

Assessment washback

Video at: www.trinitycollege.com/TESOL-AL

This video looks at washback – how tests can have an impact on classroom practice and learning.

00:09 – 02:29 Washback overview

06:57 – 08:23 Negative washback

02:30 – 04:10 Washback in the classroom

08:24 – 09:14 Resources to support teachers

04:11 – 06:56 Positive washback

1. Before watching the video

a) Why might the test your students take influence the way you teach your class?

b) How can this have a positive impact?

c) How can this have a negative impact?

d) Think about a class that you have taught that was preparing for an exam. How did the exam they were preparing for impact the way you taught?

e) To what extent did it have a positive impact on your teaching?

f) To what extent did it have a negative impact on your teaching?

2. During the video

a. Washback Overview (00:09)

Now watch the 'Washback overview' and answer the questions below.

- a) What example of 'positive' washback is given?

- b) What example of 'negative' washback is given?

b. Washback in the classroom (02:30)

Now watch the 'Washback in the classroom' section and answer the questions below.

- a) Why are more 'washback' studies concerned with summative testing?

- b) Why does formative testing tend to generate more positive washback?

c. Positive washback (04:11) and Negative washback (06:57)

Now watch the next two sections of the video: the one on 'Positive washback' and the one on 'Negative washback'. Answer the questions below.

- a) Why do tests nowadays tend to have positive washback?

- b) Why might tests in the past when audiolingual and grammar translation methods were popular have had negative washback?

- c) How could a test based on the grammar translation method have positive washback for some people nowadays?

- d) What does this tell you about language testing?

d. Resources to support teachers (08:24)

In this section of the video, they discuss what candidates need to know about the exams. There are several suggestions though this is not an exhaustive list.

Which of the following points are not mentioned? What other important points would you add to this list?

- The format of the test
- The marking criteria
- The timings for each paper
- How will the test be marked
- How many marks are allocated to each question
- Which parts of the test are most important
- How will the test run
- What are the word counts
- How will the examiner take responsibility for speaking tests
- What are the question types

3. Discussion points

Now consider the following questions below.

a) What could schools do to ensure the tests they use have a positive washback effect?

b) What could examining boards do to help teachers prepare students for tests better?

c) What can you as a teacher do to make your students feel that what they are learning in your class is not solely beneficial for their summative exam?

4. Further learning

If you want to learn more about this topic, look at these resources:

Books

Cheng, L., Watanabe, Y & Curtis, A. (2003). *Washback in Language Testing: Research Contexts and Methods*. London: Routledge.

Hughes, A. (2002). *Testing for Language Teachers*. Cambridge: CUP.

Jahangard, A., Alizadeh, M., & Mowlaje, B. (2014). *Washback Effect: The Cases of Test Format and Learner Attitudes*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Websites

https://www.ets.org/research/policy_research_reports/publications/report/1999/icmj

<https://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/RM-99-04.pdf>

Journal article

Bailey, K.M. (1996). 'Working for washback: a review of the washback concept in language testing'. *Language Testing*, 13(3): 257-79.

Biggs, J. (1998). 'Assessment and classroom learning: a role for summative assessment?'. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 5(1), 103-110.

Suggested answer for question d) in 'Positive washback (04:11) and Negative washback (06:57)' section of the worksheet:

Tests should basically test candidates in the way they are going to be using the language. The example of a test based on the grammar translation method would probably have a negative backwash for most EFL classes; however, as pointed out in the video, this type of test may have a positive backwash for students preparing to be translators.