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**University of Tlemcen**  
**Faculty of Letters and Languages**  
**Department of English**

***Investigating the Effect of Washback in Enhancing  
EFL Students' Oral Proficiency:  
The Case of Third Year EFL Students at Tlemcen  
University***

Dissertation submitted to the Department of English as a partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Didactics

**PRESENTED BY :**

Mr. Mohammed Yacine ZAOUI

**SUPERVISED BY :**

Dr. Taoufik DJENNANE

**BOARD OF EXAMINERS**

Dr. Abderrahmane BASSOU	Chairman
Dr. Taoufik DJENNANE	Supervisor
Mr. Youcef MESSAOUDI	Examiner

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# Dedication

*I dedicate this dissertation to:*

*My beloved parents who have always been a constant source of inspiration. Without their love and support, this research would not have been made possible;*

*My dear aunt and my adorable brothers Yousef, krimo, Ahmed;*

*All my family members and friends.*

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## **Abstract**

The aim of the current research study was to recognize the major problems that face EFL students when communicating and when they are assessed in oral examination. It also examines the effect of positive washback in enhancing students' oral proficiency. To reach this end, an exploratory case study of the third year students was undertaken in the Department of English at Tlemcen University, Algeria, in which data were collected from a sample population based on 30 students and 4 teachers of English. The study built only on one research instrument: questionnaires administered to the students and teachers. The data were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The results uncovered that there are several factors leading to difficulties in oral communication, like lack of self-confidence, stress and anxiety. The results also showed that the teachers use different types of tests to assess their students' oral communicating performance such as the IELTS test. At the end of the research, a number of recommendations were suggested with the aim to improve teaching/learning and assessment of the oral communicating skill.

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# List of abbreviations and Acronyms

**EFL:** English as a Foreign Language

**IDP:** The International Development Program

**IELTS:** International English Language Testing system

**LMD:** License, Master, Doctorate

**STT:** Students Talking Time

**TTT:** Teacher Talking Time

**UCLES:** University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate

# General Introduction

# General introduction

According to the needs of testing to improve students' oral communication performance, washback phenomenon or the after effect of testing has become a critical issue that impedes the students' verbal communication, which can influence positively or negatively the learning process. As a result it leads to other obstructions such as anxiety and fear from doing mistakes while performing an oral task. A set of well-designed oral tests were established to enhance the students' oral proficiency in order to lessen the negative washback during an oral examination such as the IELTS program.

The use of washback positively can improve students' fluency, but it depends on the teaching methods used during oral production lesson. Hence, teachers should use the appropriate oral test examination by predicting the effect of oral tests on their students' behaviours and results. The use of universal programs as IELTS may help teachers to reduce the negative effect of washback during an oral examination.

The students remain to suffer from anxiety during oral tests, which influence negatively on their fluency by losing the ability to speak accurately. This research study endeavours to investigate the effect of washback in enhancing students' oral proficiency. It also shed the light on the use of IELTS program and how it may promote students' verbal communication by decreasing the negative effect of washback during oral tests. The study was conducted at the level of Tlemcen University with the participation of the third-year English students. The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What difficulties do students face while performing an oral task?
2. How can positive washback help learners develop their oral communication skills?
3. To what extent the IELTS program is useful to help teachers enhance the students' oral communication

Based on the prior investigations and researchers assumptions towards the washback phenomenon the following hypotheses were settled to answer the previously mentioned questions research:

1. Students face anxiety and lack of communicative competencies during oral Performance.
2. Positive washback help learners develop Fluency
3. IELTS program help teachers to lessen the negative washback during an oral examination.

The dissertation is divided into two chapters. The first chapter gives an overview about the washback phenomenon and its impact on learning and teaching. The emphasis will be on the types of washback, oral communication assessment and its usefulness, the impact of IELTS program on students' oral proficiency.

Chapter two includes two parts. The first part is devoted to provide a detail description of the research design, instrument tool and the sample population, in addition the research site were the study took place. The second part aims to give an adequate analysis of the data collected from the instrument tool, in parallel to set an overall discussion of the results obtained throughout the research procedure. Besides, it attempts to answer the aforementioned research questions by means of confirming or rejecting the hypotheses stated before. Eventually the researcher proposed some suggestions and recommendations that may help teachers and students.

# Chapter one



## 1.1. Introduction

Language is a means of communication at first level, the development of this skill should be structured under different ways of teaching and testing. The present chapter portrays the effect of positive washback on enhancing and promoting students' oral communication. It describes the most important features of washback and oral communication skill with a reflection on the most important literature about the topic under consideration. The chapter includes definitions about washback phenomenon, types of washback, its impact on learners and teachers, oral communication and IELTS program and its impact on oral proficiency, in addition to a reflection on some difficulties and obstacles that can face learners when they communicate resulting from washback.

## 1.2. The Washback Phenomenon

Elucidations of washback are almost numerous as the linguists who write about it. Washback or backwash is a term currently used in the field of applied linguistics; it refers to the influence of testing on teaching and learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993). It has become a notable phenomenon in education "What is assessed becomes what is valued which becomes what is taught (McEwen, 1995:42). Some recent dictionaries as the Collins Cobuild dictionary defined washback as "*unpleasant after effects of an event or situation*", and "*the unwelcome repercussions of some social action*" by Webster's Comprehensive dictionary. Washback (Alderson & wall, 1993) or backwash (Biggs, 1995, 1996) it refers to the influence of testing on learning and teaching. The motif is firmly demonstrated in the notion of examination can control teaching. It also referred to **as *measurement driven instruction*** (Popham, 1987). According to Popham(1987) this notion took place when an achievement test has such serious consequences for both teachers and students that the test defines what is taught .For instance standardized test used to rank schools in the local newspaper, so it confirms the interrelation of the content and format curriculum or "curriculum surrogate (substitute), such as textbook" is supported.

### 1.3. Types of Washback

Washback phenomenon has a direct impact on learning and teaching according to its influence, which can be positive, negative, neither or both. (Alderson & Wall 1993, p. 41, 117) note that *'tests can be powerful determiners, both positively and negatively of what happens in the classroom'*. The effect of washback is considered to be positive or negative depending on the content of the test used and other circumstances as the classroom environment, the syllabus design and the different approaches used by different participants within the context.

Buck wrote,

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

From buck's quotation it is noticeable that there is an interrelation between learners and teachers to describe the type of washback depending on the importance of the test taken, and its influence over the future; moreover he asserted that the washback effect could be either valuable or baleful. Therefore, it depicts two types of washback (negative and positive). As it is illustrated in the following figure:

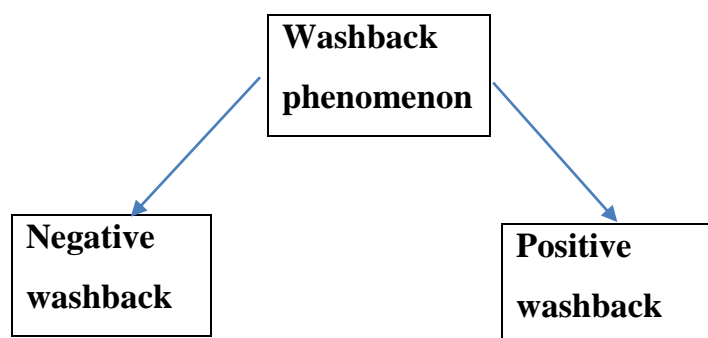


Figure 1.1: Types of Washback (Azmi et al., 2007:4)



### 1.3.1. Positive Washback

Positive washback occurred when many factors are present cohesively as classroom setting. According to (Anderson & Wall, 1993) teachers and learners will be motivated to fulfil their teaching and learning goals. On the other hand (Pearson, 1988:107) argue that a good test can be utilized and designed as beneficial teaching-learning activities, so as to encourage a positive teaching-learning process. Also, the educational/societal system, which is controlled by test holders who represent the pivotal role in the success of the learning as they have the authority power to realize the goals of teaching and learning, such as the submitting of new textbooks and new curricula to promote the quality of teaching. The function of the use of tests is to foster the idea of lifelong learning and encourage people to learn English. The table below describes the different features of positive washback.

<b>Positive Washback</b>	
<b>Classroom settings</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tests influence teachers to finish the syllabus in the prescribed time limits.</li> <li>2. Tests encourage students to do their best to have a sense of fulfillment and thus promote learning.</li> <li>3. Good tests can be utilized and designed to be as a model to enhance the learning and encourage students to be positive toward high stakes exams.</li> </ol>
<b>Educational/societal system</b>	Decision makers use their authority power of high stakes exams to reach the goals of teaching and learning. Such as the implementation of new curricula and textbooks.

**Table 1.1.** Features of Positive washback. (Yi-Ching Pan, 2009:261)

### 1.3.2. Negative Washback

Negative washback occurred when teachers focus only on what is to be tested, in other words, it appears when they usually teach to the test by narrowing the curriculum. According to (Shohamy, 1992) the test will lead to the narrowing of

content in the curriculum. What students have learned is test language, instead of total phases. Hence, teachers resort to ignore the activities and subjects that do not have relation with the content of the test; this drives to change the curriculum in a negative way. Moreover, what concerns the classroom environment, many teachers detailed high anxiety, fear and pressure to cover the material, as they felt that students' test scores assessed their job performance (Cheng, 2005). Testing programs basically lessen the time available for instruction and narrowing the curriculum and potentially reduce the capacities of teachers to teach content and to use methods and materials that they are incompatible with standardized testing formats (Smith, 1991). What concerns the Educational/societal system, decision makers predominately use tests to elevate their political agendas and control the educational system. According to (Shohamy, 1996). Tests are used as a *“lever for change”*. The table below describes the different features of negative washback

<b>Negative washback</b>	
<b>Classroom settings</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tests foster teachers to narrow the curriculum and forfeit the instructional time, this lead to “teaching to the test”.</li> <li>2. Tests create a mood of anxiety for both to teachers and students.</li> <li>3. Students may just learn what is to be tested, but do not learn the real-life of knowledge.</li> <li>4. Cramming lessons effect negatively the students' motivation toward test preparation.</li> </ol>
<b>Educational/societal system</b>	Decision makers influence negatively the teaching process and use tests as a lever of change to promote their political agendas.

**Table 1.2.**Features of negative washback (Yi-Ching, 2009:261)

#### 1.4. The Impact of Washback in Language Teaching and Learning

Washback phenomenon becomes a critical issue in teaching and learning because of its direct impact, which can influence the learning process either positively or negatively. Wall (1997) distinguished between test impact and test washback in terms of the scope of the effects. According to Wall (1997), *impact* refers to any of the effects that a test may have on individuals, policies or practices, within the classroom, the school, the educational system or society as a whole. There are many sides that may influence indirectly the teaching and learning as the policy makers. According to Shohamy (1992) washback phenomenon is the result of external authority power and the major impact will be on test takers. Shohamy et al (1996) expanded on this position arguing that

*The power and authority of tests enable policy-makers to use them as effective tools for controlling educational systems and prescribing the behavior of those who are affected by their results administrators, teachers and students. School-wide exams are used by principals and administrators to enforce learning, while in classrooms, tests and quizzes are used by teachers to impose discipline and to motivate learning. (p. 299)*

From this quotation, we deduce that the legislative and authority power are the responsible in identifying the type of washback depending on the policy followed, tests are considered as a lever of change between policy makers' hands to control the educational system. According to Petrie (1987:175) it is not an overstatement to say that evaluation and testing have become an engine for implementing educational policy. As a result of this complexity, policy makers and researchers must work together to promote the evaluation of the effectiveness of the educational system. Hence, Hughes (1993) described the Trichotomy washback model and explained as follows

*The trichotomy [...] allows us to construct a basic model of backwash. 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. (p. 2)*

It is observable from Hughes washback model that he focuses the impact of test on participants' perceptions and attitudes and this leads to affect the learning outcomes. All these components of washback model is illustrated in the table below

- (a) Participants students, classroom teachers, administrators, materials developers and publishers, whose perceptions and attitudes toward their work may be affected by a test
- (b) Processes any actions taken by the participants which may contribute to the process of learning
- (c) Products what is learned (facts, skills, etc.) and the quality of the learning.

**TABLE 1.3:** The Trichotomy washback Model (Hughes, 1993:2)

### 1.5. Types of Languages Tests

A test is defined as '*any procedure for measuring ability, knowledge and performance*' (Richards et al., 1985:291), so the test is a process to measure the linguistic background knowledge and abilities of learners. Hence, the need of testing leads to the appearance of many types of language tests.(Benmostefa, 2014:77)Below, some types are briefly mentioned

- Proficiency test, is a test that measures how much of language someone has learned
- Diagnostic test is foremost designed to diagnose some particular linguistic factors as pronunciation and phonological feature of the English language.
- Language aptitude test resort to measure a learner aptitude and identifying learners who are able to succeed.
- progress test is comparable to achievement test is generally administered at the end of the unit and it is considered as summative assessment, in addition

it helps educators in particular and examiner in general to assess the grade of their programs and methods used in learning language.

- TOFEL is the well-known and widely used language test in the world, it is considered as standardized test of English proficiency for non-native speakers who want to study abroad in American Universities and colleges. (ibid).

## 1.6. Language Test Quality

The quality of tests is important to describe the type of washback, if it is either positive or negative. Brown (1994:253) remarks that, *‘one of the biggest obstacles to overcome in constructing adequate tests is to measure the criterion and not inadvertently something else’*. According to Brown (1994), in this sense, he set three major features that describes a good test: validity, practicality and reliability, moreover if these three requirements are present in a test this can lead to positive washback. On the other hand, if teachers or test holders ignore the harmony between the content of the test and uniformity of the results of tests; it can drive to a negative test impact on learning and teaching.

### 1.6.1. Validity

It refers to how much a test measures what should be measured, or can be utilized effectively for the reasons for which it is proposed. (Benmostefa, 2014, p.72). Briefly, does the test assess what is expected to assess? Harmer (2001:322) notes that, *“to test writing ability with an essay question that requires specialist knowledge of history or biology- unless it is known that all students share this knowledge before they do the test.”* As Harmer (ibid) argues that Teachers should pay attention to the content of the test and assess what has been taught in the curriculum to ensure the validity of the test taken. If a test has poor validity then it does not measure the job-related content, when this is the situation there is no reason for utilizing the test’s outcomes for its proposed reasons. Benmostefa (2014:72) indicates that there are many aspects of validity to determine what the test

actually measures. Below some aspects are briefly mentioned. Benmostefa (2014:73).

- Content validity is the connection between the subjects related to task and test items. The test should evaluate only the content regarding to the field of the study.
- Construct validity implicates the construct (concept, ideas and notions) in conformity to the case of the art in the field. Construct validity aims endorsement between updated theories and the specific measuring of the test components.
- Empirical validity is used to elucidate the accuracy of a procedure by comparing it with another process or method, which has been described to be valid.

### **1.6.2. Practicality**

There are some functional consideration that are important when designing and constructing a test. According to Benmostefa (2014) these features are closely related to time limitations, ease of administration, financial means and scoring of the test. Certainly, a test, which demands considerable financial means and enormous budget, is considered impractical. Moreover, a test which is time consuming in the sense of the test takers took hours to complete it is considered impractical. On the contrary, a test that takes few minutes for the students and a long time for the teacher to correct it is also impractical. Finally, a practical test should accumulate all the features mentioned before.

### **1.6.3. Reliability**

Is the extent to which a test or any measuring procedure gives the same results or repeated trials. In other words, a test is said reliable when it show consistent results when it is given on different occasions. Benmostefa (2014:71). It is obvious that a test that measure the same skills by using the same methods of testing concerning the difficulty and the length of the test, this prove the reliability of the test. Harmer (2001) notes that, *“In practice, ‘reliability’ is enhanced by*

*making the test instructions absolutely clear, restricting the scope for variety in the answers, and making sure that the test conditions remain constant*". It is noticeable that a reliable test should be consistent in terms of scoring and regularity of test conditions.

### **1.7. Oral Communication Skill**

Competence in oral communication, listening and speaking is necessary to student's personal life and academic career. Sherwyn et al. (2007:1) assert that if the students have an ineffective listening skill he cannot understand the instructions delivered by the teacher. Consequently, students with unavailing listening skill fail to understand the lesson given by the teacher. As a result of poor speaking skills. Students who cannot express themselves or have difficulties in articulation, they may be erroneously judged as poorly informed, so this lead to the miscarriage of the educational system. Hence to promote their communicative competence. Kenny (2002) notes that students should learn to communicate at a level that will serve the student both within the university and in postgraduate professional and personal life. According to Morreale, et al. (2000:1), the importance of communication relates to:

- The development of the whole person;
- The improvement of the educational enterprise;
- The development of responsible world citizens, both socially and culturally; and
- succeeding in one's career and in the business enterprise.

To reach the proficiency in oral communication, a solid communication assessment program is important such as IELTS program; it will be described in the following subsections.

#### **1.7.1. The Usefulness of Oral Communication Assessment**

If students listening and speaking proficiencies were methodically assessed. It will be possible that schools implement valuable universal oral communication programs and methods. According to (Barnes, 1980). One substantial benefit of large-scale assessment of oral communication is that such testing can guide

innovation in the curriculum. Indeed, early experience in Great Britain and elsewhere demonstrates that speech assessment has a “washback” effect on the amount and kind of speech teaching undertaken in classrooms (Sherwyn et al, 2007:2). It is obvious that washback phenomenon is present in oral communication assessment, but the use of universal programs can innovate the quality of assessment and lessen the negative washback during an oral examination. Rubin (1981) observes that another benefit of oral communication assessment is that test results can be used to make decisions about the best manner in which to place individual students in instructional sequences. Assessment procedures that yield micro, rather than macro, judgments can be used for individual diagnostic purposes. According to Rubin (ibid), students who are evaluated as having difficulty with fundamental vocal production factors might focus on oral reading and presenting, while those who have difficulties in the area of planning might concentrate on developing skills linked to organizing and outlining. Students who demonstrate strengths in literal comprehension of spoken materials might proceed to instructional units asserting more critical listening. Consequently, it is obvious that more comprehension about student knowledge and skills will lead to better curricular decisions and positive washback (Rubin, ibid)

### **1.8. IELTS Program**

(IELTS) stands for the International English Language Testing System. It is owned jointly by University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES). The British Council, and the International Development Program (IDP) (Liyong Cheng et al., 2003:73). According to sheng (2003), the test is currently taken by around 200,000 candidates a year at 224 centers in 105 countries, most candidates seeking admission to higher education in the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States and Canada. The IELTS program is task-based testing system, which evaluates the candidates language skills who need to study in the aforementioned countries. It includes four modules listening, reading, speaking and writing.



### 1.8.1. IELTS Test Format

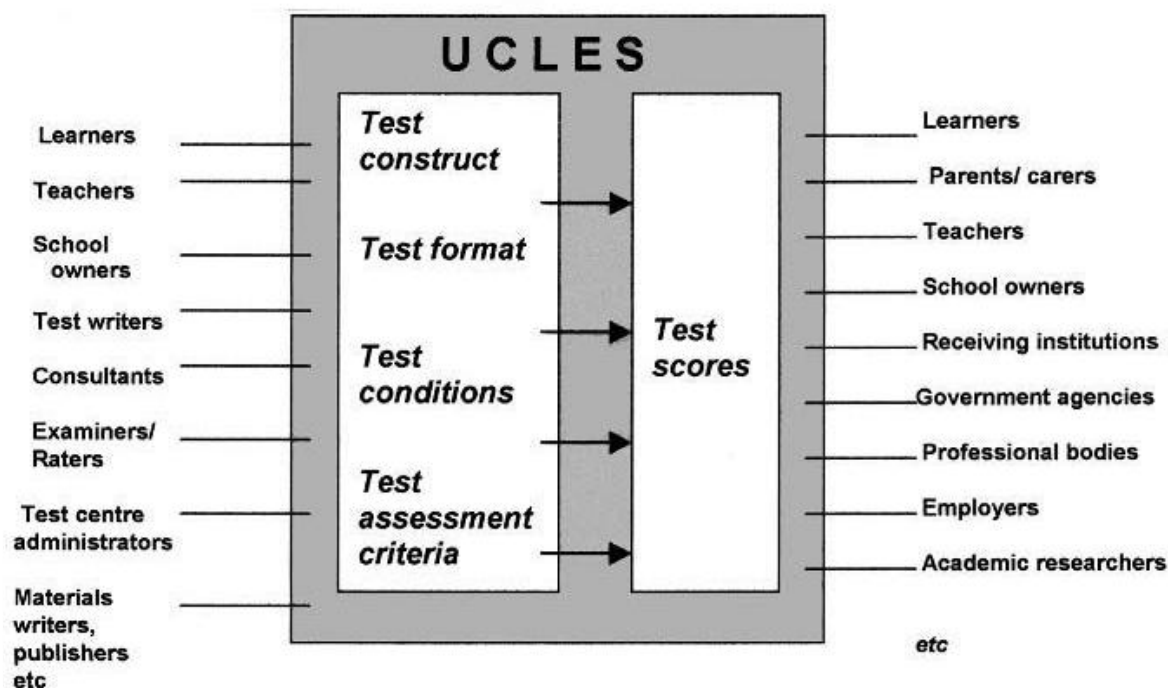
IELTS is a task-based testing system, which assesses the four language skills of candidates who need to promote their level of English language. In addition it scores the overall language ability on a nine-band scale. Below a summary of IELTS' test format is illustrated in the following table.

IELTS provides a score, in the form of a profile, for each of the four skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking). The first component of the IELTS assesses listening skills in a test enduring 30–40 minutes with 40 items in four progressively more demanding sections, the first two focusing on social needs, the second two on educational or training topics. The academic Reading test (60 minutes, 40 questions) includes three non-specialist, general-interest texts, and lengths totaling 1500–2500 words, taken from magazines, journals, and papers, books, on issues appropriate and accessible for postgraduate participants. IELTS academic writing test is a 60-minute paper requiring the production of a text of 150 words and one of 250 words. Both academic writing tasks are purposed for the assessment of candidates' responses in terms of register, rhetorical organization, style, and content appropriate to topics and contexts, which appear identical to those in the academic reading test. The IELTS speaking test is a face-to face oral test with an experienced examiner. It evaluates the candidate's ability to communicate with other English speakers using the range of language skills necessary to study through the medium of English.

**Table 1.4** IELTS test format (Cheng et al., 2003:88)

### 1.8.2. IELTS Impact on Oral Proficiency

After the emergence of IELTS program in 1995, planning began for an evaluation of the effect and effectiveness of IELTS. Nick Saville and Michael Milanovic at UCLES arranged this project in cooperation with Charles Alderson at Lancaster University, who was assigned to help design and develop instrumentation. In addition, the validation and implementation of the IELTS impact study depending to the concept of washback. IELTS impact study is designed to help UCLES to comprehend responsibilities and attitudes of the stakeholders in this area of study. The stakeholders, the participants in IELTS test and UCLES must have accountable relationships as it is illustrated in Fig. 2.2. Messick (1989, p20) stickled on the implication of the outside influences of a test ***“unified validity framework,” in which “One facet is the source of justification of the testing, being based on appraisal of either evidence or consequence. The other facet is the function or outcome of the testing, being either interpretation or use”***. According to Messick (1989),it is observable that an impact study of an international proficiency test such as IELTS should concern itself with social consequences of test including all the participants and external factors that influence the candidates oral’ proficiency. After many investigations made by researchers. Yue (1997) notes that IELTS is producing positive washback on preparation materials and provide precise information about the test, and increase students’ test-taking knowledge.



**Figure 1.2.** Stakeholders in the testing community (Cheng et al., 2003:74)

### 1.9. The Effect of Anxiety on Oral Communication Skill

It is hard to define anxiety phenomenon because it is related to human behaviors. Anxiety is a complex psychological construct; it can be correlated with feelings of frustration, uneasiness, self-doubt, or underestimating one self and natural ego preserving fears. (Brown, 1994 Sellers, 2000). Scovel (1991) defines anxiety as *“a state of apprehension, a vague fear”*. According to these definitions, anxiety is fear that may cause the learner a passive feeling in the classroom environment. For instance, we have all experienced anxiety to some extent as language learners. It occurs when we suspect in our abilities of performing a certain task particularly an oral task and we feel anxious about succeeding in it. Hence, anxiety has a negative influence on students’ ability to communicate freely. According to (Price, 1991) when learners experience severe anxiety, it can be detrimental and the effect irreversible to them: they may be terrified of taking a language course, traumatized by unsuccessful performance and achievement, and consequently hate learning the language and choose not to study at all. Anxiety threatens directly the students’ oral performance. Horwitz (2001, p. 112) confirmed

that there is "*a consistent moderated negative relationship between anxiety and achievement*". According to Horwitz (2001), researchers have identified the potential sources of anxiety such as speaking in front of peers, fear of negative evaluation by peers and teacher (e.g., making mistakes), and language testing situations. In order to alleviate stress and help students to overcome language anxiety issue. It has been suggested that teachers need to play a vital role by taking responsibility in creating supportive and caring a relaxed mood in the classroom and understanding about anxiety as well as providing assistance to the students, e.g. Some researchers have looked into different teaching approaches to help students cope with anxiety. (Koch et al, 1991) supposed an approach (humanistic approaches, the Natural Approach) that helps students to overpass anxiety during an oral examination.

#### **1.10. Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on the description of the main notions related to the concept of washback. It has dealt with a definition of washback phenomenon and its impact on learning and teaching alike. In addition, a brief notion about the IELTS program was presented. In the umbra of this literature review, washback has an essential role in affecting negatively or positively the students' oral performance as it will be demonstrated in the following chapter.

# Chapter two

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## 2.1. Introduction

For each investigation or research, it is structured under hypotheses, research questions and a practical part, which is considered as the most important phase in the research study. In this chapter, the researcher made a deep investigation by examining a sample population to understand the most critical points of his study by using different research tools as questionnaire of both students and teachers. In this study, the sample population presented the 3<sup>rd</sup> year English students at the level of Tlemcen University and it provides a description of the sample population, the setting, teachers and learners profiles and the case study. It also represents the data analysis and the results of the research study.

## 2.2. Part one: Research Design

Part one is a short description about the methodology approach adopted in the current study. It gives information about the research instruments, the research site as well as the population taking part in the study.

### 2.2.1. Research Methods

Structured and successful research study should be designed under specific features to ensure its validity and reliability by using different types of methods. In our case the researcher, opt out to use different research methods. Data are collecting from different sources, the use of a mixed method approach ensure the diversity of data collection, which provides reliable results of the study. As Mackey & Gass (2005: 64) maintain, “*the use of multiple research techniques and multiple data sources contributes to the credibility of the investigation*”. There are two types of data collection methods. Quantitative data that represents questionnaire, which includes yes/no questions and multiple choices questions. However the qualitative data represents open ended questions as interviews, dairies and observation; it supplies researchers with “*open ended data in form of words pictures or icons in*

*need of further interpretation and analysis* O’Leary (2004:99). The method used in this research study is a combination between qualitative and quantitative data collection in the form of questionnaire, which includes yes/no questions, and open-ended questions for both students and teachers.

### **2.3. Research Participants**

The participants in this research study were EFL students enrolled in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year LMD at the level of Tlemcen University and teachers of oral production who have an experience of many years in teaching oral production.

#### **2.3.1. Students’ Profile**

The students who participated in this research study were 30 English students of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year from different groups, whose average age was 23 years; the oldest student was 33 and the youngest was 21. There were 16 (53.33%) male participants while female participants were 14 (46.66%), so the researcher chose randomly the participants and distributed the questionnaire except one group who used a specific program in oral production which is IELTS program.

#### **2.3.2. Teachers’ Profile**

The researcher selected the well-experienced teachers of oral production in the English department, who taking in charge of oral production module for many years. The sample was 4 teachers, among them three are males. Their experience in teaching oral production ranged from 4 to 6 years, whose ages range from 30 to 50.

## **2.4. Research Site**

The research study was managed in the English department at Tlemcen University with the third-year students. This department was founded in 1989; recently the department of foreign languages has been reconstructed while the English section becomes independent department these last years.

English department employs fulltime 63 teachers and provides more than one thousands chair. The system used is LMD, which stands for, in French abbreviation (License/Master/Doctorate). This system was implemented in Algeria since the academic year 2004/2005. The English department provides a diversity of modules according to two major specialties, which are literature & civilization and language studies.

## **2.5. Research Tools**

There are many ways to gather data during a research study. In the current study the researcher used only questionnaires which were administered to students and teachers. The questionnaire is a traditional data collection tool which aims to collect the maximum opinions of the sample population, which gives the opportunity to the researcher to describe the appropriate analysis and interpretation of data. According to Mackey & Gass (2005), the advantages of using the questionnaire is that it is useful for collecting data from a large population in a short time, and it is economical to use. The questionnaires used in the current study are mixed questionnaires, i.e., there are both close ended and open ended questions. Therefore, the data collected is of two types: quantitative and qualitative.



### **3.1. Part Two: Data Analysis and Discussion**

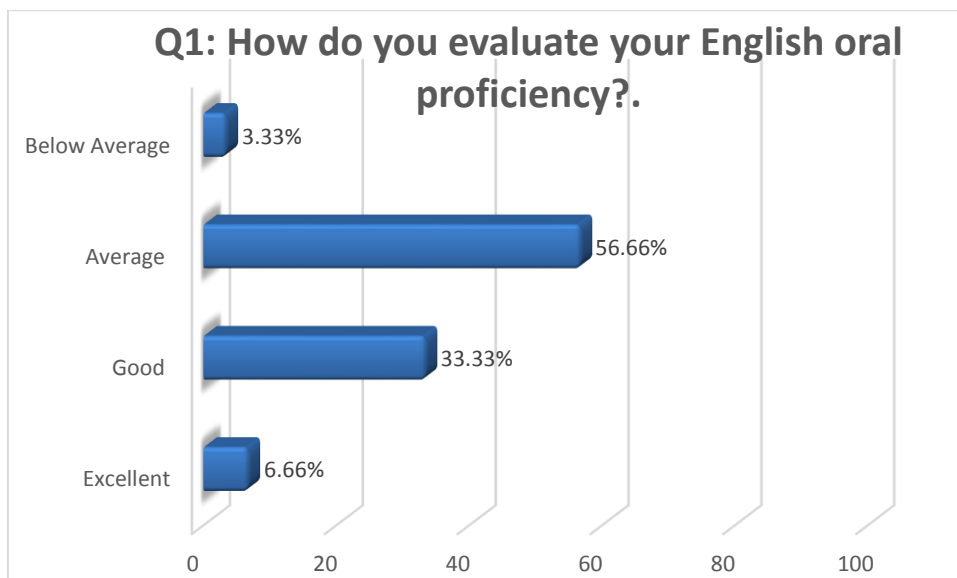
This part is devoted to analyze and interpret the data with regard of the theoretical part provided in chapter one. The goal is to analyze the data from the responses of both teachers and students, and interpret them to find adequate answers to the research questions.

### **3.2. Data Analysis**

This section consists of the analysis of the data collected from the questionnaires mentioned above. It is given to brass tacks of the whole data obtained in every part of the research procedure. The aim of this sensible phase of the research study is to find the appropriate answers of the research questions stated in the theoretical part, by proving the validity of the hypotheses proposed in the beginning of the research study. The analysis comprises qualitative and quantitative data. The core of the questionnaires includes yes/no questions and open-ended questions to contribute the credibility of the investigation.

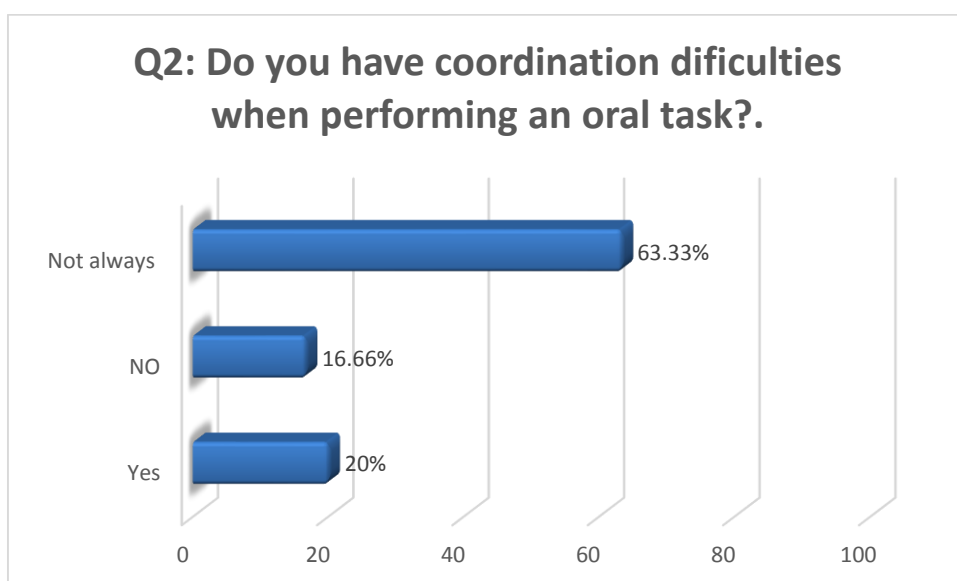
#### **3.2.1. Students' Questionnaire Data Analysis**

The questionnaire administered to students includes ten 'yes/no' questions and three 'open-ended' questions. They go around the extent to which the listening and speaking skills are developed. Furthermore, the questionnaire also checks the most common difficulties that can face students when performing an oral task during the test. It goes without saying that some items of the questionnaire verify students' perceptions about washback phenomenon and its impact on oral expression. The data are displayed in bar graphs, as mentioned below.



**Figure 2.3:** Self Evaluation of oral proficiency.

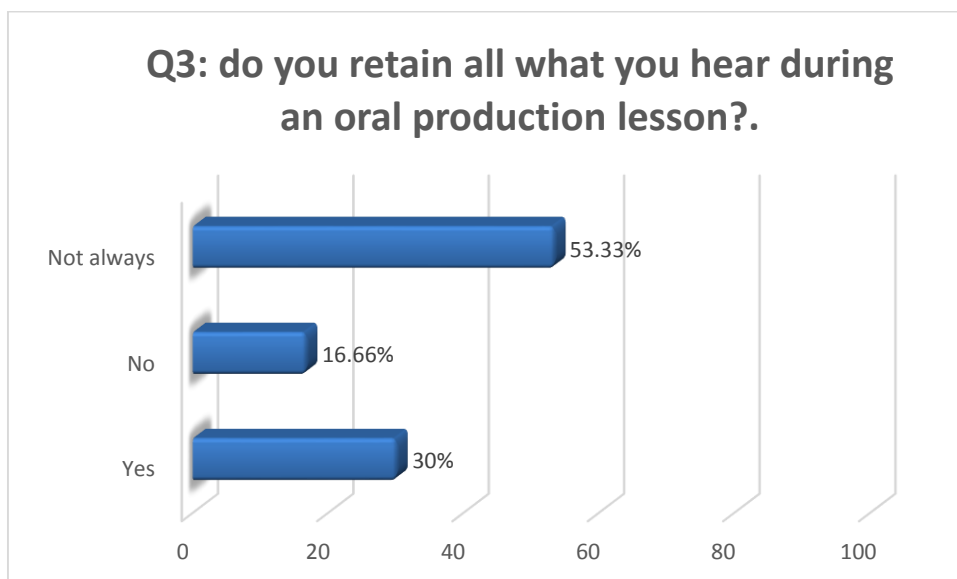
As it is shown in the Figure above, most students (56.66%) reveal that their oral proficiency is only average. About 33.33% of them proclaim to have good oral competence. Only a minority (3.33%) consider their level below average.



**Figure 2.4:** Coordination difficulties in performing an oral task.

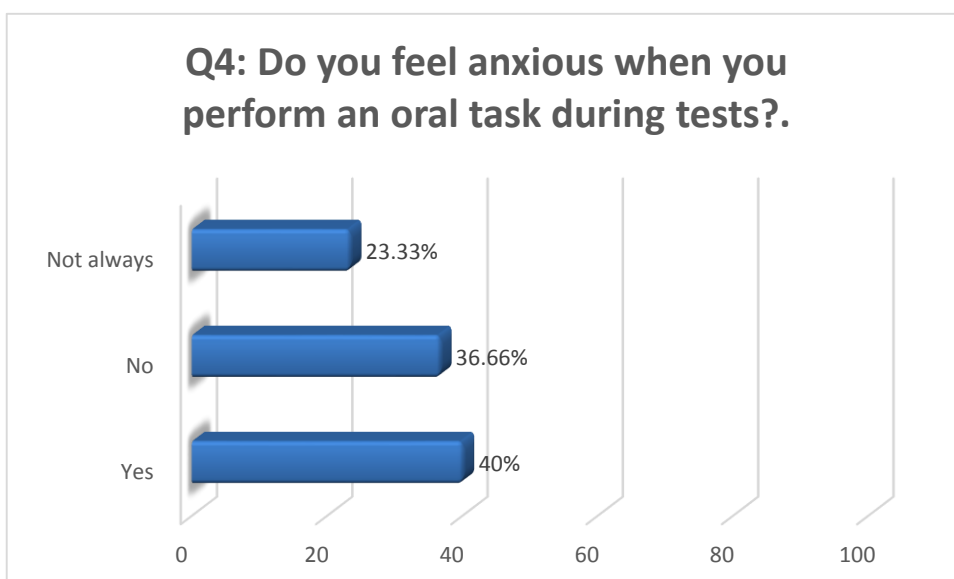
As for the second question, the researcher aims to know whether or not students have problems of coordination when performing an oral task. A clear majority among them (63.33%) argue that they rarely face this kind of problems.

While 16.66% claim that they do not have any problem of coordination, 20% confirm that they do.



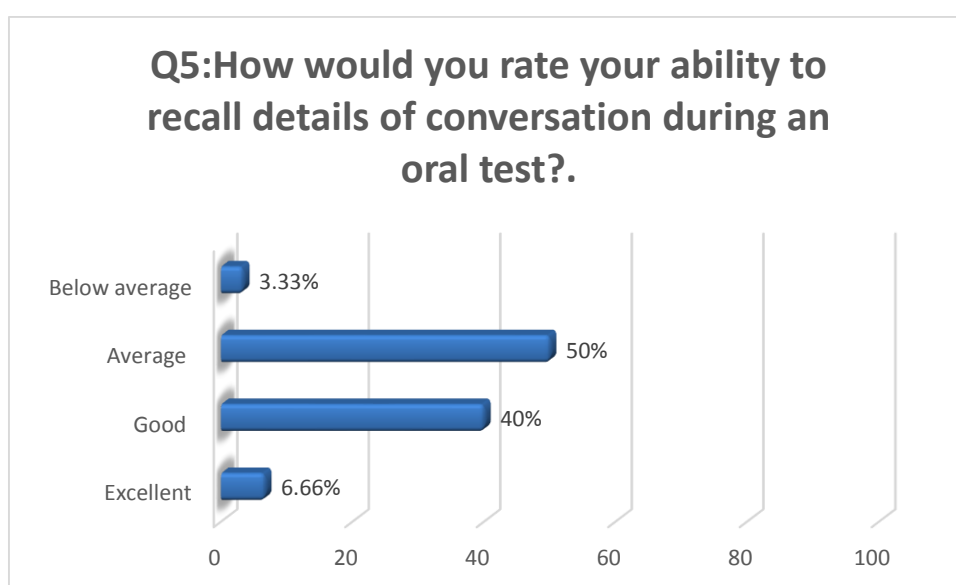
**Figure 2.5:** Ability of retention during an oral production lesson.

In this question, the researcher seeks to know if the students are able to retain all what they hear in an oral production lesson. The majority of them indicate that they occasionally grasp all what they hear in a listening task, since (16.66%) of the participants confirm that they do not retain all information during the lesson. The rest of the informants, who represent (30%), confirm that they are able to remember the whole conversations during an oral production lesson.



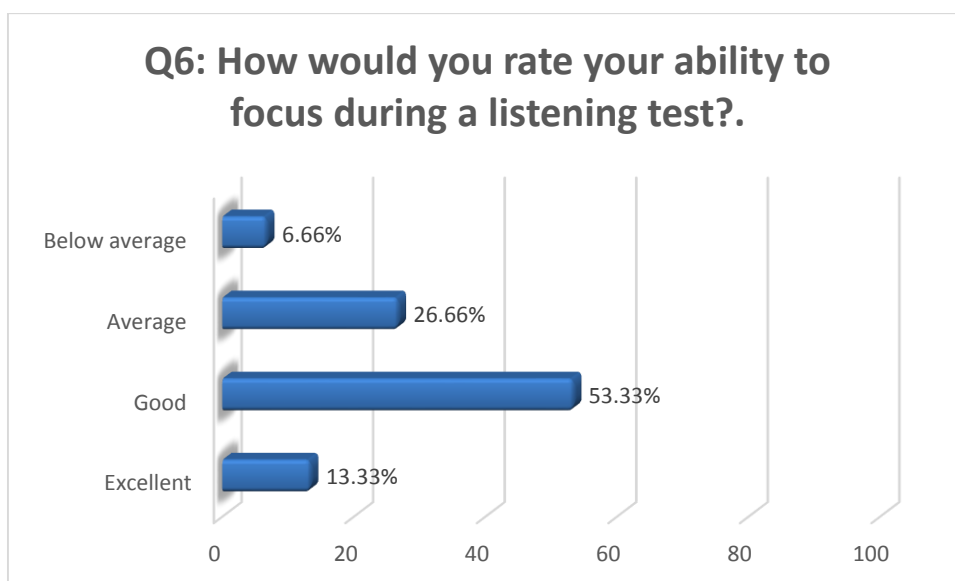
**Figure 2.6:** Problem of anxiety when performing an oral task.

The most common problem in oral expression is anxiety so, (40%) of the students, who represent the majority, determine that they feel anxious when they performing an oral task, while (36.66%) of them claim that they do not have problem of stress during an oral examination. On the other hand, the rest of the participants who represent (23.33%) indicate that they occasionally face anxiety phenomenon depending the situation.



**Figure 2.7:** Ability to recall details during an oral conversation.

As it is illustrated in the Figure 2.7, the researcher aims to measure the ability of participants to remember details of conversation during an oral task. (6.66%) of the students confirm that they have a perfect memory in terms of recalling what is said during a conversation, while (40%) of them claim that their ability of remembering details is good, since (50%) of the students who represent the half of the informants declare that their ability to recall details is average. The rest of them their ability is below average.

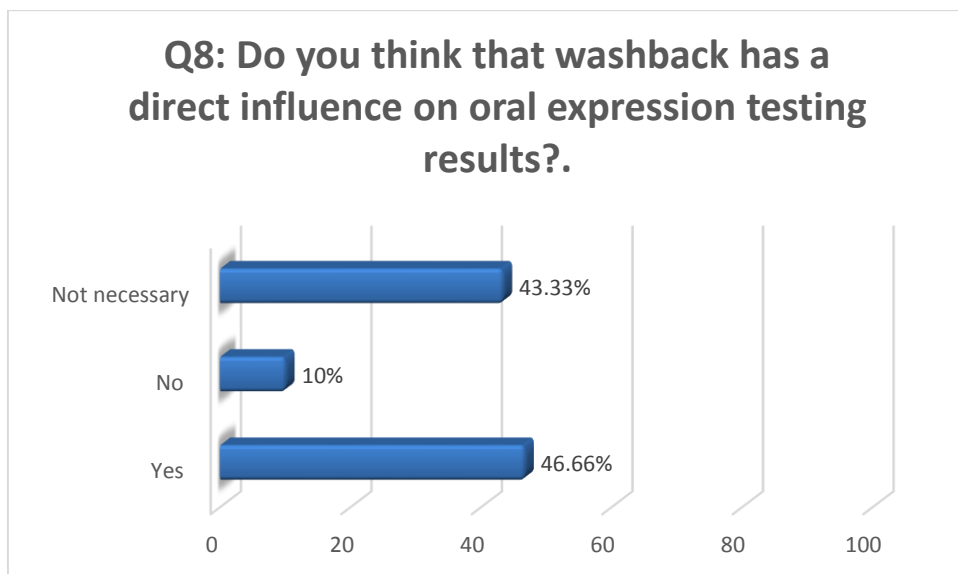


**Figure 2.8:** Ability to focus during a listening test.

The results above show that only 6.66% of the students reveal that their ability to focus during a listening test is excellent, while the majority of them, who represent (53.33%), they are good in focusing during a listening test. Since (26.66%) declare that their level of focusing is average, the rest of them who represent (6.66%) claim that their ability of focusing is below average.

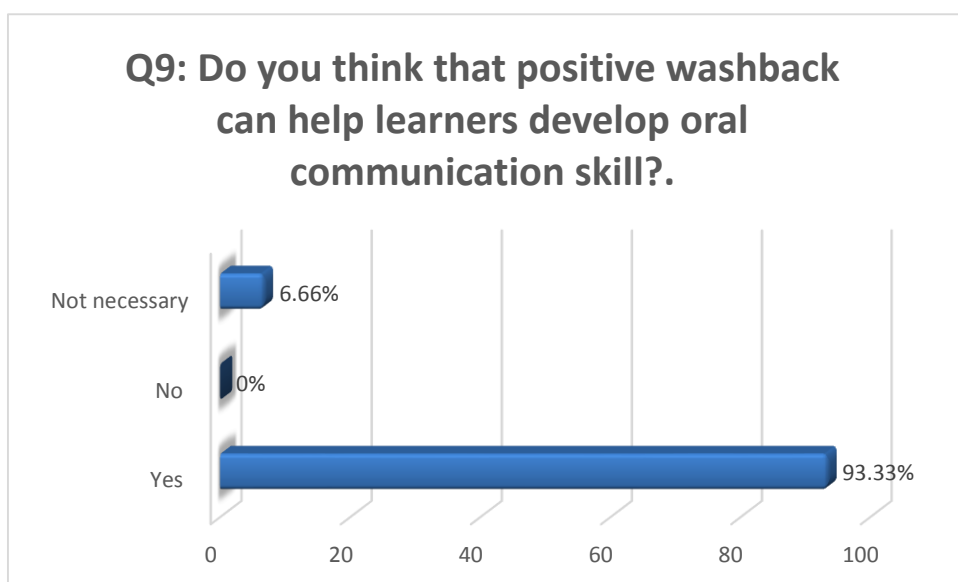
**Q7: what are the obstacles that you face when you sit for a face-to-face exam in oral expression?**

The use of open-ended questions provides the researcher with qualitative data which enrich the findings. As for the above mentioned question, the majority of the students confirm that they face stress and anxiety during face-to-face oral examination. Problems of anxiety may engender fear from the evaluator, fear from making mistakes, lack of concentration and students may also go blank in the sense that they may not find suitable words. The situation is made worse when they are tested in front of their peers



**Figure 2.9:** Washback influence on oral expression testing.

The results obtained from the figure above indicate that (46.66%) of the participants, think that washback phenomenon has a direct influence on oral expressing testing results. While (43.33%) of them claim that it is not necessary. On the other hand, the rest of the students who represent (10%) declare that there is no direct effect of washback on oral expression results.



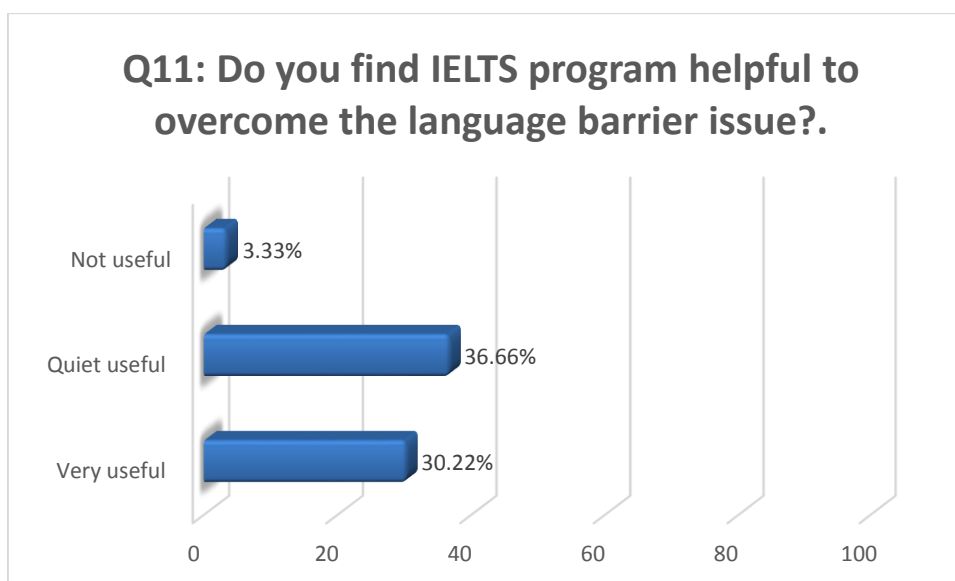
**Figure 2.10:** Positive washback impact

It is obvious from the figure 2.10, that the majority of the students (93.33%) see that positive washback can help learners develop oral communication skill. Those who argue that it is not necessary constitute no other than a marginal minority (6.66%). None of the informants agree that positive washback is not useful in promoting learners' oral proficiency.

**Q10: What do you speculate/think about washback with account of its impact on oral production?**

Most of the informants think that washback has positive and negative impact on oral production depending on the individual. They proclaim that if the students do not have problem of anxiety, washback influences positively their oral competence. On the contrary, if they suffer from anxiety during tests, washback will have a negative influence. In a nutshell, the participants think that if the washback phenomenon is used positively it can help learners develop oral expression skill, especially those have problem of anxiety and who do not speak English frequently.

The following questions was directed only to students who perform IELTS program during the oral production lesson. The sample population were 21 students. The researcher aims to evaluate this program by knowing the attitudes of students about it in terms of its usefulness and impact in enhancing students' oral proficiency. Furthermore, he needs to know its advantages compared to other methods used in oral production testing.



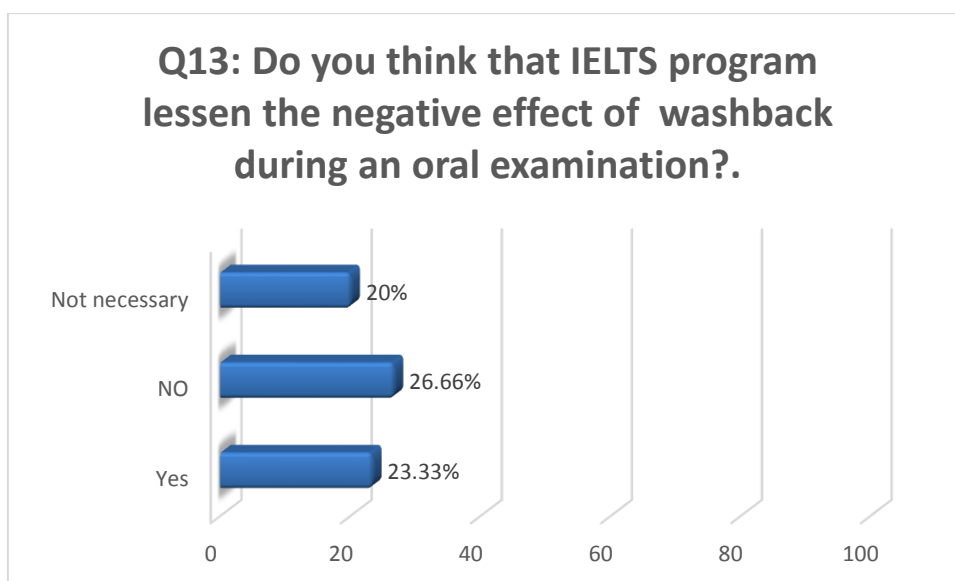
**Figure 2.11:** IELTS program usefulness.

Results indicate that no more than 3.33% of the students consider the IELTS program as being not useful to overcome the language barrier issue. However, all the other participants agree that the program is in a way or another useful.

**Q12: In your opinion, what are the advantages of IELTS program compared to other methods used in oral production testing?**

This question aims to make a comparison between IELTS program and other methods used in the oral production testing. The different opinions of the students show that all of them agree that IELTS program has many advantages in comparison with other methods. Among its benefits is that it helps to develop their oral competence by improving the four skills. It also provides a variety of topics that are related to different social contexts in which different vocabulary and grammar structures are required. Some respondents claim that they feel at ease when they use IELTS program; others confirm that it develops their fluency.





**Figure 2.12:** IELTS program effect.

As for this question, 20% of the participants indicate that it is not necessary that IELTS program lessen the negative effects of washback during an oral test or exam. Those who approve the usefulness of the IELTS program are approximately equal to those who disapprove its usefulness (26.66% vs. 23.33%, respectively)

### 3.2.2. Discussion of Students' Questionnaire

This study was proceeded to set out the aggregate comprehension of the washback phenomenon, and attempted to discover the common features of washback and its impact on EFL students' oral proficiency, along with distinguishing, the central factors that contribute in promoting the students' oral expression during the test. In this part, the researcher pursues to furnish a discussion of the main results acquired from the questionnaire analysed before. The task from this discussion is to puzzle out the appropriate results in conformity with the suggested hypotheses already aforementioned.

The results elucidated that the majority of the students have a modest level in English oral expression, which prove their ability to communicate in such way. In parallel, they find sometimes coordination problems when performing an oral task.

What concerns their ability to recall details during a conversation is average, which confirm that they have some troubles in listening. On the other hand, the results manifest that their ability of focusing during a listening test is good. From Q4 and Q7 results, it is noticeable that the most of the students suffer from anxiety and difficulties of expressing themselves because of the lack of vocabulary and language accuracy especially in listening and speaking skills. All these results lead us to validate the first hypothesis, which said that students may face anxiety and difficulties in speaking and listening skills.

From Q8, Q9 and Q10 the results show that students assert that washback phenomenon has a direct influence on oral expression testing results. Subsequently they have an affirmative speculation concerning washback, because they think that positive washback can help learners develop their fluency. According to the previous results, we can say that the second hypothesis is confirmed.

The use of universal oral testing programs is essential, contrasting to the traditional methods used in oral expression testing. From Q11, Q12 and Q13. It is obvious that students somehow find IELTS program useful in accordance to its beneficial advantages in comparison with the traditional methods used in oral production examination and may help teachers to lessen the negative effect of washback during an oral examination. This goes in hand with the third hypothesis.

### **3.2.3. Teachers' Questionnaire Data Analysis**

This questionnaire includes yes/no questions with open-ended questions. The aim of the researcher is to know the teachers' perceptions about the difficulties that students may face during an oral examination. This includes their attitude towards washback phenomenon and its impact on students' oral proficiency. The last questions is devoted to IELTS program and its impact on students' oral expression.

**Q1. How do you evaluate your students' oral proficiency (method)?**

The majority of teachers use traditional methods to evaluate the students' oral proficiency except one of them who uses an international program, which is IELTS.

**Q2. Do you use pre-test oral assessment to evaluate your students' oral proficiency?**

Two teachers confirmed that they use pre-test oral assessment to evaluate their students. The others do not use it in the sense that they basically rely on summative assessment that usually takes place in the end of the semester.

**Q3. During classes, do you think that all your students focus with you?**

Teachers' answers to such item were wholly negative. Some of them gave reasons stating that many students show disinterest in the classroom.

**Q4. What are the main factors that make students feel anxious during an oral examination?**

Answers to this item were largely identical. Among the factors that were listed we mention shyness, lack of confidence, fear from making mistakes, and from being misjudged, feeling ill at ease especially that the exam is face-to-face.

**Q5. Do all your students participate in the classroom?**

The answers here again were largely matching. All the teachers reported that having a classroom in which everyone takes share remains the wish. They explain this in terms of anxiety, stress and disinterest.

**Q6. To what extent can teachers use washback to enhance their teaching methods?**

All teachers think that if they want to enhance their teaching methods, they should use positive washback as often as possible. This can be achieved through choosing the appropriate oral tests.

**Q7. What type(s) of washback do you notice in your oral test examination?**

The results showed that two teachers notice positive washback in their oral test examination. However, the others notice both negative and positive washback depending to the test used in oral examination.

**Q8. Do you think that positive washback help learners to overcome language barrier issue?**

All the participants confirm that positive washback helps learners to cope with the language barrier issue. They reported that when positive washback is present in an oral test, it provides examinees with a psychological support. In addition, students will be aware of their mistakes.

**Q9. Do you use IELTS program in your oral production lesson?**

The use of the IELTS program in the department under investigation is the exception rather than the norm. To the exception of one teacher, none of the others use it in the oral production classes.

**Q10. Do you think that IELTS program has a positive washback on oral expression testing results?**

Although most of them do not use the IELTS program, they all reported that such a program must have positive washback on oral expression testing results. They built their answers on the fact that the program is designed by a highly acclaimed academic agency under the supervision of well experienced language teachers.

**Q11. In your opinion, what are the advantages of IELTS program as far as students' oral proficiency is concerned?**

Teachers mentioned many benefits of the IELTS program in enhancing students' oral proficiency stating that:

- ✓ students are exposed to the native speakers;
- ✓ it is designed to lessen the negative washback phenomenon

**Q12. If IELTS program is useful in enhancing students' oral proficiency, do you call for its implementation at the level of English department?**

Agreement among the informants could be entirely met. All of them welcomed the idea that such a program will be a bonus if it will be implemented in the department under investigation.

**3.2.4. Discussion of Teachers' Questionnaire**

According to the results found above in the analysis. It is noticeable that the majority of teachers still stuck to classical methods in teaching oral production module. As far as the difficulties that students are faced with when they sit for an oral exam, it is observed that psychological problems come in the forefront. To put it another way, students are confronted with anxiety, stress, shyness and fear. Teachers' perceptions about washback phenomenon were entirely positive confirming that positive washback helps learners overcome the language barrier issue, especially in oral communication. This validates the second hypothesis. As for the IELTS program, teachers affirm that such a program has a positive washback in the sense that it reduces the negative influence of washback phenomenon. Ultimately, the results of the investigation go in compliance with the hypotheses stated in the general introduction.

**4.1. Recommendations and Suggestions**

Language teachers face many challenges during their careers; those of oral production are not the exception. They are obliged to find ways to cope with the difficulties that students may face during classes and also when they sit for exams. In this latter state, the teacher is supposed to use the appropriate methods and strategies in order to decrease the negative effect of testing, and therefore to obtain better results. In parallel learners require to scout themselves and figure out what

may best develop their fluency and oral communication proficiency. Below some techniques that are recommended for both teachers and learners are listed.

#### 4.2. Techniques for Teachers

Teachers play a pivotal role in enhancing students' oral communication through identifying the different techniques and methods that help students to overcome anxiety problem and lack of competence during an oral test. Therefore, teachers should take in consideration the content of test and the atmosphere where the test took place, so the researcher propose some helpful techniques for teachers, which are illustrated in the following table.

Recommendations	Description
<b>Good Relationship with students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Teachers need to institute a good relationship with their students to make them feel at ease.</li> <li>✓ They try to create a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom in order to make students unstressed.</li> <li>✓ Teacher should give hints and clues to help students answer questions.</li> <li>✓ It is essential for teachers to incorporate humour into lessons; this may be helpful to decrease language anxiety in the classroom.</li> <li>✓ Teachers should be empathic with their students, this create a strong relationship between them in the classroom</li> </ul>
<b>Enhance students to practice speaking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Teachers try to reduce their TTT (teacher talking time) in the classroom by giving simple instructions and give the opportunity for students to answer freely without any pressure to maximize STT (student talking time) (Willis, 1990: 57; Paul, 2003: 137).</li> <li>✓ When the students have a fluency practice, teachers never, interrupt them if they make mistakes and they</li> </ul>

	<p>attempt to correct them by suggestions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Choose of different topics particularly that have relation with social context such as how to book a room in the hotel or how to introduce yourself to a foreigner.</li> </ul>
<p><b>create</b> <b>A positive</b> <b>Atmosphere</b> <b>In the classroom</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Teachers try to be always positive role model with their students by smiling and using encouragement comments.</li> <li>✓ It is important that teachers encourage their students with positive feedback. It boosts the students to be motivated to learn more.</li> <li>✓ It is preferable to establish a good communication atmosphere by using humour and other strategies to pay students' attention and interest.</li> <li>✓ Teachers attempt to involve students in group work activities such as conversations with their peers or the use of games and role plays</li> </ul>
<p><b>Reduce</b> <b>The negative</b> <b>Washback in</b> <b>Oral examination</b> <b>tests</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Teachers must select the adequate oral test depending to the students' oral competencies.</li> <li>✓ It is essential for teachers to design an oral test depending to the curriculum. The content of the test is so important to insure its validity.</li> <li>✓ An appropriate test content has a direct positive washback on students' tests scores.</li> <li>✓ The use of direct testing with tasks and text as authentic as possible, the aim is to test what has been taught in the curriculum.</li> <li>✓ Teachers should ensure that the test is known and understood by students in order for positive washback to be realized.</li> <li>✓ Test holders should provide assistance and training to teachers when they introducing a new oral test.</li> <li>✓ The use of international oral tests such as IELTS program is helpful to reduce the negative washback during an oral examination.</li> </ul>

**Table 2.5:** Techniques for Teachers.

### 4.3. Techniques for Students

The achievement of each English student is to be a good speaker and reach the proficiency, but it is a burden task, so the students need to work hard by following the teachers' instructions. In addition, the daily practice of English language and use it outside the classroom; it is helpful to overcome the language barrier issue, furthermore the most critical problem is anxiety and shyness during an oral task or examination. Hence, the researcher proposed some remedies and beneficial techniques to promote students fluency.

Recommendations	Description
<p><b>Promote language proficiency</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Language proficiency is based on two features fluency and accuracy, proficient speaker are motivated to talk at a large extent because they feel confident. Richards and Rodgers (2001:157), so this push them to speak fluently without any fear.</li> <li>✓ Students should use language at a large scale by improving their grammar because they will understand rapidly what people are saying and correct themselves quickly.</li> <li>✓ It is important for students to enrich their vocabulary to use it without wasting time and trying to think about the coherent words.</li> <li>✓ It is essential for students to ameliorate their listening skill by listening a video with the transcript on the screen to be able to understand during a conversation and reply very quickly.</li> <li>✓ Listen to native speakers and communicate with them if it is necessary.</li> <li>✓ The use of certified language proficiency application such as “<b>Elevate brain trainer</b>” it is also beneficial to</li> </ul>



	improve the four language skills.
<b>Reduce Language anxiety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Students should break the wall of silent and encourage themselves when they feel anxious.</li> <li>✓ It is important to take a deep breath before start speaking and walk if it is necessary this reduce anxiety.</li> <li>✓ Students never judge themselves too harshly if they make faults and speak without thinking about grammar mistakes.</li> <li>✓ Students may use template as model to organize their speech. It helps them with the flow of their language and they do not thing so hard about what they want to say.</li> <li>✓ Anxiety is a natural response that all people face it when they start speaking but just be confident that you are a good English speaker.</li> </ul>

**Table 2.6:** Techniques for Students.

#### 4.4. Conclusion

This chapter was about analysing and discussing the results obtained from the questionnaires. The main findings revealed that students are suffering from anxiety and lack of self-confidence. This leads them to face serious problems when it comes to performing an oral task. The use of well-studied programs such as IELTS is proved to be beneficial. Such programs have a positive washback in enhancing students' fluency The researcher provided some suggestions and recommendations for both teachers and students that can be adopted to cope with the deferent

difficulties and obstacles, which still threatening the language proficiency of the students and the methods used by teachers.

## **General conclusion**

The aim of learning a foreign language is to be able to use it fluently and accurately, and attain certain proficiency. Thus to ensure the success of learning, the test used to measure the competencies of learners should be well designed and valid to influence positively the learners language proficiency. However, in order to promote the students' oral competence. Teachers should give the importance to the teaching methods and oral tests used during an oral examination, which can influence negatively or positively the learning process.

The overall results of this research study is to assert the use of positive washback as often as possible to enhance students' oral proficiency as well as to overcome the difficulties that may face learners when they communicate verbally. Besides, the use of international oral tests as IELTS program, which is useful in enhancing students' fluency.

After conducting a case study at the level of third year LMD students in English Department of Tlemcen University, the results obtained from data collection validating the three hypotheses proposed in the theoretical part by the researcher. Results uncover that positive washback of an oral test help learners to overcome language barrier. The case of IELTS program, which is well designed by an experienced academic group, this latter can help teachers to lessen the negative washback during an oral examination. In addition, the results proved that negative washback holds a set of factors, which threatens the students' oral performance such as language anxiety and lack of competence. Furthermore teachers need to be aware of the use of appropriate oral tests that have a positive washback on the students oral performance, besides, students also need to build self-confidence when it comes to a face-to-face verbal interaction.

Eventually the present work suffered from a set of limitations; firstly, there was a lack of online references that describe the washback phenomenon particularly in the Algerian context. Secondly, the sample population was small in terms of

## General Conclusion

participants, especially teachers. Additionally it might be supposed that some students were untruthful in their answers and opinions, which may impendence the credibility of the investigation, so it would have been valuable to use interview with students or classroom observation to procure a rigorous feedback. Besides, the majority of previous studies about washback phenomenon were undertaken in foreign countries. It remains for future researchers to discover whether the findings of this study may be generalized to other universities or, probably, investigate the washback impact on students' oral proficiency from different angles and perspectives e.g., the effect of IELTS program on EFL students needs to be examined further.

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# Appendixes

A decorative flourish consisting of a horizontal line with ornate, symmetrical scrollwork at both ends, centered below the word "Appendixes".

### Appendix “A” students’ questionnaire

Dear student this is a questionnaire about the effect of washback (the influence of testing on teaching and learning) in enhancing student’s oral proficiency. You are kindly requested to tick where appropriate and make comments where necessary. Please note that questions 10, 11 and 12 are directed only to students who perform EILTS program during the oral production lesson.

Group:                      Age:

Gender: Male                       Female

1- How do you evaluate your English oral proficiency?

Excellent                       good                       Average                       below average

2- Do you have coordination difficulties when performing an oral task?

Yes  No  always

3- Do you retain all what you hear during an oral production lesson?

Yes  No  Not always

4- Do you feel anxious when you perform an oral task during tests?

Yes  No  Not always

5- How would you rate your ability to recall details of conversation during an oral test?

Excellent                       good                       Average                       Below average

6- How would you rate your ability to focus during a listening test?

Excellent  good  Average  Below average

7- What are the obstacles that you face when you sit for a face to face exam in oral expression?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

8- Do you think that washback has a direct influence on oral expression testing results?

Yes  No  Not Necessarily

9- Do you think that positive washback can help learners develop oral communication skills?

Yes  No  Not Necessarily

10-What do you speculate about washback with account of its impact on oral production?

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.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

.....

11-Do you find IELTS program helpful to overcome the language barrier issue?

Very useful  Quite useful  not useful

12-In your opinion, what are the advantages of IELTS program compared to other methods used in oral production testing?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

13-Do you think that IELTS program lessen the negative effect of washback during an oral examination?

Yes  No  Not Necessarily

***Thank you for your collaboration***

**Appendix “B” teachers’ questionnaire**

Dear teacher,

This is a questionnaire about the effect of washback (the influence of testing on teaching and learning) in enhancing students’ oral proficiency. You are kindly requested to tick where appropriate and make comments where necessary.

1- How do you evaluate your students’ oral proficiency (method)?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

2- Do you use pretest oral assessment to evaluate your students’ oral performance?

Yes                       No

If no, why?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

3- During classes, do you think that all your students focus with you?

Yes                       No

If no, why?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

4. What are the main factors that make students feel anxious during an oral examination?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

5. Do all your students participate in the classroom?

Yes  No

If no, why?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

6. To what extent can teachers use washback to enhance their teaching methods?

.....  
.....  
.....



.....  
.....  
.....

7. What type(s) of washback do you notice in your oral test examination?

Positive                   Negative

Explain:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

8. Do you think that positive washback helps learners to overcome language barrier issue?

Yes                                   No

Explain:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

9. Do you use IELTS program in your oral production lesson?

Yes                                   No

10. Do you think that IELTS program has a positive washback on oral expression testing results?

Yes

No

Explain

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

11. In your opinion, what are the advantages of IELTS program as far as students' oral proficiency is concerned?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

12. If IELTS program is useful in enhancing student's oral proficiency, do you call for its implementation at the level of English department?

Yes

No

*Thank you for your collaboration*