELTS specific books			
Teacher-made material			
Online activities			
Model tests			
<b>Provision of test specifications</b>			
<b>Feedback and error correction techniques</b>			
Peer feedback			

Peer feedback checklist			
Teacher-student feedback			
Immediate error correction			
<b>Delayed error correction</b>			
<b>Teacher's attitude and classroom environment</b>			
Teacher shows knowledge about the test			
Relaxing environment in the classroom			
Positive attitude towards the test-preparation course			
Students' motivated			
<b>Students' stressed</b>			

Comments:

## Appendix C

### Semi-Structured Interview Questions

#### Question on teachers' beliefs about language teaching:

1. What do you think are effective ways of teaching the English language?

#### Question on teachers' experiences with tests and assessment?

2. How does your experience with tests as a student or teacher influence the way you teach IELTS courses?

#### Questions about the IELTS test?

3. What do you think the IELTS test is assessing? Probe: What skills?
4. What is your understanding of the overall purpose of the IELTS test in the UAE society?
5. How does the IELTS fit in with your approach to language teaching? probe: How does it relate to other courses you teach, e.g., General English, EAP.
6. What is your overall attitude towards the IELTS test? IELTS test preparation courses?

#### Questions about IELTS preparation classes:

7. Have you done any formal training to teach IELTS or be an IELTS examiner? If yes, how has this influenced the way you approach teaching IELTS courses? If no, is there any kind of training that you would like to have to help you teach IELTS courses?
8. Is teaching IELTS different from teaching other courses? How? Why?
9. What kinds of activities do you use for IELTS classes?
10. What kind of activities do you use for non-IELTS classes? Could you explain why? Comment on any differences.
11. What do you think about teaching test-taking strategies in IELTS preparation classes?

#### Stimulated recall question about the class observation:

12. Could you please explain more about the approach/activity (specific methodology, approach used in the class) you used in your IELTS class?

#### Further comments about the IELTS test or teaching IELTS test preparation courses?

10. Is there anything else you'd like to say about teaching IELTS or the IELTS test in general?

## **Vita**

Sobia Afzal has a bachelor's degree in Pharmacy from the University of Punjab, Pakistan. She worked as a quality assurance pharmacist in a pharmaceutical company for 2 years in Pakistan.

After moving to the UAE, She did CELTA in 2012, and since then she has been working as an English language teacher in a private institute in Sharjah. She has also attended teacher training programs during her teaching career. Moreover, she attended conferences and workshops on English language teaching during her study in the MA TESOL program. She also worked as a research assistant at the American University of Sharjah.