

The First Certificate in English Textbook Washback Effect: A Comparison of Teachers' and Learners' Perceptions

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Abstract

This study has focused on the washback effect of the First Certificate in English (FCE) exam on textbook and preparation materials from teachers' and learners' perspectives. To this end, 50 FCE teachers and 50 FCE learners were selected from various language institutes in Tehran. To collect the quantitative data, FCE Textbook Materials Evaluation Questionnaire was employed. Subsequently, structured interviews were conducted on a sample of 10 FCE teachers and 10 FCE learners. The obtained results revealed that FCE preparation textbooks and materials reflected the exam requirements in terms of contents, test-tasks, and activities; as the participants relied on the exam requirements and the underlying skills in FCE preparation courses. More significantly, the results of Mann-Whitney U test indicated that there was a significant difference between the total washback perception of the learners and teachers. Considering the axial role of the teachers in preparing the learners for the real FCE exam, they had more in-depth understanding regarding the FCE exam requirements, mechanism, and objectives. Meanwhile, the learners had their own opinions in perceiving the FCE test and its textbook washback effects. Generally, the study indicated the existence of positive FCE textbook washback effect.

Keywords: FCE exam, FCE Textbooks and Course Materials, Learners' Perceptions, Teachers' Perceptions, Textbook Washback Effect

Received on January 10, 2019

Accepted on March 1, 2020

1. Introduction

Examinations and tests, mainly large-scale high-stakes ones, tend to have consequences on teaching and learning and certainly influence the education

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system and the society (Hayes, 2003). Alderson and Wall (1993) describe washback as what urges "teachers and learners to do things they would not necessarily otherwise do because of the test" (p. 115). High-stakes tests might exert an influence over the contents of materials, value of specific test activities, and pedagogical objectives and programs. The importance of high-stakes exams led the materials developers to publish more exam based textbooks and materials. The initial attempt by Lam (1993) supported the influence of exam over the contents of materials designed for a public proficiency exam (New Use of English, NUE) in Hong Kong. According to Lam (1993), the impact of high-stakes tests on teaching materials is known as *textbook washback*. Textbook washback effect is defined as the impact of high-stakes tests on teaching materials (Lam, 1993). To be more specific, textbook washback effect is found wherever the exam textbooks and materials represent directly the content, approaches, activities, and tasks of the exam.

The nature of FCE exam, as one of the high-stakes tests, and its impacts on FCE teachers and learners have caused to focus on the FCE test. More importantly, teaching and learning in favor of traditional methods and ignoring the learners' needs and FCE exam objectives might lead to detrimental effects, threatening the mastery of FCE exam techniques and skills required. Further, employing the FCE preparation textbooks and materials which do not fully mirror the FCE exam requirements or in case the teachers' compensation for the deficiencies of FCE preparation textbooks and materials are not observed, such factors might also result in negative textbook washback effect.

Teachers and learners as the main stakeholders in FCE preparation courses require a more comprehensive understanding related to the FCE preparation textbooks and materials. Low (1987) has emphasized the need to

investigate the teachers' and learners' perceptions and attitudes toward different features of the materials to find out whether they are suitable or not. Teachers' and learners' perceptions of textbook washback effect may provide extra rubrics to be determined important by materials designers and developers for designing high-stakes exam preparation textbooks and materials. According to Mirzaei, Rahimi Domakani, and Seyyed Rezaei (2014), the teachers' and learners' behavioral and attitudinal changes should be differentiated as they are related to the introduction and use of tests, pedagogical practices, and other influential factors involved in the education context.

However, few studies have examined the washback effect of FCE exam on the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of teachers and learners in exam-preparation courses (Edington, 2012; Tsagari, 2012). To this end, the current study sought to investigate the teachers' and learners' perceptions of the FCE washback effects on preparation textbooks and course materials.

2. Literature Review

In educational settings, specifically in language testing research, washback has been studied from different perspectives such as: Test preparation (Hayes & Read, 2004; Sadeghi, 2014), learners' performance (Muñoz & Álvarez, 2010; Perrone (2010), and teacher methodology (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Rezaei, Barati, & Youhanaee, 2016; Saif, 2006). Washback even resides in preparation materials and textbooks. Preparation materials are indirect evidence of washback (Pierce, 1992). Publishers, who publish textbooks for test preparation courses, have key roles in textbook washback effects (Bailey, 1999). According to Lam (1994) textbook washback is regarded as a possible result of test use. Textbook washback is noticeable in the contexts where variations in test preparation materials reflect the wide range of the tests or the status of the test; which may be a high-stakes test.

Lam (1994) investigated the content of two sets of textbooks designed for a public proficiency exam in Hong Kong using a specially-designed method. The textbooks were analyzed in terms of several issues including range of skills, authenticity of materials and task types. According to the findings of his research, most of the exercises of the textbooks were similar to the exam format published by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA). The following studies have been also reported to be conducted on the existence of the textbook washback effect (Hamp-Lyons, 1998; Hawkey, 2005; Saville & Hawkey, 2004; Tsagari, 2009a; Wang, 1997; Watanabe, 1996). However, the appropriateness and usefulness of these abundant exam preparation textbooks and materials from the teachers' and learners' perspectives might be questioned.

Language testing relies heavily on teachers' and learners' perceptions of examination textbooks and materials to reflect their needs in designing the tests. Further, teaching methodology and implementation of textbooks and materials in high-stakes exam preparation courses have improved to apply the teachers' and learners' perceptions of textbook washback effect; whether positive or negative. The two serious studies in this regard have been Tsagari (2007, 2011), investigating the perception of 15 native and nonnative FCE teachers toward the washback effect of the FCE exam on the teaching and learning of preparation courses in Greece, Athens language schools. Tsagari interviewed teachers for 30-40 minutes each. The results of this study showed that teachers tended to use actual past papers and other commercial publications containing model exam questions or supplementary materials focusing on developing language skills needed in the exam. Further, teachers resorted to their own materials which were designed according to the past papers and practice tests.

In another study, Tsagari (2009a) designed an instrument for the analysis of FCE textbooks based on the initial pilot version of an instrument used for the Analysis of Textbook Materials (Bonkowski, 1996). The results of the textbook analysis revealed that FCE textbook washback effect was complicated and the textbooks had both positive and negative washback effects. The FCE exam specifications were represented more in practical textbook activities to satisfy the teachers' and learners' needs, in comparison with the two general English textbooks. In addition, there were discrepancies among textbooks. For instance, in some books the authors and publishers reflected test specifications inaccurately and exam features (e.g., pronunciation and scoring criteria) were underrepresented while in others some skills such as grammar and vocabulary were overemphasized. The examination textbooks had presented both test practices and task types irrelevant to the test. She further mentioned that some textbooks emphasized the various features of FCE exam more than others. Negative washback was also evident in some textbooks that had failed to represent the full range of language skills and tasks needed at this level (in terms of authenticity of texts and writing genres).

The washback effect of FCE exam on the learners has also been examined in the literature as found in Edington's (2012) study. Edington (2012) in her M.A. thesis reported the positive washback effect of FCE exam on language learners. In a mixed-methods research approach, she investigated the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of 12 international adult participants through survey instruments and semi-structured interviews, in Vancouver. After the analysis of the surveys and interview data, Edington reported the participants' positive experiences in the exam-based course, as the students enjoyed the course, improved their English, and found the tasks conducive in real life. Additionally, Edington suggested that the students' changes, such as

the increased knowledge of the course, decreased belief of using cramming or strategies to pass, and their genuine desire to learn the language rather than simply acquiring a certificate, resulted in exam or exam-based course positive washback effect. Furthermore, Edington mentioned that in exam-based courses, the teachers provide the students with goals, structure, and meaningful tasks and claimed that it was a good method to promote the students' general English as they did not solely want to get a certificate, though they were prepared for that.

Owing to the important role that washback plays in language testing and the need to further investigate the nature of textbook washback effect, the current study has investigated the teachers' and learners' perceptions as to FCE washback effects on preparation textbooks and course materials. In light of the need for an in-depth study on the teachers' and learners' perceptions of FCE textbook washback effect, the following research questions were posed in this study.

1. What are the learners' and teachers' perceptions of FCE textbook washback effect on the preparation textbooks and course materials?
2. To what extent do the learners' and teachers' perceptions of the washback of FCE tests on the preparation textbooks and course materials coincide or differ?

3.Method

3.1 Participants

The participants were selected from five institutes offering directly targeted preparation courses for Cambridge exams, one of which is the FCE exam. These institutes are considered as well-known private institutes by learners and teachers in language teaching among other language institutes situated in Tehran, Iran. The participants of the main study (n=108) were both teachers and learners, selected through convenience sampling (Dornyei, 2007) and from preparation courses targeted for the FCE exam. The FCE teachers were

selected from the five private institutes; however, the FCE learners were picked from three of the five institutes. Overall, 50 of participants were teachers (with age range of 31 to 40 years, 22 females & 28 males), 50 learners (with age range of 21 to 30 years, 26 females & 24 males), and 8 participants were discarded since did not respond to the questionnaires completely. For the qualitative phase of the study, interview sessions were conducted. To do so, 10 FCE teachers and 10 FCE learners were selected from the participants who had filled out the questionnaires.

3.2 Instrumentation

To achieve the purpose of the study, the following instruments were implemented.

3.2.1 FCE Textbook Materials Evaluation Questionnaire

A three-part questionnaire, in the form of open-ended questions, checklists, and 5-point Likert scale, was designed. Part 1 focuses on demographic characteristics of the teachers and learners. Part 2 of the questionnaire, which consists of 3 subparts entailing open-ended questions, focuses on the features of FCE textbook and requires the teachers and learners to evaluate the coverage of the four skills and the book as a whole. Part 3 of the questionnaire investigated the teachers' perceptions (with 26 items) and learners' perceptions (through 27 items) of FCE textbook washback effect in the form of 5-point Likert scale items ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*.

In order to measure the reliability of the questionnaires, they were piloted with 30 FCE teachers and 30 FCE learners prior to the commencement of the study. As part 3 of the FCE textbook Materials Evaluation Questionnaire was on a 5 point-Likert Scale type, Cronbach's alpha as a measure of internal consistency of the scale was employed twice: Once with the teachers' data and the other time with the learners' data. The results indicated that the FCE

textbook Materials Evaluation Questionnaire with the teachers' and learners' data had an acceptable level of internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .71$).

Likewise, Principal Component Analysis (PCA), as a variant of factor analysis, was run to explore the underlying constructs of the questionnaires. The PCA was conducted twice with orthogonal rotation (varimax); once on the teachers' data and the other time on the learners' data. To examine the construct validity of the teacher questionnaire, the PCA was conducted on the 26 items marked by 100 teacher participants at the outset of the study. PCA was also conducted on the 27 items marked by 100 learner participants. Based on the teachers' and learners' data, the questionnaires were found a two-dimensional scale tapping two dimensions of the construct of washback.

3.2.2 Structured Interview

The interview questions, employed in this study, were an adaptation of interview questions used in previous washback studies (Hayes, 2003; Tsagari, 2011). The type of the interview was structured. Structured interviews "ensure that the interviewee focuses on the target topic area and that the interview covers a well-defined domain which makes the answers comparable across different respondents" (Dornyei, 2007, p. 135). Therefore, a fixed set of 16 interview questions for the teachers and 12 fixed interview questions for learners were designed. The interview questions elicited information about FCE learners' and teachers' experiences, knowledge, perceptions, and beliefs with regard to preparation materials used in FCE courses, task types, and its textbook washback effects. Although the interview questions were taken from reliable sources, they were scrutinized by three language testing experts and researchers for their language and content relevance and representativeness. It was a one-to-one interview session and each interview session lasted for approximately 20 minutes.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

In order to carry out the present study, the following stages were taken. At first, the FCE Textbook Materials Evaluation Questionnaire was developed for teachers and learners by reviewing the related literature, mainly taking advantage of Saville and Hawkey's (2004), Tsagari's (2009a), and Hayes' (2003) studies, and interviewing 3 language experts. The questionnaire was adapted, from the questionnaires used in the mentioned studies, and modified based on the context of the study and experts' views for the purpose of the FCE textbook washback study.

For the purpose of establishing the content validity of the FCE Textbook Materials Evaluation Questionnaire, the mentioned questionnaire was handed out to three trusted individuals; a well-experienced FCE teacher and two applied linguistics instructors; expert in the domain of language testing. They went through the questionnaire items and provided comprehensive feedback on its content relevancy and representativeness. The received feedback indicated that the questionnaire enjoys an acceptable quality as the three reviewers agreed on the 85 percent of the questionnaire content and format. Internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire items was measured by the Cronbach Alpha coefficient. The reliability of the items in both the learner and teacher questionnaire was estimated $\alpha = .71$.

Moreover, the teacher and learner interview questions were handed out to the three language experts. They scrutinized the interview questions in terms of the wording of the questions, the contents of the interview questions, and the compatibility with interview objective and research purpose. The feedback gained was profitable in finalizing the interview questions.

After pilot testing of the FCE Textbook Materials Evaluation Questionnaires, they were distributed in hard copies and collected from 50 FCE teachers and 50 FCE learners. The participants filled out the

questionnaires in 30 minutes. After the administration of the questionnaire, 10 FCE teachers and 10 FCE learners voluntarily participated in a structured interview. At the beginning of the interviews, the researchers obtained the interviewees' consent to record their voice for research purposes. As the type of the interview was structured, the researcher asked all the interview questions one by one and in a successive manner and hopefully the interviewees responded to all attentively. All the interview sessions were held in English and took approximately 20 minutes for each interviewee.

4. Results

The first research question examined the learners' perceptions of the washback effect of FCE Test on the preparation textbooks and course materials. To this end, the results of Part2 (Subparts 11, 12, & 13), Part 3 of FCE textbook Materials Evaluation Questionnaire and Interview data were considered. It is important to note that the most frequently used FCE textbook across the institutes was FCE Result (Davies & Falla, 2011); thus, the teachers and learners were to respond to questionnaire items considering FCE Result textbook.

To determine the learners' perspectives, the quantitative data, collected by means of a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire (Part 3), were analyzed. After providing the descriptive statistics, as can be seen in Table 1, the normality of the data was checked employing Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Learners' Data

| | Mean | Median | Std. Deviation | Minimum | Maximum | Std. Error |
|---|-------|--------|-------------------|---------|---------|---------------|
| Learner's Questionnaire Items: 27 | 88.62 | 90 | 8.44 | 67.00 | 101 | 1.19 |

The normality test results shown by Table 2 indicated that the data on the questionnaire total score are not normally distributed ($p < .05$); therefore, the choice of statistics was One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test to compare the sum of the sum median of the questionnaire items with the theoretical median (i.e., 81).

Table 2.
Tests of Normality for the Learner's Questionnaire

| | Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a | | | Shapiro-Wilk | | |
|-------|---------------------------------|----|------|--------------|----|------|
| | Statistic | df | Sig. | Statistic | df | Sig. |
| total | .13 | 50 | .03 | .93 | 50 | .00 |

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The results of the One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test in Table 3 indicate that there is a significant difference between the sum of the medians of the questionnaire and the theoretical median of the learner population.

Table 3
The One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test results

| | Null Hypothesis | Test | Sig. | Decision |
|---|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | The median of total equals 81.000 | One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test | .000 | Reject the null hypothesis. |

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

With regard to the descriptive statistics provided, the observed mean and median of the questionnaire was significantly larger than that of the population. The findings indicated that the learners' perception of the washback of FCE Test on the preparation textbooks and course materials is significantly higher than average, and the learners participating in this study tended to either agree or strongly agree that the FCE textbooks and course materials have a positive washback effect.

Concerning the learners' perception of FCE exam, as revealed through the interview data, 50% of them considered the FCE exam as a way to improve their English competence. Some other learners (20%) believed that the FCE exam is a *Valid certificate*. One of the learners also referred to her positive feelings toward the FCE test and showed her interests in it. The other learners talked about the structure of the FCE exam, compared it with other exams like IELTS and TOEFL, and considered it one of the best exams through which one can learn English better. However, one of the learners asserted that the FCE exam preparation course is the same as '*general English courses whose aim is to improve the learners' English*'. In response to the question that why the learners want to get the FCE certificate, 40% of the learners mentioned that they do not necessarily want to get the certificate and that they have other purposes in mind. Likewise, the learners (40%) referred to the long-lasting status of FCE exam which never expires. One of the learners also mentioned that he needs the FCE certificate in order to apply for a university abroad.

Most of the learners (80%) proclaimed that the FCE preparation materials are an accurate reflection of FCE exam. To illustrate, one of the learners mentioned that the FCE preparation materials *are according to the test that we are supposed to take, and I think it is the best method to improve English as well*. Some learners also referred to different features of FCE preparation materials such as their grammar and phrasal verbs practices.

As for the book's treatment of language skills, Writing (16%) and Use of English (16%) parts of FCE Result were found the most conclusive and representative of FCE exam. The writing section of the book orientated the learners with writing strategies. As one of the learners mentioned *Strategies are really useful* or another learner stated *The book offers different strategies for writings*. Regarding the Use of English part, some learners claimed that

this part helped them to better practice for the FCE exam. They stated that this part is *really helpful for grammar and writing and is very informative.*

In contrast, the learners (12%) were not that satisfied with the book's treatment of Listening and Reading. In this regard, the learners mentioned that the listening parts were easy and contended that *it would be better to have more reading parts in the book.* Moreover, the learners (8%) did not consider the speaking part of FCE Result appropriate, not satisfying their needs and tastes. For instance, one of the learners believed that *The subjects of speaking are not that challenging.* Overall, the learners' evaluation of the whole book was positive. In fact, the learners perceived the FCE Result with appropriate contents for the FCE exam, having a good pedagogical approach and giving a good preparation for the FCE exam.

Regarding the number of tests that learners take during the FCE preparation course, 40% of the learners stated that they had tests for each module of the FCE exam almost every session. Some learners (20%) also talked about doing some mock tests of FCE exams during the term. They referred to the resemblance of the practice tests to FCE test and that the tests *come with the textbook of FCE Result, which are also based on the FCE exam.*

As to the components of the tests, 70% of the learners stated that the test elements are the same as FCE exam. With regard to the learners' use of any special test taking strategy or techniques, 50% of the learners claimed that they use different techniques mainly in reading and writing skills such as *how to find the main idea, reading for skimming, and scanning,* and for writing, *how to write and develop paragraphs* following the essential components of writing. Some learners (20%) stated that their teacher has taught them test techniques related to various parts of the FCE exam. In particular, they talked about their *teacher explaining the techniques for each part of FCE test.*

Overall, almost all of the learners (100%) had a positive view toward the FCE exam which can motivate them to learn. As an example, some learners (20%) added that the FCE exam *pushed us to learn in a better way* and FCE exam *improved our English*. In addition, all of the learners in the interview sessions asserted that the FCE exam materials influenced their learning process. Hereupon, some of the learners put forward that the textbooks *are friendly*, and they *are a lot useful*. These statements suggest that the FCE exam materials, to a great extent, have influenced the learners' learning process.

For the purpose of identifying the teachers' perception of the washback effect of FCE Test on the preparation textbooks and course materials, the results of the data collected through Part 2 (subparts 1, 2, & 3) and Part 3 of FCE Textbook Materials Evaluation Questionnaire and Interview data were taken into account. Primarily, the quantitative data, collected by means of a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire (Part 3), were analyzed. To this end, it was required to compare the mean total answers of the participants with the defined mid answer for all the items of the washback questionnaire to see to what extent the teachers have a significantly lower or higher perception than the mid perception defined for all the questions. In other words, the midpoint answer, defined for each question, was considered as the theoretical mean (for normally distributed answers) or the theoretical median (for nonnormally distributed answers) for each question. Then the mid answer (i.e., 3) was multiplied by the number of the items in the questionnaire to come up with midpoint answer for the whole questionnaire (i.e., 78). Afterward, the observed mean or median in the data was compared with the theoretical mean or median of the total questionnaire to see to what extent the teachers' perception is lower or higher than normal. It is worthy of note that the sum of the midpoint answers defined for the questionnaire items was considered as

the theoretical mean (for normally distributed answers) or the theoretical median (for nonnormally distributed answers); therefore, it was required to compute the normality of the total questionnaire data.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Data

| | Mean | Std. Deviation | Minimum | Maximum | Std. Error |
|------------------------------------|-------|----------------|---------|---------|------------|
| Teacher's Questionnaire Items = 26 | 94.63 | 5.59 | 84.00 | 109.00 | .79 |

To this end, after providing the descriptive statistics (Table 4), the normality of the data was checked employing Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. If the data is normal, one sample t-test is employed with the sum of midpoint answers as the population or theoretical mean. If not normal, nonparametric One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test would be employed with the sum of the midpoint answer as the theoretical median of the population.

The normality test results (Table 5) indicated that the data on the questionnaire total score are normally distributed ($p > .05$); therefore, the choice of statistics was One-Sample t-test to compare the sum of the means of the questionnaire items with the theoretical mean (i.e., 78).

Table 5
Tests of Normality for the Teacher's Questionnaire

| | Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a | | | Shapiro-Wilk | | |
|-------|---------------------------------|----|------|--------------|----|------|
| | Statistic | df | Sig. | Statistic | df | Sig. |
| Total | .10 | 50 | .20* | .96 | 50 | .16 |

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The results of the One-Sample t-test in Table 6 indicated that there is a significant difference between the sum of the means of the questionnaire and the theoretical mean of the population.

Table 6
One-Sample Test for Teachers' Data

| Test Value = 78 | | | | | | |
|-----------------|-------|----|-----------------|-----------------|---|-------|
| | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Total | 18.99 | 49 | .00 | 15.04 | 13.44 | 16.63 |

With regard to the descriptive statistics, the observed mean and median of the questionnaire was significantly larger than that of the population. The findings indicated that the teachers' perception of the washback of FCE Test on the preparation textbooks and course materials is significantly higher than average, and the teachers participating in this study either agreed or strongly agreed that the FCE textbooks and course materials have had a positive washback effect.

Considering the book's treatment of Language Skills, the majority of FCE teachers (70%) found the FCE Result textbook a perfect source for developing the Speaking and Use of English for the FCE exam. One of the teacher participants evaluated the whole FCE Result textbook and considered the textbook a good resource for *Skills development and practice for FCE test with varied, interesting, and thought-provoking contents, and a systematic and well-ordered pedagogical approach with ample room for maneuver when required*. Further, they claimed that the FCE Result is highly related to the format of international FCE exam and stated that: *the textbook promotes the learners' confidence and tackles the problems in grammar tests*.

As for the teachers' perception of FCE test and the credit of its certificate, the teachers stated that there should be reasons that the learners get the FCE Certificate; however, some of the teachers (40%) were in accord that the learners have no reason for getting the certificate. These teachers brought

different reasons, as one of the teachers mentioned that the learners take part in FCE courses just to improve their English. Another teacher stated that because of teachers' recommendations the learners take part in FCE exam, and the other teacher referred to the exam as a bridge to reach higher level. Some teachers (20%) also talked about the life-long status of FCE certificate and its reasonable price. A teacher also referred to FCE exam as an English certificate that the learners require to apply for a university abroad.

Interestingly, most of the teachers (90%) believed that the FCE exam motivates the learners. However, one of the teachers stated that FCE exam motivates some of the learners, not all. She proclaimed that *It's somehow fifty-fifty. For some of them is true, for others may not.* One of the teachers highlighted the high-stakes status of FCE exam and claimed that:

Because it's an international exam which is run by Cambridge University, actually all the teachers and learners take this seriously.
(Teacher 6)

More importantly, 50% of the teachers considered the effects of FCE exam materials on the learners' learning process. One of the teachers mentioned that:

It affects to great extent. Well, we tackle different problems differently using different materials. But, choosing the right material is very important, even more important than that is how to use these materials. (Teacher 2)

However, some teachers stated that the materials have no effect or no significant effect on the learners' learning process. More than half of the teachers (60%) believed that FCE preparation materials are an accurate reflection of the FCE exam. In contrast, 40% of the teachers claimed that FCE materials do not reflect the FCE exam. Some teachers mentioned that the textbooks are *much easier than the real test*, and *FCE exam is much more*

difficult. Others named some other books as a better resource to prepare for the FCE test. The teachers might mean that a single textbook will not suffice for the FCE exam.

With regard to the number of tests they administer during the course, more than half of the teachers (60%) asserted that they test their learners every session or every other session or every two sessions. One of the teachers underscored the routine policy of the institute as:

Our FCE courses take one year and a half. At the beginning, we didn't have much practice test sessions, but toward the end like the last six months, we have had tests in FCE level 6 toward the end, for two or three months before the exam. (Teacher 8)

Another teacher stated that they usually run around 10 or 12 mock tests in the institute. He continued that the learners sit for the test for two or three months before the exam. There were also teachers who claimed that they test learners *at the end of each two units*. 80% of these teachers claimed that they do not develop the mock tests by themselves. As a few of them mentioned:

We don't write tests by ourselves because it is time consuming and because we are not qualified in this regard. (Teacher 7)

Regarding the format of the tests, all of the teachers (100%) responded that they were similar to the tasks and activities of FCE exam. 30% of the teachers believed that a course *solely designed for exam preparation is not enough* and were in favor of mixed teaching and testing in their preparation courses. Further, 40% of the teachers claimed that the preparation courses are the same as general English courses. They stated that

We use no special technique and teach the way we teach in other English courses, like every common General English course, we work on different skills. (Teacher 6)

Forty percent of them felt that *general competence is more important than learning test taking strategies*. However, 60% of the teachers claimed that they teach the learners test-taking strategies. One of the teachers claimed that

Yes, I teach a multitude of test techniques, mostly I teach different techniques for each part of the test, and then I encourage my learners to find their own technique. That's why if the learners find their own preferred techniques, this actually can finally help them to survive in the test. (Teacher 5)

Overall, the majority of the teachers (90%) agreed that their teaching in FCE courses was affected by FCE exam and textbooks and that they tended to teach based on FCE testing techniques. Hereupon, one of the teachers claimed that his teaching is *a combination of techniques required for the test and general English*. On the other hand, 60% of the teachers believed that the FCE exam has affected the learners' learning in that *they pay more attention to certain guidelines and try to improve skills to be ready for the tests*. Likewise, the FCE exam even affects the learners' feelings, not just their learning. As one of the teachers stated *the FCE exam makes the learners nervous when they think about the exam*. In brief, the teacher participants showed a high level of perceptions of FCE textbook washback effect.

For the purpose of analyzing whether there is a statistically significant difference between the teachers' and learners' perceptions of the washback of FCE tests on the preparation textbooks and course materials, the results of Part 3 of the FCE textbook Materials Evaluation Questionnaires of the participants were employed. In other words, in order to answer this research question, the total scores of the teachers and learners, on the washback perception questionnaire, were required to be compared. In order to choose between the parametric and non-parametric statistics, the descriptive statistics of the two groups' scores were checked in the previous questions. If

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remembered, the learners' data was not normally distributed; therefore, Mann-Whitney U test was employed, whose results in Table 7 indicate that there is a significant difference between the total washback perception of the learners and teachers. The descriptive statistics in the previous questions also showed that the teachers were of a higher mean and median in terms of their washback perception. In sum, the teachers had a significantly more agreeing opinion that the FCE textbooks and course materials have had a positive washback. It means that the null hypothesis to do with the second research question was rejected ($p < .05$). To be more precise, there was a statistically significant difference between the teachers' and learners' perceptions of the washback of FCE tests on the preparation textbooks and course materials.

Table 7
Mann-Whitney U test results

| Hypothesis Test Summary | | | | |
|-------------------------|--|---|------|----------------------------|
| | Null Hypothesis | Test | Sig. | Decision |
| 1 | The distribution of washback is the same across categories of Group. | Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test | .000 | Reject the null hypothesis |

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Similarly, for the purpose of understanding to what extent the learners' and teachers' perceptions of the washback of FCE tests on the preparation textbooks and course materials coincided or differed, the results of part 3 of the FCE Textbook Materials Evaluation Questionnaires of the participants were analyzed.

The investigation of the previous research question demonstrated that the teachers have had a significantly more agreeing opinion that the FCE textbooks and course materials have a positive washback. In order to answer this research question, it was required to compare the perceptions of the teachers and learners on individual items of the washback questionnaire. To

do so, a chi square cross tab was employed to consider the statistical significance of the difference between the teachers and learners (one of the nominal variables) in terms of their responses to the items of the questionnaire (the other nominal variable). Specifically, the analysis of crosstabs was run to probe if there was any significant difference between the teachers and learners in terms of their responses to the questionnaire items via standardized residuals (Std. Residual) analysis for the response cells.

In order for the residuals to be statistically significant and thus meaning that there is a significant difference or mismatch between the teachers and learners in a particular response to a question, the residuals need to be beyond 1.96. The residuals which are beyond 1.96 are indicative of the fact that these are points of mismatch between the learners and teachers in their perception of the FCE materials washback. More specifically, the residuals which are both positive and over 1.96 indicate that that particular cell (i.e., response category) is more associated with either the learners' or teachers' cells, and there is a significant difference between the observed counts of this response for either of the teachers or learners. For instance, regarding item 2 (Table 8) it has been observed that 46% of the teachers tended to strongly agree that *FCE test affects the generation of new teaching materials*; however, 36% of learners did not have any idea regarding this issue.

Table 8
Crosstabs and Standardized Residuals for Item 2 of FCE Textbook Washback Questionnaire

| FCE test affects the generation of new teaching materials. | | |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| | | Strongly agree |
| Teachers | Count | 23 |
| | Expected Count | 12.0 |
| | Std. Residual | 3.2 |
| | | No idea |
| Learners | Count | 18 |
| | Expected Count | 10.0 |
| | Std. Residual | 2.5 |
| | | Percentage |
| | | 46% |
| | | 36% |

Likewise, with regard to item 3 (Table 9), 40% of the teachers strongly agreed that *the textbooks represent the content of the FCE test*, while 34% of learners had no idea regarding this statement.

Table 9

Crosstabs and Standardized Residuals for Item 3 of FCE Textbook Washback Questionnaire

| The textbooks represent the content of the FCE test. | | |
|---|----------------|------------|
| | Strongly agree | Percentage |
| Teachers | Count | 20 |
| | Expected Count | 10.5 |
| | Std. Residual | 2.9 |
| Learners | No idea | |
| | Count | 17 |
| | Expected Count | 8.5 |
| | Std. Residual | 2.9 |

It has also been observed that item 5 (Table 10) is more associated with learners and 31% of them had no idea regarding the fact that whether *the FCE textbook promotes their English knowledge* or not.

Table 10

Crosstabs and Standardized Residuals for Item 5 of FCE Textbook Washback Questionnaire

| FCE textbook promotes our English knowledge. | | |
|---|----------------|------------|
| | No idea | Percentage |
| Learners | Count | 15 |
| | Expected Count | 8.9 |
| | Std. Residual | 2.0 |

As for item 6 (Table 11), the analysis revealed that the item is more related to the learners and 41% of them had no idea with regard to the statement: *FCE test induces the teachers to cover their subjects and textbook more thoroughly*.

Table 11
Crosstabs and Standardized Residuals for Item 6 of FCE Textbook Washback Questionnaire

| FCE test induces the teachers to cover their subjects and textbook more thoroughly. | | |
|--|----------------|------------|
| | No idea | Percentage |
| Learners | Count | 20 |
| | Expected Count | 10.4 |
| | Std. Residual | 3.0 |
| | | 41% |

Regarding item 7 (Table 12), it has been observed that 51% of the teachers disagreed that 'FCE test makes the teachers complete their syllabi within the prescribed time limits'; however, 48% of the learners agreed on the issue.

Table 12
Crosstabs and Standardized Residuals for Item 7 of FCE Textbook Washback Questionnaire

| FCE test makes the teachers complete their syllabi within the prescribed time limits. | | |
|--|----------------|------------|
| | Disagree | Percentage |
| Teachers | Count | 25 |
| | Expected Count | 14.8 |
| | Std. Residual | 2.6 |
| | | 51% |
| Learners | Count | 24 |
| | Expected Count | 13.1 |
| | Std. Residual | 3.0 |
| | | 48% |

Table 13
Crosstabs and Standardized Residuals for Item 8 of FCE Textbook Washback Questionnaire

| FCE test motivates us to work harder on the textbook and to have a sense of accomplishment, thus, enhances our learning. | | |
|---|----------------|------------|
| | Disagree | Percentage |
| Teachers | Count | 23 |
| | Expected Count | 13.7 |
| | Std. Residual | 2.5 |
| | | 48% |
| Learners | Count | 26 |
| | Expected Count | 13.3 |
| | Std. Residual | 3.5 |
| | | 52% |

The analysis also shows that 48% of the teachers (Table 13), disagreed that: FCE test motivates learners to work harder on the textbook and to have a sense of accomplishment, thus, enhances their learning; though 52% of the learners agreed on this statement.

Interestingly, the findings revealed that the teachers (22%) strongly agreed (Table 14) that *FCE textbook can be utilized and designed as beneficial learning activities so as to encourage positive learning*; however, the learners had no idea regarding this issue.

Table 14

Crosstabs and Standardized Residuals for Item 9 of FCE Textbook Washback Questionnaire

| FCE textbook can be utilized and designed as beneficial learning activities so as to encourage positive learning | | | |
|---|----------------|----------------|------------|
| | | Strongly agree | Percentage |
| Teachers | Count | 11 | 22% |
| | Expected Count | 6.1 | |
| | Std. Residual | 2.0 | |
| Learners | | No idea | |
| | Count | 14 | 29% |
| | Expected Count | 6.9 | |
| | Std. Residual | 2.7 | |

Moreover, 10% of the learners represented their disagreement regarding item 19 (Table 15) and the teachers' answers have been spread across all the options equally, and no one option was associated with the teachers regarding this item; the learners (10%) represented their disagreement to the item: *The textbook and materials we use in the preparation course represent directly the contents of FCE exam.*

Table 15
 Crosstabs and Standardized Residuals for Item 19 of FCE Textbook Washback Questionnaire

The textbook and materials we use in the preparation course represent directly the contents of FCE exam.

| | Disagree | Percentage |
|----------------|----------|------------|
| Learners | 5 | 10% |
| Count | 4.6 | |
| Expected Count | 2.2 | |
| Std. Residual | | |

Further, the analysis implied that the learners (26%) mostly and significantly had no idea regarding item 20 (Table 16), *The textbook and materials we use in the preparation course represent directly the approaches of FCE exam*, though the teachers' answers have been spread across all the options equally, and no one option was associated with the teachers regarding the item.

Table 16
 Crosstabs and Standardized Residuals for Item 20 of FCE Textbook Washback Questionnaire

The textbook and materials we use in the preparation course represent directly the approaches of FCE exam.

| | No idea | Percentage |
|----------------|---------|------------|
| Learners | 13 | 26% |
| Count | 7.1 | |
| Expected Count | 2.2 | |
| Std. Residual | | |

It can also be seen that most of the teachers (84%) tended to agree that (Table 17) *The textbook and materials used in the preparation course represent directly the activities of FCE exam*, though, 28% of the learners had no idea with regard to this issue.

Table 17

Crosstabs and Standardized Residuals for Item 21 of FCE Textbook Washback Questionnaire

| The textbook and materials we use in the preparation course represent directly the activities of FCE exam. | | | |
|---|----------------|-------|------------|
| | | Agree | Percentage |
| Teachers | Count | 41 | 84% |
| | Expected Count | 28.2 | |
| | Std. Residual | 2.4 | |
| Learners | Count | 14 | 28% |
| | Expected Count | 7.6 | |
| | Std. Residual | 2.3 | |

The analysis also revealed that the learners (24%) mostly had no idea regarding item 22 (Table 18), *The textbook and materials we use in the preparation course represent directly the tasks of FCE exam*, while the teachers' answers have been spread across all the options equally, and no one option was associated with the teachers regarding the item.

Table 18

Crosstabs and Standardized Residuals for Item 22 of FCE Textbook Washback Questionnaire

| The textbook and materials we use in the preparation course represent directly the tasks of FCE exam. | | | |
|--|----------------|---------|-----|
| | | No idea | |
| Learners | Count | 12 | 24% |
| | Expected Count | 6.0 | |
| | Std. Residual | 2.4 | |

Likewise, the analysis implied that 30% of the learners had no idea regarding item 25 (Table 19), *The preparation textbooks reflect significantly the test skills and strategies required for the FCE exam*, while the teachers' answers have been spread across all the options equally, and no option was associated with the teachers regarding this item.

Table 19

Crosstabs and Standardized Residuals for Item 25 of FCE Textbook Washback Questionnaire

| The preparation textbooks reflect significantly the test skills and strategies required for the FCE exam. | | | |
|--|----------------|-----|-----|
| | No idea | | |
| Learners | Count | 15 | 30% |
| | Expected Count | 8.0 | |
| | Std. Residual | 2.5 | |

Finally, the teachers (44%) tended to strongly agree that (see Table 20) *There is a direct relationship between the textbook and FCE test system (e.g., same formats, task types, dimensions, etc.)*, however 32% of the learners had no idea with this issue.

Table 20

Crosstabs and Standardized Residuals for Item 26 of FCE Textbook Washback Questionnaire

| There is a direct relationship between the textbook and FCE test system (e.g., same formats, task types, dimensions, etc.) | | | |
|---|----------------|------------|-----|
| | Strongly agree | Percentage | |
| Teachers | Count | 22 | |
| | Expected Count | 13.0 | |
| | Std. Residual | 2.5 | |
| Learners | No idea | | |
| | Count | 16 | 32% |
| | Expected Count | 8.0 | |
| Std. Residual | 2.8 | | |

After all, the analysis and comparison of the questionnaire items revealed that the teachers are much more cognizant of the FCE exam requirements and FCE textbooks and materials objectives in comparison with the learners. However, the learners had their own opinions in perceiving the FCE test and its textbook washback effects.

5. Discussion

This study was aimed at examining the FCE teachers' and learners' perceptions of the washback of FCE Test on the preparation textbooks and course materials. The findings revealed that both the teacher and learner participants showed positive perceptions regarding the washback of FCE Test on the preparation textbooks and course materials. However, the teachers and learners revealed discrepancies in their perceptions. The findings of this study corroborate those of Tsagari (2009a), who found positive washback effect of the FCE textbooks. Considering other exams, the findings are also in line with Hawkey's (2005) CPE textbook washback study. Hawkey (2005) found that the evaluated textbooks represented directly the content, approaches, activities, and tasks of CPE exam (p. 20). Hawkey also asserted that the revised CPE exams exert a strong washback effect on the evaluated textbooks in their treatment of language skills, micro-skills, task types, language elements and topics.

Regarding the textbook washback effect of FCE exam on the learners' perceptions, the findings could be verified by Tsagari's (2009a, 2009b) preliminary study on the existence of FCE washback effect. Tsagari (2009a, 2009b) aimed to investigate the washback effect of FCE on the teaching and learning that takes place in Greece private language schools. Tsagari in her FCE washback study interviewed 15 native and nonnative FCE teachers regarding the FCE exam effects on feelings and attitudes of the learners. The results of the interview sessions indicated that the FCE exam influenced the learners' attitudes, even on learners' expectations regarding the teachers' pedagogical practices implemented in the class. However, the learners were negative about communicative activities and any materials or activities that do not relate to the exam because they believed that such activities do not cover the requirements of the exam (Tsagari, 2009b).

Moreover Tsagari (2009a, 2009b), in her FCE washback studies revealed that the learners had a positive perception regarding the washback effect of FCE exam on FCE exam-oriented textbook. Further, Tsagari (2009a, 2009b) discovered that the content and sequence of the classroom teaching and assessment were based on the exam preparation textbook materials. Similarly, Edington (2012) through survey instruments and semi-structured interviews with learners reported on positive washback effect of FCE exam which was reflected on their attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. The teachers in this study also claimed that the learners have strong motivations for English learning, as the learners considered the FCE exam highly valid and associated with their professional and educational advancement.

The findings of this study, regarding the textbook washback of FCE exam on the teachers' perceptions, might be partially verified by Tsagari's (2009a, 2009b) preliminary study. The analysis of teacher data revealed that the majority of the teachers employed the kind of teaching methodology that exclusively focused on the requirements of the FCE exam or used a variety of exam preparation techniques. Further, the teachers stated that the FCE exam influenced the type of materials they used in exam preparation courses such as: past papers, supplementary materials focusing on the development of language skills, and or their own materials designed based on past papers and practice tests. Furthermore, the teachers stressed that the FCE exam affected their methodology which made them do things they would not otherwise do (Tsagari, 2009b). However, the results opposed that of Lam's (1994) study on *Revised Use of English (RUE)* test in Hong Kong, in that Lam referred to negative textbook washback effect as the teachers were textbook-reliant. However, in the current study, the teachers and learners claimed about the beneficial use of the textbooks and materials.

Finally, the results of the second research question supported Green's (2006) study. In the context of England, Green (2006) compared the perceptions of learners in two courses; IELTS preparation course and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). The learners in the groups were international Chinese learners whose perceptions were compared at the commencement and at the end of the two courses. Interestingly, Green found that the IELTS participants did not expect similar IELTS tasks or test-taking strategies to be a major focus of the course, which is contrary to the notion that the learners' expectations in an exam-based course drive the content (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Spratt, 2005; Wall & Horak, 2006). At the course exit, there were differences in the opinions regarding the learning outcomes between the two groups that seemed to reflect the priorities of the different teachers teaching the courses rather than the learners' expectations at the beginning of the course. Likewise, in Alderson and Hamp-Lyons' (1996) research about TOEFL preparation courses, the learners and teachers showed discrepancies in their opinions regarding the teaching methods and materials.

All in all, both the teachers and learners valued this exam and its impacts on improving not only the learners' English language learning but also their performance on the test.

6. Conclusions and Implications

This study demonstrated the existence of positive FCE textbook washback effects in this research setting. The FCE teachers and learners commonly focused on FCE preparation textbooks and materials, which were found appropriate in reflecting the FCE exam requirements in terms of contents, test-tasks, and activities. Similarly, the FCE teachers and learners focused on FCE exam requirements and the underlying enabling skills. Further, the teachers' and learners' perceptions of the FCE textbook washback effects were in some aspects, to a great extent, in line with each other. Both groups

valued and perceived the role of FCE preparation courses and FCE textbooks and materials very important in improving the learners' English competency. However, it was found that the teachers were much more cognizant of the FCE exam requirements and FCE textbooks and materials objectives in comparison with the learners.

An important implication of the findings of this study is that the teachers' and learners' perceptions can provide insights for language test designers. By considering the test objectives along with the teachers' and learners' needs and expectations, the test designers can develop authentic tests. Further, the teachers' understanding of the exam specifications and learners' needs assists them in shaping their exam preparation course instructions. In particular, the teachers can wisely create a balance between the high-stakes exam requirements and learners' expectations, needs, and goals. Additionally, the syllabus designers and materials developers should consider the requirements of the learners and the teachers of the textbooks and materials and implement them as their understanding and interpretation of the exam requirements would result in the development of well-judged teaching and learning materials. More importantly, as exam preparation textbooks and materials mediate between teaching and learning, it is the responsibility of the textbook and materials writers and publishers to accurately reflect the high-stakes test specifications along with the requirements of the consumers of the textbooks and materials.

Two major limitations need to be noted regarding the findings of the present study. First, some of the teachers and learners were not cooperative in responding to the open-ended parts of the questionnaires and most of them had provided short answers. Second, as the study was conducted in a research context where the institutes made use of some common FCE textbooks such as *FCE Result*, *Objective first*, *First certificate masterclass*, and *FCE gold*

and as a supplementary material *Use of English* textbook, the generalizability of the findings should be done cautiously. As could be implied from empirical washback studies, an examination might affect some exam preparation textbooks more than others (Hilke & Wadden, 1997; Wang, 1997), and that it is such a superficial belief to assume that a test can lead to all positive and desirable changes in textbooks, learning, and instruction (Kiani, Alibakhshi, & Akbari, 2011). Possibly, the findings of the current study could be otherwise if the study was conducted in institutes, using other FCE textbooks. Therefore, replicating this study with more participants and multiple data collection methods can yield invaluable results and validate the findings of the study.

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