



# THE IMPACT OF EPLIS ON AVIATION ENGLISH TEACHERS

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EALTA – Dublin - 2019

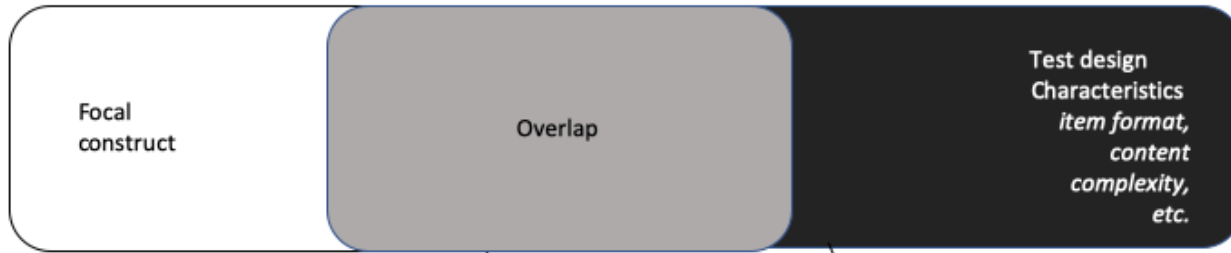
# Background

- EPLIS (Aviation English Proficiency Exam for the Brazilian Airspace Control System);
  - In-service air traffic controllers and aeronautical station operators
  - ICAO language policy
  - High-stakes test in the aviation context
- The test application was extended to initial training programs;
- A need to investigate the impact of this decision.

# Research Questions

- (RQ1) What is the washback of EPLIS on teachers' perceptions and attitudes before its implementation in the school context?
- (RQ2) Has the test washback increased on teachers' perceptions and attitudes since its implementation?
- (RQ3) What is the washback of EPLIS on teachers' actions in the classroom?

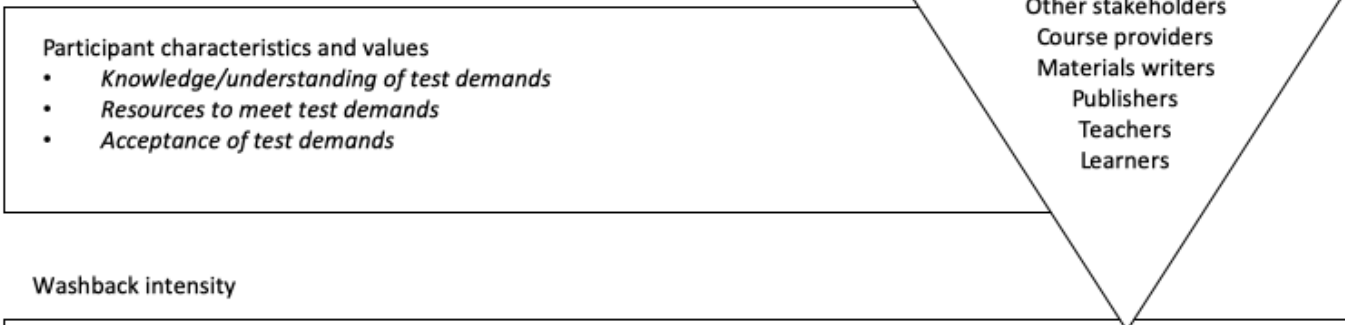
Washback direction



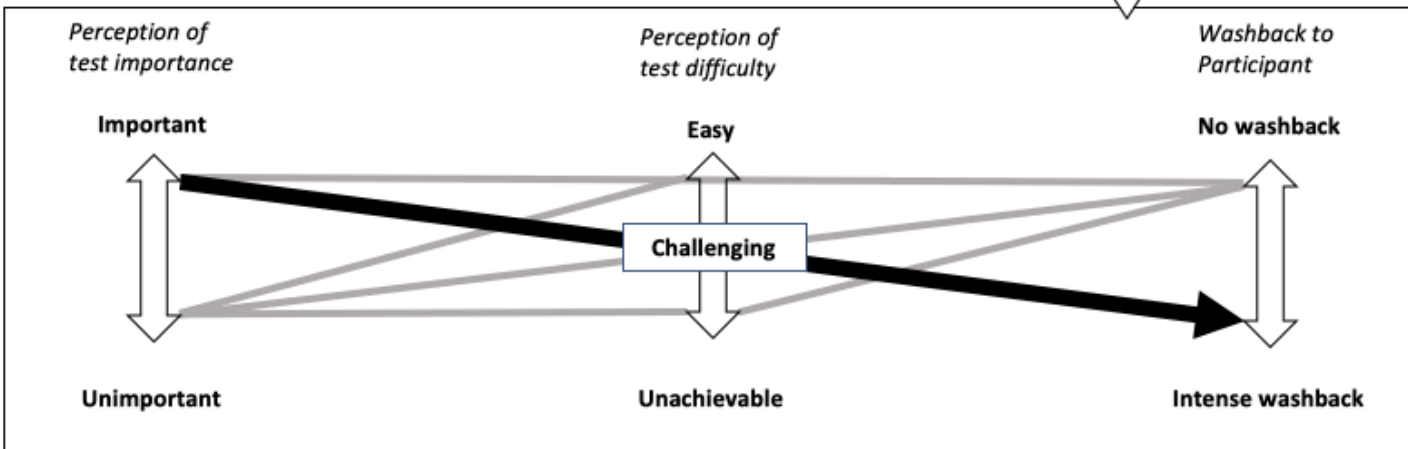
Potential for positive washback

Potential for negative washback

Washback variability



Washback intensity



Green's washback model (2007)

EPLIS	DELIVERY	FORMAT	PURPOSE	TASK
Paper 1	Via computer	30 multiple-choice items (stem and choices are written in Portuguese)	To assess listening comprehension of aeronautical communications	Choose the correct alternative according to the audio
Paper 2	Face to face	Oral Interview	To assess integrated listening and speaking skills	<p>Part 1: Four questions related to the professional routine and career</p> <p>Part 2: Ten problematic situations are read aloud, and test-taker explains it and then offers a suggestion</p> <p>Part 3: Four aviation related questions.</p> <p>Part 4: Test-taker describes a picture and then tells a story about it.</p>

# Expected Washback Effect

- The creation of English for Specific Purposes Programs;
- The development of oral skills (listening and speaking);
- The coverage of work related topics and language functions used in aeronautical communication;
- The use of plain English to manage unusual, unexpected and emergency situations;
- The use of communicative strategies to resolve misunderstandings.

# Research scenario and participants

- Air Traffic Control Initial Training Program;
- Duration: 2 year course
- 407 students (4 grades)
- 21 English teachers (17 with a major in English and 04 air traffic controllers);
- 500 hours of English instruction.

# Research Design

	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Data</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Instrument</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
Preliminary study	Early perceptions and attitudes (RQ1)	Quantitative / Qualitative	12 teachers	2014	Initial questionnaire – 17 items	Descriptive Statistics + Content Analysis
Main study – Phase 1	Current perceptions and attitudes (RQ2)	Quantitative / Qualitative	16 teachers	2017	Main questionnaire (65 items) + interviews	Descriptive Statistics + Content Analysis
Main study – Phase 2	Current actions (RQ3)	Qualitative	4 teachers	2017	Observation Scheme + interviews	Content analysis



## (RQ1) Early teachers' perceptions and attitudes

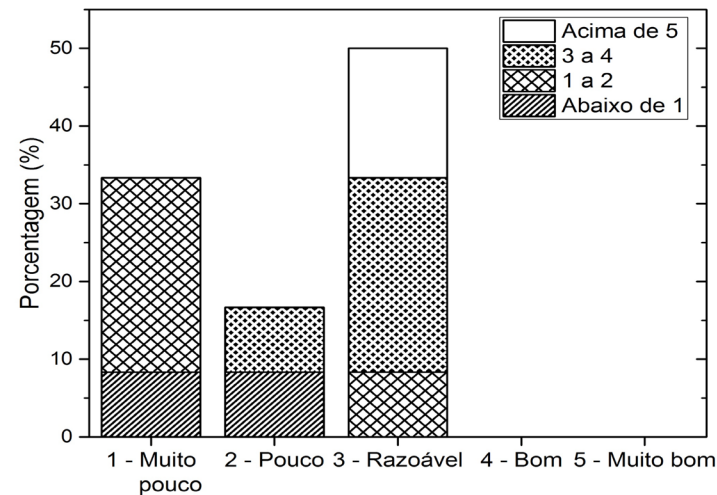
<b>Aspects of washback</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
EPLIS influence on the school syllabus	12	2,583	1,505
EPLIS influence on the use of textbooks	12	2,667	1,614
EPLIS influence on the school methodology	12	2,250	1,215
EPLIS influence on teacher's practice	12	2,167	0,937
EPLIS influence on classroom activities	12	2,417	1,165
EPLIS influence on the school assessment	12	1,750	0,866
EPLIS influence on students' learning strategies	12	1,667	0,778
	<b>12</b>	<b>2,214</b>	<b>1,154</b>

# Response Patterns (Burrows, 2004)

- Two factors seemed to mediate the washback intensity:
  - Experience in Aviation English Teaching
  - General Knowledge of the Test
- Teachers with more than 3 years of aviation English teaching experience (Group 2) rated their knowledge of the test higher, as well as the test influence on their teaching practice and on the classroom tasks they did with students.

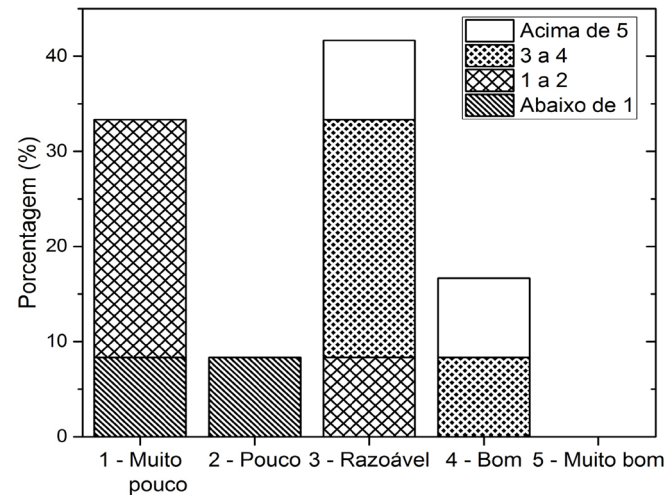
# Teacher's practice

- 83,3% of Group 1 answered VERY POOR or POOR for the influence of EPLIS on teacher's practice.
- 83,3% of Group 2 answered FAIR.



# Classroom tasks

- 83,3% of Group 1 answered VERY POOR or POOR for the influence of EPLIS on the types of activities done in the classroom.
- 100% of Group 2 answered FAIR or GOOD.



## (RQ2) Current teachers' perceptions and attitudes

<b>Knowledge of the test</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
General knowledge	16	4.000	0.966
Doc 9835 – ICAO	16	3.187	1.167
Test purpose	16	4.187	0.834
Test content	16	4.065	0.853
Tasks in Phase 1	16	4.065	0.928
Tasks in Phase 2	16	4.065	0.997
Language Proficiency Rating Scale	16	4.125	0.885
Operational Level 4	16	4.062	0.853

# Knowledge of the test

- In general, knowledge of EPLIS increased among English teachers:
  - Gaps in the understanding of the test were still reported by some teachers with a major in English and less experienced professionals;
- Few training opportunities and little interest in accessing the test website.

*Much more than before because now I know MORE than before, (+) despite not knowing (+) as much as I'd like to (+) because I'm not an EPLIS examiner (+) I've never done a course*  
(Interview with teacher Eduardo)

# EPLIS influence on classroom teaching

Aspects of washback	1	2	3	4	5
EPLIS influence on teacher's methodology	0.06	0.19	0.00	0.62	0.12
EPLIS influence on content knowledge	0.00	0.19	0.06	0.62	0.12
EPLIS influence on the use of textbooks	0.00	0.25	0.12	0.56	0.06
EPLIS influence on classroom activities	0.00	0.00	0.06	0.75	0.19
EPLIS influence on the school achievement tests	0.06	0.12	0.25	0.56	0.00
EPLIS influence on the school projects	0.00	0.06	0.06	0.69	0.19

# EPLIS influence on classroom teaching

- The English teachers confirmed that they wouldn't have developed or emphasized exam tasks in their classroom if the test hadn't been implemented at the school.

*Something that I wouldn't normally do (+) when I entered here I wouldn't do 'describe the picture'  
(+) I do it today because I know it's part of EPLIS*

(Interview with teacher Eduardo)

- Changes in the school achievement tests and the introduction of oral tests were also pointed out as influence of EPLIS.



# Positive impact

- 81% of teachers stated that the test motivates the students to study;
- 88% of teachers agreed that the test helps to increase students' language proficiency; and
- 81% of teachers affirmed that the test should not be optional.

*I think the test only helps (+) I think it is a motivating factor (+) to make students aware of the importance of the English class (+) look' you have to pay attention because you have a test to do. (Interview with coordinator and teacher Isabel)*

# Test Preparation

- Listening and speaking activities related to the test were said to be very frequent in the classroom.
- However, reading activities were considered more frequent than speaking activities.

*Because of the written tests (+) the coordinator says' (+) you have to cover these subject matters with students (+) here are the points that you can not leave uncovered (+) so, in this way (+) we are instructed to teach that subject matter because it will be in the test*

(Interview with teacher Eduardo)

# School achievement tests

- Multiple choice tests (mid term and final term)
  - listening and reading comprehension
  - 70 out of 100 = pass
  - Work location is chosen according to students' GPA.
- Oral tests
  - Oral production
  - Written prompts
  - Performance is not counted towards students' final marks.
- Teacher-made tests (Teachers didn't receive any special training in developing and designing multiple choice and speaking tests)

## The power of the written tests

*Here they (students) are very focused on getting a passing mark (+) they want a passing mark(+)  
so, they become more worried about the school written tests (+) EPLIS (+) they know they can  
have a chance of doing it again later (+) so, what do they do” (+) they hold to what is important  
right now (Interview with teacher Ana)*

◦Although, students' results in EPLIS are accepted by air traffic control authorities (decision-makers), they are not demanded (Stoneman, 2006).



(RQ3) TEACHERS' ACTIONS

## Washback and test proximity (SMITH, 1991; CHENG et al, 2010)

- In the 4th grade, the test was mentioned and discussed more often with students;
- Oral skills were further explored in the classroom;
- High impact of EPLIS Paper 1 format;
- Some aspects of EPLIS Paper 2 were overemphasized;
- Role-plays were very rare as they were not part of EPLIS;
- Narrowing of the curriculum and of the instruction methods (Smith, 1991)

# Washback and students' level of proficiency (CHENG et al, 2010)

## Higher level classes

- Teachers acted as facilitators;
- More opportunities of interaction among learners;
- Student talking time was maximized;
- More oral production activities;
- Less reading aloud practice.

## Lower level classes

- Teachers acted as controllers;
- Teacher- student interaction was predominant;
- Student talking time was reduced;
- Oral production was reduced (activities were redirected to writing)
- More reading aloud practice.

# Teachers' knowledge of test demands and test preparation

## **High levels of knowledge**

- Varied format preparation (Popham, 1991);
- Language functions are expanded;
- Different formats for oral activities.

## **Low levels of knowledge**

- Same format preparation (Popham, 1991);
- Language functions are narrowed;
- Emphasis on some aspects of the test.



# Implications

- Language functions tested should be expanded to include the management of pilot-controller dialogue;
- Teachers should receive training in the test demands;
- Teachers' assessment literacy must also be increased so that classroom tests be more aligned with students' needs.
- Students' performance in the school oral tests should be counted towards their final marks.

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# Thank you!

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Any questions?