

IELTS Washback Effect and Instructional Planning: The Role of IELTS-Related Experiences of Iranian EFL Teachers*

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Abstract

High-stakes tests exert impacts on teachers' perceptions, methodology, practices, and materials used in the classroom. However, previous research studies have overlooked the role of teachers' past experiences in the tests and their instructional planning prior to, during, and after the preparation courses. This study inspected the washback effect of IELTS examination on Iranian EFL teachers' instructional planning considering their IELTS related experiences. Through a mixed-methods research design, two sets of questionnaires were distributed among 120 Iranian IELTS instructors to examine the IELTS washback effect on their perceptions of instructional planning. Afterward, a semi-structured interview was held with 15 instructors, selected from among 120 initial participants, to supplement the previously collected data. The results of one sample t-test and Wilcoxon signed-ranks test indicated that the current level of Instructional planning at item and total score level was beyond average. Likewise, the results of Spearman rho indicated a positive and significant relationship between instructors' instructional planning and their past IELTS related experiences. It was also found that the IELTS examination made the instructors develop exam-oriented plans by focusing on the students' test performance. The results are invaluable for IELTS instructors in that they can raise their knowledge and awareness about the nature and scope of IELTS washback effect and ways to develop exam-oriented plans.

Keywords: *High-stakes tests, IELTS related experiences, IELTS instructors, instructional planning, washback effect*

*Received: 2021/04/09

Accepted: 2021/05/19

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1. Introduction

Historically, there have been many controversial debates and contrasting viewpoints over the use and influence of tests. In the past, they were looked upon as sanctions and “bête noires”; neither students enjoyed taking them nor did teachers relish making and marking them (Hoadjli, 2015). Nowadays, tests are considered as rewarding experiences and fundamental parts of the curriculum which are inseparable from teaching. They provide systematic feedback for both learners and teachers. They act as windows through which the teachers can identify the matches and mismatches in the expectations, performances, teaching methods, and the rate of attainment and progress among the students (Hoadjli, 2015).

Instead of posing a positive impact on the learners’ learning, testing can limit both the learning and instructional processes, twist and interfere with curricula, and take over treasured pedagogical time (Bracey, 1989; Dorr-Bremme, & Herman, 1986; Romberg, Zarinnia, & Williams, 1989; Smith, Edelsky, Draper, Rottenberg, & Cherland, 1989; Stake, 1988). This impact of testing on teaching and learning has been frequently referred to as *washback effect* in language teaching (Alderson & Wall, 1993). For decades, test washback effects have been the focal points of numerous research studies resulting in the introduction of many models and frameworks (e.g., Alderson & Wall, 1993; Bailey, 1996; Hughes, 1993). Such models unanimously agreed that the phenomenon is multi-faceted and many factors and variables are involved in its mechanism (Cheng, Watanabe, & Curtis, 2004).

While testing is, generally, to benefit education, the worth and validity of some tests such as traditional standardized tests are under question and research has posed challenges on whether the improvements in test results essentially guarantee improvements in learning (Cannell, 1987; Linn, Graue, & Sanders, 1989; Shepard, 1990). Other empirical investigations on standardized tests pinpoint their narrowing of the content and mismatches with the curricula and teaching. Further, the idea that they have turned a blind eye to higher-order thinking skills and that they have inadequate relevance and

meaningfulness, particularly Multiple Choice (MC) formats, has appeared in some research studies (e.g., Baker, 1989; Herman, 1989; Shepard, 1990).

The impact of tests can manifest itself in different aspects of teachers' career including their perception and methodology. Another area which is affected by tests is that of instructional planning which is regarded as a psychological process of determining what to teach and in what order long before the teacher enters the classroom (Shavelson, 1987). Carr-Chellman (2016) defined instructional planning as the process through which instruction is made for classroom practice by means of a methodical process of specifying objectives, generating learning goals, scrutinizing student individualities, developing tests, choosing materials, preparing activities, choosing media, and executing and reviewing the lesson.

Instructional planning is a fundamental construct to every bit of education process since it affords teachers with directions and steps toward a particular objective. Teachers' instructional planning, like other aspects, is affected by experience (Cheng, 2005; Watanabe, 1996), in the sense that novice and experience teachers do not plan their instruction in the same way and are not of the same quality (Sardo-Brown; 1990; Yildirim, 2003). In the case of IELTS examination, teachers' experience can be related to their being an IELTS candidate, examiner, or even a teacher trainer. Besides teaching experience, other factors like accountability, extra pressure by schools and parents, and demotivation on the part of both learners and teachers can affect the instructional process and planning (Gebriel & Eid, 2017).

Studies conducted on this issue manifest different views, some maintain that high-stakes examinations have little, if any, impact on teachers' instructional planning (Herman & Dorr-Bremme, 1983), while others assert that based on empirical investigations, tests do have impacts on teachers' instructional planning (Mehrens, 1984; Salmon-Cox, 1981). Confirming this impact, various scholars in different academic contexts have carried out studies on the washback effect of tests on teachers' planning (e.g., Abdullah, Idrisb, Hamzahc, &

Sembak, 2015; Afflerbach & Cho, 2011; Ghorbani, 2008; Hosp & Ardoin, 2008). Nevertheless, in Iran, the extant studies have mostly focused on the washback effect of tests like the university entrance exam and have not given due attention to the teacher washback effect and the role the teachers' level of experience plays. Against this backdrop, the current investigation was an effort to investigate the impact of IELTS examination, as one of the commonest international tests taken by Iranian candidates for different purposes, on EFL teachers' instructional planning in terms of experience which has been kept at the margins in the research context of Iran.

2. Literature Review

It is highly agreed that different language tests, including low-stakes (teacher-made) and high-stakes tests (upon which significant decisions are made), exert unavoidable impacts on the processes of teaching and learning (Spratt, 2005; Sultana, 2018). Capturing the essence of washback phenomenon, different scholars have proposed different models and frameworks in this area arguing that washback effect is a multi-dimensional phenomenon which affects different stakeholders in various ways (e.g., Alderson & Wall, 1993; Bailey, 1996; Hughes, 1993, among others). In educational arena, tests can affect learners, teachers, schools, and parents at the micro level and policy-makers and curriculum developers at the macro level (Bachman & Palmer, 2010; Cheng, Andrews, & Yu, 2011; Hughes, 1993). The stakeholders may undergo various perceptual, behavioral, practical, and identity change as a result of tests (Cheng, 2004; Authors, 2019; Salehi, Yunus, & Salehi, 2012; Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt, & Ferman, 1996). The direction and intensity of washback effect of tests and examinations are contingent on many factors and variables (Cheng, Watanabe, & Curtis, 2004). They include gender, experience, educational qualifications, and perceptions (Cheng, 2008).

The growth of the standardized high-stakes tests (e.g. TOEFL, IELTS, and GRE) in the new millennium has led to a score-oriented education in which the washback effect is observed. That is why many researchers in the past decades focused their attention on washback to

the learner, teacher, textbook, and the program (Beilely, 1996). However, a great body of washback studies around the world has been done on “washback to the learner” (e.g., Baily, 1996; Cheng, Andrews, & Yu, 2011; Ghorbani, 2008; Salehi, Yunus, & Salehi, 2012), and “washback to the teacher” as the main focus of attention in the process of washback (Bailey, 1996) has been less explored. Teachers are believed to be the most significant participants involved in the washback phenomenon as their lives are directly affected by both the test and their students’ scores on the test (Beilely, 1996). It is critical to note that as the knowledge and awareness of the researchers of this area grew with respect to the nature and mechanism of washback effect, more and more studies were carried out on teachers as “the ‘front-line’ channels in the process of washback effect (Bailey, 1999, p. 17) especially their beliefs and perceptions, methodology, and materials (e.g., Amengual-Pizarro, 2009; Cheng, 2005; Author, 2010; Read & Hayes, 2003; Watanabe, 1996).

As can be understood by perusing the available literature on the washback effect of high-stakes exams, most of the investigations on “washback to the teacher” are confined to the inner, immediate, and micro context of the classroom and teachers’ teaching. The discoveries in this research area demonstrate that the intensity of washback has different levels, ranging from heavy to zero washback (Cheng, 2005; Watanabe, 1996). Another important teacher-related variable in the domain of washback which is different in nature from the previously mentioned areas of research on washback is that of instructional planning. Simply, it is defined as a psychological process which comprises future visualization while at the same time bearing in mind how to attain it in the present moment (Clark & Dunn, 1991).

Instructional planning is regarded as a preparation of a set of actions for a particular time decided long before the learners start the course and can be both written or just elicited mentally (Shavelson, 1987). As Taylor (1970) maintained, the issue of instructional planning is vital for the entire process of education in that it defines, directs, coordinates, and affords a purpose for instruction. It is commonly believed that the

students' amount of success in learning is regularly established before they come into the class. Normally, a large proportion of a teacher's time is paid out on scheduling what they are going to do in the class, consequently the teacher's plans have a substantial effect on what truly happens in the classroom context (Reiser & Mory, 1991). It provides confidence and security for the teacher in case it is done properly.

It is obvious that a high-quality instruction is by no means detachable from a high-quality planning. The application of assessment to drive and direct instruction has also been supported for years (Afflerbach & Cho, 2011; Paris, 2001). Hence, teachers who teach high-stakes examinations also follow a pre-thought instructional planning as teachers do in regular classes. Apparently, these examinations affect the way teachers plan their teaching to a great extent. This linkage between testing and instructional planning is a rational suggestion which guides educators to choose the right strategies and skills to teach so as to facilitate the students' improvement (Afflerbach & Cho, 2011).

Concerning this line of research, various studies have been carried out all around the world to uncover the effects of tests and examinations on teachers' instructional planning. For example, in their study, Hosp and Ardoin (2008) committed themselves to the belief that assessment is a prevalent task in educational arena which is of diverse aims. They presented a practical framework for how to use assessment data to plan and schedule instruction. Moreover, they provided some contextual information concerning the development or use of assessment tools and guidance for planning education. In a similar manner, Abdullah, Idrisb, Hamzahc, and Sembak (2015) conducted a mixed methods study on 589 teachers in Malaysia using a double layer rubric questionnaire and interviews. The outcomes of their study indicated that strong and durable planning was crucial for ensuring the perfect application of School-Based Assessment (SBA) among teachers.

Nevertheless, once test scores are concomitant with rewards or even sanctions, research has demonstrated that "high-stakes" testing brings about a constricted and confined curricula and instruction. In this

regard, Madaus (1988) contended that teachers follow “the teach to test” approach once they assume that significant decisions like student promotion would be on the basis of the test scores. Similarly, in Iran, Ghorbani (2008) has scrutinized the washback effect of the University Entrance Exam (UEE) on EFL teachers’ curriculum planning and instruction. The results of his investigation demonstrated that UEE strongly affected “what of teaching” but not “how of teaching” in Iranian EFL teachers. Nearly all the participants irrespective of their teaching experience, educational background, gender, and the school type and its location endorsed the negative effects of the UEE. By the same token, Ramezaney (2014) examined the washback effects of UEE on Iranian EFL teachers’ curricular planning and pedagogical techniques concluding that, from the teachers’ standpoint, Iranian UEE has a significant impact on teachers’ curricular planning and instructional techniques.

In a recent study, Ansyari (2018) identified some challenges in five aspects of instructional planning including learning objective, teacher role, learning activities, assessment, and the time required for learning activities. The use of rubric, however, was found conducive to determine the internal consistency of instructional planning components. Although this area of research is not an uncharted territory, the current study was a bid to investigate the influence of a high-stakes standardized test (i.e., IELTS) other than UEE on Iranian EFL teachers’ instructional planning in light of their teaching experience as a key factor in determining the existence, direction, and intensity of washback phenomenon (Cheng, 2005; Fish, 1988). IELTS examination has been chosen for investigation because of the growing surge of interest among Iranian students to fulfil their qualifications for continuing their education abroad and this motivated the researchers to explore the possible IELTS washback effects.

The aim of this research was to unpack the washback effect of IELTS examination as a standard, high-stakes exam in Iran on EFL teachers’ instructional planning in light of their teaching experiences in this regard which has been limitedly explored (if any) in the scholarly

context of Iran. More particularly, this study delved deeply into the succeeding research questions.

1. To what extent, if any, is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' IELTS related experiences and their instructional planning as a result of receiving washback from IELTS examination?
2. How does IELTS examination influence Iranian EFL teachers' instructional planning?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The target participants of this research study were 120 Iranian IELTS teachers, both male and female instructors and with different academic degrees (72 MA and 48 PhD), who were teaching IELTS in various English language institutes in Tehran. They had different levels of teaching experience (56 participants with 3 years of IELTS teaching experience, 40 between 4 to 7, and 24 with more than 8 years of IELTS teaching experience) and their age ranged from 20 to 62. The participants were chosen non-randomly using convenience sampling and according to their tendency to take part in the investigation. To scrutinize the IELTS instructors' conceptions of the possible impacts of IELTS on their instructional planning, in the qualitative phase of the study, 15 instructors picked from the initial 120 participants attended a semi-structured interview.

3.2. Instruments and Materials

Three research instruments were utilized in the present study, including Teachers' Demographic Questionnaire, Teachers' Instructional Planning Questionnaire, and a semi-structured Interview, whose details are presented hereunder.

3.2.1. Teachers' Demographic Questionnaire

To gain a vivid picture of the participants' background information, a teacher's demographic questionnaire was developed by the researchers with a section related to the participants' gender, age, institute type, teaching experience, current level of education, and the age of their

students. In another section, the participants were asked to provide some information about their past IELTS related experiences through some developed items. More specifically, they were asked if they had attended IELTS preparation courses, IELTS teacher and examiner training centers, neither or both. Similarly, to have credible findings on the washback effect of IELTS examination and verify the presence of washback under the impact of the test, the IELTS instructors were asked if they take advantage of mock tests in their classes.

3.2.2. Teachers' Instructional Planning Questionnaire

In order to explore Iranian IELTS instructors' perceptions about the washback effect of IELTS examination on their instructional planning, the researchers adapted the questionnaire developed by Russell (1979). Originally, the questionnaire was made up of two parts. The first part asked for background and demographic information and the second part of the questionnaire encompassed 12 items on the teachers' instructional planning. It used a 5-point Likert-scale with 1 representing "Not at all" (NA) and 5 as "Most of the Time" (MT). It is critical to note that, Russell's (1979) instructional planning questionnaire was selected due to its popularity among scholars in the field of Applied Linguistics. As this questionnaire lacked items measuring the construct of examination, the researchers added some items related to tests and their impacts on planning and measured the reliability and validity indices afresh. The revised and final version of the questionnaire was comprised of 35 items with no reverse scored item. The results of Cronbach's alpha and factor analysis revealed that the questionnaire had a high internal consistency reliability (.92) and construct validity.

3.2.3. Teacher Interview

In the qualitative phase of the study, a thorough semi-structured interview was held with the instructors in order to reach a more inclusive understanding of the research concern. In so doing, all the 15 participants were requested to partake in a comprehensive semi-structured interview which took about 15-30 minutes of their time. The justification for using a semi-structured interview was that in this data collection technique, one can utilize a list of questions as a guide, while

at the same time having the freedom to go off the point and probe for more information (Mackey & Gass, 2005). As for the selection of the interviewees, they were selected according to their responses in the quantitative data analysis of the questionnaires and their agreement for further cooperation. The interview questions were developed by the researchers (Appendix) and concerning the content validity of the items, they were reassessed by two language and two content teachers in order to ensure the suitability of their content and language.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

To fulfill the aims of the study, a pilot testing phase was conducted by the researchers to ensure the reliability and construct validity of the teachers' Instructional planning questionnaire. Afterward, 120 IELTS instructors were administered the questionnaires (demographic information questionnaire together with Instructional planning questionnaire) to examine the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' past IELTS-related experiences and their Instructional Planning. The questionnaires were distributed, through convenience sampling, among IELTS instructors who were teaching IELTS preparation courses in different language institutes in Tehran, Iran. The respondents were requested to fill in the questionnaires during their non-instructional times and deliver them to the researchers within one week of time-span. The researchers also assured the respondents of their identity and confidentiality of their responses. Afterward, the questionnaires were analyzed through diverse statistical methods.

Subsequently, the researchers developed the interview questions and gave them to two language and two content experts in Applied Linguistics in an attempt to ensure their relevance and suitability. Considering the results of the quantitative phase and the teachers' IELTS teaching experience, 15 instructors from the initial 120 participants were selected to join in an in-depth semi-structured interview to scrutinize the IELTS instructors' perceptions of the possible impacts of the examination on their instructional planning. In the end, all the responses to the interview questions were deeply

analyzed through thematic analysis in order to determine the common themes raised by the instructors.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data analysis was done on the basis of the data gleaned through both questionnaires and interviews. As for the quantitative research question of this study in the first phase, one sample t-test, Wilcoxon signed-ranks test, and Spearman rho were employed. Considering the qualitative phase, the interview data were analyzed qualitatively taking advantage of thematic analysis. In so doing, first all the interviews were transcribed, summarized, and categorized by the researchers. Having the transcriptions proofread for spotting any mismatches among audios and texts, the researchers reviewed the transcriptions again and coded and categorized them carefully to specify the main themes and patterns in the teachers' responses. Taking advantage of frequency counts and descriptive statistics, the emerging themes and patterns in the transcriptions were grouped according to their frequency of occurrence. By this means, the themes and patterns were put in a thematic table drawn in line with the interview questions along with the sample extracts from each of the 15 interviewees. Subsequently, all the themes and patterns were carefully categorized to indicate the main themes in the interview data. Then the main themes were examined in juxtaposition to the quantitative data to validate the overall findings.

4. Results

4.1. Research Results to Respond to the First Research Question

To answer this question, determining if IELTS examination has had any washback effect on Iranian EFL teachers' instructional planning, ex post facto data on instructional planning items and total scores were collected from 120 teachers who had already taught IELTS for more or few years. To see how the current level of instructional planning at item and total score level are beyond or below average, the theoretical mean/median of the population for the total score (i.e. 35 multiplied by 3 as the mid answer on the Likert scale, equaling 105) and individual item score (i.e. 3 as the mid score on Likert scale) was computed, and then one samples t-test for the total instructional planning scores of the

teachers and one sample Wilcoxon signed-ranks test for individual items were run. To do so, first the descriptives of the total instructional planning and its item scores were computed (Tables 1 and 2), which apparently indicate that they are all beyond the theoretical mean/median (i.e. 105 and 3)

Table 1. Descriptive statistics (total instructional planning scores from 120 teachers)

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	
							Std. Error	Std. Error
Instructional. Planning.Total	120	56.00	183.00	131.00	20.58	-.22	1.00	.43

Table 2. Descriptive statistics (instructional planning item scores from 120 teachers)

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	
							Std. Error	Std. Error
P22	120	1	5	4.08	.97	-.94	.22	.43
P18	120	1	5	4.27	.90	-	.22	.43
P24	120	1	5	4.19	.82	-	.22	.43
P20	120	1	5	4.12	.85	-	.22	.43
P23	120	1	5	4.11	.97	-	.22	.43
P16	120	2	5	4.10	.83	-.54	.22	.43
P19	120	1	5	4.10	.87	-	.22	.43
P17	120	2	5	4.07	.88	-.72	.22	.43
P29	120	1	5	4.04	.90	-.85	.22	.43
P15	120	2	5	4.02	.86	-.42	.22	.43

P32	120	1	5	4.00	.85	-	.22	1.62	.43
								1.00	
P21	120	1	5	3.99	.84	-.74	.22	.65	.43
P31	120	1	5	3.93	1.00	-.65	.22	-.40	.43
P30	120	1	5	3.89	.89	-.71	.22	.27	.43
P27	120	1	5	3.88	.90	-.89	.22	.89	.43
P28	120	1	5	3.83	1.07	-.95	.22	.39	.43
P14	120	1	5	3.78	1.00	-.45	.22	-.38	.43
P25	120	1	5	3.73	1.08	-.59	.22	-.32	.43
P33	120	1	5	3.73	1.17	-.74	.22	-.28	.43
P10	120	1	5	3.68	1.11	-.61	.22	-.37	.43
P13	120	1	5	3.66	1.19	-.59	.22	-.57	.43
P34	120	1	5	3.66	1.06	-.46	.22	-.53	.43
P5	120	1	5	3.63	1.03	-.41	.22	-.41	.43
P2	120	1	5	3.61	1.07	-.49	.22	-.42	.43
P3	120	1	5	3.58	1.16	-.46	.22	-.65	.43
P7	120	1	5	3.45	1.15	-.48	.22	-.56	.43
P1	120	1	5	3.43	1.24	-.50	.22	-.67	.43
P26	120	1	5	3.41	1.28	-.48	.22	-.67	.43
P4	120	1	5	3.40	1.15	-.36	.22	-.65	.43
P6	120	1	5	3.39	1.23	-.29	.22	-.82	.43
P9	120	1	5	3.37	1.13	-.41	.22	-.39	.43
P35	120	1	5	3.26	1.22	-.36	.22	-.81	.43
P8	120	1	5	3.20	1.26	-.30	.22	-.92	.43
P11	120	1	5	3.11	1.45	-.20	.22	-	.43
								1.33	
P12	120	1	5	3.00	1.37	-.09	.22	-	.43
								1.23	
Valid N (listwise)	120								

To test the statistical significance of these findings, one sample t-test results in Table 3 were checked showing the total instructional planning scores of the teachers are significantly higher than the theoretical mean, indicating higher than average instructional planning total scores ($p <$

.01). Table 4 also indicates that the teachers scores on instructional planning items are all higher than average (i.e. above 3 = occasionally) except for items 8, 11, and 12 which are at the bottom of Table 2 indicating only occasional and average practice ($p > .05$).

Table 3. One-sample t-test

Test Value = 105						
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		Sig. (2- df tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper	
Instructional.Planning.Total		13.84	119	.00	26.00	22.28 29.72

Table 4. Wilcoxon signed-ranks test results on instructional planning items

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The median of 1. I have received instruction in lesson planning.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
2	The median of 2. I feel the need for more planning time to adequately carry out my teaching duties.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
3	The median of 3. Written lesson plans are essential for effective instruction.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
4	The median of 4. I feel the need for in-service work in lesson planning.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
5	The median of 5. It is desirable to use written plans in instruction.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
6	The median of 6. Written lesson plans should be required by administrators.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
7	The median of 7. I spend a lot of time per week in lesson planning and preparation.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
8	The median of 8. I use written lesson plans in my classes.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.13	Retain the null hypothesis
9	The median of 9. I review and reuse previously used written lesson plans.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
10	The median of 10. In my written lesson plans, I outline the basic or main parts of the lesson.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
11	The median of 11. The system in which I am employed stresses teacher lesson planning and/or written lesson plans.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.59	Retain the null hypothesis

12	The median of 12. The administrators of the institute in which I am employed stress teacher planning and/or written lesson plans.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.84	Retain the null hypothesis
13	The median of 13. In my instructional plans, I first identify the purpose of the test when I design the classroom tasks and activities.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
14	The median of 14. I consider the standards or attainment targets which the curriculum requests and because I think they are more likely to be tested in the tests.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
15	The median of 15. I arrange my classroom activities carefully in order to achieve the requirements of the syllabus with an aim to help my students perform well in the tests.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
16	The median of 16. I look for relevant materials for syllabus to cover the subject matter on the test objectives.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
17	The median of 17. I emphasize the skills which are more likely to be tested while planning for my syllabus.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
18	The median of 18. I consider what the students' needs are when I design the classroom tasks and activities.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
19	The median of 19. I try to cover what will be tested, as my students would expect me to do so.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis



20	The median of 20. I balance the attainment targets with the students' needs when I design the classroom tasks and activities.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
21	The median of 21. I plan in such a way to consider what the students know at that particular time.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
22	The median of 22. I consider the students' potential to use the language effectively when I plan for my instruction.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
23	The median of 23. I ensure that all students are given the same learning opportunities in the classroom.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
24	The median of 24. In devising my teaching syllabus, I would look at the relevant sources to assure that I cover the subject matter of the test objectives.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
25	The median of 25. I use test specifications when I plan for my course instruction.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
26	The median of 26. I use Teachers' Manuals as a guideline for my curricular planning and instruction.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
27	The median of 27. I put more attention on the skills which are more likely to be tested in the tests while planning for my instruction.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
28	The median of 28. I adjust my teaching objectives to the purpose of the tests.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
29	The median of 29. I would include some relative content in my instruction other than the content in the textbook in order to help my students get a better score in the tests.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
30	The median of 30. I spend more time on some skills and activities because my students are more interested in the skills which are likely to be tested.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
31	The median of 31. The tests have an impact on what and how I plan to teach.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
32	The median of 32. My curricular planning and instruction are influenced by teaching time.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis

33	The median of 33. The institute's policy influences my curricular planning and instruction.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
34	The median of 34. My personality influences my curricular planning and instruction.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis
35	The median of 35. The economic and social backgrounds affect my curricular planning and instruction.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.00	Reject the null hypothesis

To examine the correlation between Iranian EFL teachers' IELTS related experiences and their instructional planning, first the experience data of the teachers were divided into 10 categories or ranks (i.e. ordinal data). Then Spearman rho as a correlation for ordinal data was computed between experience level and instructional planning of the teachers. In so doing, first the descriptives of these data were computed (Table 5).

Table 5. Descriptive statistics (instructional planning and experience)

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Std. Error	
								Std. Error	Std. Error
Instructional. Planning.Total	120	56.00	183.00	131.00	20.58	-.22	1.00	.43	.20
Experience.Ranks	120	1.00	10.00	4.81	2.53	.52	.22	-.49	.43
Valid N (listwise) 120									

Then Spearman rho was computed, whose results in Table 6 show a positive and significant rho ($p < .05$), indicating that the higher the experience level of the teachers, the higher their Instructional Planning.

Table 6. Correlations (instructional planning and experience)

	Experience. Ranks	Instructional. Planning.Total
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	1.00 .21*

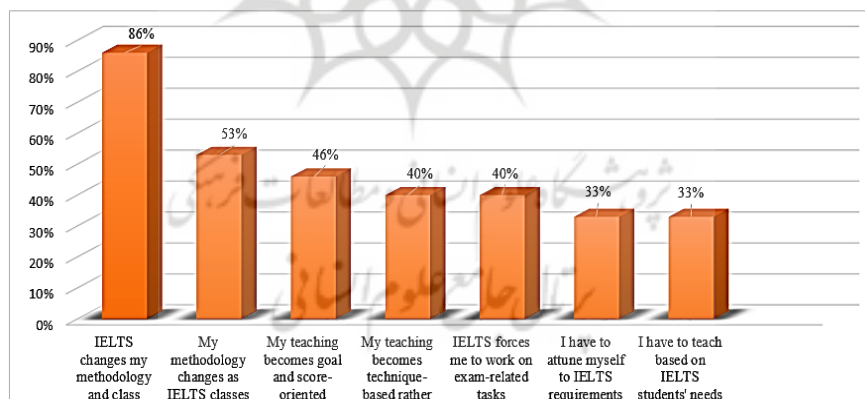
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.01
	N	12	12
Instructional.Planning.TotalCorrelation Coefficient		.21*	1.00
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.01	.
	N	120	120

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4.2. Research Results to Respond to the Second Research Question

To answer this research question concerning the effects of IELTS examination on Iranian teachers’ instructional planning, sections two and three of the interview questions were used. An in-depth analysis of the interview data indicated that a great majority of the teachers’ (86%) teaching and instructional behavior were affected by IELTS examination, which can be seen in Figure 1 and the following extracts.

Figure. 1 Teachers’ perception of the impact of IELTS on their teaching and class behavior



As Figure 1 indicates, most of the instructors raised points indicating that IELTS examination has changed their methodology in IELTS classes making it score-oriented, technique-based rather than knowledge-based, and exam-oriented. More deeply, there emerged some other themes from the interview data, the frequency and the representative excerpts for each can be seen hereunder.

IELTS changes my methodology and class behaviors (86%)

By and large IELTS examination can absolutely affect a teacher's pedagogical performance and I'm not an exception and I have been affected totally by IELTS in my classroom behavior and pedagogical methods. (Teacher 12)

IELTS exam definitely affects the way I teach and the materials that I select to teach... my methodology is also different. (Teacher 4)

IELTS examination definitely affects teachers' performance, priorities, and also their aims, methodologies, tactics, and class behaviors. (Teacher 14).

My methodology changes as IELTS classes differ from General English (GE) classes (53%)

My teaching in IELTS classes and GE classes are totally different cause in IELTS classes you don't try to teach your students the basics of language, you try to teach them some tips and tricks in order to gain a good score in the exam and you just try to work on specific contents and teach for the test. (Teacher 9)

My teaching becomes goal and score-oriented (46%)

In IELTS classes, the students are more motivated and more focused on the exam's scores that's why our teaching becomes score-oriented. (Teacher 13)

In the IELTS classes everything is directed toward the goals and objectives of the test although we do need to work on grammatical competence, to expand their vocabulary. (Teacher 15)

My teaching becomes technique-based rather than knowledge-based (40%)

IELTS has created a condition that makes students try to find tricky and easy ways to get scores rather than learning pure knowledge of English and we have to give them tips and tricks in this situation. (Teacher 10)

The responses of the interviewees to the questions of this section clearly demonstrated that all of the teachers unanimously agreed on the dependency of their instructional planning on their students' results in the IELTS examination. In particular, they argued that they re-plan or continue the same planning considering the students' scores on the examination. Furthermore, to investigate whether IELTS examination has imposed a particular type of planning on its instructors, all the respondents commonly agreed on the fact that IELTS examination has made their instructional planning exam-oriented. These excerpts indicate the teachers' views regarding the impact of IELTS on their planning.

My instructional planning is dependent on the students' results in the examination (100%)

If the performance of some of the students seems to be lacking something I of course try to re-plan my job to focus more on the weak points. (Teacher 8)

If my students do not get their desired score, I absolutely change my planning and if they get high scores I continue the implementation of my planning. (Teacher 2)

My Planning has become exam-oriented (100%)

Yes, when I want to plan for my IELTS classes I need to prepare materials for my students which are exam-oriented. (Teacher 13)

Undoubtedly IELTS has a big effect on my planning for classes. As I told you I have been trying to focus on the issues which are likely to appear on the test and it is completely natural. So, we have to adjust and design our plans in line with the examination. (Teacher 5)

The analysis of these extracts implies that IELTS examination has forced its instructors to develop and implement their instructional planning in tune with the requirements of the test. Moreover, such an exam-oriented planning was claimed to be dependent on the students' test results and performance.

5. Discussion

The results of this study found that there was a positive relationship between teachers' IELTS related experiences and their instructional planning as a result of IELTS washback effect. This finding was in tune with a number of studies, which unanimously referred to the fact that experienced teachers differ from rookie teachers in a multitude of ways. They more specifically maintained that teachers with more experience are inclined to display better planning skills and indicate a more hierarchical and prearranged structure when presenting their materials (Borko & Livingston, 1989; Covino & Iwanicki, 1996; Simsek & Yildirim, 2001). The results are also comparable to those of Haynie (2006), who conducted a similar study in the area of teaching Biology and found that expert teachers utilize assessment data in planning their instruction through frequent assessment. Hence, their assessment and instructional planning are interconnected.

The IELTS instructors of the present study believed that their instructional planning was affected by IELTS examination. They claimed that such a teaching context needed a specific instructional planning in the sense that it should be exam-oriented, needs-specific, and purpose specific. Therefore, the participants' agreeing opinions about the impact of IELTS examination on their planning came from their previous experience with IELTS examination, either from teaching it or passing some courses as an IELTS candidate. The obtained results of the current research were also consistent with the study of Ramezaney (2014), who examined the washack effects of UEE on Iranian EFL teachers' curricular planning and instructional techniques. In the end, the researcher substantiated the presence of a strong overt washback effect on the teachers' planning.

The results were also found in line with those of Hosp and Ardoin (2008), Afflerbach and Cho (2011), and Salmon-Cox (1981) who approved that tests and assessment vigorously affect teachers' instructional planning, sequencing instruction, and grouping students. To go even further, the findings were in tune with those of Herman and Golan's (1991) survey who maintained that examinations substantially affect teachers' instructional planning. They further argued that the teachers, in their study, preferred to examine previous tests to ensure that their instructional materials have covered all or most of the exam items. They also managed their teaching goals and the presentation order of their materials according to the test performance of their previous year classes.

However, the findings were in conflict with those of Herman and Dorr-Bremme (1983) who argued that standardized tests have a relatively little influence on teachers' instructional planning, grading, and diagnosing/prescribing, in comparison with other sources of information that the teachers have at hand. Moreover, Valazza (2008) found fairly little effect of standardized tests on teachers' planning their instruction. In the same manner, Chen (2002) investigated the perceptions of English teachers in Taiwan junior high schools regarding the washback effect of the Basic Competency Test and argued that such an effect was quite superficial and restricted with respect to planning and instruction.

The results of the qualitative phase also showed Iranian IELTS instructors' agreement in that their instructional planning was dependent on IELTS results. The respondents further argued that they have already had enough IELTS related experiences and knew that the type of planning in such an exam preparation course was quite different and required to be needs-specific, tailored to the test, and restricted to what is likely to be tested in the examination, and other issues which did not contribute directly to the test were required to be dismissed.

This finding was compatible with those of Herman and Golan (1991), who argued that teachers narrowed their instruction to what

appeared in the exam. They further contended that examinations considerably affected teachers' instructional planning as they usually preferred to review previous tests to comfort themselves that their materials have touched upon or dealt with all or most of the test items. The score-polluted context created around such a high-stakes exam naturally forces the instructors to develop and follow a different planning for their instruction. This different planning is derived from the fact that IELTS students have different needs and expectations. Unlike general English students, IELTS learners are more goal-oriented, motivated, and organized to make a difference in their language proficiency as they have a limited time-span to reach a desirable level. Hence, IELTS instructors have no choice but to keep up with this test-oriented industry.

6. Conclusion and Implications

The overall results of the study revealed a positive and significant relationship between IELTS instructors' experience and their instructional planning. IELTS instructors in the qualitative phase argued that their instructional planning had become exam-oriented and dependent on the students' results in the examination. In light of the results of the current study, it can be concluded that IELTS instructors' instructional planning has become test-tailored since they frequently feel a compelling force behind themselves exerted by both the authorities and students themselves as they often ask their instructors to skip over those parts which are not included in the test. They have to constantly plan and re-plan their instruction based on the results their students wish to get in the IELTS exam. To do so, they narrow down their plans to test-oriented issues and allocate more of their instructional time to contents included in the examination. They are required to constantly gather information from various sources to better plan and regulate their pedagogical practices (Hayes, 2015).

The findings of this research can be of significant implications for different individuals, including IELTS instructors, examiners, and test takers. The results can add new visions to the body of the related literature concerning how high-stakes examinations can affect teachers'

instructional planning. They also highlight the important role that teachers' qualifications, in general, can play in determining the washback effect. More particularly, the findings are helpful for IELTS teachers in that they can augment their knowledge and awareness about the nature and scope of washback effect of the IELTS examination on their career. This study also provides detailed insight into how factors like teacher qualifications and experience play a major role in determining washback. The results can also be useful for IELTS preparation course developers in that they can design a test preparation course curriculum and materials that are more compatible with IELTS testing formats and the skills that are tested. Moreover, language testing researchers can benefit from the results of this study in the sense that they can have fresh insights about the associations between IELTS related experiences and teacher-related factors like instructional planning.

Despite its various implications, the present study has had some limitations including its limited number of participants which constrained the generalizability scope of the findings to other contexts. Moreover, in analyzing the qualitative data, care should be taken in preventing the danger of self-reported data. Additionally, the researchers have had no control over the age, gender, socio-economic status, and educational background of the participants. To get a more comprehensive view, avid researchers can run longitudinal studies on teachers' planning for other high-stakes examinations (e.g., TOEFL, GRE). It is also possible to run studies on other teacher-related variables like teacher empowerment and professional knowledge to examine whether or not they affect the process and direction of washback phenomenon.

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Appendix

Interview Questions: IELTS and Teachers' Instructional Planning

1. Would you please provide us with an account of your teaching qualifications?
2. How long have you been teaching IELTS examination?
3. Have you had any kind of training (i.e., pre-service or in-service) for instructing IELTS examination?
4. Do you think that students' performance and results on IELTS examination have any impact on your planning? If yes, how?
5. Has the examination forced you to develop your instructional planning in tune with test-format and areas covered in the exam?
6. Do you think that IELTS examination has any effect on your planning the sequence of teaching? How?