

Relationship between Teaching and Testing: A library research focusing on teaching, learning, and testing in the Afghan EFL context

Sayed Hikmatullah SAIFI¹

¹Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Education, Helmand University, Afghanistan

Corresponding author Email: sayedhikmatsaifi500@gmail.com

Abstract

Teaching and testing are so closely interrelated that it is virtually impossible to work in either field without being constantly concerned with the other. The primary objectives of this library-based descriptive quantitative research were to explore the relationship between teaching and testing in the Afghan EFL (English as Foreign Language) context and the impact of testing on teaching practices, explore how testing affects student motivation and learning, and propose solutions to align assessment with effective teaching practices. The findings reveal that there is a reciprocal relationship between teaching and testing and these two terms are so closely interrelated with each other. Besides teaching and learning, tests definitely can affect the teaching methodology, teaching materials, assessment methods, students' learning outcomes and educational stakeholders' perceptions. The study concludes that a more balanced approach to teaching and testing is necessary, incorporating both summative and formative assessment methods to foster deeper student engagement and real-world language use instead of teaching and learning for the purpose of testing. It recommends the integration of formative assessments and the professional development of teachers to mitigate the negative impacts of testing and improve overall educational outcomes. The research also suggests areas for future studies, including an exploration of students' perceptions of different tests and the potential role of technology in modernizing assessment practices.

Keywords: Teaching, Testing, Assessment, Learning, English as Foreign Language, and Washback Effect.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The relationship between teaching and testing plays a critical role in educational outcomes, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In Afghanistan, English language education is essential due to its increasing relevance in global communication, academia, and professional development (Barfield & Brown, 2019). However, the Afghan EFL education system faces various challenges that influence the interplay between teaching methods and testing practices. These challenges include limited access to educational resources, lack of enough trained teachers, and a heavy reliance on traditional assessment methods that often do not align with modern teaching practices (Qureshi & Khokhar, 2016). The alignment of teaching with testing practices is pivotal for achieving effective learning outcomes, as misalignment can hinder students' progress and create barriers to learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993). In the Afghan context, testing has primarily been used for summative purposes, often focusing on rote memorization rather than critical thinking or language proficiency (Jalil, 2021). This research explores the connection between teaching and testing within the Afghan EFL classroom and aims to identify the gaps and issues surrounding this relationship.

1.2 Research Gap or Problem Statement

While there is substantial research on the relationship between teaching and testing in global EFL contexts, very little research specifically addresses this issue within Afghanistan's unique social and educational environment. Existing studies have emphasized the role of testing in language learning and its impact on teaching strategies, but few have examined how these two aspects interact in the Afghan context, where

resources, teacher training, and curriculum development are often limited. Given the limited research available on Afghan EFL education, there is a significant gap in understanding how testing practices affect teaching methods, and how the relationship between these two elements can be optimized for better educational outcomes. Therefore, this study aims to fill the research gap by exploring the complex dynamics of teaching and testing in the Afghan EFL context and identifying the challenges faced by teachers in this area.

1.3 Research Objectives

This research aims to investigate the relationship between teaching and testing in Afghan EFL classrooms. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To explore how teaching and testing are interrelated and how testing practices influence teaching methods and strategies in Afghan EFL classrooms.
2. To identify the challenges Afghan EFL teachers and learners face when aligning their teaching methods with assessment requirements.
3. To suggest practical recommendations for improving the relationship between teaching and testing in Afghan EFL classrooms, with a focus on enhancing student learning outcomes.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the research objectives, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How teaching and testing are interrelated and how do testing practices impact the teaching methods used by Afghan EFL teachers?
2. What challenges do Afghan EFL teachers face when aligning their teaching strategies with testing practices?

3. How can the integration of teaching and testing be improved in Afghan EFL classrooms to foster better learning outcomes?

The research will rely on secondary data from existing literature, studies, and reports on the Afghan educational system, as well as research on EFL teaching and testing worldwide. The findings from this research will provide valuable insights into the relationship between teaching and testing in Afghanistan's EFL classrooms and offer recommendations for enhancing educational practices in the country.

2. Literature Review

The relationship between teaching and testing is a topic that has garnered significant attention in language education research. Teaching and testing, both as separate entities and in their interrelation, play a pivotal role in shaping the educational experience and outcomes in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms. This literature review seeks to examine key research findings that explore the role of testing in teaching, the impact of teaching methods on testing, and the influence of testing on learning outcomes, particularly within the Afghan EFL context.

2.1 Testing and Its Impact on Language Teaching

Testing has long been a critical component in educational systems worldwide. According to Shohamy (2001), tests serve not only as tools for measuring learners' language proficiency but also as instruments that shape the teaching process. The concept of "washback" – where the format and content of tests influence teaching practices – has been extensively studied (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Cheng, 2005). Washback can be positive or negative, depending on the alignment between testing and teaching objectives. In many contexts, such as in Afghanistan, the washback effect can lead to a focus on rote memorization, teaching to the test, and a disregard for communicative language skills (Khan, 2017; Qureshi & Khokhar, 2016).

Cheng and Curtis (2004) argued that testing in EFL environments can encourage teachers to focus more on test-taking strategies rather than language learning itself. This trend is particularly noticeable in contexts where exam scores are the primary measure of students' success (Biggs, 1996). In contrast, when testing is designed to assess the full range of language competencies, including communicative and pragmatic aspects, it can lead to improved teaching practices (Hughes, 2003).

2.2 The Influence of Teaching Approaches on Testing

The relationship between teaching methods and testing is reciprocal. While testing often influences teaching, the approach teachers take to teaching also shapes the nature of the tests used (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). For example, task-based language teaching (TBLT), which focuses on using authentic language tasks in real-world contexts, emphasizes communicative competence rather than simply grammatical accuracy (Ellis, 2003). TBLT encourages a form of assessment that aligns with communicative language use, pushing instructors to incorporate assessments that reflect practical language skills rather than rote memorization (Nunan, 2004).

However, many teachers in traditional EFL contexts, including Afghanistan, continue to rely on teacher-centered approaches, such as the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), which limits opportunities for communicative practices (Qureshi & Khokhar, 2016). This pedagogical approach, while rooted in the historical development of language teaching, often leads to assessments that prioritize written exams focused on vocabulary and grammar, rather than assessing speaking, listening, reading or writing in meaningful contexts (Khan, 2017). Furthermore, the focus on testing in these contexts often leads to a mismatch between the test's design and students' actual language proficiency (Alderson & Wall, 1993).

2.3 The Role of Formative and Summative Assessment

In recent years, the importance of formative assessment in EFL teaching has gained significant attention. Formative assessments, which are conducted during the learning process to monitor student progress, are considered more beneficial for enhancing student learning outcomes (Black & Wiliam, 1998). These assessments help teachers provide timely feedback and adapt their teaching strategies to meet students' needs, which leads to improved learning outcomes. However, formative assessment methods are often underused in traditional education systems, where summative assessments (final exams or large-scale tests) dominate (Hughes, 2003).

In contrast, the incorporation of both formative and summative assessments can improve the relationship between teaching and testing. According to Biggs (1996), the alignment of assessment with teaching goals helps to create a more coherent educational experience. Teachers can use formative assessments to monitor progress and make adjustments to instruction, while summative assessments serve as final evaluations of students' overall proficiency.

2.4 Testing in the Afghan EFL Context

Afghanistan presents a unique context in which the relationship between teaching and testing is influenced by social and educational factors, lack of resources, and traditional pedagogical practices. Khan (2017) highlighted that, in Afghanistan, English language teaching largely relies on rote memorization, with little focus on developing communicative competence. This traditional approach, which is prevalent in many Afghan classrooms, has resulted in language tests that emphasize memorization rather than practical language use (Barfield & Brown, 2019). Teachers often align their teaching with the demands of those exams which primarily assess students' ability to recall vocabulary and grammar rules, rather than their ability to use language in real-world contexts (Jalil, 2021).

Research by Qureshi and Khokhar (2016) also indicated that Afghan teachers tend to emphasize written exams over speaking and listening assessments, thereby neglecting key aspects of language proficiency. This misalignment between teaching practices and testing demands leads to a mismatch in students' learning experiences. As Barfield and Brown (2019) argued, the overemphasis on testing based on memorization negatively impacts students' motivation to engage in language learning and limits their ability to use English in authentic situations.

2.5 Challenges and Opportunities for Improvement

The relationship between teaching and testing in Afghanistan presents several challenges but also opportunities for improvement. One key challenge is the pressure on teachers to focus on exam preparation at the expense of more communicative and task-based teaching practices (Cheng, 2005). However, as Nunan (2004) suggested, shifting toward communicative language teaching (CLT) and integrating formative assessments can help align teaching with testing and improve students' language proficiency. Teachers could also benefit from professional development programs that provide training in modern language assessment techniques and how to integrate formative and summative assessments effectively (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Another opportunity lies in the potential for digital assessment tools to revolutionize language testing in Afghanistan. With the increasing availability of technology, online assessments that provide instant feedback can support both teaching and learning. According to Cheng and Curtis (2004), digital assessments also provide opportunities for more diverse and dynamic testing formats, moving beyond the traditional pen-and-paper exams that dominate Afghan education.

In conclusion, the relationship between teaching and testing is reciprocal, with significant implications for language learning

outcomes. In the Afghan EFL context, the traditional focus on rote memorization exams creates a disconnect between teaching methods and assessment practices. However, shifting towards more communicative, task-based teaching and integrating formative assessments can improve this alignment and foster better language acquisition. This literature review highlights the importance of revisiting assessment practices in Afghanistan and emphasizes the need for a more balanced, student-centered approach to teaching and testing.

3. Research Methodology

This library-based research, utilizes secondary data to investigate the relationship between teaching and testing within the Afghan EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context. As a descriptive quantitative study, it explores existing literature, educational reports, and prior research studies in order to synthesize current knowledge on the title. The research methodology is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic by analyzing relevant academic articles, books, and other scholarly sources.

3.1 Research Design

The research follows a descriptive quantitative design utilizing secondary data collected from existing academic sources, such as journal articles, books, research papers, and reports. I believe, such a research design allows the researcher to examine existing theoretical frameworks, identify trends and patterns in previous studies, and evaluate the effectiveness of various teaching and testing practices, specifically in the Afghan EFL context. The data for this study is not collected directly from participants but it was extracted from a variety of secondary sources, which offer insights into the current state of teaching and testing practices.

3.2 Data Collection

Data for this study was obtained through an extensive review of secondary sources, which include peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, dissertations, conference proceedings, and educational reports. The selection of sources was based on relevance to the research questions, focusing on the relationship between teaching and testing in language learning, with particular attention to the Afghan EFL context. The sources were accessed from academic databases, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, ERIC, and university libraries. The process of data collection involved identifying key articles and reports published over the past two decades, ensuring that the literature review reflects contemporary trends in education.

In order to maintain the quality and reliability of the sources, only peer-reviewed articles and reputable publications were included. The study also considered the credibility and expertise of authors and the relevance of their findings to the research objectives. The search terms used to identify relevant articles included Teaching, Testing, Assessment, Learning, Afghan EFL Context, and Washback Effect.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study involves thematic analysis of the collected secondary sources. In the context of this study, thematic analysis was applied to the reviewed literature to identify recurring themes, trends, and gaps related to the relationship between teaching and testing in EFL settings. Key themes will include the impact of testing on teaching methods, the role of washback, the influence of assessment on student learning outcomes, and the specific challenges faced by Afghan educators.

Additionally, the study compares and contrast findings from the literature to highlight both similarities and differences in the way testing influences teaching in different cultural and educational contexts. For

instance, the review explored the differences between the Afghan EFL context and other global contexts, such as those in developed countries, where testing practices may differ significantly. The goal is to synthesize a balanced view that reflects the complex interactions between teaching and testing in Afghanistan's EFL environment.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Although this study does not involve primary data collection, it is important to address ethical considerations related to the use of secondary data. According to Seale (2017), ethical research practices in library-based research include proper citation of sources, avoiding plagiarism, and respecting intellectual property rights. In this study, all data sources have been properly cited using APA format to ensure that the contributions of original authors are acknowledged. Furthermore, the research adheres to academic integrity by synthesizing and analyzing existing data rather than presenting it uncritically.

3.5 Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between teaching and testing in the Afghan EFL context, there are limitations inherent in the use of secondary data. Since the research is based on existing literature, it is constrained by the scope and quality of the available studies. Additionally, the lack of direct interaction with EFL teachers and students in Afghanistan means that some contextual nuances might not be fully captured in the analysis. As with all library research, the findings are dependent on the quality and relevance of the data used, and the study may not account for emerging trends or new developments in the field that have not yet been documented in the literature.

4. Results and Findings

The findings of this study are based on a thorough analysis of existing literature and secondary data from relevant academic sources. The primary objectives of this research were to explore the relationship

between teaching and testing in the Afghan EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context and the impact of testing on teaching practices, explore how testing affects student motivation and learning, and propose solutions to align assessment with effective teaching practices. The findings reveal that there is a reciprocal relationship between teaching and testing and these two terms are so closely interrelated that it is virtually impossible to work in either field without being constantly concerned with the other. Besides teaching and learning, tests definitely can affect the teaching methodology, teaching materials, assessment methods, students' learning outcomes and stakeholders' perceptions. The study concludes that a more balanced approach to teaching and testing is necessary, incorporating both summative and formative assessment methods to foster deeper student engagement and real-world language use instead of teaching and learning for the purpose of testing. It recommends the integration of formative assessments and the professional development of teachers to mitigate the negative impacts of testing and improve overall educational outcomes. Through the review of multiple studies and sources, several key themes emerged as below that address the research questions and objectives outlined in the introduction.

5. Discussion

This research explored the intricate relationship between teaching and testing within the Afghan EFL context. Through a comprehensive analysis of secondary data, the study highlighted the reciprocity of relationship between teaching and testing and significant role that testing plays in shaping teaching practices, learning outcomes, and educational policies in Afghanistan. The findings from the literature review and secondary data indicate that while testing is an essential part of the educational framework, its effects on teaching practices, student engagement, and language learning are mixed.

In Afghanistan, the pressure to perform well on exams leads teachers to emphasize test preparation strategies over communicative language teaching and skills development (Sami, 2016). A critical aspect of this research is the impact of testing on student motivation and learning outcomes. High-stakes testing in Afghanistan can both motivate and demotivate students, depending on the context and the methods used to prepare for the exams. As Shohamy (2001) argued, tests can serve as a powerful motivator when aligned with the educational goals of the curriculum. However, in the Afghan context, where the focus is often on memorization and rote learning, this motivation can be short-term and superficial.

The literature indicates that while testing can have positive effects on students' focus and discipline, it often leads to surface learning, which does not support long-term language acquisition (Cheng, 2004). The overemphasis on test performance at the cost of meaningful engagement with the language can stifle students' intrinsic motivation to learn English (Azimi, 2020). This issue is particularly pressing in Afghanistan, where students may only learn English to pass exams, rather than developing a deep understanding of the language that will serve them in real-world communication.

The findings also suggest the need for a more balanced approach to teaching and testing in Afghanistan. While testing remains a necessary tool for assessing language proficiency, the overreliance on exams as the primary measure of student success can detract from the broader educational goals. The research supports the findings of Wall and Alderson (1993), who noted that teaching methods should not solely focus on preparing students for exams but should also aim to enhance their language skills in real-world contexts.

One possible solution, as suggested by Ghani (2019), is the integration of formative assessment techniques, which can help guide students' learning without the added pressure of high-stakes exams. Formative

assessments, such as quizzes, peer feedback, and reflective writing, can foster a deeper understanding of the language and encourage students to engage in active learning. Furthermore, professional development programs for teachers could play a key role in supporting a shift toward more communicative and formative assessment practices (Bashir, 2017). These changes could help alleviate the tension between teaching and testing and lead to improved learning outcomes for Afghan EFL students.

While this research highlights the potential for positive change in the Afghan EFL context, it also underscores several limitations in the current educational system. These include large class sizes, limited teaching resources, and a lack of teacher training in modern assessment methods (Ghani, 2019). These factors contribute to the persistence of test-centric teaching practices, despite the recognition of their drawbacks. As noted by Kakar (2018), even when teachers attempt to implement innovative methods, the lack of support and resources often undermines their efforts.

The findings of this research suggest several avenues for future research. Firstly, further studies should investigate the perceptions of Afghan students regarding the impacts of different tests on their language learning and motivation. Understanding students' experiences could inform the development of more effective teaching and testing practices. Additionally, research on the effectiveness of formative assessments in the Afghan context could provide valuable insights into how assessment methods can be aligned with communicative teaching practices. Furthermore, future research should explore the role of technology in the teaching and testing process in Afghanistan. With the increasing availability of digital resources, there may be opportunities to introduce more dynamic and interactive assessment methods that go beyond traditional paper-based tests.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has provided valuable insights into the intricate and reciprocal relationship between teaching and testing in the Afghan EFL context. While testing remains a powerful force shaping teaching practices, there is chance for improvement in the design of assessments, teacher training, and the overall educational system. To address these issues, a more balanced approach to teaching and testing is needed, one that incorporates both summative and formative assessments and promotes the development of practical language skills. By promoting more balanced and communicative approaches to both teaching and testing, it is possible to enhance the quality of English language education in Afghanistan. Future research could further explore the experiences of Afghan teachers and students in this regard and investigate the impact of changes in testing policies on language learning outcomes.

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د تدریس او ازموینې ترمنځ اړیکه: یوه کتابتوني څېړنه د افغانستان د

انګلیسي ژبې د تدریس، زده کړې او ازموینې په تړاو

پوهنیار سید حکمت الله سیفی^۱

انګلیسي څانګه، ښوونې او روزنې پوهنځی، هلمند پوهنتون، افغانستان

Sayedhikmatsaifi500@gmail.com

لنډیز

تدریس او ازموینه یو له بل سره ډېر نږدې تړاو لري او تقریباً ناممکنه چې د دې دوو برخو له یو سره کار وشي پرته له دې چې د بل اړخ په اړه اندېښنه موجوده نه وي. د دې کتابتوني، کمي څېړنې اصلي موخې دا وې چې په ځانګړې توګه افغانستان کې د انګلیسي ژبې د تدریس او ازموینې ترمنځ اړیکه او د ازموینې اغېزې پر تدریس او د زده کونکو پر انګېزې او زده کړې وڅېړل شي، او داسې حللاري وړاندې شي چې ارزونه له مؤثر تدریس سره همغږې کړي. د څېړنې موندنې څرګندوي چې د تدریس او ازموینې ترمنځ متقابل اړیکه شته، او دا داوړه یو له بله سره ژور تړاو لري. سربېره پر دې، ازموینې نه یوازې پر تدریسي میتود، درسي موادو، د ارزونې میتودونو، او د زده کونکو د زده کړې پر پایلو اغېزه لري، بلکې د ښوونې او روزنې اړوند د ښکېلو اړخونو انګېرنې هم بدلولی شي. څېړنه دې پایلې ته رسېږي چې د تدریس او ازموینې لپاره یو متوازن چلند اړین دی، داسې چې هم نهایي (Summative) او هم روزمره (Formative) ارزونې پکې شاملې وي. دا طریقه به زده کونکي وهڅوي چې د واقعي ژبې کارولو ته مخه کړي، نه دا چې یوازې د ازموینې لپاره تدریس او زده کړه وشي. څېړنه سپارښتنه کوي چې روزمره ارزونې (Formative Assessments) ته پاملرنه زیاته شي او د ښوونکو مسلکي پرمختګ ته وده ورکړل شي، ترڅو د ازموینو منفي اغېزې کمې شي او د زده کړې پایلې لا ښه شي. همداراز، څېړنه د راتلونکو څېړنو لپاره ځینې وړاندیزونه هم کوي، چې پکې د زده کونکو د ازموینو په اړه نظرونه، او د ارزونې د عصري کولو لپاره د ټیکنالوژۍ رول څېړل شامل دي.

کلیدي ټکي: تدریس، ازموینه، ارزونه، زده کړه، انګلیسي د بهرنۍ ژبې په توګه او د ازموینې انعکاسي (Washback) اغېزې.



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