FACILITATING POSITIVE WASHBACK THROUGH AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT IN EFL ASSESSMENT

Arief Eko Priyo Atmojo

IAIN Surakarta

Email: arief.atmojo93@iain-surakarta.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Washback has become a main concern for researchers in the field of language testing proven by numerous studies which have been done. The degree, nature, and scope of washback depend on the kinds of tests employed and the contexts where the tests are administered. This present article is aimed at discussing how authentic assessment brings positive washback in EFL assessment. It is only a literature review, not an empirical research article. This article limits and focuses the discussion on the washback at micro level which means the test effects on teaching and learning at classroom level. It addresses how authentic assessment leads to positive washback in EFL assessment. It also discusses how each form of authentic assessment can uniquely generates positive washback in EFL assessment. In conclusion, authentic assessment brings positive washback in EFL classes. It links classroom instructions to students' real-world experiences. It is suggested for EFL teachers to be literate of how to facilitate positive washback in EFL assessment and how to employ authentic assessment in assessment practices. Some kinds of further researches are also encouraged.

Keywords: authentic assessment, EFL assessment, EFL classes, positive washback.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. General Introduction

The use of tests at every level of education gives impact on many intentional or unintentional changes in the curriculum, particularly in teaching and learning practices. The impact of testing on teaching and learning is known as "washback" in language testing. It is obvious that tests give effects not only on learning products but also learning processes and strategies. The degree, nature, and scope of washback depend on the kinds of tests employed and the contexts where the tests are administered (Damankesh & Babaii, 2015). Consequently, it makes washback considered as one important aspect to ensure the quality of assessment in foreign language teaching (Hamidi, 2010).

Washback has become a main concern for researchers in the field of language testing proven by numerous studies which have been done (Safa & Goodarzi, 2014). Numerous studies on washback in language testing literature have increased rapidly because of its critical impact on learning, learners and teachers, and the whole educational system. The testing formats over the world have guided the scholars to focus on the effects of tests on students and teachers (Şenel & Tütüniş, 2011).

Many researchers have done empirical studies to explain further the term and the interaction with its related concepts as well as to identify the effects of different tests due to the essential role which washback plays in language testing. Accordingly, the washback of tests as an essential and trending topic of studies has recently attracted testing specialists and researchers in applied linguistics. It leads many researchers to study the phenomenon for different purposes (Damankesh & Babaii, 2015).

Many researchers have investigated the washback effects of standardized tests in language classes (Hung, 2012). Some researches on the effects of high-stakes exams and their washback effects on students' language development such as reading have also existed (Khanshan, 2018). Mostly, washback is mainly related to high-stakes tests which result in significant decisions affecting other sectors. Therefore, researches regarding the washback of alternative tests are perceived as important to discover how different kinds of tests make changes in EFL classes (Wiyaka, 2020).

This article is aimed at discussing how to facilitate positive washback in EFL assessment by employing authentic assessment in EFL classes. However, it is only a literature review, not an empirical research article. Thus, there is no empirical finding or result based on primary data in this article. Moreover, this article limits and focuses the discussion on the washback at micro level which means the test effects on teaching and learning at classroom level. It also discusses how several forms of authentic assessment generate positive washback in EFL assessment.

1.2. An Overview on Washback

The current literature on language testing has mainly focused on the impact of tests on teaching and learning. It refers to washback (Green & Andrade, 2010). Washback presents in every type of assessment. In the areas of education and applied linguistics, it is obviously believed that testing gives effects on teaching and learning (Safa & Goodarzi, 2014). Generally, washback is defined as the effects of each test item on teacher's teaching and learner's learning which may result in positive and negative aspects (Paker, 2013).

Washback can be defined as the effects which a test has on teaching in the classroom (Dorobăţ, 2007). Washback is also perceived as the way in which tests give influence on

teaching and learning. At the micro level, washback refers to the extent to which a test gives effect on teaching and learning within the classroom, primarily in the change or innovation of curricula and teachers' methodologies and the effect on students' learning (Pan, 2009). Washback is also known as the effect of tests on an educational curriculum and its related components, like learning goals and objectives, teaching and learning materials, procedures, teaching and learning, and teachers and learners (Damankesh & Babaii, 2015). It is an aspect of impact or a part of consequential validity which has become a main field of study within the applied linguistics, particularly language testing and assessment (Hamidi, 2010).

1.3. An Overview on Authentic Assessment

Finch (2002) defines authentic assessment as a process-oriented way of evaluating communicative competence, cognitive abilities, and affective learning by applying reflective forms of assessment in appropriate instructional classroom activities (e.g., communicative performance assessment, language portfolios, and self-assessment). It focuses on curriculum goals, enhancement of individual competence, and integration of instruction and assessment. Moreover, Mueller (2005) perceives authentic assessment as a type of assessment in which students are encouraged to perform real-world challenges which demonstrate meaningful applications of essential knowledge and skills. The tasks are either replicas of or analogous to the types of problems met by adult citizens or professionals in the real-world.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1. Authentic Assessment Leads to Positive Washback

Testing always has impacts due to being an undertaking to examine students' competence. Examinations or tests should ideally guide learning and teaching (Altowaim, 2015). Moreover, washback happens as the consequences of different assessment procedures within classrooms leading researchers to study changes in students' motivation, learning styles, learning strategies, educational outcomes, and achievements (Safa & Goodarzi, 2014).

Washback itself is neutral and related to influence. It means if the test is poor, the washback may fall to be negative. In contrasts, good tests will have good effects when the washback hypothesis holds (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007). It is obvious that washback is basically a neutral concept which can be positive or negative (Brown & Hudson, 1998; Damankesh & Babaii, 2015). It reflects the tests effects and practices give on teaching and learning processes. Although it is a very essential topic in language teaching, there is still few evidence or support which links specific test practices to any specific kinds of behaviours. It needs a comprehensive interpretation and analysis of the washback concept to understand the

test impact and the extent to which language tests manage or not in encouraging learners to achieve appropriate target language behaviours and skills (Reimann, 2010).

A positive washback will be resulted if the assessment procedures are in line with the goals and objectives of the course. For example, performance assessments (e.g., role plays and interviews) and personal-response assessments (e.g., self-assessments and conferences) should be employed to create a powerful and positive washback if the course includes a set of communicative performance objectives. In short, positive washback happens if the tests measure the same types of materials and skills which are set in the objectives and taught in the course. Teachers should consider the way to assess the objectives and follow through by choosing the most appropriate assessment format which matches each objective. It will lead to generate a strong relationship between the assessment procedures and the objectives and hence facilitate a positive washback (Brown & Hudson, 1998; Paker, 2013).

Some researchers reveal that tests will result in beneficial washback if the accountability in testing improves (Hamidi, 2010). At micro level, positive washback employs meaningful and innovative learning activities in teachers' teaching methodologies and increases teachers' attention to students' intentions, interests, and preferences. As results, students will be immediately encouraged and motivated to perform their best (Pan, 2009).

Washback is closely related to the idea that the success of students in a test becomes an indicator of their life skills development which is necessary for daily communication (Altowaim, 2015). Of course, a role play or communicative test can possibly provide the context, authenticity, and positive washback which other tests lack of. It is due to one main purpose of education which is obviously the preparation of students to engage and have role in the real-world (Reimann, 2010). With this in mind, authentic assessment can bring positive responses from students. It impacts EFL classes positively which can be seen from students' enjoyment in reading which grows with time and their awareness of reading interests and development stages (Ardianti & Mauludin, 2017).

Exams which foster the development of communication skills rather than the use of rote memory and a narrow range of specific skills can create a positive washback on the students' learning strategies and their focus. A speaking test in the form of a personal interview is an example of this evident. It needs actual performance and communication in English to foster communication skills. However, most tests do not employ the tasks which students will experience in real-life situation. These kinds of tests are poor motivator of practical skills and behaviours and considered as a strong source of negative washback without considering any appropriate content and representativeness (Reimann, 2010).

To overcome this problematic issue, authentic assessment comes to provide positive washback into EFL classes (Safa & Goodarzi, 2014). Authentic assessment brings positive washback effects in EFL classes. Meanwhile, traditional standardized tests may not bring these positive washback effects since students only choose several options provided in the tests. Significantly, authentic assessment is different from traditional standardized test in terms of the washback effects resulted in EFL classes which can be seen from students' learning motivation, for instance (Sumardi, 2017).

Authentic assessment has purpose to link classroom instructions to students' real-world experiences (Dikli, 2003). Actually, authentic assessment has been carried out to measure productive skills such as writing and speaking. However, some problems on its implementation still emerge such as inappropriate design, scoring, and feedback (Rukmini & Saputri, 2017). Moreover, Finch (2002) provides some examples on the forms of authentic assessment such as portfolios, projects, self-assessment and peer-assessment, learning conversations, and reflective journals.

2.2. Each Form of Authentic Assessment Generates Positive Washback

A test should be valid, reliable, and designed to contain representative language in the real-world contexts. Here are some forms of authentic assessment and how each of them possibly generates positive washback in EFL assessment.

2.2.1. Role Play or Communicative Interaction

A series of role play variations or communicative interactions can effectively achieve this objective in the context of a classroom or typical test environment. This kind of testing can facilitate students to replicate the real-world languages and other non-linguistic factors which are essential for successful communication. It also generates positive washback which is necessary for encouraging students to foster more abstract and untestable communication skills like critical thinking, meaning negotiation, creativity, or flexibility (Reimann, 2010).

2.2.2. Project

In this digital age, video projects, for instance, can be utilized to foster students' ability to introduce themselves, manage voice and expression, and enhance creativity. Video projects also develop students' fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary at the same time because they do not feel anxious when creating video projects for learning English. It is also believed that video projects help students to express more ideas and make self-reflection regarding their learning (Sumardi, 'Adzima, & Wijaya, 2020).

2.2.3. Portfolio

Portfolios guide students to create various kinds of more authentic works and reinforce them to become more creative. Portfolios provide more freedom to the students and

facilitate them to foster and encourage higher order thinking skills and meta-cognitive strategies. Portfolios also facilitate students with opportunities to see themselves not only as readers or writers but also as individuals having specific interests and needs. Moreover, portfolios provide students with unique chances to foster their learning (Charvade, Jahandar, & Khodabandehlou, 2012). In reading for example, portfolios can enhance students' reading strategy, encourage them to read, change students' learning attitude positively, foster autonomy in their learning (Suryoputro & Akip, 2016), decrease students' boredom, improve their curiosity, and increase higher order thinking skills (Wiyaka, 2020).

2.2.4. Self-Assessment and Peer-Assessment

Other forms of authentic assessment which are practical and effective in language classes are self-assessment and peer-assessment. These forms of authentic assessment foster affective and cognitive aspects of social awareness which can be maintained by teachers and used by students to reflect on issues which they may encounter. Self-assessment and peer-assessment can also decrease most of students' assessment burden and increase their responsibility (Finch, 2002).

Self-assessment provides various educational advantages such as providing continuous feedback, improving students' self-monitoring, developing students' and teachers' self-esteem and motivation, appraising through obvious standards, focusing on mastery and progress, and generating positive washback (Bahmani, 2014). In addition, Muñoz & Álvarez (2010) point out that self-assessment is related to beneficial washback because it facilitates students to encourage internal requirements for progress and success and hence foster students' autonomy.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, authentic assessment can provide positive washback in EFL assessment. It links classroom instructions to students' real-world experiences. By employing authentic assessment, students will have chances to practice authentic activities which they may experience in the real-world. These activities enable them to perform their skills in various real-world contexts. The more authentic assessment tools are used, the more the students express their knowledge in their own ways using various intelligences.

It is suggested for EFL teachers to be literate of how to facilitate positive washback in EFL assessment and how to employ authentic assessment in their assessment practices. By generating positive washback in assessment, teaching and learning activities will gain positive impacts. Therefore, students will be positively encouraged to develop and improve their communicative competencies, behaviours, and skills to encounter real-world challenges. Further researches and publications on washback and authentic assessment are encouraged in

both quantitative and qualitative methods. It is also interested to carry out research on these topics in mixed-method.

Due to the COVID-19 which has become global pandemic nowadays, special research on washback and authentic assessment in online EFL learning are very reccomended. Researchers must investigate the washback of current EFL assessment which has been administered amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also encouraged to investigate about authentic assessment in digital or online setting since EFL classes still run in online mode.

REFERENCES

Altowaim, M. A. (2015). Effectiveness of washback in language testing: Analyzing the validity and relianility. *Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods*, *5*(2), 33.

Ardianti, T. M., & Mauludin, L. A. (2017). Students' Responses on the Application of Authentic Assessment in EFL Reading Class. *METATHESIS*, *1*(2), 110–122.

Bahmani, F. (2014). The washback effects of self-assessment, analytic, and holstic scoring on the speaking skills of Iranian EFL learner. *International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World*, *7*(3), 339–355.

Brown, J. D., & Hudson, T. (1998). The alternatives in language assessment. *TESOL Quarterly*, *32*(4), 653–675.

Charvade, M. R., Jahandar, S., & Khodabandehlou, M. (2012). The Impact of Portfolio Assessment on EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension Ability. *English Language Teaching*, *5*(7), 129–139.

Damankesh, M., & Babaii, E. (2015). The washback effect of Iranian high school final examinations on students' test-taking and test-preparation strategies. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, *45*, 62–69.

Dikli, S. (2003). Assessment at a distance: Traditional vs. alternative assessments. *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology-TOJET*, *2*(3), 13–19.

Dorobăţ, D. (2007). *The methodology of evaluation and testing*. Bucharest: Ministerul Educaţiei şi Cercetării Proiectul pentru Învăţământul Rural.

Finch, A. E. (2002). Authentic assessment: Implications for EFL performance testing in Korea. *Secondary Education Research*, *49*, 89–122.

Fulcher, G., & Davidson, F. (2007). *Language testing and assessment*. New York: Routledge.

Green, B. A., & Andrade, M. S. (2010). Guiding principles for language assessment reform: A model for collaboration. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *9*(4), 322–334.

Hamidi, E. (2010). Fundamental issues in L2 classroom assessment practices. *Academic Leadership: The Online Journal*, *8*(2), 21.

Hung, S. T. A. (2012). A washback study on e-portfolio assessment in an English as a

Foreign Language teacher preparation program. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *25*(1), 21–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2010.551756

Khanshan, S. K. (2018). An examination of the washback effect on Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension: Any implications for text difficulty in the classroom? *International Journal of Language Testing and Assessment*, *1*(2), 9–16. https://doi.org/10.24815/ijolta.v1i2.10624

Mueller, J. (2005). The authentic assessment toolbox: enhancing student learning through online faculty development. *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, *1*(1), 1–7.

Muñoz, A. P., & Álvarez, M. E. (2010). Washback of an oral assessment system in the EFL classroom. *Language Testing*, *27*(1), 33–49.

Paker, T. (2013). The backwash effect of the test items in the achievement exams in preparatory classes. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *70*, 1463–1471.

Pan, Y.-C. (2009). A review of washback and its pedagogical implications. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, *25*(4).

Reimann, A. (2010). A critical analysis of test impact: Identifying washback. 宇都宮大学国際学部研究論集, (30), 49–57.

Rukmini, D., & Saputri, L. A. D. E. (2017). The authentic assessment to measure students' English productive skills based on 2013 Curriculum. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *7*(2), 263–273. https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v7i2.8128

Safa, M. A., & Goodarzi, S. (2014). The washback effects of task-based assessment on the Iranian EFL learners' grammar development. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *98*, 90–99.

Şenel, E., & Tütüniş, B. (2011). The washback effect of testing on students' learning in EFL writing classes. *Dil Dergisi*, *153*, 43–52.

Sumardi. (2017). Performance-Based Assessment As a Current Trend in Elt: Investigating Its Washback Effects on Secondary-School Students Learning. *Kajian Linguistik Dan Sastra*, *2*(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.23917/kls.v2i1.5347

Sumardi, 'Adzima, R., & Wijaya, A. N. (2020). Digital Video Project: An Authentic Assessment to Assess Students' Speaking Skills. *Indonesian Journal of EFL and Linguistics*, *5*(1), 57–72. https://doi.org/10.21462/ijefl.v5i1.217

Suryoputro, G., & Akip, R. (2016). Exploring EFL Students ' Perceptions of Washback of Portfolios in Reading. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, *3*(2), 157–162.

Wiyaka. (2020). Washback of the performance-based test of reading for EFL learners. *EduLite: Journal of English Education, Literature and Culture*, *5*(2), 202–203. https://doi.org/10.30659/e.5.2.202-213