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Investigating the Impact of the Engineering College Admission Test on Test-Takers

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the washback effects of ECAT on test takers. ECAT (Engineering College Admission) test is a high-stakes exam. In Pakistan, every year number of candidates with the hope of getting admission appeared in the test. The current study aims to explore the washback effects of ECAT on its test takers (both successful and unsuccessful). To investigate the washback effects of ECAT, the researcher adopted a qualitative approach. The data collection tool used for the current study is semi-structured interviews. The total number of participants (n=30). The participants of the study are divided into two groups: Group A successful candidates, and Group B unsuccessful candidates. The current study used convenient sampling. From the data analysis, the constant comparative Method (CCM) Maykutt and More (1994) guidelines are used. The findings of the study revealed that ECAT has strong positive and negative consequences on test takers. The successful test takers seemed more focused, disciplined, and hardworking worried about getting success in the test. The washback effect on the unsuccessful test takers revealed the fact that few participants were ever interested in the ECAT. Besides this, other factors contribute to their failure. The perceptions of both groups about ECAT showed, it is a transparent test and the format and content and their system of conducting the entrance exam is good. The implications of this study are for future test takers and test developers to ensure the validity, reliability, and quality of the test. Secondly, to build a trusting relationship between test takers and test developers. Thirdly, the washback research will be a good addition to the washback effect of the test on test takers, as they are the most neglected stakeholders in washback research at a national and international level. It will be a good addition to the literature available for washback research.

Keywords: Washback, ECAT, Test-takers, High stakes exams, constant comparative method (CCM).

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Introduction

The notion of Washback is widely discussed in general education and applied linguistics. In general, in education, it is known as backwash whereas, in applied linguistics, it is known as Washback. In simple words, it is an impact on tests on teaching and learning phenomenon. Another definition given by Pearson of Washback is that usual public examinations put a lot of effect on the motivation, attitude, and behavior of students, teachers, and parents respectively (1988). The outback is nothing but a subset of tests defined by Bachman and Palmer (1996) which put a strong impact on individuals, society, and the education system in general. The operation of Washback takes place at two distinct levels; micro and macro. (Bachman and Palmer, 1996). By micro level, we mean students and teachers only whose teaching and learning got affected. Whereas the macro level includes the whole society and educational systems prevailing in it. Therefore, Washback can be on learners, teachers, parents and administrations, test preparation academies, and publishers of the education system as a whole.

ECAT (Engineering College Admission TEST) is a high-standard test in Pakistan. It is a common practice in Pakistan to conduct an entrance test for admission test in universities. ECAT is the branch of that system that prevailed in the country. All candidates seeking to get admission to any engineering university are required to pass the test.

There has been limited research conducted in the present context typically on the Washback effect of the entrance test. The central concern of this study is to examine the washback effects of ECAT on test-takers, those who succeeded in the test, and those who could not achieve success.

Keeping in mind the central aim of the study the following questions were formulated:

R Q1. What is the washback effect of ECAT on test-takers?

R Q2. What are the perceptions of test-takers (successful and unsuccessful candidates) about the ECAT?

Literature Review

Washback

In language testing and assessing the role of washback is of prime importance. It is therefore for this reason this area of Washback has attracted the attention of several researchers almost everywhere in the world. Testing organizations like ESPL ELTS are deeply concerned about the validity and reliability of their testing system. This is due to the reason that most high-stakes exams faced bitter criticism. The notion of Washback works under the domain of these criteria.

In the words of Pearson (1988:98), washback can be defined as exams influencing the care, attention, and interest of teachers, parents, and students as exams often come at the end of the year, this effect works in a backward direction therefore the term washback is used. This definition of washback says that high-stakes exams are not confined to teachers and students. It also influences parents to motivate themselves according to the demand of the test.

According to Buck (1988), washback is the effect of a test that bound teachers and learners to plan their strategies according to the demands of the test. This in return determines their success.

Theoretical Models of Washback

Apart from the definitions given by the pioneers of the notion of Washback, these pioneers have given theoretical models of washback. These models include

These theoretical models of Washback are the following:

- Alderson and Wall's 15Washback Hypothesis (1993)
- Hughes' (1989) Model of Washback
- Bailey's (1996) Model of Washback
- Green's model of washback (2007)
- Shih's model of washback(2007)

All these above-mentioned models of Washck guide the researchers on how to investigate the phenomenon of Washback and its working. Alderson & Wall's (1993) model illustrates the working of Washback within classroom boundaries. Hughes's models and Baily's model explain the entire working of washback on the entire sections of academic institutes. It includes participants, process, and product. Whereas Greens' model deals with the washback intensity, washback variability, and washback difficulty. Shih's model deals with the intrinsic and extrinsic factors involved in the process of washback.

Keeping in mind the definitions and understanding of the entire working of Washback, researchers from every corner of the world have conducted research with different aims and objectives of their research. The very first classic study of Washback in general education. It was conducted in 1982 by Kellegahan, Madaus, and Airasian to investigate the Washback effect of standardized tests on teachers, students, and parents in Ireland. It was a longitudinal study that took the period from 1974 to 1977 and was experimental. The study was planned with three objectives. The first objective was to examine the Washback effect of the test on school administration and practices. The second objective of the study was to address students' perceptions of the test. The third objective of the study was to examine the effects of the test on parents. Their findings showed that the school organization seemed to support test practices. The test's effect on the students and teachers seemed positive. Students took the test seriously they took the test as enjoyment rather than anxiety. The impact of the test on parents seemed negligible. The overall results of the study showed that standardized test was beneficial for all the participants of the study. The drawback noticed in the study was that it was conducted in an artificial setting because the study was designed for experimental purposes.

Therefore, the study has little relevance. The noticeable thing in the study is it provides deep insight into the investigation of Washback on teachers, parents, and students. In contrast to the study of the washback effect in the field of general education, a study was conducted by Alderson and Wall (1993) in applied linguistics. Like Kellegahan, Madaus, and Airasian (1982), it was also a longitudinal study. It took two years to find out the results of the study. The study aimed to investigate the Washback effects of the O-level English exam in a Srilankan context. The method used for the investigations was observation. Their findings showed that there were no changes in the teachers' method of teaching. As a result of their study, they gave their famous 15 washback hypothesis. A significant study in this context was conducted by (Alderson & Hamp – Lyons, 1996) on the TOEFL and non – TOEFL preparation courses at the three institutes in North America. The Participants of their study were teachers and students. The sample size used in the study was 11 teachers and an unspecified number of students. The data collection tools were observation and interviews, for observation, researchers used 8 regular and 8 non-regular classes. The findings revealed that non-TOEFL classes were more interactive whereas TOEFL classes seemed fewer laughter teachers focused on teaching the test. They came up with the findings that TOEFL preparation classes seemed to be more focused and anxious as compared to non-TOEFL preparation classes. The shortcoming of the present study is it focused on the teachers' perspective only. On the other hand, students' voice is neglected in this study.

Furthermore, Mahmoudi's (2014) study on the washback effect of the National University Entrance Exam (INUEE) on pre-university teaching and learning showed that both students and teachers had a negative influence on teaching and learning. They criticized the test on the ground of memorization. It was noticed that the exam led to anxiety to score well, rather than focus on academic knowledge the students criticized the multiple-choice format of the exam. Along the same line, Latimer's (2009) study revealed that the Cambridge Preliminary English test exerted a negative influence on teachers and students.

On the other hand, an interesting study, including participants from different countries was carried out (Carrigan, 2016) in the USA. Interesting results were also witnessed in this study which came up with six positive effects and three negative washback effects. The result showed it showed: self-confidence, learning goals awareness of the learning, and building community as positive, whereas negative attitudes were measured in terms were misidentification of the learning goal. The disadvantage of the study was limited participants cannot be generalized.

Reynolds (2010) conducted a significant study on learners. In her study, she used learners as evaluators of Washback. Her study was on the TOEFL exam. The results showed that the learners perceived the effect of TOEFL as negative on their learning. Moreover, they showed that there was

uncertainty on their part while preparing for TOEFL.

Framework of the Study

To examine the Washback effects of ECAT on test-takers, the researchers found Green's model of Washback a suitable model to find out the answers to research questions. Green's Model of Washback is based on three postulates namely,

1. Washback Intensity
2. Washback Variability.
3. Washback Difficulty.

These three postulates revolve around test use. ECAT is a test that is with a purpose. The purpose of the ECAT is the selection of test-takers. The present study examines the effect of ECAT on successful and unsuccessful test-takers.

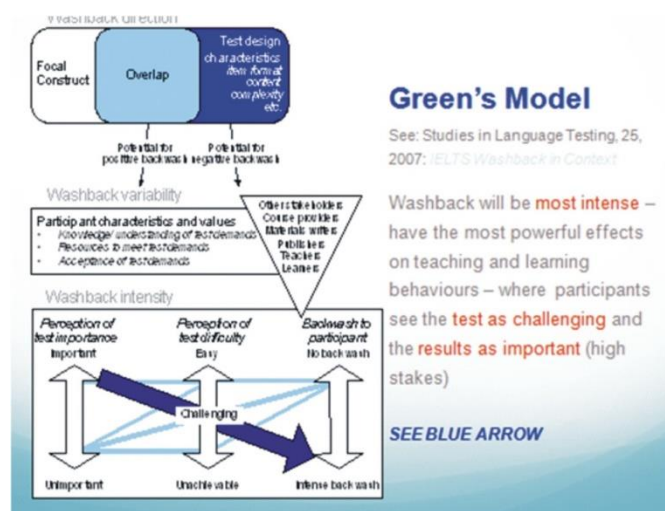


Fig:1 Greens 'Model of Washback

Research Context

The University of Sindh and MUET Jamshoro

As the study was designed to investigate the Washback effect of ECAT in successful and unsuccessful test-takers, therefore it was conducted at the University of Sindh and the Mehran University of Engineering and Technology Jamshoro.

ECAT Test

The ECAT is conducted every year by MUET. The ECAT (Engineering college admission test) is designed to screen and select candidates for admission to the various departments of MUET. The nature of ECAT is MCQS type. It consists of four sections. The first section is based on the

assessment of candidates' knowledge of English. The other three sections are based on candidates' knowledge of Physics, Chemistry, and Mathematics. The section below describes the format of the ECAT

Format of the ECAT (Engineering Colleges Admission Test)

ECAT (Engineering Colleges Admission Test) is a subject test. It consists of subjects four English, Chemistry, Physics, and Mathematics. The present study aimed to focus English section of the test. That is to find out the difference between successful and unsuccessful test-takers.

Table I Format of ECAT (Engineering College Admission Test)

S.No	Subjects	Percent
1.	English	25%
2.	Mathematics	25%
3.	Physics	25%
4.	Chemistry	25%

The table mentioned above shows that the test is based on four sections i.e. English, Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry. These sections of the test are equally divided. It means 25% English, Mathematics, 25% Chemistry, and Physics 25%.

Research Methodology

The washback is the background of the current study. Therefore, it is necessary to mention which methods of research were emphasized by the pioneers of Washback research. (Wall and Alderson, 1993) emphasized observation as an important tool for the collection of data to investigate the washback effect. Whereas Alwright and Bailey (1996) emphasized on the use of both qualitative and quantitative data methods was preferred by Shohamy et.al. (1996) to examine the complex nature of the investigation. The qualitative approach is a fundamental one to examine Washback effects in the research (Watanabe, 2004; Banerjee and Luoma, 1997; Bello-Davila, 2004; Shohamy, 2001; Shohamy 1993; Watanabe 2004). To Cohen, 1976; Cohen &Manion, 1989) it is suitable to use the qualitative method to portray the real picture of reality and bring more complexities to light. The qualitative approach is capable of presenting a realistic picture of reality and deep insight, but it is time taking and the findings are not meant to be readily generalized to other contexts (Cohen, 1976; Cohen &Manion, 1989). Watanabe (2004) gave suggestions for examining Washback through a qualitative approach. He gave guidelines to the researchers. He proposes three general aspects. Dimensions of Washback, intensity, length, and value, aspects of learning and teaching may be influenced by the exam and factors mediating the process of Washback being generated. The choice of methodology always depends on the focus of the study. Guidelines for qualitative research and Washback studies were provided by (Watanabe, 2004). He threw light upon Washback and Qualitative research.

(Watanabe, 2004) came up with three general aspects of language testing Such as specificity, length, and intensity. Aspects of learning and teaching that may be influenced by the exam.

Rationale for Using Qualitative Methodology

In the testing community of any test, test-takers are the main players in the field. Their voices and stories are UN heard in Washback research. Therefore, to hear the stories of test-takers in their voice it was decided to approach the test-takers, through a qualitative method of research to know more about the effects of the test on their lives.

Participants

The participants of the study were test-takers of the ECAT. The population size of the participants was 30It included both males and females. The participants of the study were of almost the same age group. There are two groups of participants in this study. Group A consisted of successful test-takers, whereas group B consisted of unsuccessful candidates.

Sampling

As the study is qualitative and the data collection tool is semi-structured interviews we found convenience sampling suitable for my study. This is a type of non-probability sampling, which the researchers used for their accessibility. It is getting participated whenever you find a theme and whenever it is convenient. We chose this technique of sampling for the reasons. Being female researchers to conduct research we found it convenient to access the participants of the study easily. Furthermore, thousands of test-takers appeared in the test. Out of these thousand numbers only in thousand number test-takers declared pass, whereas the majority of the test-takers were declared failed. The study is divided into two groups, those who succeed and those who were declared a failure in the test to engineering university, and others who got admission to the different departments of the university of Sindh. Therefore, due to these reasons, we went through this technique of sampling.

Data Collection Tool

This study is qualitative According to McKay, (2006) and Silverman (2000), in qualitative study interviews are mostly used to gather data about participants 'experiences, and the reality of the context. The semi-structured interview is a qualitative method of data collection to investigate Washback effects (Alderson &Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Cheng 1997; Saif, 2006) with emphasis on interviews to collect data. Therefore the data collection tool used in my study is semi-structured interviews.

Data Collection Process

The semi-structured interviews were used for data analysis. Informed consent was obtained. The interview was conducted face to face. The interviews were conducted individually by the participants. The duration of the interviews was 20 minutes. Interviews were conducted in the native language of the participants. The interviews were conducted in a friendly atmosphere. We recorded interviews, for transcriptions and the coding and decoding process. The interviews were categorized to find out the main themes of the interviews conducted by all the participants of the study. The scope of the interview was widened with a reason to provide a chance for the candidates to tell their stories. A general series of questions were asked of the participants of the study. Some relevant questions also emerged from the interaction process. While, conducting interviews We took brief notes of the impression of the body language of the participants of the study.

Data Analysis Procedure

For the data analysis, we have followed the format of Maykutt & Morehouse (1994). The data analysis procedure of this study consists of the following four stages:

Stage: 1 Indicative categorization

According to Maykutt and Morehouse (1994), the first stage of the data analysis procedure consists of two steps. The first initiative is to read the transcribed interviews thoroughly to list out themes, concepts, and ideas. Therefore, we stated our data analysis we collected the transcribed interviews in one place. Then a started a careful reading of transcribed interviews. As a result of thoroughly reading a list of themes emerged. After this, the process of combination of identical themes was done. For the combination of similar themes, the technique of Maykut & Morehouse was used *to look alike to feel alike*. For this number of times, we look back and forth to interview transcripts to make a list of provisional codes.

We underlined the particular sections of the transcribed interviews. There are different suggestions by different researchers to manage qualitative data analysis like color-coded paper pieces. But to manage well-organized data we used Microsoft word document to keep it more organized and handle it tactfully. As a result of this whole procedure of indicative categorization a list of 57 modified codes from 40 interview transcripts was made.

Stage 2: Refinement of Categories

The following step after the indicative categorization is a refinement of categories Maykutt and Morehouse. The interviews were scanned and reread for the formation of general rules for the

refinement of categories. The categories were refined by revising and comparing. A table in Microsoft word was made.

Stage: 3 Exploration of relationship across categories

The refinement of categories is followed by the Exploration of relationships across the categories. (Maykutt & Morehouse,1994). For exploring the relationship among the categories both the documents of the word (Code list) and refinement categories (Tables of codes) and transcribed interviews were revised and re-revised to explore the relationship between the category.

Stage 4: Integration of data

According to Maykutt &Morehouse (1994), the final stage of CCM is synthesis. The synthesis of data is the organization of the whole. We integrated the data moves around the three research questions of this study.

Findings

The findings are :

RQ1: What is the Washback effect of ECAT on test-takers?

Academic background of the successful participants of ECAT

The selection criterion of the ECAT is based on the marks of the Matriculation and Intermediate and the test score. The eligibility criteria are announced by the university authorities. In the press release of regional, national, and dawn newspapers. The same information for the selection criteria is also uploaded on the official website of MUET. Therefore, it is necessary to mention before data analysis the grades and the test score of the participants of the study.

Table: Academic Profile of Successful Test-takers

STI	Matric Grade	Intermediate Grade	Test Score	Department
ST2	A -I	A	70	Software Engineering
ST3	A-I	A	70	Software Engineering
ST4	B	B	72	Civil Engineering
ST5	A	A	69	Electronics
ST6	A	A	70	Electrical Engineering
ST7	A	B	75	Petroleum Engineering
ST8	A	B	73	Biomedical Engineering
ST9	B	A	80	Biomedical Engineering
ST10	A	A-I	68	Mechanical Engineering
ST11	A	B	69	Telecommunication
ST12	B	B	79	Civil Engineering Department
ST13	A-I	A	75	Software Engineering
ST14	A	B	71	Mechanical Engineering
ST15	A	A	65	Software Engineering

ST= Successful Test-Takers, Total Number (n=15)

The table mentioned above illustrates the academic background of successful test-takers. The grades, test scores, and departments of the successful participants are mentioned in the table. It describes the allocation of the departments of MUET based on their marks. This shows that the majority (11, 79%) of successful participants have a strong academic background.

Academic Background of Unsuccessful Participants

The table mentioned below is a detailed description of the academic performance of the unsuccessful participants.

Table: Academic Profile of Unsuccessful Test-takers

FT1	Matric Grade	Intermediate Marks	Test Score	Department
FT2	A	B	40	Physics
FT3	B	A	50	Physics
FT4	B	B	55	Mathematics
FT5	A	B	42	Mathematics
FT6	A	B	47	Physics
FT7	A-I	A-I	62	Computer Science
FT8	A	B	37	English
FT9	A	B	40	Mathematics
FT10	A	B	49	Commerce
FT11	B	A	40	Chemistry
FT12	A	A	62	English
FT13	A	B	55	Mass communication
FT14	B	A	64	Telecommunication
FT15	A	A	50	Business Administration

FT= Unsuccessful Test-takers, Total number (n) =15

This table describes the academic profile of the unsuccessful test-takers. Their intermediate and Matric grades meet the requirements of the test. But their test score decided that they are not eligible for any department of MUET. As there were limited seats and competition was tough. The majority of the unsuccessful participants (15, 100%) could not succeed in the test.

From the academic background of the successful participants, it can be easily speculated that it is not only the test score that matters in the selection of candidates in MUET. Infact measures the entire academic performance of the candidates to select them on a merit basis. The story does not end here. The climax of the story is in the allocation of the departments. The top departments are allocated to brilliant students throughout their academic performance. In the views of the participants of the study, the top departments are civil engineering and software engineering. Therefore, the best departments are allocated to the students who secure, high grades in metric, intermediate, and ECAT scores. However, it is not a hard and fast rule. Sometimes, it depends on the choice of the candidates as well. An example of this is two female participants of my study get selection in Biomedical engineering having a good scores in their entire academic careers. The foremost and noticeable finding regarding the Washback effects of ECAT on unsuccessful test-takers as compared to their counterparts can

easily be found in the academic background of the unsuccessful test-takers. The successful test-takers had strong academic backgrounds throughout their academic career. On the other hand, The group B unsuccessful test-takers had a low academic background.

Experience of Taking Ecat

The experience of taking high-stakes exams like the ECAT on the part of the candidates often comes in the form of mixed feelings. These feelings are in the form of fear, nervousness, and excitement. This might be due to the exam pressure and fear of failure in the test. The other element includes rumors about the test and misguidance. From the responses of the test-takers, three categories emerged. These categories are good, average, and bad. Following are the comments of the successful participants of the study. To some participants (3, 31%) test was good. To (2, 23%) the experience of taking the test was average whereas one of the successful participants revealed that to him the experience of taking the test was bad.

Well: It was a combination of both excitement and nervousness. Overall it was a good experience.

Successful test-taker-3

Like successful test-takers, the unsuccessful test-takers' response to the question about the experience of taking the test was mixed. It means good, average, and worse this can be seen in the light of the comments of unsuccessful participants of the study.

Hmm: The experience of taken ECAT was an average one. I mean to say it was neither good nor bad.

Unsuccessful test-takers-13

The response to the same question from the unsuccessful participants was

It was a bad experience of mine. Because I was not interested in taking ECAT. I was not prepared for it. I appeared in the test without preparation.

Unsuccessful test-taker-2

Finding 2:

The experience of taking test matters in the Washback effects of the test. From the comments of the unsuccessful participants it was found to some of the participants (10, 75%) it was good, to other participants (5, 25%) it was the worst experience. As compared to the group a successful participant the unsuccessful participant was found less motivated. While in the findings of RQ2 of the study, the unsuccessful test-takers were found less motivated. As they seemed directionless and less focused as compared to their counterpart successful test-takers. In their comments, they responded that they

have no direction and guidelines. From the comments of the interview of the successful participants, it was found that the experience of taking ECAT for some participants was good, and for other participants was bad whereas for other participants was average.

Deterministic effect of ECAT

Bachman and Palmer (1996) suggested that test affects the lives of test-takers in two ways. The first way in which they receive feedback is in the form of the score or results. The second way is the future decisions made about them based on the score they received on the test. The findings revealed the following facts: To successful participants, it was a turning point in their lives. On the other hand, the researcher found that participants were aware of the exposure to opportunities apart from getting entry into MUET. Their life aims were different. In nutshell, the failure in ECAT was no threat to their future.

Factors Contributed to the success and failures of the test-takers

The Washback researchers cleared that Washback is not a linear effect of the test. Rather, it is a complex phenomenon. It involves many factors and stakeholders contribute to its effects. Therefore, it is clear that ECAT is a standardized test and recognized exam in Pakistan. The successful participants seemed to be fully prepared for the test. Behind their success, the role of the test preparation industry, mock tests, Exam preparation materials, and parents' support were the main factors in the success of the participants of the study. The unsuccessful participants were disinfested in ECAT, lack of guidance had a low academic background, limited seats, and concepts were not clear.

RQ2: Findings of the research question 2mes.

Test-Preparation Strategies of Successful Test-Takers

Joining of Centre

In Pakistan, it is a common practice to join the Centre to score well on the test. The parents, students, and other stakeholders seem to rely on the tuition centers to get success in the selection process for the ECAT. These centers tailor their exam preparation strategies to the requirement of the test. The majority of the successful test-takers (10, 85%) responded while talking about their test preparation strategies that they joined the coaching centers to score well on the test. Only one participant responded that he did not join the Centre. This might be speculated that students who get admission to the MUET are supported by their parents financially. The fee structure of the coaching centers is skyrocketing, this shows that only affording parents can send their children to these highly acclaimed centers. A few comments of the successful test-takers on the question of test-preparation

strategies were the following:

Well, like all other students, I have my own test preparation strategy. For this I joined the coaching Centre. And there I follow and practice all the tips and tricks to solve MCQS.

Successful test-taker -2

Another participant commented that,

I joined the coaching Centre immediately after the intermediate examination. The decision was due to the shortage of time and the course was long and completion was tough. There I strictly follow the techniques given by teachers. Their strategy was to conduct a weekly, monthly, and mock tests. Therefore, we were trained to attempt the questions in the test.

Successful test-taker -12

From the above-mentioned comments of the successful participants of the study, the researcher found the two sub-themes mock test and tips and tricks to solve MCQS.

In the findings from the interviews of successful participants, it was revealed that the coaching center played a significant role in the success of participants. On the other hand here in this section of the unsuccessful test-takers, it was found that the majority (7, 78%) of the unsuccessful participants did not join any Centre. Therefore, they were found less focused and without guidance. In the data analysis of the successful test-takers, it was found that the candidates were well-trained to attempt the exam and they were goal-oriented and motivated. Whereas in the case of the unsuccessful participants we have seen they were less motivated and less interested in the test. The same thing we have noticed in the section on test preparation strategies of the unsuccessful participants. This whole scenario can be seen in the following comments of the unsuccessful participants.

I had not joined the coaching center because I was not crazy to become an engineer

Unsuccessful test-taker-2

Mock Test

It is common practice in Pakistan that many academies arrange the mock test before the conduct of ECAT by the university authority. Therefore, the aspirants of the ECAT rush behind the mock test to assess their ability to cope with the tough exam and prepare themselves mentally. The majority of the successful participants (15,100%) responded that they attempt mock tests to score high on the exam. The following comments of the successful participants may be representative of this category.

I attempt mock tests arranged by different tuition academies. It boosts my confidence and encourages me to score well on tests.

Successful test-taker-1

The same response was given by another participant of the study in the following words:

Well, the mock test was arranged by our tuition academy. Their marking system and whole environment were just like the environment of MUET. As we were made familiar with the test environment of MUET. In this way, we were familiar with the examination environment.

Successful test-taker -2

In the prevailed testing society the mock test is an indispensable part of it. The students who seek admission to engineering universities often go through these mock tests. The same trend was found in our research this suggests that the successful participants attempt the mock test to assess their ability. On the other hand, the unsuccessful participants have not tried to attempt the mock test.

Techniques and tips to solve MCQS paper

To pass a high-stakes exam like ECAT, there are always certain tips and tricks to solve questions. Therefore, the candidates also follow and practice those tips and tricks during their exam preparation. The successful participants (7, 54%) responded that they strictly follow the tips and tricks to solve the MCQS paper. These tips and tricks are usually given by subject specialists at the academies and these tips and tricks are mentioned in the exam preparation books like Dogars ECAT book etc.

From the analysis of the interviews on the question of test preparation strategies, it was found that the successful participants invested all their energies in learning tips and tricks to solve the MCQS test.

It is mentioned earlier that unsuccessful participants had not joined the center. Therefore, it was found that they rely on the ratification policy. One of the participants in a joyful mood expressed that ratification is the best qualification for the examination. Some of the participants (5, 23%) revealed that instead of focusing to clear the concepts they started to memorize the formulas and law's as the test was from the science subjects and English. One of the participants in a joyful mood expressed: Ratification is the best qualification for the examination.

Unsuccessful test-taker -8

RQ3:

The findings of research question 3 are:

Test-Takers' Perception

The third research question of the study was related to the perceptions of test-takers about the ECAT. The perceptions of participants were measured in the light of Greens 'model. This model is based on the following three postulates.

- Test difficulty
- Test Value
- Test Importance

All these postulates suggested by Greens' model will be discussed in detail individually.

Test Difficulty

The very first finding was found in the terms of Test Difficulty, Test value, and test importance. It was found through the data analysis that the test was not difficult for both the groups of study. This can be seen in light of the responses given by successful and unsuccessful participants. The responses of the almost total number of participants (n=30) were the same. This suggests the test was to the point i.e., it was according to the prescribed syllabus. To them, the test was not much difficult. There was not a single participant in the study declared that it was a tough test. They consider it as an average test combination of 50 % difficult questions and 50% easy questions.

Test Value

Next, Greens' (2007) model suggests that the test may value for some stakeholders of the testing community whereas the possibility is this it is not of value to other stakeholders. It was found by the researcher from the interview of the participants that the ECAT exam was of value to some of the test-takers the test-takers whereas to other test-takers it was not of value. See the below comments given by the participants of the study. The total number of successful participants of the study (N=15) was valued high to the test. Their responses indicated that they were focused to achieve their goal. During their entire journey while asking about their perceptions of ECAT, they seemed more focused. There were elements of fear, excitement, and nervousness at the same time. They reported that the test was important for their career building. Whereas, the responses of the unsuccessful test-takers were mixed. Few of the participants were focused, whereas others were interested in another field, they seemed satisfied while getting admission to other universities. Some of the participants reported that ECAT is of less importance as compared to the IBA Karachi test, NED test, and IBS test. Therefore, the test value for the participants was different.

Test Importance

Another point of Grees' model was that tests may be important to some of the stakes holders and they may not be important to other stakeholders. It was found in the comments of the participants of the test-takers that to successful test-takers test was of prime importance. A vivid example of this was found in their response when they were asked a question about their test preparation strategies

and the everlasting effect of the test on their lives. On the other hand, to the majority of the unsuccessful test-takers the ECAT was not of much importance. The researchers conclude that successful test-takers were not crazy for ECAT. As they were found that they were not serious in ECAT. It was found in their test preparation strategies as well. The effects of ECAT on their lives. A few of the comments of both participants of the study are given below:

Transparency of the Test

The transparency of high-stakes tests matters to all stakeholders of the test community. The directly affected stakeholders are the test-takers. The participants indicated that they were pretty satisfied with the score they secure on the test.

The perceptions of the total participants of the study were test-takers both successful and unsuccessful were satisfied and happy. Their responses were about transparency it is an excellent and perfect marking system. No one can doubt the transparency of the score of the test. Only two participants had come up with the response that it was not justified as they only provide the answer key whereas they have not provided us with the question paper. There were reservations about their response and that they might change the answer sheet or the question paper.

The marking system of MUET was computerized and they provide us with the answer key and the answer key was uploaded. Therefore, we do not think there can be biased results. It was fair and free from any favoritism and despotism.

Successful test-taker 4

Satisfaction with the Format and Content

In the Washback research, the different stakeholders often seemed not satisfied with the content and format of the test. Moreover, MCQ's exams have always faced criticism in the testing community. Interestingly the researcher found satisfaction on the part of test-takers. Interestingly the researcher found satisfaction on the part of test-takers. The response of the participants to the question about the format of the test was satisfactory. Almost all the participants (N =30) declared that the format of the ECAT is good. This can be seen in the light of the comments of participants of the study:

Well: the content and format of the test were based on the concept and understanding of the test. The ECAT is an MCQ's-type test. I think it is best. Because MCQ's type test requires more extensive study and assesses the student's ability to understand concepts. Therefore, the content and format of the test were overall good.

Successful test-taker -14

The comment of other successful participants on the same question was:

We all were informed about the test format and content through the prospect of MUET. They explain all the instructions with the sample test format. If candidates cover the entire course they can easily score high on the test.

Successful test-taker- 10

ECAT is not a Tough Exam

The participants revealed that passing the ECAT is not a difficult task. The reason they give it is from the prescribed syllabus of the intermediate Sindh Textbook Board. They only consider it a lengthy syllabus to cover which requires hard work and dedication.

ECAT Devoid of Criticism

According to the Washback researchers high-stakes exams are often stigmatized for favoritism, despotism, and criticism. (Khan 2000, Brown, 2004). Surprisingly in our study, it was found that ECAT is free from this type of criticism. It was found when the researcher was trying to find out the answer to RQ3 which is a test-takers' perception of ECAT. Both groups of the study (30, 100%) concluded that the transparency of the ECAT is 100% sure. They considered ECAT a flawless exam.

One participant's comment was:

Yeah, the score was according to my expectations.

Unsuccessful test-taker -3

Other participant expresses:

The scoring system of ECAT is awesome. There are no such blunders in it. It is a multiple-choice test. The scoring in these types of tests is most probably sure. And I am satisfied with the score I secure. Besides this, they also provide the answer key.

Unsuccessful test-taker- 6

The e successful participants' comment was:

Yes, it was satisfactory because the carbon copy of the test was with us and the answer key was uploaded on the same day as the test.

Successful test-taker -5

The other participant says:

The marking system of MUET was computerized and they provide us with the answer key and the answer key was uploaded. Therefore, I do not think there can be biased results. It was fair and free from any favoritism and despotism.

Test-Takers Significant Participants in Testing Community

In the literature review part, we have discussed in detail the stakeholders of the testing community. In the testing community test-takers are the main stakeholders. The Washback researchers have empathized with the research on the test-takers. The study was an attempt to investigate the Washback effects of ECAT on test-takers. In the investigation of Washback effects, the researcher found that the test-takers of ECAT had sound knowledge and awareness about ECAT and their role in the test process.

The researcher while analyzing of data found that the test-takers of ECAT were enough capable to give suggestions to future test-takers and test developers. In the following section, we will discuss in detail the participants' suggestions for the test developers and test-takers.

Test-Takers' Suggestions for The Future Test-Takers

The participants of the study were asked about their suggestions for future test-takers. To score well in the exam and avoid the fallacies done by the participants. One participant suggests:

Take your Board exams seriously so that you already have a strong base for the entry test. Do not hesitate "to ask friends and teachers for help.

Successful test-takers-1

The suggestion from other participants was in the following words:

For future test-takers, we would recommend that they should be focused and dedicated. Furthermore, they should learn certain tricks and techniques to attempt the test to guess the right answer to the question.

Successful test-takers-11

Implications

The implications of the study are useful for test developers, test-takers, teachers, and parents. The implications for the test developers are they can build a trusting relationship with the test-takers of their test. It is the essence of any good test. Moreover, the implications of the study for the teachers are in terms of preparing their students for the test. Moreover, the implications of the study are for parents in the sense that they should not impose on their children. If children are willing to join the engineering field they must encourage their kids and provide all the possible facilities for the test preparations.

Limitations

Apart from the implications, there are certain limitations in this study. The study was carried out on a small scale with a limited number of participants. Despite its loopholes, it opens the doors for future research on the Washback effects of exams like A-level examinations on test-takers and other stakeholders on a large scale.

Conclusion

The study was designed with an urge to investigate the Washback effect of ECAT on test-takers. Test-takers are the main players in the entire field of the testing process. But the irony of fate is test-takers are the most neglected stakeholders in Washback research. Therefore, there is a gap in Washback research on test-takers. Keeping in mind the existing gap in Washback research the researcher focused on the untold stories of test-takers. To pay heed to untold and unheard voices it was found that the Washback effect of ECAT on its test-takers was strong and intense.

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