The Students' and the Teachers' Perception of the Washback Effect of the English Progress Test

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ABSTRACT

Tests can directly impact educational processes in various ways. It means that the test may influence the students and the teachers. This influence is called washback or backwash. Washback or backwash is generally known as the effect of testing on teaching and learning (Djuric, 2008). The local government usually prepares formative and summative tests in the school while the teachers design the progress test. This research investigates the washback effect of the English progress test on the students and teachers in one reputable senior high school in Yogyakarta. This research used a qualitative descriptive method. Interviews and focus group discussions were used as methods of data gathering. The respondents were three English teachers and 16 students of 12th-grade at a public senior high school in Yogyakarta. The research focused on how the progress test gave a washback effect to the teachers as the test developers and what the students' perception was of the washback effect of the progress test. It concluded that washback effects for teachers depended on 1) focusing on the objective of teaching, 2) the teaching materials, and 3) the teaching methodology. Meanwhile, the effects on students were 1) influencing the learning strategy, 2) preparation for doing tests, 3) improving the learning motivation, the learning mastery, and the learning-teaching atmosphere.

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1. Introduction

Assessment is usually employed when students or other individuals learn a lesson topic, and it is a continuous process that involves a much broader area (Brown, 2004). Assessment is a term used to define how people usually evaluate the performance of an individual or a group. It could be about many things, like a student's knowledge, understanding, skills, and attitudes, or it could be about a specific event or instrument. Assessment is thus the process of collecting information about learners using different methods or tools like tests, quizzes, portfolios, and so on; therefore, a test refers to a tool, technique, or method intended to measure students' knowledge or ability to complete a particular task. In this sense, testing is a form of assessment. Tests should meet some basic requirements, such as validity and reliability (Brown, 2004). Ur (1996) states that tests are used as a means to motivate students to learn or review specific material. It means tests motivate students to learn or review material in their school. Furthermore, Fernandes (1984) states that a test is a systematic procedure for surveying and explaining a person's behavior using a numerical scale or category system. In contrast, Airisian and Russell (2008) say that a test is a formal, systematic procedure to gather information about student achievement or other cognitive skills. In addition, Linn and Gronlund (1995) argue that a test is a type of assessment typically consisting of a set of questions

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administered during a fixed period under reasonably comparable conditions for all students. A good progress test will bring positive results both for students and teachers. This research investigated the backwash effect of a progress test for students and teachers in their teaching and learning processes.

Some existing research discuss the washback effects of an assessment. Among others, research by Syafrizal and Pahamzah (2020), entitled: Language Assessment in English Language Teaching: A Washback Of Indonesian Students’ Test In COVID-19 Situation discussed an English lecturer’s perception on washback effect of an assessment. The research showed that the assessment gave appropriate positive washback through the online classroom to the students. Another piece of research was conducted by Madkur and Irwansyah (2018), entitled The Students’ Perceptions of National Examination Washback: A Case Study at MTS Daarul’ Ulya Metro. This research claimed that most students felt unconfident with their National Examination (NE) scores since their English competence was considered low. However, the difficulty of NE did not significantly affect their English language studies. In other words, the washback of NE in their study was negative. This research investigated the washback effect of a progressive test both on the teachers and the students during their teaching learning during a semester period.

The research results can provide several benefits and be helpful to students, teachers, institutions, and future researchers. For students, this research will show that a test has a backwash effect when they do the formative test. This research also provides the teachers with information about the backwash effect the students get when they do the formative test. Meanwhile, using the result, the institutions can provide guidelines for the teachers when they develop the formative test. Finally, this research is important for other researchers interested in the same issue. The findings of this study can be used to generate fresh ideas for a study with a similar or identical scope. The literature in this study might be used as a reference by other scholars working on comparable projects.

Before researching the researcher interviewed some senior high school students and teachers about the washback effect of a test. The conversation indicated that most students did not know that a test should have a washback effect, while the teachers had tried to design the test in a way that might affect the student's attitude toward their learning processes. Due to the identified problem, the researcher will investigate whether the progress test has a backwash effect on the students and teachers in the teaching and learning processes. Washback refers to an exam's positive or negative influence on students' learning in class. Hughes in Brown (2010: 37) said that washback was the effect of testing on teaching and learning. Based on the definitions above, washback refers to the effect of testing on the teaching and learning process. It has two sides: positive and negative. This research will reveal the perception of the washback effect of a progress test from the point of view of both students and teachers.

The objective of the research is based on the research questions. There are two objectives of the research: 1) to investigate how progress tests give a backwash effect to the teachers as the test developers; 2) to investigate what backwash effect students get when they do the progress test. Due to the objective of the research, the research provides two research questions: 1) How does the progress test give a washback effect to the teachers as the test developers? and 2) What is the student's perception of the washback effect of the progress test?

Literature Review
1. Test

The test is the examination, evaluation, trial, or use to determine and document a material, product, or system's capabilities, characteristics, effectiveness, reliability, and suitability. The test can also determine a person's ability, aptitude, behavior, skill level, knowledge, or performance. Some experts have defined tests. Ur (1996) states that tests motivate students to learn or review specific material. It means that students can use a test to learn or review material in their school. Another scholar, Fernandes (1984), states that a test is a systematic procedure. It can be used for surveying and explaining a person's behavior using a numerical scale or category system.

Meanwhile, Airisian and Russell (2008) say that teachers can use tests to gather information about students' achievement or other cognitive skills. In addition, Linn and Gronlund (1995) argue that a test is a particular type of assessment. It consists of questions administered during a certain period under reasonable conditions for all students. In summary, a test is part of the assessment. It is used to reinforce learning and motivate students by giving them a task or a set of tasks. Using the test, the lecturer can measure and motivate the student's abilities, besides improving the lesson in the teaching-learning process.

2. A good test

Brown (2010: 25) states that there are five major principles of language assessment: practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback. They are going to be described in more detail as follows. Practicality measure how simple a test is from the point of view of the cost, the person involved in the test
administration and the time allocation. Reliability means how consistent the scores of a test are across the test takers, test markers and the time the test is administered. Validity is considered good when the test exactly measures what should be test. Validity covers the content validity, construct validity, concurrent validity, predictive validity, and face validity. Authenticity of a test is the degree to which test materials and test conditions succeed in replicating those in the target situation. Authentic tests are an attempt to duplicate as closely as possible the circumstances of real-life situations. Whereas washback refers to the impact of testing on curriculum design, teachings practices, and learning behaviors.

3. Assessment

According to Brown (1990), assessment is a series of measures used to determine a complex attribute of an individual or group that involves gathering and interpreting information about a student's attainment of learning goals. Assessments are also used to identify individual student weaknesses and strengths so that educators can provide specialized academic support, educational programming, or social services. In addition, assessments are developed by a wide array of groups and individuals, including teachers, district administrators, universities, private companies, state departments of education, and groups that include a combination of these individuals and institutions. In classroom assessment, since teachers themselves develop, administer, and analyze the questions, they are more likely to apply the assessment results to their teaching.

Therefore, it provides feedback on the effectiveness of instruction and gives students a measure of their progress. As Brown (1990) maintains, two major functions can be pointed out for classroom assessment: One is to show whether or not the learning has been successful, and the other is to clarify the expectations of the teachers from the students (Brown, 1990). Assessment is a process that includes four basic components: 1) Measuring improvement over time 2) Motivating students to study 3) Evaluating the teaching methods 4) Ranking the students' capabilities concerning the whole group evaluation. Why Assessment is important first and foremost, assessment is important because it drives students learning (Brown, 1990). Whether we like it or not, most students focus on the best or most expeditious way to pass their 'tests.' Based on this knowledge, we can use our assessment strategies to manipulate the kinds of learning that take place. For example, assessment strategies focusing predominantly on knowledge recall likely promote superficial learning. On the other hand, if we choose assessment strategies that demand critical thinking or creative problem-solving, we are likely to realize a higher level of student performance or achievement. In addition, good assessment can help students become more effective, self-directed learners (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

As indicated above, motivating and directing learning is only one purpose of assessment. Well-designed assessment strategies also play a critical role in educational decision-making and are a vital component of ongoing quality improvement processes at the lesson, course, and curriculum levels. 3.2. Types and Approaches to Assessment Numerous terms are used to describe different types of learner assessment. Although somewhat arbitrary, it is useful for these various terms to represent dichotomous poles (McAlpine, 2002).

4. Washback

Washback or backwash is generally known as the effect of testing on teaching and learning (Djuric, 2008). Hughes (1989) said that the term 'backwash' had been used to refer to the way a test affects teaching materials and classroom management. Nevertheless, the term 'washback' was widely used in applied linguistics and language testing today (Weir, 1990; Alderson and Wall, 1993; Alderson, 2004). Washback refers to an exam's positive or negative influence on how students learn in class. Hughes in Brown (2010: 37) said that washback was the effect of testing on teaching and learning. Based on the definitions above, washback refers to the effect of testing on the teaching and learning process, and it has two sides: positive and negative.

Negative washback occurs when a test's content or format is based on a narrow definition of language ability, especially in the teaching or learning context. For example, if the skill of writing is tested only by multiple-choice, the students tend to practice such items rather than practicing the skill of writing itself; this is called negative washback (Davies, 1999). Conversely, when a testing procedure encourages good teaching practice, the test is considered to have a positive washback. An example of a positive washback is when an oral proficiency test is given in the hope that it will support the teaching of speaking skills.

Moreover, Alderson and Wall (1993) said there was no automatic relationship between tests and their impact. The relationships were in specific areas such as teaching content and methodology, teacher competence, assessment methods, whether they were positive or negative, and the potential effect of washback on the whole education system. Furthermore, Alderson and Wall (1996) said that washback was the influence of a test on the teaching that precedes it. Green (2007) also said that the effect of a teaching
test was often also on learning instead of just on teachers and learners. Similarly, Bachman and Palmer (1996) state that washback is a test's impact on society, educational systems, and individuals. Backwash is also defined as examinations' direct and indirect effects on teaching methods (Prodromou, 1995).

Shohamy (1993) proposed four washback concepts: 1) the impact of tests on teaching and learning, 2) measurement-driven instruction means that tests should drive learning, 3) curriculum alignment connects testing and the teaching syllabus, and 4) systemic validity integrates tests into the educational system and shows that the introduction of a new test can improve learning. Gates (1995) defined washback as the influence of testing in teaching and learning, while Thornbury (2006) mentioned that washback was when a test affects classroom teaching. As stated by Zhang (2016), testing could impact or influence all test stakeholders, and the influence might be positive or negative.

Prodromou (1995) gives examples of washback when teachers may feel trapped in exam preparation and may sacrifice communicative or humanistic methodologies in covering the syllabus. Another example given by Pan (2009) is that teachers often dismiss activities that are not directly connected with passing an exam by focusing on teaching test-taking skills rather than language learning activities. Similarly, Barnes (2016) mentions that teaching and learning can be influenced by strengthening the use of test preparation materials. From the previous examples, a negative effect on the teaching and learning process may also cause a lack of follow-up or lead-in activities concerning tests (Prodromou, 1995).

On the other hand, washback may also positively affect teaching and learning. According to Brown (2002), positive washback can be strengthened by manipulating the factors of test design, changing factors of test contents, adjusting factors of test logistics, and modifying factors of test interpretation. In this sense, good tests can have a positive effect on the teaching-learning process, motivate teachers as well as learners, and encourage the idea of lifelong learning (Pan, 2009).

Based on some definitions above, backwash can be concluded as the effect of the tests on the teaching and learning processes, such as syllabus design, students' and teachers' motivation and attitudes, and even parents' positive and negative influences. In other words, tests influence the way teachers teach and the way students' study.

Several studies were like this one. Among others was entitled: Language Assessment in English Language Teaching: A Washback Of Indonesian Students' Test In COVID-19 Situation. This research mentions that an English lecturer's perception was appropriate with the positive washback obtained in the formative assessment through the online classroom by giving feedback to the students.

Another piece of research was entitled The Students' Perceptions of National Examination Washback: A Case Study at MTS Daarul' Ulya Metro. This research claimed that most students felt unconfident with their National Examination (NE) scores since their English competence was considered low. However, the difficulty of NE did not significantly affect their English language studies. In other words, the washback of NE in their study was negative.

2. Method

This study aims to determine students' points of view toward the backwash effects of the summative tests held in a reputable public senior high school in Yogyakarta. Based on the objectives, the researcher uses a qualitative research method because it encourages participants to describe their experiences and opinions. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011), researchers can use qualitative research to discover trends in thought and opinions and dive deeper into the problem. Besides, according to Creswell (2018), using qualitative research, researchers can focus on participants' perspectives, ask comprehensive, general questions, and gather data mainly in words. Therefore, the researcher is interested in exploring the student's thoughts and opinions about the washback effects of the summative test at a reputable senior high school in Yogyakarta.

Research Instrument

A recording tool will be used to record the interviews with the respondents. The researcher will also prepare a notebook and pen, anticipating when the recorder does not work properly. Before doing the interview, an interview guideline with some questions related to both research questions will be provided. For the research, permission from the school will be obtained in advance. After being permitted to conduct research, the researcher will ask for help from the English teacher to select the students who could be interviewed. The researcher will also interview the English teachers who develop the formative tests. Before the interview, the researcher will contact the participants through WhatsApp to make an appointment and make sure they can be participants. The participants will be pleased to choose a comfortable place for the interview. They can select the best place at school, their home, or any other comfortable place.

After all, participants agree to the appointment, and the researcher will meet them for the interview. A friendly interview will be conducted to make the participants feel free of pressure. The Indonesian
language will be used so that the participants will understand the question better and thus give better answers. The interview will be recorded and last between 15 and 20 minutes.

**Population and Sampling**

The research participants were three English teachers and 16 students in 12th-grade at a reputable Senior High School in Yogyakarta, whom their English teachers selected. The teachers chose them randomly from all the students in 12th-grade at the school. The research participants also included the English teachers who developed the formative tests in that school.

**Data Collection Procedure and Data Analysis**

The data were collected through some interviews and some mini-group discussions. The interview was held to get the data from the teachers, while the group discussions were to collect the data from the students. There were 4 teachers as the resource persons. The researcher used interview method to gain the data. In another hand, the researcher apply small group discussion to collect the data from the students.

From the interviews and the mini-group discussions, the data were transcribed while checking whether all the questions asked were well answered. Transcribing was followed by member checking to confirm whether the researcher's interpretations were suitable for the participants' responses. After there is incorrect information or no information is added, the researcher immediately inputs the information into the data to be processed to confirm the findings. After the member checking was clear, the participants reconfirmed all interview results.

The next step was coding. In this procedure, the researcher identified similar information, which enabled the researcher to search and retrieve the data in terms of those items that bear the same code. A list of codes was stored and accompanied by data such as who coded the data when the coding was undertaken, and what the code means. Coding processes included open, analytical, axial, and selective coding.

Open coding was performed on a line-by-line, phrase-by-phrase, sentence-by-sentence, paragraph-by-paragraph, or unit-by-unit text basis. In this step, the researcher coded and grouped the data into categories, and each category was given a title or name. In analytic coding, all categories were drowned together and were given more explanatory and analytic meaning by a group of descriptive codes. This coding step gave more information and was mentioned by the participants.

The data were originally segmented into small fractional units in axial coding and recombined in new ways following the open coding. Axial coding works within one category, connecting subgroups of that category and between one category and another. The last step was selective coding. In selective coding, the researcher identified the text's core categories and integrated them to form a theory. This step was the process of identifying the core category in a text. Central categories or phenomena around which all the other categories identified and created were integrated and to which other categories were systematically related and validated.

3. **Result and Discussion**

The research investigated the perceptions of the teachers and the students to find the backwash effect of a progressive test to their teaching and learning activities. The first section showed the perceptions of the teachers on the washback effect whereas the second part was the perceptions of the students on the washback effect of the progressive test.

In this research, there were three teacher respondents. The researcher used pseudonyms for the respondents: Alam, Bunga, and Bintang. Their responses showed some important findings. The findings are as follows:

**Influence the teachers to focus on the objective of teaching**

Before teaching, teachers have prepared the lesson plan, including the test specifications. The test specification the teacher has designed keeps them focused on the lesson's objective. It was because of the validity of the content of the test. Alam said that the syllabus, lesson plans, knowledge, and skills were arranged. They put the test specifications in the lesson plan, and the test specifications had to meet the content validity requirements. Thus, the test they prepared forces the teacher to focus on the lesson's objective. It signifies Ur's (1996) idea that tests were tools to motivate students to learn or review specific material. It was meant that students could use a test to learn or review material in their school. For this reason, teachers were test-driven in maintaining the objective of the teaching-learning activities.
Influence the teachers to focus on the teaching materials

The test specification influences the teacher's focused on the teaching materials they gave students during teaching and learning. Bunga said: "The test must follow the curriculum and be under the material we teach in the syllabus every semester. Whereas Bintang said: "I use the curriculum of 2013 for grades 11 and 12, so I have to refer to the syllabus for teaching and testing." It is then compatible with what Shohamy (1993) said: "Curriculum alignment connects testing and the teaching syllabus. That is why the test has a backwash effect on teachers by focusing on the materials they use in the teaching and learning processes”.

Influence the teachers to focusing on the teaching methodology

The teaching methodology was also influenced by the tests prepared by the teachers because of the backwash effect. Concerning the teaching methodology, Alam said: "For the teaching and learning process, we try to apply discovery learning. All we must do is adjust it to the teaching material and the test.” Bunga also said that the test affected the teaching methods she gave students. Meanwhile, Bintang explained: "The test has a significant role because we continuously develop our teaching methods, so we do not focus on only one method when we teach. This case related to Thornbury (2006), he mentioned that washback appeared when a test affected classroom teaching.

Similarly, Pan (2009) argues that teachers often dismiss activities that are not directly connected with passing an exam by focusing on teaching test-taking skills rather than language learning activities. Thus, the tests can influence the teachers’ teaching methodology. Similar to the idea of Barnes (2016), teaching and learning can be influenced by strengthening the use of test preparation materials.

In this research, we interviewed 16 students from five different classes. The researcher used pseudonyms from Silver 1 until Silver 16. The result of the research is as follows:

Influence the student's learning strategy

When the students knew the test specification, they could prepare their learning strategy. There were many reasons why tests influenced their learning strategy. Silver 2 and Silver 15 had similar reasons. Silver 2 said that he paid more attention to learn in the class because he was afraid he did not understand. Meanwhile, Silver 15 said that it made her more focused on the learning material taught by the teacher so that she did not waste it; she could pay more attention to the teacher. Silver 3 and Silver 4 had different backwash effects from the test. They said that by knowing the test specifications, they could know which one they did not understand and asked the teacher in the class before the test time was due. "It influences more self-evaluation. The point is that after the test, we can learn what we learned and what went wrong, and then I ask the teacher again." Finally, Silver 10 claimed that the test specifications motivated him to be a great student and improved his learning quality in class.

This finding showed that the test had a significant backwash effect, as Ur (1996) and Pan (2009) explained. Ur (1996) said that tests motivated students to learn or to review specific material. It’s meant that students could use a test to learn or to review material in their school. Similarly, Pan (2009) mentioned that good tests could have a positive effect on the teaching and learning process, motivated teachers as well as learners, and encouraged the idea of lifelong learning.

Improving the learning motivation

The test also had a backwash effect on the students learning motivation. By knowing the test specification, students tended to increase their motivation to get better scores; thus, they modified their learning style and motivation. Many students reported different reasons. Silver 4 said that the test had influenced him to prepare readiness for a couple day before doing the test. Silver 7 claimed, "I studied hard and prepared well because the progress test grades will affect the report." Whereas Silver 9 mentioned: "I have better preparation to achieve a satisfying result." Finally, Silver 13 and 14 declared that the test had influenced them to review the learning materials and to prepare themselves better for a long day before the test was administered. It related to the claims of Darling-Hammond's (2006) that good assessment could help students become more effective self-directed learners. On the other hand, Pan (2009) explained that good tests could have a positive effect on the teaching-learning process, motivated teachers as well as learners, and encouraged the idea of lifelong learning.

Improving the learning mastery

Tests also had a washback effect on the students' learning mastery. By knowing the specifications of the test, the students adjusted their way of learning which increased their mastery of the materials. Silver 5 claimed that the test had driven him to foster his skills in understanding the material that he could use to measure as a benchmark. Silver 10 had a different reason. She said, "It has an impact because progress tests..."
can make me explore my creativity and knowledge more”. For Silver 15 and Silver 16, the test could enhance their vocabulary mastery. The improvement of learning mastery was supposed to be closely related to (Brown, 1990). He mentioned that assessment was a process that included four basic components: 1) measuring improvement over time, 2) motivating students to study, 3) evaluating the teaching methods, and 4) ranking the students’ capabilities concerning the whole group evaluation. That is why tests can have a backwash effect on improving learning mastery.

Improving the learning-teaching atmosphere

The backwash effect of a test also appeared in the teaching and learning atmosphere. Students became more aware of the lesson and eager to discuss it more seriously. Some students mentioned different reasons. Silver 5 claimed: "The test motivates me to be one of the best, so I burn my enthusiasm even more, to learn in the class." Similarly, Silver 10 said: "The influence of the test is to motivate me to be a great student and to enhance our learning quality in the class."

Meanwhile, Silver 8 said that the progress test made the class more conducive and competitive. These findings showed good agreement with some experts' ideas. Barnes (2016) mentioned that teaching and learning could be influenced by strengthening the use of test preparation materials. Pan (2009) also mentioned that good tests could positively affect the teaching-learning process, motivate teachers and learners, and encourage lifelong learning. Thus, it is true that the test can have a backwash effect on improving the learning-teaching atmosphere.

Influence the students in preparing the strategy for doing the test

Not only a test has a washback effect on student’s learning styles, but it also influences the students’ strategy for doing the test. The researcher found a respondent who reviewed the test specifications before administering the test. In this case, Silver 3 said, "The most certain is that I learned from the previous lessons; sometimes the teacher gives a hint of the material to be tested and also learns from the material that has been given before or from our notes." Another student, Silver 4 said: "I search similar materials using Google Chrome; usually, the material is in pdf format." Another student, Silver 5 said, "Obviously, I often study around the materials that will be used for the test." Other students even take a course outside the school. Silver 8 said, "I prepared it through the tutoring course, so I made a special schedule for studying for the tests. So, if there were sudden tests, I became more prepared." On the other hand, Silver 16 said: "For preparation, I take learning courses, and sometimes I review the learning material a night before the test." It is, of course, in line with Darling-Hammond (2006). He said that good assessment could help students become more effective, self-directed learners.

Based on the above findings, a test, in this case, a progressive test, could have a washback effect on both students and teachers in teaching and learning. The washback effect could be positive or negative. Nevertheless, in this research, positive washback was more well reflected, whereas no negative washback was found.

4. Conclusion

The research has found three backwash effects of a progressive test on teachers. They have influenced the teachers to focus on the objective of teaching, the teaching materials, and the teaching methodology. On the other hand, the student's perception toward the washback effect of the progress test was that the progressive test gave them backwash effects on the students in the learning strategy, the learning motivation, the learning mastery, the learning teaching atmosphere, the student preparation, and the strategy for doing the test.

Hopefully this research informed the teachers that they should develop the progress test better, as the test had influenced how they taught and prepared the test questions, including the test terms and specifications. Besides teachers, the researcher hoped that the research could help the students understand that identifying the progress test specifications could influence them better in their learning process, their mastery of the learning materials, and in preparing to do the test to get better results in learning. Finally, for other researchers, this research could be an input so that they could convey any deeper areas in similar topics.

References


