THE WASHBACK EFFECTS OF CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT REFORM IN BOTSWANA

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Abstract
This paper presents and discusses the results of survey questionnaires administered to both students and teachers of the Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) ESL on their attitudes towards and perceptions of speaking in English, its teaching and assessment. Both students and teachers were asked to complete survey questionnaires in which they were asked both closed and open ended questions on their attitudes towards the teaching and learning of ESL. The findings indicate that the attitudes of both students and teachers towards speaking were found to have remained positive, in spite of the fact that it is not tested in the BGCSE English exam. However the study indicates that the teachers’ perceptions of the BGCSE English examination’s influence on students’ attitudes towards learning speaking was affected, and their perceptions of the exam’s influence on their work with regard to speaking was also affected. It was also found that the BGCSE English examination has had some impact on classroom practice. The teachers reported that they taught writing and reading, which are tested in the exam, more than speaking and listening, which are not tested. The students also ranked writing and reading as the skills in which they do most exercises/tasks as compared to listening and speaking. However, the impact on classroom practice in the Botswana study was mitigated by the sociolinguistic status of English in Botswana.

Keywords: attitudes, assessment, perceptions, washback, reliability, validity.

1. Introduction
In 1998 the Botswana Government nationalised Senior Secondary School examinations. Previous to that the University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate (UCLES) in the United Kingdom had been running them. The whole senior secondary school curriculum had to be reviewed and subject task forces were appointed to review the curriculum. The task force that reviewed the Senior Secondary School English syllabus completed its work in 1997 and developed a syllabus that was believed to be more relevant for the situation in Botswana. The previous Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) English examination syllabus, which had been followed in senior secondary schools, was an academic oriented syllabus intended to equip students with the academic skills of reading and writing and had been perceived as unsuitable for the linguistic situation of Botswana.

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The new Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) English syllabus, which was implemented in January 1998, is a skill oriented English as a Second Language (ESL) syllabus intended to equip students with communication skills in English and the teaching methodology recommended is the communicative approach. ESL in the Botswana context only means that English is the official language of education but does not imply that it is the language known or spoken by most people after their first language. The communicative approach to language teaching emphasises the use of language for communication, such as using language appropriately in different types of situations; using language to perform different kinds of tasks, and using language for social interaction with other people. The teaching syllabus covers the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Thus unlike the previous syllabus, which only included reading and writing to the neglect of speaking and listening skills, this one provides for the inclusion of all the four skills.

The Examination syllabus, however, unlike the teaching syllabus, has postponed the assessment of oral/aural skills to the unspecified future, when the facilities for testing those skills will be available (Ministry of Education, 2000). Therefore, although the teaching syllabus for senior secondary schools has changed with regard to the teaching of speaking skills, the examination syllabus has not. It has been argued that unless the assessment procedures are also changed to test communicative skills, the pedagogy would also remain unchanged in spite of the methodology recommended in the teaching syllabus (Weir, 1993). It has also been argued that in a situation like that of Botswana, where there is no congruence between the curriculum and what is tested, it is usually the case that the test replaces the curriculum in that both learners and teachers pay more attention to what is tested than what is not (Kellaghan & Greaney, 1992). Steffy & English (1997) contend that there are three generic curricular contents that provide directions to teachers in schools and school systems. These are the written curriculum, the taught curriculum, and the tested curriculum. They claim that the aim of good curriculum management is bringing these three types of contents into congruence, that is, the written curriculum should be the same one that is taught and tested. Steffy & English (1997) further assert that where there is no congruence between the three curricular contents more of the curriculum that is tested is taught.

It is worth noting that research on curriculum reform and assessment and on how they bring about the desired teaching and learning indicates that there are divergent views. Some suggest that changing a test is possibly the most powerful means to bring about improvements in the learning experiences that go before it (Kellaghan & Greaney, 1992). Tests, it is argued, can have a most useful and powerful washback effect on teaching. Others argue that a teacher’s professional consciousness is a more fundamental determinant of teaching practice (Shohamy, Reves, & Bejarano, 1986; Davies, 1990; Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt, & Ferman, 1996; Weir, 1993; Messick, 1996). Yet another group, while appreciating the strong association between curriculum reform and test reform, assert that tests and exams cannot be singled out as determinants of teaching practice because of other factors that contribute to the success or failure of curriculum reform (Alderson & Wall,
1993; Wall & Alderson, 1993; Wall, 1996, 1999, 2000). They contend that one cannot meaningfully isolate the effects of tests and exams on the curriculum from those of other factors. Such factors include for instance, the quality of the teachers and the availability of adequate resources needed to effectively implement the curriculum.

The current research was aimed at establishing whether the absence of a speaking test in the BGCSE English examination has had a bearing on the attitudes towards and perceptions of speaking in English, its learning and teaching of ESL students and teachers. The paper reports only part of a larger PhD study.

2. Washback

Some researchers in language testing have argued that changing a test is possibly the most powerful means to bring about improvements in the learning experiences that go before it. Tests, it is argued, can have a most useful and powerful washback effect on teaching. This section first considers the importance of washback in language education and assessment and then provides a review of a number of empirical research studies on washback. It then discusses a number of washback and curriculum innovation models that informed the current study.

It has been argued that if materials are changed to reflect a new approach to a syllabus, and teachers are trained in the new materials and methodology, but corresponding tests are not taken into consideration, all this enterprise may be to no avail (Shohamy et al., 1986; Davies, 1990; C. Weir, 1988; Shohamy et al., 1996; Messick, 1996). In other words, curriculum reform that is not accompanied by assessment reform may not bring about the desired changes. In fact researchers like Orpwood, (2001) have explicitly argued that changes in curriculum reform need to be closely linked to changes in assessment.

The above assertions and arguments seem to suggest that tests and examinations are powerful determiners of what goes in classrooms. But one wonders whether that is really the case. This research attempted to answer this question through data from Botswana. In language testing, washback is the term that is frequently used to refer to the supposed relationship between a test and teaching and learning. Messick (1996) defines washback as the degree to which the introduction and use of a test influences teachers and learners to behave in ways that either promote or inhibit language learning. Implicit in Messick’s definition is that washback can either be positive (promoting language learning) or negative (inhibiting language learning).

Wall and Alderson (1993), in an impact study in Sri Lanka, seem to be the first who investigated the impact of an examination on the classroom. In this study, which involved the use of questionnaire surveys of teacher practice, group interviews with teachers and local education officers, and classroom observations, Wall and Alderson (1993) investigated the effects of a new Cambridge O-Level English examination on Sri Lankan classes. Their conclusion is that the impact of the new examination is less pervasive than had been expected. The study indicated evidence of some washback on what teachers teach and on the way local education
officers designed tests, but indicated no evidence of washback on the methodology of teaching. With regards to the teaching methodology, teachers continued to use the teacher-centred approach as before.

Teachers were anxious to cover those areas of the textbook they felt were most likely to be tested in the examination. For instance, listening and speaking skills were found to be receiving less attention (the examination did not test speaking and listening skills) than reading and writing skills (reading skills were tested more than writing skills). It is interesting to note that, as with the BGCSE English examination, the original plan was to produce an examination that covered all four language skills (like with the BGCSE English examination reading and writing were to be tested in a ‘final paper’ at the end of year 11 (year 12 for Botswana) and speaking and listening skills were to be tested by means of continuous assessment tasks throughout years 9-11 (years 11-12 for Botswana). But this plan is said to have proven practically and politically impossible. The continuous assessment idea was dropped, resulting in an examination which tests only reading and writing (Wall and Alderson, 1993).

The Sri Lanka impact study reported interesting results because of the fact that, even though the examination did not assess speaking and listening skills, teachers did not completely abandon teaching them but continued to give a fair amount of time teaching them, albeit to a lesser extent as compared to the skills which were tested in the examination. They only completely abandoned teaching them towards the examination period, when they were basically drilling the students on the coming examination. Wall and Alderson assert that they had expected the washback of the new examination to show itself in the neglect of speaking skills in the classroom but were rather surprised to find that teachers still invested quite a bit of time teaching them.

Wall & Alderson (1993) draw a very important conclusion for impact or washback studies; that an examination on its own can have no impact on the teaching methodology unless the teachers understand and have mastered the recommended methodology. In the Sri Lankan study, they found out from classroom observations, and group interviews of teachers, that teachers appeared to be not in command of communicative teaching methodologies which were recommended for the new examination.

It would appear that professional development, which is very essential for the success of curriculum reform, was not made an integral part of the reform process. Therefore, teachers were not prepared for it. Also the study revealed that teachers knew nothing or very little about the examination for which they were supposed to be preparing their students. They knew the types of passages that might appear or the type of writing tasks, but most did not know what was going to be tested. Many teachers were found to be unfamiliar with the criteria that would be used to mark the students’ writing. Teachers were reported to have no training on how to use the textbooks that were used to prepare students for the examination and as many as 40% of them did not have access to some of the teachers’ guides. It was also reported that only one-third (1/3) had received any training on how to prepare students for the examination, and only half (1/2) had access to copies of
official examination-support materials (Wall and Alderson, 1993). Wall and Alderson (1993) suggest that this kind of ignorance could prevent examination impact. The Sri Lankan study demonstrated that more than a test is needed to implement curriculum reform. The provision of teachers’ guides and other materials, accompanied by the professional development of teachers, are also crucial in successful educational innovation.

Some of the above problems could be avoided through comprehensive professional development, not only of teachers but of principals, education officers and all other practitioners involved, as suggested by Silbeck (1990) and Lipsitz et al. (1997). Wall (2005) also reports on the Sri Lankan study, albeit in the context of curriculum innovation.

Yung (2002) argues that though it is usually claimed that assessments are determinants of educational practice, teachers’ professional consciousness is a more fundamental determinant of teaching practice. In a study that examined the relationship between teachers’ practice and their beliefs in the context of a mandatory school-based scheme, Yung (2002) found that some teachers adopted a passive role regarding policy interpretation and implementation, while others adopted a more critical stance in interpreting the policy requirements, demonstrating a more proactive approach in its implementation. The latter teachers demonstrated professional confidence, professional interpretation and professional consciousness that helped to interpret policy in a way that enhanced their teaching practice.

In Japan, Akiyama (2004), in a study on the feasibility of introducing speaking tests in the senior high school entrance examination, found that various stakeholder groups were resistant to the introduction of the test. Senior high school teachers’ resistance was said to arise not only from their traditional teaching practice, but also from anxiety about taking on new technical roles, such as interlocutor, rater or analyzer of test scores. Their resistance was also said to arise from external pressure, such as the need to prepare their students for university entrance examinations, socio-cultural aspects related to their understanding of the meaning of ability and the ideology of teaching English, and political aspects associated with the desire to protect the autonomy of the development and the administration of the entrance examination (Akiyama, 2004).

Akiyama (2004) also found that the main reasons why senior high school teachers did not want speaking tests introduced included the difficulty of selecting the scoring criteria (i.e., what scoring criteria should be used), their lack of confidence in their reliability as raters, the practicality of assessing speaking, including time schedules and the shortage of administrators. The other problem was that senior high school teachers tended to devalue speaking skills. Akiyama (2004) offers two possible reasons for this: the first is that the teachers did not see speaking tests’ relevance to the university entrance examination, the examination for which they were preparing their students, and the second was their lack of oral teaching skills.

The concerns of the Education Board mainly had to do with the practicality of test administration (the time required for administering and rating speaking
tests) and rater reliability. They thought that the introduction of speaking tests would compromise the reliability of the examination and therefore its fairness as a selection exam. Their main concern was rater reliability and this made them more comfortable with the status quo even though they ideally would have liked to see oral/aural skills assessed (Akiyama, 2004). Akiyama (2004) demonstrated in his study that though the practical concerns about administrative feasibility and reliability could be overcome, there were deeper objections reflecting deeply held cultural values in relation to education. He found that the cultural values of meritocracy and egalitarianism originating in Confucianism are expressed in a merit-based system of competitive examinations: candidates are differentiated purely according to test scores. Examinations were considered as effective instruments that enabled candidates to demonstrate diligence and hard work, valued attributes in the Japanese culture, along with ability in the subject area. McNamara and Roever (2006), commenting on Akiyama’s study, contend that the actual content of the Japanese high school entrance examination and its validity in terms of conformity with the curriculum guidelines (which stress spoken communication skills) were found to be not the central issue. What was important was that the test should be difficult, and play the role of selecting for character attributes of diligence and effort.

In the BGCSE English examination situation, external examinations are essentially considered as instruments of selection for the various pathways that can be followed by secondary school leavers: further academic education, vocational training and employment. Those who get good passes in the essentially academic exam follow the further academic education path; those whose results are average follow the vocational or technical training pathway, while those whose results are rather poor have to look for employment. Therefore, the idea of testing the practical skills of speaking through school-based continuous assessment goes against the established traditions of external academic examinations in Botswana. With the exception of a few practical or technical subjects, such as Design and Technology, class teachers are not involved in high-stakes terminal assessment of their students at the end of secondary school. As in the Japanese case, the underlying construct of the BGCSE English examination is not necessarily the one stated in the syllabus; i.e. communicative language proficiency, but intellectual or academic ability. For instance, although the syllabus mentions that “the subject is skills based, focusing on the development of the basic language skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing with the emphasis on developing the communicative competence of learners in real life situations” (Ministry of Education, 2000:i), one of the main aims of the subject is to “develop skills in thinking, enquiring, problem solving, creating, performing, judging, evaluating and communicating” (Ministry of Education, 2000:iii), which are mainly academic skills. This academic slant, in a syllabus that is supposed to be skills based, is a legacy of the former COSC ordinary level English exam which was academic oriented, as evidenced by the fact that it is aimed to prepare students for academic progression, such as A level study (University of Cambridge International Examinations, 2005).
The concept of test washback states that a test does not only influence what is taught in class but also how it is taught. In the Botswana situation, where we have a curriculum that provides for the teaching of speaking skills but an exam that does not provide for their testing, there is an opportunity to test the assertion that a test or an exam is a powerful determiner of what is taught in the classroom.

The washback studies discussed in this section have indicated that tests alone may not be the powerful determiners of what happens in classrooms, but rather that they may be working with other factors, such as teacher professional consciousness and development, the interests of stake-holders, availability of resources and the wider context in which the reform takes place.

**Bailey’s Model of Washback**

A number of models of washback have been proposed. What follows is a discussion of those that helped guide the current study. The first one is Bailey’s (1999) washback model (see Figure 1). Bailey (1999), using Hughes (1993) washback framework, proposes a model of washback consisting of three main components—participant, process and product. All three may be affected by the nature of a test. In this model participants include language learners and teachers, administrators, material developers and publishers. According to Bailey (1999) and Hughes (1993), a test may affect the perceptions and attitudes of the participants towards their work. Process in this model includes the activities engaged in by the participants that may contribute to the process of learning. According to Hughes (1993) these activities include material development, syllabus design, changes in teaching methods or content, learning and/or test-taking strategies. Product in this model relates to what is learned (facts, skills, etc) and the quality of learning (e.g fluency). According to Hughes’s (1993) framework and Bailey’s (1999) model, 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 the participants’ behaviour in carrying out their work (process) such as practising the kinds of items that are to be found in the test, which in turn influence the learning outcomes, that is, the product of that work. The model is represented in Figure 1.

The current study was also situated within the parameters of this model because it looked at how the impact of the BGCSE English curriculum on teaching was affected by the BGCSE English exam in the light of the assumption that tests have washback. Bailey (1999) asserts that the ultimate product of beneficial washback is improved learning of language and therefore not all the participants’ processes lead directly to learning. Only the learners, she argues, can learn and therefore the other participants’ processes only play an ancillary role. It can only be hoped that their products, such as new materials and curricula, improved teaching and valuable research findings will contribute to and promote student learning.

The current study investigated two (participants and processes) of the three components of the Bailey washback model because of time and financial constraints. As far as the participants were concerned, it included the students, teachers and administrators (curriculum development officers; examinations,
research and testing officers, secondary education officers). It did not include
materials, writers, textbook publishers and researchers also because of time and
financial constraints. The processes, which perhaps can best be investigated
through observations, were deduced from the tasks reported by the participants in
the questionnaires and interviews. This was because apart from financial and time
constraints, school heads and form five (year 12) teachers do not give permission to
researchers to conduct classroom research in form five classes as they consider that
to be a disruption of students' learning at a crucial time when they are preparing for
the examinations. However, permission is granted to researchers to conduct their
research during prep time, which was taken advantage of to administer
questionnaires to the students.

Figure 1: A Basic Model of Washback (Bailey 1999:11)
3. Research Design for the Study

In this study quantitative methods were used to gather socio-demographic data, attitudes, perceptions, opinions and views regarding the teaching or the learning of speaking, teaching methods, types and number of tasks or exercises given and other information through structured questions. On the other hand, qualitative methods were used for drawing out reasons behind behaviours, and the depth of statements that were given in response to the closed-ended questions.

3.1 Research Question

To what extent and, if at all, in what ways has the BGCSE English language curriculum that is accompanied by an exam that does not assess speaking influenced the perceptions and attitudes of the teachers and the students towards the teaching and learning of speaking skills?

3.2 Research Instruments

3.2.1 Students’ questionnaires

A survey questionnaire for form five students (Year 12) was designed with closed questions relating to students’ classroom experiences with regard to the teaching and assessment of speaking skills. Questions relating to students’ perceptions, views and opinions regarding the importance of speaking as compared to reading or writing were included. In total the questionnaire consisted of 12 questions and took approximately 30 minutes for the students to complete.

3.2.2 Teacher questionnaires

A survey questionnaire for teachers was designed with both closed and open-ended questions relating to teachers’ classroom experiences with regard to the teaching of speaking skills and to whether they thought the BGCSE English syllabus recommendation to assess speaking is a feasible proposition or not. Questions relating to teachers’ perceptions, views and opinions regarding the importance of speaking as compared to reading or writing were included. The questionnaire consisted of 52 questions, 30 of which were closed and 22 open-ended.

3.3 Recruitment, sample size and data collection

3.3.1 Students

A total of 577 form five (year 12) students were originally recruited but 553 participated in the study. The recruitment and the administration of the survey questionnaires was done by the researcher himself and participation was completely voluntary. The students were drawn from 10 senior secondary schools sampled from a total of 27 senior secondary schools in the country. Table 1 below shows the distribution of the 27 senior secondary schools by district in Botswana and also the names and number of schools that were sampled from each district. The number of students recruited from each school is indicated in the last column.
Table 1: The number and names of schools sampled in each district and the number of students participated from each school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>No. of Schools</th>
<th>Number &amp; Name of Sampled Schools</th>
<th>No of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mosupa Secondary school (1)</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kgalagadi &amp; Gantsi</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gantsi Secondary school (1)</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Central</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Gaborone Secondary school</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ledumang Secondary school</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kgari Sechele Secondary school (3)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maun &amp; Boteti</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lethakane Secondary School (1)</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Francistown Secondary school</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Masunga Secondary school (2)</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Moeng College</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Swaneng Secondary school (2)</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>553</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is worth noting that the total number of students in senior secondary schools is approximately 38,254, consisting of approximately 19,928 form 4 (year 11) and 18,326 form 5 (year 12) students. The average total number of students in each school is approximately 1,417, consisting of approximately 738 form 4 and 679 form 5 students (Government of Botswana, 1997). The sample amounted to about 8.1% of the total population of form five students. The total sample, 553, is a relatively large number of participants which is good for statistical calculations. The participants were also recruited from schools in all the major school districts in the country.

3.3.2 Secondary school teachers of English

A total of 53 teachers of English as Second Language (ESL), recruited from the 10 sampled senior secondary schools in Botswana, participated in this study. The aim was to recruit five teachers from each school. Participation in the study was voluntary. The teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire return was very high because only four participants out of the fifty five that were recruited failed to hand in the questionnaires, and some promised that they would post it to the researcher. Of the four, two kept their promise and posted them but two did not. Fifty three returns was a good number and exceeded the fifty that had been planned for. In most schools the five volunteers that were needed were easily reached and in some this number was even exceeded. The teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire eliciting information on their perceptions, views, and opinions with regard to the assessment of speaking skills and also on information relating to their classroom activities with regard to the teaching and testing of oral skills. They were asked about their attitude towards the recommended teaching approach and whether they used the approach in their teaching or not. They were also asked whether they thought introducing a speaking test in the BGCSE English
examination was feasible or not. The recruitment and the questionnaire administration for both students and teachers took a maximum of three days per school.

4. **Data Analysis**

4.1. **Data Analysis for Quantitative Data**

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program (Version 11.0) was used for data processing and analysis. Data was entered in SPSS and verified. It was cleaned up, and out-of-range values were identified and corrected. After that descriptive outputs were produced for the report.

4.2. **Data Analysis for Qualitative Data**

4.2.1. Data analysis for teachers’ open-ended survey questions

The teachers’ survey questionnaire consisted of both quantitative questions and qualitative questions. Each teacher’s responses to the open-ended questions were examined and summarized according to the themes and the salient points that emerged (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After that, the 53 individual teachers’ responses were synthesized and recorded into a summary of teachers’ responses to the open-ended survey questions.

5. **Findings**

5.1. **Demographic data**

5.1.1. Students

The total number of student participants was 553 and these were form five students aged between 16 and 22 years who were recruited from 10 senior secondary schools. The average number of students recruited from each school was 55.3. The majority of the students attended school in a rural setting (377, 68.2%) and only about one third (176, 31.8%) attended school in an urban setting. This reflects the fact that there are more secondary schools in rural (19) areas than in urban ones (8) because more people in Botswana also live in the rural areas than in urban areas. Male students (286, 51.7%) were slightly more than female (266, 48.1%) students. A large majority of the students (456, 82.5%) have Setswana as their first language. This reflects the linguistic landscape of the country in which about 78% (Batibo, 2005) of the people of Botswana can fluently speak Setswana.

5.1.2. Teachers

There were more female teachers (29, 54.7%) than were males (24, 45.5%). As with the students the majority (35, 66%) of the teachers were teaching in rural schools. The majority of the teachers have a professional teaching qualification and only four out 53 have general bachelors’ degrees without any teaching qualifications.
With regard to the teaching experiences of the teachers the results indicate that 50.9% have teaching experiences ranging between less than one year to five years, 20.8% between six years and 10 years and only 22.5% between 11 years and over. These results indicate that the teaching experiences of the majority of the teachers in the sampled senior secondary schools are rather low. A teaching work force with a low teaching experience may negatively affect the success of educational innovation because such teachers need more guidance on how to implement it.

5.2. Students’ and Teachers’ Attitudes and Perceptions

In this paper perceptions are defined as the impression, conception or understanding that people have of something or peoples’ intuitive judgment about something (Knight, Grandison, McGinley, Shearer, & Summers, 1991), while attitudes are defined as peoples’ outlook, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings toward something that influences them to behave in certain ways under defined contexts or circumstances (Adegbija, 1994). This distinction is important for washback because according to the above definition, while attitudes influence people to behave in certain ways under defined contexts, perceptions, also according to the definition above, may not necessarily influence them to behave in certain ways under defined circumstances. The practical difference between them is that attitudes are more likely to be associated with test washback than perceptions. The results of the students’ and teachers’ survey questionnaires are presented first and then they are interpreted and discussed together, highlighting the attitudes and the perceptions of both the students and the teachers.

In order to find out the attitudes towards and perceptions of the students regarding speaking in English, they were asked a closed ‘yes, or ‘no’ question in which they indicated if speaking skills in English were important to them or not. The majority (545, 98.7%) said that speaking skills were important to them. The closed question was then followed up by an open question in which they were asked to give reasons why they considered speaking skills to be important, the most frequently mentioned of which are shown in the Table 2 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate fluency, self-expression and confidence</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>86.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help improve the other language skills</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important for communicating with foreigners</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above frequencies include those of students who gave more than one reason, and that is why the total number does not add up to 553. The fact that fluency, self-expression and confidence was the most frequently given reason could be a reflection that the ability to speak English fluently is associated with being educated in Botswana. Also English is the language of power which earns the speaker respect and opens one’s doors to further education and employment. It is
interesting that the students realize the interrelatedness of the four language skills; they seem to be aware that learning and improving their speaking skills will impact the other macro language skills such as listening, reading and writing. Other important reasons, such as the fact that speaking skills are used in the job market especially for middle and upper levels in the formal sector, the fact that English is the medium of instruction in schools from year two in primary school onwards, and the fact that English is the official language in Botswana, were each mentioned by less than 10% of the participants.

Only seven students (1.3%) did not think that speaking skills in English were important, and while five of them did not give any reasons for their answers, two of them indicated that if the skills were assessed in the BGCSE English examination they would disadvantage those students who are poor at speaking. This reason is most likely motivated by the anxiety of the students as potential test takers in the event speaking is assessed in BGCSE English examination. Akiyama (2004) found that some students expressed anxiety as potential test takers of speaking tests.

In order to find out the attitudes towards, and perceptions of the teachers regarding speaking, they were asked five closed ‘yes’ or ‘no’ questions and they were also to give the reasons for their answers. The first question that was addressed relates to whether the participants thought speaking was as important as reading or writing or not. A large majority (43, 82.7%) of the teachers reported that speaking skills were just as important as reading or writing skills, six (11.5%) indicated that speaking was not as important as reading or writing, only three (5.8%) were not sure if speaking was as important as reading or writing, and one did not respond to the question. The 43 who believed that speaking was just as important gave the following reasons: Speaking is more important than writing or reading as it is used in daily conversation (7/16%); Speaking is equally important as a language cannot fully occur without it (15/35%); The four language skills complement each other (16/37%); It is a requirement in most work situations in Botswana (13/30%); Speaking, like the other three, is a life skill (7/16%); Speaking is a requirement if one proceeds to tertiary education (6/13%); English is the official medium of instruction and communication in schools (5/12%); and Speaking reveals students’ weaknesses and strengths (5/12%). It should be noted that some teachers gave more than one reason. From the above, it is clear that most teachers have pertinent reasons why they consider speaking in English to be important in the Botswana situation. The reasons relate to three important functions of speaking English, namely in education as a medium of instruction, in employment as a requirement in middle and high level jobs, and as a life skill to communicate with foreigners.

The second question asked the teachers whether they always delivered their lessons in English. The result indicated that the majority (51, 96.2%) did and only two (3.8%) did not. Asked to give the reasons why they always delivered their lessons in English, the following are their answers: ‘it is a requirement as it is the official medium of instruction’ (13/25.4%); ‘English is a prerequisite for students’ admission into tertiary institutions both in Botswana and outside’ (7/13.7%); ‘I am
a role model to my students with regard to English speaking' (19/37.2%); 'the exam is in English so students should get used to using it' (4/7.8%); ‘an English lesson should be conducted in English’ (16/31.3%); ‘to promote a culture of English speaking’ (9/17.6%) and ‘to provide an input which can be used by students to acquire the language’ (12/23.5%).

The reasons advanced by the teachers are very pertinent and show they have positive attitudes towards speaking. For instance, the fact that more than one quarter of them said that they did so because they consider themselves as role models for their students with regard to English speaking and that almost all the teachers always deliver their lessons in English indicates that their attitudes towards speaking are good. Reasons such as those relating to the fact that English is the medium of instruction in education advanced by two fifths of the teachers, and to the fact that teachers’ spoken language provides input to students which can be used by the students to acquire the language, reflect the important functions played by English speaking in Botswana.

The third question relates to whether the teachers thought speaking should be tested in the BGCSE English exam. The result shows that 73.1% said it should (while 26.9% said it should not). The reasons that were advanced by the teachers are divided into two categories. One comprises teachers’ perception that the lack of a speaking test in the BGCSE English exam might be having a negative influence on students’ attitudes towards learning speaking. These include the following: ‘it will encourage students to speak it more often in an attempt to practice” (15/38, 39.4%); ‘Students will see the necessity of improving their fluency in speaking English’ (10/38, 26.3%); and ‘it will help improve the students’ general command of English’ (6/38, 15.7%).

The second category comprises teachers’ wishes that speaking should be tested based on general academic principles and other considerations. These include the following: ‘a language is taught to develop competence in all the four language skills so competence in all four should be assessed’ (11/38, 28.9%); ‘speaking should be tested in order to help students who might be more talented in speaking than in reading or writing to improve their English exam mark’ (6/38, 15.7%); ‘it should be tested in order to assess our students’ level of spoken English’ (5/38, 13.1%); ‘the communicative language teaching approach demands that all the four language skills be tested’ (14/38, 36.8%); ‘the testing of speaking may improve the quality of the BGCSE English exam’ (5/38, 13.1%) and ‘speaking skills are needed in the job market’(4/38, 10.5%). The above responses show that teachers have sound reasons why they want speaking to be assessed.

The fourth question that was addressed related to whether the respondents thought that the assessment of speaking will result in the improvement of its teaching or not. About three quarters (73.6%) indicated that the assessment of speaking would result in the improvement of its teaching. They gave the following reasons: ‘through the examination results teachers would be able to know whether the methods they use are effective or not’(11/39, 28.2%); ‘the Ministry of Education (MoE) would be constrained into coming up with better methods of teaching and assessing speaking’(13/39, 33.3%); ‘students would pay more attention to it’(15/39,
38.4%); ‘teachers would pay more attention to it’(13/39, 33.3%); and ‘paying more attention to speaking by both teachers and students would result in students becoming more confident in speaking the language’(25/39, 64.1%).

The reasons they gave for their views indicate that teachers think the exam has a negative influence on teachers and students with regards to the teaching and learning of speaking. These responses somewhat overlap with those relating to the previous question relating to whether speaking should be assessed, indicating consistency in the way teachers were responding. Only 7.5% did not think that the assessment of speaking will result in the improvement of its teaching and did not give reasons for their answers. Almost one-fifth (18.9%) were not sure.

The fifth question relates to whether teachers thought that the assessment of speaking would result in the improvement of its learning or not. The result indicated that the majority (75%) of the respondents said that the assessment of speaking would result in the improvement of its learning. The reasons they advanced included the following: ‘students are only serious with subjects that are examined’(30/39, 76.9%); ‘students would speak English more frequently knowing that in the process they are also preparing for the exam’(21/39, 53.8%); ‘students would find a reason for speaking the language’(10/39, 25.6%); and ‘some students who like debates, class presentations and discussions would get more opportunities to improve their skills than they do now’(7/39, 17.9%). The reasons advanced by the respondents also seem to support the view that they have positive attitudes towards speaking to the extent that they believe that its assessment would result in the improvement of its learning. Only 5.8% said it would not and 19.2% were not sure.

In order to further explore teachers’ perceptions and attitudes towards the assessment of speaking in the BGCSE ESL examination, teachers were asked to indicate whether the assessment of speaking in the BGCSE English examination would serve a useful purpose. This question was asked to find out if teachers think speaking assessment would serve an important educational purpose. The result indicates that 34 (65.4%) said it would; 10 (19.2%) said it would not; and 8 (15.4%) were not sure. When asked to give reasons for their answers those who agreed with the assertion gave the following reasons: ‘it will constrain our students into speaking English’ (22/34, 64.7%); ‘it will constrain teachers to come up with ways of teaching and assessing speaking’ (7/34, 20.5%); ‘it would result in students being tested in the entire syllabus’ (13/34, 38.2%); ‘though teachers’ workload might increase, the benefits would outweigh the disadvantages’ (5/34, 14.7%); and ‘an aggressive program of English is needed in Botswana such as the French one’ (6/34, 17.6%). The remark about an aggressive program similar to the French one is a reference to the teaching of French in some secondary schools in which speaking is emphasized and students are able to speak it within a relatively shorter time, as compared to the teaching of English which, though less intensive, is more extensive and it takes much longer to speak it.

The above result indicates that the majority of teachers have positive attitudes towards the assessment of speaking, as the majority of them are in favour
of it. The result also shows that teachers have good reasons, which are based on sound pedagogical principles for their positive attitudes.

A pattern that appears to emerge from the responses of both the students and the teachers to all the questions they were asked is that they have positive attitudes towards speaking. However, it is worthwhile to examine their responses to each or to a group of related questions to get a clearer picture. First the responses relating to the importance of speaking are addressed because they were given by both the students and the teachers. Then those relating to the language of ESL lesson delivery are addressed. Lastly those relating to whether teachers thought speaking should be tested in the BGCSE English examination and whether that would result in the improvement of the teaching and the learning of speaking are addressed together.

The fact that almost all of the students and over four-fifths of the teachers said that speaking in English was important in the Botswana ESL situation indicates that both teachers and students have positive attitudes towards it despite it being not tested in the BGCSE English examination. The reasons advanced by both the students and the teachers also show that both of them have positive attitudes towards speaking. Some of the teachers (close to one fifth of them) even said that speaking was more important than reading or writing as it is used in daily conversation. Although this might be an overrating of the importance of speaking in the Botswana context, it shows that their attitude towards speaking is very positive. The reasons advanced by both students and teachers also indicate that they do value speaking as much as they do the other language skills.

It should be taken into consideration that Botswana is one of the African countries that, according to Heine (1990), does not pursue an active endoglossic policy. This means that although it aims at developing a local language into a lingua franca, its actual policy favours the use of an alien language in most official domains of significance, such as government, administration, higher education, or the written mass media. Myers-Scotton (1990) contends that there was an instrumental reason to learn and retain English. The alien language had the power to open doors in the colonial period, a power that has not diminished even today. The knowledge of spoken English is considered by ordinary Batswana as a tangible sign that one is educated. Therefore with such strong social and economic advantages competence in English in general, and spoken English in particular, accords to people, a test, however important it could be, cannot change the attitudes of people towards English speaking.

Another indicator of the positive attitudes of teachers towards speaking is the fact that almost all the teachers said that they always delivered their ESL lessons in English. Impressive though this is, what really indicates their positive attitudes towards speaking in English are the reasons they gave for doing this. The fact that many teachers considered themselves as mentors for their students as far as speaking English was concerned, and also as providing input for their students to learn speaking, indicates that their attitudes towards speaking is positive. Lastly, the fact that almost three-quarters of the teachers think that speaking should be tested in the BGCSE English examination, and that the assessment of speaking
would result in the improvement of its teaching and learning, indicates that they believe speaking is as important as the other language skills that are examined.

The responses seem to confirm the teachers' positive attitudes towards speaking, indicating that if the majority of the respondents had their way, speaking would be tested in the BGCSE English exam as they seem to believe that it would result in a lot of educational benefits. For instance, they endorse the prescribed teaching methodology, the communicative language teaching approach, which calls for the testing of all the four language skills. This is because teaching under this approach integrates all the four skills as the language is used for genuine communication both for teaching purposes and for other classroom communication. In fact close to two fifth of them said that speaking should be tested because the communicative language teaching approach, which is the prescribed approach, demands it.

Moreover, the testing of speaking was regarded by some of the teachers as something that would play an important role in triggering the development of better teaching and assessment methods by the MoE to be used in the schools by the teachers. The fact that this point was raised by one third of the teachers shows that it is of concern to many of them. This point should be seen in light of the fact that speaking has never been tested before in the public school system in the country, and therefore if the MoE does not assist teachers with materials for teaching and assessing speaking, there is no previous experience from which teachers can draw. The materials for teaching and assessing speaking are therefore not easily available. The teachers are in effect suggesting that the introduction of a speaking test will have a positive washback effect on those in the MoE who are responsible for the production of teaching materials to produce materials for teaching and assessing speaking.

These findings support Bailey's washback model as they indicate that teachers' perceptions with regard to the testing of speaking are that it would have a positive influence on teaching and on the production of teaching and assessment materials on speaking. This however is based on the teachers' perceptions of the influence of the exam on teaching and not on their attitudes towards speaking as those were found to be positive. This data also indicates that teachers have the perception that tests or examinations have positive influences on teaching and learning; they thought that the testing of speaking would make both teachers and the students pay more attention to speaking than they currently do.

It is also clear from the reasons presented that many teachers believe that the BGCSE English exam has an impact on the attitudes of students towards the learning of speaking. It seems to be the case that even though the BGCSE English examination may not have had a lot of impact on teachers' attitudes towards speaking, it has had an impact on the perception of teachers with regard to its influence on students' attitudes towards learning speaking. For instance, close to four fifths of the teachers said that students are only serious with subjects that are tested in the exam.

However, students' results on their attitude towards speaking, which have already been reported earlier in this paper, do not support this view. In fact,
students' attitudes towards speaking were found to be very positive. As suggested before, teachers might be saying this because they feel that the exam is not reinforcing what they are doing by testing it. As already said, while teachers' perceptions of the influence of the exam on students' attitudes towards learning have been affected by the exam, the attitudes of teachers towards speaking were largely not affected.

The data provided by the teachers' reasons seem to be more complex than what the Bailey (1999) washback model provides for. While the model only provides for the effect of the test on the perceptions of the participants (teachers and students) with regard to items that are tested or not tested in the exam, it does not provide for the perceptions of one category of participants (for example teachers) with regard to what they think might be the negative influence the test or exam is having on the attitudes of another (for example students) towards items that are or are not in the exam. The fact that the model does not cater for the perceptions the various participants may have of each other due to items that are tested or not tested in a test or exam seems to be a shortcoming of Bailey's model.

The data provided by the teachers also imply that they believe that at the moment the teaching and learning of speaking may not be up to the standard it could be if speaking was assessed. The comments that the teachers made themselves to the effect that the students and the teachers would pay more attention to speaking than they do now if it is tested support this view. Bailey's (1999) washback model seems to assume that participants will always have either both negative perceptions and attitudes towards those items in the curriculum that are not assessed in a high-stakes test or exam, and therefore not pay as much attention to them as compared to those that are assessed, or both positive perceptions and attitudes towards those items in the curriculum that are assessed in a high-stakes test or exam and therefore pay more attention to them as compared to those that are not assessed. However, data from this study has indicated that while participants may have positive attitudes towards items that are not assessed in the exam, they may still have negative perceptions of the effect of the exam on items that are not tested in the exam, thereby depicting a more complex situation than Bailey's model allows for. The importance of English, including oral skills, due to its high sociolinguistic status, already referred to earlier, ensures that attitudes towards English speaking remain high. On the other hand, teachers' perceptions of the power of exams, indicated by the fact that more than three quarters of them said that students were only serious with subjects that are examined, make them think that the students' attitudes towards speaking is negative since it is not examined.

The one-quarter of the teacher respondents who did not think that speaking should be tested in the BGCSE English exam gave the following reasons: ‘I am not sure how it could be done’ (7/14, 50%); ‘the whole education system is not in order, so to test speaking would only aggravate the situation’ (6/14, 42.8%); and ‘it would be too time consuming’ (3/14, 21.4%); and ‘its testing would disadvantage most students in their English exam performance since most of them are shy to speak it’ (2/14, 14.2%). The above reasons do not seem to reflect the teachers' attitudes, as
defined in this paper, towards speaking but their perceptions with regard to their ability to test it, their perceptions of the viability of testing it in light of their view that it is too time consuming and would aggravate a situation where the educational system is already not working very well. Also the reason which says that the test would disadvantage most students since they are shy to speak reflects teachers’ perceptions of the students’ profile rather than their attitudes towards speaking. Moreover it is difficult to attribute the above perceptions solely to the BGCSE English examination because most have to do with issues in the whole education system, such as the efficiency or otherwise of the system and the quality of teachers.

The above perceptions of teachers who did not think that speaking should be tested, as well as those that have already been discussed that relate to teachers’ perceptions of the influence of the BGCSE English exam on students’ attitudes towards speaking, are not catered for in the Bailey (1999) washback model.

6. Summary and Conclusions

This paper has examined how the BGCSE English curriculum which is accompanied by an exam which does not assess speaking has affected the perceptions and attitudes of students and teachers towards speaking in English, its teaching and assessment. An important distinction between attitudes and perceptions was made. Whereas perceptions were defined as the impression, conception or understanding that people have of something or peoples’ intuitive judgment about something, and are less likely to influence them to behave in certain ways under defined contexts, attitudes were defined as peoples’ outlook, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings toward something that influence them to behave in certain ways under defined contexts or circumstances. The results have indicated that because of the high status of English in Botswana, the BGCSE ESL exam has not affected students and teachers’ attitudes towards speaking that much in that they have remained positive even though they are not assessed. Both teachers and students consider speaking in English and its teaching and assessment to be just as important as reading or writing, which are tested in the BGCSE ESL exam. Teachers believe that the assessment of speaking will influence both teachers and students to take it more seriously than is the case now. They believe in exam washback and think that the non-assessment of speaking is having a negative effect on the teaching of speaking in BGCSE ESL classes.

However, teachers’ perceptions of the effect of the exam on their own teaching and on the attitudes of students towards the learning of speaking were affected. This therefore indicates that the Bailey (1999) washback model has been supported as far as perceptions are concerned and not supported as far as attitudes are concerned by data from Botswana. This model was also found to have some limitations or shortcomings. For instance, it only caters for the participants’ perceptions of the items that are tested or not tested in the test or exam and not on the perceptions of the participants on how the test is affecting the attitudes of other participants or on the perceptions of teachers of their own ability to teach items
that are in the test or not in the test. For example, some respondents were found to have negative perceptions of their own ability to test speaking, of the viability of testing speaking under the current situation, of the student’s ability to cope with a speaking test, and of the influence of the BGCSE English exam on students’ attitudes towards speaking.

This paper has indicated that while the BGCSE English exam has not negatively affected students’ and teachers’ attitudes towards speaking due to the high sociolinguistic status of English in Botswana, it has affected their perceptions since they were found to believe in the washback effects of the BGCSE ESL exam, thereby partially supporting the washback model. Besides their belief in exam washback effects, the perceptions of the teachers were also found to be influenced by many other factors, such as the fact that no testing mechanism had been developed yet, many teachers claimed that they were not trained to assess speaking in their pre-service training and were not confident they could reliably test it, and that the material resources needed for assessing speaking were not available.

Works Cited


