

AN ANALYSIS WASHBACK AUTHORITY OF STANDARDIZED EDUCATIONAL TESTS ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTIONS

Lala Nining Indrawati¹, Yulia Agustina², Hajriana Arfah³, Usuluddin⁴

^{1,2,3} Universitas Hamzanwadi,,Selong, Nusa Tenggara Barat, Indonesia

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history: Received: November 6, 2024 Revised: November 19, 2024 Accepted: December 26, 2024 Published: December 31, 2024</p> <p>Keywords: Washback Effect Standardized tests English Language Instructions</p>	<p>Standardized evaluations are a widely used tool in education and assessment. These evaluations are carefully designed to present uniform questions and instructions to all participants, ensuring consistent measurement of a student's knowledge or skills in a specific area. They play a crucial role in assessing and enhancing students' proficiency in the English language. Hence The purpose of this study is to examine the washback effect of standardized testing in the English language subject. The researcher employed a descriptive qualitative method, utilizing a sample of 10 eighth-semester students majoring in English and 3 lecturers at Hamzanwadi University. The sampling technique used was random sampling, while data collection methods included observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings of this study reveal that standardized tests have a significant impact on the teaching and learning process. These tests often create pressure for both students and teachers, which can lead to stress and anxiety during examinations. Additionally, they can inhibit creativity in teaching methods and result in students struggling to understand the material. Consequently, students may become focused solely on passing exams rather than genuinely comprehending the subject matter. Further elaboration on these points is discussed in detail in the following discussion section</p> <p><i>This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA license.</i></p> 
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<p>Corresponding Author: Lala Nining Indrawati English Education Department Universitas Mataram Cut Nyak dien Road, Selong, Indonesia. Email: lalaniningindrawati81@gmail.com</p>	

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, English language skills are essential in increasing the competitiveness of individuals and educational institutions. According to (Al Butary et al., 2021), English is not only a tool of international communication but also a profound basis for opening the door to access information, knowledge, and opportunities in an increasingly integrated world. In line with this, (Abdulaal et al., 2022) state that Mastery of English allows active participation in global dialogue, expands social networks, and makes substantial

contributions to the professional realm involved on the international stage. To raise high educational standards, accurate assessments are needed. Standardized exams play a vital role in evaluating the learning system.

Tests Standardized tests are a form of measurement widely applied in education and evaluation (Kubiszyn & Borich, 2024). These tests are designed to provide uniform questions and instructions to all test takers, consistently measuring a student's ability or knowledge in a particular area. According to (Toshpo'latovich, 2022), standardized exams play a fundamental role in evaluating and improving students' English language skills. Exams are not just a measuring tool but an instrument that provides valuable guidance for educational practitioners (Constantinou & Wijnen-Meijer, 2022). Each test result is a numerical representation and a basis for identifying areas of needed improvement and designing more effective teaching strategies (Ezugwu et al., 2022). Hence, educators can know individual students' progress and identify each student's strengths and weaknesses, allowing for the adaptation of more specific teaching approaches.

Apart from acting as an evaluation tool, the results of this test also make an essential contribution to curriculum development (Chan, 2023). Therefore, standardized tests function as formal evaluations and as structured instruments to improve students' English language skills (Hultgren et al., 2022). Hence, to optimize students' abilities and provide an overview of how teachers should explain material in class, teachers must give tests where the results of these tests are called the washback effect.

According to (Schissel, 2018) Washback refers to the Impact or influence produced by the implementation of standardized exams or tests on the teaching and learning process. In Other words, washback reflects how a particular exam can influence teaching methods, learning strategies, and student attitudes in an educational environment. These impacts include changes in the curriculum, adjustments to teaching approaches by teachers, and even student motivation (Rasmitadila et al., 2023). So, the results obtained from this washback effect can be a reference for teachers in creating more effective learning strategies and improving the quality of education.

On the other hand, washback can also have a negative impact. Suppose the exam is designed with less relevance or less emphasis on memorization. This can result in learning focusing solely on remembering the exam material rather than understanding it (Doyle, 2023). This allows students only to be oriented towards achieving high grades without fully understanding the material. This could hinder the development of students' creativity and critical thinking.

Actually, there are many researches have conducted the research about washback authority. First research was conducted by Hung & Huang (2019) and Dong & Liu (2022) highlights the impact of "washback" on standardized English tests within the educational context. In the first study, Hung & Huang explored the "washback" effects of proficiency tests on student learning within a campus-wide English curriculum, using a quantitative descriptive method and references from previous studies. This study involved 694 students from a

national university in Taiwan, majoring in engineering, business, and foreign languages. The findings indicated that the “washback” effects were particularly noticeable on future employment prospects, learning motivation, mood, and self-image of the students. Furthermore, a statistically significant correlation was found between “washback” and proficiency level. However, there was no statistically significant difference in “washback” between male and female students or among students from different majors. The second study by Dong & Liu employed standard multiple regression methods, exploratory factor analysis, structural equation modelling, and descriptive statistics to examine the impact of students’ perceptions of high-stakes tests on their learning motivation and time allocation for studying.

These two studies underscore the need for a deeper understanding of the “washback” effects on learning, particularly in determining whether students truly comprehend the material studied or are simply preparing for exams. In line with it, these articles provide a holistic view of "washback." Hung & Huang (2019) offer a macro-level perspective by addressing its impact on personal and professional dimensions, while Dong & Liu (2022) provide a micro-level analysis of its psychological and behavioral aspects. The combination of these findings enriches the understanding of how "washback" manifests both externally (career and emotional outcomes) and internally (motivation and study habits). Based on the description above, the researcher tries to investigate the nature and extent of the washback effect resulting from standardized tests, examine how standardized tests influence instructional strategies and methodologies in English language classrooms, and explore the perceptions and experiences of both educators and students regarding the Impact of standardized tests on language learning.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research method, aiming to explore the washback effect of standardized tests in an educational setting. Qualitative descriptive methods were valuable for examining complex phenomena, as they not only presented factual data but also explored patterns, themes, and meanings within the context. Data was collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis, providing a deep understanding of how washback influenced teaching practices and curriculum. This approach was effective for analyzing the impact of standardized testing on educational processes, especially in terms of why and how certain effects emerged.

The research took place at Universitas Hamzanwadi during the final exam period in September 2024, involving eighth-semester English majors and three lecturers. Data collection included interviews with students and lecturers to gauge their perspectives on the washback effect, along with observation, recording, and documentation to accurately capture the

responses. Instruments like recording were essential for minimizing bias and maintaining data integrity, while systematic documentation ensured all information could be accessed and reanalyzed if needed. Random sampling of students and lecturers allowed the researcher to gather varied viewpoints on how washback affected teaching and learning.

For data analysis, the study utilized thematic analysis, particularly the Huberman method, which organized qualitative data through stages of reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. This method, developed by Miles and Huberman, helped to systematically identify key themes related to washback's impact on students, teachers, and educational practices. By organizing similar ideas, interpreting the data's significance, and summarizing findings, the researcher aimed to present meaningful insights into how standardized tests influenced instructional strategies and academic outcomes in the university context.

1. **Data Reduction**

During data reduction, after interviewing the 8th-semester students and 3 lecturers of Hamzanwadi University, the researcher condensed the data or responses from the participants to focus on relevant information for the study.

2. **Data Display**

The researcher organized the data by categorizing the different impacts on teaching methods, curriculum design, and classroom activities. The results were classified based on positive and negative washback effects, illustrating how standardized tests influenced instructional practices.

3. **Conclusion Drawing and Verification**

After presenting the data, the researcher interpreted the findings, explaining the effect of washback in standardized tests.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

In the next phase, this research aims to address the previously outlined research questions. The researcher selected 10 eighth-semester English students and 3 lecturers from Hamzanwadi University as respondents, with interviews serving as the primary data collection

method. The results obtained provide a detailed understanding of the impact of standardized testing on students and educators alike.

Interview Results for Students

Interviews with students indicated that standardized tests significantly impact their learning experiences. The majority of respondents reported that the presence of such tests increases stress levels during their studies. Many students shared that the pressure to achieve high scores causes anxiety, which they feel negatively affects their learning quality. This stress and pressure often shift their focus from a comprehensive understanding of English language concepts to rote memorization, aimed solely at performing well on tests. This shift toward memorization means students are often prioritizing exam preparation over developing a deeper understanding of language use, which leads to a less effective learning process and limits long-term retention.

The interviews also revealed a mix of feelings towards standardized testing among students. Some students expressed frustration and anxiety, feeling that these exams did not fully represent their actual language abilities. While a few respondents acknowledged that the tests served some purpose, they still found limitations in the design, especially when the tests failed to align well with what had been taught or how they learn best. A key concern raised was the emphasis on standardized testing over practical language use, which many felt created a disconnect between what they learned in the classroom and real-life applications of the English language. For instance, focusing on grammar and vocabulary for test purposes often overshadowed opportunities for interactive, communicative language practice.

The pressure to perform well on these exams was another recurring theme. Several students noted that they felt increased stress due to the focus on test performance, particularly regarding specific skills like grammar and vocabulary. Many students reported using coping strategies, such as reviewing past tests, attempting to maintain a positive mindset, and managing their study time more effectively to handle this stress. However, some mentioned that external pressures, like tightly scheduled exams, compounded their anxiety, making it difficult to manage their well-being and academic performance effectively.

When preparing for standardized tests, students also faced specific challenges. The most common issues included difficulties in memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules, balancing test practice with improving other language skills, and dealing with test formats, particularly multiple-choice questions, which often focus on narrow aspects of language knowledge. Many students found it hard to stay motivated, especially when test content felt disconnected from real-life language use. This lack of motivation was frequently attributed to the emphasis on memorization rather than understanding language in a practical, applicable way.

Regarding the effectiveness of standardized tests in language learning, most students felt that these tests were not useful for overall language development. Although a few students acknowledged that standardized testing helped them identify weaknesses in specific areas, many expressed frustrations with the narrow scope of test preparation. They felt the exams focused too much on memorization and specific skills without fostering real communicative abilities or practical language use. This emphasis on passing tests often resulted in limited attention to other vital language skills, such as creative writing or conversation, which students felt were more relevant to practical language competence.

To improve standardized testing, students suggested several adjustments. These included changes in the test format to incorporate more practical language tasks, such as speaking or essay writing, which would better reflect real-world language applications. Additionally, some students called for a more balanced approach that evaluates the learning process rather than solely the final outcome. They also recommended using more engaging, interactive preparation materials that encourage active language use, rather than relying on memorization alone.

One of the main impacts of standardized testing that emerged from the interviews was a decreased enjoyment of learning. A recurring sentiment was that standardized tests made English lessons less engaging and enjoyable. Students felt that the pressure to perform well on these exams took away from the joy of learning the language in a meaningful and creative way. For many, the focus on testing overshadowed more dynamic activities, making their language learning experience less satisfying.

Interview Results for Lecturers

The interviews with lecturers revealed that they, too, perceived standardized tests as having a notable impact on students, particularly regarding participation and engagement. According to the lecturers, standardized tests influence students' motivation and anxiety in various ways. The first and second lecturers noted that students often experience test anxiety, which can hinder their engagement in class. They observed that this anxiety affects students' ability to focus on more interactive or creative aspects of language learning, as their primary concern becomes test performance. On the other hand, the third lecturer viewed exams as a positive challenge that could increase students' motivation and drive them to interact more actively with the material. This lecturer felt that exams, when approached constructively, could help students set and achieve higher goals, thereby enhancing their language learning experience.

Each lecturer employed different strategies to reduce student anxiety regarding standardized tests. The first and second lecturers highlighted the importance of providing emotional support to help students cope with exam-related stress. They felt that fostering a supportive learning environment where students feel understood and encouraged could alleviate some of the stress caused by these high-stakes assessments. The third lecturer, however, focused on the need for intensive and consistent practice as a means of helping students feel more prepared and confident, thereby reducing their anxiety. By familiarizing students with the test format and content, this lecturer believed that students could approach exams with a more positive outlook and less apprehension.

The lecturers also acknowledged that standardized tests impact how they design and conduct lessons. The first and second lecturers felt that these tests often limit the scope for creativity in the classroom, as the focus shifts towards exam preparation. They noted that standardized tests sometimes make it necessary to prioritize test-related content over other interactive learning activities, which they felt restricted the flexibility and creativity of their teaching methods. However, the third lecturer had a different perspective, viewing the tests as an opportunity to enhance student skills by providing intensive practice in areas critical to test success, such as critical thinking and language accuracy. This lecturer believed that while standardized tests require a more structured approach, they also offer a chance to help

students develop skills that will benefit them in future challenges, such as international exams like TOEFL or IELTS.

All three lecturers recognized that standardized testing plays an important role in assessing students, yet they acknowledged its limitations. The first and second lecturers emphasized the importance of a more holistic approach to evaluation, which would consider students' daily performance and growth, rather than just their test scores. They felt that this approach would better reflect students' abilities and allow for more comprehensive feedback. Meanwhile, the third lecturer valued the objectivity that standardized tests provide, believing they offer a consistent metric for student evaluation. Despite their differences, the lecturers agreed that both standardized testing and ongoing assessment are essential, each offering unique insights into student progress.

The lecturers also concurred that standardized tests often necessitate adjustments in teaching methods. While the first and second lecturers expressed concerns that these adjustments limit creativity, the third lecturer saw these changes as beneficial, stimulating students' skills and enhancing critical thinking. For the third lecturer, standardized tests were seen as challenges that could foster creativity by encouraging students to apply their knowledge in focused ways. This divergence in perspectives reflects the varied ways in which standardized tests are perceived by educators and highlights the potential of these assessments to shape and influence teaching practices, depending on the approach taken by each lecturer.

DISCUSSION

This research was carried out utilizing research instrument which was interviews. The data analysis method employed was descriptive analysis. Based on the findings from the interviews above, the researcher can draw the conclusion that findings from the interviews reveal a complex relationship between standardized testing and students' educational experiences in English language learning. Many respondents expressed a mixture of anxiety, frustration, and mild acceptance regarding these assessments. While some participants acknowledged the usefulness of standardized tests in identifying specific weaknesses in their language skills, a significant number felt that the tests do not accurately reflect their true abilities. This misalignment can lead to feelings of inadequacy and disillusionment,

particularly when students perceive a disconnect between the test content and the curriculum they are taught.

stress associated with standardized testing. Many participants reported feeling overwhelmed by the pressure to perform well, which detracts from their overall learning experience. This intense focus on high-stakes testing shifts the emphasis from meaningful engagement with the material to rote memorization and exam preparation. Consequently, the interactive and communicative aspects of language learning, essential for developing proficiency, are often overshadowed or neglected. The stress experienced by students may not only affect their academic performance but also have long-term implications for their mental well-being (Davis et al., 2006).

According to Cordova Jr et al., (2024) The stress related to standardized testing affects not only individual students but also the broader classroom environment. As exam periods approach, educators often modify their teaching strategies, placing greater emphasis on test-related exercises. This shift can result in a more rigid classroom environment, where creative teaching methods and deeper explorations of language concepts are sacrificed in favor of exam preparation. While this approach may help students become familiar with the exam format, it limits opportunities for holistic language development and critical thinking. Additionally, some educators expressed concern that this focus on testing undermines their ability to teach in ways that foster genuine understanding and engagement, as they feel pressured to prioritize test preparation over enriching educational experiences.

Moreover, respondents reported facing specific challenges in preparing for standardized tests, particularly in memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules. Many students expressed frustration over the necessity of rote memorization, which they felt did not contribute to their overall language competency. The format of the tests, especially multiple-choice questions, was often viewed as particularly challenging, as it tends to emphasize a narrow range of language skills while neglecting others that are crucial for effective communication (Jahongirmirzo Ulug'bek o'gli & Muxayyoxon, 2023). This narrow focus can hinder students from applying their language skills in real-world contexts, further contributing to their feelings of disconnect between testing and actual language use.

Additionally, the issue of motivation emerged as a recurring theme throughout the interviews. Many respondents expressed difficulty in maintaining motivation to study for standardized tests, especially when they perceive the test content as disconnected from practical language use. This disconnect highlights the importance of integrating real-life language tasks into both teaching and assessment practices. By making the content more relevant to students' lives, educators can enhance students' motivation and engagement in their language learning journey. Lecturers also expressed concern regarding students' motivation, indicating that the pressures of standardized testing can lead to a disinterest in learning, as students may feel that their efforts are solely aimed at passing exams rather than genuinely acquiring language skills.

In light of these findings, respondents offered several recommendations for improving standardized testing practices. A significant suggestion was to include more practical language tasks in test formats, such as speaking and writing assessments. These types of evaluations could provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' language abilities and their application in real-world scenarios. Additionally, participants advocated for a balanced approach to assessment that evaluates the learning process alongside final outcomes, leading to a more holistic understanding of student proficiency and progress. Educators emphasized the need for a curriculum that encourages critical thinking and creativity, suggesting that a broader assessment framework could alleviate some of the pressures students face.

Enhancing the quality and engagement of test preparation materials was another key recommendation. Respondents highlighted the need for resources that reflect real-world language use and encourage active participation. According to (Purhanudin et al., 2023) By incorporating engaging and interactive materials into the preparation process, educators can better support students' learning experiences and help alleviate some of the anxiety associated with standardized testing. This focus on practical language use may foster a more enjoyable and effective learning environment. Educators also noted that providing diverse and dynamic materials can rekindle students' enthusiasm for learning and promote a more comprehensive understanding of the language.

The interviews also revealed a concerning trend regarding students' enjoyment of English lessons. Many respondents noted that the emphasis on standardized testing

diminished their engagement and enthusiasm for learning the language. This decline in motivation can hinder overall learning outcomes, as students may begin to view language learning solely as a means to perform well on tests rather than as a valuable and enjoyable pursuit in its own right. Lecturers reinforced this sentiment, indicating that the current assessment methods often neglect to appreciate the creative and expressive elements of language, which are vital for fostering a love for learning.

Furthermore, the participants' experiences underline the need for educators to adopt a more flexible approach to teaching and assessment. According to (Prastikawati et al., 2024) By diversifying assessment methods and emphasizing formative assessments, teachers can create a more supportive learning environment that recognizes individual student strengths and weaknesses. This approach encourages a growth mindset, allowing students to view challenges as opportunities for learning rather than as sources of stress. Educators also highlighted the importance of fostering a classroom culture that prioritizes experimentation and creativity, suggesting that this could lead to a more engaging learning atmosphere.

In summary, the analysis of the interview results emphasizes the need for a critical reevaluation of standardized testing in English language education. While standardized tests can provide structure and benchmarks for progress, they often fail to capture the full spectrum of language competencies and contribute to increased stress and disengagement among students. Educational stakeholders must consider alternative assessment methods that align more closely with students' learning needs and real-world applications. Lecturers play a crucial role in advocating for changes that can lead to a more balanced approach to language education.

Ultimately, creating a more effective and enjoyable learning environment will require a concerted effort from educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders. According to (Ramzan et al., 2023) By prioritizing meaningful language learning experiences and adopting a more integrated approach to assessment, we can foster a more positive attitude toward language acquisition. This will not only improve students' performance on standardized tests but also encourage a lifelong love of learning languages.

The book "Language Testing and Assessment: An Advanced Resource Book" by Glenn Fulcher and Fred Davidson delves into the washback effect, the impact of testing on teaching and learning processes. The washback effect occurs when the format and focus of a test begin to shape the teaching methods of instructors and the learning approaches of students. In this context, high-stakes language tests, such as national exams or university entrance exams, often lead teachers to focus more on test material rather than the broader learning goals. The book explains that this impact can be positive, for example, when exams encourage teachers to emphasize important language skills. However, it can also be negative if exams drive teaching to be solely focused on memorization and repetitive practice, hindering deeper understanding.

Fulcher and Davidson also discuss strategies to manage and minimize the negative effects of washback. One key strategy is designing tests that align with learning objectives, so that the test can encourage high-quality teaching practices. The book highlights the importance of creating questions that assess critical thinking and relevant language skills rather than merely memorization. Additionally, they suggest that teachers should have flexibility in choosing teaching methods that are not solely exam-oriented, allowing students to gain a richer learning experience. Through this analysis of the washback effect, the book invites readers to understand the social and educational impact of testing and the importance of assessments that support comprehensive language development.

As we look to the future, it is crucial to advocate for educational policies that support innovative teaching practices and assessments that reflect the complexities of language learning. By engaging in ongoing dialogue among educators, students, and policymakers, we can work toward a more balanced and equitable educational landscape that prioritizes both assessment and meaningful learning experiences. In doing so, we can help ensure that students are not only prepared for standardized tests but also equipped with the language skills necessary for success in a globalized world.

CONCLUSION

After the data was compiled, the results of the interview regarding the washback effect of standardized tests on English language instructions, The analysis of the interview results underscored the significant impact of standardized testing on English language

learning, particularly concerning student stress and anxiety. Many respondents reported feeling overwhelmed by the pressure to perform well on these exams, which often led to a narrow focus on test preparation rather than fostering a comprehensive understanding of the language. This situation created a challenging learning environment where the joy of language acquisition was overshadowed by the anxiety surrounding standardized assessments.

Additionally, respondents highlighted a critical disconnect between classroom instruction and real-life language application. The emphasis on standardized testing encouraged students to prioritize rote memorization of vocabulary and grammar rules over meaningful communication and interactive learning experiences. As a result, students often felt that the skills they acquired in preparation for exams did not adequately prepare them for practical language use outside the classroom.

Moreover, while some students acknowledged that standardized tests could help identify specific weaknesses in their language skills, the overall sentiment indicated that these assessments fell short of promoting holistic language development. The focus on narrow skill sets and test-specific content often neglected essential areas such as creative writing and conversational abilities, which were crucial for effective communication in real-world scenarios.

In light of these findings, participants advocated for a more balanced approach to language assessment that integrated practical language tasks and interactive learning opportunities. By shifting the focus away from solely standardized tests, educators could create a more engaging and effective language learning environment. This comprehensive approach would not only reduce stress levels among students but also enhance their overall language competency and enjoyment in learning English.

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