CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

2.1 Overview

A study of the effects of feedback from marking of localised external examinations on teaching and learning requires a review of literature focusing on the relationship between English language and colonialism, and the localisation of examinations in the context of Lesotho. The concept of assessment will be discussed both in general and more specifically, with focus on assessment of English language in the context of Lesotho. Reference will be made to different perceptions about ‘washback’ effects, how washback works, and strategies suggested by different authors that promote positive washback in relation to examination feedback to teachers. This also calls for an exploration of literature on ‘high-stakes testing’. This is done because the COSC examinations are considered high-stakes tests. Moreover, literature on teacher change is relevant in this study. Finally, reference will be made to the concept of critical discourse analysis, because the discourse of examiners’ reports is crucial in understanding the ways in which such texts are positioned and positioning the readers (teachers) (Janks, 1995).

2.2 English and Colonialism

English became the language of both imperialism and colonialism (Phillipson, 1992) hence the reason why most ex-British colonies have English language as both the official language and the language of learning and teaching. Lesotho is no exception. Lesotho became a colony of Britain in 1868. English was the language of education and conversion in Lesotho. That is, Christian missionaries who also became agents of
colonialism and British imperialism used the language of the coloniser in education to convert the colonised people to their religion and culture. The education system which was imported into Lesotho during the colonial period was exclusive\(^1\) unlike the indigenous education which was more inclusive\(^2\). This exclusive nature of education has been maintained through a ‘high-stakes’ examination system (to be elaborated on later in this chapter) that emphasises selection to university, and is targeted at a small proportion of the student population, and that still exists in Lesotho today.

In different places and at different times colonialism depicted itself in various forms. To some people it appeared as a threat and force but to others it was laden with throbs of promise (Phillipson, 1992). On the same note, Skutnabb-Kangas (1999), argues that there can be colonialism of both the mind and the body. She furthers her argument by saying that the former, which is done through language, is “the most sophisticated means of controlling people” (1999:26). The language policy in Lesotho as presented in the Lesotho Constitution (1994) and the Ministry of Education, Policy Document (1995) puts a rubber stamp on the dominance of English in education and in the market place. Through these two documents, English is made an official language concurrently with Sesotho.

It has to be noted that colonialism brought about the marginalisation and suppression of the languages of the people colonised, while elevating English as a language of power (Pennycook, 1994). Apart from being the language of education, English became an

\(^1\) Exclusive education - Those who fail English language are excluded. They cannot proceed to the higher secondary or university

\(^2\) Inclusive education – Every one is legible, no one is excluded by an examination.
official language, concurrent with Sesotho. In addition, it became a ‘failing subject’ at secondary education level. Research findings by Chabisi (2000) revealed that parents and teachers are not happy with that state of affairs. In Chabisi’s (2000) study all the interviewees felt that English should not be a failing subject although they believed that English should remain the language of teaching and learning. The dominance of English language in the education system of Lesotho is in line with what Ngugi (1986:9) argues the colonialists did. He states,

> In my view language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation.

The educated elite and those who hold the administrative, economic and political power remain the ones who control, select and determine what has to be taught and assessed, and how (Bernstein, 1977). These are the people who seem to perpetuate the supremacy of the English language at the expense of the needs of the Basotho nation which it is supposed to serve. This state of affairs is referred to as colonial legacy. The economic and socio-political pressures and movements in the colonies led to political independence of the ex-colonies without economic independence which landed many of these states into what is termed neo-colonialism. This marked the entrenchment of economic dependency by the politically independent African states on the ex-colonisers and other economic powers such as America. Lack of full control over their own affairs led to many problems, especially in the education systems of the ex-colonies – Lesotho included. The desire for full control over their own affairs forced the Basotho to think seriously about the need to localise the COSC examinations in Lesotho which were

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3 In the context of Lesotho, a ‘failing subject’ refers to that subject which if a student fails s/he cannot proceed to the next level even if s/he has passed all other subjects.
formerly controlled by Britain. Hence the next section will discuss localisation of examinations in Lesotho.

### 2.3 Localisation of Examinations in Lesotho

The continuing attachment of some of the national education systems to UCLES and the conventions thereon resulted in declining standards as a result of poor performance in the English proficiency tests; and the substantial cost involved in the running of these examinations (Smarter Network, 2003). This state of affairs led to a rethinking of necessary measures to be taken in order to assume control over the O’level examinations (the COSC in the case of Lesotho). Experience has shown that the UCLES tended to impose conditions no longer appropriate to national needs and curriculum priorities of former British colonies therefore there was the need to redress this situation.

Thoughts about the feasibility of the localisation of examinations date back to the Deakin's Report of 1973 in (Nketekete, 2002), which ruled out the ability of the three countries (Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland) to localise the O’level examinations. In 1985/86, UCLES indicated that a uniform examination, the General Certificate of Secondary Examination (GCSE) for the United Kingdom, with overseas countries served by the International General Certificate of Secondary Examination (IGCSE), was to be introduced in 1988. Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland thought it wise to commence localising the O’levels with the help of UCLES. Today Botswana has made more progress in terms of the localisation of its examinations. For instance, both the setting and marking of the examinations are done locally, while in the two countries only marking of
the examinations is done locally, while Lesotho still buys the examinations from Cambridge and only marking is done locally. It has to be noted that developments towards localising the COSC are quite advanced in Swaziland (Swaziland News, June 2003).

The rationale for localisation of COSC (Ministry of Education, Seminar Report 1995:18) is indicated in the previous chapter (section 1.5) of this report. However, those countries that wish to localise need to take into consideration that they need to be competent in constructing examinations which should maintain the standards that preceded localisation. There was the need for teacher-training in order to equip teachers with assessment skills and techniques that would help them carry out the marking of examinations diligently. Fears and misgivings about localisation became part of the ongoing debates and discussions that preceded localisation. Those who are against localisation said that they feared corruption, leaking of examination papers and lack of international recognition of locally controlled examinations (Lesotho Today, June 1995). These fears are evidenced by lack of confidence among the Basotho to handle their own education affairs - the result of the so-called colonial legacy. There is evidence of some of the above-mentioned apprehensions about the recognition of a wholly local school-leaving examination in the following comments by the Assistant Registrar of the Examinations Council of Lesotho (ECOL):

The Cambridge Overseas School Certificate was, and still is, a powerful document to our candidates as it enjoys recognition in many parts of the world. For this reason, ECOL will not make a complete separation from UCLES immediately; there will be a joint certificate given to successful candidates by both ECOL and UCLES (Morahanye, 1999:11).
Although the existence of these fears and threats cannot be overlooked, on the whole the 1995 National Seminar on Localisation in Lesotho reached a consensus on the feasibility and viability of localisation of COSC examinations in Lesotho. The reasons for localisation of the school leaving examinations cut across the African region. These are both political and economical. There was a dire desire by those countries whose examinations are run by Cambridge to have full control of the education standards by developing examinations and administering them locally at all levels. The question of relevance was one of the compelling ones. In terms of the economy, localisation was seen as a welcome move since it would reduce the amount of money paid by both the governments and the parents to UCLES in examination fees. The final reason was that localisation would ensure unity between education levels. Before localisation there was no correlation between the O’level examinations and the Junior Certificate programmes run locally. Fully-fledged localisation would mean that the COSC syllabus would be designed on the basis of the JC syllabus and hence the two examinations would have a link.

Literature has shown that English foreign and second language proficiency tests were for some time not based on any particular syllabus but were designed to measure different language abilities in general (Nketekete, 2002). This made it difficult for teachers to prepare students for these tests because the learning objectives that could serve as guidelines for selecting appropriate teaching materials and procedures that would serve these objectives were not identified. This state of affairs prevailed in Lesotho and its implications are far-reaching for Lesotho English education, especially when the tests are
set by speakers of English as a first language, in a foreign country, but are meant for second language speakers in Lesotho. It has to be noted that presently however, Basotho children write COSC examinations based on the Cambridge syllabus. Prior to 1995, both the setting and marking of COSC examinations, and of English language examinations in particular, were done in Cambridge. Assessment feedback was delivered from Cambridge in the United Kingdom to ECOL and down to the teachers in schools from the United Kingdom. For this reason, there is a possibility that many teachers did not have access to that information, hence their pedagogical practices were likely to be uninformed about assessment processes and requirements, and as a result they could not help students improve their work. Lack of information could be attributed to, among other factors, postage delays and other complications in the delivery of mail between overseas countries.

In order to make localisation realistic the localising country should embark on comprehensive training programmes to meet the needs of the giant responsibility (Ministry of Education, Seminar Report 1995). Localisation in the sister countries mentioned earlier in this report began as a gradual process. The transition in Botswana occurred in collaboration with the UCLES. Initially the training of personnel was conducted by UCLES. The reasons for this move were mainly to achieve full control of the education standards, to reduce costs, and to integrate the Junior Certificate programme which was locally set with the Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE). Localisation in Botswana took this priority structure:

- marking – training of markers was done first, initiated by the UCLES and then locals using the cascade model - where the first group of teachers trained, were trained to train the next and so on;
development of syllabuses;
setting - administration and processing of papers;
grading and grade review was to be the last on the priority list.

All the stages of localisation have been implemented in Botswana in 2002 (Republic of Botswana- Ministry of Education 2003).

Lesotho adopted the same procedures as Botswana. In the case of Lesotho however, the training of markers was conducted concurrently with the training of setters, as mentioned in Chapter One. What motivated Lesotho in her endeavour to localise were some of the achievements made by her predecessors in localisation. For example, the Kenyan representative at the Lesotho Seminar for localisation (1995:16) claimed that among others, the benefits of localisation of examinations are: the local involvement in setting and moderation, experience in marking activities and processing of examination records and computerisation of results. The Kenyan representative stated,

Teachers and lecturers have gained a lot of experience in marking which has helped them keep up high standards of teaching and also to be updated with the changing trends in the world of education. Moreover, students have gained more from classroom experience (Ministry of Education Seminar Report, 1995:16).

It is envisaged by the researcher that now that English language examinations are marked locally, there would be benefits for English language education in Lesotho. The study further hopes to reveal whether, as the aftermath of the localisation of marking, feedback from the local examination board is readily available to all teachers throughout Lesotho. In addition, it is hoped that the study will reveal whether this information is useful to the teachers, who may in turn use it to improve English language teaching and learners’ performance in the examinations. The Assistant Registrar of ECOL made the
observation that the localisation process has already improved the teaching of subjects in schools where teachers are marking their subjects (Morahanye, 1999: 29).

Having considered localisation of the marking of English language examinations, it is of benefit to examine the concept of assessment in general and more specifically by looking at assessment of English in Lesotho. Therefore, the next section examines the concept of assessment in broader terms and assessment in the context of Lesotho.

2.4 Assessment

Assessment is best described as a holistic process aimed at determining how much students have learned and understood (Brown et al., 1996). They further define assessment as a multifaceted process that has several aims such as grading, failing or passing students, promotion, obtaining feedback, enabling teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching, and maintaining an academic standard of awards. Madaus et al (1997:9) support the above statements by defining assessment thus:

It is designed to measure or assess a particular body of knowledge, skills, abilities or performances that are of interest to the test developer and the eventual user.

Many educationists argue that assessment should not be seen as an isolated entity, independent of teaching and learning. Shepard (2000:10) asserted, “[It must be] insightfully tied to learning steps and must not be postponed to an end point of instruction”. On the same note, Horn-Botha (1996) asserts that assessment is an important and an integral part of the learning process. Other scholars in the field of assessment state,
Assessment defines for students what is important, what counts, how they will spend their time and how they will see themselves as learners. If you want to change student learning, then change the methods of assessment (Brown, Bull and Pendlebury, 1997:6, In Luckett and Sutherland, 1997).

The concept of fairness is very important in assessment literature. Fairness in assessment is derived from two important notions of reliability and validity. The former has to do with consistency (Bailey, 1998). This means that assessment must produce the same set of results under different circumstances. Validity means that in order for assessment to be valid it must measure what it is intended to measure and serve the purposes for which it is set (Bailey, (1998); Brown and Knight, 1994; Pahad, 1997). Fredricksen and Collins 1989 in Gipps, 1994) introduced the notion of ‘systemic validity’- this means, tests used to improve learning can be effective only if they relate to the whole educational system, and not if they are used in isolation. According to them, testing is a dynamic process in which systemic change takes place according to feedback obtained from the tests. On the basis of this argument, Shohamy (1992) asserts that in order for information to lead to change, it must have high systemic validity and be translatable into instructional activities and actual strategies for teaching and learning.

If assessment is about enhancing learning, one may wish to find out how true this statement is in practice. Boud (1990) argues that the paradox is that assessment can so often do the opposite. He contends that it can promote competitiveness and strategic or partial learning by encouraging students to focus on those things that are assessed at the expense of those things that are not. In support of this argument, Davies (1995) asserts that in an attempt to achieve reliability, teaching objectives tend to be diluted, teachers tend to prepare students for assessment purposes and overlook the most integral part in
the teaching and learning process, which is to enhance students’ understanding and assist them to acquire knowledge. The next section will consider types of assessment.

Assessment is categorised into two main types – formative and summative. The former is continuous and developmental since it is done during instruction. It serves the purposes of providing feedback to students, to motivate them and to help teachers diagnose students’ strengths and weaknesses. The outcomes of formative assessment tend to help teachers to improve their teaching in order to foster desired, and improved learning. According to contemporary research, summative assessment in the form of public external examinations is not only used to predict success in future study and work, but it could also be used to help teachers improve students’ learning. Contemporary research again addresses alternative assessment approaches which require students to demonstrate their competencies in a variety of contexts including students’ ‘everyday’ contexts. Hill and Parry (1994) refer to these as students’ cultural contexts. This creates an assessment paradox in the case of Lesotho where the assessor resides in Cambridge, while the assessed are in Lesotho. One may question how the former could be in a position to use contexts that students in Lesotho are familiar with. This paradox could have been the premise upon which localisation of COSC examinations were based. The findings of this study are likely to throw light on this paradox. Darling-Hammond et al (1995) describe these alternative assessments as: engaging students in reading, writing, and speaking activities “set in a meaningful context that provides connections between real world experiences and school-based ideas” (1995:4).
In response to the need for alternative assessment approaches, some educational systems in the region, for example South Africa, have opted to include alternative assessment practices in both internal and external examinations. South Africa’s Curriculum 2005 includes alternative assessment such as portfolios and internal assessment (Ministry of Education, 1998 May, June). The portfolios provide yearly records of a student’s progress along his/her educational path. The final decision to promote or keep a student in a class is not based solely on one examination. A student is assessed on a continuous basis. This also implies progressive assessment. A learner’s fate is not determined by one method of assessment. In implementing full localisation Lesotho may think of adopting this alternative methods of assessment. Having considered assessment in general it is fit here to look at the assessment of English language in particular, since the focus of the study was on the flow of information from the marking of COSC English examinations in the context of Lesotho.

2.5 Assessment of English language in Lesotho

Assessment of English language is done at three levels of the education system in Lesotho. There is a Primary School Leaving Certificate which is used for selection into secondary education. This certificate is written after seven years of primary education. At secondary level students write a Junior Certificate, which is written after three years of schooling. This provides selection to a higher level of secondary education which is two years, after which an O’Level examination (COSC) is written.
Assessment of English language in Lesotho will be looked at, at the level of the COSC examinations. The two junior examinations are fully under local control. There has been a concern that there is disunity between the JC and the COSC examinations. Some people have argued that continuity and unity between the two could be achieved if full localisation of the COSC is realised. The localisation of the marking of COSC examinations was formalised in 1995. However, the setting of these examinations remains in the hands of external examinations body - the UCLES. These examinations give a summary of learners’ level of achievement at the end of secondary school. They determine which students graduate to university. Research has shown that assessment produces washback which affects what happens in English language sessions and examination preparation (Brown, 1998) in ways that will be illustrated in the following paragraphs. This study will undertake an analysis of the English language examiners’ reports and other methods such as interviews and questionnaires to establish if there is any ‘washback’ effect in English language teaching and learning in Lesotho. This will be traced back to teachers’ involvement in the marking of English language external examinations and how feedback from the marking board is disseminated and utilised by teachers. The concept of ‘washback’ is now going to be discussed in detail in the next section.

2.6 Dilemmas of Washback

In assessment literature washback is generally defined as the backwash, the test impact, curriculum alignment, test feedback, and the influence of testing on instruction. In this study it will be referred to as the washback. Hamp-Lyons (1998:329) defines the
washback effect as “the influence of tests onto teaching and learning”. Gates (1995) and Shohamy et al (1996) concur with Hamp-Lyons by conceptualising washback as the connection between testing and learning. Some scholars present washback as measurement-driven instruction, or teaching to the test, which implies harmful effects of high-stakes tests (Madaus, 1988).

It has to be noted that recent research has revealed that washback has both positive and negative effects. Bucks (1988 in Bailey, 1996); Bailey (1996) and Shohamy (1993) write about beneficial or harmful washback. Brown and Hudson (1998:367) define washback as “The effect of testing and assessment on the language teaching curriculum that is related to it”. For them washback could either be positive or negative. Messick’s (1996) definition is going to be used as a working definition in this study since it is more encompassing, and inclusive than the previous definitions. He defines washback as:

The extent to which the introduction and use of a test influences language teachers and learners to do things they would not otherwise do that promote or inhibit language learning (1996:241) (italics in original).

In a nutshell, washback has to do with the effect of external testing on the teaching and learning processes in the language classrooms. Alderson and Wall (1993) questioned the existence of washback and then undertook a study to establish its existence or non-existence. The results revealed that both positive and negative washback effects exist. Other empirical studies that have addressed the issue of washback are those by Westdorp (1982), Hughes (1988), Khaniya (1990) and Wall and Alderson (1996). Among the many studies that confirm the existence and the complex nature of washback, reference could be made to Watanabe (1992, 1996a, 1996b), Wall (1996), Alderson and Hamp-Lyons
(1996), Shohamy et al (1996) and Brown and Hudson (1998). However, Alderson and Wall (1992, 1993) argue that there are insufficient empirical studies to confirm the existence of washback, in particular, evidence from classroom observations.

Brown and Hudson (1998) argue that negative washback is experienced if the assessment procedures in a curriculum do not correspond to a curriculum’s goals and objectives; if that is the case, the tests are likely to create a negative washback effect on those objectives, and on the curriculum as a whole. For example, if a certain programme in the curriculum sets a number of communicative performance objectives, but at the end of the course assesses students with multiple-choice tests, this will definitely have a negative effect on students who will not be willing to study curriculum content which is not asked in the tests. This mismatch could force students to insist on studying what is in the tests and ignore the curriculum. This notion of mismatch is neatly related to the concept of ‘constructive alignment’ in teaching and learning, which is expounded by Biggs (1999:11). According to Biggs, constructive alignment occurs when

Good teaching aligns teaching methods and assessment to the learning activities stated in the objectives, so that all aspects of this system are in accord in supporting appropriate student learning.

Positive washback occurs when assessment procedures correspond to the course goals and objectives (Brown and Hudson, 1998). For instance, if a programme in an English language class sets a number of communicative performance objectives and then tests the students using performance assessments such as roleplays, interviews and personal response assessments, a powerful positive washback effect can be created in favour of the communicative performance objectives. This simply means that positive washback
occurs when the tests measure the same types of materials and skills that are described in
the objectives and taught in the courses.

Bailey (1996) has formulated a basic model of washback, in which he talks about the
influence of tests on three elements: participants, processes and products. He goes on to
show that the nature of a test affects the perceptions and attitudes of the participants
(teachers, learners, curriculum designers and materials writers) towards teaching and
learning and other processes such as materials development. These changes tend to affect
the learning outcomes, that is, the product (performance) of work. These could either
reveal beneficial or harmful washback. This study hopes to reveal how feedback from the
tests influences teaching and learning in Lesotho secondary schools. Alderson and Wall
(1993) present fifteen hypotheses in an attempt to further clarify the concept of
“washback hypothesis”. From these, Bailey (1996) deduced two categories of washback
– first, washback to the learner and secondly, washback to the programme. The former,
washback to the learner is clear, the latter refers to the test influence on teachers,
administrators, councillors, curriculum developers and all those who have a stake in the
examinations. There are views on test influence to the individual learner, and on test
influence on other stakeholders in the tests. Shohamy (1992:514) has this to say
concerning washback to the programme:

When the writing of the tests does not involve those who are expected to carry out the
change – the teachers; and when the information tests provide is not detailed and specific
and does not contain meaningful feedback and diagnosis that can be used for repair, it is
difficult to expect that tests will lead to meaningful improvement in learning.

In order to enhance positive washback to the programme Shohamy (1992) suggests that
diagnostic information is crucial. She goes on to say that the effective use of assessment
information demands that it be “detailed, innovative, relevant and diagnostic, and that it addresses a variety of dimensions rather than being collapsed into one general score” (Shohamy, 1992:515). The researcher hopes to find out through this study the usefulness of examiners’ reports to the teachers of English in Lesotho secondary schools. I would also like to discover if the information is diagnostic, relevant and detailed enough for teachers to make use of. Shohamy further argues that if tests are to have positive instructional impact, change agents (teachers and administrators and curriculum developers) must be involved because they are the ones expected to carry out the change. Shohamy refers to the principle of ‘connecting teaching with learning’, this implies that changes in the teaching and learning situation will take place according to the feedback obtained from tests (Shohamy, 1992:515). My assumption is that teachers will make informed decisions about their teaching methods and strategies on the basis of information they received from the marking board. However, the questions of ‘when’ and ‘how’ feedback is delivered to teachers are vital in rendering marking board information helpful to teachers.

On the question of encouraging positive washback, Heyneman and Ransom (1990) argue that a good feedback mechanism has to be set up in order to analyse and interpret student errors. They maintain that thought processes behind wrong answers have to be explained and performance results have to be made public. These give teachers and testing officials an opportunity to improve their jobs. The discourse of examiners’ reports becomes crucial here and this calls for a discourse analysis of such reports, which will be part of this study.
2.6.1 Strategies for Promoting Positive Washback

A number of writers on ‘washback’ have focused on strategies for promoting positive washback such as those by Hughes (1989); Heyneman and Ransom (1990); Shohamy (1992); Kellaghan and Greaney (1992); Bailey (1996); and Wall (1996). Although they do not agree on any one strategy in particular, Brown (1998) compiled them into meaningful comprehensive units. Brown (1998) categorised these strategies into four groups- test design strategies, test content strategies, logistical strategies, and interpretation strategies. These were presented to the people of Japan in his study where he wanted to find out viable ways in which the Japanese university entrance examinations could be harnessed to foster positive washback effects that would help improve language education. The study concluded that most of those strategies could only work if there was comprehensive teamwork and collaboration between the examination writers and the instructors who teach high school English. The situation in Lesotho becomes problematic where the writers of the tests reside in Cambridge, in the United Kingdom, while the instructors (teachers) live in Lesotho where the examinations are written and marked.

Since English language COSC examinations are set outside Lesotho by Cambridge University, test design strategies and test-content strategies will not be discussed here. Both the logistical and interpretation strategies mentioned by Brown (1998) are relevant to my research. First, with regard to logistical strategies, Bailey (1996) and Hughes (1989) argue that the ‘powers that be’ have to ensure that test-takers, teachers, administrators, and curriculum designers understand the purpose of the test. In this case, ECOL is responsible for not only administering the tests and the marking process, but
they are also responsible for disseminating information about testing and marking of the examinations.

Secondly, it has to be noted that assistance has to be provided to teachers to help them understand the tests, argues Hughes (1989). This implies the need for the training of teachers on the requirements of examinations from marking board examiners’ reports. Thirdly, provision of feedback to teachers and others is crucial so that meaningful change can be effected (Hynemann and Ransom, 1990; Shohamy, 1992). Fourthly, stipulation of detailed and timely feedback to schools on levels of pupils’ performance and areas of difficulty in public examinations is imperative (Kellanghan and Greaney, 1992). Fifth, making sure teachers and administrators are involved in different phases of the testing process because they are the people who will have to make changes is crucial (Shohamy, 1992). Finally, provision of detailed score reporting leads to positive effects on teaching and learning (Bailey, 1996).

With regard to interpretation strategies, Bailey (1996) suggests that examination results should be believable, credible, and fair to test-takers and score users. With all these, the results alone could motivate both the teachers and students. Kellanghan and Greaney (1992) posit the need to consider factors other than teaching effort in evaluating published examination results and national rankings. Out-of-classroom factors should not be overlooked in analysing results. For example, in this study the effects of information flow to teachers from the marking board is investigated with the hope of establishing how it could promote learning, and hence affect results either positively or negatively.
2.6.2 International Empirical Studies on Washback

More empirical research on washback reveals insightful information about the influence of tests on English language teaching and learning. Priest (1996) conducted research in order to test washback in the reading classroom. First of all, the study attempted to survey English teachers’ attitudes and views on testing in Brunei Darussalam. The analysis showed that teachers believe that there is a washback effect from examinations. What is interesting about this study is that the differences between teachers’ views happened to be dependent on gender and age. Another study was conducted by Cheng Lying (1995) in Hong Kong, in which teachers and students were involved. This was done with the aim of investigating what actually worked with the introduction of the new Certificate of Education in English. The findings revealed that washback occurred quickly and efficiently in the creation of language teaching materials. Teachers’ and students’ perceptions of classroom teaching and learning activities were also directly influenced. The washback effect was very minimal as far as the teaching methods and strategies were concerned. The study concluded that genuine classroom change can be achieved through co-operative effort of effective teacher training and materials development.

Another case study was carried out examining washback in language education through classroom observation at a secondary school in Sri Lanka (Wall and Alderson, 1992). A combination of classroom observation with data from interviews, questionnaire responses, and test analyses were used to determine whether washback exists and to what degree it operates, or whether it is positive or negative in relation to instructional content, methods, techniques and assessment. The study concluded that both positive and negative
washback existed to some extent in teaching content but not in methodology. Both positive and negative washback was discovered in the way teachers and local education officers design tests. DeVincenzi (1995) who studied language tests and how they affect ESL teaching, argued that teachers need to become ‘informed consumers’ of standardised tests in order to influence decisions about test use and about ways to help students perform at their best. Hamp-Lyons (1989), in her study in which she explored the role of textbooks in test washback, raised pertinent questions about the prevalent practices of test preparation and the materials used in it. She argues that tests will have different amounts and types of washback, for example, the high stakes tests will have more washback effect. Related to the points made above is the concept of ‘High-Stakes Testing’. How are high-stakes tests related to the concept of feedback from the marking of external examinations? The concept of high-stakes testing will be explored more fully in the next section.

2.7 High-Stakes Testing

Loschert (2000) describes high-stakes tests as assessments in which “students, teachers, administrators, and the entire school systems must account for student performance” (2000:1). They are also referred to as ‘standardised assessments’. The South Africa’s (Grade12) Matriculation, Botswana’s General Certificate of Secondary Examinations and Lesotho’s COSC are examples of high-stakes tests. These forms of assessment are used to make high stakes decisions. Students’ scores on these tests may be used to determine promotion to the next grade level, which curricular track students will follow in school, or whether or not they will graduate. In addition, high-stakes tests are also used for the
award of a high school diploma, assignment of a student to a remedial class, allocation of funds to a school or district, award of merit pay to teachers on the basis of their students’ test performance, certification or recertification of teachers (Madaus, 1988).

2.7.1 Arguments against High-Stakes Testing

Madaus argues that

A high-stakes test can directly and powerfully influence how teachers teach and students learn, this process he continues, corrupts the test’s ability to serve as a valid indicator of the knowledge or skill it was originally intended to measure (1988:30).

In a situation where instruction is driven by the testing process, there are likely to be more negative effects than positive ones. Madaus (ibid) says that what is important about testing is test validity. This refers to the degree to which a particular inference, and any resultant description or decision about an individual or institution, made on the basis of test performance is appropriate or meaningful (Madaus,). He refers to three types of validity evidence. The first is content validity, when the sample of questions or test adequately represent the content, skills or behaviours of the domain; the second type, construct validity occurs when inferences are made from scores on such tests concerning the degree to which a person possesses the construct or trait in question (intelligence, motivation, competence, functional literacy, musical aptitude, mathematics problem-solving ability, reading comprehension ability and spatial ability). Relating these two concepts of validity to the context of Lesotho becomes problematic as the tests are set by an external body, the UCLES in Cambridge. The third occurs when the scores are used to predict how a student may perform at a tertiary institution. The inference about the likelihood of a person being successful or not in a different domain of classroom
performance is called *criterion-related validity*. Brown (1995) emphasizes that when assessment is criterion-referenced, students should already know what will be on the test based on course objectives. Again this is a problematic issue in the case of Basotho students who write an examination based on a foreign syllabus and set by foreigners. Critchley (2004) argues that if all students know the assessment criteria this will increase their chances of success and they will be more motivated. Thus according to him, increased test validity promotes learning and motivation.

Madaus (1988) asserts that perceptions that a test has high-stakes aligned with it results in test preparation and measurement-driven instruction. The accountability process has definitely forced teachers to teach towards tests. That is, it has negative implications. Shanker, in Madaus, 1988) argues,

> Since the reputation of a school, its principal, its teachers and the school board and superintendent depends largely on [standardised] test scores, schools are devoting less time to reading real books, writing essays, and discussing current events and more and more time teaching kids strategies for filling in blanks and choosing the answers to multiple-choice questions. This destroys much of the value of these tests, which only tell you something if they are an independent measure of what the student knows (1988:37).

Madaus (1988) continues his argument by saying that the more emphasis is put on test preparation, the more it distorts the test’s ability to validly portray the skill level of students. Madaus (ibid) quotes the Irish Primary Certificate Examination which is a high-stakes test. This test was considered very important in the lives of students and teachers because both teachers and students are held accountable for this test. Since the same topics were asked year in and year out, teachers taught generations of Irish children to memorise a series of stock sentences that could be used with any prompt (e.g. “I
awakened early, jumped out of bed and had a quick breakfast”. “My friend was coming to our house at nine o’clock as we were going for a --------). Obviously this type of test preparation which might lead to high score on the writing examination was no longer a valid indicator of well developed writing skills, but only of the students’ ability to memorise, recall, and use the stock responses with that year’s prompt. These tests changed teaching, and the ensuing test-taking strategies drilled into students corrupted the validity of inferences made from the examination about student’s ability to write (Madaus, 1988:37; Madaus and Greaney, 1985). Madaus (Ibid) rejects the use of test preparation materials, whether commercial or prepared by school districts, because they distort and destroy the validity of the test.

Mehrens and Kaminski (1989) argue that there are appropriate and inappropriate ways of preparing for the high-stakes tests. For example, if the test is sampled from the total set of objectives, it would be inappropriate to focus instruction on only those objectives that happened to be tested. Such a practice, they continue, would make invalid any inference from the test score to a student’s knowledge of the total set of objectives. They said they agree with the notion that “test results can be used to identify from among these curriculum topics, the greatest needs of individual students, as well as groups, and to focus instruction on those needs” (CTB/McGraw-Hill, 1985 in Mehrens and Kaminski, 1989:21). Mehrens et al (1989) further argue that it would be appropriate to publish a test preparation guide that prepare a student for the total set of objectives, while it would be inappropriate to publish a guide where the objectives have the same form as those of the test. In addition, they say that what is and is not appropriate must eventually be based on
the closeness of the match of the preparation materials to the tests and the inference one wishes to make from the test scores.

As school districts and states come under increased pressure to improve educational results, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States, high-stakes testing has emerged as a controversial issue. There are two sides to the debate. On the one hand, supporters of high-stakes testing argue that it can be a powerful tool to change classroom and school practices for the better. They assert that tests provide a clear, unbiased view of student performance from school to school, and from year to year (Shohamy, 1992). There is also a strong belief that achievement data from the tests provide educators with valuable diagnostic information to improve classroom practices and student learning. Moreover, it is believed that tests set high expectations, holding all students accountable to the same standards, and this leads to achievement gains. In support of this, Resnick (2000: 5 of 8) posits that

Testing offers a kind of structure and coherence that is lacking in some teachers’ classrooms, especially those teaching in poorly funded schools.

He furthers his argument thus:

There are also places that five years ago were hardly teaching kids at all, especially poor kids. So now, at least they are teaching them something, and it appears this is coming in the wake of high-stakes testing.

On the other hand, opponents of high-stakes tests argue that these tests are misused, they punish some students especially the bilingual, the poor, ethnic-minority students and the disabled (Mcneil, 2000). Murray (2000) indicates that these tests are rigid, inappropriate, and inadequate as the sole determinant of a quality education, especially for those who are bilingual or disabled. Moreover, opponents of high-stakes tests contend that too much
class time is spent on test preparation, what Smith et al (1989) call ‘lost instructional time’. This happens when large amounts of class time are used for test preparation hence reducing the amount of time available for meaningful instruction and learning.

These tests, the opponents argue, force teachers to narrow the focus of their curriculum to concentrate on what is tested, by so doing limiting the instructional approaches (Madaus, 1988; Cooley, 1991). Emphasis on the test reduces room for the teacher creativity and the student enjoyment of learning. Instruction is diverted from emphasis on skills that require complex thinking or problem solving to rote-learning (Fredericksen, 1984; Darling-Hammond and Wise, 1985). The end result is attainment of memorised knowledge. Students learn information which they tend to forget. In actual fact, this is artificial content which is meant to increase test scores (Mcneil, 2000). Test results may also be invalidated by teaching so narrowly to the objectives of a particular test that scores are raised without actually improving the broader, often more important, set of academic skills that the test is intended to measure. Teaching to a particular test invalidates the test results as indicators of more general learning (Koretz et al 1991). Standardised testing has an impact both on the teachers and the entire school system. Reference will be made in the next paragraph to some empirical studies that will give evidence to either the positive or the negative side of high-stakes testing.

### 2.7.2 Local Experiences with High-stakes testing (Southern Africa)

In response to the pressure to raise test scores, teachers and schools may do things that are not welcome. Teachers tend to retain students in one grade or they encourage them to
drop out. In responding to these pressures for high scores, schools in Lesotho that were regarded to be performing badly, that is, schools with low COSC scores, registered their students who were performing poorly to write as private candidates so that only the best candidates’ results will appear publicly and the rest would be held for private consumption by concerned candidates (*Lesotho Today Newspaper*, April 1994). This strategy did not work for a long time because it meant parents had to pay more for private registration. Again, many candidates who registered as private candidates gained passes which were better than those whose results were to be publicised. In actual fact this strategy defeated the purpose for which it was set up. Moreover, this practice raised alarm because the usually poor performing schools began to occupy the higher ranks in the national ranking of schools. The public began to question the results and became suspicious of their validity. Gradually, the pressure subsided and schools began to register all their students in the normal way so that all their results would be publicised and good schools assumed their positions in the national ratings.

In South Africa, because of the mounting pressure and financial incentives to improve matric results, government schools with a history of high-failure rates are now resorting to unwelcome measures to improve their average pass rates (*The Teacher*, 2002). Such schools are using a ‘gate-keeping’ tactic in Grade 11. Students who perform poorly in Grade 11 even though they have attained a required pass mark of 40 percent, are not promoted to Grade 12. This is a concern and the South African Democratic Teachers Union is blaming the government for allowing situations where learners’ rights are compromised to improve Matric results. This is an example of the negative effects of
high-stakes tests. It is again exemplified by the huge decline in the number of candidates generally in the country. Molotwane Likheth e, speaking on behalf of the Minister of Education appealed to schools to stop compromising students in order to obtain better results. He said, “Bad results are not the end of the world” (*The Teacher* November, 2002).

2.7.3 International Empirical Studies

In the United States of America, the legislation and the education initiatives emphasised the role of high-stakes testing and this led to the mounting of the reform movements designed to increase accountability for schools and improve students’ achievement. Alderson and Wall (1993) came up with a washback hypothesis which states that, tests that have important consequences will have washback; and conversely, tests that do not have important consequences will not have washback. As standards and accountability movements continue to gain momentum not only in the United States but also in Britain, teachers and administrators are eager to help their students and schools succeed in today’s accountability–driven environment. Increasingly, teachers and administrators are held accountable for test results through published test scores, school ratings, school report cards and funding of school programmes on account of their performance. In the same manner, students are held accountable as many must pass high-stake tests to be promoted to the next grade level, earn a course credit and graduate.

Razel (1991) was involved in a ‘feedback project’, which gives evidence to positive effects of high-stakes tests. The intention was to evaluate a measurement-and-feedback-
driven instruction system in Israel. The participants in the project used mandated curriculum topics and teachers were informed of the topics included in each test. The tests were said to be ‘instructionally illuminating’ (helping teachers to determine what they need to teach). The participants in the project gave instructional support to teachers in the form of materials and suggestions for teachers on methodologies and strategies – in the way of in-service training to teachers and/or the dispatching of subject-area experts to schools where requested or where deemed necessary by project organisers. The message of accountability was clearly delivered to the schools. They were expected to show improved levels of performance on the tests over time. The conclusions that were drawn from the study were the following: it was realised that tests which were written and administered by an outside, objective agent, at the request of a high authority motivate teachers, principals and schools administrators. It seems that knowing that they were being monitored motivated these agents to work even harder to ensure that their students reach even higher levels of achievement. It was also discovered that the detailed feedback system would help the teacher to identify areas in need of reinforcement in students and thereby help the teacher to assist them to do better.

This system could also provide the teacher with information about the whole class. The information could also reveal something about the teacher. Weaknesses of the class as a whole as well as failure to adhere to the rubric (that is failure to follow the instructions) point to areas which have either been ignored completely, or have been taught improperly or superficially. In that case the teacher would see a need to produce change in him or herself in order to produce change in the child. The lesson that is learned from this study
is that it is not enough only to make teachers accountable. They need to be given instructional support and materials through in-service training and other means. This study aims to find out how much follow-up and professional support the teachers of English language receive in order to better implement the marking board feedback in Lesotho secondary schools.

Some scholars believe that high-stakes tests punish some students. One of Alderson and Wall’s (1993) hypotheses on washback states that tests will have washback effects (positive) for some learners and some teachers, but not for others. When the English language learners, (that is, L2 learners) take standardised tests, the results tend to reflect their English language proficiency and may not accurately assess their content knowledge or skills (Menken, 2000). Many of these are enrolled in bilingual education classes and receive some of their content-area instruction in their native language. They may be able to demonstrate their subject-area knowledge more effectively in their native language. Tests in languages other than English are rarely provided. In fact, testing accommodations\textsuperscript{4} that involve translation of a test into student’s mother tongue are prohibited in Lesotho. In addition, concerns about high-stakes tests for English language learners stem from the cultural familiarity and knowledge assumed in some test items. Some test items may contain references to ideas or events that are unfamiliar to English language learners because they have not been exposed to similar concepts in their native culture. In order to cater for the English language learners, appropriate accommodations and modifications should be selected so that high-stakes tests can be fair to them. Rivera

\textsuperscript{4} Accommodations are methods of reaching out to linguistically disadvantaged candidates during examination time by increasing the writing time, reading for them, explaining instructions, or even finding a scribe for them.
et al (2000) argue that the most frequently used accommodations for English Language learners include increased time to take a test, use of a scribe to write down answers, and use of a reader to read instructions and questions aloud. This happens in Wisconsin state in the United States of America. These accommodations could be considered in the case of Lesotho where English language though an official language is, for all intents and purposes a foreign language and it is only used in classrooms. The high failure rate of the subject is a matter for concern.

Smith (1991:9 in Gipps, 1994) conducted a study on the role of external testing in two elementary schools in the USA. The findings indicated that, “the publication of test scores produces feelings of shame, embarrassment, guilt and anger in teachers, and the determination to do what is necessary to avoid such feelings in future”. Indeed some teachers who are conscientious with their work usually have these feelings and have a desire to see the performance at COSC, especially in English language improve. Smith further argues that these feelings are incorporated into teachers’ identities and subsequent definitions of teaching. Beliefs about the invalidity of the test, and the necessity to raise scores, set up feelings of dissonance and alienation among some teachers. In order to render high-stakes tests not burdensome to teachers, students and administrators, multiple sources of information should be used when making high-stakes decisions; assessment methods must be appropriate for their purpose (Bray in Llyod Jones, 1986); assessment should advance students’ learning and inform teachers as they make instructional decisions; assessment should be a transparent process with everyone knowing what is expected, what they will measure, and what the results imply for what should be done
next. To conclude this section, it could be said that if tests are used as one of the multiple measures in making high-stakes decisions about students, those tests must be valid and reliable for the purposes for which they are used (Messick, 1996). They must measure what the student was taught; provide students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate proficiency; and provide appropriate accommodations for students with special needs or limited English proficiency (NCTM 2000).

Requirements of high-stakes tests demand that teachers are accountable for the success or failure of students in these tests. So teachers’ readiness and adaptability to changes becomes crucial here. Therefore, the next section will focus on teacher change and development within the broader context of the educational reform such as the localisation of examinations in the Lesotho context.

2.8 Teacher Change and Innovation

Localisation of the marking of the COSC English language examinations is an innovation which requires one to talk about the role of teachers in such education reform. Fullan and Hargreaves (1998) argue that there can be no improvement without the teacher. They emphasise teacher involvement in education reform both outside and inside their own classrooms, for example, in curriculum development, assessment processes and other improvements of their schools. Loucks-Horsley et al (in Delano et al 1994:52), assert that Teacher development is a complex process whose success depends upon a favourable context for learning and practical, engaging activities. Availability of resources, flexible working conditions, support, and recognition can make all the difference in the desire of teachers to refine their practice.
Delano *et al* (ibid) posit that in promoting an innovation then it is vital to build in rewards and incentives in order to motivate participants and promote cooperation. Alderson (1992) argues that testing reform needs to be a collaborative exercise involving genuine consultations between all stakeholders if it is to succeed. Fullan and Hargreaves (1998) problematise teacher involvement by arguing that:

> The greatest problem in teaching is not how to get rid of the ‘deadwood’, but how to create, sustain and motivate good teachers throughout their careers. [They suggest] interactive professionalism a key to this (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1998:45).

By this they mean that meaningful teacher change is not an individual undertaking, it involves other teachers. It is collaborative and collegial.

For any innovation to succeed it has to be accompanied by teacher change. Goodson (1992) asserts that any attempt to change a teacher in any significant way requires changing the person the teacher is. Goodson further contends that in order to achieve meaningful teacher development, motivation should underlie our development strategies. Goodman (1992:89) concurs with Goodson that meaningful and lasting change is gradual since ‘human growth is not like rhubarb’. In other words, changing people is not achieved overnight. Fullan (1995) suggests that in order to cope with change, teacher development has to take into consideration the whole person of the teacher if such a teacher is to give off his/her best. Berliner (1993) asserts that the expertise which the teacher develops over a professional career puts teachers at the two ends of the ‘experienced’–‘novice’ continuum. He argues that what is considered as teaching for a novice is very different from what is considered as teaching for an experienced teacher. There are considerable differences, in interpretative abilities, use of routines and emotional investment among
individuals with various levels of experience, not only in classroom teaching, but in other fields as well. The flow of information from COSC marking and how it is received and used by the teacher-markers and non-teacher-markers, as well as experienced and inexperienced teachers constitute part of this study. The stakes attached to any assessment processes and instruments have significant influence on teacher change with regard to his/her pedagogical practices.

As new educational reforms are put into place there is the need for teachers to be aware of power struggles that characterise the flow of information from the top to the bottom and vice-versa. There is need for awareness among Lesotho teachers of the importance of locally produced Examiners’ reports and how they can be beneficial to them and their students. Therefore, a theoretical framework for critical discourse analysis is going to be presented in the next section. The framework will also be used in the analysis of documents in the data analysis section.

2.9 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a contemporary approach to the study of language and discourses in social institutions. CDA draws on post-structuralist discourse theory and critical linguistics. It focuses on how social relations, identity, knowledge and power are constructed through written and spoken texts in communities, schools and classrooms (Luke, 2003). CDA sees language as a form of social practice. All social practices are tied to the specific historical contexts and are the means by which existing social relations are reproduced or contested and different interests are served (Janks, 1997). CDA helps
us interpret how the world is portrayed, how human, biological and political actions are represented, sanctioned and critiqued in the official texts of educational institutions (Luke and Freebody, 1997 in Luke, 2003). It employs interdisciplinary techniques of text analysis to look at how texts construct representations of the world, social identities, and social relationships (Luke, ibid). CDA assumes that systematic asymmetries of power and resources between speakers and listeners, readers and writers can be linked to their access to linguistic and social resources. Related to the concept of CDA is the concept of ‘intertextuality’, which refers to the interrelatedness of texts to each other. This concept is relevant in this study because in order to understand the discourse of the ERs, we have to understand the discourse and content of the Passlists. The next section will focus on the discussion of the concept of intertextuality.

2.10 Intertextuality

Texts are related and that relationship is important in understanding various texts presented to us. Fairclough (1992: 84) defines ‘intertextuality’ as

> Basically the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in, and which the text may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth.

Texts tend to share certain characteristics and information which are so vital in understanding them. Fairclough (1992) continues that the concept of intertextuality sees texts historically as transforming the past–existing conventions and prior texts into the present. It appears that full understanding of the examiners’ reports will not be achieved without looking at the Passlists which present students results of the COSC examinations at the end of every sitting and after the completion of the marking process. Other vital
information is also included such as comments on specific subjects from the examiners through what is termed the ‘Examiner’s Eye’.

In concluding this section, I say, teaching and learning without some form of accountability may not yield fruitful results. However, administrators, teachers and students should guard against inappropriate ways of preparing for high-stakes tests. Again the lesson that may be learned from this discussion is that it is not enough only to make teachers and students accountable. Teachers need to be given back-up support and materials, as well as in-service training, and be well-informed in order to foster positive washback effects of high-stakes tests (Messick, 1996). The literature review and the theoretical framework provided in this chapter will provide a basis for data collection and analysis and addressing the research questions. The next chapter will focus on the research methodology used in this study.