

Tunisian English Language Teachers' Perceptions and Practices: Washback of the English Baccalaureate Exam

Hanen Dammak^{1,a,*}, Ali Khatibi^{2,b}, S. M. Ferdous Azam^{2,c}

¹Post Graduate Centre, Management and Science University, University Drive, Off Persiaran Olahraga, Section 13, 40100, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

²Management and Science University, University Drive, Off Persiaran Olahraga, Section 13, 40100, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

a. hanen.dammak@iseaht.rbu.tn, b. alik@msu.edu.my, c.drferdous@msu.edu.my

**corresponding author*

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Abstract: The present paper examines the washback effect of teachers' perceptions about the High-Stakes National English Baccalaureate Exam (AE) and their beliefs about what constitutes effective teaching methodology (BETM). A sequential quantitative-qualitative methodology was used. A questionnaire was administered to 450 English language of 4th form of secondary school. 4 teachers volunteered for a follow-up study to get an in-depth understanding of what is happening in the classroom and to cross-check the findings obtained from quantitative analysis. To analyse the data, SPSS version 23 was used. Linear regression models were calculated to examine the relationships between teachers' attitudes and beliefs and their teaching practices. The results revealed that other variables, apart from the EBE, lead to teaching practices that go against teachers' beliefs about what constitutes effective teaching. The paper concludes with some practical implications to bring about some changes in the classroom. Hence, bringing changes in the teachers' beliefs and attitudes would subsequently bring changes in the classroom.

1. Introduction

The teaching and testing of English is central in the educational, political, social, and economic processes. Most of the studies on washback, the impact of high-stakes examinations on the process, product, and participants, were in response to an implementation of language reform and innovative practices in education in general and language teaching in particular (e.g., [1]; [2]; [3]; [4]). These studies aimed to check if the changes in the tests were accompanied by intended and beneficial improvements in language teaching. Regardless of the quality design of the test, findings revealed a mismatch between the intended objectives and conflicting practices. Given the complex and multi-faceted nature of the washback effect of examinations, several variables interact to shape its scope and nature [5].

There are far fewer studies on teacher-related factors and their effects on teaching and learning when compared to the number of washback studies of the test factors and prestige factors. In education in general and language teaching and testing in particular is known as washback [4]; [6]; [7]; [8].

Though different researchers examined the impact of different examinations in various educational contexts, most of the research studies are mainly qualitative. Nonetheless, quantitative analysis are better in checking the strength of the relationships and impacts of the different factors influencing the teaching and learning processes. The section that follows examines relevant literature on washback and teacher-related factors.

2. Literature Review

This section provides an overview of the research on teachers' perceptions and the washback effect in the classroom about high-stakes exams. The washback-related factors were classified into (i) test factors; (ii) prestige factors; (iii) personal factors; (iv) micro-context; and (v) macro-context factors [9]. Consequently, research on washback changed from studying test factors and prestige factors into examining teacher cognitions and beliefs.

Researchers have explored teacher cognition and the relationship between cognition, washback, and instructional methods and identified a link between teachers' opinions and their teaching practices [10], [11], [12]; [13], [14]; [15], [16]; [17]; [5]; [3]. They maintain that teachers' perspectives, beliefs, and knowledge all have an impact on the examination. The different practices that teachers go through to maximise their students' scores and for accountability purposes are (i) teaching to the test, (ii) focusing on past tests, which ultimately determines the curriculum, (iii) focusing on "the form and format of the questions on a high-stakes test" [18] pp.35-43.

By reviewing the different empirical studies on washback from external exams and assessments conducted in the field of English language teaching, English language teachers were provided with a greater understanding of the roles the teachers can play and the decisions they can make about washback [17]. She also showed how important the teacher is in shaping the forms and degrees of washback, and how they may thus become actors for generating positive washback.

The effects of the high-stakes First Certificate in English examination (FCE) on teachers' views were examined relying qualitative data analysis to check whether the exam altered EFL teachers' attitudes, and hence their teaching practices [5]. Teachers in Greece reported that the exam made them feel frustrated and worried and subsequently worked hard to handle all the contents of the syllabus.

Using a convenient sampling procedure from 12 secondary schools in Bangladesh, a study was carried out to explore the washback effect of Secondary School Certificate (SSC) English examinations on English teaching and learning [19]. Results indicated that there was a lack of conformity between the objectives of the curriculum and the format of the test, and subsequently, the SSC English test had a strong negative washback on English teaching-learning. The data analysis results show that teachers lack adequate understanding of the curriculum and the current assessment system.

A study in Riyadh Province, KSA carried very recently by [20] to investigate both students' and teachers' attitudes toward a new type of testing called e-tests, as well as students' washback effects of e-tests. Two different versions of questionnaires for teachers and students were used to find out what may affect students, teachers, the educational environment, and the curriculum. The findings indicated that e-tests had an impact on both teachers and students, as well as their perceptions and the teaching materials utilised. An important finding was the extensive use of multiple-choice

questions (MCQs) which discouraged students from being creative and innovative, and teachers tend to teach and cover only what is included or related to the exam.

Equally, in a Midwestern state in the United States, using a mixed-methods approach the washback effect of high-stakes exams on teachers' perceptions and emotions was explored [21]. The results of the study indicated that teachers were under stress and had a negative attitude toward the test.

On the contrary and in a different context, the washback effect of the attitudes of senior high school teachers on Seleksi Bersama Masuk Perguruan Tinggi Negeri (SBMPTN), a university admission exam in Indonesia was explored [22]. The results of their study, however, indicated that the teachers' perceptions and their teaching practices were positively affected.

Similarly, the findings of a study conducted in Vietnam exploring the impact of teachers' perceptions of the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), indicated that there was no significant variation in how individual teachers responded to the test [23]. The teachers in Vietnam who should have used the communicative approach to teach English changed their teaching practices to respond to the test requirements.

Within the framework of doctoral research, [24] carried out a longitudinal study supported by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) to examine the impact of the Certificate in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) implementation relying on both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Based on her research findings, [24] suggested a new model of washback. The findings revealed that, while teachers reported experiencing changes in their teaching practices to varying degrees, they couldn't agree on what caused these changes. They differ depending on whether the changes were brought about by the CSWE or if they occurred after the new curriculum was implemented.

In Hong Kong, a longitudinal quantitative-qualitative study was conducted to determine whether the new examination positively generated the desired changes and affected teachers' teaching methods and various aspects of the classroom [25]. The findings indicated that the teachers held positive attitudes about the new exam, but they were hesitant to modify their teaching methods and align their teaching practices to the objectives of the test. The results also revealed that regardless of the communicative aspect of the test, the teachers' teaching methods, language, and the way they taught remained unchanged. Hence, a discrepancy between teachers' perceptions and practices was found. Likewise, a preliminary investigation into the washback of the Secondary Education Certificate Examination (SECE) in Libya revealed that the teachers admitted that their main duty was to help their students achieve high exam scores. Consequently, they ended up teaching English as a school subject rather than boosting their students' communicative performance [26].

In order to explore tertiary level teachers' teaching practices in two different educational contexts in Taiwan: schools with English Certification Exit Requirements (ECER) and schools without ECER (non-ECER), a quantitative-qualitative study was carried out [27]. The results from this comparative study indicated that unlike teachers in non-ECER, teachers in ECER schools paid more attention to test factors and participate in activities related to the test. The teachers in ECER in Taiwan emphasized test preparation materials, taught test-taking skills rather than language learning activities, and used a rote learning approach in which students were encouraged to memorize several model answers.

To conclude, beliefs are significantly more powerful than knowledge in affecting how people adopt views and behave. In a nutshell, beliefs are far more powerful than information in dictating how individuals form attitudes and reflect their behaviours.

3. Context of the Study

Because English is still the only language with which to join the global English language market the government, families, and individuals are investing in teaching languages and especially English. It is taught as a foreign language in basic, middle, secondary, and higher education. It is a prerequisite for all 4th graders. In Tunisia, where the education system is exam-oriented, language assessment is primarily considered as a summative rather than a diagnostic technique for generating a holistic view of pupils' language abilities. Students are evaluated on whether they pass or fail rather than on diagnosing their deficiencies and identifying their problems [28]. Despite the efforts of the MEO to follow international quality standards and, subsequently, improve the teaching of English, students' English language communicative proficiency has been considered poor [29]; [30]. Primary Education Certificate (PEC), Basic Education Certificate (BEC), and Baccalaureate Certificate are the three standardized national exams (BC). Students at primary and lower secondary school, on the other hand, who would like to enter pioneer middle and secondary schools must take and pass the PEC and BEC exams. As being influenced by the French education system, the Tunisian government introduced the BE, a high-stakes exit and admission exam, in 1957; it has significant consequences and determines the future of thousands of candidates yearly. In June, at the end of the academic year, 4th form of secondary students take the BE. The BE is controlled and administered by the education board, the examinations council, and regional examining boards. External MOE agencies review, administer, and score the exam anonymously to ensure that all candidates have equal chances.

In view of the prestigious nature of the exam as a high-stakes exam in the Tunisian educational context, a reform in language teaching and testing took place in 1994. It aimed at changing the pedagogical focus from the traditional method of teaching language to the communicative approach of developing language proficiency. It also aimed at involving the learners in the process of learning, real-life problem solving, and promoting critical thinking and creativity. Hence, the classroom becomes learner dominated rather than teacher-centered. The EBE has been operating for long period. Three sections-the reading comprehension, language, and writing- make the EBE exam. The reading comprehension is composed of 7 questions. Part 2 of the exam is writing, which is divided into two sections that evaluate the students' writing ability. The third component is the language section, which consists of three tasks. Table 1 gives an idea about the different sections of the exam. Regardless of the intended aim of implementing the communicative approach by introducing the EBE, the exam fails to evaluate two essential skills: listening and speaking for practical purposes.

Table 1. An overview of the EBE.

Sections	Skills	Questions	Marks
Part One	Reading Comprehension: theme-based	Q1—Q7 Scanning- Skimming – Personal point of view	15 marks
Part Two	Writing	Writing 1: Guided Writing Writing 2	5 10
Part Three	Language section : Use of English (Grammar +Vocabulary)	Vocabulary: Gap filling Tense and Form Multiple Choice	3.5 3.5 3

While the washback effect has been studied extensively in several educational situations, it has not been studied in MENA regions such as Tunisia [25]. Even though EBE has been operating for a

long period, nothing is known regarding its impact on different aspects of the classroom. There is a considerable gap in the literature and research on the washback effect of the EBE and the many factors that may affect the teaching of English in Tunisia. However, little research has been conducted in the Tunisian educational system to investigate the relationship between teacher cognition and teaching methods.

Given the centrality of the role of the teacher in language teaching and assessment and the scarcity of research on the influence of the EBE in Tunisia, the current research investigates how teacher cognition—specifically their attitudes and beliefs—influences their teaching practices. To further understand the overall goal, four primary objectives were specified. It aims at exploring (i) teachers' attitudes toward the EBE (AE), (ii) their beliefs about effective teaching methodologies to teach 4th form classes (BETM), (iii) the relationship between teachers' attitudes and their teaching practices, and (iv) the correlation between teachers' beliefs about effective teaching methodologies and their teaching practices. The research questions to be addressed in the present paper are as follows:

- 1) How do English language teachers of 4th form secondary education in Tunisia perceive the EBE?
- 2) What are the teachers' beliefs about effective teaching methodology to teach 4th form of secondary school?
- 3) What are the teachers' stated teaching practices?
- 4) Do teachers' attitudes towards the EBE affect their instructional practices?
- 5) Do teachers' beliefs about effective teaching methodology affect their teaching behaviours?

4. Methodology

The current study was exploratory, with the primary purpose of investigating teachers' attitudes and practices in the context of the washback effect of High Stakes EBE. Using a mixed-methods approach, the impact of teachers' attitudes toward the EBE (AE) and their beliefs about what constitutes effective teaching methods (BETM) on their teaching practices (TP) was investigated [31]; [32]; [33].

Based on the proposed conceptual framework, two relationships were constructed to meet the aims of the study. Figure 1 depicts a conceptual framework built-in light of the previous related washback studies.

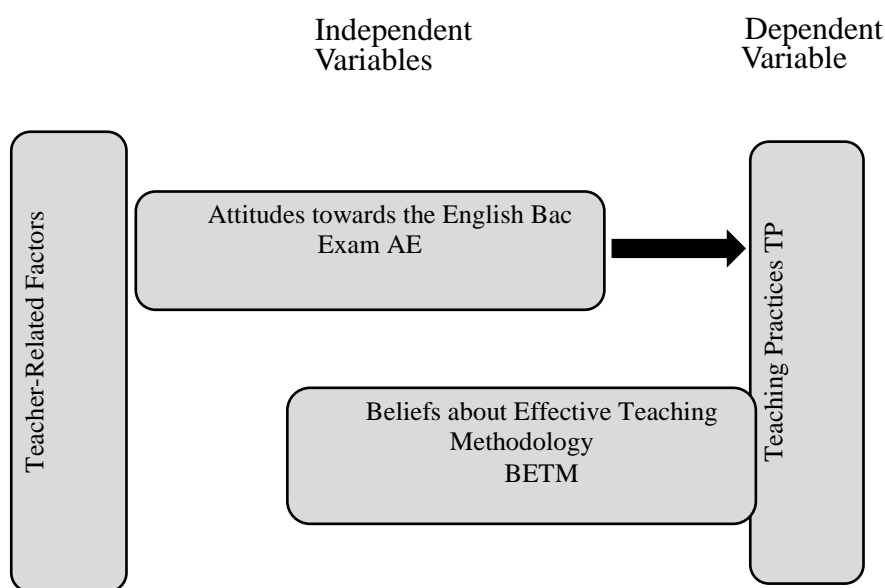


Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework

4.1. Participants

A questionnaire was addressed to 450 English language teachers from six different Tunisian governorates randomly selected. 364 teachers who taught and graded the EBE completed and returned the questionnaire. The overall response rate was about 81 %. About 19% of teachers were excluded from grading the EBE as they were at a higher risk of getting the coronavirus, subsequently, they did not answer the questionnaire.

The greater part of teachers who took part in the study ranged in age from 41 to 50. 76.4 % of them were above the age of 41, 20% were between the ages of 36 and 40, and only 1.4 % were between the ages of 36 and 36. 3% were between the ages of 26 and 30. The majority of responders (78.4 %) have a Bachelor's degree in English, 21.3 % hold a Master's degree, and only .3 percent hold a Ph.D.

4.2. Research Instruments

A questionnaire was used in the first phase of the study to assess teachers' views toward the EBE and their beliefs about what constitutes effective teaching methods for 4th form secondary students (see appendix A). Besides, as a follow-up study to gain a better and more in-depth understanding of teachers' teaching practices and to cross-check the findings from the quantitative data analysis, 4 classrooms were observed and their respective teachers were interviewed (see appendix B and C.) To ensure the validity and reliability of the instruments, an iterative process of testing and retesting the instruments was followed. 30 teachers with similar backgrounds and 5 experts in the area of language teaching and testing assisted in testing the validity and reliability of the instruments.

4.3. Data Collection Procedures

Due to the Covid-19 epidemic and the measures taken and upon formal consent teacher educators, being informed of the purpose of the study, from the 6 governorates assisted in the dissemination of the questionnaire to the target population. To avoid any type of bias, the teacher educators agreed to remain neutral and not to exert any form of pressure on the teachers. To validate

the quantitative findings, four teachers from those who responded to the questionnaire volunteered for class observation and semi-structured interviews.

4.4. Data Analysis

SPSS version 23 was used for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were computed for each set of items in each variable, and survey item frequencies were computed. Factor analyses were performed on Likert items to reduce the number of items measuring different variables and to examine the relationships between different variables. Because the demographic characteristics of the sample in terms of age, gender, school type (secondary), subject and grade taught, and teaching experience, the teachers who completed the questionnaire are similar to those of the overall population. Therefore, the results can be generalized to the nationwide teachers.

Furthermore, in order to get a better understanding of the phenomenon and upon request, among the participants, 4 teachers volunteered to participate in a follow-up study. The observed lessons and interviews were recorded. Each observed teacher was interviewed informally after class and formally for roughly 20 to 30 minutes. The interviews were then transcribed and delivered to the interviewees for review and approval.

5. Results

This section summarizes the findings of quantitative and qualitative data analyses and the results are organized according to the research questions.

RQ1: What do teachers think about the EBE?

In order to determine understand the teachers' perceptions about the EBE, the participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement about different statement regarding the EBE. The statistical analysis of the different items about teachers' attitudes indicated that the mean of the responses for all items is about equal to four which indicates higher levels of agreement and positive attitudes regarding EBE.

QAE1 asked participants to express their thoughts on the EBE in terms of its intended purpose, specifically if the EBE evaluates the English knowledge and skills that 4th form students should have learned. The results indicated that 76.1 % of the respondents reported that the EBE measures English knowledge and skills that 4th graders should have gained, while 23.9 % said that the EBE does not evaluate English knowledge and skills that 4th form students should have learned.

The participants were also asked to share their viewpoints on the impact of the EBE on their teaching methods in terms of WHAT and HOW they teach. 59.3 % and 58.4 % reported that the EBE determined what and how they taught respectively. Similarly, 69.9 % of the respondents stated that the EBE incited them to teach to the exam. Besides, 75.3 % of the respondents reported that they would have allocated time differently to teach each skill (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) if the EBE was cancelled. 76.1 % felt obliged to devote and increase the amount of time spent on grammar and vocabulary. 77.8 % also admitted that they allocated less time to teaching speaking and listening. Besides, 90.2 % of the participants agreed that their classroom-based assessment had to have the same format and content as the EBE. Generally, the participants showed contradictory feelings about the EBE.

RQ2: What are the Teachers' Beliefs about Effective Teaching Methodology to Teach 4th Form of Secondary School?

In order to determine whether teachers' perceptions about effective teaching methodology, and to check whether they had different views about teaching 4th form of secondary schools, several items were used. Unlike most school subjects, English serves as a means of communication and teachers are expected to believe in the communicative aspect of the language to motivate learners to learn the language as a system for developing the various skills—speaking, reading, listening, and writing—so that they can express themselves and engage with others. Yet, 88.2% reported that the most effective teaching method is to focus on the language skills (reading and writing) measured on the EBE. Furthermore, 78.4 % agreed that modifying their teaching objectives about the EBE is a successful way for teaching the 4th form of secondary school. Equally, 64.9 % of participants agreed that focusing on specific skills because they will be assessed on the EBE and disregarding other skills that do not weigh is an effective teaching method. 78.4 % acknowledged revising and adjusting the order of their teaching objectives about the EBE. They rather believe that teaching the language form, grammar and vocabulary, focusing on tested components help students score high. To cross-check the teachers' opinions about effective teaching practices, the participants were asked to rank their reasons for the most effective approach they used from most important to least important. 87.4% reported that they preferred a mixed approach incorporating features of structural and communicative approaches because it is the best method for helping students pass the EBE. Figure 2 illustrates the reasons the participants ranked from the most important to the least important.

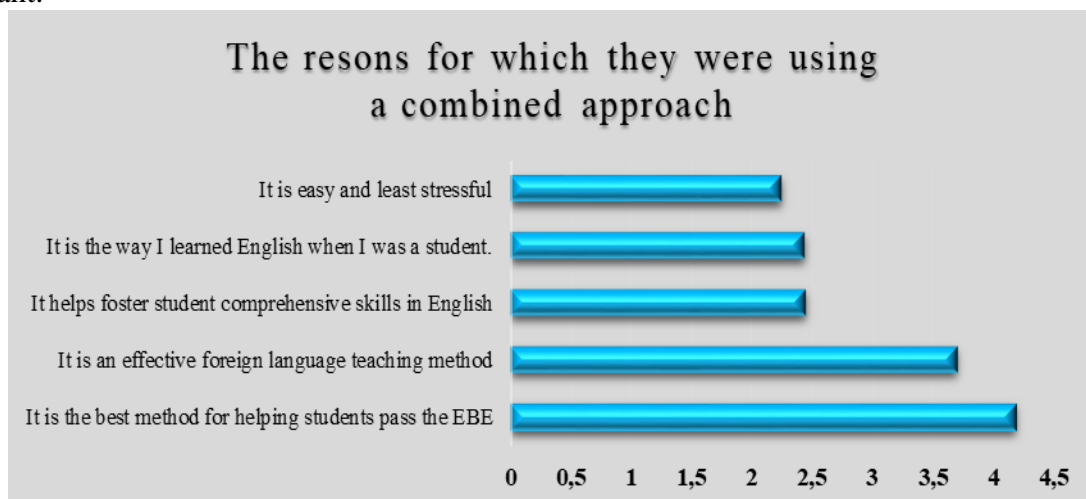


Figure 1. Reasons Ranked from the Most Important to the Least Important.

RQ3: What are the Teachers' Reported Teaching Practices?

In order to compare stated beliefs to reported practices, items TP1 to TP10 asked the participants to show on a frequency scale how often they engage in performing a particular activity, to show the timeline of getting engaged in particular activities. They were given a list of teaching methods and asked to rate their frequency of use on a scale of NEVER to ALWAYS. Teachers may use a range of strategies and use different activities as long as they follow and conform to the key communicative principles of English language instruction in Tunisia, as specified by an advisory group and implemented by teacher educators. Hence, teachers must encourage constructive learning, promote group work, involve students in learner-centered classrooms, provide formative feedback, and prepare their lessons by integrating skills and developing a positive environment. 91.6% reported that they always taught to the exam. The most popular teaching approaches described by respondents included offering practice and activities centered on the EBE, giving

students strategies for answering multiple-choice, and teaching exam-taking strategies. Non-tested skills (listening and speaking) were disregarded. Instead of developing students' performance, the teachers focused on what would assist them get higher exam results. 80% of teachers claimed that they gave their students written production samples to help them prepare for the writing section. Similarly, 90% of teachers stated that they taught their students how to use tactics to solve multiple-choice questions.

QTP6 and QTP10 questioned about the ideal time to give and utilize activities and practice from past exam papers. 30.3 % and 43% said they provided and utilised past exam activities during their lessons throughout the year, respectively. Almost 57 % of respondents said they provided written samples to their students to help them prepare for the writing questions. Approximately 62 % and 64.6 % of teachers said they taught their students strategies for answering multiple-choice questions as well as some exam-taking strategies throughout the year. In general, teachers focused on skills and content that could help students score high.

Inferential statistics were utilized to examine (i) the relationship between teachers' attitudes towards the EBE and their teaching practices, and (ii) the relationship between teachers' beliefs about what constitutes effective teaching methodology and their teaching behaviour. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient and linear regression were computed to estimate the relationships between teachers' perceptions and their teaching practices.

RQ4: Do Teachers' Attitudes towards the EBE Affect their Instructional Practices?

To examine the relationship between teachers' attitudes and their teaching practices, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used to identify common factors that explain the structure of observed data [34], [35]; [36]. Three key criteria were used: (i) a minimum of three items with an eigenvalue of one or higher; (ii) factor loadings of less than .4 were removed; and (iii) items with double loadings were discarded. The criteria variables within a single component are intimately related, and there are no substantial cross-loadings between factors, confirming that factor extraction has both convergent and discriminant validity.

A principal components analysis was performed to identify the common structure of the acquired variables-attitudes, and practices- to determine whether the variables represented a single construct. Items AE1–AE9 were estimated to be of good quality based on conventional abilities to assess 4th form language teachers' opinions toward EBE. According to the result of factor analysis, the 9 survey items clustered together around instructors' opinions toward the EBE, resulting in two factors: factor one with an eigenvalue of 2.377, accounting for 29.718 % of the total variance, and factor two with an eigenvalue of 1.787, accounting for 22.342 %. Two factors were retrieved and saved for further examination. Correlations between items range from .0212 and .575. The KMO value for sample adequacy is .703. Table 2 displays the loading factors, sampling adequacy KMO values, and Cronbach's Alpha values.

Table 2. Summary of the Factors retained.

Variables	Components	Items	Loading Factors	KMO	Cronbach's Alpha	Nb Items
Attitudes towards the EBE AE	AE1	AE2	.822	.703	.683	3
		AE3	.801			
		AE1	.669			
	AE2	AE6	.778		.676	5
		AE5	.736			

		AE7	.702			
		AE8	.519			
		AE4	.517			
Overall					.654	8

Items TP1–TP10 were estimated to assess teachers’ practices. According to the result of factor analysis, the 10 survey items clustered together, resulting in a comparable scale in three components. Factor one, with an eigenvalue of 2.784, accounted for 27.836 % variance, factor two, with an eigenvalue of 1.604, accounted for 16.038, and factor three, contributed for 14.452 %.with an eigenvalue of 1.445. Table 3 summarizes the three components, their loadings, the KMO, and the Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 3. Summary of the Factors retained.

	Variables	Components	Items	Loading Factors	KMO	Cronbach's Alpha	Nb Items
Dependent variable	Teaching Practices	TP	TP9	.852	.651	.780	4
			TP10	.772			
			TP5	.747			
			TP4	.701			
			TP7	.812		.632	3
			TP8	.732			
			TP6	.686			
			TP2	.761		.551	3
			TP3	.749			
			TP1	.658			
Overall						.678	10

A Pearson Correlation coefficient was calculated to prove or nullify the first hypothesis that there is a relationship between AE and TP. A significant positive correlation was found between the two variables (r (AE) and TP =.242; p .005), indicating a significant linear relationship between them.

A simple linear regression equation was also computed to validate the positive relationship between AE and TP. Table 4 displays the regression coefficient for the prediction of TP and AE. Given the significance of AE, a significant regression equation was found:

$$Y = 31.752 + .356(AE) \quad (1)$$

Table 4. Regression Coefficient for Prediction of TP from AE.

Coefficients ^a										
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF

1	Constant	31.752	1.60		19,805	.000					
	AE	.356	.076	.242	4,698	.000	.242	.24	.242	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: TP

AE has an unstandardized regression coefficient of .356; it is statistically significant ($p < .05$). As a result, an increase of one unit on the AE measure is expected to be accompanied by a .356-unit increase in Teaching Practices (TP). The hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between teachers' attitudes toward the High-Stakes EBE and their teaching practices is supported by statistical findings. Intriguingly, AE is a statistically significant predictor of the teachers' teaching practices.

To triangulate and cross-validate the findings of the quantitative data and to better understand the reasons for their extensive use of materials they developed, their focus on language form, and disregard of some skills, the teachers were interviewed on different occasions shortly after leaving the classroom informally. They were also interviewed at a predetermined time. The findings of the formal and informal interviews mirrored teachers' mixed and inconsistent attitudes towards the exam. The majority of them felt confused about the EBE, ranging from negative to positive. One of the teachers (T1) claimed that "The Bac exam should not be the only assessment tool to measure the student's performance, because we need to add other tasks and skills like speaking, listening, and other practices".

T4 expressed the pressure they and their students underwent.

Our students themselves feel lots of pressure as they have to pass the exam. We as teachers feel the same pressure since we want them to score high so that they can pursue their dream careers. The Bac exam is haunting every 4th form teacher! Even those that spot weaknesses and want to address them, feel pressured to 'catch up with everyone else otherwise they'd be behind schedule.

Both quantitative and qualitative findings indicated that teachers had conflicting feelings towards the EBE. They expressed apprehension, dissatisfaction, and unease. They claimed that the MOE reform the exam, curriculum, and syllabus. Their attitudes were overwhelmingly critical and convergent.

In general, the teachers were disillusioned and felt driven by the exam. They felt obsessed with exam-related activities and thought it necessary to teach to the exam to raise their students' scores as their accountability would be judged by their students' results.

The findings show a significant relationship between teachers' attitudes and their teaching practices in terms of more time spent on language activities, writing and reading skills, and less time spent on listening and speaking. The EBE had also an impact on the materials they used. The overuse of MCQs would prevent students from being creative and innovative, and teachers tend to teach only the points similar to those on the exam. There was almost no significant variation in how individual teachers responded to the exam.

These results are consistent with the findings of [24]. Regardless of the communicative aspect of the curriculum, the teachers continued to utilize the traditional teaching methods with much emphasis on language form and weighting components. However, this finding contradicts claims made by [1] who explained, in a different situation where the exam motivates teachers to teach communicative skills, that the teaching practices remained constant and teachers did not respond to the requirement of the test to teach the language communicatively.

RQ5: Do teachers' Beliefs about Effective Teaching Methodology Affect their Teaching Practices?

The present research intends also to test the hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between BETM and TP. To investigate teachers' beliefs about what constitutes effective teaching methodology, several items were utilized. They were coded BETM1 through BETM 4. The EFA analysis produced one factor with an eigenvalue of 1.879, accounting for 46.983% of the total variance. All items loaded higher than .60 on the factor, except BETM 1 loaded .524. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy is .606. The loading factors, KMO, and Cronbach's Alpha are given in table 5.

Table 5. Summary of BETM Factor: Loading Factors, KMO and Internal Reliability.

Variables	Components	Items	Loading Factors	KMO	Cronbach's Alpha	Nb Items
Beliefs about effective teaching methodology	BETM	BETM4	.828	.606	.616	4
		BETM3	.690			
		BETM2	.666			
		BETM1	.524			

To explore the relationship between BETM and TP, Pearson correlation was calculated. It indicated that there was no significant relationship between BETM and TP (r is .019). Hence, there is no relationship between BETM and TP. A regression analysis test of the statistical significance of the relationship between BETM and TP using a one-way between-subjects ANOVA was calculated and yielded that, no significant positive correlation (r (BETM) and TP = .019 $p > .005$) was found, indicating that the two variables had an inconsequential linear relationship.

To summarize, the respondents' TP was predicted using simple linear regression based on their BETM. The results revealed that there was an insignificant regression equation

$$F(0.31) = 38.961, p > .05 \quad (2)$$

The regression coefficient for the prediction of TP from BETM is given in table 6.

Table 6. Regression Coefficient for Prediction of TP from BETM.

Coefficients ^a											
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	Constant	38.961	1.130		34.485	.000					
	BETM	.019	.111	.009	.175	.861	.009	.009	.009	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: TP

Results from the classroom observation were used to synthesize and cross-validate the findings from quantitative analysis. The findings indicated that although the syllabus was based on theme-based content with integrated skills, almost all the observed teachers placed emphasis mainly on tested components, language form (vocabulary, grammar), and writing. They disregarded the untested skills namely, listening and speaking. They assigned the writing task, usually past exam questions, as homework. Besides, the results revealed that the teachers were affected to varying degrees by the High-Stakes national EBE. They rarely used the official textbook developed by the MOE. Almost all the teachers produced their materials in conformity with the spirit of the national exam. They were driven to align the content and teaching materials to the exam rather than to the core principles of the curriculum. Yet, only one observed teacher behaved differently. She used the textbook, taught listening once, and spent one lesson teaching writing as a process. Though she requested her students to discuss the topic, brainstorm ideas, she did not give them the opportunity to prewrite, write, review and edit their writing. The students were not given the chance to experience the evolving nature of the writing process. Generally, the teachers trained their students the same way they were taught. Contrary to the spirit of the curriculum to teach writing as a process and train students to explore and experience the process of writing, students were provided with ready-made statements and were simply asked to use mechanics to make the statements coherent. Sometimes, the teachers asked their students to read their writings aloud, but there was no feedback either from the teachers' side or their peers'.

Half of the class time was devoted to teaching topics, concepts, and terminology that students would use in the writing section. Individually, students were always asked to categorize propositions as solutions, threats, causes, and consequences and to utilize these classifications in their writing. All of the writing assignments were writing questions administered in the previous years. The other half of the class was usually devoted to language form. Furthermore, it was very evident that cooperative learning activities were completely lacking; no pair or group work was used. Students rarely asked questions or used English in class. They were passive recipients, and they were not exposed to authentic material or real-life situations. In terms of participant organization and content management, there was minimal diversity. The most important driving objective was to help pupils pass their exams and score high. Most teachers confirmed that the curriculum aims to provide students with opportunities to communicate, collaborate, reflect on themes such as global warming, education, etc., and solve problems. They thought that their teaching practices contradict their concepts and perceptions about what constitutes effective teaching methods. Yet, they felt obliged to focus on the themes, investigate language forms-grammar and vocabulary- and devote some time to teaching writing, and subsequently, they ended up teaching decontextualized language.

These findings are consistent with the claims made by [37] and [38] who stated that teachers mainly teach to the test, focusing on test items and exam-related practice activities. Teachers were compared to slaves to previous exams and materials.

The findings from classroom observation support findings from previous research in various educational settings [39] [40] [41]; [42]; [43], [44], which affirm that in exam-oriented education teachers' teaching practices reflect their beliefs. The teachers stuck and adhered to the teaching methods that they believed they would help students score high. Therefore, they ended up utilizing traditional methods and a dominated teacher-centered classroom which is very similar to how they were taught.

6. Conclusion

This article presents an examination of the effect of teacher-related factors on their teaching practices in the context of the EBE. It aimed to investigate (i) English language teachers' perceptions toward the EBE and its washback effects, as well as (ii) their beliefs about what constitutes effective methods. The analyses of quantitative and qualitative data proved that teachers' attitudes and beliefs affected various aspects of the classroom, including teaching content, instructional methods, teaching materials, and the time devoted to teaching different skills. They also indicated that the teachers' attitudes about the EBE were mixed but negative. Even though the curriculum encouraged teachers to employ a communicative language teaching approach and integrate language skills, they continued to teach using the traditional approach, narrowing down the curriculum and conforming to the scope of the exam. They largely focused on exam skills at the expense of listening and speaking, which are two crucial skills that were consequently ignored. Furthermore, many teachers relied significantly on prior exam papers and offered and used activities throughout the year during their classes. This sort of teaching method fosters memorization and cramming, which fails to meet the curriculum's primary goals of encouraging learners to become thinkers capable of solving everyday problems and engaging in genuine knowledge building rather than knowledge reception.

The paper as part of a larger study suggests some practical and useful actions to reinforce the English language teaching and testing in the Tunisian context. Careful thought should be given to teachers' attitudes and beliefs. Teachers should be aware of their attitudes, knowledge, and their teaching practices. They should be aware of the negative effect of teaching to the exam and ignore the main objectives of the English curriculum which aim at fostering the communicative skills of the learners. They should themselves be guided and encouraged to be creative and maintain a balance between teaching the curriculum and preparing students for the exam. It is not enough to know and insights into the English language as a system and teaching methods, the MOE should provide teachers with ongoing and practical professional development to better understand their attitudes and beliefs and to design professional development training to modify their attitudes and beliefs. Teachers would not teach differently from the way they were taught if they do not believe in coping with the development in language teaching and testing. It is also crucial to set a comprehensive system of in-service training. Yet, this in-service training should be as a mandatory refresher course to refresh their knowledge, reflect and gain new experience.

One way to modify teachers' beliefs and attitudes is to make them aware of the detrimental impact of their negative attitudes towards the EBE on their teaching practices as they would not provide learners with the real opportunities to learn and use English communicatively. In light of the examination nature of the Tunisian education system, very little is known about the teaching of English and other core subjects in secondary schools. Hence, much more local research is needed and it should embrace not only the teaching of English language but also other core subjects as well.

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Appendix A

Teachers' Questionnaire

Section 1: Please tick the appropriate answer.

1. Your Gender:

- Male Female

2. Age:

- 23-25 31-35 41 and above
 26-30 36-40

3. Academic Qualifications

- English Bachelor Masters Other.....
 License of English Ph.D.

4. Professional Qualifications

- Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT)
- Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA)
- Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (DELTA)
- Other.....

5. Which grades do you teach?

- 1st Form
- 2nd Form
- 3rd Form
- 4th Form

6. Number of years you have been teaching:

- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16 and above

7. Number of years you have been teaching 4th form of secondary education:

- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16 and above

8. Which sector of education do you work for?

- Public
- Private
- Pioneer
- Other**

9. Where do you teach?

- North
- East
- South
- West

10. How many times did you attend any kind of in-service teacher education (training) program within the past five years, including this year?

- None
- under 3
- 3-5
- 6-9
- over 10

Section 2: Indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements by circling the appropriate number that best indicates the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement using the given scale: **1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Neutral), 4 (Agree), 5 (Strongly Agree).**

Statements	1	2	3	4	5
The EBE measures English knowledge and skills that 4th form students should have learned.	1	2	3	4	5
The EBE determines WHAT I teach.	1	2	3	4	5
The EBE determines HOW I teach.	1	2	3	4	5
The EBE requires teachers to teach to the exam.	1	2	3	4	5
My time allotment in class would be different if the English Bac Exam were cancelled.	1	2	3	4	5
The EBE decreases the time spent on teaching speaking and listening.	1	2	3	4	5
The EBE increases the time spent on teaching grammar and vocabulary.	1	2	3	4	5

My tests must have the same content as the EBE.	1	2	3	4	5
For my students to do well on the EBE, I need to teach them additional content not covered in the official program.	1	2	3	4	5

Section3: Indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements by circling the appropriate number that best indicates the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement using the given scale: **1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Neutral), 4 (Agree), 5(Strongly Agree).**

An effective method to teach 4th form of secondary education is to

Statements	1	2	3	4	5
Emphasize the language skills (reading and writing) which are more likely to be tested on the EBE when planning lessons.	1	2	3	4	5
Skip certain sections in the textbook because they are NOT on the EBE.	1	2	3	4	5
Adjust my teaching objectives in relation to the EBE.	1	2	3	4	5
Focus mainly on certain sections in the textbook because they are to be tested on the EBE.	1	2	3	4	5

24. Was the teaching of this subject part of your academic training? Please tick the appropriate answer.
Yes No

25. Check what you think is appropriate. Tick what applies to you. What teaching approach do you prefer to use?

- The traditional approach: focus on grammar rules
- Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): focus on communication
- a combined approach (a combination of CLT and the structural approach)
- other, specify: _____

26. Select the reasons why you prefer the teaching approach you have chosen in (25)

Rank them according to you. You should rank the most important reason as 5, the next in importance as 4, and so on

- It is an effective foreign language teaching method.
- It is the way I learned English when I was a student.
- It is easy and least stressful.
- It helps foster student comprehensive skills in English.
- It is the best method for helping students pass the English Bac Exam.
- other, specify: _____

Section 4: How often do you typically do each of the following activities in your 4th form classes? Choose **1 (Never, 0%), 2 (Sometimes, 30%), 3 (Often, 60%), 4 (Usually, 80%) and 5 (Always, 100%).**

Statements	N	S	O	U	A
I teach ONLY skills which are to be tested on the EBE	1	2	3	4	5
I emphasize mainly the language skills (Reading & Writing) which are to be tested on the EBE	1	2	3	4	5

I teach skills which are NOT to be tested on the EBE	1	2	3	4	5
I teach students exam-related activities to raise their EBE scores	1	2	3	4	5
I teach to the exam	1	2	3	4	5

32. What percentage of class time would you typically spend working on each of the following language skills?

Reading	Writing	Listening	Speaking	Language	Total
					100%

Section 5: Indicate if you typically use the following activities to prepare students for the English Bac exam by circling the appropriate number against each statement, using the scale given **1 (Never, 0%), 2 (Sometimes, 30%), 3 (Often, 60%), 4 (Usually, 80%) and 5 (Always, 100%).**

Statements	1	2	3	4	5
I provide practice and activities using those of the exam that were administered during the previous years (Supplementary materials).					
I use language (vocabulary, grammar, etc.) similar to test questions found on the EBE.					
I provide samples of written productions to prepare my students for the writing.					
I teach students strategies to answer multiple choice questions					

Section 6: Indicate **when** you typically use the following activities to prepare students for the national English Bac exam by circling the appropriate number against each statement, using the scale given **1. (Never N) 2. (Before each test during the year BT) 3. (Before the Bac Blanc BBB) 4. (Before the Bac Exam BBE) 5- (During Lessons throughout the year DL)**

Statements	N	BT	BBB	BBE	DL
I provide practice and activities using those of the EBE that were administered during the previous years (Supplementary materials).	1	2	3	4	5
I use practices and activities (language, vocabulary, grammar, etc.) similar to test questions found on the EBE	1	2	3	4	5
I provide samples of written productions to prepare my students for the writing.	1	2	3	4	5
I teach students strategies to answer multiple choice questions	1	2	3	4	5
I teach students some guessing and exam-taking strategies.	1	2	3	4	5

I sincerely appreciate your time and cooperation. Please make sure that you have completed all sections. Follow-up interviews to find more about the impact of the English Bac Exam will be done, if you would like to participate in the follow-up study, please provide your email address:

Email:

Thank you!

Appendix B

Teachers' interview

Questions about the EBE?

1. What is your overall attitude towards the English Bac exam? Explain why
2. Do you think the English Bac exam is the only assessment tool to measure students' performance?
Yes
No
Why
3. Do you think the English Bac exam is not assessing some **other important language skills**?
If yes, what is missing from the exam?

Questions about Effective Teaching Practices

1. What do you think are effective ways of teaching the English language 4th form of secondary education?
Why
2. Is teaching English Bac classes different from teaching other courses?
How?
Why?
3. What kind of activities do you use for non Bac classes? Could you explain why?
Comment on any differences.

Questions about English Bac exam preparation:

1. Do you specify a specific period to prepare your learners for the National Exam (English Bac Exam)?
When
How often
2. What kinds of activities do you use for English Bac classes that you do not use for other classes?
3. What are the most common test preparation activities you use?
4. Based on your answer of the previous question, do you use these activities throughout the year or just before the exam? Please, explain in detail when you use them,
How,
Why,
How often
5. Do you use test preparation as a stand-alone unit? In other words, do you teach exam preparation separately or do you integrate it within your teaching?
How?
Why?
6. Which skill would you focus more when teaching 4th form classes? Can you order the skills according to the importance you allocate when teaching a Bac exam.
Reading
Writing
Speaking
Listening
Vocabulary
Grammar

Appendix C

Classroom Observation Checklist

Date of observation:

Teacher's name:

Class observed:

No. of students in class

Focus of the lesson:

Starts at:

Ends at:

1: Not observed- 2: Rarely-3: Sometimes-4: Often-5: Always

Activities observed	1	2	3	4	5	Note
Teaching content						
Student's book						
Student's activity book						
Teacher made material						
Past papers						
Commercial materials for English Baccalaureate Exam preparation						
Teaching grammar inductively						
Explicit focus on language						
Form (explicit focus on grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation)						
Function (explicit focus on illocutionary acts such as requesting, apologizing, and explaining)						
Discourse (explicit focus on the way sentences combine into cohesive and coherent sequences)						
Sociolinguistics (explicit focus on the features which make utterances appropriate for particular contexts)						
Focus on reading						
Focus on speaking						
Focus on writing						
Focus on listening						
Integration of skills						
Speaking into reading,						
Speaking into Writing						
Listening into Speaking						
Speaking into Listening						
Reading into Writing						
Reading into Speaking						
Interaction pattern						
Whole Class						
Teacher to student or class, and vice versa						
Student to student, or student(s) to class Group work						
Use of varied activities						

BAC exam tips and strategies						
Minimal teacher guidance						
Greater teacher guidance						
Time-management (e.g., time allocation for activities)						
Writing as a process						
Generating ideas						
Planning and organizing the ideas						
Writing the first draft						
Sharing and responding (peer review)						
Revising and editing						
Writing the final draft						
A correction code is provided						
Feedback and error correction techniques						
Teacher feedback						
Peer feedback						
Learner						