

A case of positive washback: an exploration of the effect of pre-release examination materials on classroom practice

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Abstract

Assessment in schools in the UK takes many different forms, including the use of examinations with pre-release materials. These examinations allow teachers and students early access to materials that will be used during assessments at a later date.

This study had three general research questions: do teachers use pre-release materials in different ways; how do students perceive and respond to the use of pre-release materials in exam preparation; and are there any discernable associations between student outcomes, motivation and teacher practices.

Data were gathered from six secondary schools that were using pre-release materials in advance of a General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)¹ geography examination. These data were collected via teacher interviews, lesson observations, student surveys, and statistical analyses of student performance data in the live geography examination.

Study findings suggest that the pre-release examination mode was beneficial in terms of: motivation; providing a positive learning experience; and facilitating the assessment of higher order types of skills to those often tested by other exams.

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¹ GCSEs are the main form of Level 1 and Level 2 national examinations taken at the end of compulsory schooling in the UK