

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This chapter concerns a review of the literature which is related to theories, concepts, and previous literature. The summary of the main parts is as follows:

5.1 Theory of Washback Effect

5.2 Previous studies

#### **5.1 WASHBACK EFFECT**

Since many tests are used to assess English proficiency among learners of English as a foreign or second language, the number of these test preparation courses is growing as well. As a result, a phenomenon of correlation between the test and the program exists. It is known as “Washback.”

In applied linguistics, “Washback” is a common term which is perceived as an influence that a test has on teaching and learning. In 1993, Alderson and Wall did research on the “Washback Hypotheses” which assumed that “teachers and learners do things they would not necessarily otherwise do because of the test.” (p.117) According to “Washback Hypotheses”, they pose 15 possible hypotheses that they hope will lead to the eventual refinement of the washback construct in empirical investigations (pp. 120-121):

1. A test will influence teaching.
2. A test will influence learning.
3. A test will influence what teachers teach; and
4. A test will influence how teachers teach; and by extension from (2) above,
5. A test will influence what learners learn; and
6. A test will influence how learners learn.
7. A test will influence the rate and sequence of teaching; and
8. A test will influence the rate and sequence of learning.
9. A test will influence the degree and depth of teaching; and
10. A test will influence the degree and depth of learning.
11. A test will influence attitudes too on the content, method, etc. of teaching and learning.

12. Tests that have important consequences will have washback; and conversely,
13. Tests that do not have important consequences will have no washback.
14. Tests will have washback on all learners and teachers.
15. Tests will have washback effects for some learners and some teachers, but not for others.

In “Washback in language testing” by Kathleen M. Bailey (1999), numerous definitions of washback and concepts related to washback are summarized. One evident explanation from Shohamy (1993b) firstly describes that the washback effect refers to the impact that tests have on teaching and learning. Secondly, measurement driven instruction refers to the notion that tests should drive learning. Thirdly, curriculum alignment focuses on the connection between testing and the teaching syllabus. Lastly, systemic validity implies the integration of tests into the educational system and the need to demonstrate that the introduction of a new test can improve learning.

For many years, arguments over washback effect on language preparation programs have arisen. While some claim that the washback is negative, others think otherwise. Observation and investigation of TOEFL preparation class by Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) revealed that the TOEFL test does have an impact on teaching method. On the other hand, a washback is partially created by administrators, teachers, and material writers as well. “Washback” has been associated with a number of studies and research papers in order to explore the correlations and their effect on language preparation programs.

Tests usually begin at the end of the teaching and learning process. However, with the start of high-stake public examination testing nowadays, the direction seems to be reversed. Testing usually comes first, before the teaching and learning process. As examinations are commonly used as levers for change, textbooks will be designed to match the purposes of a new test. School administrative staff, teachers and students will all work hard to achieve better scores in the test.

According to Alderson and Wall (1993), tests that have important consequences will have washback; and conversely, tests that do not have important consequences will have no washback. This can be proved by different studies which have shown the impact a significant test can have on learners. This is also noted by Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt, and Ferman (1996): "Results obtained from tests can have serious consequences for individuals as well as programs, since many crucial decisions are made on the basis of test results" (p. 299).

## **5.2 PREVIOUS STUDIES**

### **5.2.1 A study of the Effect of Direct Test Preparation on the TOEIC Scores of Japanese University students**

Thomas N. Robb and Jay Ercanbrack studied the effect of TOEIC test preparation on TOEIC scores among two samples of students- English majors and non-majors at a Japanese University. These two samples of students were divided into 3 treatment groups as follows.

- 1) TOEIC preparation
- 2) Business English
- 3) General (four-skills) English

The findings of this study demonstrate that TOEIC preparation programs result in a significant increase in TOEIC scores among non-majors. However, these gains in scores are for the reading part of the test only.

In conclusion, TOEIC preparation program is not very beneficial to students enrolled in a comprehensive English program, but it can be effective for students enrolled in a university-level general English course by enabling them to gain higher scores in the reading component. Since a recent trend in English proficiency test preparation programs is growing around the world, it is clear that the test is no longer a measurement of general proficiency. Instead, it becomes a method which demonstrates how well students were prepared and tutored for the test.

According to the results, Robb stated that TOEIC preparation courses can surely be useful for those whose previous TOEIC scores are relatively low. On the other hand, it might not be very effective for those who are at a higher level. If the purpose of the program is to enhance communicative ability, a TOEIC preparation course is not recommended. (Robb and Ercanbrack, 2004)

Apart from Robb and Ercanbrack's study specifically in the field of TOEIC, another meta-analysis which can be somewhat useful is "Coaching for the SAT: A summary of the Summaries and an update" by Powers (1993).

### **5.2.2 Preparation Programs for the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test)**

Although a number of English language institutes provide the public with proof that their test preparation courses result in a gain in scores among their students, it does not completely indicate the effectiveness of the program (Powers, 1993). Moreover, he points out that an increase in scores can be affected by numerous reasons. Two significant variables are:

1) "Practice effect" which allows students to be familiar, comfortable, and confident to take the test

2) "Measurement error" which indicates that the gains or losses in scores depend considerably on test takers' initial scores. Those who score lower in their first tests tend to achieve the greatest gains upon retesting, while those with higher scores in the first test will make the smallest gain or largest drop in their second test.

In contrast with the above studies, "The impact of training type and time on TOEIC scores", a study by R.F. Boldt and S.J. Ross in 1998, indicates that the effectiveness of the TOEIC courses in terms of score increases depends on different factors, such as objective of training, instructors, teaching method, class material, and length of time.

### 5.2.3 The impact of training type and time on TOEIC scores

“TOEIC is a kind of test which enables organizations or language schools to assess the English language proficiency of employees and students accurately and rapidly” (Boldt and Ross, 1998). Over the past years, a number of organizations or companies value the importance of providing their employees with the TOEIC preparation program which may allow their employees to perform more effectively and efficiently in global workplaces. Therefore, it is important for organizations, companies, or language schools to take these two questions into consideration when providing TOEIC Programs to their employees.

- 1) Which type of training is most effective in increasing the English language proficiency of employees?
- 2) What is the most economical way to increase the English language proficiency of employees?

To allow organizations, companies, or even language schools to find answers for those questions, the study gathered data of pre- and post-training TOEIC scores, training length and intensity, the objective of the training course, instructor qualifications, course materials, and class size from 4,247 people in 23 Japanese companies, which partly contributes to an increase in TOEIC scores and the students' English development. Results of the study can be categorized as follows.

- 1) Training time and intensity is found to pay little contribution to the students' English development or gain in TOEIC scores
- 2) Teaching methods which include videos as part of the TOEIC preparation class has proved to be associated with the largest total of TOEIC scores gained.
- 3) Class of 10 – 20 people is somewhat effective in helping students increase their TOEIC scores.

- 4) Classes given to develop new employees found to be more effective in motivating employees to develop themselves.
- 5) An instructor with a certificate in teaching seems to have a greater impact on student progress and TOEIC scores than those graduating with a master's or bachelor's degree.

Although few studies have been conducted to explore the effectiveness of TOEIC preparation programs in terms of the impact on TOEIC score increases or student attitudes towards their English language development in Thailand, the concept and some previous research papers were found to be relevant and significant to this study. Therefore, the researcher adopted the methodology and instruments from previous studies which were conducted abroad and adapted them for use in the survey.