

ABSTRACT

Washback Effects of Speaking Assessment of Teaching English in Sri Lankan Schools

Washback is a concept commonly used in applied linguistics to refer to the influence of testing on teaching and learning. The purpose of this study was to investigate the washback effect of a new system of English language speaking assessment in Sri Lanka. The new assessment was introduced with the intention of promoting the teaching and learning of English speaking skills in schools as part of a Presidential educational initiative called the English as a Life Skill Programme.

The study examined the washback effect of the introduction of speaking assessments at both National and school levels from the perspectives of participants at three levels of the education system: the decision making level, intervening level (teacher trainers and in-service advisors), and implementing level (teachers and students). For this purpose, a mixed methods research approach was employed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants at the decision making level and intervening level to examine whether there were any important gaps in translating policy intentions to the implementing level participants (teachers and students). A questionnaire survey was conducted with teachers and students to investigate their perceptions of the assessment change and its effects on teaching and learning speaking in the classroom.