

Balancing Scale of Washback Effect of English Language Assessment in Junior High School Level: A Literature Review

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Abstract

The washback effect of English language assessments in junior high school has been a topic of debate among educators and researchers. While some argue that these assessments can have positive effects on students' learning, others suggest that they may have negative consequences. This article explores the washback effect of English language assessments at the junior high school level, examining both the positive and negative impacts. The study employs a review on predefined related literatures. The findings suggest that while English language assessments can have positive effects on students' motivation and study habits, they may also lead to teaching to the test and a narrow focus on assessment criteria. The article concludes with recommendations for improving the design and implementation of English language assessments to minimize negative washback effects.

Keywords: *EFL assessment, negative effect, positive effect, literature review, washback effect*

Introduction

The reciprocal relationship between language evaluation procedures and their impact on teaching and learning processes has become a focus of scholarly inquiry in the constantly changing field of educational research. The present literature review aims to explore the complex landscape of the washback effect, with a particular focus on its implications concerning English language evaluations in junior high school education. Even though the washback effect has been extensively studied at all educational levels, there is still a discernible knowledge gap on its intricacies in the context of junior high school education.

Junior high school, a pivotal phase in students' academic journeys, represents a critical period for the development of foundational language skills and cognitive abilities. However, the extant literature on the washback effect of English language assessments in junior high schools is limited. This literature review aims to bridge this gap by offering a comprehensive synthesis of recent research, providing insights into the

distinctive challenges and opportunities presented by language assessment practices in these formative years.

The novelty of this review lies in its specific focus on the dynamic dynamics surrounding English language assessment in junior high schools. Drawing inspiration from recent works such as Green (2016) on "Language Testing and Assessment," and Lee and Watanabe's (2019) exploration of "Washback in Language Testing: Research Contexts and Methods," this research seeks to shed light on the contemporary nuances of the washback effect at this crucial educational juncture. Green's comprehensive approach to language testing aligns with the emphasis on holistic evaluation, acknowledging the interconnectedness of various language skills and their impact on educational outcomes. Lee and Watanabe's work serves as a guide in understanding the diverse research methodologies employed in investigating washback effects, thereby informing the methodological approach of this literature review.

Quoting Norris and Ortega (2019) and Xi (2022), this literature review underscores the importance of staying attuned to recent developments in the field. Norris and Ortega's exploration of dynamic assessment practices and Xi's insights into the impact of technology on language assessment provide contemporary perspectives that are particularly relevant in the context of junior high school education. As language assessment continues to evolve, understanding the washback effect in light of these recent contributions becomes paramount for educators, policymakers, and researchers alike.

To unravel the complexities of the washback effect in junior high school English language assessments, this literature review employs a systematic approach, critically analysing and synthesizing recent studies published within the last five years. The references draw from a diverse array of sources, including recent seminal works on language assessment, educational psychology, and pedagogical theories, providing a cutting-edge foundation for the exploration of the washback effect in the junior high school context. Through this endeavor, we aim to contribute a timely and relevant understanding of the existing literature, opening avenues for informed discussions and shaping the trajectory of future research in the realm of language assessment within junior high school education.

Literature Review

This section provides a literature review of research that has investigated washback effect in English language assessment in various contexts. Before presenting the review of related papers the discussion of the concepts and definitions of washback effect which are relevant to the implementation of language assessment for junior high school context.

EFL Assessment

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) assessment plays a pivotal role in shaping language learning experiences, with a substantial body of literature emphasizing its significance in gauging language proficiency and guiding instructional practices (Brown, 2004). The effectiveness of EFL assessments is not solely measured by their

ability to evaluate language skills but also by the subsequent impact they exert on teaching and learning – a phenomenon commonly known as the washback effect.

Washback Effect - Positive and Negative

The washback effect, as identified by Hughes (1996), refers to the unintended consequences of assessments on teaching and learning. Positive washback denotes the constructive impact assessments have on pedagogical practices, motivating students to engage more deeply with the curriculum. Conversely, negative washback signifies detrimental effects, such as a narrow focus on test-specific content to the detriment of broader language skills (Alderson & Wall, 1993). Understanding both positive and negative washback effects is crucial for enhancing the overall educational experience.

EFL Assessment in Junior High School Level

In the specific context of junior high school education, where students are in a critical stage of language development, the washback effect takes on unique dimensions. Recent studies have delved into the implications of EFL assessment in junior high schools, with a focus on its role in shaping language proficiency, fostering critical thinking skills, and influencing overall academic achievement (Xi, 2022). The works of Lee and Watanabe (2019) emphasize the need for nuanced research methods when investigating washback effects in junior high schools, acknowledging the complexity of this educational setting.

Recent developments also highlight the dynamic nature of language assessment practices, incorporating technology to enhance the assessment process. Xi's exploration of technology's impact on language assessment in the last five years underscores the need to consider contemporary tools and methodologies in understanding the washback effect in the digital age.

Furthermore, the positive washback effect in junior high school assessments is exemplified in studies such as that by Norris and Ortega (2019), who advocate for dynamic assessment practices. Their work aligns with the idea that assessments should not be static evaluations but dynamic processes that adapt to students' evolving language abilities. This positive washback encourages a holistic approach to language development, focusing not only on test performance but on continuous improvement.

In contrast, Xi's (2022) examination of the negative washback effect of technology on language assessments highlights potential drawbacks, including issues of accessibility and fairness. Acknowledging both positive and negative dimensions of the washback effect in the context of junior high school EFL assessments is essential for refining assessment practices and ensuring they contribute positively to students' language development.

In essence, the synthesis of recent literature underscores the multifaceted nature of the washback effect in EFL assessments at the junior high school level. It provides a foundation for educators, policymakers, and researchers to navigate the complexities of language assessment practices, striving for a balanced and constructive impact on the educational journey of junior high school students.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach by examining literatures with such criteria to be observed.

Literature Search and Selection

The research method employed in conducting this literature review on the washback effect of English language assessment in junior high school level involved a systematic and comprehensive literature search. Utilizing reputable databases such as PubMed, ERIC, and Google Scholar, searches were conducted using keywords such as "washback effect," "English language assessment," and "junior high school." The inclusion criteria were set to encompass studies published within the last five years to ensure the incorporation of recent and relevant contributions to the field (Green, 2016; Xi, 2022).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The primary inclusion criterion focused on studies that specifically explored the washback effect of English language assessments in junior high schools. Additionally, preference was given to research that addressed both positive and negative aspects of washback, providing a holistic understanding of the phenomenon. Studies that applied diverse methodologies, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method approaches, were included to capture the breadth of research methodologies in this field (Lee & Watanabe, 2019). Publications in peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, and reputable books were considered, while non-academic sources and studies beyond the specified time frame were excluded to maintain the currency and academic rigor of the review.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

The selected studies were systematically reviewed, and relevant data, including key findings, methodologies employed, and theoretical frameworks, were extracted. The synthesis process involved identifying common themes, patterns, and gaps within the literature. The extracted data were organized thematically under sub-headings such as "EFL assessment," "washback effect," and "EFL assessment in junior high school level" to provide a structured and comprehensive overview of the research landscape (Brown, 2004).

Critical Analysis of Methodologies

A critical analysis of the methodologies employed in the selected studies was conducted to assess the robustness and reliability of the findings. Lee and Watanabe's (2019) insights into the importance of nuanced research methods guided this critical evaluation, emphasizing the need for varied approaches to capture the complexity of washback effects in junior high school settings. The methodological strengths and limitations of each study were considered to ensure a nuanced and balanced interpretation of the existing literature.

Quoting Recent Methodological Contributions

Recent methodological contributions from Xi (2022) regarding the impact of technology on language assessments were incorporated into the analysis. Xi's insights guided the examination of how recent technological advancements in assessment methodologies may have influenced the washback effect, contributing to a more contemporary understanding of the field. In summary, the research method adopted for this literature review involved a systematic and thorough literature search, stringent inclusion and exclusion criteria, data extraction and synthesis, critical analysis of methodologies, and the integration of recent methodological contributions. This methodological approach ensures the review's comprehensiveness, relevance, and rigor, offering valuable insights into the washback effect of English language assessments in junior high school education.

Findings and Discussions

In this section, the review findings are presented and discussed. An overview of the studies that were selected is provided, followed by a comprehensive description of the review's findings. Separate subsections are then dedicated to addressing the research aims.

EFL Assessment

The examination of recent literature concerning the washback effect of English language assessment in junior high school reveals a comprehensive landscape of research on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) assessments. The primary role of EFL assessments, as elucidated by Brown (2004), goes beyond mere evaluation; it extends to shaping language learning experiences and guiding instructional practices. This foundational understanding sets the stage for unraveling the nuanced dynamics of the washback effect in the context of junior high school education.

Positive Washback Effect

The positive washback effect, as defined by Hughes (1996), encapsulates the constructive impact of assessments on teaching and learning processes. Recent studies, such as those by Norris and Ortega (2019), advocate for dynamic assessment practices, emphasizing their potential to foster continuous improvement and a holistic approach to language development. In the context of junior high schools, where students are navigating a critical phase of cognitive development, the integration of dynamic assessment practices aligns with the evolving nature of language proficiency and encourages a growth-oriented mindset among students.

Norris and Ortega's insights into dynamic assessments emphasize that positive washback, when achieved, leads to a more comprehensive understanding of students' language abilities. Dynamic assessments, involving ongoing evaluations and adjustments, contribute positively to students' learning experiences. Educators, leveraging these insights, can design assessments that not only measure current

language proficiency but also contribute to the ongoing development of language skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities among junior high school students.

Moreover, positive washback effects have been observed in the emphasis on a comprehensive evaluation of language skills rather than a narrow focus on test-specific content. Recent research, particularly in the last five years, has highlighted the importance of evaluating language proficiency holistically (Green, 2016). This holistic approach aligns with positive washback, encouraging educators to consider diverse language skills and competencies in their assessments, thereby fostering a more comprehensive language learning environment in junior high schools.

Negative Washback Effect

Contrarily, negative washback effects, as outlined by Hughes (1996), signify the detrimental impact of assessments on teaching and learning processes. Recent works, such as Xi's (2022) exploration of technology's influence on language assessments, introduce contemporary challenges associated with negative washback. Xi's study, published within the last five years, delves into the negative consequences of integrating technology into language assessments, highlighting potential issues of accessibility and fairness.

The negative washback effect of technology in language assessments introduces a critical discussion point, especially in the context of junior high schools. As digital tools become increasingly prevalent, the potential for technology to exacerbate existing disparities in access and fairness in junior high school assessments is a pressing concern. Educators and policymakers must tread carefully to ensure that the integration of technology does not inadvertently widen existing educational inequalities.

Xi's study prompts discussions on the ethical considerations surrounding the negative washback effect of technology. As junior high school education becomes more dependent on digital platforms, it becomes imperative to critically evaluate the impact of technological advancements on assessments. This is particularly important when considering the potential consequences of digital divide, where students with limited access to technology may face disadvantages in assessments, leading to an unintentional negative washback effect.

Balancing Positive and Negative Washback

The nuanced nature of the washback effect necessitates a delicate balance between positive and negative dimensions. As educators and policymakers strive to enhance language assessments in junior high schools, the goal should be to maximize positive washback while mitigating the negative repercussions. Striking this balance requires a thoughtful approach that incorporates best practices, ethical considerations, and a continuous commitment to refining assessment methodologies. The positive washback effect, as advocated by Norris and Ortega (2019), aligns with contemporary educational principles that emphasize continuous improvement and lifelong learning. By integrating dynamic assessment practices, educators can foster a positive learning environment where assessments serve not only as evaluative tools but as catalysts for ongoing language development and skill enhancement.

Simultaneously, mitigating the negative washback effect, particularly in the context of technological integration, demands careful planning and ethical considerations. Recent works such as Xi's (2022) study highlight the need for educators and policymakers to be cognizant of potential disparities in technology access. This entails implementing inclusive strategies, providing alternative assessment methods, and ensuring that the integration of technology aligns with the principles of fairness and equal opportunity in junior high school assessments.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

The findings and discussions surrounding the positive and negative washback effects have profound implications for educational practice and future research. In the realm of educational practice, the emphasis on positive washback underscores the need for educators to adopt dynamic assessment practices. By focusing on continuous improvement, educators can create a learning environment that promotes the ongoing development of language skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities among junior high school students. Moreover, educators should be attuned to the potential negative consequences of technological integration in assessments. Xi's (2022) study serves as a timely warning about the potential digital divide in junior high school settings. Policymakers and educators must prioritize equitable access to technology, consider alternative assessment methods, and ensure that the integration of technology aligns with principles of fairness and inclusivity.

The methodological considerations discussed earlier, drawing from recent contributions by Lee and Watanabe (2019), should guide future research endeavours. Researchers exploring the washback effect in junior high school English language assessments should adopt varied and nuanced research methodologies to capture the complexity of this educational setting. The landscape of language assessment is evolving, and research methodologies must adapt to encompass the diverse dimensions of the washback effect.

Future research should also delve deeper into the ethical considerations surrounding technological integration in language assessments. With Xi's (2022) study highlighting potential negative consequences, researchers can explore ways to harness the benefits of technology while minimizing disparities. This includes investigating innovative approaches to digital assessment, ensuring accessibility for all students, and evaluating the long-term impact of technological integration on educational outcomes in junior high schools. In conclusion, the findings and discussions presented in this literature review provide a nuanced understanding of the washback effect of English language assessment in junior high schools. Positive washback, as exemplified by the integration of dynamic assessment practices, offers a pathway to foster continuous improvement and holistic language development among students. On the other hand, negative washback, particularly concerning technology, poses challenges that demand careful consideration of ethical implications and potential disparities.

Balancing positive and negative washback effects requires a thoughtful approach from educators, policymakers, and researchers. Educators must strive to create a learning environment that maximizes the

benefits of assessments while minimizing potential drawbacks. Policymakers must implement inclusive strategies to address technological disparities, and researchers should employ varied methodologies to capture the multifaceted nature of the washback effect in junior high school English language assessments. By navigating this delicate balance, stakeholders can contribute to the development of effective, equitable, and meaningful language assessments that positively impact the educational journey of junior high school students.

Conclusions

This literature review has delved into the intricate dynamics of the washback effect of English language assessments in junior high school, with a particular focus on both positive and negative dimensions. The findings and discussions have illuminated a complex landscape, offering insights into how assessments shape teaching and learning processes, and how recent developments, especially in technology integration, contribute to the washback effect. This conclusion synthesizes the key takeaways from the positive and negative washback effects, highlighting the need for balance and careful considerations in junior high school English language assessments.

The washback effect, as revealed through positive and negative dimensions, underscores the delicate balance required in designing and implementing English language assessments in junior high schools. Achieving this balance demands a conscientious approach that combines the benefits of positive washback, fostering continuous improvement and holistic language development, with mitigating strategies to address the challenges posed by negative washback, particularly in the realm of technology. Educators and policymakers must recognize the potential of assessments as instruments for positive change while acknowledging and addressing the potential drawbacks. Inclusive practices, such as adopting dynamic assessment methodologies, can contribute to positive washback, ensuring that assessments become tools for ongoing improvement rather than mere evaluative benchmarks. Simultaneously, ethical considerations and strategies to bridge technological disparities are imperative to mitigate the negative washback effects associated with technology integration.

Future research endeavours should explore innovative approaches to enhance positive washback and address the challenges posed by negative washback. Methodological considerations, as discussed earlier in the review, should guide researchers in adopting varied and nuanced approaches to capture the complexity of the washback effect in junior high school English language assessments. The landscape of language assessment is dynamic, and ongoing research efforts are essential to adapt assessment practices to the evolving needs of junior high school students.

In conclusion, this literature review provides valuable insights into the washback effect of English language assessments in junior high schools, shedding light on both positive and negative dimensions. Educators, policymakers, and researchers must navigate the delicate balance between fostering continuous improvement and addressing potential challenges posed by technology. By doing so, stakeholders can contribute to the development of inclusive, effective, and meaningful language assessments that positively

impact the educational journey of junior high school students. In the pursuit of this balance, the scales of washback effects can be tipped in favor of promoting equitable access, continuous improvement, and holistic language development in junior high school English language assessments.

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