



Working for washback

from university entrance tests in Japan

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University entrance examinations in Japan a perennial crisis



Japan's education system is faltering. To re-strengthen it, changes should start at the center of the system — the university entrance exams. Entrance exams should decide which students are best suited for which university department in new and better ways.

Whether the exam system can be changed will be a test for the entire country.

The Japan Times. Editorial, 3 Feb 2013

University of Bedfordshire

English components of entrance tests

Centre Test plus locally developed university examinations.

Mainly involve reading comprehension with grammar/vocabulary. Some include translation, listening.

Mainly involve an idiosyncratic ad hoc variety of selected response formats.

September 2006

2



問 5 Mr. Brown

PART 1
Text 1

1. In his documentary "Universe," astrophysicist Stephen Hawking argues that extraterrestrial life almost certainly exists. He speculates that forms of life in an astounding and almost unpredictable variety may be found not only on other than the Earth, but also on stars and in space. His reasoning is based on largely mathematical. It has long been known that there are billions of galaxies, each containing hundreds of millions of stars. In this place, he concludes, it is highly unlikely that the Earth is the only planet to exist.

Hawking's argument follows the reasoning of probability. He makes the same case for life elsewhere in the universe as the ancient Greeks made for extraterrestrial life. The ancient Greeks believed that life probably exists beyond the Earth. They thought that life probably exists beyond the Earth. They thought that life probably exists beyond the Earth.

partly on Sunday. In the first paragraph, what relatively recent finding does the author say supports the claim that life probably exists beyond the Earth?

- The universe has 100 billion galaxies.
- Millions more stars have now been discovered.
- Hundreds of exoplanets have been detected.
- Planets identical to the Earth have been found.

What type of evidence does Stephen Hawking mainly use to support his argument for extraterrestrial life?

- Logical reasoning
- Direct observation
- Experimental study
- Expert opinion

Why do scientists believe extremophiles are relevant to the argument for extraterrestrial life?

- They are the only organisms that have been identified.
- They are the only organisms that have been identified.
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- They are the only organisms that have been identified.

What chemical structures not found on Earth are particularly diverse and adaptable?

... (54) ... a strictly mathematical point of view, straight lines ... (55) ... literally served this purpose. But the Greek architects knew ... (56) ... of perception to realize that when the eye views a perfectly straight vertical shaft, the ... (57) ... to the brain is that the column is skinny and ... (58) ... enough to hold up anything at all, just as a part ... (59) ... of sagging downward.

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Validity, usefulness and consequences

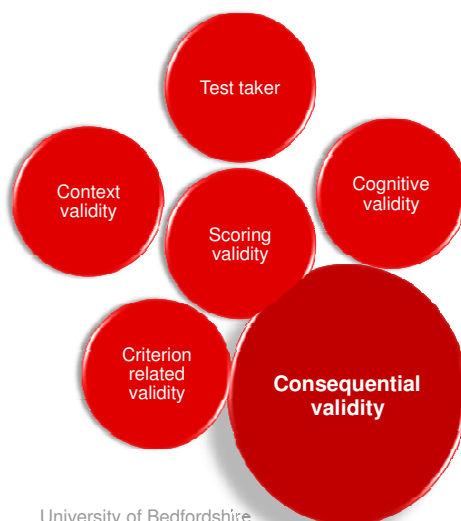
WASHBACK AND VALIDATION

The test of English for Academic Purposes TEAP



- Developed for Japanese university entrance by Society for Testing English Proficiency (STEP) & Sophia University advised by CRELLA
- Innovative 4 skills test
- Purpose to encourage changes in teaching of English in Japanese High Schools:
 - Communication rather than Grammar-Translation
 - Promoting teaching of spoken English

Socio-cognitive view of validation



Consequential aspect of validity/
test use fundamental to justification
of new test

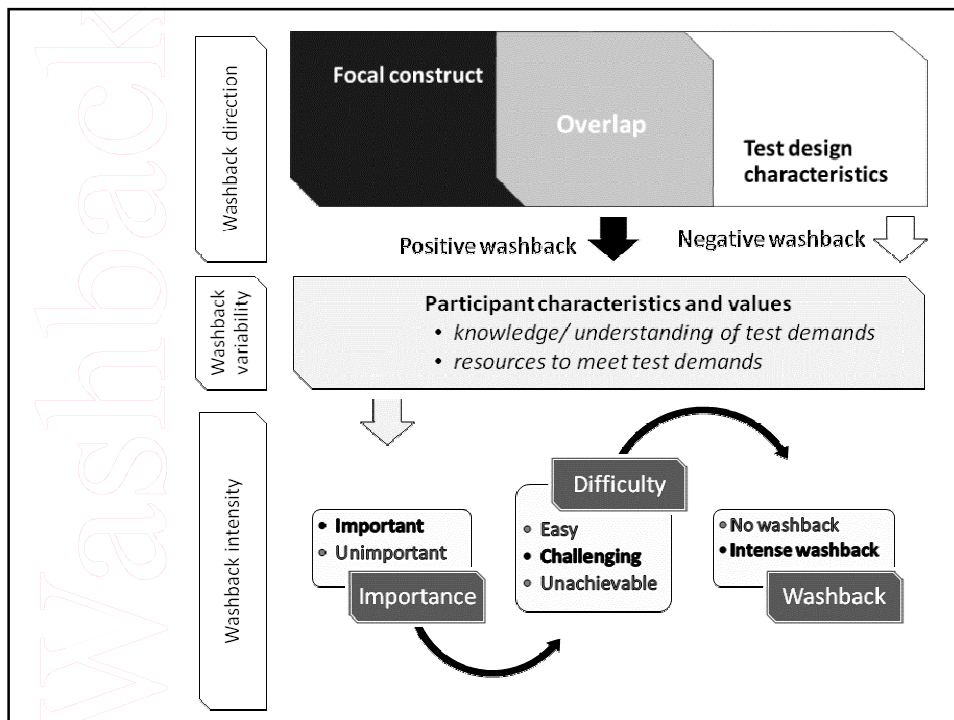
- *A priori* evidence for likely washback effects
- *A posteriori* evidence of observed washback effects

Statement of intended impact



Testing projects often declare intention to promote 'good practice in teaching and learning' without detailing what this entails or how it is expected to come about.

- Need for explicit washback strategy as part of assessment use argument
- Detailed statement of intended impact to include
 - teaching and learning behaviours to be promoted
 - strategies used to promote them
 - anticipated threats to positive washback



Statement of intended impact

what kinds of washback should we expect?



Setting: key participants' identity & investment in decisions based on results

Test use: value & stakes of success; perceived difficulty; availability of alternatives

Beliefs about teaching and learning: compatibility with test demands; local precedents for test preparation

Knowledge of the test: awareness/ misconceptions

Resources: for test preparation

Beliefs about testing: familiarity with tests; orientation towards tests

Interactions between participants: information flow; social pressures

Anticipating washback

How might the new test affect educational practice?



- Theoretical insights
 - Washback theory, innovation theory, theories of learning and SLA
- Insights from developers
 - Experience of educators involved in test design and development, knowledge of context
- Insights from stakeholders
 - Questionnaires and focus groups with representative stakeholders

Investigating washback from TEAP over time

Four linked projects



- Project 1: initial design phase of the test
 - Reflection, anticipated washback effects of design choices
- Project 2: emerging plans for implementation
 - Gathering evidence of views of key participants of test itself and of test developers' strategies for promoting beneficial effects
- Project 3: Investigating washback in context
 - Reports from stakeholders and direct observation of behaviour in the classroom
- Project 4: Outcomes
 - Evidence for improved teaching and learning

Anticipatory questionnaire to high school (HS) teachers and students

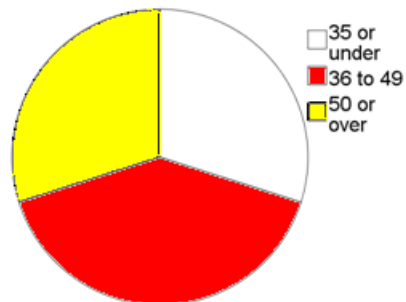


- Target Language Use: Perceptions of university study and the English language skills required at university
- Current practices in Japanese HS English classes
- Perceived washback effects of current university entrance exams
- Likely effects of changes to content of university entrance exams
- Perceptions of innovative features of TEAP

Anticipatory questionnaire
to high school (HS) teachers and students



- 75 schools
- 3,868 final year students. 79% female, 21% male
- 423 teachers. 55% female, 45% male



What do HS teachers and students believe to be the English language demands of university study in Japan?

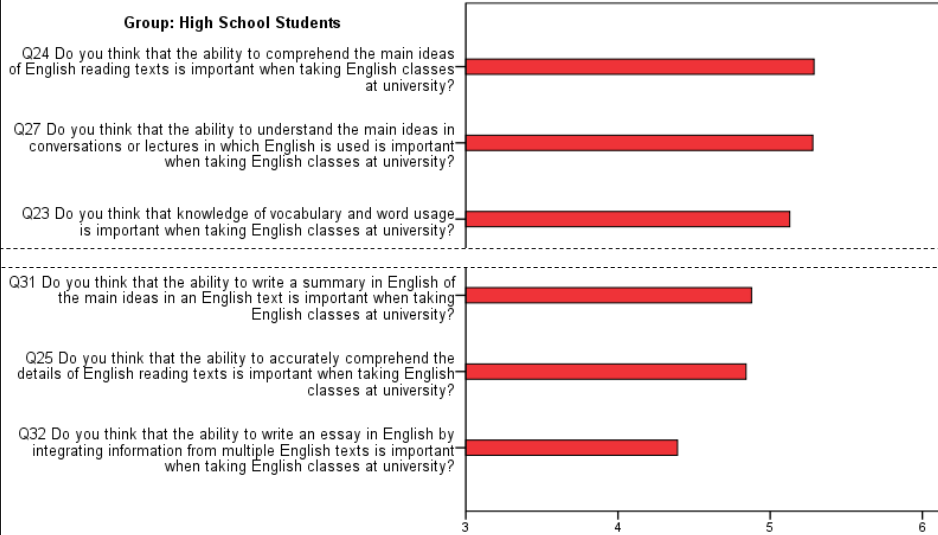
ENGLISH IN UNIVERSITY STUDY

English language requirements at university

1 (Definitely not) - 6 (Definitely).



Group: High School Students

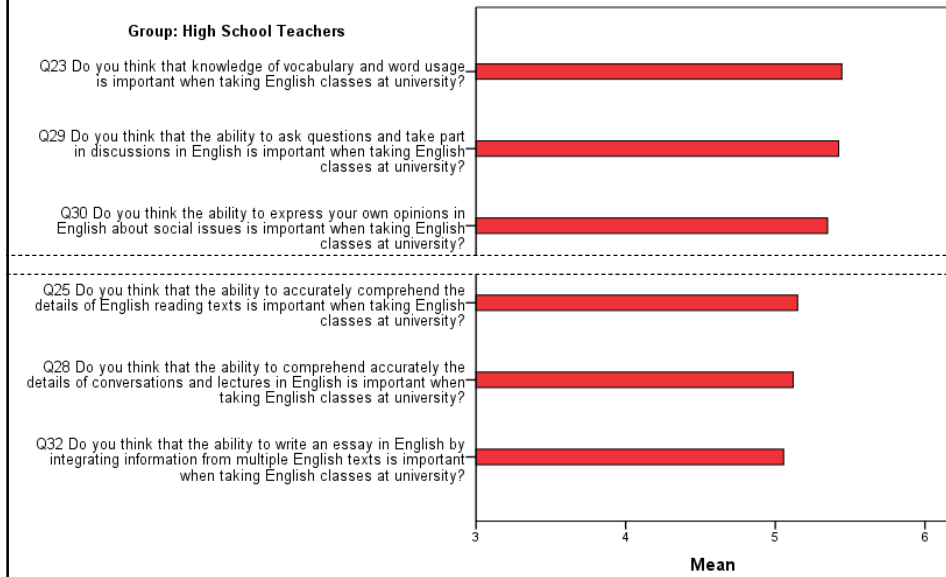


English language requirements at university

1 (Definitely not) - 6 (Definitely).



Group: High School Teachers



What is the focus in English language classes in Japanese High Schools?

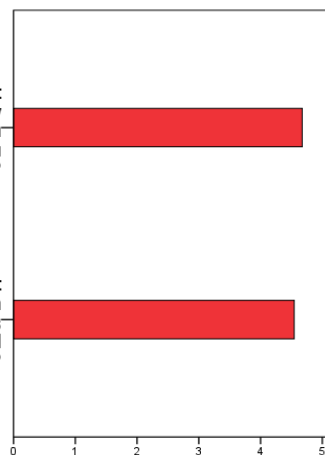
HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TODAY

Perceived washback of current tests

Group: High School Students

Q7 Do you think the kind of test items used in the University English entrance exams you plan to take influence the way you study English?

Q6 In general do you think that the kind of test items used in university English entrance exams has an influence on high school English classes in Japan?

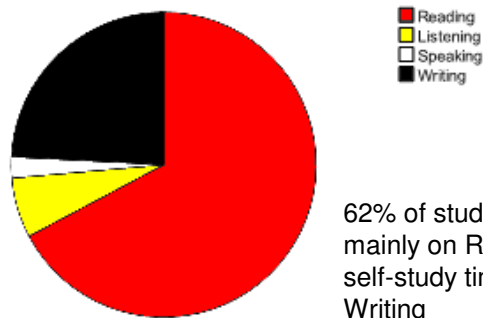


Focus in entrance test preparation Students



Q3 The greatest amount of time in the lessons or study programs is devoted to which of the following four skills?

Group: High School Students



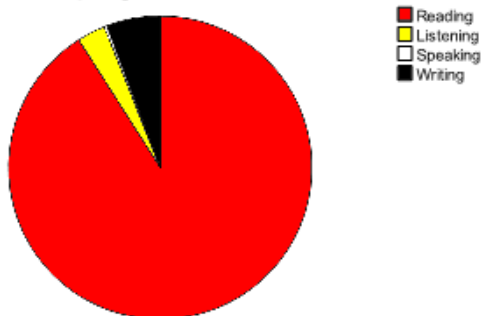
62% of students focus mainly on Reading in self-study time, 28% Writing

Focus in entrance test preparation Teachers



Q3 The greatest amount of time in the lessons or study programs is devoted to which of the following four skills?

Group: High School Teachers

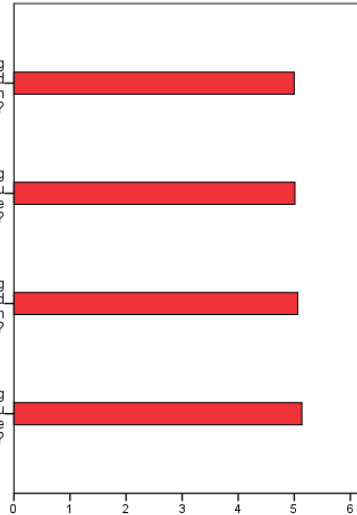


Perceived washback of new tests



Group: High School Students

- Q8 Do you think that the inclusion of a speaking test in university English entrance exams would lead to an increase in speaking activities in high school English classes in Japan?
- Q9 Do you think that the inclusion of a speaking test in the university English entrance exams you plan to take would lead to an increase in the amount of time you spend studying speaking?
- Q10 Do you think that the inclusion of a writing test in university English entrance exams would lead to an increase in writing activities in high school English classes in Japan?
- Q11 Do you think that the inclusion of a writing test in the university English entrance exams you plan to take would lead to an increase in the amount of time you spend studying writing?



How would changes to the system affect practice?

VIEWS ON POSSIBLE CHANGES

Q8 *Do you think that the inclusion of a speaking test in university English entrance exams would lead to an increase in speaking activities in high school English classes in Japan?*

- Students 89.9% (42.3% 'Definitely')
- Teachers 95.7% (47.0% 'Definitely')

Q9 *Do you think that the inclusion of a speaking test in the university English entrance exams you plan to take would lead to an increase in the amount of time you spend studying speaking?*

- Students 90.2% (43.5% 'Definitely')

Q17 *Do you think that testing only reading is sufficient for university English entrance exams?*

- Teachers 91.7% No (46.6% 'Definitely not').
- Students 59.8% No (28.2% 'If I had to choose, no')

Q18 *Do you think that university English entrance exams should include a listening test?*

- Teachers 88.3% (42.7% 'Definitely')
- Students 72.2% (32.7 'If I had to choose, yes')

Q19 Do you think that university English entrance exams should include a speaking test?

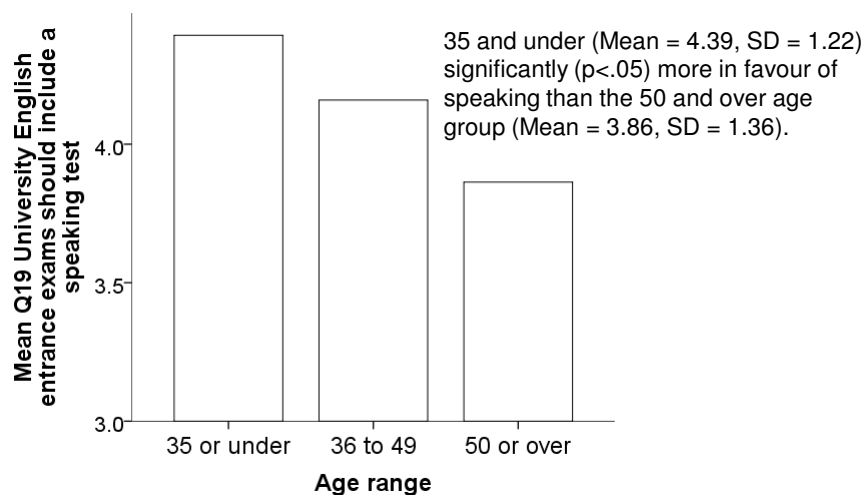
- Teachers 71% (30.7 'If I had to choose, yes')
- Students 51.6% (27.1% 'If I had to choose, yes')
- Note 12.4% of students 'Definitely no' vs 10.8% 'Definitely'

Q20 Do you think that university English entrance exams should include a writing test?

- Teachers 92.0% (36.4% 'Probably')
- Students 75.6% (37.1% 'If I had to choose, yes')

Changes to tests

Teachers



Innovative features of TEAP



Welcome from most teachers and students for...

- Standardising and publicising the structure of the test
- Providing of feedback on performance when reporting results
- Multiple administrations: more opportunities to sit for the test
- Recognition of results by multiple universities

But minority of teachers oppose the last two.

Statement of intended impact



- The *social impact* of the test on the broader social context in which it will be administered and used
- *General washback* from the test design as whole on EFL education in Japan
- *Task-specific washback* how each of the various task types included in the components of the test are intended to contribute to improved teaching and learning
- **Intended Impact**
- **Features of test design/ procedures**
- **Action Plan**

Conclusions



- Contrary to the mandated 'four skills' teaching, classes currently heavily weighted towards written language
- All four skills judged by teachers and students to be important at university
- Belief in strong influence on what is taught and studied: Intended changes to testing → attention to skills other than reading in class
- Proportion of both teachers and students reluctant to see speaking tests introduced