

Washback Effect on Examiners

Implications for the Greek KPg Language Evaluation System

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The evaluation of language skills is of great importance in the field of second language acquisition, since assessment processes are often geared towards providing satisfactory feedback on the candidate's, and thus of the learner's, language proficiency level. This implies that evaluation systems influence certain educational factors. These include not only teachers and learners, but also the teaching material, the curriculum, the test developers and finally the examiners. Moreover, high-stakes language tests influence the norms of society. The criterion of test usefulness, as defined in its social dimension by Bachman/Palmer (1996), is affected by the test use and especially the test misuse, which may originate to the malpractice of test developers and examiners. Thus, washback effects of language tests in the educational level (micro) can trigger a larger impact in the societal level (macro).

The study aims to present the washback effects of the KPg (Greek Language Evaluation System) German Language Exam in the micro and macro level. Attention is paid to the generation of positive and negative washback on the examiners of the Writing module. In order to gain an overview of the evaluation processes we undertook the following research pattern: 21 examiners were asked to evaluate six short essays written by B2 examinees. Research findings showed variations of test scores for the same essay, which may lead to misinterpretation of test scores and thus to test misuse. In order to determine the washback effects responsible for these variations we examined with the aid of two questionnaires the factors that generated positive and/or negative washback on the same group of examiners. This research deepened our understanding of the factors and processes that affect the performance of examiners on high-stakes tests, such as the Greek KPg assessment system, and generate washback effects in both the educational and the social dimension. These washback inducing factors were analyzed under the scope of Messick's unified validity concept. Hence, the study argues that concerns for ethical conduct from the examiners' side must be grounded in the validation of test use. It is thus suggested, that ethical test use must be considered, in order to maintain quality in the design, development, measurement, interpretation of scores and use of language tests.