

Chinese EFL students' perception of the IELTS test design and the value of taking a preparation course

Liu Yuan (Quentin) yl573@leicester.ac.uk

Background

Despite the growth in test volume and the associated increase in test preparation, the average speaking and writing scores for Chinese students has remained low at 5.39 and 5.39 respectively, which is lower than most of western universities minimum language entry requirement (Doe & Fox, 2010; IELTS, 2018).

Even though many studies have conducted to classify the cause of this issue, few studies have explored learners' understanding of the test itself, or their attitudes and motivations for undertaking test preparation course and how these perceptions could connect with the test result.

Mean band score for the most frequent nationalities (Academic)



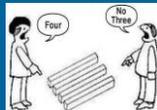
Literature Review

The Washback effect

- ❑ Common concerns with test-takers (Critical language testing and Washback) → test-takers' perception/ test validity
- ❑ Five dimensions - specificity, intensity, length, intentionality, and value (Watanabe, 2004).
- ❑ The occurrence of positive/negative washback is affected by how the test works and within which educational contexts it is situated (Cheng, 2005, p8; Buck,1988)

Washback on learning

- ❑ A test will influence what learners learn and how learners learn (Alderson & Wall, 1993).
- ❑ The involvement of other factors might shape students' perceptions of the learning process (e.g. Green,2007; Xie &Andrew , 2013; Sato, 2018).
- **Independent Variable 1** : Learner's interpretation of IELTS test design --- (1) Test demands (2) Self-perceived evaluation goal
- **Independent Variable 2**: Learners' intentions of taking a test preparation course--- (1) academic expectation (2) self – perceived language proficiency (3) individual differences
- **Dependent Variable**: Test performance



The Mechanism of Washback

- ❑ The role of different factors on shaping learning has been identified, but the interactions among these factors have not been extensively studied (Cheng, 2012; Xie &Andrew, 2013; Sato, 2018).
- ❑ A Washback Model of Student's Learning (Shih, 2007, p151)
- ❑ *A Basic Model of Washback (Bailey, 1996, p.264) – Diagram 1*

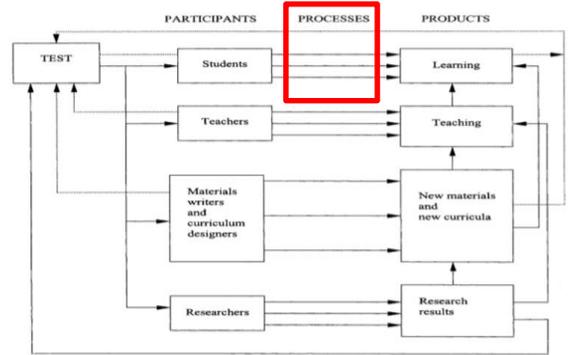


Diagram 1

Research Question

What is the relationship between students' interpretation of test design, attitudes of taking test preparation course and their productive skills test performance?

Sub-RQs:

1. What are Chinese IELTS test-takers' interpretation of IELTS speaking and writing test design?
2. What is the role of mediating variables on influencing test-takers' intentions to take an IELTS preparation course?

Methodology

A Mixed-Methods Approach

Quantitative data: Questionnaire (Factor analysis) -- Diagram 2
Qualitative data: Semi-structured Interview (Deductive approach)

Participants

Questionnaire: 280-300 Chinese EFL students who have taken IELTS preparation course in mainland China.

Semi-structured interview: 40 students (get different band score)

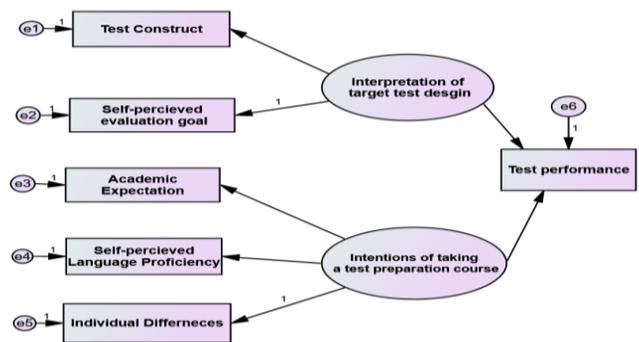


Diagram 2

Significance

The current study has potential to...

- to confirm or corroborate with the washback hypotheses on learners and learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993)
- enrich the definition of consequential Validity by including test-takers' perceptions.
- classify the mechanism of washback, in particular to its influence on learning.