



## Evaluating the communicative nature of high-stakes English language tests in Ghana

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### Abstract

According to the official English Language syllabus issued by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA) of the Ministry of Education, the aim of teaching English is to assist learners to communicate effectively in English and to improve their communicative competence so that they can communicate effectively and confidently with other users of English. To achieve this aim of teaching English, NaCCA advises teachers of English and test developers to adopt communicative *language teaching* and communicative *language testing* respectively in teaching and testing of English Language in Ghana. The objective of this paper was to find out whether the high-stakes English language tests in Ghana were communicative. The researcher used the mixed-methods approach and the convergent parallel design. The participants were made up of 24 English Language teachers and 344 students from 6 junior high schools and 6 senior high schools. The findings revealed that the high-stakes tests were not *communicative* enough. For this reason, the teachers did not also teach the Language *communicatively*. This implies that proper or well-designed language tests can go a long way to improve the quality of classroom teaching and learning.

**Keywords:** discrete-point testing, communicative language test, communicative competence, high-stakes tests

### INTRODUCTION

Although the aim of teaching a second or a foreign language is to equip language learners to develop communicative competence, this aim of teaching and the language teaching method are always changed when teachers teach with the aim of preparing language learners for high-stakes tests, especially if the high-stakes tests are not *communicative* enough. According to Nunan (2009), communicative language teaching requires communicative language testing. According to Liao, Xueting Ye, and Yang (2023) communicative language test is a language test which is designed in such a way that second or foreign language learners would be able to complete an authentic task which reflects their experiences in real life situations. Such a test is designed to test both *receptive* and *productive* skills. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA) of the Ministry of Education advises Ghanaian ESL teachers to adopt the

integrated language teaching approach focusing on the four main language skills - *reading, writing, speaking, and listening* through the *communicative language teaching* approach. It is expected that the communicative language teaching approach will lead to *communicative competence*. *Communicative competence* refers to a language user's internalised grammatical knowledge as well as social and cultural knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately. Powers (2010) also defines *communicative competence* as the ability to use language correctly and appropriately to accomplish specific communicative goals. In the words of Harding (2014), it is the ability to put *linguistic knowledge* to use in relevant contexts.

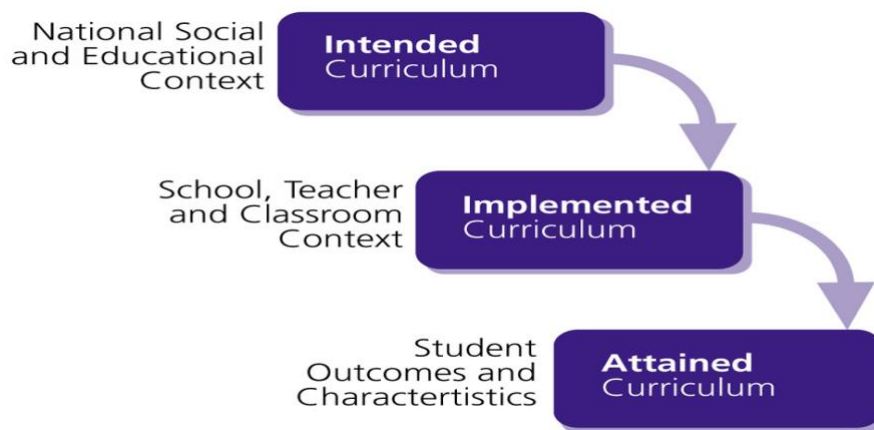
If the teaching is expected to be *communicative*, then the high-stakes tests that language learners take at the end of their studies should also be *communicative*, so that *teaching* would be aligned with the *examination*. This is because, high-stakes tests always influence **what** and **how** learners learn (Alderson & Wall, 1993). What this implies is that the tests can be used as a device to introduce novelties into the syllabus. If teaching is expected to be *communicative*, then assessment should also be *communicative*, that is, any aspect considered important in the syllabus must be assessed. This is because teachers and their learners do not just follow the content of the curriculum; they usually focus on areas that are tested (Mupa, 2015).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Relationship between Teaching and Testing

Testing always has an overwhelming influence on *what, how* and *how much* teachers and students teach and learn respectively. According to Havnes (2004) testing does not influence only teaching and learning, but also textbooks and even the entire educational system. Depending on how the results are used, assessment can be considered as *formative* or *summative*. Formative assessment enables teachers to find out whether their lessons have been effective, in order to determine appropriate remedial activities to help the learners. Stiggins (2002) refers to this type of assessment as *assessment for learning*. Summative assessment on the other hand, is conducted at the end of a programme. It is designed to ascertain the level of the learners' achievement at the end of a programme or course of study. Agbeti (2011) refers to summative assessment as *assessment of learning*. This type of assessment, which always takes the form of high-stakes tests, can be used to change, or modify the curriculum or teaching content in a positive way, to improve teaching and learning, or a negative way, where teachers pay more attention to test content at the expense of the syllabus content. The course syllabus is the primary document through which the teacher or the instructor communicates to students his course goals, expectations of students, and assessment criteria. Student learning process is always enhanced by a properly developed syllabus, an appropriate teaching methodology, and a carefully designed assessment instrument. A valid test or assessment should reflect the various components of course syllabus, such as the learning outcomes, standards, content, and scope.

According to Alsubaie (2016), curriculum is concerned with the planning, implementation, evaluation, management, and administration of education programmes. It is the overall written plan about what teachers should teach and what students should learn, based on clearly defined standards and learning outcomes. On the other hand, syllabus only looks at the selection and grading of content. The *intended curriculum* by the educational authorities should be delivered by the teacher and learnt by the student. The *intended curriculum*, according to Kridel (2010), is the *overt curriculum* that is acknowledged in policy statements which schools or other educational institutions or arrangements set out to accomplish. The assessment cannot be said to be valid or comprehensive, if the *implemented curriculum* (the content delivered by the teacher) and the *attained curriculum* (the content actually learnt by students) deviate from the *intended curriculum* (the content provided by the state or the educational authorities) as illustrated in Fig 1 below. What this means is that there should be a link between the *intended curriculum*, the *implemented curriculum*, the *attained curriculum*, and the *tested curriculum*.



**Fig. 1.** The TIMSS curriculum model (Mullis et al., 2003, p. 3)

An authentic assessment that evaluates what is taught and valued should be aligned with the curriculum. All the components of the educational system, such as performance standards, content of the syllabus, instruction, and assessments must work together to achieve the desired goals. When assessments deviate from the content of the curriculum, teachers and students respond by concentrating on the subject areas that are likely to be tested. In order not to deviate from the learning outcomes and the performance standards, assessment should always be comprehensive enough to cover all the important areas of the curriculum. Teachers may not necessarily rely on textbooks to determine what is taught and assessed, because the textbooks may not thoroughly address the desired match between the curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Education should be based on the holistic understanding and mastery of real subjects and not just on preparing students for standardized tests. One of the washback hypotheses posited by Alderson and Wall (1993) is that *a test will influence what teachers teach*. Research has also shown that high-stakes testing can, in the words of Shih (2009), trigger some unethical test preparatory practices. There is the tendency for teachers to alter the

teaching content by eliminating important curricular content not covered by the test. According to Rich (2003) high-stakes testing can cause teachers *to teach to the test* thereby limiting their ability to focus on a holistic understanding of the subject matter. This practice of *teaching to the test* has been noted in countries such as Canada, United States, England, Australia, Japan, Israel, and the Czech Republic (Levinson, 2000). *Teaching to the test* tends to reduce the depth of instruction in specific subjects. It also narrows the curriculum so that non-tested subject areas and disciplines receive less attention in the classroom.

Teachers should aim at addressing the entire curriculum (*curriculum teaching*, Popham, 2001), when preparing their students for standardized or high-stakes tests. According to Volante (2004), the practice of addressing the entire curriculum will provide students with a solid foundation for future success. Although tests can assess only part of the curriculum, they should be comprehensive enough to minimize negative washback effects. According to Green (2013), a well-designed test should encourage good teaching. It is rather a poorly designed test that tempts teachers and students into practices that have limited value in relation to long term learning goals. If a test is poorly designed, teachers and educational authorities will continue to focus on preparing students for tests at the expense of holistic understanding of subject matter which leads to applied learning and thinking skills.

### **The Communicative Language Teaching Approach Versus Communicative Language Testing**

There have been several competing methods and approaches to second language teaching over the last few decades. Some of these approaches are *Grammar-Translation Approach*, *Direct Approach*, *Reading Approach*, *Audio-lingual Method*, *Suggestopedia*, and *Total Physical Response*. However, there is no single method or approach that can meet the goals and needs of all learners. What has emerged from these developments in second language teaching is a variety of *communicative language teaching* methodologies. The *Communicative Language Teaching* approach is based on Dell Hymes' study of *ethnography of communication* which focuses on *communicative competence* (Hymes, 1972)

The *Communicative Language Teaching* approach makes use of almost any activity that can engage the learner in authentic and meaningful communication. The objective is to help learners to achieve *communicative competence* as opposed to *grammatical or linguistic competence*. Although foreign or second language learners may not be able to achieve native-like proficiency or use the target language just like the native speaker, they are expected to use the language correctly and appropriately to achieve desired goals. According to Canale and Swain (1980), the second language learner is expected to achieve competence in four areas, namely *grammatical competence*, *sociolinguistic competence*, *discourse competence*, and *strategic competence*. *Communicative competence* is achieved as a result of *communicative language teaching* approach.

The proponents of *communicative language teaching* approach argue that grammatical competence is not the only thing involved in learning a second language, because one can master the rules of the target language but may not be able to use the language for meaningful communication. For this reason, language techniques should be developed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, and functional use of language for meaningful communicative purposes (Brown, 2001). The teacher is expected to put his students in language situations which are as close to real life as possible, to facilitate communication in the classroom and to act like an adviser and guide to the learner. The teacher should motivate the learner to communicate in the target language by overlooking or tolerating learner errors and returning to them later with an *accuracy-based* activity. The learner, on the other hand, is encouraged to practice the target language in *listening, speaking, reading, and writing* activities, in order to develop fluency in using the target language in spontaneous communication.

It is for this reason that the English Language curriculum developers in Ghana advocate the use of the *integrated approach* to the teaching of language skills through *communicative language teaching* methodology (NaCCA, 2020). If the *Ministry of Education* and the *Curriculum Developers* want the teachers of English in Ghana to adopt the *communicative language teaching approach* in the teaching of language skills, then the body that conducts the achievement tests, *West African Examinations Council* (WAEC), has to make sure that the examination is also *communicative*, otherwise the teachers will narrow the curriculum to suit the examination. This is because a test will always influence *what* teachers teach and *what* learners learn (Alderson & Wall, 1993).

Testing of language skills of learners is a very important component of language teaching. Effective *language teaching* should be accompanied by effective *language testing*. Testing evaluates both the progress and the achievement of learners and the effectiveness of the teaching materials and methods used. According to Coughlin (2006), a good test can also be used as a valuable teaching tool, as it will aim at locating the specific and precise areas of difficulties experienced by the learner. A well-designed language test would always create a *positive washback* effect. Unfortunately, testing often results in a situation where teachers teach learners what they need to know for the test only. If a second language test creates a *negative washback* effect, then it does not reflect the content of the syllabus, it is not *comprehensive*, and it lacks *washback validity*. If a second language test lacks *washback validity*, then the test is used to control the curriculum, which can result in *unexpected, harmful consequences*. That is why it is important to find out whether the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) English Language tests have been designed to measure second language learners' ability to use the Language in authentic or real-life situations. In the words of Akhmedov (2017), *if teaching is carried out according to the communicative approach, then tests must be designed accordingly*. Akhmedov (2017) continues that a communicative language test should revolve around *linguistic/grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic and illocutionary* competence.

### ***The BECE English Language Test***

The BECE English language test consists of 3 parts. Part I (which is based on the Section 2 of the BECE English Language Syllabus) is made up of 32 multiple-choice items on *lexis and structure*, which is further divided into Sections A, B, C, and D. Section A is a test of grammatical structure of English. It consists of 17 multiple-choice items with alternatives lettered A to D. The candidate is expected to choose from the 4 alternatives the one which most suitably completes each of the given sentences, as in 1 to 3 below, which are extracted from 2020 to 2022 English language past examination papers by the WAEC.

#### ***Section A***

1. The lion.....under the tree waiting for its prey.
  - A. lie
  - B. lain
  - C. lay
  - D. laid
2. Shika was absent yesterday,.....?
  - A. isn't she
  - B. has she
  - C. didn't she
  - D. wasn't she
3. The students were hostile..... the lazy teacher.
  - A. on
  - B. to
  - C. from
  - D. with

Sections B and D (which consist of 5 items each) are tests of vocabulary which assess the candidates' ability to recognise *synonyms* and *antonyms* respectively. The candidate is expected to choose from alternatives lettered A to D the one which is nearest in meaning or most nearly opposite in meaning to a word that is underlined in a given sentence, as in 4 and 5 below.

#### ***Section B***

*Choose from the alternatives lettered A to D the one which is nearest in meaning to the underlined word in each sentence.*

4. The new headmaster met the staff and made his maiden speech.
  - A. first
  - B. fresh

- C. official
- D. original

### Section D

From the list of words lettered **A** to **D**, choose the one that is **most nearly opposite** in meaning to the word underlined in **each** sentence.

5. The man was disgraced in public.
- A. respected
  - B. honoured
  - C. welcomed
  - D. accepted

### Section C

Section C (which is made up of 5 items) assesses the candidate's ability to recognise idiomatic expressions. The candidate is expected to choose from alternatives lettered A to D the one that *best explains* an underlined group of words in a given context, as in 6 below.

6. The student was caught red-handed breaking the louvers. This means that the student was caught
- A. while committing the offence.
  - B. with blood on his hands.
  - C. before the act.
  - D. after the act.

Part II of the BECE English language test (which consists of 8 multiple-choice items) is based on the Section 5 of the syllabus. This section of the BECE English language test assesses the candidate's ability to recognise and appreciate the use of literary terms and techniques, as in 7 and 8 below.

7. The sequence of events in a play is the
- A. theme.
  - B. plot.
  - C. conflict.
  - D. resolution.
8. An address directed at oneself is known as
- A. monologue.
  - B. Dialogue.
  - C. apostrophe.

D. soliloquy.

Part III of the BECE English language test is made up of 2 sections: sections A and B. Section A, which is based on the Section 4 of the syllabus, is on essay-writing. Candidates are required to use not less than 250 words to write on one of the three essay topics. Section B is based on the Section 3 of the syllabus. This section tests the students' ability to read, understand and answer questions based on a given comprehension passage.

### ***The WASSCE English Language Test***

The WASSCE English language test consists of 3 papers. Paper 1 (which consists of 2 parts; *A* and *B*) is made up of 80 multiple-choice items. Part *A*, which is on *lexis and structure*, is divided into 5 sections; *I, II, III, IV*, and *V*. Sections *I* and *III* (which are made up of 10 items each) are tests of vocabulary. They test the candidates' ability to recognise *antonyms* and *synonyms* respectively. In Part *A* Section *I*, the candidate is required to choose from a list of words lettered *A* to *D* the one that is ***most nearly opposite*** in meaning to an underlined word and which can, at the same time, ***correctly fill*** a gap in a given sentence, as in 9 and 10 below.

9. Though the man rudely dismissed us, his wife .....asked us to come in.
  - A. hurriedly
  - B. politely
  - C. casually
  - D. meekly
10. This book is .....but there are some exciting portions.
  - A. big
  - B. lengthy
  - C. torn
  - D. boring

Part *A*, Section *III* assesses the candidates' ability to recognise *synonyms*. The candidate is required to choose from a list of words lettered *A* to *D* the word which is ***nearest in meaning*** to an underlined word or expression in a given sentence, as 11 and 12 below.

11. The dress you bought is comparable in colour to mine.
  - A. agreeable
  - B. equal
  - C. quite
  - D. similar
12. There was anarchy when the rebels took over the city.



- A. fear
- B. lawlessness
- C. injustice
- D. oppression

Part A, Section II (which is based on the Section 3 of the WASSCE English syllabus) is always made up of 10 items. It tests candidates' ability to use grammatical forms and vocabulary appropriately in a given context, as in 13 and 14 below.

13. The chairman was given a standing.....after his speech.

- A. reception
- B. position
- C. order
- D. ovation

14. The old currency notes issued by the bank are still.....circulation.

- A. with
- B. under
- C. in
- D. on

Part A, Section IV (which consists of 10 items) is a test of *idiomatic expressions*. The candidate is required to choose from alternatives lettered A to D the expression he considers **most appropriate** in a given context, as in 15 below.

15. Muniratu was not happy in her new school because the other girls called her names. This means that the other girls

- A. teased her.
- B. insulted her.
- C. gave her several names.
- D. objected to her real name.

Part A Section V is made up of 10 items. It tests candidates' ability to recognise appropriate *words, expressions, and idioms* used in a particular context. In this section, the candidate is required to choose from a list of words lettered A to D the one which is **most suitable** to fill each numbered gap in a given passage, as in 16 below.

16. *The ambulance took the injured man to the...1....ward. After....2...his injured leg, the doctor ordered that an...3...be taken of the leg and he should be admitted to the hospital.*

A.	B.	C.	D.
1. labour	emergency	female	male
2. feeling	diagnosing	examining	taking pictures
3. analysis	enquiry	anatomy	X-ray

Part *B* of Paper 1 (which is based on the Section 5 of the WASSCE English syllabus) is divided into 3 sections: Sections *I* (*prose*), *II* (*drama*), and *III* (*poetry*). Each section (which is based on prescribed set books) is made up of 10 multiple-choice items. This part of the WASSCE English language test assesses candidates' ability to understand and appreciate various genres of written literature (prose, drama, poetry).

The Paper 2 of the WASSCE English language test consists of 3 sections: Sections *A* (*essay*), *B* (*comprehension*), and *C* (*summary*). The Section *A* of Paper 2 is based on the Section 4 of the WASSCE English language syllabus. Candidates are required to use not less than 450 words to write on only one of the five essay topics. The Sections *B* and *C* of Paper 2 are based on the Section 2 of the syllabus. The Section *B* tests candidates' reading skills and ability to answer comprehension questions accurately and appropriately. The Section *C*, on the other hand, assesses candidates' ability to summarise passages or texts appropriately.

The Paper 3 of the WASSCE English language test (which is made up of 60 multiple-choice items) is based on the Section 1 of the syllabus. It is a *listening comprehension* test which is designed to assess candidates' ability to recognise segments and supra-segmental features of English pronunciation. This test is further divided into 8 tests. Tests 1 to 5 are tests of English segments. Tests 6 and 7 are tests of *emphatic stress* and *intonation* respectively. Test 8 is a test of basic comprehension, which is made up of conversations and narratives.

Looking at the structure of both BECE and WASSCE English Language tests, we can conclude that the examinations are not communicative enough. The tests focus mainly on reading knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, probably for reasons of practicality. Completing the tasks in these language tests will not certainly lead to communicative competence. According to Brown and Abeywickrama (2019), a communicative language test must:

- i. be based on communication that is meaningful to the test taker,
- ii. offer the learner the chance to use the language in authentic situation,
- iii. use creative and unpredictable language input, and
- iv. test all the four main language skills.

We can conclude that the BECE and WASSCE English Language examinations do not offer the student the opportunity to use the language in authentic situations. The examinations again do not use creative and unpredictable language input, as the students are able to predict quite accurately similar examination questions with the use of past examination questions and answers booklets. In all the schools that the researcher visited, the students were found studying past examination questions and answers. Furthermore, the examinations do not test all the four main language skills.

## METHOD

The research approach for this paper was mixed methods. The research design was convergent parallel. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 English Language teachers and 344 students from 6 junior high schools and 6 senior high schools. Some past examination questions were also analysed. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select representative samples from the three categories A, B, and C schools at both junior high school (JHS) and senior high school (SHS) levels, and purposive sampling was used to select the teachers. The data from the *interviews* and *document analysis* were analysed qualitatively using the descriptive and contextual methods while the ones from the *questionnaires* were analysed using the 22 version of the IBM SPSS software.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### How Communicative is the BECE/WASSCE English Language Test?

Just as it is possible for a literate native speaker of a language to fail an examination in their native language, it is also possible for a non-native speaker to perform well in a language test but may not be able to speak the language fluently. According to Lewis (2016), studying a language, just like passing a language exam, *will never help learners to speak the language*. Studying a language can help learners to know the linguistics of the language and to pass an examination that is also designed to test linguistic competence of learners. It is therefore possible for many students to perform well in the BECE/WASSCE English language test but they may not be able to speak the language fluently. This is because the BECE/WASSCE English language test is designed primarily to test linguistic competence of learners. However, the ability to translate linguistic competence into actual performance in authentic situations does not come automatically. The exam must also test the students' ability to use the language in real life situations. This section analyses the views of the teachers on the possibility of passing the BECE/WASSCE English language test without being able to speak the language fluently in authentic situations. As shown in Table 1 below, all the 6 teachers who were interviewed indicated that it was possible for a candidate to perform well in the English language examination without being communicatively competent. This is because, as Interviewee 3 indicated, teaching and learning were not geared towards preparing students to communicate freely in the language, but just to perform well in the examination. Interviewee 6 also said that because the examination was not meant to test the communicative competence of candidates, a lot of people pass the examination but they

struggle to communicate in English. What this means is that there is very little or no direct correlation between the performance of students at the BECE/WASSCE and communicative competence. That is, candidates who perform well in the BECE/WASSCE English test may be able to read and write the language well but may struggle to speak the language in authentic situations. This is because, as indicated by Interviewee 5, teachers and students focus more on *writing* and *reading* skills.

**Table 1.** Teachers' Views on the Possibility of Passing the High-Stakes Tests without being Communicatively Competent

Item	Responses
10. Looking at the structure of the BECE/WASSCE, is it possible for a candidate to perform well in the English language exam without being communicatively competent? Explain.	<u>Interviewee 1:</u> Yes. The students need to concentrate more on examinable areas than the speaking skills.
	<u>Interviewee 2:</u> Yes. The students familiarize themselves with the demands or the areas of the examination and concentrate more on those examinable areas.
	<u>Interviewee 3:</u> Yes, because teaching and learning are not geared towards preparing students to communicate freely in the language, but to perform well in the examination.
	<u>Interviewee 4:</u> Yes. The students are able to study and follow the pattern of the examination.
	<u>Interviewee 5:</u> Yes, because teachers and students focus more on writing and reading skills, but language is spoken rather than written.
	<u>Interviewee 6:</u> Yes, because the examination is not meant to test the communicative competence of candidates. A lot of people pass the exam but they struggle to communicate in English.

**Table 2.** ESL Learners' Views on the Communicative Nature of the BECE/WASSCE English Language Test

Items	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Undecided	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
1. Learning only topics and language skills that are examined in the BECE/WASSCE will adversely affect students' communicative competence.	3.8%	3.2%	.9%	37.8%	54.4%	4.36	.946
2. Our teachers only concentrate on language areas that are examined in the BECE/WASSCE.	0%	.5%	7.3%	37.8%	54.4%	4.46	.653

3. It is possible for a candidate to perform well in the BECE/WASSCE English language exam without being able to speak English fluently.	.6%	2.9%	.9%	32.6%	62.8%	4.55	.715
4. The BECE/WASSCE English Language examination is NOT designed to help students to speak English fluently.	0%	0%	2.6%	28.0%	69.4	4.67	.524
5. Students are always able to predict the language input of the BECE/WASSCE English Language examination.	.6%	.9%	1.7%	24.4%	72.4%	4.67	.615
6. The BECE/WASSCE English language examination does NOT allow students to create authentic language output.	3.2%	5.5%	5.5%	29.4%	56.4%	4.30	1.020
7. The BECE/WASSCE English language examination does NOT test all the four main language skills.	0%	.5%	1.0%	29.5%	68.9%	4.67	.524

As can be seen from Table 2 Item 1, the students indicated that learning only topics and language skills that are examined in the BECE/WASSCE will adversely affect their communicative competence. The *mean value* of 4.36 shows that the students agreed that learning only examinable areas would affect their communicative competence negatively. In Table 3 Item 1, the teachers also expressed similar opinions. They indicated that teaching only topics and language skills that are examined in the BECE/WASSCE would adversely affect the communicative competence of the students. The *mean value* of 4.40 also shows that the teacher agreed that teaching only examinable areas would negatively affect the communicative competence of the students. This implies that there were some very important skills or areas in the English Language curriculum that could enhance the students' communicative competence, but because they are not examined the teachers and students skipped those areas. Again, as shown in Table 1, the teachers who were interviewed indicated that it is possible for a candidate to perform well in the English language exam without being communicatively competent. The Interviewee 6 said that *because the examination is not meant to test the communicative competence of candidates, a lot of people pass the exam but they struggle to communicate in English*. This is also confirmed by the students' responses in Table 2 Item 3. The students agreed (with the *mean value* of 4.55) that *it was possible for a candidate to perform well in the BECE/WASSCE English language exam without being able to speak English fluently*. This finding is similar to that of Polesel, Rice and Dulfer (2014). They found that in Australia, high-stakes tests had the tendency of restricting the range of skills and competencies that students should learn.

The students again indicated that their teachers only concentrated on language areas that are examined in the high-stakes tests, as shown in Table 2 Item 2. The *mean value* of 4.46 shows that the students agreed that their teachers only concentrated on examinable areas. As shown from Table 3 Item 2, the teachers also agreed (with the *mean value* of 4.44) that communicative language teaching method would help students to speak English fluently but would not help them to pass well in the BECE/WASSCE. This implies that the examination was not communicative and so teaching could not be done communicatively. This finding is similar to what Islam (2016) found in Bangladesh. According Islam (2016), the *power of exam* was one of the factors which made it difficult to implement the Government policy of *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT) approach in schools in Bangladesh.

**Table 3.** Teachers' Views on the Communicative Nature of the BECE/WASSCE English Language Test

Items	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Undecided	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
1. Teaching only topics and language skills that are examined in the BECE/WASSCE will adversely affect students' communicative competence.	0%	0.5%	2.6%	52.8%	44.0%	4.40	.570
2. Communicative language teaching method will help students to speak English fluently but will not help them to pass well in the BECE/WASSCE.	0%	0%	0%	56.0%	44.0%	4.44	.498
3. It is possible for a candidate to perform well in the BECE/WASSCE English language exam without being communicatively competent.	0%	0%	.5%	36.3%	63.2%	4.63	.496
4. The BECE/WASSCE English Language examination is NOT designed to test the communicative competence of candidates.	0%	0%	0.7%	50.3%	49.0%	4.48	.515
5. The teachers and the students are always able to predict the language input of the BECE/WASSCE English Language examination.	0%	.5%	2.6%	52.8%	44.0%	4.40	.570
6. The BECE/WASSCE English language examination does NOT allow students to create authentic language output.	0%	.7%	1.3%	37.1%	60.9%	4.58	.558

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7. The BECE/WASSCE English language examination does NOT test all the four main language skills.	0%	0%	2.6%	28.5%	68.9%	4.66	.526
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The teachers and the students again indicated that it was possible for a candidate to perform well in the BECE/WASSCE English language test without being able to speak English fluently because the test was designed primarily to measure the linguistic competence of the learners. The test would probably be ideal for native speakers who are already fluent in the language. As shown in tables 3 and 4, the *mean values* of 4.55, 4.67, 4.63, and 4.48 show that the students and their teachers agreed that the test was not communicative enough as it was not designed to test the communicative competence of the students. The *Interviewee 6* in *Table 1* above also indicated that because the examination was not meant to test the communicative competence of candidates, a lot of people passed the exam but they struggled to communicate in English. This finding is in line with Islam and Stapa (2021), who found that many students of private universities in Bangladesh were not able to communicate fluently in English, although they had passed the English test that qualified them for admission into those universities.

The main principle behind the *Communicative Language Testing* is to design tasks that are close to real-life communication situations. According to Brown and Abeywickrama (2019), communicative language tests use creative and unpredictable language input. However, the teachers and the students indicated that they were able to predict the language input of the BECE/WASSCE English Language test. This is shown in the teachers' and students' responses to *Item 5* in *Tables 2* and *3*. The *mean values* of 4.40 and 4.67 respectively show that the teachers and the students agreed that they were always able to predict the language input of the BECE/WASSCE English Language examination. This is because, as Interviewee 2 indicated, the students were able to familiarize themselves with the demands or the areas of the examination and concentrated more on those examinable areas.

Again, an ideal *Communicative Language Test* is always designed to measure how well learners are able to create authentic language input or function in the target language in authentic and meaningful contexts (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019). The responses to the *Item 6* (the *mean values* of 4.58 and 4.30) show that the teachers and students agreed that the BECE/WASSCE English language test did not allow the students to create authentic language output. The BECE/WASSCE English Language Test was more of *discrete-point testing*, since it did not give opportunity to the test takers to create authentic language output.

The fourth requirement of a communicative language test, according to Brown and Abeywickrama (2019) is that it must test all the four main language skills. A second language test cannot be described as *communicative* if it fails to test the learners' *speaking, listening, reading, and writing* skills. Looking at the structure of BECE/WASSCE English language test from 2.3 and 2.4 above, and the responses from the interviews and the questionnaires, we can conclude that the test is not communicative. This is because it

does not test all the four basic language skills. The BECE tests *writing* and *reading* skills only. The WASSCE, on the other hand, tests *writing*, *reading*, and *listening* skills; it does not test the *speaking* skills of learners. Interviewee 5 indicated that teachers and students focused more on *writing* and *reading* skills, because those were the areas that were examined. The teachers and the students also agreed that the BECE/WASSCE English language examination did not test all the four main language skills. This is shown in their responses to *Item 7* in *Tables 2* and *3*. This is shown in the mean value of 4.67 for the students and 4.66 for the teachers. Similarly, Moremi et al (2018) found that the *Botswana General Certificate School Examination* (BGCSE) assessed *reading* and *writing* skills only, teachers therefore focused their attention only on the *reading* and the *writing* skills which were examined.

## CONCLUSION

It can be inferred from the foregoing analysis that the BECE/WASSCE English Language test is not communicative enough, and that if learners focus their attention on only topics and language skills that are examined in the BECE/WASSCE they will not be able to speak the language fluently in real life situations. In effect, it is possible for a candidate to perform well in the English language test without being communicatively competent. This is because the examination does not allow students to create authentic language output. Because the examination is not communicative, the teachers also concentrated on teaching vocabulary and grammar in isolation, which only helped the learners to achieve *grammatical competence*, which is the focus of the examination.

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