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Investigating the Washback Effect of BEM Examination on Middle School EFL Pupils' Learning Strategies Use The case of EFL Pupils at BOUREZGUE ABDELMADJID Middel School M'sila

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Dedication

First of all, we are thankful and grateful to almighty Allah for his guidance in finishing this work.

We dedicate this dissertation to our families for their love , generous spirit and support through the many years of our education.

To our parents, it is impossible to thank you adequately for everything you have done, for loving us unconditionally to raising us in a stable household where instilled traditional values and taught your children to create and embrace life .we couldn't ask for better parents.

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Abstract

This study investigates the washback effects of BEM (Brevet d'Enseignement Moyen) tests on middle school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' choice of learning strategies in M'sila, Algeria. Given the high-stakes nature of the BEM examination, the research explores how these assessments influence student behaviors, particularly their reliance on specific learning strategies, such as rote memorization and test-oriented preparation, potentially at the expense of communicative and interactive language skills. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative questionnaires with qualitative interviews and classroom observations to assess both learners' and teachers' perspectives. Findings indicate a strong washback effect, where test format and perceived importance shape classroom instruction and learners' strategy preferences. The study concludes with pedagogical recommendations to align assessment with effective language learning practices, promoting strategies that support long-term language development rather than short-term test performance.

Keywords: washback effect,Midel School EFL learners, Learning Stratigies.

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Abbreviations

BEM: Brevet d'Enseignement Moyen (Middle School Certificate – French term)

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

FA: Formative Assessment

DA: Diagnostic Assessment

SA: Summative Assessment

LLS: Language Learning Strategies

SILL: Strategy Inventory for Language Learning

CBA: Competency-Based Approach

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General Introduction

The increasing importance of English as a global lingua franca has led to a growing emphasis on effective English language teaching (ELT) worldwide. Proficiency in English is now considered essential for academic success, career opportunities, and global communication. Consequently, assessment plays a crucial role, not only in measuring learners' language proficiency but also in shaping their learning experiences and academic trajectories. One key aspect of assessment's influence is "washback," also known as "backwash," which refers to the impact of testing on teaching and learning practices.

In language education, washback can be positive or negative. Positive washback occurs when testing encourages beneficial learning behaviors, such as engaging in communicative activities or developing critical thinking skills. In contrast, negative washback arises when testing leads to undesirable consequences, such as rote memorization, excessive focus on test-taking techniques, or neglect of broader language skills(Cheng, L., Watanabe, Y., & Curtis, A. 2004).

High-stakes testing examinations significantly influence students' academic or professional futures, are widely recognized for producing strong washback effects on both teaching and learning (Bailey, 1996; Cheng, 2005). These assessments often shape classroom activities, as teachers and students concentrate their efforts on the content and skills that will be evaluated. While this alignment may lead to more focused preparation and improved performance in specific areas, it can also produce negative consequences, such as teaching to the test, neglecting important but untested language skills, and increasing student stress (Shohamy, 2001; Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996).

It has been observed that the higher the stakes of an examination, the greater its influence on teaching and learning practices. Such influence often leads to a narrowing of classroom activities, aligning them closely with the test's content and format, rather than promoting broader and more holistic educational goals. The nature and extent of washback effects largely depend on the test format, stakes, and alignment with pedagogical goals.

This study investigates the washback effects of the BEM tests on middle school EFL learners' choices of learning strategies. These standardized assessments are high-stakes exams that influence not only students' academic progress but also classroom instruction and curriculum design. Understanding the ways in which these tests shape learning behaviors is essential for optimizing assessment practices and fostering more effective language learning.

2. Statement of the Problem

The BEM tests, as high-stakes assessments, likely exert considerable influence on the curriculum, teaching methodologies, and learners' approaches to studying. While these tests aim to evaluate learners' language competence, their impact on learners' learning strategy choices remains an underexplored area of research.

It is hypothesized that the specific format, content, and perceived importance of the BEM tests may lead learners to adopt particular learning strategies, some of which may be more conducive to test preparation than to genuine language acquisition. For example, if BEM tests primarily assess grammatical accuracy and reading comprehension, learners may prioritize rote memorization and repetitive exercises over communicative and interactive learning approaches. This potential misalignment between test demands and effective language learning strategies constitutes a significant problem, as it could hinder learners' long-term language development and communicative competence.

The limited focus on washback effects in middle school EFL contexts calls for an in-depth investigation into how learners' strategy choices are influenced by BEM test preparation. By examining this relationship, educators and policymakers can make informed decisions to enhance assessment design, pedagogical practices, and student learning outcomes.

3. Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following main research question:

What is the washback effect of BEM examination on Algerian EFL Middle school pupils learning strategies use?

In accordance with the main question a number research sub-questions are asked:

- What learning strategies do middle school EFL learners use when preparing for the BEM tests?
- How do learners perceive the influence of the BEM tests on their use of learning strategies?
- Do the BEM tests encourage or discourage the use of specific language learning strategies?
- Is there a correlation between learners' BEM test performance and their chosen learning strategies?

4. Aims of the Study

This study seeks to achieve the following aims:

- Investigate the impact of the BEM (Brevet d'Enseignement Moyen) examination on the learning strategies adopted by Algerian EFL middle school pupils.

- Identify the types and frequency of language learning strategies utilized by students in preparation for the BEM test.
- Explore learners' perceptions regarding the influence of the BEM examination on their strategic learning behaviors.
- Determine whether the BEM exam encourages or discourages the use of specific language learning strategies.
- Examine the relationship between learners performance on the BEM test and the learning strategies they employ.

5. Hypotheses

This study hypothesizes that:

- Learners preparing for the BEM tests will predominantly employ test-oriented learning strategies, such as rote memorization and practice with past papers.
- Learners will perceive the BEM tests as having a strong influence on their choice of learning strategies.
- The BEM tests may discourage the use of certain communicative and interactive language learning strategies.
- There will be a relationship between learners' BEM test performance and their chosen learning strategies, potentially favoring test-oriented strategies.

6. Research Methodology

This study will employ a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. Quantitative data will be gathered through questionnaires administered to middle school EFL learners, assessing their learning strategy use and perceptions of the BEM tests. Qualitative data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with learners and teachers to gain deeper insights into the washback effects of the BEM tests on learning strategy choices.

Data analysis will involve statistical methods to identify patterns and correlations within quantitative data, while thematic analysis will be used to interpret qualitative responses. The combination of these methods will provide a comprehensive understanding of how BEM tests influence learners' study habits and the broader implications for language education.

7. Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will have important implications for multiple stakeholders, including learners, teachers, curriculum designers, and policymakers. By identifying the specific washback effects of the BEM tests, this research can inform instructional practices and assessment design to ensure that language tests encourage meaningful and effective learning strategies. Additionally, recommendations derived from this study may contribute to more balanced language testing policies that support holistic language development rather than narrow test-driven learning approaches.

Overall, this research seeks to bridge the gap between language assessment and pedagogy, fostering an educational environment where assessments serve as constructive tools for enhancing language proficiency rather than limiting it to test-oriented learning.

CHAPTRE ONE :

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Introduction

This chapter explores key concepts in education, focusing on assessment, washback, and learning strategies, and their influence on student learning, particularly in the Algerian school system. It begins with an overview of assessment and evaluation, highlighting their role in measuring student achievement and guiding teaching practices. The chapter then examines washback, or the impact of testing on teaching and learning, emphasizing its influence on classroom dynamics and student motivation. The next section discusses learning strategies, detailing the methods students use to enhance their learning, influenced by both assessments and instructional practices. Finally, the chapter explores how washback affects these learning strategies, either encouraging or hindering their effectiveness. By integrating these concepts, the chapter lays a foundation for understanding the relationship between assessment, washback, and learning strategies in Algerian education.

1.1 Assessment

Astin and Antonio (2012) describe assessment as a set of practices used by educators and learners to measure skills, assign grades, or issue certifications. It includes tools such as exams, reports, essays, projects, portfolios, and standardized tests. They emphasize that its main purpose is to collect data on learners' performance, language skills, and institutional practices, in order to improve the teaching and learning environment. Similarly, Sárosdy et al. (2006) explain that assessment is also used to evaluate language progress and learning outcomes, or to provide learners with feedback before official exams sometimes without giving scores. Although *assessment*, *testing*, and *evaluation* are often used as synonyms in academic literature (Bachman, 1990), they serve different functions. Understanding these distinctions is key to a clearer grasp of what assessment truly involves.

1.1.2. Importance of Assessment

According to Appiah and Tonder (2018), assessment holds a fundamental position in the context of higher education. Zhao (2013) links this importance to the teaching process, suggesting that assessment provides valuable insights for instructors. It allows them to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching, gauge learners' understanding, determine whether educational objectives have been achieved, and pinpoint key areas of learning. Zhao also emphasizes that learners benefit as well, since assessment informs them about their academic progress and learning outcomes.

Hyland (2003) adds that assessment supports effective teaching aligned with students' needs and future goals. It contributes to fair evaluation of student achievement, enhances learning progress, and helps in designing and assessing course content. Furthermore, it enables teachers to detect learning difficulties and apply suitable interventions. He also argues that assessment can boost student motivation, encourage greater effort, and prepare them for standardized or national examinations. In his view, it plays a guiding role in shaping the course and judging the success or failure of teaching strategies or materials used.

In a similar perspective, Black (2003) considers the data collected through assessment as essential feedback that informs instructional decisions and improves learning outcomes. The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC, 2007) also highlights its dual role in enhancing both institutional performance and student development. It fosters diligence among learners and supports the development of essential skills over time. Furthermore, JISC identifies effective assessment as a key indicator of teaching and learning success.

Nasab (2015) emphasizes its motivational role, highlighting how active learner engagement in assessment can inspire continuous effort and improvement. In this regard, Crisp (2011) advocates for carefully designed assessments that are meaningful for both

teachers and learners. Such assessments should focus on long-term educational goals with societal impact, while also reflecting student performance effectively (Ridgway et al., 2004).

Similarly, Brown (1999) stresses the necessity for educators to develop solid assessment skills, as this contributes to more effective teaching and learning. Assessment involves various actors—including teachers, tutors, peers, and learners themselves—and should be guided by principles such as reliability, validity, and consistency. Ultimately, it informs the next steps in instruction by using the data gathered to adjust and improve future teaching practices.

Considering all these perspectives, it becomes clear that assessment is a vital component of the educational process, consistently emphasized by researchers for its role in enhancing teaching quality and student achievement.

1.1.3.Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment and evaluation are often used as synonymous terms, although they can represent different concepts depending on the context. Some scholars, like Scriven (1967), view assessment as a component of the broader process of evaluation. Nunan (1992:185) attempts to clarify the distinction by stating: *"assessment refers to the processes and procedures whereby we determine what learners are able to do in the target language… Evaluation, on the other hand, refers to a wider range of processes which may or may not include assessment data."* Based on this definition, assessment can be understood as process-focused, aiming to observe how learners perform specific tasks, while evaluation is more outcome-oriented, emphasizing the final product or achievement.

Drawing from the above, assessment can be defined as the process of collecting and analyzing data from various sources to determine students' language abilities and support their progress in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). As McAlpine (2002) notes,

assessment functions as a form of communication between the various stakeholders in education—providing learners with feedback on their progress, informing teachers about the effectiveness of their instruction, guiding curriculum developers, supporting administrative decisions on resource use, and helping employers gauge applicant quality. Each of these actors uses assessment results for critical reflection and improvement.

To ensure this communication is effective and meaningful, McAlpine (2002) suggests that several key elements must be considered:

- The purpose of assessment must align with the students' specific needs and challenges.
- It should be valid, targeting the appropriate skill or competency, and reliable in terms of consistent outcomes.
- Assessment should be measured against a clear benchmark, whether that be peer performance, set criteria, or the learner's own progress in other areas.
- The difficulty of assessment tasks should match the average ability level of the learners.
- Lastly, the grading system must be transparent and easy to interpret.

The assessment designer is required to take into consideration various parameters, including the motives underpinning this assessment and these entail:

> *"the information that you want to get out of the task, the uses that you will put that information to, how much time and effort you are able to devote to it, what information you wish to convey to students and others" (McAlpine, 2002: 6).*

The assessor's awareness and insightful control over all these issues are of prime necessity for a valid and reliable assessment. In fact, the validity and reliability of any

evaluation should be reached in order to guarantee the accuracy and stability of the obtained outcomes.

Differently couched, it can be defined as a process of systematically gathering data as part of a broad evaluation. In this regard Richards and Schmidt point out that assessment is *"a systematic approach to collecting information and making inferences about the ability of a student or the quality or success of a teaching course on the basis of various sources of evidence". (2002: 35).* Accordingly, assessment can cover different ranges but for the present study the emphasis is centered much more on the learner's assessment to improve his writing skills.

1.1.4. Types of Assessment

Broadly Generally speaking, three types of common assessments are identified, namely diagnostic, formative and summative. They all serve distinct purposes and respond to definite requirements.

1.1.4.1. Diagnostic Assessment (DA)

Diagnostic assessment refers to a form of pre-instruction evaluation used to identify learners' existing knowledge, skills, strengths, and areas of difficulty before any teaching takes place. Its main purpose is to uncover specific learning challenges and inform both lesson planning and curriculum design. This type of assessment acts as a proactive tool, laying the foundation for more effective and targeted instruction.

The benefits of diagnostic assessment extend to both teachers and students. For instructors, it offers valuable insights into what students already know and where their learning gaps lie. This enables teachers to tailor their teaching to address those specific weaknesses, reducing the chances of student boredom due to redundant content or frustration from content that's too advanced. Furthermore, diagnostic data supports the personalization of

instruction, helping educators identify groups of learners who may require additional support on certain topics. Consequently, teachers can organize remedial sessions that allow struggling students to better engage with future material and keep pace with their peers.

1.1.4.2. Formative Assessment (FA)

Formative assessment refers to a wide range of methods that teachers use to conduct in-process evaluations of learners' comprehension, learning needs, and academic progress during a lesson, a unit, etc. Formative assessment is meant for learning. The term formative assessment has been defined by many researchers as Irons (2008) and Clark (2008) as the ongoing process that continuously gathers information about learning capacity and effectiveness of teaching. This type occurs during teaching / learning mode, *"a process used by teachers and students during teaching that provides feedback to adjust learning and continuous learning to improve student achievement of the intended educational outcomes."* (Cowie and Bell, as in Andraide and Cizek, 2010) *"Teachers and students to learn and respond to student learning in order to enhance learning while learning."*

Some researchers have sought to restrict the concept meaning to instances where the alterations to the instruction are fairly immediate.

For Kahl *"A formative assessment is a tool that teachers use to measure student grasp of specific topics and skills they are teaching. It's a 'midstream' tool to identify specific student misconceptions and mistakes while the material is being taught."* (2005: 11).

The **FA** is a set of activities that are undertaken during the learning process for the purpose of identifying learner's level and improving their learning goals. Formative assessment has a direct impact on both the learner and the teacher since it provides teachers with a range of information about the success of their teaching strategies. In this type of

assessment, teachers do not give a final grade to learners' work rather they provide them with feedback about progress in their learning,

1.1.4.3. Summative Assessment (SA)

Summative assessment is referred to as the assessment of learning. It takes place at the end of a course semester or programme which often results by attributing scores/grades on students one`s own performance for the purpose of measurements rather than

improvement. The assessment of learning informs both the teachers and the learners about the effectiveness and the appropriateness summative assessment. It *"...aims to measure or summarize what a student has grasped and typically occurs at the end of a course or a unit of instruction"*, Brown (2003). Briefly, **SA** focuses on global rather than individualized learning.

1.1.4.4. Informal vs Formal Assessment

According to Brown (2003: 5) informal assessment*"can take a number of forms, starting with incidental, unplanned comments and responses, along with coaching and other impromptu feedback to the student."* Informal assessment is anunplanned type of assessment that occurs throughout the classroom performance. The teacher recurrently assesses learners' work through, for instance:

> *"Marginal comments on papers, responding to a draft of an essay, advice on how to better pronounce a word, a suggestion for a strategy for compensating for a reading difficulty, and showing how to modify a student's note-taking to better remember the comment of a lecture."(Brown, 2003: 5-6).*

Teachers may not always be aware that they are engaging in **informal assessment**, as it often occurs spontaneously and becomes part of their daily classroom interactions. Unlike formal assessment, informal assessment does not involve structured judgments about student work. Instead, it consists of supportive, non-evaluative feedback such as "well done," "keep

going," "there's a mistake here," or "why not try this approach?" These comments are intended to guide and encourage rather than formally evaluate.

In contrast, formal assessment is deliberately planned and systematically implemented to provide both teachers and learners with insights into academic performance. As Brown (2003:6) points out, formal assessments are designed to measure student achievement in a structured way. Although they may appear similar to tests, it is important to distinguish between the two. All tests are forms of formal assessment, but not all formal assessments are tests. While formal assessments—such as portfolios or learner journals—aim to gauge students' progress and abilities, tests are typically time-bound and designed to produce definitive judgments or scores (Brown, 2003:8). Therefore, formal assessment evaluates learners' performance in specific areas without necessarily leading to final decisions about their progress or achievement.

1.1.5. Methods of Assessment in the Algerian School

1.1.5.1. Overview of Assessment Practices

Assessment in Algerian schools plays a crucial role in tracking students' progress and shaping teaching strategies. For decades, the system has relied heavily on summative evaluations, particularly national exams like the Brevet d'Enseignement Moyen (BEM) and the Baccalauréat (BAC). These high-stakes tests significantly influence students' educational paths (Kerma & Ouahmiche, 2018). However, they tend to focus more on rote memorization and written accuracy rather than actual language use or communication skills. Benmoussat and Benrabah (2007) note that English exams in Algeria often emphasize vocabulary and grammar over listening and speaking. Similarly, Bouzidi (2006) highlights that classroom assessments are predominantly written, which restricts the development of oral skills—

especially at the middle school level, where students are still in the early stages of language acquisition.

1.1.5.2. Traditional Assessment Methods

In Algerian secondary schools, teachers often rely on traditional testing formats like multiple-choice questions, true/false items, and short written responses. These methods are convenient to administer and grade, particularly in large classrooms. Kerma and Ouahmiche (2018) observe that such tests remain widespread because they align easily with the old curriculum and are simple to manage. However, these assessments mainly target surface-level recall rather than deeper understanding. Benmoussat and Benrabah (2007) argue that these tests evaluate only lower-order thinking skills and do little to foster students' ability to use English in meaningful, real-life situations. For instance, a standardized test with a mix of question types may quickly check whether students remember facts taught in class—an approach that, according to Kerma and Ouahmiche (2018), is both familiar and widely used among teachers.

1.1.5.3. Emergence of Formative Assessment and Competency-Based Approaches

In recent years, educational reforms have introduced shifts toward formative assessment. This model emphasizes continuous monitoring and feedback to support student learning, rather than relying solely on a final exam to determine achievement. Formative assessments include class observations, quizzes, group projects, and oral examinations that offer teachers the opportunity to adjust instruction based on ongoing student performance. However, Kerma and Ouahmiche (2018) found that while primary school teachers tend to report high confidence in traditional tests, they exhibit challenges in effectively implementing competency-based or formative strategies.

The study highlights that teachers often feel less competent when using assessment methods aligned with the competency-based paradigm. For instance, portfolio assessments, essay-type tasks, self-assessment, and peer-assessment were areas in which teachers reported lower proficiency. This reluctance underscores a need for focused in-service training and professional development aimed at transitioning from summative-dominated practices toward more dynamic, student-centered approaches.

1.1.5.4. Challenges and Implications

Key challenges arise from the entrenched nature of traditional practices. Large class sizes, limited resources, and insufficient training in newer assessment techniques complicate efforts to diversify assessment methods. The reliance on summative assessments means that changes to incorporate formative approaches often progress slowly and unevenly across different schools. Moreover, the cultural and systemic expectations regarding teaching and learning may further reinforce the predominance of summative examinations. Kerma and Ouahmiche (2018) suggest that for meaningful reform to take place, continuous professional development—including workshops on alternative assessment strategies—must be a priority for policy makers and school administrations.

Implications for Practice:

- **Teacher Training:** Regular, targeted workshops could help teachers build the competencies required to design, implement, and interpret formative assessments.
- **Curriculum Alignment:** Revising curricula to include clear guidelines and examples for competency-based assessment could facilitate a smoother transition.
- **Resource Allocation:** Increased access to digital tools and contextualized professional support may enhance the effectiveness of formative methods

1.2. Washback

In the early 19th century, studies have been proceeded on the concept of the effect of testing on learning and teaching. Yet, research on washback can be traced back to the 1980's due to the fact that teachers, schools, and governments have begun to give much solicitude to test preparation, much importance was endued to measurement outcomes and the focus has mainly been put on the knowledge and skills that tests measured.

1.2.1. Definition of Washback

In educational contexts, the terms "washback" and "backwash" are often used interchangeably. While *washback* is rarely found in standard dictionaries, *backwash* appears more frequently. For instance, *Merriam-Webster's Electronic Dictionary* defines *backwash* as "a backward flow or movement produced especially by a propelling force." Despite this, many British applied linguists have adopted the term *washback* instead of *backwash* to specifically describe the impact that testing has on teaching and learning (Alderson & Wall, 1992, p.2). Thus, it is generally accepted that there is no significant semantic difference between the two terms.

Washback, also referred to as backwash, describes the influence that testing can exert not only on learners and teachers but also on educational practices more broadly. As Hughes (2003) notes, tests can carry significant consequences, and it is these consequences that define the washback effect. In high-stakes contexts, this influence often extends beyond the classroom, shaping curricula, instructional methods, and assessment strategies in ways that prioritize test performance. While washback can encourage alignment between teaching and assessment goals, it may also lead to a narrowing of educational objectives, focusing primarily on tested content at the expense of comprehensive skill development. The concept gained notable attention through the work of Alderson and Wall (1993), whose influential

article proposed fifteen washback hypotheses. These hypotheses examine how tests may shape behaviors, attitudes, and outcomes across various stakeholders in the educational process.

1) A test will influence teaching

2) A test will influence learning

3) A test will influence what teachers teach

4) A test will influence how teachers teach.

5) A test will influence what learners learn.

6) A test will influence how learners learn.

7) A test will influence the rate and sequence of teaching.

8) A test will influence the rate and sequence of learning.

9) A test will influence the degree and depth of teaching.

10) A test will influence the degree and depth of learning.

11) A test will influence attitudes to content, method, etc. of teaching/learning

12) Tests that have important consequences will have washback

13) Tests that do not have important consequences will have no washback

14) Tests will have washback on all learners and teachers Washback is a context-dependent phenomenon, affecting some teachers and learners while leaving others largely unaffected (Alderson & Wall, 1993, pp. 120–121). It refers to the influence—positive or negative—that testing exerts on teaching and learning practices (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 634), often shaping instructional focus according to test demands.

1.2.2. Types of Washback

Educationalists make a distinction between two types of washback; positive (beneficial) and negative (harmful).

1.2.2.1. Positive Washback:

It is believed that examinations may bring about some positive effects. Positive washback (sometimes referred to as washforward) indicates the expected test effects. For instance, an exam probably encourages students to make more efforts in their studies or it may boost the link between standards and instruction. This positive washback can be achieved in a way that teachers pick out tests that reflect the teaching goals that are already set. In this context, Hughes (2003) notes that if our goal is to make people able to write compositions, we ought to give them tests in which they will write compositions. However, if our goal is to foster students' ability to read scientific articles, we have to get them do that in the test. That is, there should be no gap between what we seek to teach and what we measure. In fact, this will reinforce students' willingness to learn and tests will contribute positively to the learning process.

In the same line of thought, Brown points out that "washback enhances a number of basic principles of language acquisition: intrinsic motivation, autonomy, self-confidence, language ego, interlanguage and strategic investment, among others". Brown (2003, p.29)

1.2.2.2. Negative Washback

Negative washback refers to the unintended harmful consequences of testing, such as the narrowing of instruction to focus solely on test preparation, often at the expense of broader educational goals. According to Taylor (2005), "negative washback is said to occur when a test's content or format is based on a narrow definition of language ability, and so

constrains the teaching/learning context" (p. 154). Washback is regarded as negative and hurtful if students are taught one thing and the day of the exam, they find something that they never saw before. However, negative washback appears mainly when teachers tend to coach students for a particular test without taking into account other classroom activities "teaching to the test". Additionally, students focus their learning about materials that will be tested rather than developing their completely basic competencies.

1.2.3. Washback and Test Validity

Language tests are not designed randomly. In fact, some criteria should be respected. One of these characteristics is that a test must measure what it is supposed to measure. This feature is named test validity that has been defined as **"*the degree to which a test measures what is supposed to measure, or can be used successfully for the purpose for which it is intended*"** (Richards and Schmidt, 2010, p.622).

It has been defined by Groundlound (1998) as "*the extent to which inferences made from assessment are appropriate, meaningful, and useful in terms of the purpose of the assessment*" (quoted in Brown 2003, p. 22)

Many scholars have examined the relationship between washback and test validity, often highlighting washback as a key element of consequential validity. Alderson and Wall (1993) point out that "some writers have even gone so far as to suggest that a test's validity should be measured by the degree to which it has had a beneficial influence on teaching" (p. 116). In a similar vein, Messick (1996) frames washback within the consequential aspect of construct validity, linking positive washback to authentic and direct assessment practices, and emphasizing the importance of minimizing construct underrepresentation and construct-irrelevant difficulty in testing (p. 241).

morrow (1986) mentions the term washback validity, which means the connection between an exam and the related curriculum (as quoted in Brown, 1997, p.1). Also, studies have found that construct validity is closely related to the washback effect of communicative language test on communicative language instruction.

In the case of the BAC exam, washback validity of this high-stakes exam must be measured as much as the exam leads to a positive impact on instruction. That is, if the BAC exam creates motivation for students to work harder and learn the language, washback validity is the result.

1.2.4. Washback Theories

Washback describes how tests influence teaching and learning. Alderson and Wall (1993) argue that tests direct focus toward exam content, shaping teaching practices. Hughes (2003) views washback as a dynamic process involving teachers, students, and policymakers. Messick (1996) highlights that tests can motivate learners but may also cause stress. Bailey (1996) emphasizes the role of curriculum and resources in shaping washback effects.

1.3 Learning Strategies

1.3.1.Defintion of Learning Strategies

Researchers have been investigating and writing in the field of language learning strategies (LLS) for more than thirty years; however, providing a clear definition of LLS has remained a challenging issue at an international level (Macaro, 2001). Griffiths (2008) notes that the concept has been described as elusive, fuzzy, and fluid, concluding that it has been "notoriously difficult to define" (p. 83). The lack of consensus and confusion regarding the definition of LLS centers on the "nature of strategy, its size and location" (Grenfell & Macaro, 2007, p. 20). In other words, whether LLS are mental, behavioral, or emotional, what constitutes a strategy or sub-strategy, and whether they are conscious or unconscious, are all matters of concern to many researchers.

An overview of some LLS definitions is of salient importance to understand what LLS are and how various researchers have attempted to overcome the definition problem. To begin with, the word 'strategy' has Greek origins—'strategia'—which means "steps or actions generals take for the purpose of winning a war" (Oxford, 2001, p. 362). When the term was introduced to the field of education, it took on a new meaning (Oxford, 1990, 2001). This new meaning was first approached by Rubin (1975) as "techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge" (p. 43).

Further definitions followed during the 1980s and 1990s up to the present, each characterized by the authors' specific interests—either in psycholinguistics or pedagogy (Macaro, 2001). Willing (1988) defines LLS as "specific mental procedure[s] for gathering, processing, associating, categorizing, rehearsing and retrieving information or patterned skills" (p. 7). According to this definition, LLS are claimed to have a cognitive nature, opposing what has been suggested by Wenden (1987), who claims LLS to be behavioral, stating that LLS are "language learning behaviors, learners actually engage in to learn and regulate the learning of a second language" (p. 6).

Other definitions combine both perspectives, declaring that LLS are both cognitive and behavioral: "[LLS are] particular approaches or techniques that learners employ to try to learn L2. They can be behavioral ... or they can be mental" (Ellis, 1997, p. 76). To make it more complex, Oxford (1990) points out that LLS can also be emotional; they are "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations" (p. 8).

A more global definition that encompasses all of these—cognitive, behavioral, and emotional—is provided by Weinstein, Husman, and Dierking (2000), who posit that "learning strategies include any thoughts, behaviors, beliefs or emotions that facilitate the acquisition, understanding, or later transfer of new knowledge and skills" (p. 727).

Dörnyei and Skehan (2003) argue that LLS, like any other concept, cannot be cognitive, behavioral, and emotional at the same time. However, Grenfell and Macaro (2007) assert that "they can as long as they simply remain aids of pedagogy" (p. 28).

A further issue, which remains unresolved, is the basis upon which normal and strategic behaviors can be distinguished; in other words, when it can be said that a given learning activity is strategic or not (Dörnyei, 2005). To find answers to this question and others concerning LLS, lists of LLS features have been outlined to better clarify what they are.

1.3.2. Types of language Learning Strategies

In recent years, a growing body of research has highlighted the effectiveness of language learning strategies (LLSs) in facilitating specific learning tasks and enhancing knowledge acquisition. Scholars have consistently shown that the regular application of LLSs in the EFL classroom significantly contributes to learner success. Consequently, the field of foreign language education has increasingly turned its attention to exploring these strategies.

The importance attributed to LLSs is evident in the various ways researchers have classified them. For instance, O'Malley et al. (1985) categorized LLSs into three main groups: **metacognitive**, **cognitive**, and **socio-affective** strategies. Later, Chamot (1993) differentiated between observable strategies such as *note-taking*—which she referred to as *behavioral*—and internal, unobservable processes like *information retrieval*, which she labeled as *mentalistic*.

Oxford (1990) further advanced this field by distinguishing between *direct* and *indirect* strategies through a theatrical metaphor: she likened direct strategies to *actors* actively engaged on stage, while indirect strategies played the role of *directors*, organizing and guiding the learning process. For example, activities like memorizing vocabulary or grasping grammar rules fall under direct strategies, while actions such as emotional regulation, planning, and collaboration are classified as indirect.

Oxford's contribution became more influential with the development of the **Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)**, a comprehensive questionnaire that has since been widely adopted in global LLS research. Studies utilizing the SILL can be broadly

divided into three categories. The first examines the general use of strategies across different contexts—such as Merrifield (1996) in France; Oxford and Ehrman (1995) in the U.S.; Lunt (2000) in Australia; Wharton (2000) in Singapore; and Mistar (2001) in Indonesia. These investigations typically reveal moderate strategy use among learners.

The second category focuses on the link between strategy use and learner success, often measured through proficiency levels or achievement tests. Key studies in this area include Dreyer and Oxford (1996) in South Africa, and Setiyadi (2004) and Mistar (2006) in Indonesia, as well as Park (1997) in South Korea. Their findings confirm a strong correlation between strategy use and academic performance.

The third category explores factors that influence LLS use, such as **motivation**, **age**, **language proficiency**, **gender**, and **subject matter**, as discussed by Ehrman & Oxford (1990), El-Dib (2004), Yang (2007), Lee & Oxford (2008), and Mistar (2016).

According to Oxford (1990), SILL identifies six types of strategies:

1. **Memory strategies** (e.g., grouping, visualizing),
2. **Cognitive strategies** (e.g., repetition, analysis),
3. **Compensation strategies** (e.g., using the mother tongue when necessary),
4. **Metacognitive strategies** (e.g., connecting new knowledge with prior learning),
5. **Affective strategies** (e.g., managing anxiety or self-encouragement),
6. **Social strategies** (e.g., collaborative learning).

Among these, metacognitive and affective strategies are considered indirect, offering support through reflection, planning, emotional control, and interpersonal cooperation

(Oxford, 1990, p. 151). Each strategy type will be discussed in further detail in the subsequent sections.

1.3.2.1. Memory Strategies

Memory strategies enable learners to store and retrieve new information. Memory is one of the primary and most essential mental functions in human cognition. It involves the active mental process of retaining and reviewing information or experiences. Memory strategies—previously referred to as mnemonics—have been shown to enhance recall by linking new information with familiar words or images (Levin, 1983; Mastropieri, Scruggs, & Fulk, 1990; Woolfolk, 1993). These strategies often include associating new vocabulary with previously learned material, using imagery, or applying grouping techniques (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1991, as cited in Atay, 2007, p. 41). According to Thompson (1987), "memory strategies help learners link one L2 item or concept with another but do not necessarily involve deep understanding" (p. 286).

Mnemonics work by utilising some well-known principles of psychology: a retrieval plan is developed during encoding, and mental imagery, both visual and verbal is used. They help individuals learn faster and recall better because they aid the integration of new material into existing cognitive units and because they provide retrieval cues. (Worthen, J. B., & Hunt, R. R. 2008)

Within memory strategies, many steps are offered to help learners build up a more proficient and compelling memory. Students benefit from being given directions in both visual and verbal format. A difficult word might be substituted by a common word; utilizing visual pictures to remember words; the use of handouts to effectively well sort out the information, improving short memory enrolment by making learners underline, highlight or scribble down words; taking a test as a retrieval practice i.e., it is an act of recalling

information that has been studied from long-term memory; using cues when developing or storing information, such as acronyms, all these are incorporated within memory strategies.

The utilization of mnemonics, which are memory training devices or ways of making sentences to help remembering, include, rhymes, acronyms or reviewing the primary letter of each word. Besides, redundancy can also be a method for recovering data, the more circumstances you go over something, the better your memory will be of that information. In this way, each time you find a different angle, by diverging your approach, you will make more associations in long-term memory. Additionally, defining objectives, deciding on personal goals, recognizing motivation behind the tasks, having a particular realistic objective for all sessions are basic in creating powerful memory strategies. For example, one method for learning foreign language vocabulary is to recall new data as indicated by its sound.

1.3.2.2. Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive strategies are mental routines or procedures for accomplishing cognitive goals like solving a problem, studying for a test or understanding what is being read. Van Dijk and Kintch (1983) gave an astounding depiction of Cognitive strategies:

Thinking and problem solving are well-known examples: we have an explicit goal to be reached, the solution for a problem, and these may be specific operation, mental steps to be performed to reach that goal. These steps are under our conscious control and we may be at least partly able to verbalise them, so that we can analyse the strategies followed in solving the problem. (Janice and Dole et.al., 1983, p. 4)

Cognitive strategies are personal strategies that help learners alter and deal with information. Oxford (1990) stated that *"cognitive strategies can be recognized by the use of a dictionary, organizing information, reading out loud, analyzing, summarizing and reasoning" (why italicized)* (Alharthi, 2011, p.75). Weinstein and Mayer (1986) distinguished three kinds

of cognitive strategies: *"organization strategies, which recognize information to be learned to make it more meaningful; rehearsal strategies, which include the repetition of the information to be learned; and elaboration strategies, which link new knowledge and previously acquired information"* **(Ibid, p.76).**

O'Malley and Chamot contended that: "*Cognitive strategy operates directly on incoming information, manipulating it in a way that enhances learning"* **(1990, p. 44).** Cognitive learning strategies, then, involve rehearsing that includes practising the material being learned, repetition, replicating, posting and underlining; elaborating through associating a new piece of information with information already learned, shaping mental pictures, rewording, summarising, framing analogies, relating new information to definitely known information; and organising by arranging material into an organised framework, gathering, illustrating and outlining.

1.3.2.3. Compensation Strategies

Compensation strategies involve compensation for missing knowledge. Deneme (2008) contended, *"Compensation strategies allow learners to use the language despite the gaps in knowledge"* (2008, p. 84). Compensation strategies include, for example, approximation by using an alternative term that expresses the meaning of the target lexical term as closely as possible. Moreover, students would make up new words to communicate an idea for which they have not had the required vocabulary yet.

Interestingly, compensation strategies in language learning encompass various techniques used by learners to overcome gaps in linguistic knowledge and ensure effective communication. Among these techniques are the use of non-verbal cues—such as mimes, gestures, or facial expressions—which serve to enhance understanding when verbal

expression is limited. Learners may also employ circumlocution, using a series of descriptive or synonymous words to convey the meaning of a term they cannot recall.

In addition, students often select discussion topics based on personal interest or familiarity with relevant vocabulary, thereby reducing the cognitive load during interaction. Another notable strategy is foreignizing, where learners adapt an L1 word to the phonological or morphological system of the target language (L2)—for example, by attaching an L2 suffix to an L1 root word. When communication becomes particularly challenging, learners may also resort to code-switching, temporarily shifting to their first language (L1) to ensure clarity and facilitate understanding.

1.3.2.4. Metacognitive Strategies

metacognitive strategies involve the awareness and control of one's thought and ideas. This kind of strategy requires knowledge that is used to interpret ideas, to solve problems, to think, to reason, but most importantly to learn. Self direction, mindfulness and conscious control of one's own reasoning and learning are referred to as Metacognitive strategies. Purpura (1997) postulatesd:

Metacognitive strategies are commonly discussed within the framework of information processing theory to describe executive functions. These include strategies for planning learning, reflecting on the learning process during its execution, monitoring comprehension or production, and evaluating outcomes after completing a task. Douglas (2000) explains:

Metacognitive strategies are used in information processing theory to indicate an executive function, strategies that involve planning for learning, thinking about the learning process as it is taking place, monitoring of one's production or comprehension and evaluating learning after an activity is completed. (p. 124)

Correspondingly, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) affirmed that metacognitive strategies are “higher order executive skills that may entail planning for, monitoring or evaluating the success of a learning activity” (p. 44). They are also essential for regulating and coordinating cognitive strategies, enabling learners to take control of their learning processes more effectively.

general LLSs, which involve identifying one’s own learning style preferences and needs, planning for a L2 task, gathering and organising materials, arranging a study space and a schedule, monitoring mistakes and evaluating the success of any type of learning strategy.

Nunan (1999) defined metacognitive strategies as “learning strategies that encourage learners to focus on the mental process underlying their learning” (cited in Mistar et.al., 2014, p.297). Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) described that monitoring is an internal system of learners to process information consciously.

According to Chamot (1987), Oxford (1990), Cohen and dorneyei (2002) and Shapira and Lazarowitz (2005), metacognitive strategies are those general skills that are manifested through students’ comprehension, motivation and self-awareness. Wiles (1997) defined them as “self-management… the ability…to plan, monitor and revise, or …control…learning (cited in Alharthi, 2011, p.75). Ehrman, Leaver and Oxford (2003) summarised concisely metacognitive strategies that include “planning on writing, goal setting, preparing for action, focusing, using schemata, activity monitoring, assessing its success and looking for practice opportunities” (Alharthi, 2011, p.75).

In this way, Metacognitive are the way in which a learner plans, monitors and controls his/her reasoning. In the classroom, educators are in charge of helping learners develop better metacognitive skills by joining dynamic reflection through the learning procedure. The educator may assess learners’ work to figure out where their strengths and shortcomings lie.

Students may also consider their learning and decide how well they have learnt something. They may also use self-questioning to check their own particular information as they are learning. Besides, learners may employ discourse to examine thoughts with each other and their instructor as they may give comments to their peers by providing feedback to other students about their work in a constructive way.

1.3.2.5. Affective Strategies

Affective strategies are concerned with managing feelings, inspiration, and attitudes. Along these lines, one's affective traits and knowing how to manage them are identified. As it is stipulated by Deneme (2008), *"affective strategies help regulate emotions, motivations and attitudes"* (2008, p. 84). There is no denying, at that point, that a positive learning condition enables students to boost their learning in general.

Cohen and Dörnyei (2002) contended that affective strategies *"serve to regulate emotions, motivations and attitudes (for example, strategies for reduction of anxiety and for self-encouragement)"* (Cohen & Dörnyei, 2002, p.181).

In fact, lessening anxiety levels with unwinding methods, for example, listening to slow music and profound breathing are one sort of affective strategies. Laughter and the use of humour is also an excellent way to bring down one's tension. Bringing selftalk to the conscious level by reminding oneself of his/her progress and the resources one has available, but more suitably, setting goals for learning; using journals in which one may expound on his emotions to peers; using agenda to quiet nonsensical apprehensions; sharing feelings to a trusted, positive companion are all steps and techniques involved within affective strategies. (Cohen & Dörnyei, 2002, p.181).

1.3.2.6. Social Strategies

Working with peers, asking for cooperation and gaining from and with the others are on the whole under the heading of social strategies. Douglas, rather, put it vividly as that, *"they have to do with social mediating activity and interacting with others"* **(2000, p. 124).** They enable learners to learn through connection with others. Social strategies are altogether variations of three essential strategies. Initially, coordinating with others i.e., communicating with companions or individuals proficient in the target language one is learning. Second, making inquiries for help, clarification, explaining for correctness and lastly, having compassion with others through offering the human experience to others and understanding them.

Cohen and Dornyei (2002) identified three most important social strategies and they include: asking questions, co-operating with others to complete a task, and peer revision **(Ibid, p.180)**. Shapira and Lazarowitz (2005) emphasised the importance of interacting with peers so as to overcome learning obstacles and its effects on

"promoting thinking, facilitating the writing process and thus improving writing as a whole" **(p.74).**

Social strategies can be an exceptionally fruitful teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of various levels and abilities, use a variety of learning activities to enhance their comprehension of a subject. Each member of a group is mindful of realizing not only learning what is taught but also for helping classmates learn; thus, creating an atmosphere of achievement. Importantly, social learning strategies result in participants striving for mutual benefit so that all group members gain from each other's efforts and know that one's performance is mutually caused by oneself and one's team member.

Interestingly enough, social strategies make use of various techniques to advance students' learning and academic achievement, increase students' retention, students' satisfaction with their learning experience, help students develop skills in oral communication, build up learners' social aptitudes, and advance their confidence. More or less, Oxford summarised the diverse sorts of LLSs as follows:

Metacognitive strategies can help students keep themselves on track; cognitive, memory and compensation strategies provide the necessary intellectual tools; and affective and social strategies offer continuous emotional and interpersonal support. **(Abdel Latif, 2006, p. 22)**

Clearly, research into LLSs blossomed in the late 1990s with richness in theoretical conceptions. Meanwhile, it also extended in scope as researchers stepped beyond the focus on the use of LLSs to examine learners' variables and their impact on the use of LLSs. Many factors that affect the choice of LLSs' use are illustrated in the following points.

1.3.3 Learning Strategies Used in Algerian Schools

1.3.3.1. Overview

In recent years, Algerian schools have increasingly recognized the need to transition from traditional teacher-centered approaches toward more student-centered instructional methods. This shift is driven by the goals of the Competency-Based Approach (CBA) and global trends toward active learning methodologies that promote critical thinking, collaboration, and problem solving. Research conducted in both secondary and middle schools indicates that a growing number of educators are adopting explicit strategy training, active learning, and cooperative learning techniques to enhance language acquisition and overall academic performance.

1.3.3.2. Active and Cooperative Learning

Studies have shown that active learning strategies are becoming more prominent in Algerian secondary schools, particularly in the context of language learning. For example, Bouaroua et al. (2024) investigated the use of active learning strategies among first-year students in a science-focused track. The study revealed that techniques such as cooperative learning, role-playing, brainstorming, and project-based activities are seen as effective means to increase student engagement. These methods encourage learners to work collaboratively and to build both linguistic and cognitive skills through interaction and practical problem-solving. Importantly, active strategies shift the focus from the teacher's lecture to students' active involvement—a move that is viewed as essential for fostering the 21st-century skills that Algerian educators seek to develop.

1.3.3.3. Explicit Language Strategy Training

Another line of inquiry has centered on the explicit training of language learning strategies. Benkheddoudja (2022) examined the impact of explicit strategy training on fourth-year middle school pupils' achievement and learning awareness in English language classes. The findings suggest that when students are taught to use metacognitive and cognitive strategies explicitly—such as monitoring comprehension, employing background knowledge to interpret texts, and using dictionaries effectively—they are more likely to develop autonomy and improve their academic performance. This research highlights that while many Algerian schools traditionally emphasize direct instruction and rote memorization, there is an emerging recognition of the value of teaching learners how to learn actively and independently.

1.3.3.4. Integration with Educational Reforms

Both studies note that a major driver behind the adoption of these active and explicit strategy training approaches is the ongoing educational reform in Algeria. The Competency-

Based Approach (CBA) and constructivist theories have inspired curriculum designers to recommend that learning be viewed as a dynamic, interactive process. Consequently, learning strategies such as collaborative tasks, cooperative learning, group investigation, and explicit metacognitive instruction are gradually being integrated into classroom practices. However, challenges still remain; for instance, teachers often report limited training in these newer methods and face difficulties adapting these strategies in overcrowded classrooms and in contexts where traditional examination formats dominate.

1.3.3.5. Challenges and Recommendations

Despite promising advances, research suggests several hurdles to the broad implementation of active learning strategies in Algerian schools:

- **Teacher Training and Professional Development:** Both Bouaroua et al. (2024) and Benkheddoudja (2022) stress that many teachers still rely on traditional methods, partly due to a lack of adequate professional training in active and cooperative learning techniques. There is a clear need for ongoing in-service training and workshops that bridge theory and practice.
- **Classroom Conditions:** Overcrowding and insufficient resources can make the execution of group work or individualized strategy instruction challenging. Innovations in teaching practices must be accompanied by administrative efforts to improve classroom environments.
- **Curricular Constraints:** Given that national examinations often emphasize rote recall, teachers may feel compelled to focus on methods that promise short-term gains on standardized tests rather than on long-term skill development. Aligning assessment with instructional objectives that value critical thinking and active engagement is essential.

1.3.4 The washback effects on learning strategies

In contexts where high-stakes tests have a powerful impact on curriculum and instruction as is often the case in many educational systems, including those in Algeria the washback effect can significantly shape the learning strategies that students adopt. The following points outline the main ways in which washback affects learning strategies:

1.3.4.1.Promotion of Test-Oriented (Surface) Strategies

The washback effect tends to reinforce strategies that are closely aligned with the demands of high-stakes examinations. In such contexts, students may favor surface-level learning tactics such as memorization, drilling, and practicing past test questions—over deeper, more reflective strategies. This "teaching to the test" phenomenon directs both student effort and classroom instruction toward methods that yield immediate exam improvements, often at the expense of cultivating long-term critical thinking, problem solving, and communicative competencies (Alderson, 2005). Consequently, students might become skilled in recalling factual information under timed conditions while neglecting the development of analytical and metacognitive skills.

1.3.4.2.Influence on Teacher Instruction and Classroom Practices

Washback effects extend to the behavior of teachers, who may feel compelled to design lessons and learning activities that closely mimic the format and content of high-stakes tests. When curriculum and assessments are heavily focused on certain content areas and question types, teachers are more likely to adopt instructional strategies that prioritize these aspects. This can lead to a narrowing of the curriculum where alternative approaches—such as inquiry-based learning, collaborative problem solving, and learner-centered activities—are sidelined. The resulting classroom environment may limit opportunities for learners to experiment with various self-regulated, active learning strategies that go beyond the test (Cheng, 2004).

1.3.4.3.Impact on Student Motivation and Autonomy

The pressure to perform on high-stakes tests can have a dual effect on student motivation. On one hand, needing to achieve good test scores may prompt students to develop organized and systematic test-taking strategies, such as effective time management and focused review sessions. On the other hand, overemphasis on predictable exam formats often leads students to become overly dependent on narrow, test-focused methods. This dependence can undermine the development of autonomous learning strategies, reducing opportunities for creative exploration and self-directed study. As a result, learners may struggle to transfer their knowledge to tasks requiring higher-order thinking or real-world problem solving. Research has consistently shown that high-stakes assessments tend to foster surface learning and controlled motivation—focusing on doing well on tests—rather than promoting intrinsic motivation and deeper cognitive engagement (Kaplan-Keleş & Güloğlu-Demir, 2021; Kusurkar et al., 2023).

1.3.4.4.Long-Term Effects on Learning Outcomes and Curriculum Reform

Washback extends its impact far beyond the classroom, influencing long-term educational practices by reshaping curriculum priorities. When high-stakes assessments consistently reward rote memorization and discrete-point knowledge, schools may reallocate resources toward test preparation rather than toward activities that foster critical thinking, collaboration, or authentic learning experiences. Research shows that such testing often leads to curriculum narrowing, with teachers focusing on what is tested while sidelining broader educational objectives (Stecher & Barron, 1999; Menken, 2006). Over time, a self-reinforcing cycle can develop: test performance becomes the primary measure of success, impeding the cultivation of cognitive and metacognitive skills essential for learners in the 21st century (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt, & Ferman, 1996; Menken, 2006).

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the concept of assessment and its central role in shaping the educational process, particularly in the Algerian context. Assessment functions not only as a measure of students' academic achievement but also as a driving force that influences both teaching practices and learning behaviors. The structure and nature of high-stakes examinations in Algeria significantly impact classroom instruction and the strategies students employ to succeed.

The concept of washback was examined as a key factor in understanding how assessments affect the learning environment. When well-designed, assessments can produce positive washback, encouraging the use of effective learning strategies and the development of communicative competence. However, when poorly aligned with curriculum goals, assessments can result in negative washback, limiting learning to memorization and test preparation.

The chapter also addressed language learning strategies, showing how students' approaches to learning are closely connected to how they are assessed. In many Algerian schools, learners tend to adopt passive or surface-level strategies in response to examination-focused teaching, which may reduce the depth and quality of learning outcomes.

Improving assessment practices to better reflect pedagogical aims and support active learning is essential. A shift toward more formative, communicative, and strategy-based assessment can enhance both teaching effectiveness and student engagement. Such reforms can help ensure that assessments contribute to meaningful and lasting educational progress.

Chapter II:

Research Methodology, Data Analysis, and Pedagogical Recommendations

Introduction

Section One: Research methodology

1. The research methodology and design
2. The mixed method research design (the research method)
3. The population and study sample
4. The setting
5. Data collection tools
6. Data collection procedures study.

Section Two :Data analysis procedures

1. Analysis of Teacher's Questionnaire
2. Analysis of Classroom
3. Discussion of Findings
4. Limitations of the Study
5. Conclusion and Recommendations
6. Recommendations

Introduction :

This chapter outlines the methodological framework adopted to investigate the washback effects of BEM tests on middle school EFL learners' choice of learning strategies. It is structured into three main sections. The first section presents the research design, sampling procedures, study setting, and the instruments used for data collection. The second section focuses on the procedures followed in analyzing the collected data, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The final section summarizes the findings and provides recommendations for further research. The overall aim is to gather sufficient data to answer the main research questions related to the influence of BEM testing on learners' strategy use.

Research Methodology

1. Research Methodology and Design

This study uses a descriptive analytical methodology appropriate for investigating the effects of BEM testing on EFL learners' learning behavior. The research combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches to collect, analyze, and interpret data. This mixed-methods approach ensures a richer understanding of how learners adapt their strategies under the influence of high-stakes exams like the BEM.

To achieve a comprehensive view of the BEM test's washback effects, the study incorporates:

- **Quantitative data**: gathered via structured questionnaires distributed to EFL teachers to capture their perceptions of how BEM influences their students' learning strategies.
- **Qualitative data**: obtained through semi-structured interviews with teachers and classroom observations of learners during English sessions. This triangulated approach allows the researcher to explore how learners adapt in practice to meet the expectations of exam preparation.

2. Population and Sample

The research population includes Algerian EFL middle school learners. The accessible population is 4 year middle school pupils at Middle School Bourezgue Abdelmadjid in M'sila district. One class, considered representative due to its overcrowded nature and BEM focus, was selected as the primary sample, comprising 35 pupils. In addition, 20 EFL teachers from different schools were approached to questionnaires. Of these, 15 completed the questionnaire.

3. Research Setting

The fieldwork was conducted at Bourezgue Abdelmadjid Middle School in the M'sila district during the academic year **2024/2025**. The researcher attended English sessions at a frequency of 6 sessions per month, alongside distributing and collecting data from EFL teachers across five other schools in the region.

4. Data Collection Instruments

To meet the study objectives and answer the research questions, three key instruments were employed:

4.1. Teachers' Questionnaire

This structured questionnaire was distributed to 20 EFL teachers one middle schools in M'sila. It consisted of **24 items**, including both **closed and open-ended questions**, categorized into three sections:

The teachers' questionnaire is organized into three main sections. **Section One**, titled Teachers' Background and Professional Experience, aims to collect key demographic and professional information, including gender, academic qualifications, and years of teaching experience. This data provides valuable context for understanding teachers' perspectives and instructional approaches. The section consists of four items.

Section Two, Perceived Washback Effects of BEM Tests on Learners' Strategies and Classroom Practices, explores teachers' views on how the BEM exam influences students' learning behaviors and classroom activities. It examines whether the test promotes strategies such as memorization or exam-centered learning. This section includes six items, featuring a mix of multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions.

Section Three, Coping Mechanisms and Pedagogical Recommendations for BEM-Related Pressures, focuses on the strategies teachers adopt to handle the demands of high-stakes testing and their suggestions for improving current practices. It includes three items, primarily Likert-scale statements designed to assess the balance between exam preparation and broader educational goals.

4.2. Classroom Observation

Six structured, non-participant classroom observations were conducted in April at Middle School Bourezegue Abdelmadjid. This type of observation involved the researcher recording specific behaviors and classroom practices using a predefined checklist, without participating in or influencing the lessons. The observation tool focused on the following key areas:

- Lesson organization and emphasis on exam-related content.
- Strategic student behaviors, such as memorization techniques and test-taking practice.
- Interaction styles between teachers and students, including the frequency and quality of exchanges.
- Use of teaching materials and the distribution of time across different classroom activities.
- Classroom challenges arising as a result of exam washback effects.

5.2.1. Data Collection Procedures

Structured questionnaires were distributed and collected from 20 teachers, with **15 responses received**. This phase provided a general landscape of the perceived washback effects and served as a foundation for the interview protocol..

In the final phase, classroom practices were observed at Middle School Bourezgue Abdelmadjid to validate the findings from teachers' self-reports and gain firsthand insight into actual learner behaviors and teacher strategies.

5.2.2. Data Analysis Procedures

Both **quantitative** and **qualitative** analysis techniques were used:

- **Quantitative data** from the questionnaires were analyzed using Microsoft Excel (2019) for descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage.
- **Qualitative data** from observations were coded thematically. Emerging themes included exam-oriented instruction, strategic memorization, time pressure, and teacher–student dynamics.

The convergence of findings from all three tools provided a comprehensive picture of how BEM testing shapes learners' strategy use and the instructional environment.

1. Analysis of Teacher's Questionnaire

This section presents background information about the participating teachers, including their gender, age group, academic qualification, and years of teaching experience. This demographic data provides context for interpreting their responses and helps frame their perceptions in relation to their professional profiles.

Section One: General Information

Table (01) provides general demographic and professional background information about the teachers who participated in the study. It includes data on their gender, age, academic qualifications, and years of teaching experience.

Table (01) : General Information about the Teachers.

Item	Option	Teachers (N)	Percentage
Gender	Male	7	46.7%
	Female	8	53.3%
Age	25–30 years	5	33.3%
	31–40 years	6	40%
	41+ years	4	26.7%
Academic Qualification	Master's degree	6	40%
	Classical system diploma	4	26.7%
	LMD system diploma	5	33.3%
Years of Experience	1–3 years	3	20%
	4–6 years	5	33.3%
	7–10 years	7	46.7%

The demographic data of the sample reveals a balanced distribution in terms of gender, with 53.3% female and 46.7% male participants. Most teachers are between 31 and 40 years old (40%), followed by those aged 25–30 (33.3%), and a smaller portion aged 41 and above (26.7%). Regarding academic qualifications, 40% hold a Master's degree, 33.3% come from the LMD system, and 26.7% have a classical system diploma. In terms of teaching experience, the majority (46.7%) have between 7 and 10 years of experience, while 33.3% have 4–6 years, and 20% are in their early career with 1–3 years. This mix of age,

qualifications, and experience levels suggests a diverse and well-rounded group of educators, which can provide varied insights into current teaching practices and challenges in the classroom.

Section Two: Exam-Oriented Instruction

Table (02) presents data on how frequently teachers design lessons primarily aimed at preparing students for exams, showing varying degrees of emphasis on exam-focused instruction among the respondents.

Table (02): Frequency of Designing Lessons Primarily for Exam Preparation

	Nb	**%**
Q1. How often do you design lessons primarily focused on preparing students for exams?		
1. Always	**06**	40%
2. Often	**04**	33.3%
3. Sometimes	**04**	20%
4. Rarely	**01**	6.7%
5. Never	0	0%
Total 15		

The table shows the frequency with which teachers design lessons primarily focused on exam preparation. The majority of teachers (73.3%) reported that they either always (40%) or often (33.3%) create exam-focused lessons, indicating a strong emphasis on exam readiness in their teaching practice. A smaller portion (20%) sometimes design lessons with this focus, while very few (6.7%) rarely do so, and none reported never doing it. This suggests that exam preparation is a significant priority for most teachers in the sample.

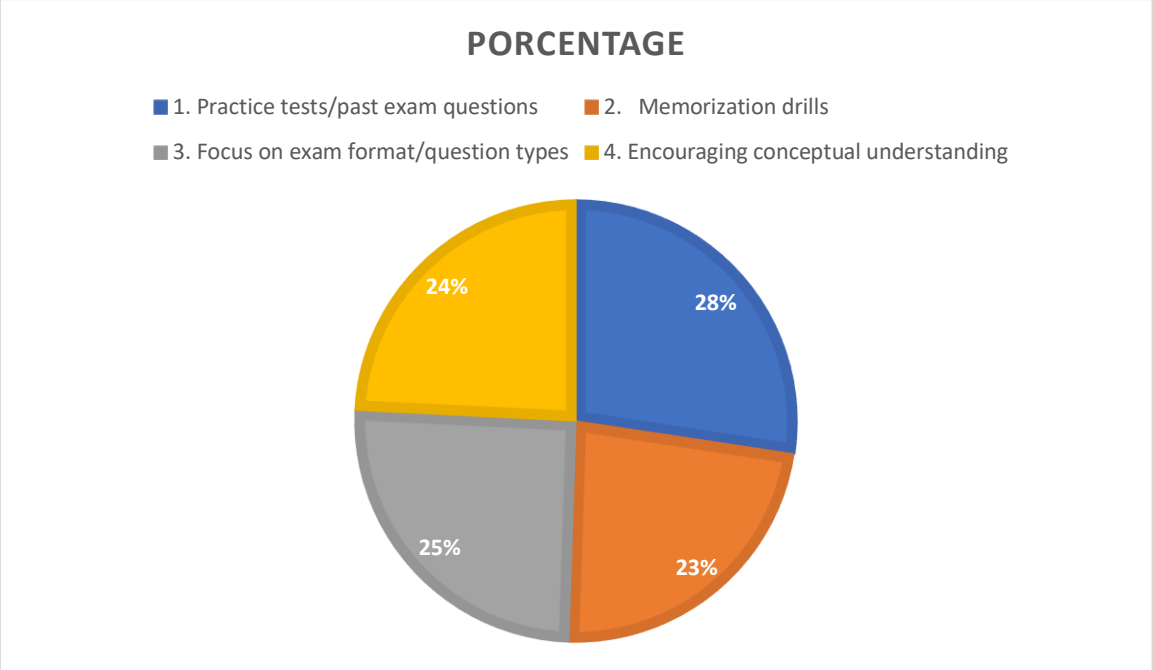

Figure (01): Strategies Used to Prepare Students for Exams

The pie chart visually illustrates the distribution of exam preparation strategies employed by teachers, closely reflecting the data in the table. Practice tests and past exam questions constitute 28% of the methods used, while memorization drills account for 23%. Emphasis on exam formats and question types represents 25%, and encouraging conceptual understanding makes up 24%. This balanced distribution shows that although practice tests and exam formats are slightly prioritized, teachers also place considerable importance on memorization and fostering deep conceptual comprehension to prepare students effectively for exams.

Table (03) illustrates teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of exam-oriented teaching on student motivation, highlighting a generally positive attitude among the majority of respondents.

Table (03): Teachers' Beliefs on Exam-Oriented Teaching and Its Impact on Student Motivation

	Nb	%
Q3. 3. Do you believe exam-oriented teaching affects students' motivation positively?		
1. Strongly Agree	04	26.7%
2. Agree	07	46.7%
3. Neutral	02	13.3%
4. Disagree	02	13.3%
5. Strongly Disagree	00	0%
Total 15	-	-

The table reveals that a majority of teachers believe exam-oriented teaching has a positive impact on student motivation. Specifically, 26.7% strongly agree and 46.7% agree that focusing on exams boosts motivation, while 13.3% remain neutral and an equal percentage disagree. Notably, no teachers strongly disagreed, indicating a general consensus that exam-focused instruction serves as a motivating factor for students.

Section Three: Student Learning Strategies

Table (4) presents data on how frequently teachers encourage the use of diverse learning strategies. It shows that the majority of teachers (46.7%) do so often, while a smaller percentage (26.7%) always promote such strategies.

Table (04) : Teachers' Frequency of Encouraging Diverse Learning Strategies

	Nb	**%**
Q3. Frequency of encouraging diverse strategies		
1. Always	4	26.7%
2. Often	6	46.7%
3. Sometimes	4	13.3%
4. Rarely	1	13.3%
5. Never	0	0%
Total 15	-	-

As shown in Table 4, 46.7% of respondents reported that they often incorporate a range of learning strategies in their teaching, while 26.7% stated that they do so always, indicating that a majority of teachers (73.4%) are consistently engaged in promoting diverse instructional methods. This aligns with contemporary pedagogical approaches that emphasize learner-centered and differentiated instruction. In contrast, a smaller proportion of teachers (13.3%) reported only occasional encouragement of diverse strategies, and another 13.3% admitted to rarely implementing such practices. Notably, no participants selected the "never" option, which reflects a shared recognition of the importance of instructional variety in language teaching, even though the degree of application varies among teachers.

Table (5) illustrates the various learning strategies promoted through BEM-oriented instruction, as reported by teachers. Collaborative learning (73.3%) and memorization (66.7%) are among the most commonly encouraged strategies, followed closely by critical thinking/problem-solving.

Table (05) : Strategies Promoted by BEM-Oriented Instruction as Perceived by Teachers

	Nb	**%**
Q2. Strategies promoted (multiple selections possible)		
1. Memorization	10	66.7%
2. Critical thinking/problem-solving	9	60%
3. Collaborative learning	11	73.3%
4. Use of technology/multimedia	8	53.3%
5. Others	2	13.3%
Total 15	-	-

The table shows the types of learning strategies that teachers believe are promoted by BEM-oriented instruction. The most frequently selected strategy was collaborative learning (73.3%), followed by memorization (66.7%), indicating that both interactive and rote methods are commonly encouraged in exam-focused classrooms. Critical thinking and problem-solving were reported by 60% of the teachers, suggesting a moderate emphasis on higher-order thinking skills. In addition, 53.3% of respondents noted the use of technology or multimedia, showing a growing incorporation of digital tools in the learning process. A small number of teachers (13.3%) selected "others", indicating the presence of additional, less common strategies. These results reflect a mixed instructional environment where both traditional and progressive methods are used, with exam demands still playing a significant role in shaping classroom practices.

Table (6) presents teachers' views on students' overreliance on memorization. The majority either agree (40%) or strongly agree (33.3%) that students depend too much on memorization in their learning.

Table(06) : Teachers' Agreement on Students' Overreliance on Memorization

	Nb	**%**
Q3. Students rely too much on memorization?		
1. Strongly Agree	5	33.3%
2. Agree	6	40%
3. Neutral	2	13.3%
4. Disagree	2	13.3%
5. Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total 15	-	-

The table presents teachers' responses regarding their level of agreement with the statement that students rely too heavily on memorization. The majority of respondents either agreed (40%) or strongly agreed (33.3%), indicating that 73.3% of teachers perceive an overdependence on memorization among students. A smaller proportion of teachers were neutral (13.3%), while an equal percentage disagreed (13.3%). Notably, none of the teachers strongly disagreed with the statement, which reinforces the view that memorization is a dominant learning strategy, likely influenced by the nature of exam preparation. These findings suggest that rote learning remains prevalent in the classroom, possibly at the expense of deeper learning and communicative competence.

Section Four: Teacher Support and Methods

Table (7) outlines teachers' self-reported classroom practices and beliefs in relation to BEM exam preparation. It shows strong support for personalized student assistance, the use of interactive methods, and efforts to balance exam preparation with communication skill development.

Table (07) : Teachers' Self-Reported Classroom Practices and Beliefs Related to BEM Preparation

No.	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I provide personalized support to struggling students	6 (40%)	7 (46.7%)	2 (13.3%)	0	0
2	I frequently use interactive, student-centered methods	5 (33.3%)	6 (40%)	3 (20%)	1 (6.7%)	0
3	I balance exam prep and communication skills	4 (26.7%)	5 (33.3%)	3 (20%)	2 (13.3%)	1 (6.7%)

Section Four highlights teachers' approaches to support and teaching methods. A majority of teachers provide personalized support to struggling students, with 40% strongly agreeing and 46.7% agreeing to this practice. Regarding the use of interactive, student-centered methods, 33.3% strongly agree and 40% agree that they frequently apply these techniques, though 6.7% disagree. When it comes to balancing exam preparation with communication skills development, responses are more varied: 26.7% strongly agree, 33.3% agree, while 20% remain neutral and 20% disagree to some extent. This section reflects a generally positive commitment to personalized and interactive teaching, alongside some challenges in balancing exam focus with broader skill development.

Section Five: Student Engagement and Pressure

Table(8) summarizes teachers' perceptions regarding student engagement, the impact of exam pressure, and the strategies used to support students. It indicates that while many teachers observe moderate engagement, most agree that exam pressure affects students, and a majority actively use strategies to help manage exam stress.

Table (08) : Teachers' Perceptions of Student Engagement, Exam Pressure, and Classroom Support Strategies

No.	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Students show high engagement	3 (20%)	6 (40%)	4 (26.7%)	2 (13.3%)	0
2	Exam pressure affects motivation and participation	6 (40%)	5 (33.3%)	2 (13.3%)	2 (13.3%)	0
3	I use strategies to help manage exam stress	7 (46.7%)	5 (33.3%)	2 (13.3%)	1 (6.7%)	0

Section Five examines teachers' perceptions of student engagement and the impact of exam pressure. While 20% of teachers strongly agree and 40% agree that students show high engagement, 26.7% remain neutral and 13.3% disagree. Regarding the effect of exam pressure on motivation and participation, 40% strongly agree and 33.3% agree that it has a significant impact, with 13.3% neutral and another 13.3% disagreeing. Notably, 46.7% of teachers strongly agree and 33.3% agree that they use strategies to help students manage exam stress, demonstrating a proactive approach to supporting students' well-being during high-pressure periods.

2. Analysis of Classroom

2.1. Classroom Observation Checklist 1 .

A. Evidence of Exam-Oriented Instruction

Table (9) presents observational data indicating that exam-oriented instruction was evident in Classroom 01, with 100% of observations confirming its presence.

Table (09) : Evidence of Exam-Oriented Instruction Observed in the Classroom 01

	%
Observation Criteria	
1. YES	100 %
2. NON	0 %

The data in Table (09) reveals that 100% of the classroom observations provided evidence of exam-oriented instruction, indicating that all teaching practices were directly focused on preparing students for standardized assessments. This strong emphasis suggests that lesson content, instructional methods, and classroom activities were tailored to meet exam requirements, likely prioritizing test-taking strategies and curriculum coverage. While such an approach may enhance short-term performance and ensure alignment with evaluation standards, it also raises concerns about limiting students' critical thinking, creativity, and broader cognitive development. The findings highlight the dominance of assessment-driven teaching and underscore the need for a more balanced pedagogical approach that also fosters holistic learning.

B.Student Learning Strategy Use

Table (10) shows that student learning strategy use was clearly observed during Lesson 01, with 100% of the observations confirming its presence.

Table (10) : Student Learning Strategy Use During the Lesson 01

	%
Observation Criteria	
1. YES	100 %
2. NON	0 %

The data presented in Table (10) shows that 100% of the observations confirmed the use of student learning strategies during Lesson 01, indicating that learners actively employed methods to support their comprehension and engagement with the lesson content. This suggests that students were not passive recipients of information but rather participated in the learning process through strategies such as note-taking, asking questions, summarizing, or using prior knowledge. The consistent presence of such strategies reflects a classroom environment that encourages active learning and cognitive involvement, which are essential for deeper understanding and long-term retention of knowledge

C. Teacher Support and Instructional Methods

Table (11) presents data on observed teacher support and instructional methods in Lesson 01. It shows that supportive and structured teaching practices were evident in 66.7% of the observations, while 33.3% showed no such evidence.

Table (11) : Teacher Support and Instructional Methods 01

	%
Observation Criteria	
1. YES	66.7 %
2. NON	33.3 %

Table (11) indicates that 66.7% of the observations reported evidence of teacher support and the use of effective instructional methods during Lesson 01, while 33.3% did not. This suggests that in most cases, the teacher provided guidance, clarification, and scaffolding to facilitate student understanding, possibly through explanations, feedback, or differentiated instruction. However, the presence of a significant 33.3% where such support was lacking points to some inconsistency in instructional quality. This disparity may affect students' learning experiences, particularly for those who rely on structured guidance, and highlights the need for more consistent application of supportive teaching strategies across all parts of the lesson.

D. Student Engagement and Exam Pressure

Table (12) indicates that both student engagement and the presence of exam pressure were fully observed during Lesson 01, with 100% of the observations confirming their existence.

Table (12) : Student Engagement and Exam Pressure Observed 01

	%
Observation Criteria	
1. YES	100 %
2. NON	0 %

Table (12) shows that 100% of the observations confirmed the presence of both student engagement and exam-related pressure during Lesson 01. This indicates that while students were actively participating in the lesson, their motivation and focus were likely driven by the looming pressure of upcoming exams. Such engagement, although positive in terms of attention and effort, may be primarily extrinsically motivated, potentially leading to stress and anxiety. The data suggests a learning environment where students are highly involved but possibly under psychological strain, emphasizing the importance of balancing academic rigor with emotional support to maintain healthy and sustainable learning behaviors

E. Challenges Observed

Table (13) shows that challenges were clearly observed in Classroom 01, with 100% of the observations indicating the presence of difficulties during the lesson.

Table (13) : Challenges Observed in the Classroom 01

	%
Observation Criteria	
1. YES	100 %
2. NON	0 %

Table (13) indicates that 100% of the observations confirmed the presence of challenges in the classroom during Lesson 01, highlighting that various obstacles were consistently encountered throughout the session. These challenges could include classroom management issues, student behavioral problems, time limitations, or difficulties related to content delivery and understanding. The fact that such difficulties were universally observed suggests that, despite efforts made by both the teacher and students, certain factors negatively impacted the flow and effectiveness of the lesson. This finding underscores the need for

targeted strategies to mitigate these challenges and create a more conducive learning environment.

2.2. Classroom Observation Checklist 2

A. Evidence of Exam-Oriented Instruction

Table (14) confirms that exam-oriented instruction was fully observed, with 100% of observations indicating its presence in the classroom setting.

Table (14) :Evidence of Exam-Oriented Instruction Observed

	%
Observation Criteria	
1. YES	100 %
2. NON	0 %

Table (14) shows that 100% of the observations confirmed the presence of exam-oriented instruction, indicating that the entire lesson was structured around preparing students for standardized tests. This suggests that the teacher's approach, lesson objectives, and classroom activities were all aligned with exam content and formats, likely emphasizing memorization, practice with test-like questions, and strategies for success in formal assessments. While such a focus can enhance exam performance, it may limit opportunities for creative thinking, critical analysis, and deeper conceptual understanding. The data highlights a highly assessment-driven teaching environment that prioritizes exam success over broader educational development.

B. Student Learning Strategy Use

Table (15) presents observational data on student learning strategy use, showing that such strategies were evident in 83.3% of the cases, while 16.7% showed no observable strategy use.

Table (15) : Student Learning Strategy Use Observed

	%
Observation Criteria	
3. YES	83.3 %
4. NON	16.7%

Table (15) reveals that 83.3% of the observations indicated active use of learning strategies by students during the lesson, while 16.7% showed an absence of such strategies. This suggests that the majority of students engaged in behaviors that support effective learning, such as summarizing information, taking notes, asking questions, or applying prior knowledge. However, the presence of a minority (16.7%) who did not demonstrate the use of learning strategies points to a potential gap in learner autonomy or instructional support. These findings highlight the importance of consistently encouraging and teaching effective learning strategies to all students to enhance engagement and comprehension.

C. Teacher Support and Instructional Methods

Table (16) shows that teacher support and the use of instructional methods were observed in 100% of the cases, indicating consistent application of supportive teaching practices.

Table (16) :Teacher Support and Instructional Methods Observed

	%
Observation Criteria	
1. YES	100 %
2. NON	0 %

Table (16) shows that 100% of the observations confirmed the presence of teacher support and effective instructional methods during the lesson. This indicates that the teacher consistently provided guidance, clarification, and structured instruction to facilitate student learning. The use of varied teaching techniques and responsive support likely contributed to better student understanding and engagement. Such consistent instructional quality reflects a well-managed classroom environment where the teacher plays an active role in scaffolding learning, addressing students' needs, and promoting academic success.

D. Student Engagement and Exam Pressure

Table (17) indicates that both student engagement and the presence of exam pressure were fully observed, with 100% of the observations confirming their occurrence.

Table (17) : Student Engagement and Exam Pressure Observed

	%
Observation Criteria	
1. YES	100 %
2. NON	0 %

Table (17) indicates that 100% of the observations confirmed the presence of both student engagement and exam-related pressure during the lesson. This suggests that students were actively involved in classroom activities, likely motivated by the urgency and importance of upcoming exams. While high engagement is a positive indicator of focus and participation, the underlying exam pressure may also point to elevated stress levels among students. The data reflects a learning environment where performance expectations strongly influence student behavior, highlighting the need to balance academic demands with emotional well-being to ensure sustainable and healthy learning outcomes.

D. Challenges Observed

Table 18, classroom challenges were observed in 100% of the sessions, underscoring their pervasive and consistent presence throughout the observed lessons. This uniformity indicates that such challenges are a recurring feature of the classroom environment and should be addressed in future pedagogical planning.

Table (18) : Challenges Observed in the Classroom

	%
Observation Criteria	
1. Observed	100 %
2. Not Observed	0 %

Table (18) shows that 100% of the observations reported the presence of challenges in the classroom, indicating that difficulties were consistently encountered during the lesson. These challenges may include issues such as time constraints, student behavior problems, lack of resources, or difficulties in maintaining student focus. The consistent observation of such obstacles suggests that, despite efforts by the teacher and active student engagement, certain factors hindered the smooth flow and effectiveness of the teaching process. This highlights the importance of identifying and addressing these classroom challenges to improve the overall learning environment and instructional quality.

2.3. Classroom Observation Checklist 3

A. Evidence of Exam-Oriented Instruction

Table (19) indicates that exam-oriented instruction was fully observed in all instances, with 100% of observations confirming its presence.

Table (19) : Evidence of Exam-Oriented Instruction Observed 3

	%
Observation Criteria	
1. Yes	100 %
2. No	0 %

Table (19) shows that 100% of the observations confirmed evidence of exam-oriented instruction during Lesson 3, indicating that the entire teaching session was focused on preparing students for upcoming assessments. This suggests that the teacher prioritized exam-related content, formats, and strategies, likely through activities such as practicing test questions, reviewing exam topics, or drilling key information. While this approach may improve student performance on standardized tests, it can also narrow the scope of learning and reduce opportunities for critical thinking and deeper understanding. The data highlights a highly exam-driven teaching style that prioritizes test outcomes over broader educational goals.

B. **Student Learning Strategy Use**

Table (20) shows that student learning strategies were observed in 66.7% of instances, while 33.3% of observations reported their absence.

Table (20) : Student Learning Strategy Use Observed 3

	%
Observation Criteria	
1. Yes	66.7 %
2. No	33.3%

Table (20) reveals that 66.7% of the observations indicated that students used learning strategies during Lesson 3, while 33.3% did not. This suggests that a majority of students were actively engaged in employing techniques to support their learning—such as note-taking, summarizing, or asking questions—demonstrating a level of autonomy and

involvement in the learning process. However, the fact that one-third of the students did not exhibit such behaviors points to a gap in the consistent application of effective learning strategies. This highlights the need for teachers to further encourage and explicitly teach strategy use to ensure all students are equipped to learn effectively.

C. Teacher Support and Instructional Methods

Table (21) presents the observed use of teacher support and instructional methods, indicating that such practices were evident in 66.7% of cases, while 33.3% showed no such evidence.

Table (21) : Teacher Support and Instructional Methods Observed 3

	%
Observation Criteria	
1. Yes	66.7 %
2. No	33.3 %

Table (21) indicates that 66.7% of the observations confirmed the presence of teacher support and the use of effective instructional methods during Lesson 3, while 33.3% did not. This suggests that in most instances, the teacher provided guidance, feedback, and structured explanations to facilitate student learning. However, the fact that one-third of the observations lacked evidence of such support points to inconsistencies in instructional delivery. These gaps may affect student understanding and engagement, particularly for those who rely on direct support. The findings emphasize the need for more consistent and inclusive teaching strategies to ensure that all students benefit equally from the learning experience.

D. Student Engagement and Exam Pressure

Table (22) shows that student engagement and exam pressure were observed in 100% of the cases, indicating a strong presence of these factors in the classroom.

Table (22) : Student Engagement and Exam Pressure Observed

	%
Observation Criteria	
1. Yes	100 %
2. No	0 %

Table (22) shows that 100% of the observations confirmed the presence of both student engagement and exam pressure during the lesson, indicating that all students were actively participating but also visibly influenced by the stress of upcoming assessments. This suggests that while learners were focused and involved in classroom activities, their motivation was likely driven by the need to perform well in exams. Such an environment can enhance short-term academic effort but may also contribute to anxiety and emotional strain. The findings highlight the importance of maintaining student engagement while implementing strategies to reduce exam-related stress and promote a healthier learning atmosphere.

E. Challenges Observed

Table (23) highlights that challenges were observed in the classroom in 66.7% of cases, while they were not observed in 33.3% of instances.

Table (23) : Challenges Observed in the Classroom

	%
Observation Criteria	
1. Observed	66.7 %
2. Not Observed	33.3 %

Table (23) reveals that challenges were observed in 66.7% of the classroom sessions, while 33.3% showed no evidence of such difficulties. This indicates that in the majority of cases, the teaching and learning process was affected by obstacles such as classroom

management issues, time limitations, student disengagement, or lack of resources. However, the fact that challenges were not observed in one-third of the cases suggests that effective strategies were sometimes in place to maintain a smooth learning environment. These findings point to the need for more consistent approaches to classroom management and instructional planning in order to minimize disruptions and enhance the overall effectiveness of teaching.

2.4. Classroom Observation Checklist 4

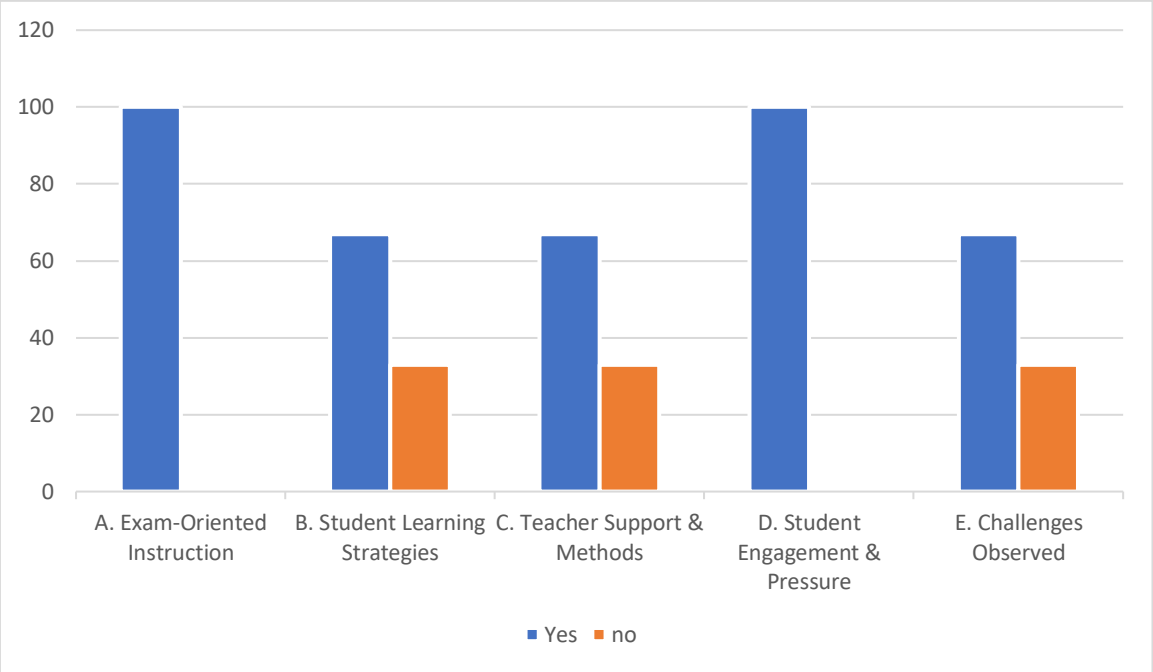

Figure (02) : Classroom Observation Checklist

The bar chart clearly illustrates the distribution of "Yes" and "No" responses across five main categories from the classroom observation checklist. Categories A (Exam-Oriented Instruction) and D (Student Engagement & Pressure) exhibit near-perfect "Yes" scores, demonstrating strong exam-focused teaching and high student involvement despite evident exam pressure. In contrast, Categories B (Student Learning Strategies), C (Teacher Support & Methods), and E (Challenges Observed) show a significant share of "No" responses—about one-third unmet criteria—highlighting areas for improvement in promoting diverse learning

strategies, balancing exam preparation with communication, and addressing issues like student autonomy and overreliance on memorization. The similar ratio of "Yes" to "No" answers in these categories suggests persistent gaps that could impact learning effectiveness. Overall, while the chart underscores strengths in exam orientation and student engagement, it also emphasizes the need for more balanced instructional approaches and enhanced support to improve learning outcomes.

3.Discussion of Findings

3.1 The Washback on Teaching practices

The findings clearly indicate that exam preparation is a central focus in classroom teaching practices, with a significant majority of teachers routinely designing lessons aligned with exam readiness. This aligns with existing literature that highlights how high-stakes testing environments often shape pedagogical decisions (Au, 2007; Madaus & Russell, 2010). Such emphasis is frequently driven by accountability systems and standardized assessments, which compel teachers to align instruction with tested content, often at the expense of broader educational goals.

The use of various exam preparation strategies—ranging from practice tests to conceptual understanding—suggests an effort to balance rote learning with deeper cognitive engagement. This duality reflects what researchers such as Biggs and Tang (2011) have emphasized: effective learning involves both surface (e.g., memorization) and deep strategies (e.g., understanding concepts). However, the continued dominance of practice-based methods confirms earlier critiques that test-oriented instruction may narrow the curriculum (Nichols & Berliner, 2007), even when conceptual understanding is nominally encouraged.

Teachers' generally positive attitudes toward exam-oriented teaching's impact on motivation also reflect findings from studies that suggest structured exam-focused environments can boost students' goal orientation and effort (Pintrich, 2000). Yet, the concern voiced by teachers about students' over-reliance on memorization supports criticisms by scholars like Marton and Säljö (1997), who argue that excessive focus on recall can undermine critical thinking. The tension between promoting diverse learning strategies and addressing students' habitual memorization underscores a gap between intended pedagogy and actual student behavior.

Finally, the proactive use of personalized support and interactive methods, as well as efforts to reduce exam stress, resonates with the growing literature on learner-centered pedagogy (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000). While the findings indicate strong teacher engagement in supporting student well-being and interactivity, the mixed responses on balancing exam prep with communication skill development suggest unresolved challenges in integrating holistic learning goals. These observations confirm that while some elements of progressive pedagogy are embraced, traditional exam-driven pressures continue to influence classroom dynamics significantly.

Learners' Learning Strategies Choice

The classroom observations at Middle School Bourezgue Abdelmadjid strongly confirm the phenomenon of negative washback documented in the literature, wherein high-stakes examinations shape not only teaching content but also instructional methods

The consistent alignment of teaching with BEM exam formats—using multiple-choice questions and test-taking strategies—mirrors findings by Andrews et al.who observed similar patterns in exam-driven contexts. This conformity to exam structures suggests that teaching is being shaped more by assessment demands than by pedagogical ideals, echoing

concerns that exams narrow the curriculum and hinder the development of critical and communicative skills.

The reliance on cognitive and metacognitive strategies observed aligns with studies by O'Malley and Chamot, which identify these strategies as central to academic success in language learning. However, the absence of social and affective strategies diverges from the comprehensive strategy use advocated by Oxford, who emphasized the importance of a balanced strategy repertoire—including cooperation, emotional regulation, and anxiety management—for effective language acquisition. The lack of collaborative learning further contradicts the communicative language teaching (CLT) framework, which highlights interaction and peer support as essential to language development .

Student engagement observed during exam preparation aligns with studies such as those by Dörnyei and Ushioda, which indicate that goal-oriented contexts like high-stakes exams can temporarily enhance motivation and focus. However, the reduction of learner autonomy and minimal exploratory or creative engagement challenges the principles of learner-centered instruction promoted by Nunan and Little . These scholars argue that true language acquisition requires not just attention to accuracy, but also space for learner initiative, self-expression, and decision-making—elements largely missing in the observed classrooms.

In sum, the findings both confirm and challenge existing literature. They support the view that exam pressure leads to increased structure and focus (confirming positive washback on engagement and strategy use), but they also validate concerns about the negative impact of such pressure on broader educational outcomes. As highlighted in the works of Alderson and Wall, washback is rarely neutral; it benefits some aspects of learning while undermining others. The absence of affective support and communicative practice in the observed classes

reveals a need to balance exam preparation with a more holistic approach to language teaching that nurtures both performance and personal development.

3.4.2 Comparisons to Existing Research

The findings from the observations at Middle School Bourezgue Abdelmadjid corroborate existing research on the washback effects of high-stakes exams on EFL teaching and learning. Similar to studies by Brown (2004) and Alderson & Wall (1993), the strong exam orientation observed in lessons aligns teaching methods and learning strategies primarily with the demands of standardized testing, often at the expense of communicative language use and holistic language development.

The emphasis on cognitive and metacognitive strategies, such as underlining and self-monitoring, confirms prior findings that students adapt their strategies to meet exam requirements (Cheng, 2005). However, the lack of social and affective strategy use reflects a persistent challenge noted in the literature, where exam pressure reduces opportunities for collaborative learning and emotional regulation (Hughes, 2003).

Furthermore, the limited autonomy and overreliance on memorization mirror trends identified by Shohamy (1993) and Wall (2005), who argue that washback can narrow teaching to exam preparation, limiting student engagement in exploratory and communicative activities. The visible anxiety and stress among students also align with findings by Cheng et al. (2004), emphasizing the psychological impact of exam-focused instruction.

The bar chart analysis further supports these conclusions, showing high marks for exam-oriented instruction and student engagement but revealing gaps in teacher support, balanced teaching methods, and the promotion of diverse learning strategies. These findings point to the need for more balanced instructional approaches that integrate exam preparation with communicative competence and emotional support, as advocated by recent washback research (Tsagari, 2010).

4. Limitations of the Study

Despite the efforts made to ensure the reliability and relevance of this research, several limitations should be acknowledged, as they may have affected the depth and scope of the study's findings.

One of the primary limitations faced during this research was the restricted time available for data collection, analysis, and reporting. Due to academic deadlines and scheduling limitations within the academic year, it was not possible to conduct a more extended and comprehensive investigation. This limited timeframe may have constrained opportunities for deeper engagement with participants, additional classroom observations, or the inclusion of longitudinal data.

As a student researcher, this study was conducted within the framework of academic learning, which meant that limited prior experience in academic research may have affected certain aspects of the process. Challenges were encountered in designing data collection tools, analyzing qualitative data, and interpreting findings with full methodological rigor. While support from academic supervisors helped guide the process, more extensive research training and experience would have likely enhanced the overall quality of the study.

Balancing the demands of academic research with other personal, academic, or professional obligations also posed a significant challenge. Time and energy had to be divided between coursework, study commitments, and, in some cases, employment or family responsibilities. These competing pressures may have influenced the level of focus and detail applied to some elements of the research process, such as extended fieldwork or deeper literature review.

5.1 Pedagogical Implications

Educators should endeavor to complement exam preparation with communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based language teaching (TBLT) methodologies, fostering authentic language use alongside test readiness.

Instructional practices should incorporate explicit strategy training that empowers learners to engage in goal-setting, self-monitoring, and reflective evaluation to cultivate autonomous learning behaviors.

Teaching practices ought to embed cooperative learning, peer collaboration, and anxiety reduction techniques, thereby addressing affective filters and fostering a supportive classroom climate.

Continuous capacity-building programs should be provided to equip teachers with contemporary pedagogical skills that reconcile washback effects and promote diverse instructional strategies.

Classroom observations revealed a consistent alignment with the BEM examination structure, with predominant teacher-centered instruction and restricted learner interaction. This calls for:

- **Increased Use of Interactive and Communicative Tasks:**

  To enhance learner engagement and language proficiency, classrooms should incorporate interactive tasks that simulate real-life communicative scenarios.

- **Diversification of Learning Strategies:**

  Teachers should systematically integrate social and affective strategies within their instruction to foster collaboration and mitigate test-related anxiety.

- **Encouragement of Learner Initiative and Creativity:**

  Educational practices should prioritize learner-centered activities that stimulate creativity, critical thinking, and independent inquiry, addressing the current limitations observed.

Informed by the empirical findings of this study, the following recommendations are advanced to augment pedagogical efficacy and to alleviate the adverse consequences associated with high-stakes examination pressures within the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction:

6.1.Adoption of a Holistic Pedagogical Framework

It is imperative that educators implement an integrative instructional paradigm that seamlessly combines examination preparation with communicative language teaching (CLT) principles. This paradigm should move beyond a predominantly test-centric focus, emphasizing not only linguistic form acquisition but also the cultivation of pragmatic communicative competence. Such a balanced approach is essential for fostering learners who demonstrate proficiency in formal assessment environments while simultaneously possessing the ability to engage in meaningful, authentic language interactions.

6.2.Strengthening Professional Development and Capacity Building

To redress existing deficiencies in pedagogical practice, sustained professional development programs are indispensable. These initiatives should aim to expand instructors' methodological repertoires by incorporating diverse, evidence-based pedagogical strategies, especially those that facilitate social interaction and provide affective support. Structured workshops and specialized training modules can play a pivotal role in equipping educators with learner-centered pedagogical tools, thereby enhancing their capacity to nurture

comprehensive language skills while adeptly managing the pressures inherent in examination settings.

6.3.Fostering Learner Autonomy through Metacognitive Strategy Instruction

Curricular designers and educators ought to prioritize the explicit integration of comprehensive learning strategies encompassing cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective dimensions. Empowering learners with the ability to self-regulate and strategically navigate their learning processes is crucial, particularly within high-stakes assessment contexts. The cultivation of such metacognitive and strategic competencies can significantly mitigate examination-related anxiety and foster deeper, more adaptive learning beyond superficial memorization.

6.4. Recommendations for Further Research

While the current study provides valuable insights into the washback effects of BEM examinations on middle school EFL learners' strategy use, several avenues remain open for further exploration to enrich and extend the existing findings. First, future research should move beyond the scope of cognitive and metacognitive strategies to investigate the underutilized social and affective learning strategies, which were notably absent in the present observations. A deeper understanding of how students manage test anxiety, collaborate with peers, or seek emotional support could offer a more holistic view of learner behavior under exam pressure.

Second, it is recommended that subsequent studies adopt a multi-method approach, integrating not only classroom observations, learner journals, and think-aloud protocols to gain richer, more nuanced data on learners' internal processes and decision-making. Such triangulation would enhance the depth and credibility of the findings.

Third, research could expand across different educational levels, such as primary or secondary school, to examine whether the patterns observed at the middle school level persist or evolve with age, curricular complexity, or assessment type. Comparative studies involving different school settings (urban vs. rural, public vs. private) or regions within Algeria may also reveal contextual factors that shape washback dynamics.

Moreover, researchers are encouraged to explore the perspectives of teachers more systematically, assessing how they interpret and respond to exam pressures and whether their beliefs influence their instructional choices. Studies focusing on teacher training programs could evaluate how well educators are equipped to balance exam preparation with communicative and student-centered pedagogy.

Lastly, it would be fruitful to assess the long-term effects of exam-oriented instruction on students' language development, motivation, and attitudes toward English learning. Longitudinal studies could track how reliance on exam strategies influences learners' overall proficiency, retention, and ability to apply language skills in real-world contexts beyond the test environment.

By addressing these gaps, future research can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of washback effects and support the development of pedagogical practices that are both exam-relevant and educationally enriching.

Conclusion

This study examined the washback effects of the Brevet d'Enseignement Moyen (BEM) examination on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching methodologies and learner strategies within a middle school context at Middle School Bourezegue Abdelmadjid. The findings, derived from teacher questionnaires and systematic classroom observations, underscore a predominant emphasis on examination-oriented pedagogy. Teachers predominantly focus on preparing students for test formats, which, while enhancing test-taking skills, constrains the cultivation of communicative competence and learner autonomy.

Notably, students exhibit proficient use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies aligned with examination demands; however, the deployment of social and affective strategies remains negligible. This pedagogical orientation potentially limits students' broader linguistic development and emotional well-being, highlighting the need for a more balanced instructional approach that integrates examination preparation with holistic language learning objectives.

General Conclusion

This study investigated the washback effect of the Brevet d'Enseignement Moyen (BEM) examinations on the learning strategies employed by Algerian middle school students in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Specifically, it aimed to examine the types of strategies learners adopt in preparing for high-stakes assessments, their perceptions of how the BEM influences their learning behavior, the extent to which the exam encourages or discourages specific strategies, and whether a correlation exists between learners' academic performance and the range of strategies they employ.

To address these research questions, a mixed-methods research design was implemented. Quantitative data were collected via standardized questionnaires administered to a representative sample of middle school students, focusing on the frequency and type of strategies used and students' perceptions of the BEM's impact on their learning. Complementary qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews conducted with both students and instructors, offering rich contextual insights into the pedagogical and emotional dynamics surrounding exam preparation and strategic learning behavior.

The findings revealed a pronounced reliance on cognitive and metacognitive strategies, such as memorization, identifying key terms, organizing content, and managing time. These strategies appeared to be reinforced by an instructional environment heavily aligned with exam requirements, emphasizing accuracy and test performance over communicative fluency. Notably, social and affective strategies—including peer collaboration, help-seeking, and anxiety regulation—were largely absent from classroom practice, likely due to the prevailing test-focused instructional approach that prioritizes individual achievement over interaction and emotional resilience.

Furthermore, the study found that learners perceived the BEM as a dominant force shaping their approach to language learning. Most students adapted their strategy use to match the demands of the exam, often sacrificing broader, more meaningful engagement with the language in favor of surface-level preparation. The analysis also demonstrated a **positive relationship** between the diversity of strategies employed—particularly among students who incorporated both cognitive and metacognitive approaches—and higher academic achievement in the BEM exam.

In conclusion, while the BEM examinations motivate learners to adopt certain effective strategies for test performance, they also constrain the development of holistic, communicative, and autonomous language learning practices. This exam-centric focus contributes to a narrowed instructional framework that neglects critical dimensions of language education, such as communicative competence, emotional support, and learner agency. The findings therefore underscore the need for pedagogical reform—one that balances rigorous exam preparation with the promotion of diversified, interactive, and learner-centered instructional practices—to cultivate a more inclusive and effective EFL learning environment.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Investigating Washback Effects of

BEM Tests on Middle School EFL Learners' Learning Strategies Choice

Classroom Observation Checklist: Washback of BEM Tests on EFL Learning Strategies

Observer's Name:…… **Date:**.....

School/Class:…… **Grade Level:**……..

Number of Pupils:…….. **Lesson Topic:**…….

Duration:…….

A. Evidence of Exam-Oriented

Observation Criteria	Yes	No	Comments
The lesson content reflects BEM exam format (e.g., writing tasks, reading comprehension, grammar drills).			
Teacher emphasizes test-taking strategies during the lesson.			
Tasks and activities are aligned with past BEM exam questions.			

B. Student Learning Strategy Use

Observation Criteria	Yes	No	Comments
Students use **cognitive strategies** (e.g., summarizing, note-taking, applying grammar rules).			
Students demonstrate **metacognitive strategies** (e.g., planning answers, checking their work).			
Students engage in **social strategies** (e.g., peer discussion, asking for clarification).			
Students apply **memory strategies** (e.g., repetition, mnemonics, vocabulary lists).			
Students use **compensation strategies** (e.g., guessing meaning from context, paraphrasing).			
Students show **affective strategies** (e.g., managing anxiety, using positive self-talk).			

C. Teacher Support and Instructional Methods

Observation Criteria	Yes	No	Comments
Teacher guides students to use specific learning strategies.			
Teacher provides feedback aligned with BEM exam expectations.			
Lesson activities balance between exam prep and communicative language use.			

D. Student Engagement and Exam Pressure

Observation Criteria	Yes	No	Comments
Students appear focused on exam performance.			
Signs of anxiety or pressure related to BEM exam are noticeable.			
Students ask questions related to exam formats or marks.			

E. Challenges Observed

Observation Criteria	Observed	Not Observed	Comments
Students appear dependent on memorization rather than understanding.			
Time pressure affects lesson delivery or student responses.			
Lack of student autonomy in applying strategies.			

Appendix B

Teachers' Questionnaire

Investigating Classroom Teaching Practices and Their Impact on Student Learning:

Teachers' Questionnaire

Dear Teachers,

I kindly invite you to participate in this research study by completing the following questionnaire. Your responses will help explore current teaching practices and identify areas for improvement in enhancing student learning and engagement.

Section One: General information :

1 - Gender = Male ☐ female ☐

2- age = ……..

3- Academic Qualification :

- Master's degree ☐
- classical System diploma ☐
- LMD system diploma ☐

4- Years of teaching experience.

- 1 - 3 years ☐
- 4-6 years ☐
- 4 – 10 pubi ☐

Section Two: Exam-Oriented Instruction

1. How often do you design lessons primarily focused on preparing students for exams?

- Always ☐
- Often ☐
- Sometimes ☐
- Rarely ☐
- Never ☐

2. Which of the following strategies do you use to prepare students for exams? (Choose all that apply)

- Practice tests and past exam questions ☐
- Memorization drills ☐
- Focus on exam formats and question types ☐
- Encouraging conceptual understanding beyond exams ☐

3. Do you believe exam-oriented teaching affects students' motivation positively?

- Strongly Agree ☐
- Agree ☐
- Neutral ☐
- Disagree ☐
- Strongly Disagree ☐

Section Three: Student Learning Strategies

1. How often do you encourage students to use diverse learning strategies (e.g., group work, self-study, peer teaching)?

- Always ☐
- Often ☐
- Sometimes ☐
- Rarely ☐
- Never ☐

2. What learning strategies do you commonly promote in your classroom? (Select all that apply)

- Memorization ☐
- Critical thinking and problem-solving ☐
- Collaborative learning ☐
- Use of technology and multimedia ☐
- Others (please specify): _____ ☐

3. Do you feel students rely too much on memorization rather than understanding concepts?

- Strongly Agree ☐
- Agree ☐
- Neutral ☐
- Disagree ☐

- Strongly Disagree

Section Four: Teacher Support and Methods

No.	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I regularly provide personalized support to students struggling with course material.					
2	I frequently use interactive and student-centered teaching methods.					
3	My teaching methods balance exam preparation with the development of communication skills.					

Section Five: Student Engagement and Pressure

No.	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Students in my classes show a high level of engagement.					
2	Exam pressure negatively affects students' participation and motivation.					
3	I use various strategies to help students manage exam-related stress (e.g., time management, motivation).					

الملخص :

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف استراتيجيات التعلم التي يستخدمها متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في مرحلة التعليم المتوسط في الجزائر أثناء استعدادهم لاجتياز امتحان شهادة التعليم المتوسط كما تتناول آثار "الواشباك "التي يُحدثها هذا الامتحان على اختيارات المتعلمين الاستراتيجية، والممارسات التعليمية للأساتذة، وديناميكية القسم. تم جمع المعطيات من خلال استبيانات موجهة للمعلمين، وملاحظات صفية في متوسطة "بورزق عبد المجيد."

كشفت النتائج أن التحضير للامتحان يؤثر بشكل كبير على كل من أساليب التعليم والتعلم. فقد لوحظ اعتماد كبير على الاستراتيجيات المعرفية وما فوق المعرفية، مثل إعادة الصياغة، والتحقق من الإجابات، وإدارة الوقت، في حين غابت الاستراتيجيات الاجتماعية والعاطفية بشكل ملحوظ. ركّز المعلمون على التدريس الموجه نحو الامتحان، غالبًا على حساب تنمية الكفاءة التواصلية والدعم النفسي للمتعلمين.

تتوافق هذه النتائج مع ما ورد في الدراسات السابقة حول الآثار السلبية للامتحانات عالية المخاطر، حيث تُقيّد هذه الامتحانات استقلالية المتعلم، وتحد من تنوع استراتيجيات التعلم، وتُضعف تطور الكفاءة اللغوية الشاملة. وتختتم الدراسة بجملة من التوصيات الرامية إلى تحقيق توازن بين الاستعداد للامتحانات وتشجيع تبني استراتيجيات تعلم فعالة، بما يعزز من اعتماد منهج تواصلي وتعليمي محوره المتعلم في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية بالمدارس الجزائرية.