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**DEPARTAMENT DE FILOLOGIA ANGLESA I DE GERMANÍSTICA**

**English in the Catalan Baccalaureate System: A  
Study of a Possible Washback Effect from the  
University-Entrance Exam**

Treball de Fi de Grau/BA dissertation

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## **Abstract**

Testing and the resulting grades are currently of great importance since they can determine the future life of a student. The term ‘washback’ studies the effect testing has on several aspects since the 1980s. However, more research is needed in order to better understand this phenomenon and into crease its familiarity among the educational environment. The aim of this TFG study is to provide a description of washback and to consider how testing influences the Catalan educational system, particularly in the second year of the baccalaureate, when students are about to take the Spanish University-Entrance Examination (SUEE) that will determine their future academic life. This dissertation will focus on the English Test (ET) set by the SUEE and how it affects curriculum, materials and teaching methodology in the final year of secondary-school education. In order to carry out this study, a questionnaire responded to by English teachers will provide data to determine whether there is a washback effect on the above-mentioned aspects, given that curriculum, materials and teaching methodology appear to be constantly influenced by the ET.

**Keywords:** *Washback, English Test, curriculum, materials, teaching methodology*

## 1. Introduction

At the end of their secondary-school education, students in Spain wishing to enter higher education have to take the Spanish University-Entrance Examination (SUEE). This is “a public examination across Spanish universities to select students at the end of their secondary education for entering a Spanish university (Amengual-Pizarro, 2009: 583). The result of these exams is of great importance for the academic future of the students. As a result, over the two years of baccalaureate study<sup>1</sup> (typically from the ages of 16-18), the SUEE is given considerable attention in classes, particularly in the final year. A great number of students are worried about their admission grades and, in some instances, classes might be focused on so-called ‘high-stakes tests’<sup>2</sup> in order to help them improve these grades.

One of the high-stakes tests included in the SUEE is the English Test (ET), which assesses reading, writing, and listening skills. However, oral production is not assessed. The aim of this project is to analyse how the ET included in the SUEE affects three classroom-related areas over the last year of secondary school in Catalan education: the curriculum, materials and teaching methodologies. To carry out this study, the term “washback” will be reviewed as it concerns the impact high-stakes tests have on several aspects.

In order to observe the washback effect in this context, this project will aim to shed light both on the term “washback” and on previous research, so as to understand this phenomenon more fully. First, to determine a possible washback effect on the Catalan education system, particularly in the English lessons of the second year of the

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<sup>1</sup> The final period of secondary education. It is non-obligatory and takes place over two academic years.

<sup>2</sup> According to Gail and Ennes (2018), a high-stakes test is a test in which “results are used to make decisions about promotion, admissions, graduation and salaries”.

baccalaureate, the SUEE and then the ET and its structure will be described. Moreover, a detailed study of the ET from 2000 to 2019 will be carried out. To determine a possible relation between ET and classroom-related areas, the final section of this project is devoted to the discussion of the results obtained from an online questionnaire responded to by Catalan teachers of English currently teaching in the last year of secondary-school education. This questionnaire inquiries into the curriculum, materials and teaching methodologies and their relation to the ET.

## **2. The Notion of ‘Washback’**

In the 1980s, researchers began to investigate the so-called ‘washback’ effect since exam results started to be increasingly important for “students, teachers, schools and states” and so, exam preparation also gained importance (Hughes, 1989: 2). The research carried out in the 1990s centred on “the direction of washback”, so the purpose was to find out in what way tests influenced forms of teaching and learning, the attitude towards tests and how they were used (Hughes, 1989: 2). However, little empirical research has been done on the mechanism of washback, especially in the language-education field. Nevertheless, the few studies that examine washback are essential in demonstrating that this topic still needs to be studied further (Alderson and Wall, 1993).

The term ‘washback’ or ‘backwash’<sup>3</sup> has multiple definitions. According to Hughes (1989: 1), it refers to “the effect of testing on teaching and learning”. More specific to this current study, it is “the influence that language testing has on curriculum design, teaching practices, and learning behaviors” (McKinley and Thompson, 2018: 1).

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<sup>3</sup> The terms ‘washback’, ‘backwash’ and ‘impact’ are interchangeable in applied linguistics.

Some authors have shed light on the mechanism of washback, on how it seems to work. Alderson and Wall (1993) link the notion of washback to the ‘Washback Hypothesis’ and its 15 possible hypotheses (1, appendix). These hypotheses are based on their own research through different studies carried out in Sri Lanka and also by reviewing other research published up to 1993. However, when these authors make reference to washback in the field of language education, they consider that “there is remarkably little research (..) that can be said to have investigated and established what washback is or how it works”. (Alderson and Wall, 1993: 123).

Cited in Bailey (1996), Hughes (1993), in an unpublished study, considers a trichotomy in participants, process and product in teaching and learning that might be affected by the nature of a test, and their division allows us to observe how the mechanism of washback may actually work. This suggestion is presented in the following figure by Bailey (1996: 264):

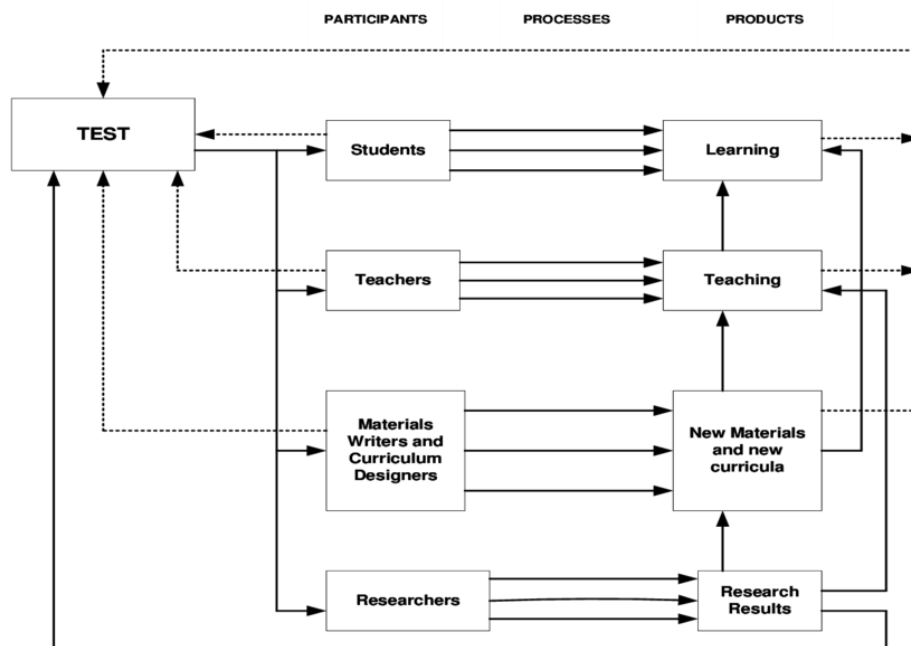


Figure 1: *A basic model of Washback* (Bailey, 1996: 264).

This figure shows that a test has a direct impact on participants (students, teachers, material writers, curriculum designers and researchers). This impact influences the products (learning, teaching, new materials and new curricula, and research results) through the processes. The dotted lines illustrate the ‘washforward’ effect.<sup>4</sup>

Alderson and Wall (1993) and Hughes (1993) highlight different ideas for examining washback. This information could be combined to better understand how this mechanism works. Nevertheless, Alderson and Wall’s hypothesis and Hughes’ trichotomy are not in themselves enough for the study of this phenomenon. Further research has been carried out since the 1980s, but a more empirical investigation is still needed.

According to Hughes (1989), the effect that an examination has on teaching and learning “can be harmful or beneficial”; consequently, there can be a negative or a positive washback effect. The former is “destructive and can be a hindrance in achieving the goals” (Lodhi et al., 2018: 228). It appears “when there may be a mismatch between the stated goals of instruction and the focus of assessment and it may lead to the abandonment of instruction goals in favour of test preparation” (McKinley and Thompson, 2018: 1), and the positive washback effect “is required and beneficial in learning and teaching processes” (Lodhi et al., 2018: 228). According to Bailey (1996), this beneficial washback is achieved through four different factors: language learning goals; authenticity; learner autonomy and self-assessment; and detailed score reporting. Nevertheless, some authors believe that, independently of whether the washback effect is positive or negative, exactly how it works in distinct environments needs to be more empirically explored (Prodromou, 1995: 14 & Allison, 1999: 18).

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<sup>4</sup> “Possible influence from the participants on the test” (Bailey, 1996: 263).

## **2.1. Dimensions Affected by Washback**

Several dimensions may be influenced by a high-stakes test that must be considered in order to study this phenomenon. The following section will examine how washback can affect learners, teachers, materials and curriculum.

### **2.1.1. Washback Effect on Learners**

Test-takers are the agents most affected by the impact of the examination. According to McKinley and Thompson (2018: 5), “preparing for and taking the tests, as well as resulting outcomes, will affect them”. The way in which tests affect students is also related to “the effect of the tests on their teachers, textbook developers, and schools” because they have the most direct responsibility for the students’ success in their learning.

### **2.1.2. Washback on the Teacher**

Tests have an impact on curriculum design, pedagogical practice and different aspects of language teaching; in light of this, teachers are obviously affected by them. Nevertheless, “the ways in which tests influence teaching is complex -different teachers respond to tests in different ways” (McKinley and Thompson, 2018: 6).

### **2.1.3. Washback on Materials**

Materials may be influenced by language tests when they are narrowed down to being practice for the exam. However, while “tests can influence materials negatively” (Saville & Hawkey, 2004 cited in McKinley and Thompson, 2018: 6), materials can be used positively as tools for students preparing for high-stakes tests (Tomlinson, 2013). Once again, the washback effect may be positive or negative, depending on circumstances.

#### **2.1.4. Washback on the Curriculum**

The curriculum can also be affected by tests when it is focused on performing well in an exam; in such cases, “a test will influence what teachers teach” (Alderson and Wall, 1993: 12). However, Spratt (2005: 10)—following her study into different perspectives on the impact of tests on the curriculum—clarifies that “washback on to the curriculum operates in different ways in different situations and in some situations it may not operate at all”. Thus, information in this ambit may be contradictory.

A small number of authors have studied the relation between test and curriculum in order to provide a new perspective and new formats that offer a positive washback effect on the educational programme. For example, Shohamy (1992: 515) present a model of assessment that “relates to the learning system and is grounded in the theory of foreign language education to determine what needs to be tested, and in the theory of testing and evaluation to ascertain what procedures to use for such an assessment”.

### **3. The Spanish University-Entrance Examination**

The Spanish University-Entrance Examination (SUEE), is a public examination used across the Spanish educational system “to select students at the end of their secondary education for entering a Spanish university” (Amengual-Pizarro, 2009: 583). In Catalonia (one of the so-called “autonomous communities” in Spain), this examination is divided into two phases: the compulsory general phase and the specific phase. The former comprises five exam subjects: Catalan Language and Literature, Spanish Language and Literature, Foreign Language, History, and a further compulsory subject from Latin, Mathematics, Mathematics for Social Sciences or Foundations of the Arts. The latter phase is voluntary and a maximum of three subjects may be taken, from

Musical Analysis, Biology, Earth and Environmental Science, Media Culture, Creative Drawing, Technical Drawing, Design, Business Economics, Electrical Engineering, Physics, Foundations of the Arts, Geography, Greek, Art History, History of Philosophy, Spanish Literature, Catalan Literature, Latin, Mathematics, Mathematics for Social Science, Chemistry or Industrial Technology (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2020).

Both phases are qualified in a specific way (Figure 2). Finally, the average of the baccalaureate (60%) together with the mark obtained in the compulsory general phase SUEE (40%) results in the university-entrance grade. The admission grade is the result of the university-entrance grade and the specific phase.

$$\text{University Entrance Grade} = (0.6 \times \text{USSG}) + (0.4 \times \text{GPG})$$

USSG = upper secondary school grade.

GPG= general phase mark (if this is equal or higher than 4).

$$\text{Admission Grade} = \text{university entrance grade} + (a \times G1) + (b \times G2)$$

a, b = weighting parameters of the subject of the specific phase (0.1 or 0.2).

G1, G2 = the two subject grades passed in the specific phase which, after weighting, give the best admission grade.

Figure 2: *How to calculate the university-entrance grade and the admission grade in accordance with information made available by the Catalan government (Generalitat de Catalunya).*

### 3.1. English Test (ET)

The English Test (ET) in the SUEE “is a competitive norm-referenced proficiency test whose main purpose is to select and discriminate students as reliably as possible” (Amengual-Pizarro, 2010: 151). It is compulsory and belongs to the general phase, since English is a foreign language in this context. The design of the ET may vary across regions or autonomous communities within Spain. In this section, the ET in the SUEE in Catalonia will be described.



### **3.1.1. Exam structure<sup>5</sup>**

The current format of the ET consists of three parts: reading comprehension (30%), writing (40%) and listening comprehension (30%). The instructions and the questions in the exam are in English. All answers must be given in English. The English Test structure has changed throughout the years and its evolution will be considered in the following section.

#### **3.1.1.1. Part one: Reading comprehension (3 points)**

This part consists of comprehension on a text written in a standard language. The task consists of eight multiple-choice questions (a, b, c, and d) about a given text. The score for each correct answer is 0.375 points; however, if the answer is incorrect, the question or item is penalized (-0.125). Nevertheless, if there is no answer (that is, if an item is left blank), the response is not penalized.

#### **3.1.1.2. Part two: Writing (4 points)**

In this part, the test-taker needs to write a composition using between 125-150 words about a topic related to the previous comprehension text. Two options are available but only one has to be chosen.

The assessment criteria for this part contemplate four items that constitute the final grade for this part of the ET: grammar (1 point), lexis (1 point), coherence (1 point) and reasoning (1 point).

#### **3.1.1.3. Part three: Listening comprehension (3 points)**

This part consists of a recorded monologue or dialogue (the subject is not pre-determined). The audio is played twice. There are eight multiple-choice questions (with 4 possible answers: a, b, c and d) about the audio text. The score for each correct answer

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<sup>5</sup> Based on Generalitat de Catalunya information (2020).

is 0.375 points however, if the answer is incorrect, the question or item is penalized (-0.125). Nevertheless, if there is no answer the response is not penalized.

### **3.2. Evolution (2000-2019)**

The ET in the SUEE has been modified over time. According to Garcia Laborda (2012: 20), “a foreign language test comes into force in the so-called Spanish University Admission Examination (PAU)<sup>6</sup> in 1984”. Garcia Laborda (2012) admits that the ET had undergone little change since 1989, with only certain autonomous communities carrying out minor modifications.

In this section, the evolution of SUEE from 2000 to 2019 in the Catalan context will be studied. The comparison will generally focus on the structure of the ET, since several modifications have been carried out, specially changes regarding the reading and the oral comprehension.

In the academic years 2000 and 2001, the ET was composed of only two parts: a reading comprehension and a writing exercise. The reading comprehension consisted of three open-ended questions on the text and one multiple-choice question. Each correct answer was awarded 1 point. The second part was a writing activity in which the participant had to choose between two topics and write a composition. The answer had to be 75-100 words in length. This part was of great importance to the final grade since it represented six points (three for grammatical accuracy and three for writing fluency).

In the following academic year (2001-2002), the ET underwent several changes. First, the reading comprehension activities consisted of three open-ended questions as in the previous academic year, but it also carried two true or false questions. The whole part

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<sup>6</sup> Spanish University-Admission Examination (PAU) and Spanish University-Entrance Examination (SUEE) can be interchangeable.

represented five points. The writing had the same instructions as the preceding writing activity, but now represented five points. Nevertheless, the great innovation came with the listening exercise which consisted of ten multiple-choice questions. This section was optional and could increase candidates' overall grades.

In the following years, the fact that the listening comprehension appeared in the ET entailed changes in the scoring of each part as well in their format. In 2003, the reading comprehension was based on three open-ended questions (1 point each) and two multiple-choice questions about the text (0.5 points each). The writing, with the same instructions (except for a slight modification in the number of words required, which was now 100), represented four points and the listening comprehension was compulsory, and represented two points. This final part consisted of eight multiple-choice questions (0.25 points each) on the audio set for the exam.

The ET that was taken in 2004 was very similar to that carried out in the previous academic year. However, the reading comprehension part changed and was made up of eight multiple-choice questions (0.5 points for each correct answer). In 2006, the format was the same but the scoring in the reading comprehension and the listening comprehension parts changed. If the answers were incorrect, students were penalized (-0.16 in the reading comprehension and -0.08 in the listening comprehension); however, if they were left unanswered, there was no penalization.

In 2008, a new design of the ET in the SUEE was proposed in the BOE, the Official Gazette of the Government of Spain (2, appendix), in which the reading and oral comprehension and the oral and written expression would be assessed in all the autonomous communities. However, these changes in the structure of the exam were not carried through because "the oral test was difficult to introduce" (Martín-Monje, 2012:145). Nevertheless, two communities, Catalonia and Galicia, had introduced the

listening comprehension test several years before the BOE proposal in 2008, though not for the speaking part (García Laborda, 2012).

The structure of the ET did not change until 2017 when the scoring of the reading and listening comprehension was modified (3, appendix). From this point forward these two parts have the same scoring: 0.375 points for each correct answer in each section. Incorrect answers are penalized (-0.125) and there is no penalty for unanswered questions. The scoring for each section is therefore 3.

As far as the writing is concerned, the most recent modification took place in 2019 and is related to the length of the composition. Instead of 100 words, the new format requires between 125-150 words.

The emergence of the listening comprehension component in the ET in Catalonia and Galicia was of great importance, but it has been less relevant than the written competence as far as scoring is concerned (Bueno Alastuey & Luque Agulló, 2012). Consequently it can be asserted that “the ET is not so much concerned with the communicative competence models” (Herrera Soler 1999, cited in Bueno Alastuey & Luque Agulló, 2012: 89).

Although there have been modifications in the ET over the last two decades, more improvements in relation to its design are needed, especially concerning oral expression (speaking). According to García Laborda (2012), new formats for speaking tests may be based on short monologues and activities in pairs. However, these suggestions might not be taken into consideration since the pair assignment for the exam would be particularly complex. Moreover, the economic cost of organising oral exams would be too high for the administration to afford. Therefore, “the change cannot be conducted carelessly” (García Laborda, 2012: 24). Amengua-Pizarro & Méndez García (2012), Bueno Alastuey

& Luque Agulló (2012) and Martín-Monje (2012) proposed a new kind of ET in the SUEE that includes the evaluation of a speaking component, since “a language has a complete sense if it is spoken” (Martín-Monje, 2012:148) but the oral test has never been introduced in this exam. The most likely reasons for this are cost and logistics, as stated above.

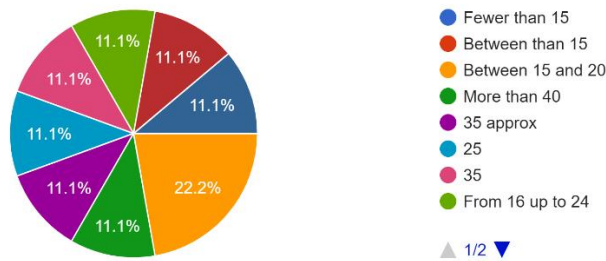
#### **4. How ET in SUEE influences the second year of Baccalaureate**

The ET is a high-stakes test and the grade obtained is very important for the final average grade in the Spanish University-Admission Examination and, as a result, for the students’ academic future. Since the ET is of high importance, students need some previous training before facing this test. Most of the participants take two years of baccalaureate education because it prepares them for incorporation into tertiary studies.

Considering the importance of the ET in the SUEE, this section will discuss the influence that this high-stakes test may have in the second course of the baccalaureate related to the curriculum, materials, teaching methodologies and teachers’ opinions. In order to verify a possible washback effect on these classroom-related areas, a teacher’s online questionnaire based on Amengual-Pizarro (2009) (4, appendix) was employed to collect data.

A total of nine teachers currently teaching English in the second year of baccalaureate at six different secondary schools in the province of Barcelona took part in the present study by answering the questionnaire. All teachers participating in this study have over 15 students at this pre-university level (*Graph 1*).

What is the average number of students you usually have in your English classes?  
9 responses



*Graph 1*

## 4.1. Results and discussions

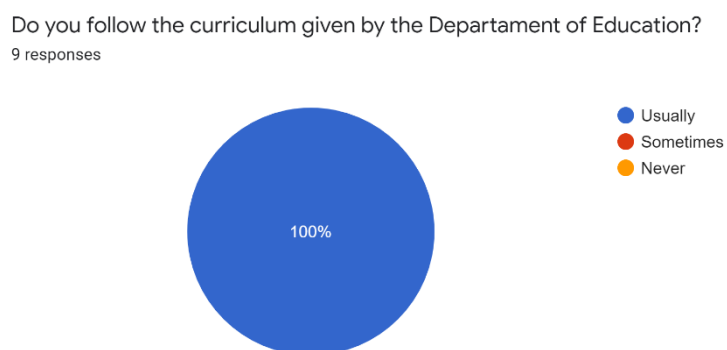
### 4.1.1. Curriculum

In Catalonia, the Department of Education provides the curriculum for the Catalan education system. For the second year of baccalaureate study as regards English (as a foreign language), the Department considers that the content to be taught in this year is the same as in the first year of the baccalaureate, but enhanced. This content consists of four dimensions: the communicative, which includes oral, written and audiovisual interaction, comprehension and production and knowledge of the mechanism of the language and its learning; consultation and processing of information; multicultural and intercultural factors; and the aesthetic and literary (Decret 142/2008).

The first section of the questionnaire consisted of 13 questions related to the different aspects of teaching associated with the curriculum in the second year of the baccalaureate and its hypothetical relation with the ET in the SUEE.

First of all, I would like to point out that the results show that all the participants usually follow the curriculum (*Graph 2*); they therefore consider that they are focusing the course on the dimensions previously explained. Nevertheless, the following questions

will assess the way that teachers follow the curriculum, as established by the Department of Education in the Catalan context.

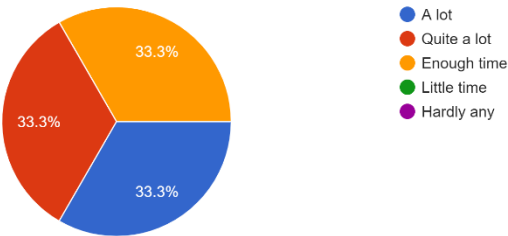


*Graph 2*

As far as the ET is concerned, the time devoted to preparing students for the high-stakes test varies among the participants (*Graph 3*) between ‘a lot’ (33.3%), ‘quite a lot’ (33.3%) and ‘enough time’ (33.3%); no negative answers (‘little time’ or ‘hardly any’) were given in response to this question. Therefore, respondents consider that teachers spend sufficient time preparing students for the ET. All of them say that they teach students the skills and contents included in the ET (reading comprehension, writing and listening comprehension) (*Graph 4*) but the time devoted for these skills as a whole varies among the participants (*Graph 5*): 33.3% of the teachers admit to spending more than two thirds of the course working on the skills assessed in the ET; 22.2% of the participants report spending less than half of the course practicing them; only 11.1% of the teachers admit to spending more than half of the course working on these skills. Nevertheless, one participant, who had been working as a substitute teacher since January 2020 admitted to spending half of the academic year from January on practising the assessed skills. Only 11.1% of the teachers gave over less than a third of the course to these skills; one participant (11.1%) reported that “the entire programme is given over to preparing them (students) for the ET”. Moreover, a single participant (11.1%) indicates that the skills

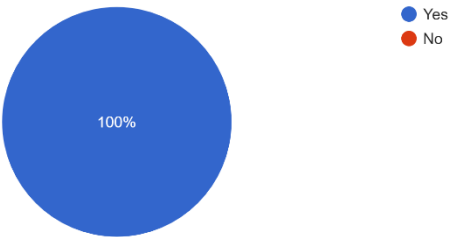
included in the ET “are always part of the classes”. Bearing these results in mind, all the teachers use the time they consider necessary to teach their students the skills and content that are included in the ET. There is no regulation based on the curriculum that defines the time teachers have to dedicate to improving their students’ different skills.

How much time do you give to preparing students for the English Test in the Spanish University-Entrance Examination?  
9 responses



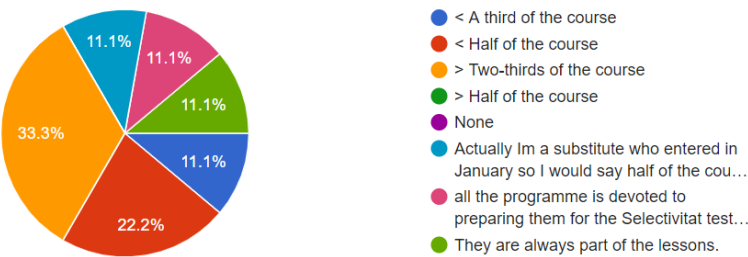
Graph 3

Do you teach your students the skills and contents that are included in the English Test during the academic year?  
9 responses



Graph 4

How much time do you give to teaching these skills?  
9 responses

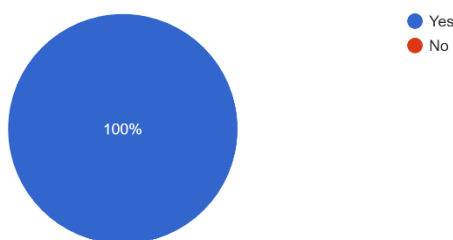


Graph 5



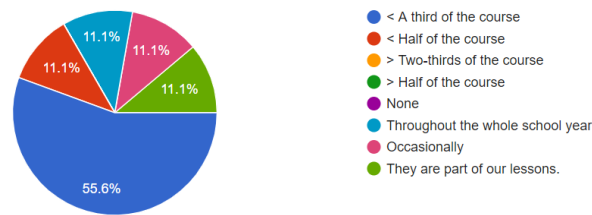
Regarding the skills that are not included in the ET (speaking and use of English), all the participants recognise that they give over some time to work on them (*Graph 6*). However, the time spent on these skills varies among the teachers interviewed (*Graph 7*): the vast majority of participants (55.6%) admit to spending less than a third of their course time practicing skills that are not assessed in the ET; only 11.1% of the teachers indicate spending less than half of the course performing these skills; the same small percentage (11.1%) focuses their class on these skills. Moreover, two participants opted for a more general view: one stated that “they (skills) are part of their lessons”, while the other reported that they actually work on these skills “throughout the whole school year”. According to these results, the skills excluded from the ET in the SUEE seem to have less importance in the classroom than those included in the high-stakes test. As with the previous question on time dedicated to the skills included in the ET, these results verify that there is a clear tendency to work on what will be assessed in the ET, possibly because the time that teachers should give to the different skills is not stated or regulated in the curriculum.

Do you give some time to teaching skills and content NOT included in the English Test during the academic year?  
9 responses



*Graph 6*

How much time do you give to the teaching of these skills?  
9 responses



*Graph 7*

Before analysing the time dedicated in class to Reading comprehension, Writing skills, Listening comprehension, Use of English and Speaking, a possible negative washback effect can be appreciated from the information given in the previous section. Although all the participants indicate that they usually follow the curriculum, the skills that are not included in the ET do not seem to have the same weight in class as those included in the ET. Therefore, the ET may have a possible negative impact on the curriculum (i.e., it is modified according to the students' perceived needs).

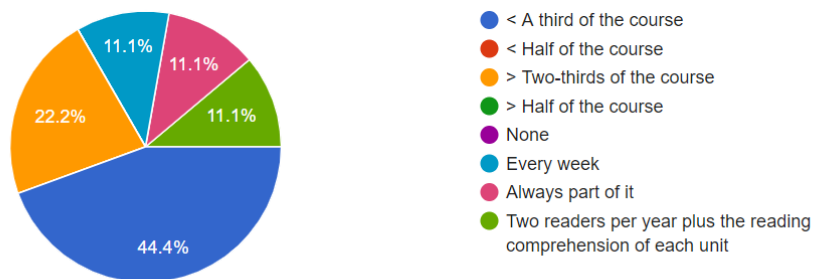
The following five questions are related to the time that teachers dedicate to the three skills that appear in the ET (Reading comprehension, Writing skills, Listening comprehension) and two areas that are excluded from the high-stakes test (Use of English and Speaking).

First, reading comprehension seems to be present at all times in the English classes during the second year of the baccalaureate but to a different degree depending on the participant (*Graph 8*): a larger part of the participants (44.4%) give less than a third of the course to working on reading comprehension. However, the rest of the participants dedicate more time to this skill even though they report different options: 22.2% of them spend more than two-thirds of the course working on reading comprehension; 11.1% state that "it is always part of the course"; another participant (11.1%) gave their students "two readers per year plus the comprehension for each unit"; only one participant (11.1%)

carried out a reading comprehension task every week. Therefore, 55.5% of the participants usually give two thirds of their time or even more to the practising this key skill.

How much time do you give to the Reading Comprehension during the academic year?

9 responses

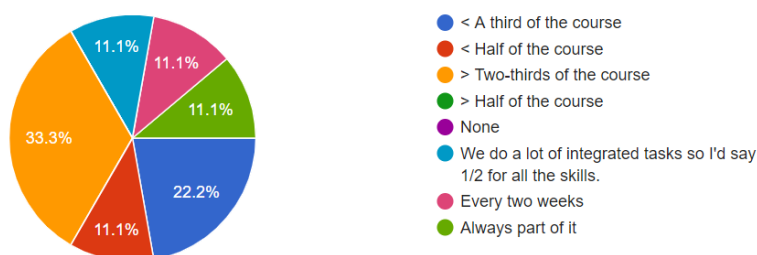


Graph 8

Second, as far as the writing is concerned, this is one of the principal skills in the ET and its weight within the English exam is the highest (4 points). All the participants give some class time during the year to improving this skill. However, as expected, they do not dedicate the same amount of time on it (*Graph 9*): the vast majority of the teachers (55.5%) spend a considerable number of hours on writing: 33.3% dedicate more than two-thirds of the course to this; 11.1% confirm that it is always part of the course and only one participant stated that “a lot of integrated tasks” are carried out. The rest of the participants (44.6%) give less than a third of the course (22.2%) or less than a half of the course (11.1%) to this skill. One participant indicated working on this skill every two weeks (11.1%).

How much time do you give to the Writing Skills during the academic year?

9 responses

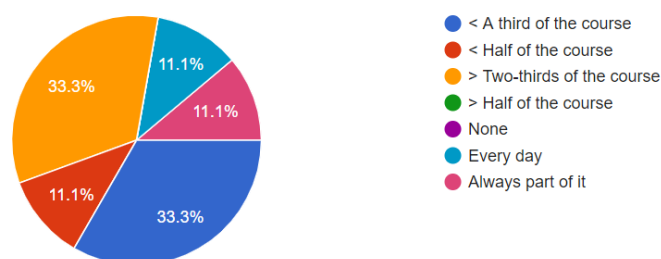


Graph 9

With regard to listening comprehension, the last skill assessed in the ET, it is always present in the English classes, as the previous skills were. Nevertheless, teachers differ in the amount of time given to it and their answers are varied (*Graph 10*): on the one hand, 33.3% of the participants indicate spending more than two-thirds of the course on listening comprehension, only one participant (11.1%) works on this skill every day and another one states that it is always part of the course. On the other hand, 33.3% of the participants dedicate less than a third of the course to listening comprehension and only 11.1% spend less than half of the course working on this aspect.

How much time do you give to the Listening Comprehension during the academic year?

9 responses



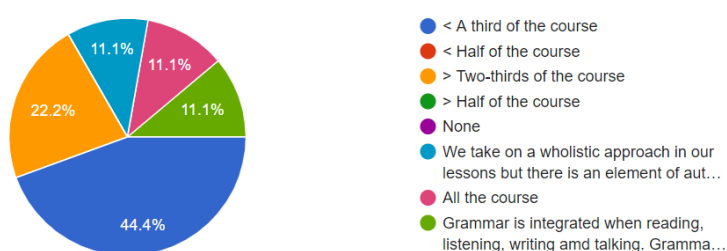
Graph 10

The time devoted to Use of English, an aspect that is not assessed in the ET, varies among participants. A vast majority of the teachers (44.4%) dedicate less than a third of the course to studying and improving areas of grammar and vocabulary. In addition, in

this group of participants that do not devote so much time to this ambit, one participant (11.1%) said she does not work on grammar in isolation since it appears in readings, listenings, writings and also when speaking. Besides, one participant (11.1%) reports that students mostly work on grammar and vocabulary autonomously with a self-reference book. However, some participants dedicate more than two-thirds of the course (22.2%) or all the course (11.1%) to working on the area of Use of English.

How much time do you give to the Use of English (Grammar and Vocabulary) during the academic year?

9 responses

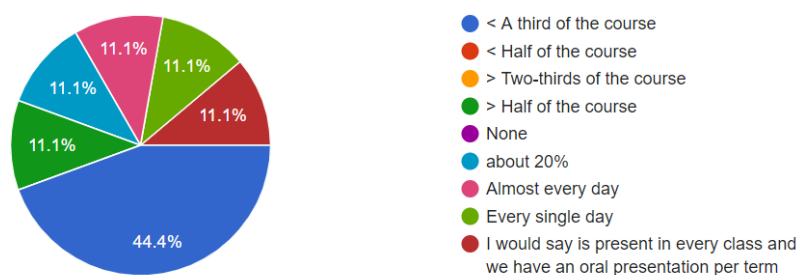


Graph 11

Concerning speaking, a range of distinct dedication is given to this skill, unassessed in the ET, among the teachers (*Graph12*). On the one hand, some teachers do not dedicate as much time to oral production as to the remaining skills (44.4% spend less than a third of the course and 11.1% spend 20% of the course on this). On the other hand, four participants consider that they spend sufficient time practising speaking: more than half of the course (11.1%), “every single day” (11.1%), “almost every day” (11.1%) and that it is “present in every single class [which includes] an oral presentation once a term” (11.1%). Therefore, a higher percentage is represented by teachers who give less time to speaking production than to any other assessed content in the ET.

How much time do you give to the Speaking during the academic year?

9 responses



Graph 12

In question 17, participants were asked whether they work on other aspects or skills that have not been previously enquired into. Only six out of nine teachers answered this question and two of them stated that they did not spend time on other skills. One of them considers that there is “not much time left”. The rest of the teachers work on different aspects such as readers, yearbooks, or group activities (*Graph 13*).

Do you work on other aspects or skills? (Specify)

6 responses

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Readers, Yearbook                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| culture / interculturality / plurilingual awareness                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| no                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Group work activities, music projects, kahoot , films, documentaries, YouTube videos,. I like them to prepare their own videos specifying some premises. Oral presentations in front of the class and in front of other courses. Google classroom,. The use of mobiles, tablets or computers and so on |
| History, News, Songs, Games, Projects...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| not much time left                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

Graph 13

In light of these results, it can be stated that the ET is taken into consideration when teaching and that, in a clear sense, it is “what teachers teach”.<sup>7</sup> Although reading and listening comprehension, writing, speaking and Use of English are included in all the

<sup>7</sup> Hypothesis number 3: “A test will influence what teachers teach” (Alderson and Wall, 1996: 120).

survey participants' classes, the skills assessed in the ET are more present in those classes than is the case for the skills excluded from the test. Thus, a negative washback effect on the curriculum can be found. According to Martín Martín (2012), there is an unwritten law stating that a focus on content that is excluded from the SUEE in the last year of baccalaureate study is, simply stated, a waste of time.

Another evidence deduced from the results in this section of the questionnaire and the analysis of the curriculum in the second year of the baccalaureate is that the ET may influence the curriculum since the educational programme is not greatly restricted and teachers can actually adapt their lessons to what they think is important (usually, the skills present in the ET).

For further research in this field to verify the negative washback effect on curriculum, and to provide more information on this aspect, some class observation and a study of the students' opinion on this subject could be of great interest. Both aspects might offer a new perspective, since triangulating findings could be useful in order to corroborate, or not, previous information.

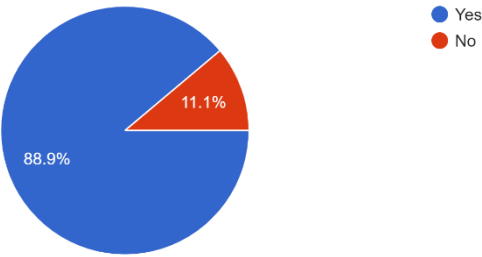
#### **4.1.2. Materials**

The second section of the questionnaire is given over to materials used in class. Four questions are asked in order to determine whether there may be a possible washback effect on materials. The issues in this section deal specially with the use of exam-related materials.

First, teachers were asked whether they use exam-related materials to prepare students effectively for the ET. Eight out of nine participants indicate that they work with these materials to prepare their students (*Graph 14*). Six teachers use textbooks, self-made materials and previous English tests used in earlier sittings of the Spanish

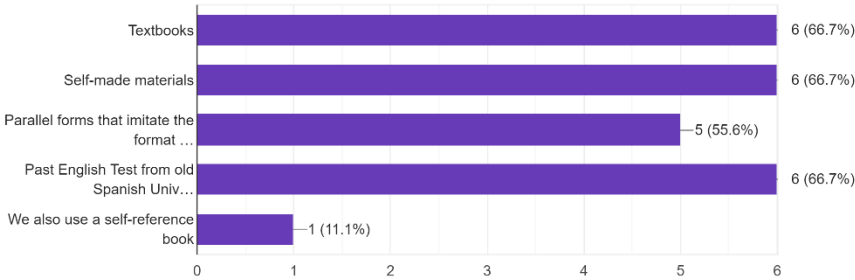
University-Entrance Examination; five teachers also use parallel forms that imitate the format of the English Test. Additionally, one teacher uses a self-reference book (*Graph 15*). Participants who use textbooks are asked to provide their reference. According to their reply, with the exception of three participants who use *Key to Bachillerato*, all of them use different textbooks (*Graph 16*).

Do you make use of exam-related materials to prepare students effectively for the ET?  
9 responses



Graph 14

What kind of materials do you use in your English lessons?  
9 responses



Graph 15



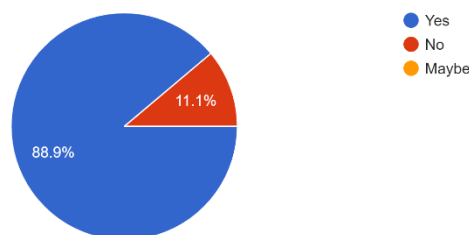
If you use a textbook, could you provide the reference?  
8 responses

|                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------|
| Key to Bachillerato 1 and 2                     |
| Advantage 2 - Burlington                        |
| First Certificate Language Practice (MacMillan) |
| Key to Batxilkerato - OUP                       |
| Advanced Result CAE                             |
| LIVING ENGLISH 2 (Burlington Books)             |
| Burlington Advantage                            |
| Key 2. OUP                                      |

*Graph 16*

As the ET date approaches, most of the participants make heavier use of exam-related materials. Only one participant claims not to use the above-mentioned material (*Graph 17*). Therefore, materials are clearly influenced by the ET since teachers use exam-related materials, particularly when the test is imminent. The washback effect on materials is negative, since their main objective is preparation for performing well in the exam. For future studies on this section, an analysis of the textbooks used in English classes in the second year of baccalaureate would be useful to carry out. This would allow researchers to examine how the skills (included and excluded in the ET) are distributed within the textbook and to determine the time and space allocated to this content.

Do you make a great use of exam-related materials as the English Test dates approach?  
9 responses



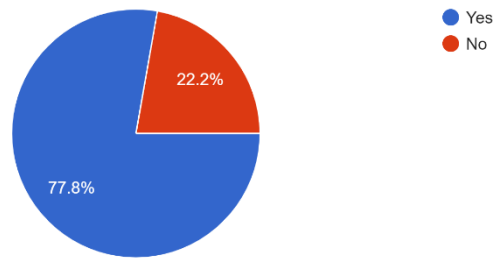
*Graph 17*

#### 4.1.3. Teaching Method

The last section of the questionnaire focusses on the teaching methodology used among the participants in relation to the ET. In order to determine whether the ET influences this aspect, five questions are asked.

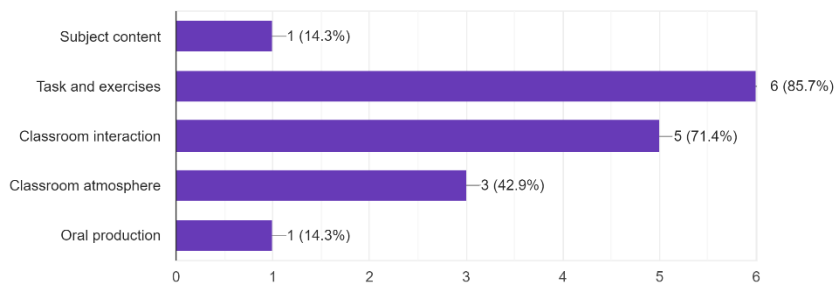
According to 77.8% of the participants, preparing the students for the ET affects their way of teaching. Only two participants are not in agreement with this statement as they consider their teaching is not influenced by any ET preparation (*Graph 18*). The aspects that they consider most affected by the influence of the high-stakes test vary, but tasks and exercises (85.7%) and classroom interaction (71.4%) are deemed to be the most affected. Furthermore, classroom atmosphere (42.9%), subject content (11.1%) and oral production (11.1%) are also affected (*Graph 19*). As far as oral production is concerned, although only one person thinks that it is affected by the ET, when participants are asked specifically whether students' interaction and oral production in class is affected by the fact of having to prepare students for the ET and why, a range of answers are given: on the one hand, five out of eight teachers (one participant did not answer this question) think that they are affected by the language. Nevertheless, different reasons were forwarded by the participants in which the importance of grades among students, the exclusion of oral production in the ET, insufficient time to practise speaking and the fact that writing is difficult for students are the main reasons given by the participants. On the other hand, two participants think that students' interaction and oral production in class are not affected by the preparation of the ET. One of these indicates "integrating speaking production and speaking tasks" and the other participant believes that the students have a high level of English, which indicates that their interaction and oral production is not influenced. One participant did not answer yes or no to this question, but indicates that "interaction is the key when learning language".

Do you think that preparing students for the English Test affects the way you teach your students?  
9 responses



*Graph 18*

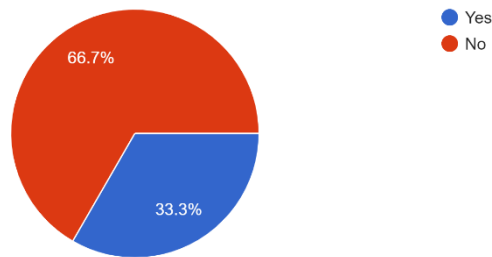
If so, what aspects are mainly affected by it? (Please indicate as many aspects as you consider relevant).  
7 responses



*Graph 19*

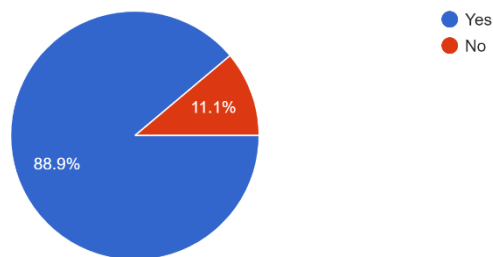
With regard to teaching methodology, in a hypothetical scenario where the ET does not exist, 66.7% of the teachers would not use the same approach. Only 3 participants (33.3%) would use the same teaching methodology they are currently using (*Graph 20*). Therefore, it is clear that the ET has a great impact on their teaching methodology. Moreover, a vast majority of the participants (88.9%) indicate that they work on a strategy for performing well in the ET. Only one participant feels reluctant to use a strategy for this purpose (*Graph 21*).

Would you use the same teaching methodology if there was no English Test?  
9 responses



*Graph 20*

Do you work on any strategy in order to help your students to perform well in the English Test?  
9 responses



*Graph 21*

In light of these results, a direct washback effect exists on teaching methodology since most of the aspects are influenced by the ET. Teachers indicate that they would change the way they teach if SUEE did not exist. Additionally, this section supports the fourth hypothesis by Alderson and Wall (1993: 120), which states that “a test will influence how teachers teach”.

For future studies, listening to teachers’ opinions would be interesting in order to know their views on how they feel when they teach, knowing that at the end of the course their students will perform a high-stakes test that is vital for their future academic life. Moreover, asking teachers for suggestions in order to reach a positive washback would be of great interest since they approach the ET from an influential position, as the ones who provide knowledge to the students.

## 5. Conclusion

This TFG began by defining what the so-called ‘washback’ is and describing its historical evolution, based on certain research. As regards the origins of this phenomenon, Alderson and Wall (1993) and Hughes (1989) are the pioneers of this concept and are always included in subsequent research.

The washback effect is the influence that tests have on different aspects such as learners, teachers, curriculum and materials. It can be harmful or beneficial (Hughes, 1989). Usually, negative washback effect is of greater importance as grades have become extremely important for the test-takers, with these grades constantly determining students’ academic future. This in turn leads to the significance attached to high-stakes language tests such as the English Test in the Spanish University-Entrance Examination.

The SUEE is taken across Spain but it varies amongst the autonomous communities. As far as the ET is concerned, in Catalonia, three skills are currently assessed: reading and listening comprehension and written expression. Nevertheless, the ET format has not been always the same; the form and the scoring of the parts in the test have been constantly changing. However, the greatest change took place when the listening comprehension started to be an assessed skill in the exam. Catalonia and Galicia were pioneers in introducing this skill in the ET. One of the main skills that is unassessed in the exam is oral production. Although the BOE proposed introducing a speaking exam in the ET in 2008, this has not yet occurred.

The importance of the SUEE is evident at the end of secondary education when almost all subjects are oriented towards to the high-stakes test. In order to observe whether there is a washback effect on English classes in the second year of the baccalaureate, an online questionnaire was given to nine English teachers currently teaching this course. Questions were based on curriculum, materials and teaching method and related to the

ET. The results show that these classroom-related areas are influenced by the ET, and therefore that a washback effect is present. However, class observation, learners' opinion, textbook analysis and teachers interviews would improve this research.

While curriculum, materials and teaching method have been studied in this paper in order to prove a possible washback effect on them, additional areas could also be examined to verify the washback effect (negative or positive) in the second year of baccalaureate within the Catalan context. These would include elements such as learners, teachers and the exams carried out during the last year of their secondary-school education.

Further research on this topic is clearly necessary. Although there are studies on washback and how it affects contents and skills, a more focussed line of research is needed. Washback is an important concept in the general educational environment, but more information and studies are needed in our specific context. The ET in Catalonia influences teaching and learning, as indicated by the study questionnaire; indeed, several authors (Amengua-Pizarro & Méndez García (2012), Bueno Alastuey & Luque Agulló (2012) and Martín-Monje (2012)) have presented distinct proposals to improve the test, including the speaking component but their suggestions have never been introduced in the test. However, the Catalan Government is ultimately responsible for any modification in the ET.

Considering that speaking is an important communicative skill when learning a language, one of main lines of future studies would be to assess how the ET would potentially influence teachers, learners and classroom-related areas if oral production were included in the high-stakes language test. This research would be of particular interest since, according to the data gathered in the questionnaire, oral production is not given great attention in English classes throughout the course.

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## Appendix

(1)

- 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 therefore 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 to 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) Test will have washback on all learners and teachers.
- 15) Tests will have washback effects for some learners and some teachers, but not for others.

(2) *El tercer ejercicio será de lengua extranjera y tendrá como objetivo valorar la comprensión oral y lectora y la expresión oral y escrita. El ejercicio presentará dos opciones diferentes entre las que el estudiante deberá elegir una* (BOE núm. 283, de 24 de noviembre de 2008, p. 46.934).

(3) Reading and Listening scoring since 2017, retrieved from XTEC. *Generalitat de Catalunya* (2019).

Reading + Listening puntuació sobre 3  
Correcte +0,375  
Incorrecte -0,125

| Correctes | Incorrectes | Resultat |
|-----------|-------------|----------|
| 8         | 0           | 3,00     |
| 7         | 0           | 2,63     |
| 7         | 1           | 2,50     |
| 6         | 0           | 2,25     |
| 6         | 1           | 2,13     |
| 6         | 2           | 2,00     |
| 5         | 0           | 1,88     |
| 5         | 1           | 1,75     |
| 5         | 2           | 1,63     |
| 5         | 3           | 1,50     |
| 4         | 0           | 1,50     |
| 4         | 1           | 1,38     |
| 4         | 2           | 1,25     |
| 4         | 3           | 1,13     |
| 4         | 4           | 1,00     |
| 3         | 0           | 1,13     |
| 3         | 1           | 1,00     |
| 3         | 2           | 0,88     |
| 3         | 3           | 0,75     |
| 3         | 4           | 0,63     |
| 3         | 5           | 0,50     |
| 2         | 0           | 0,75     |
| 2         | 1           | 0,63     |
| 2         | 2           | 0,50     |
| 2         | 3           | 0,38     |
| 2         | 4           | 0,25     |
| 2         | 5           | 0,13     |
| 2         | 6           | 0,00     |
| 1         | 0           | 0,38     |
| 1         | 1           | 0,25     |
| 1         | 2           | 0,13     |
| 1         | 3           | 0,00     |
| 1         | 4           | 0,00     |
| 1         | 5           | 0,00     |
| 1         | 6           | 0,00     |
| 1         | 7           | 0,00     |
| 0         | --          | 0,00     |

#### (4) Questionnaire

Dear teacher,

This is a questionnaire for teachers working in the second year of the baccalaureate. The questions here are divided into four sections. The first covers personal information; the following three sections refer to curriculum, material and the teaching methodology that teachers have used just before the English Test in the Spanish University-Entrance Examination (“selectivitat”).

The information that we derive from this questionnaire will be anonymous, private and strictly confidential. Its data will be used in a Degree-Final Project at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

It will only take you 10 minutes to answer this questionnaire.

Thank you so much for your collaboration!

#### **Personal Information**

##### **\* Required**

1. Sex \*

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male

2. Age \*

- ☐ 20-30
- ☐ 31-35
- ☐ 36-49
- ☐ More than 50

3. Years of working experience \*

4. \_\_\_\_\_  
Number of courses you teach in this academic year \*

5. \_\_\_\_\_  
Place of work and city \*

### Curriculum

6. Do you follow the curriculum given by the Department of Education?

*Mark only one.*

- ☐ Usually  
☐ Sometimes  
☐ Never

7. How much time do you give to preparing students for the English Test in the Spanish University-Entrance Examination?

*Mark only one.*

- ☐ A lot  
☐ Quite a lot  
☐ Enough time  
☐ Little time  
☐ Hardly any

8. Do you teach your students the skills and content included in the English Test during the academic year?

*Mark only one.*

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

9. How much time do you give to teaching these skills?

*Mark only one.*

- ☐ < A third of the course  
☐ < Half of the course  
☐ > Two-thirds of the course  
☐ > Half of the course  
☐ None  
☐ Other:  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. Do you give some time to teaching skills and content NOT included in the English Test during the academic year?

*Mark only one.*

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Other:  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. How much time do you give to teaching these skills?

*Mark only one.*

- ☐ < A third of the course
- ☐ < Half of the course
- ☐ > Two-thirds of the course
- ☐ > Half of the course
- ☐ None
- ☐ Other:
- 

12. How much time do you give to Reading Comprehension during the academic year?

*Mark only one.*

- ☐ < A third of the course
- ☐ < Half of the course
- ☐ > Two-thirds of the course
- ☐ > Half of the course
- ☐ None
- ☐ Other:
- 

13. How much time do you give to Writing Skills during the academic year?

*Mark only one.*

- ☐ < A third of the course
- ☐ < Half of the course
- ☐ > Two-thirds of the course
- ☐ > Half of the course
- ☐ None
- ☐ Other:
-

14. How much time do you give to Listening Comprehension during the academic year?

*Mark only one.*

- ☐ < A third of the course  
☐ < Half of the course  
☐ > Two-thirds of the course  
☐ > Half of the course  
☐ None  
☐ Other:
- 

15. How much time do you give to Use of English (grammar and vocabulary) during the academic year?

*Mark only one.*

- ☐ < A third of the course  
☐ < Half of the course  
☐ > Two-thirds of the course  
☐ > Half of the course  
☐ None  
☐ Other:
- 

16. How much time do you give to Speaking during the academic year?

*Mark only one.*

- ☐ < A third of the course  
☐ < Half of the course  
☐ > Two-thirds of the course  
☐ > Half of the course  
☐ None  
☐

Other:

---

17. Do you work on other aspects or skills? (Specify)

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18. What is the average number of students you usually have in your English classes?

*Mark only one.*

- ☐ Fewer than 15  
☐ Between than 15  
☐ Between 15 and 20  
☐ More than 40

Other:

### Materials

19. Do you make use of exam-related materials to prepare students effectively for the ET?

*Mark only one.*

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

20. What kind of materials do you use in your English classes?

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Textbooks  
☐ Self-made materials  
☐ Parallel forms that imitate the format of the English Test  
☐ Past English Test from old Spanish University-Entrance Examination

Other: ☐ \_\_\_\_\_

21. If you use a textbook, could you please provide the reference?

- 
- 
22. Do you make considerable use of exam-related materials as the English Test date approaches?

*Mark only one.*

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Maybe

### **Teaching Method**

23. Do you think that preparing students for the English Test affects the way you teach your students?

*Mark only one.*

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

24. If so, what aspects are mainly affected by this? (Please indicate as many aspects as you consider relevant.)

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Subject content  
☐ Task and exercises  
☐ Classroom interaction  
☐ Classroom atmosphere

Other: ☐ \_\_\_\_\_

25. Do you think students' interaction and oral production in class is affected by the fact of having to prepare for the English Test? Why?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No
-



- 
26. Would you use the same teaching methodology if there was no English Test?

*Mark only one.*

☐ Yes

☐ No

27. Do you work on any strategy in order to help you students to perform well in the English Test?

*Mark only one.*

☐ Yes

☐ No