

Washback Effects of Summative English Test on Teaching Practices in EFL Classrooms: Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract

This study explores the perception of two secondary school EFL teachers towards the washback effect of summative English tests on their teaching practices. Employing a qualitative descriptive design with purposive sampling, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) interactive model, comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Given the exploratory nature of this study and its limited number of participants, the findings are not intended for generalization but to offer contextual insights into how teachers interpret and respond to assessment demands in their daily classroom practices. The findings reveal that the summative English test shaped teachers' instructional decisions, material selection, classroom activities, and time allocation before the examination. Both positive and negative washback were identified. Positive washback appeared in the form of increased student motivation, learning focus, familiarity with the test formats, material reinforcement, and formative feedback. Negative washback manifested as skills narrowing, particularly the marginalization of speaking and listening teaching to the test, score orientation, and student anxiety. Importantly, the findings suggest that washback is not mechanically produced by the test itself but is mediated by teachers' pedagogical responses, including their choices of material, assessment media, and strategies for managing student pressure. These findings contribute to washback scholarship by foregrounding the teacher's mediating role in the context of regular classroom summative tests, a dimension that remains underexplored compared to high-stakes national or international examinations.

Keywords: *EFL classroom, language assessment, summative English test, teaching practice, washback effect*

Introduction

Assessment occupies a central position in language education not merely as a measurement tool, but as a force that actively shapes pedagogical decisions and classroom dynamics. In EFL settings, teachers routinely make decisions about what to teach, how to teach it, and how much time to devote to particular skills, and these decisions are frequently guided, consciously or otherwise, by the demands of summative tests. Green (2020) explained that it is almost impossible to imagine any form of teaching that does not involve assessment, underscoring the extent to which evaluation is embedded in classroom practice. However, the relationship between assessment and

teaching extends far beyond the neutral technical function. Assessments shape how learning is organized, what content gets attention, and how students are prepared for examinations.

In educational and applied linguistic literature, the relationship between test and teaching is explained through the concept of washback (Alderson & Wall, 1992). Washback refers to the influence of tests on teaching and learning practices, including what teachers teach, how teachers teach, and how students learn (Luxia, 2007, in Kirkpatrick & Zang, 2011). Washback is not just a side effect of assessment; it is a pedagogical process through which test demands are translated into classroom decisions. Importantly, washback can have a positive or negative impact. Positive washback occurs when the test encourages learning practices, knowledge mastery, and promotes engagement with subject matter that supports the development of students' language skills more meaningfully in a way that aligns with broader educational goals (Suryanto, 2025). Moreover, Munoz and Alvarez (2010) demonstrated that when assessment is in line with learning objectives and employs real-world tasks, it may also facilitate more organized and significant learning, and it can give a positive washback. Negative washback, on the other hand, tends to limit learning to test-taking exercises and limit chances for more comprehensive language growth (Safa & Jafari, 2016; Ahmmed & Rahman, 2019; Alqahtani, 2021). The distinction between the two is not always clear-cut; the same practice, such as drilling, can serve as a positive or negative washback depending on its frequency, intensity, and pedagogical purpose.

Previous washback studies have focused mostly on high-stakes English examinations in certain EFL contexts, such as national examinations, university entrance examinations, and international proficiency tests. In the Indonesian context, Sukyadi & Mardiani (2011) mainly examined the washback effect of the National Examination on teachers' classroom teaching and students' learning. Similar issues were also investigated in Vietnam, which investigated how TOEFL iBT and high-stakes national tests shape EFL teaching (Barnes, 2016; Thi & Nhung, 2024), Turkey (Kilickaya, 2016), Iran (Sadighi et al., 2018), Bangladesh (Rahman et al., 2021), Nepal (Dawadi, 2021), and China (Liang et al., 2025). In these various contexts, the impact of washback is generally manifested in an exam-oriented teaching culture, narrowed classroom practices, and marginalization of communicative learning goals, specifically speaking and listening (Kilickaya, 2016; Soomro et al., 2016).

However, washback not only occurs in certain high-stakes testing contexts but has also become a widespread issue in English language learning in various EFL contexts. In many EFL settings in Asia and the Middle East, washback commonly encourages an exam-oriented learning culture, narrowed classroom instruction, and marginalization of communicative learning goals because teachers tend to adjust learning to test demands (Barnes, 2016a; Kilickaya, 2016; Sadighi et al., 2018). In addition, parental expectations and institutional pressure strengthen a learning orientation based on scores and test performance (Rahman et al., 2021). These findings indicate that washback is not only related to the test itself, but also related to how the assessment culture is formed and negotiated in certain educational contexts.

Moreover, the influence of tests on learning can be very dominant. Madaus (1988, p. 83, as cited in Spratt, 2005) stated that testing increasingly determines what is taught, how it is taught, what is learned, and how it is learned. In high-stakes testing situations, teachers often focus teaching on the content and skills being tested, so assessment functions as a curricular magnet that directs classroom practice (Cheng, 2005). Furthermore, the effect of washback is not simple; it is a complex phenomenon and

depends on the context. Barnes (2017) cautioned that the effect is mediated by teacher confidence, institutional expectations, and the specific assessment culture of a certain educational environment. In the teaching and learning context, some studies also show that the effect of washback does not always appear directly and uniformly in every learning situation. Mirza et al. (2023) showed that teachers often experience tension between assessment objectives and pedagogical ideals when high-stakes examinations emphasize language knowledge measurement over competency-based learning, driving instructional practices toward traditional, exam-aligned methods and sidelining broader curricular goals. Dawadi (2021) further explained that washback is influenced by the educational, cultural, political, family, economic, and social contexts in which the test is embedded. This complexity suggests that the washback effect cannot be understood solely through the test design point of view; it must be examined in relation to how the teacher interprets and responds to the demands of the assessment.

Prior research also indicates that washback exerts a significant influence on teaching practices in English language classrooms. Soomro and Shah (2016) show that students and teachers focus on examinations and ignore real teaching and learning, causing certain language skills to receive less attention in classroom learning. Similarly, previous studies have shown that teachers often prioritize tested materials and reduce attention to skills that do not appear in the test (Safa & Jafari, 2016; Ahmmed & Rahman, 2019; Alqahtani, 2021). In addition, Kirkpatrick and Zang (2011) explained that exam-oriented learning contexts encourage intensive practice-based activities because of pressure to achieve high test scores. This tendency is also evident in how students learn in the classroom, where instruction is focused on adjusting to the structure and requirements of the test.

In a broader context of washback that deserves more attention is the teacher's role as an active mediation agent. Teachers do not passively transmit test demands into classroom practice; they negotiate, adapt, and sometimes reject those demands based on their professional assessment and contextual constraints (Barnes, 2016; Mirza et al., 2023). As Thi and Nhung (2024) explained, washback affects not only what teachers teach but also how they teach, including learning strategies, time allocation, and forms of classroom interaction used in EFL classrooms. This shows that the washback examination requires attention not only to the characteristics of the test but also to the teacher's interpretative and responsive process. These findings indicate that washback influences not only assessment outcomes but also teachers' classroom learning strategies in various educational contexts.

Furthermore, a summative English test is one type of assessment that has the potential to impact classroom learning. The summative English test is commonly used to evaluate students' learning achievement at the end of a learning period and is often associated with grades, final examinations, or standardized tests (Brown, 2004). Because the summative English test is oriented toward final findings, teachers tend to adjust teaching strategies, classroom activities, and learning materials to be in line with the format of assessment demands. Phuong et al. (2025) showed that pressure on test findings can encourage the practices of teaching to the test and reduce teachers' flexibility in developing more communicative learning activities. In the context of EFL classrooms, the effects of washback can be seen through intensive use of practice questions, exam-oriented instruction, and focus on tested skills (Soomro & Shah, 2016). Therefore, teachers have an important role in determining how washback appears and influences classroom learning practices.

Despite the growing body of washback research, studies that specifically focus on classroom-based English summative tests, rather than high-stakes national or international examinations, are still relatively limited, especially from the perspective of how teachers understand and address washback in their daily teaching decisions. Suryanto (2025) noted that this washback dimension is less explored in the existing literature. This is a significant gap, as classroom-level summative tests are much more frequent in the professional lives of most EFL teachers than large-scale national examinations, and their washback effect on everyday pedagogical decisions has not received proportional scientific attention. In response to this gap, summative English tests need to be explored further to understand how teachers perceive washback and how the effects appear in teaching practices in EFL classrooms.

Regarding the context of education in Indonesia, it is also important to acknowledge the ongoing transition towards the *Merdeka Curriculum*, which emphasizes the active role of students, project-based learning, and formative assessment compared to high-stakes summative evaluation. Under this curriculum framework, summative tests are intended to serve as one of many assessment tools rather than the dominant measure of student achievement. However, the degree to which this curriculum shift has been fully implemented varies across schools and regions, and classroom practices, particularly those shaped by long-standing assessment cultures, do not always change as rapidly as official policy. The present study examines the washback in the context of this transition moment, where summative tests continue to influence teachers' teaching decisions even as broader curriculum reforms encourage a more balanced assessment approach.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the perception of two secondary school English teachers towards the washback effect of classroom-based summative English tests on their teaching practices in EFL classrooms and to identify forms of washback that appear in classroom learning practices. The contribution of this study lies in its specific focus on the washback effect of classroom-based summative English tests on daily EFL learning and how teachers interpret and implement assessment demands in their pedagogical decisions, a context that is pedagogically significant but underrepresented in the existing literature, and in its attention to teachers' active role in mediating washback effects. Given the limited number of participants and the exploratory nature of this study, this contribution is offered as a contextual insight rather than a claim of novelty in the broader washback literature. This study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How do English teachers perceive the washback effect of summative English tests on their teaching practices in EFL classrooms? and (2) What forms of washback appear in classroom teaching practices?

Method

To investigate how two secondary school English teachers perceived and experienced the washback effect of summative English tests on their teaching practices in EFL classrooms, this study employed a qualitative, descriptive methodology. Sandelowski (2000) defined qualitative descriptive research as an approach that provides a rich, straightforward description of events in the everyday terms of those events. Because this study aimed to understand how teachers interpret assessment demands and translate them into pedagogical decisions rather than to measure statistical relationships, this design was considered appropriate. Moreover, Creswell & Creswell (2012) further explained that qualitative research is suited for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to social or human problems.

It is important to acknowledge that, given its exploratory orientation and limited number of participants, this study does not aim to produce generalized findings. The decision to work with two participants was intentional: both teachers were selected through purposive sampling because they were considered to have direct experience related to the research focus, particularly in using summative English tests in classroom assessment practices. As noted by Lawrence et al. (2016), purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research for identifying and selecting information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest. The goal is not to achieve saturation across a large sample, but to get an in-depth and context-based perspective from teachers who actively navigate the tension between the demands of assessment and pedagogical decisions in their daily work.

The instruments used in this research were semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they allow researchers to explore teachers' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations regarding the washback effect of summative English tests on teaching practices in EFL classrooms in greater depth. Furthermore, data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with each participant. This technique was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the teachers' experience, beliefs, and perceptions in more depth regarding the effect of summative English tests on classroom learning practices (Dejonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Interview sessions were conducted using Indonesian to provide participants the opportunity to explain their experiences openly so that the data obtained was more in-depth and reflective. All interview sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed to facilitate the data analysis process.

The data in this study were analyzed using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. In the first stage, the researcher selects and focuses on the interview data that is relevant to the washback effect of summative English tests on teaching practices. Then, the data were displayed descriptively to identify patterns, similarities, and relationships across participants' experiences. Finally, conclusions were drawn and continuously verified throughout the analysis process to ensure that the interpretations remained consistent with the research data. Four thematic categories emerged from the analysis: (1) teachers' perception of washback, (2) positive washback, (3) negative washback, and (4) washback in classroom practices. These themes were derived inductively from the participants' responses and reflect repeated patterns in both interviews.

Results

This section presents findings from semi-structured interviews with two secondary school English teachers, showing how they perceive the washback effect of summative English tests on their teaching practices and the forms of washback that appear in classroom learning practices. The data are organized into four thematic categories that emerged from the analysis: (1) teachers' perceptions of washback, (2) positive washback, (3) negative washback, and (4) washback on classroom practices. Direct quotations from participants are presented in Indonesian, followed by the English translation, to maintain the authenticity of the participants' expression and maintain analytical transparency.

Table 1. Summary of Main Findings from Teachers' Interviews

Theme	Description of Findings	Representative Quotes
Teachers' Perceptions of Washback	Both teachers perceived summative English tests as having a clear influence on teaching practices, especially in teaching focus, material selection, teaching methods, and pedagogical decisions.	T1: <i>"Seminggu atau dua minggu sebelum summative test, saya menggunakan metode drilling soal-soal jadi siwa lebih familiar dengan tipe soalnya."</i> [One or two weeks before the summative test, the teacher uses drilling exercises so that students become familiar with the question types.] T2: <i>"Cukup memiliki pengaruh yang besar terhadap pembelajaran, terutama motivasi siswa, apalagi di fase ujian."</i> [It has a fairly large influence on learning, especially on students' motivation, particularly during the exam period.]
Positive Washback	Summative tests helped students become more focused, motivated, familiarity with test formats, encouraged material reinforcement, and helped teachers evaluate students' abilities.	T1: <i>"Dampak positifnya adalah siswa jadi lebih fokus dan familiar dengan tipe soal."</i> [The positive effect is that students become more focused and familiar with the question types.] T2: <i>"Siswa jadi excited, motivated, fokus, punya target, jadi lebih sering belajar dan bertanya, lebih curious."</i> [Students become excited, motivated, focused, have a clear target, study and ask questions more often, and become more curious.]
Negative Washback	Summative tests narrowed instruction toward tested skills, especially reading and grammar, while speaking and listening received less attention. Students also became more score-oriented and some experienced anxiety.	T1: <i>"Dampak negatifnya, memang jadi lebih fokus ke skill reading, misalnya skill speaking dan listening jadi less attention, dan siswa jadi focus kepada hasil."</i> [The negative effect is that it becomes more focused on reading, while speaking and listening receive less attention and students become score-oriented.]

Theme	Description of Findings	Representative Quotes
Washback on Classroom Practices	Washback appeared through drilling, test-based material selection, exam-oriented classroom activities, time adjustment, and the use of assessment-oriented media such as Google Form and Quizizz.	T2: <i>"Guru jadi membatasi beberapa skill seperti grammar dan reading; speaking dan listening jadi terbatas di-explore."</i> [Teachers end up limiting certain skills such as grammar and reading; so that speaking and listening are less explored, and students become more focus on the score than meaningful learning.] In a related response, T2 also noted: <i>"Siswa jadi lebih fokus ke nilai daripada meaningful learning."</i> [Students become more focused on grades than on meaningful learning.]
		T1: <i>"Untuk listening menggunakan speaker dan laptop. Selain itu siswa diberikan Google Form yang harus dijawab, biasanya soalnya multiple choice, cloze test."</i> [For listening, teacher use a speaker and laptop. Students are also given a Google Form to answer, usually multiple choice and cloze test questions.] T2: <i>"Guru memberikan siswa pertanyaan yang mirip dengan format ujian, medianya kadang pakai website assessing online, quizizz, dan lain-lain. Bukan cuma paper based."</i> [The teacher provides students with questions that are similar to the exam format, usually using online assessment websites, Quizizz, etc. Not just paper-based.]

Teachers' Perceptions of the Washback Effect of the Summative English Test

Both teachers perceived classroom-based summative English tests as exerting a real and identifiable influence on their teaching practices. Their responses consistently indicated that this influence extended beyond the assessment event itself, shaping how they prepared students, what content received priority, and how they managed classroom time in the weeks leading up to the examination.

Teacher 1 explained how the test directly shaped the teaching sequence. She explained that the students' learning method switched to exam preparation about one to two weeks before the summative exam. She stated:

"One or two weeks before the summative test, I use drilling exercises and practice questions so that students become familiar with the types of questions that will appear in the summative test."

Teacher 2 also expressed similar sentiments, stating that the test had a significant impact in shaping the way she organized the teaching, especially regarding student motivation and focus. In her words:

"It has a fairly large influence on learning, especially on student motivation, particularly during the exam period, and on aligning the material I have taught."

Both teachers also noted that summative tests shaped the content of their teaching. Teacher 1 focused primarily on reading comprehension because the summative test was predominantly text-based and written. She observed that students with stronger reading skills tended to perform better, while students with weaker reading skills had difficulty, strengthening the role of the test in determining which skills were taught as a priority. Teacher 2 similarly reported focusing more on learning reading, grammar, descriptive text, recount text, and narrative text because the material is more dominant in the exam. This finding indicates that the teacher's perception of washback is closely related to the skills and materials tested. This tendency shows that both teachers interpret summative test demands as an important consideration in determining learning priorities in the classroom. In this context, assessment affects what the teacher teaches and how learning is conducted in the classroom. This finding is in line with the research of Sukyadi and Mardiani (2011), Barnes (2016), and Kılıçkaya (2016), which reveals that tests can affect teaching content, teaching methods, and classroom practices in the context of EFL.

Form of Positive Washback in Classroom Teaching Practice

Despite the concerns about the narrowing of the impact, both teachers also identified positive impacts in their classroom practice. This positive washback mainly emerged from the interview data: increasing student learning motivation, familiarity with the test format, and teacher-led material reinforcement and feedback.

First, summative English tests help increase students' focus and learning motivation ahead of the exam. Both teachers explained that students tend to be more active, motivated, and focused as they approach exams. Teacher 2 observed this shift in student behavior as follows:

"Students become excited, motivated, focused, have a clear target, study and ask questions more often, and become more curious."

While, Teacher 1 mentioned a more nuanced account. She noted that students showed lower motivation during regular formal lesson hours, but became much more involved and enthusiastic during material enrichment activities:

"Students are less motivated during formal class hours, but during enrichment sessions they are more motivated, more active, more enthusiastic because the atmosphere is more relaxed."

This result shows that the summative test can encourage students to pay more attention to the learning process when they understand the purpose and form of the exam that they will face. This difference is noteworthy because it suggests that the positive

washback in the form of motivation may be stronger in relation to the context of informal preparation than with formal teaching in the classroom.

Second, summative tests help students become more familiar with the exam format. To help students better understand the exam format, both teachers conduct preparation activities to expose students to the types of questions they would encounter. Teacher 2 provides grids and exercises adapted to the exam format, so students are better prepared and less anxious when facing the test:

"Usually, one or two weeks before the exam, I give questions that resemble the exam format, discuss the questions, share the question grid, and explain the actual question format so that students feel less anxious."

This finding indicates that the test preparation process can help students understand the types of questions they will face and reduce uncertainty before the exam. This aligns with the research from Suryanto (2025), who revealed that the test can encourage students to use strategic learning behaviors and focus more on the competencies being tested.

Third, summative tests help teachers reinforce the material and evaluate students' understanding. Teacher 1 reviewed the material and discussed practice questions before the exam, while Teacher 2 used formative tests to monitor student progress and provide feedback. Moreover, Teacher 2 explicitly noted:

"From the teacher's perspective: I am able to understand and provide better feedback. Beyond that, I am better able to assess my students."

Taken together, these forms of positive washback demonstrate that summative English tests can support the learning process when teachers use assessment as part of learning reinforcement, monitoring student progress, and reducing exam-related uncertainty, not just as a tool for giving final grades.

Forms of Negative Washback in Classroom Teaching Practices

Alongside positive effects, both teachers also found several forms of negative washback in their classroom learning practices. Three main forms of negative washback in this study were identified: narrowing of language skills taught, exam-oriented learning, and increased students' anxiety about scoring.

The most visible negative washback form is skill narrowing. Both teachers acknowledged that learning in the classroom becomes more focused on the tested skills, especially reading comprehension and grammar, because the summative test uses a more written assessment format. Teacher 1 reflected on this tension directly:

"The negative effect is that the learning becomes more focused on reading, while skills like speaking and listening receive less attention, because the summative test itself emphasizes written assessment."

Teacher 2 reinforces this pattern by noting that the format of the summative test effectively determined which skills were considered as curricular priorities:

"Teachers end up limiting certain skills such as grammar and reading; speaking and listening become limited in the exploration. Beyond that, because instruction becomes teacher-centered, students become bored, less motivated, less explorative, more focused on grades, and anxious."

It is important to place the narrowing of this skill in the specific format of the summative test used in these classrooms. Because the test largely assesses reading and grammar comprehension through a written format, with writing included to a lesser degree and speaking and listening largely non-existent in the summative evaluation, teachers reasonably direct their teaching energy to the skills that are most likely to determine their students' grades. The structural dynamics between the test format and classroom teaching highlight the importance of test design in shaping pedagogical practice. This finding indicates that summative English tests encourage teachers to prioritize the tested skills compared to other skills. This aligns with a study by Suryanto (2025), which revealed that narrowed instructional strategies, which shape a test's format and design, can hinder the development of broader skills. Additionally, Kılıçkaya (2016) and Soomro and Shah (2016) confirm this finding: listening, speaking, and writing often receive less attention because these skills were not assessed in the tests.

In addition, the second form of negative washback found is teaching to the test. Both teachers mentioned that learning before the exam is increasingly directed towards teacher-centered, drilling, and activities oriented towards the test format. Teacher 2 explained this transition clearly:

"As the exam approaches, I adjust the teaching methods. During regular lessons, it is more student-centered. When the summative test is coming, it becomes more teacher-centered: drilling, practice questions, explaining."

Teacher 1 described a similar pattern, noting that practice questions and material review dominated class time in the weeks before the exam. It should be emphasized that practice and exam preparation are not a negative thing; both teachers use it intentionally to reduce student anxiety and increase exam preparation. However, when these practices become the dominant mode of classroom interaction, replacing communicative activities, exploratory tasks, and student-centered learning, it limits the broader language development that is clearly designed to be assessed by summative tests. These findings show that the summative test can shift learning to be more exam-oriented. This research supports the findings of Sukyadi and Mardiani (2011) and Rahman et al. (2021), which show that exam pressure can encourage exam-oriented learning practices in the classroom.

Another important finding shows that the negative washback of summative English tests also encourages the tendency of score-oriented learning and psychological pressure in students. Both teachers observed that some students became too focused on test scores and tended to associate low scores with academic failure. Teacher 1 noted:

"The negative effect is that students become more focused on results and feel like they have failed when their score is below the minimum passing standard."

Teacher 2 similarly reported the same division among students:

"Students become more focused on grades than on meaningful learning. Some students become more motivated, some remain indifferent, while some feel pressured and less motivated."

These findings show that summative tests can create pressure when students treat the test as the main determinant of their academic success, as research by Rahman et al. (2021) confirms these findings in their studies. Thus, an important caveat is warranted here: these observations about student anxiety and this class orientation are entirely based on the perception of both teachers. The students themselves were not interviewed,

and their actual psychological experiences on the summative test could not be confirmed directly from the available data. Therefore, this finding must be understood as a description of the teacher's interpretation of student behavior and not as direct evidence of the student's internal state.

Washback on Classroom Practices

Beyond its impact on teaching focus and student motivation, the indirect impact of washback is also seen in concrete classroom practices: learning time adjustment, selection of teaching materials, and integration of media and assessment-oriented activities.

First, both teachers adjusted the learning time before the summative test period. Teacher 2 noted that she spent about one to two weeks before each examination to practice exercises, discuss questions, and review the material. Teacher 1 also explained how the learning practice was managed differently since the beginning of the semester, with the completion of the material prioritized early to give time for practice and enrichment activities later. This result indicates that summative tests affect how teachers manage classroom time allocation before the exam takes place.

Second, both teachers choose learning materials based on summative test demands. For example, Teacher 1 adjusts the material to the classroom's needs and the type of question. Meanwhile, Teacher 2 explained:

"It influences the material I teach. I choose material that corresponds to what will be tested. For example: descriptive, recount, and narrative texts. Teachers allocate time to reading and grammar. Speaking and listening are mostly treated as formative only."

Third, classroom-level manifestation of washback was teachers' use of assessment-oriented media and digital tools. Both teachers use a range of platforms or media for assessment-oriented activities and media in learning to support exam preparation. Teacher 1 described how listening assessment was conducted:

"For listening, I use a speaker and laptop. Students are also given a Google Form to answer, usually multiple-choice and cloze test questions."

Teacher 2 described a broader series of assessment tools that were used in classroom preparation:

"The media I use is sometimes online assessment websites, Quizizz, etc. Not just paper-based."

These choice of media and format reflects that washback not only appears in teaching content but also in media, classroom activities, and assessment tools used by teachers. The integration of digital platforms such as Google Forms and Quizizz shows that teachers adapt their exam preparation practices to a more contemporary format, although the underlying pedagogical logic, preparing students for a summative examination format, remains consistent. This supports the view of Barnes (2016) and Sukyadi and Mardiani (2011) that washback can appear in daily classroom practices, including methods, activities, strategies, and learning media.

Overall, the research findings show that summative English tests produce both positive and negative washback. This result also confirms that washback in EFL classes is not a one-way phenomenon but a dynamic process influenced by assessment demands, learning priorities, and teachers' pedagogical responses to classroom assessment

practices. Positive washback can be seen in increasing student motivation, learning focus, familiarity with the test format, material reinforcement, and giving feedback. On the other hand, negative washback appears in the form of skill narrowing, teaching to the test, score orientation, student pressure, and reduced exploration of communicative skills. Thus, the washback effect in this study is not one-way but affects the teacher's learning practice through various forms, including instructional decisions, classroom activities, and students' learning experiences.

Discussion

The findings of this study explain how classroom-based English summative tests produce a washback effect in EFL teaching practice. Instead of treating this effect as a direct consequence of the test design, this analysis highlights the role of teacher mediation, their interpretation of test demands, their pedagogical choices, and their efforts to balance test preparation with broader learning objectives. The main contribution of this study is that it shows that even in the context of regular summative tests at the classroom level, the feedback effect is not mechanically generated by the test itself, but is actively shaped by the teacher's response to it.

In this study, both teachers perceived the summative English test as an important factor guiding their teaching, especially before the examination period. This finding supports Alderson and Wall's (1992) foundational claim that tests can affect what teachers teach and how they teach it, while also expanding the claim into the context of classroom-based examination compared to high-stakes national examinations. It is also consistent with Barnes (2016), who found that the TOEFL iBT affects both what teachers teach and how they teach it. Similarly, Sukyadi and Mardiani (2011), found comparable patterns in their study of Indonesia's National Examination, including effects on classroom activities, teaching materials, and assessment methods. The present study suggests that similar dynamics operate at a smaller scale, within the regular summative assessment cycle of individual schools. Even classroom-level summative tests, in other words, can produce meaningful washback on teachers' daily instructional decisions.

Another important point is that the summative test creates a positive washback, which was identified in several forms: increasing students' learning focus, motivation, and greater familiarity with the test format, and teacher-led material reinforcement and feedback. The increase in learning focus observed before the examination shows that the summative English test can shape students' academic engagement and preparation behavior. This finding is consistent with Suryanto (2025), who found that the test can serve as a constructive engagement and encourage students to foster effective study habits. However, it should be noted that the increase in motivation described by the teachers is not distributed evenly throughout the student group. Teacher 1 observed that students were less motivated during regular class sessions but were more involved in enrichment activities; this shows that the positive impact was influenced by the learning context as well as by the test itself. This nuance underlines the need to examine the positive washback not as a uniform effect but as a process that is sensitive to context.

However, the findings also show that the summative English test has a negative washback effect, particularly in the form of skill narrowing. Both teachers admitted that the format of the summative test, which was mostly based on text-based and written tasks, made them prioritize reading comprehension and grammar, while speaking and listening skills received less attention. These findings support Kılıçkaya (2016) and Soomro and Shah (2016), who found that untested skills such as listening, speaking, and

writing were ignored when the test did not assess those skills. Importantly, this narrowing is not just a choice made by the teacher; it was a structural consequence of how the summative test was designed. If reading and grammar are the primary content of the test, teachers who are accountable for student performance have rational grounds for prioritizing those skills. This points to the centrality of test design in producing washback, a point with direct implications for assessment policy.

Another significant form of negative washback identified was the emergence of the practice of teaching to the test. Before the summative English test, both teachers shifted from a student-centered, exploratory teaching approach to a more teacher-centered and practice-intensive format; teachers were provided with drilling, practice questions, and review activities. This pattern has been documented in various EFL contexts, and Rahman et al. (2019) reported that assessment pressure encourages exam-oriented teaching and learning practices in high school. This also supports Spratt's (2005) argument that washback can affect classroom materials, teaching content, and instructional methods. Moreover, this pattern reflects how teachers adjust learning strategies and allocate more time to exam preparation as examinations approach, a tendency noted by Thi and Nhung (2024). However, the picture that emerges from the current data is more ambivalent than completely negative. Both teachers described drilling and practice not only as examination preparation but as a deliberate strategy to reduce student anxiety and build confidence. The same drilling practice has two purposes: preparing students for the examination format while managing the psychological dimension of examination preparation. This ambivalence reflects Barnes's (2017) observation that the washback effect is formed by the teacher's pedagogical intention, not just by the examination structure.

Furthermore, students' score orientation and the psychological pressure were the third important issue of negative washback. These observations are consistent with Rahman et al. (2021) and Dawadi (2021), who linked student pressure to the broader educational, social, and institutional contexts in which tests are embedded, including school-level expectations and parental pressure. In the Indonesian context particularly, the minimum passing score (*KKM*) seems to function as a significant psychological threshold, where students associate grades below this standard with academic failure. However, it must be acknowledged that this observation is filtered through the teachers' perception. Without direct data from students, claims about their internal psychological state should be understood as interpretative and not as confirmation.

Perhaps the most theoretically significant finding from this study is related to the role of teacher mediation in shaping the washback effect. Not only did teachers absorb and transmit the test demands into their classrooms; they actively negotiated them. They adjusted the material, chose the media (Google Forms, Quizizz, online assessment platforms), provided formative feedback, and explicitly motivated students to understand that scores are not the only measure of learning success. Teacher 2, for instance, described attempting to counterbalance the pressure of score orientation by reminding students that progress during learning is as important as final results. This active mediating strategy is consistent with Barnes (2016), which shows that washback can be mediated by teaching materials and classroom practice. It also supports Mirza et al. (2023), who found that teachers often experience tension between assessment demands and pedagogical ideals. The implication is that the professional assessment and pedagogical role of the teacher itself is a determining factor in whether feedback tends to produce positive or negative results.

It is also important to place these findings in a broader context of the current Indonesian education transition. The Merdeka Curriculum Framework formally repositions summative assessment as one of the components of a more balanced and process-oriented evaluation system. Yet the teachers in this study continued to report that summative tests exerted considerable influence over their instructional decisions, suggesting that the washback of classroom assessment culture persists even as official policy moves in a different direction. The gap between policy intention and practice in this classroom is not always a sign of teacher resistance; this may reflect the nature of the assessment culture that has been rooted over the years of practice, as well as the institutional pressures that teachers face as the progress of curriculum reform. Researchers and policymakers should address this implementation gap when designing and evaluating assessment reform initiatives.

Overall, the findings suggest that the washback effect of the summative English test in the EFL class is complex and two-sided. Positive washback appears when the test encourages motivation, focus, material reinforcement, and feedback. Negative washback occurs when the test narrows the focus of learning, encourages teaching to the test, and increases the emphasis on grades. These findings support previous research indicating that washback can be positive or negative depending on test design, classroom context, and teachers' pedagogical responses (Cheng, 2005; Spratt, 2005; Sukyadi & Mardiani, 2011; Barnes, 2016; Kilickaya, 2016). Therefore, the main issue is not simply whether a summative test should be used, but how the test is designed and implemented to support broader language learning goals.

This discussion also highlights the importance of aligning summative English tests with the goals of communicative language learning. If the summative test only assesses reading and grammar, teachers will naturally focus more on those skills and pay less attention to speaking and listening. However, if the summative test includes a more balanced representation of language skills, washback can be more supportive of meaningful EFL learning. This is relevant to this study because teacher practice is heavily influenced by the skills and formats included in the test. Thus, class-based summative English tests need to be carefully designed to not only measure achievement but also encourage balanced, meaningful, and pedagogically beneficial learning.

Conclusion

This study examines how two intermediate EFL teachers perceived and experienced the washback effect of a classroom-based English summative test on their teaching practices. The findings, based on the perspective of these two participants, showed that the summative test produced a feedback effect that could be identified in various dimensions of classroom teaching: teaching focus, material selection, time allocation, classroom activity choices, and assessment-oriented media used. Both positive and negative feedback effects are documented, and the analysis revealed that these effects are not mechanically generated by the test but are actively mediated by the teacher's pedagogical responses.

Positive washback appeared in the form of increased student motivation and engagement before examinations, greater familiarity with test formats, and teacher-led material reinforcement and formative feedback. Negative washback manifested as skill narrowing, particularly the reduced emphasis on speaking and listening, teaching to the test, score orientation, and student anxiety. Importantly, the same practices that constituted negative washback in some respects, such as drilling and format-focused preparation, also served pedagogically legitimate functions, including reducing exam

anxiety and building student confidence. This ambivalence reflects the complexity of washback as a phenomenon and cautions against oversimplified evaluations of test preparation practices.

The significance of this study lies in its focus on regular classroom-based summative tests, contexts that receive less academic attention than high-stakes national or international examinations, but represent the reality of assessment that is most relevant to the daily work of EFL teachers. The study also highlighted the role of teacher mediation: both participants showed an active and deliberate response to assessment demands rather than passive compliance, including an explicit attempt to balance examinations. Therefore, this study contributes to the field of washback by showing how teachers interpret and respond to assessment demands in a regular EFL classroom

Some of the limitations of this study need to be recognized. The findings are based on the perception of two teachers and cannot be generalized to the context of EFL, school, or other teacher populations. The lack of classroom observation means that the described washback effect is fully mediated through the teachers' self-report. Furthermore, this study did not include student data, so claims about student motivation, anxiety, or value orientation reflect the teacher's interpretation of student behavior rather than the student's own perspective. Future research may involve more teachers from various school contexts and include classroom observations to triangulate interview data with actual learning behavior, and include student voices to provide a more complete picture of the effects of feedback in EFL classes.

Suggestions

Based on the findings, English teachers are suggested to design summative English test preparation activities that not only focus on drilling and test-taking practice, but also support meaningful language learning. Teachers need to balance reading and grammar practice with speaking, listening, and writing activities so that the assessment does not narrow students' language development. Schools are also encouraged to design summative English tests that represent broader communicative skills and learning goals. Future research may examine how different test formats produce different forms of washback in EFL classrooms.

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