

The Backwash Effects of The General Aptitude Test (English Part) Examination on English Learning Management of EFL Teachers and Students in Secondary School.

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Abstract

The purposes of this study were 1. to investigate the backwash effect of the General Aptitude Test (GAT) with specific to the English part on English teaching management of EFL teachers and 2. to investigate the backwash effect of the GAT (English part) on English learning management of Matthayom Suksa 6 students. The samples participated in this study included 420 Matthayom Suksa 6 students and 40 EFL teachers in the Secondary Educational Service Area Office 3, selected by simple random sampling. The research tools included two adopted questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The results of this study were: 1) The GAT examinations have influenced EFL teachers in English teaching management in the aspects of teaching activities and methods, teaching materials, and teaching content which is positive effect. And 2) the backwash effect of the GAT (English part) on Matthayom Suksa 6 students is mainly on their attitudes and perceptions which is considered to be negative backwash.

Keywords: Backwash Effect, General Aptitude Test (GAT), English Learning Management, EFL Teachers

Introduction

A test is a subset of assessment, which is a method of measuring a person's ability, knowledge, or performance in a given domain. Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) stated that tests are a process of quantifying a test-taker's ability according to explicit procedures. The test-taker's ability or competence can be implied by the result of the measurement. Normally, language tests measure one's competency to show the ability to use a language, that is, to speak, write, read, or listen in one test. On the other hand, it is not uncommon to find tests designed to identify a test-taker's language knowledge. An aptitude test is one types of tests which is used to assess a person's ability to learn a foreign language in general. Thailand has begun to employ the General Aptitude Test (GAT) in the academic year 2009.

The General Aptitude Test (GAT) The National Institute of Educational Testing Service has developed the test to measure students' ability in English communication. The General Aptitude Test (GAT) is considered a high-stakes test in the educational system in Thailand because the test results have been used as a part of the student selection process in the Direct Admission System (depending on the requirements of individual universities). The test was given for the first time in the academic year 2009. It was then given 3 times a year (July, October, and March) until 2010. In 2011, it was given only once since 2012 and later, it has been given

twice/year (October, March). However, the GAT English mean score of Thai students was lower than 50% every year (National Institute of Educational Testing Service, 2021). Thai University Central Admission System: TCAS has published the admission requirements for undergraduate Thai students. TCAS has promoted the importance of the GAT score in various ways, such as using it in Quota, Admission, and Direct Admission rounds (The Council of University Presidents of Thailand, 2021). The importance of the GAT score can have a backwash effect on English teaching and English learning management. Then, the backwash effect can have both positive and negative effects on teaching and learning English.

The Backwash Effects The backwash effect is known as the effect that is the effect from the test to learning and teaching activities. It also has the effect to content and teaching technique. The backwash effect can be harmful and positive backwash. There has been a model of backwash which is seen the impact of language testing on teacher and learner in term of educational systems and the society. Hughes (2003) stated “the term impact as it is used in educational measurement, is not limited to the effect of assessment on learning and teaching but extend to the way in which assessment affects society as a whole” According to Brown (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010) discriminated about the backwash or washback is known as the impact of language assessment field which can be both beneficial and harmful backwash. Testing is critical in the evaluation of educational objectives, content, techniques, and even reliability and validity. There were two ways of backwash: positive impact on teaching, which plays a positive backwash role, points out the correct direction of teaching, and ensures and promotes the realization of teaching objectives; but unscientific testing has a negative impact on teaching, plays a negative backwash role, may lead teaching in the wrong direction, and affects or even hinders the realization of teaching objectives (Huang, 2019).

This study the backwash effects refer to the influence of the GAT (English part) on EFL teachers’ classroom activities and teaching methods, teaching materials and content, and on the students in terms of their English learning, attitude and perceptions toward EFL learning. The test can be a positive backwash if it can measure students' ability in English communication and change learning and teaching activities, content, and teaching techniques in terms of educational systems and society. However, negative backwash makes students only focus on their score for admission to the university and not on their English communication ability.

Backwash effects are an interesting issue in the field of language testing. The backwash effects of national tests in English language learning and testing were studied in Thailand, but there were a few studies that investigated in GAT English. The present study investigated the backwash effects on English learning management of EFL teachers and students. In the Secondary Educational Service Area Office 3 (Nonthaburi), there are 18 secondary schools. Debsirin Nonthaburi School was one of those that supported students who graduated from it to get the satisfactory program. The findings would have both positive and negative effects on both teachers and students. Therefore, the aims of this study were to investigate the backwash effect of the GAT (English part) on English teaching and learning management as perceived by EFL teacher and Matthayom Suksa 6 students.

Purpose

1. To investigate the backwash effect of the GAT (English part) on English teaching management as perceived by EFL teachers in secondary school
2. To investigate the backwash effect of the GAT (English part) on English learning managements as perceived by Matthayom Suksa 6 students

Methodology

This study used mixed methods in order to investigate the backwash effect of the GAT (English part) on English teaching management as perceived by EFL teachers in secondary school and English learning management as perceived by EFL teachers and Matthayom Suksa 6 students.

1. Research Participants

The samples for this study were 40 EFL teachers and 420 Matthayom Suksa 6 students selected by random sampling from Debsirin Nonthaburi School for the quantitative phase to answer the questionnaire. For the qualitative phase, in terms of teaching management, four teachers who had different education levels, native or non-native speakers, and teaching experience were purposefully selected to answer the semi-structured interview. In terms of learning management, there were twelve students who were the representatives from each study program; they were purposefully selected from students who had goals for the university. The researcher stopped the interview at only twelve students because they provided the same information.

2. Research Instruments

There were two main research instruments in this study; namely: the questionnaires to collect quantitative data from EFL teachers and their students, and the semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data from EFL teachers and their students. The detailed explanations of the aforementioned instruments are as follows:

The questionnaire for EFL teachers, the researcher adapted the questionnaire developed by Ramezaney (2014) as the instrument for collecting the data. The adapted questionnaire was based on EFL teachers' classroom activities and teaching methods, teaching materials, and teaching content to investigate the backwash effect of GAT (English part) on English learning management as perceived by EFL teachers. The backwash effect of the GAT (English part) questionnaire consisted of 25 items using a five-point Likert's rating scale. The questionnaire comprised two sections. The questionnaire for EFL students adopted from Lunrasri (2014) as the instrument to collect the backwash effects of GAT (English part) on the students in terms of their English learning, attitude and perceptions toward EFL learning. The questionnaire consisted of 30 items using a five-point Likert's rating scale.

The semi-structured interviews were chosen to corroborate and confirm the data from the questionnaire. The questions were created from the results of the questionnaire. Both semi-structured interviews for EFL teachers and Matthayom suksa 6 students were created as five open-ended questions in interviews with EFL teachers and Matthayom suksa 6 students that related to the result data from the questionnaire.

Data Collection

Data collection was carried out at the end of the second semester in the academic year 2019. The quantitative data were collected first from the sample's groups using a questionnaire in Thai for Matthayom Suksa 6 students, and using a questionnaire in English for 48 EFL teachers from the same four school. For the qualitative data, a semi-structured interview was conducted to collect data from EFL teachers and students. At this stage, the researcher interviewed English teachers at the four secondary schools. For student interviewing, four groups of students in each program were employed. Each group consisted of six Matthayom Suksa 6 students, each taking different study programs. The interview was conducted in Thai and lasted 10–20 minutes per group.

3. Data Analysis

3.1 Quantitative Phase The data obtained from EFL teachers and students' questionnaires were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) program to calculate percentages, frequencies, arithmetic means, standard deviation. The interpretation of mean scores to analyze the washback effects on EFL Teachers' Classroom activities and teaching methods, teaching materials and teaching content are as follows: 4.21 – 5.00 means “always” do it , 3.41 – 4.20 means “often” do it , 2.61 – 3.40 means do it “sometimes”, 1.81 – 2.60 means “seldom” do it and , 1.00 – 1.80 means “never” do it

3.2 Qualitative Phase, content analysis was used to analyze the data from semi-structured interviews.

Result

The backwash effect of the GAT (English part) on English teaching management as perceived by EFL teachers in secondary school.

Table 1 The Questionnaire's Results from EFL Teachers in term of Classroom Activities and Teaching Methods, Teaching Materials and Teaching Content (items)

English teaching managements	EFL teachers (n=48)		
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level of frequency
The General Aptitude Test (English Part) has the effect to my teaching method	4.68	0.572	always
I apply some teaching method which are helpful for my students on the General Aptitude Test (English Part).	4.98	0.158	always
I skip over some sections in the textbook except for reading parts because I think their content is more likely to be tested in the General Aptitude Test (English Part).	4.63	0.490	always

I teach whatever I think is appeared on The General Aptitude Test (English Part) regardless of whether my students satisfy it or not.	3.90	0.632	often
I focus more on certain sections in the school curriculum because I think the content is more likely to be tested in the General Aptitude Test (English Part).	4.52	0.599	always
I expect my students to read some extra books which related to the General Aptitude Test (English Part) by themselves.	5.00	0.000	always

Based on the table 1 the results from EFL teachers shows that I expect my students to read some extra books which related to the General Aptitude Test (English Part) by themselves has the highest score at mean 5.00 (S.D. = 0.000) followed by I apply some teaching method which are helpful for my students on the General Aptitude Test (English Part) has mean at 4.98 (S.D.= 0.158), and The General Aptitude Test (English Part) has the effect to my teaching method has mean at 4.68 (S.D. = 0.572). On the other hand, I adjust my teaching method to help the students succeed in the General Aptitude Test (English Part) has the lowest score at mean 3.48 (S.D. = 1.012) followed by I change my lesson mostly based on the objectives of the General Aptitude Test (English Part) has mean at 3.73 (S.D. = 0.784). Moreover, I teach whatever I think is important regardless of whether my students like it or not, and I organize the learning activities related to the General Aptitude Test (English Part) have the same mean at 3.90 (S.D. = 0.632). Whereas, the rest of items have mean in the range between 4.25 – 4.55.

The semi-structured interview was used in this research to confirm the backwash effect on the General Aptitude Test in aspects of EFL teachers. Thus, the following parts: classroom activities and methods, teaching materials, and teaching content were made by the EFL teachers:

Classroom activities and teaching methods, the finding showed that most EFL teachers have changed classroom activities and teaching methods to improve their students' communication skills in English. However, classroom activities were not much changed because they used a communicative approach to teach students. Almost every EFL teacher applied some teaching methods that were helpful for my students on the General Aptitude Test (English Part) at the end of class.

Teaching materials most EFL teachers skipped over some sections in the textbook and used material related to GAT's test blueprint. However, the foreign teachers thought that the teaching content was likely to be tested in the General Aptitude Test (English Part) as usual. The specific language teaching materials will be used to prepare my students for the General Aptitude Test (English Part) when they are about to take the test.

Teaching content, most of them said that teaching content was selected by the school curriculum because the other teachers had to teach similarly. The teaching syllabus of every program in this subject is the same. It is also relevant to the achievement test. When their students were about to take a test, they used GAT-related materials or test items from previous years.

the backwash effect of the GAT (English part) on English learning managements as perceived by Matthayom Suksa 6 students

Table 2 The Questionnaire's Result in aspects of Matthayomsuksa 6 students School in terms of Learning English Management and Students' Attitudes and Perceptions (Items)

English learning managements	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level of frequency
I focus learning on each in the English textbook that are likely to appear in the General Aptitude Test (English Part).	4.48	0.612	always
I learn test-taking strategies for English language tests.	4.42	0.598	always
I am worried for the poor results of the General Aptitude Test in English Part.	4.41	0.606	always
A student's score on General Aptitude Test (English Part) is an indication of how well she or he has learned English in classrooms.	4.40	0.631	always
I think it is a good idea to use General Aptitude Test (English Part) scores as the criterion for Admission System.	4.40	0.607	always
General Aptitude Test (English Part) emphasizes critical thinking skills.	4.39	0.610	always

Based on the table 2 the students gave the highest mean to I focus learning on each in the English textbook that are likely to appear in the General Aptitude Test (English Part) at mean 4.48 (S.D. = 0.612), followed by I learn test-taking strategies for English language tests (mean = 4.42, S.D. = 0.598), and I am worried for the poor results of the General Aptitude Test in English Part (mean = 4.41, S.D. = 0.606). In contrast, the lowest mean is I focus learning on communicative English language skills at 3.22 (S.D. = 0.681), followed by I spend my time practicing communicative English language skills in classrooms (mean = 3.64, S.D. = 1.028), and I like the activity in class that help students obtain high scores on the General Aptitude Test (English Part) (mean = 3.67, S.D. = 0.953).

The results from semi- structured interview Learning English Management, Matthayom Suksa 6 students said that they had read a lot of books to get high scores in GATS by themselves because they thought English teachers taught the same thing that I had learnt before. Learning English in a classroom will not help them achieve high GAT scores, which they will not be able to use for TCAS. They spent their time on test preparation because the GAT was considered a high-stake test.

Students' Attitudes and Perceptions, statements from Matthayomsuksa 6 students showed that the GAT is the most difficult test. Most of them are really worried about GAT. They also felt excited about the GAT examination because it was very important for their future. The students were expected to get a high score of more than 100. However, there were some students who cared about their English competency, but I don't care about GAT because it is not related to their future career.

Conclusion

1. the backwash effect of the GAT (English part) on English teaching management as perceived by EFL teachers in secondary school

In conclusion, the results are quite the same in the items of the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview. The questionnaire showed that I expect my students to read some extra books which related to the General Aptitude Test (English Part) by themselves has the highest. The semi-structured interview was used in this research to confirm the backwash effect on the General Aptitude Test in aspects of EFL teachers. Almost every EFL teacher applied some teaching methods that were helpful for my students on the General Aptitude Test (English Part) at the end of class. However, the foreign teachers thought that the teaching content was likely to be tested in the General Aptitude Test (English Part) as usual. The specific language teaching materials will be used to prepare my students for the General Aptitude Test (English Part) when they are about to take the test.

The GAT examinations have influenced EFL teachers in English teaching management in the aspects of teaching activities and methods, teaching materials, and teaching content. The finding can be considered that GAT (English Part) has a positive effect on English learning management in aspects of classroom activities and teaching methods.

2. the backwash effect of the GAT (English part) on English learning managements as perceived by Matthayom Suksa 6 students

From the questionnaire, it can be concluded that students gave the highest mean to focus learning on each topic in the English textbook that is likely to appear in the General Aptitude Test (English Part) at 4.48 (S.D. = 0.612). The lowest mean score is that I spend my time practicing communicative English language skills in classrooms. The semi-structured showed that the management of English learning by Matthayom Suksa 6 students said that they had read a lot of books to get high scores in GATS by themselves because they thought English teachers taught the same thing that I had learnt before. Learning English in a classroom will not help them achieve high GAT scores, which they will not be able to use for TCAS. They spent their time on test preparation because the GAT was considered a high-stake test. Students' attitudes and perceptions Statements from Mathayomsuksa 6 students showed that the GAT is the most difficult test. The students were expected to get a high score of more than 100. However, there were some students who cared about their English competency, but I don't care about the GAT because it is not related to their future career.

The result showed that students gave the highest mean for focus learning on each topic in the English textbook that is likely to appear in the General Aptitude Test (English Part) at 4.48 (S.D. = 0.612). The lowest mean score is that I spend my time practicing communicative English language skills in classrooms. Students read a lot of books to get high scores in GATS by themselves.

Discussion

1. The backwash effect of the GAT (English part) on English teaching management as perceived by EFL teachers in secondary school

The GAT examinations have influenced EFL teachers in English teaching management in the aspects of teaching activities and methods, teaching materials, and teaching content. The finding can be considered that GAT (English Part) has a positive effect on English learning management in aspects of classroom activities and teaching methods. The research result related to Huang (2019) showed that positive impact on teaching, which plays a positive backwash role, points out the correct direction of teaching, and ensures and promotes the realization of teaching objectives. According to Tayeb, Abd Aziz, Ismail, and Khan (2014) as a result, the test has a significant impact on students, educators, and society. Despite the fact that parents, schools, and the Ministry of Education spend a lot of money and effort to help students cope with the GSEE's obstacles, the washback effect is unavoidable. due to the enormous risks it has for all parties involved, particularly students. Watkins, Dahlin, and Ekholm (2005) claimed that, before the student may interpret evaluation in this manner, the instructor must have the goal and competence of designing assessment problems that promote higher order learning processes. Yuan Ping examines the interrelationship between academic achievement tests and education and learning to determine if academic achievement tests have a positive effect on education and learning. It also suggests that the EFL class does not pay sufficient attention to the academic achievement test. After conducting empirical studies, the authors conclude that performance testing has a positive feedback effect on EFL teaching and learning (Ping, 2002).

2. The backwash effect of the GAT (English part) on English learning managements as perceived by Matthayom Suksa 6 students

The result showed that students gave the highest mean for focus learning on each topic in the English textbook that is likely to appear in the General Aptitude Test (English Part) at 4.48 (S.D. = 0.612). The lowest mean score is that I spend my time practicing communicative English language skills in classrooms. Students read a lot of books to get high scores in GATS by themselves. The result of this study shows the negative backwash on the General Aptitude Test (English) which accord with the study of Prodromou (1995) explained In public forms, this often means doing a lot of pre-work in class to prepare for an exam; this may involve recreating, from old work or from textbooks, the preferred types of exam-specific exercises the student will do: multiple-choice, transform, or fill-in. The methodological process resulting from negative backwash in its overt forms is all too familiar: a text presentation followed by exam-like questions. This “text + question” formula is a rough mirror image of what goes on in most conventional exams. Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) stated that the current global use of standardized tests for the testing process can lead students to focus solely on achieving acceptable scores rather than language development. According to Gashaye (2012) found that the test contents were not related to text book, which was not influenced to students ‘s learning. Kirkpatrick & Zang’s essay describes the various problems China faces on account of its exam-centric education system and

pedagogy. Along with interviews and focus groups, this study draws on survey responses from 43 Chinese high school students enrolled in the Yunnan Province's No. 10 school. Moreover, this essay explores the policy arguments and key assumptions underlying this pedagogical approach as well as the negative influences exam-oriented education systems have on Chinese students, who view education as nothing more than merely passing examinations (Kirkpatrick & Zang, 2011)

Suggestion

1. The researcher did not investigate the relationship of the backwash effect of the general aptitude test between EFL teachers and students. Further research should investigate the relationship in term of the same factors of both EFL teachers and students to get understand and whole picture of the backwash effect.
2. This study used two main research instruments which were questionnaire and semi-structure interview about only the backwash effect of the General Aptitude Test (English). To find out more depth information, classroom observation and document analysis should be used.

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