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Dewi Nopita

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Washback in EFL Writing Courses: A Reflective Teaching at English Education Study Program of Teacher Training and Education Faculty of Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji

Dewi Nopita

Abstrak

Washback is one of the principles of language assessment. It is the effects of an assessment on teaching and learning prior to the assessment itself, that is, on preparation for the assessment (Brown, 2004). This article aims at describing washback in EFL writing courses at English study program of teacher training and education faculty of Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji (UMRAH). The description was got from my own experiences and another writing lecturer's. To get a more detail description from another lecturer, I interviewed him and his students dealing with the assessment done during the course as well as its impact towards the teaching and learning. Futhermore, I did observation on the improvement of the students' task and test scores. Finally, it was found that in writing courses at English Education Study Program of Teacher training and Education Faculty (FKIP) of UMRAH, washback did contribute to the quality of teaching and learning since it provides feedback for both the instructors and the students. The feedback helps the instructors to plan a better teaching as well as helps students to do a better learning. The form, content, focus and delivery of writing assessments (tasks and tests) administered during the course determine the way it is taught and the way the students learn. As a result, these features in turn tend to affect the success of the course.

Keywords: *washback, EFL writing course, reflective teaching, assessment*

Corresponding author: dewinopita.umrah@gmail.com



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INTRODUCTION

Assessment is one of the aspects that should be considered by an English language instructor in designing his instructional planning. McEwen (1995) describes that what is assessed becomes what is valued, which becomes what is taught. It seems that teaching and assessment are intertwined. An English language instructor should design his/ her instructional planning where the instruction is in line with the assessment. Hence, in the world of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), it is a must for English Foreign Language teachers/ instructors to keep in mind that they have to focus on giving instructions on what to assess as well as on assessing what the students have learnt. The assessment is designed to see the students' progress towards the learning goals. In other words, assessment functions as measuring the success and the quality of teaching and learning.

There are five principles of language assessment; (1) practicality, (2) validity, (3) reliability, (4) authenticity, and (5) washback. Practicality deals with the cost, the instructions, the duration, and the scoring/ evaluation procedure of a test. Then, validity is the extent to which inferences made from assessment results are appropriate, meaningful, and useful in terms of the purpose of the assessment. The third principle, reliability, is a test has to consistently yield the same results in a given population. The test components (directions/ rubrics), the students, the scoring, the test administration, and the test itself are variables of reliability. Next, authenticity is how well the characteristics of the test correlate to the native language (target language); how likely the language tasks will actually be performed in the real world. The last, washback is the feedback that a test gives to both the test takers and the test developers (Brown, 2004; Gronlund, 1998).

Among the five principles of language assessment, washback contribute more on teaching and learning. The first contribution is that washback can motivate both students and English language instructors to fulfill their teaching and learning goals (Anderson & Wall, 1993). Secondly, washback help improve English language instructors' creativity in utilizing and designing good tests as beneficial teaching-learning activities in order to encourage a positive teaching-learning process (Pearson, 1988). A creative and innovative test can quite advantageously result in a syllabus alteration or a new syllabus. Other impacts of washback deal with the selection of teaching methods and students' learning styles (Tayeb, et al., 2014). Here, washback affects the components of the language teaching-learning processes and influence what and how the teachers teach, and the learners learn.

However, to take washback into account in TEFL is not an easy task for some reasons. First of all, to get an accurate washback is time-consuming. English language teachers/ instructors need to look in depth each task and test done by each student during the teaching and learning to find out the students' weaknesses. Then, they have to tell/ show the students these weaknesses as well as give scores/ grades on the students' tasks or tests. Moreover, washback does require English language teachers and instructors to be more creative so as to be able to make students enthusiastic, interested, and have high motivation to learn because the success of their teaching will be reflected by students' success in doing the tasks and tests or by the students' task/ test scores. The next reason is that students tend to ignore topics and activities which are not directly related to those tested. They do focus on learning discrete points of knowledge and skill to be tested stated in the course syllabus that make them have less time and interest to improve themselves in learning a more complex real-life knowledge and skill. This is due to the weaknesses identified. Therefore, washback is a great challenge for English language instructors and teachers to consider in their teaching.

In the teaching of writing courses at English Education Study Program of Teacher Training and Education Faculty of UMRAH, washback has been used as a consideration in teaching and learning. Each assessment (tasks and tests) has given different effects to the teaching and learning. The effects, then, is different for each class of writing courses as well. Throughout this article, I intend to describe washback in EFL writing courses conducted at English Education Study Program of FKIP, UMRAH.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Washback

There have been various definitions for the term "washback". Hughes (2003) describes washback as the effect on testing and learning. This definition shows that washback gives impact to teachers/ instructors and students. This is in line with what Biggs (1995) mentions that washback refers to the fact that testing drives not only the curriculum, but teaching methods and students' approaches to learning. In relation to this, Karabulut (2007) states that if a test is significant for the test taker, it displays strong washback; yet, if it is not fundamental at all, it presents weak washback. It indicates that to have valuable washback, any assessment during teaching and learning should be designed based on the syllabus. According to Wall (1997), washback has effects on individuals, policies and practices, within the classroom, the school, the educational system, or society as a whole. In English language teaching, it is better for the teachers and the instructors to focus more on washback which affects those effects within the classroom.

Bailey (1996) contended that any test may have either negative or positive washback “to the extent that it promotes or impedes the accomplishment of educational goals held by learners or personnel.” A test which provides beneficial washback positively influences what and how teachers teach, what and how learners learn, and offers learners a chance to prepare for the test. The test is more formative rather than summative, and gives learners necessary feedback for their language development (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). On the other hand, negative washback is when a test leads to an undesirable effect on teaching and learning. For example, both learners and teachers do not want to learn and teach due to pressure of this test (Alderson & Wall, 1993). Frustration and discouragement, competitiveness, and the devaluing of grades are other problems for students that may emerge from this negative washback.

For English language teachers and instructors, understanding the factors influencing washback is of concern. Sprat (2005) explains that washback is influenced by exam-factors, teachers’ beliefs and attitudes toward the test, teaching methods, teachers’ education and training, resources available and the school. Among the factors, he states that teachers’ influence is considered as the key factor for washback. Teachers are the sources of promoting positive washback since they hold a significant role in determining the types and intensity of washback.

2.2 English Foreign Language (EFL) Writing Course

EFL writing course is a course designed for students in which English is still a foreign language in their community. In line with this, Johnston and Partridge (2014) define English as a foreign language as English for people in whose community English is not the usual language of communication. Then, teaching writing to EFL students means an effort to make students in which English is rarely used in the community where they live able to write in English well. Therefore, in teaching writing, the instructors need to consider the learners’ characteristics. It includes who the learners that they teach are, the ethnic, linguistic, and religious heritage of the learners, the learners’ native languages, levels of education, socioeconomic characteristics, life’s experience, intellectual capacities, abilities, etc. These focus attention on some of the crucial variables affecting both learners’ successes in acquiring a foreign language and the instructors’ capacities to enable learners to achieve that acquisition (Brown, 2007).

According to Raimes (2002), there are ten steps that the writing instructors need to know in planning writing course, as follows:

1. Ascertaining goals and institutional constraints

The constraints are assigned curricula, approved textbooks, and designated proficiency examinations. Different constraints will lead in different direction.

2. Deciding on theoretical principles

Writing instructors first need to confront their ideological position and recognize their perceptions of the relationship between the types of writing they teach and the roles they are preparing students for in academia and the wider world of work. The ideology can be seen from the syllabus and the choice of materials and activities even though it is not articulated.

3. Planning content

Writing instructors need to keep in mind that all writers have to grapple with content and form. The question of content involves the question of what content will actively encourage students to use writing as a tool for learning, and for communication and to become engaged enough with their writing to have an investment in examining it, improving it, and eventually revising it for readers.

4. Weighing the elements

Writing consists of many constituent parts and we need to consider which ones will be the most important for a course: content, organization, originality, style, fluency, accuracy, or using appropriate rhetorical forms of discourse. Dealing with these, writing instructors have to form priorities and weight the elements according to students' needs and our own philosophy.

5. Drawing up a syllabus

This point deals with how we organize the content and the learning experiences in the classroom. There are six types of syllabus organization for writing course: structural, functional, topical, situational, skills and processes, tasks.

6. Selecting materials

The materials has to fit as far as possible with the goals, principles, content, and weighting that writing instructors have already decided on.

7. Preparing activities and roles
8. Choosing types and methods of feedback

There are several questions the writing instructors need to consider in relation to this point: will anyone respond? If so, who? What will be the methods and type of response? What do I have time for? What is the purpose of my response?

9. Evaluating the course

Writing instructors use tests to evaluate students' progress and their own success as the instructors.

2.3 Assessments in Teaching Writing

Assessment in teaching writing is done to see the students' progress in pursuing the learning goals. O'Malley and Pierce (1996) elaborate eight considerations that writing teachers and instructors need to think about in assessing their students' writing. For beginning writers, the teachers and the instructors have to assess the stages of writing development as students gradually gain control of writing processes. The next is that the teachers and the instructors should assess writing in the context of other language skills, when appropriate, as with integrated language assessment. Also, they have to assess all domains of writing, especially composition, in addition to sentence construction, word usage, and mechanics. Then, in designing writing assessment, the teachers and the instructors should include self-assessment, share scoring rubrics, and involve students in setting criteria as well as in developing and selecting writing prompts. Moreover, the writing assessment may include writing processes and strategies as well as the product of written efforts. The writing teachers and instructors may use multiple assessments of writing across various purposes, genres, and content areas, and include writing samples in portfolios to illustrate student growth over time and to show accomplishments relative to classroom objectives. The last consideration is to use the results of writing assessments and of your conferences with students to plan instruction. Identify students' strengths, educational needs, and interests and determine what works most effectively in instruction for each student.

According to Brown (2004), there are four types of writing performance that can be assessed by the writing teachers and instructors. The first is imitative writing. It is one of the writing performance that requires students to be able to produce simple written language, such as writing letters, words, punctuation, and very brief sentences. The writing assessments for this type of performance are tasks in (hand) writing letters, words, and punctuation, and spelling tasks and detecting phoneme-grapheme correspondences. Then, the second writing performance is intensive (controlled) writing. Here, the students' skills in producing appropriate vocabulary within a context, collocations, and idioms are assessed. To assess these skills, the writing teachers and instructors may employ such tasks of dictation and dicto-comp, grammatical transformation tasks, picture-cued tasks, vocabulary assessment tasks, ordering tasks, and short-answer and sentence completion tasks. Finally, the last two writing performance is responsive and extensive writing. These two performances are regarded as a continuum of possibilities ranging from lower-end tasks whose complexity exceeds those in the previous category (imitative and intensive), through more open-ended tasks such as writing short reports, essays, summaries, and responses, up to texts of several pages or more. Paraphrasing, guided question and answer, and paragraph construction tasks are the assessments for these performance.

3. Method

The description of washback in EFL writing courses was got from my own experiences and another writing lecturer's when teaching Essay Writing course in the odd semester of the academic year 2017/ 2018 at English Education Study Program of Teacher Training and Education Faculty of Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji. To get a more detail description from another lecturer, I interviewed him and his students dealing with the assessment done during the course as well as its impact towards the teaching and learning. Besides, I did observation on the improvement of the students' task and test scores. In doing the interview and observation, I referred to the course syllabus. Finally, after doing the interview and the observation, I made a list of each assessment and the washback of the assessments.

4. Results and Discussion

After doing the interview and the observation, it was found that washback did contribute to the teaching of writing at English Education Study Program of FKIP UMRAH in several ways as it is shown by the following table.

Table 1: Assessments and Washback in Writing Course at English Education Study Program of FKIP UMRAH in the Academic year 2017/2018

Week	Course Objective	Assessment	Assessment Results	Washback
1	The students are able to comprehend the course agreement	-	-	-
2 3 4 5	The students are able to write grammatical sentences for the purpose of EFL writing	Grammatical transformation tasks	The students got problem in constructing compound sentences, complex sentences, and complex	For the instructors: ➤ Weighing the teaching materials on how to construct compound, complex, and compound-

			compound sentences.	complex sentences For students: ➤ Participate more (more active) in learning
6 7	The students are able to write introductory paragraph of Essay	Paragraph construction tasks	The students got problems in constructing sentences with adjective clause and those with noun clauses, and in writing introductory sentences that lead them to the thesis statement	For the instructors: ➤ Use a different method which makes students involve more in the teaching and learning ➤ Give students chances to select real-life topic For students: ➤ Have higher motivation in learning how to construct sentences with adjective clause and those with noun clauses ➤ Are more motivated to write real-life topic
8	Mid Semester Test	Paragraph construction task (a take-home exam)	➤ 21 from 85 students got problem in constructing	For the instructors: ➤ Reviewing the teaching materials related

			<p>sentences with adjective clause and those with noun clauses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 17 students got problems in writing introductory sentences that lead them to the thesis statement ➤ 14 students got problem in formulating the thesis statement 	<p>to the problems faced by students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Use a different technique (discussion) <p>For students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ More serious in learning topics which become a problem for them
9 10 11	The students are able to write essay body and its concluding paragraph	Writing essays (portfolio)	Students got problems in making their essays coherent, in formulating thesis statements	<p>For the instructors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Weighing the teaching materials on the problems the students is facing

12 13 14 15	The students are able to write different types of essays in English		for different types of essay, and in composing the topic sentences for the body paragraphs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Give students more opportunity to practice writing <p>For students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The feedback given in each essays written was used as a consideration in
				<p>learning/ in writing essays</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Do proof reading with their classmates ➤ Practice writing more essays
16	Final Semester Test	Writing an essay	Only 18 students from 85 got problems in making their essays coherent, 10 students got problems in formulating thesis statements for different types of essay, and 13 students got problem in composing the topic sentences for the body paragraphs.	For the instructors: the result of the final test will be used in designing the syllabus and classroom instructions for the next <i>Essay Writing</i> course.

In writing course at English Education Study Program of FKIP UMRAH in the academic year 2017/2018, there were four kinds of assessment employed; grammatical transformation tasks, paragraph construction tasks and test, portfolio, and writing essays. In each type of test and task, washback positively affected the teaching and learning. It affected positively both the writing instructors and the students in pursuing the learning goals. For students, washback motivated students to be more active, more serious, and more creative in learning. In other words, it makes students have positive attitude toward the learning. Then, for the writing course instructors, washback affected the teaching materials and methods, as well as beliefs in teaching. Related to teaching materials, the writing instructors need to be able to consider of weighing several course topics which become problems for students. As a result, washback will be used as a consideration in designing the next *Essay Writing* course syllabus.

The findings also described the relationship between course objectives, assessment, and washback. In teaching writing, the course instructors need to be able to design a communicative measurement-driven instruction where the form, content, focus and delivery of writing assessments (tasks and tests) are all in line with the teaching process based on the syllabus which is then produce positive washback. It means that the measurement-driven instruction takes measurement or test as the main concern for the writing instruction in designing their instruction. This findings is supported by Hughes (2003) who proposed that washback consists of three components; participants, processes, and product.

The washback hypotheses proposed by Alderson and Wall (2003) support the result of this descriptive research as well. It was found that there were 15 aspects of teaching and learning affected by washback of a test as it was formulated by Alderson and Wall (2003), as follow:

- 1) A test will influence teaching.
- 2) A test will influence learning.
- 3) A test will influence what teachers teach.
- 4) A test will influence how teachers teach.
- 5) A test will influence what learners learn.
- 6) A test will influence how learners learn.
- 7) A test will influence the rate and sequence of teaching.
- 8) A test will influence the rate and sequence of learning.
- 9) A test will influence the degree and depth of teaching.

- 10) A test will influence the degree and depth of learning.
- 11) A test will influence attitude to the content, method, etc. of teaching and learning.
- 12) Tests that have important consequences will have washback; and conversely.
- 13) Tests that do not have important consequences will have no washback.
- 14) Tests will have washback on all learners and teachers.
- 15) Tests will have washback effects for some learners and some teachers, but not for others

Finally, it is clear that in writing courses at English Study Program of FKIP UMRAH, washback have affected all aspects of the teaching and learning.

5. Conclusion

Washback is the effect that an assessment gives to the teaching and learning. It affects all aspects of the teaching and learning. There are two kinds of washback; positive and negative washback. Positive washback will improve the quality of the teaching and learning, while negative one will make both the course instructors and the students have negative attitudes toward the teaching and learning. To get positive washback, course instructors need to able to design measurement-driven instruction that is a notion in which the instruction is designed based on what to assess at the end. The types of assessment determine what and how the instructors teach, and how the students learn. Therefore, it is suggested that English language instructors take washback into account in teaching any courses.

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