Making Use of Motivational Theories in Understanding Washback from Low-Stakess Test

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Abstract

Washback is widely believed as common to happen in high-stakes test as this type of test impacts students' life and future. Therefore, there is less concern on the type of washback which is generated from low-stakes test as it is believed that this type of test has no or less importance in students' life and future. However, the hypothesis needs further investigation as test, no matter how low its stakes is, to certain extent influence students' perception toward their learning. Therefore this article presents confirmatory study on whether washback is only generated by high-stakes test using three theories of motivation suggested by Watanabe (2006). The study used survey in form of questioner as the method of collecting data. The data were computed using SPSS and then analyzed using three theories of motivation. The result shows that using attributive theory of motivation, students tend to have internal motivation, using motivational theory of flow, students are motivated by the difficulty level of test being administered, while using functional autonomy of motives, students tend to be motivated to learn English by test. This indicates that washback effect generated by low-stakes test to students' motivation was present in the context being investigated.

Keywords: washback, low-stakes test, TOEFL-like test, Paper Based Test TOEFL, attributive theory of motivation, motivation theory of flow, functional autonomy of motives

Introduction

Not until recently, interest in the effect of testing to teaching and learning which is called washback or backwash has been growing. According to Goturk Saglam (2018), the term washback is more common to use in the field of applied linguistics, language education and language testing. The investigation on washback has widely conducted in language learning including in English as first language as well as second or foreign language. To name but a few is an investigation employed to 50 EFL students which were equally grouped into test-based class and general class and one of the findings is that washback significantly affect learning and teaching methodologies in the context being studied (Altowaim, 2015). Other research conducted in a lower-secondary level of a co-education national secondary school in Malaysia. This research aimed at studying the washback effect of a newly introduced school-based language assessment (Alla Baksh, et all., 2016). An up to date research aimed at exploring and comparing the washback effects of Thailand's O-NET and Indonesia's UN on English language learning viewed from students'perception (Sundayana, Meekaeo, Purnawarman & Sukiyadi, 2018).

It is commonly believed that washback is likely to occur in high-stakes tests. This is confirmed by Alderson & Wall's hypothesis that tests that do not have important consequences will have no washback (1993). Since it is high-stakes test which will typically affect teaching and learning (Ozaki, 2010), it is implied that low-stakes test does not possess such influence, or if the influence exists, it is not as strong as the one emerging from high-stakess test. However, the claim still needs further investigation to confirm that it is only high-stakes test, not low one, which typically generates washback effect.

Studies on washback effect generated by low-stakes test are rarely done and have covered certain dimensions of washback. One of them is the research done by Muñoz & Álvarez (2010) who report the presence of positive washback yielded from classroom-based oral assessment in an EFL classroom. Study carried out by Caromawati (2017) on the impacts of PBT TOEFL test as the progressive and summative tests results in revealing the presence of both positive and negative washback in low-stakes test. However, as washback effect covers various dimensions of language teaching and learning and it is far from uniform (Watanabe, 2006), further investigation on washback effect resulted from low-stakes test types is clearly needed to give a more comprehensive picture of washback phenomenon. Therefore, this study was aimed at filling the gap.

This study was design to investigate the presence of washback effect generated from a type of low-stakes test. The washback effect which was investigated in the study was in term of motivation as a positive washback effect on students in a private university in Bandung. Students became the focus of this study as according to Watanabe (2006) washback to students has been less investigated than to teachers. Further, washback likely affects learners most among all of stakesholders (McKinley & Thompson, 2018). To gain in dept understanding of students' motivation generated from tests, three motivational theories which are important in understanding washback to learners proposed by Watanabe (2006) was used.

Literature Review

In this part of writing, body of knowledge concerning EPT as TOEFL like test, washback as well as theories of motivation is presented to discuss the background theories for the study.

a. EPT as TOEFL Like Test

At a private university in Bandung, the relationship between teaching and testing in English subject is direct. Students enrolled in the first year are tested using TOEFL like test called English Proficiency Test (EPT), and grouped based on the result of the test into three broad categories: elementary, intermediate and advance. The students whose test result passes the requirement score to be grouped in advance class are granted A right the way: they do not have to attend any class for the entire semester. Based on this, the EPT can be then classified as Norm-Referenced Test which is intended to place test-takers along a mathematical continuum in rank order (Brown, 2004). Moreover, the EPT also becomes means of streaming students according to their ability which, according to Harmer (2007) this type of test groups students having the same level of ability within a class.

On the other hand, the EPT which is also administered at the middle and the end of course is one of Criterion-Referenced Test type. This means that the test is designed to measure students' progress toward the objective of the course (Brown, 2004) that is to achieve certain score on EPT. Having EPT three times, students are expected to achieve better score from their baseline score and finally gain intended score. This implies that the teaching and learning process is designed to aid students mastering material related to the test. In other words, the EPT is influential in the decision process regarding to what teachers teach and what students learn. An evidence of the impact of EPT to the process of teaching and learning is the textbook used in the class for both level consisting English grammar rules, explanation and practices as the major material. In addition, material to help students to be able solving listening problems is given in the laboratory class. Therefore, students only learn skills needed in answering questions appear in the EPT to achieve certain score as the goal.

The reason why EPT orients curriculum and thus the process of teaching and learning in the university is the belief that TOEFL is important in the future of students. Based on survey to alumna, TOEFL score is especially required for their future study and career. It is not unusual as, particularly in the context of Indonesia, for a long time TOEFL has been strongly believed as one of must take tests to continue education (Taufiq, Santoso & Fediyanto, 2017). Considering this, the curriculum of English subject was drastically changed. English subject is then intended to aim at preparing students to be able to solve types of questions which are usually asked in TOEFL.

Therefore, it can be clearly seen that TOEFL has strongly influenced teaching and learning process in the university. This is not a surprise as TOEFL is one of high-stakes tests commonly known in the world (Templer, 2004) which is intended to be a measurement of English in an academic setting (Enright, 2004). This fact is in line with Bailey (1999) who suggests that it is high-stakes test which naturally tends to affect teaching and learning.

However, the EPT itself is not a type of high-stakes test as TOEFL is for two reasons. Firstly, it does not affect the life of students as test takers. Secondly, as it is intended to be predecessor of students' future TOEFL score, EPT does not serve students' immediate need. As low-stakes test is believed to have no or less effect to teaching and learning, it is therefore interesting to investigate the presence of washback effect generated by EPT in the context.

b.   Washback

The effect of testing to teaching and learning is called washback. To put it more precisely, as soundly stated by Messick (1996:1), washback is the extent to which the tests influence language teachers and learners to do things they will not otherwise necessarily do. According to Bailey, washback lies in the continuum between simple and complex definition, narrow and broad contexts (1993: 3). Similar to this, Bachman and Palmer (1996) as cited in Newsfield (2005: 84) suggests that washback operates in micro context i.e. in a classroom and in macro contexts i.e. on educational systems and societies at large, and that a synergism between both contexts often exists. This implies that testing has an effect on teaching learning process as well as on educational system and societies, and in turn societies, educational system and teaching and learning process affect testing. All of those are covered in the term of washback.

It has been investigated that washback is a phenomenon resulted from a high stakes test. It is noted by Shohamy (1992) as cited by Bailey (1993: 3) that washback is the ramification of the strong authority of external testing and its major impact on the lives of the test takers. As Buck (1988) in Bailey (1999: 3) suggests, when the test is very important to the future of the students, and pass rates are used as a measure of teacher success, the natural tendency to relate classroom activities to the demand of test appears.

In contrary, low-stakes test is believed having less power in influencing teaching and learning process. Unlike in high-stakes test, in the low-stakes ones less frequency of washback is predicted to happen (Bailey, 2006). The peripheral position in decision-making owned by this type of test makes it has fewer consequences. Therefore, washback resulted from low stakes test is often neglected due to its less important existence.

In investigating washback, it is important to clarify its scope or coverage. To fulfill this need, three models of washback will be presented. The three models, even though are slightly different from one another, complement each other and thus provide a complete picture of washback phenomenon.

The first model is built by Huges (1993), which distinguishes three factors that are possibly affected by the nature of a test: participant, process and product. Based on this model it can be described that a test will influence the perceptions and attitudes of all such as learners, teachers, administrators, materials developers, and publishers (participants). In turn, these perceptions and attitudes may affect the actions taken by participants contributing to the teaching and learning process (process). Then, the process influences what is learned and the quality of learning (product). To conclude, this model covers factors which are typically influenced by test yet the model is still general in nature and does not provide specific information on each factor.

To present more specific coverage on washback, the second model from Alderson & Wall (1993) may help. The model provides Alderson & Wall's hypotheses on washback. Thus, they hypothesize:

1. A test will influence teaching
2. A test will influence learning
3. A test will influence what teachers teach and
4. A test will influence the way teachers teach
5. A test will influence what learners learn and
6. A test will influence the way learners learn
7. A test will influence the rate and sequence of teaching
8. A test will influence the rate and sequence of learning
9. A test will influence the degree and dept of teaching
10. A test will influence the degree and dept of learning
11. A test will influence attitudes to the content, method, etc. of teaching and learning
12. Tests that have important consequences will possess washback, and to the opposite
13. Tests that do not have important consequences will possess no washback.
14. Tests will possess washback on all learners and teachers.
15. Tests will possess washback effects for some learners and some teachers, yet not for others.

It is clearly seen that this model provides more specific information on washback phenomenon. Therefore, an investigation on the phenomenon can be built based on the washback hypotheses proposed by Alderson & Wall (1993). Yet, there is one last model which complements the previously mentioned models.

The last model is from Bailey (1999). The model is built based on Hughes' model of washback and provides comprehensive information relating to factors influenced by test. In describing the model, Bailey drafts the following chart.
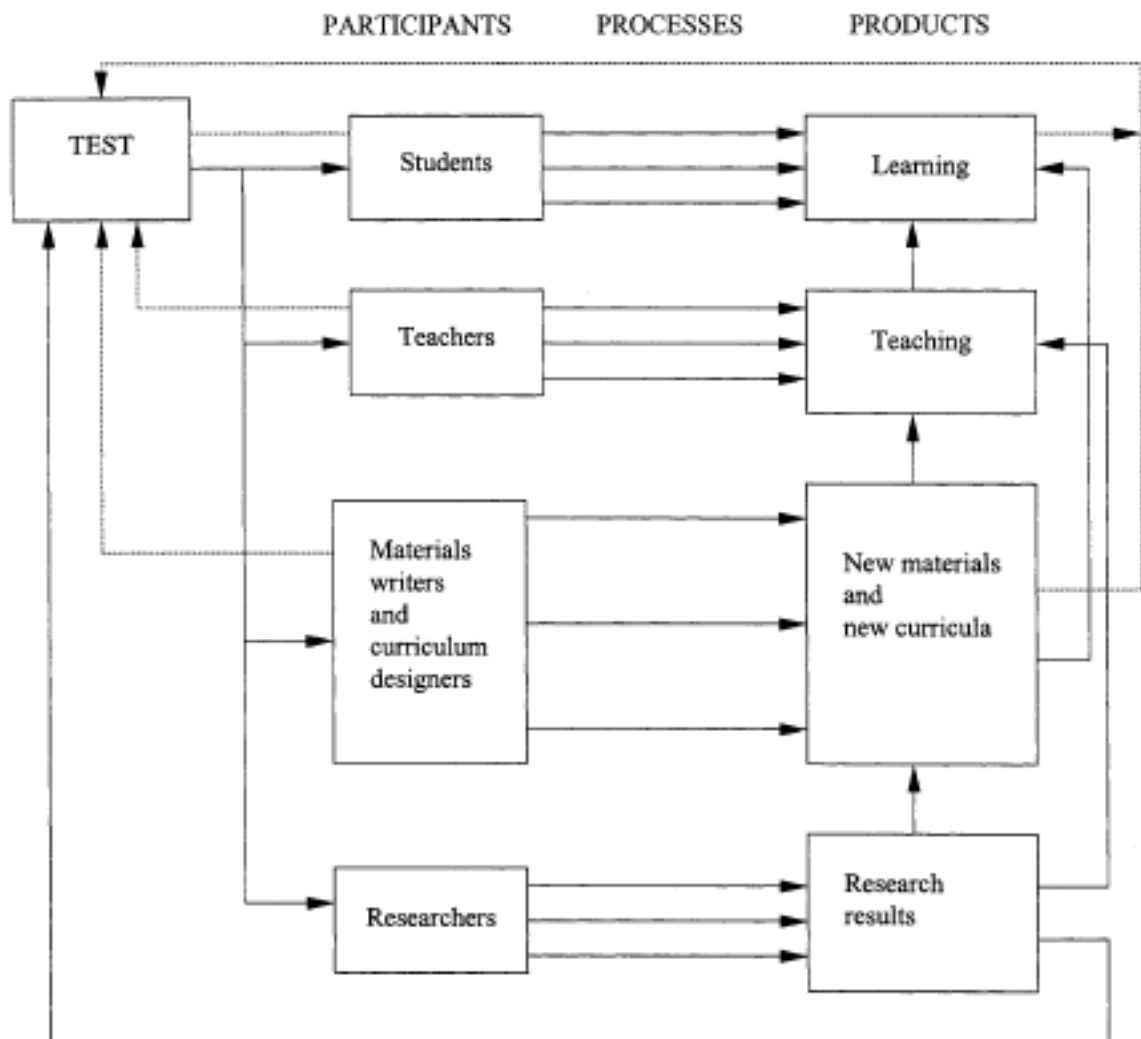
Fig. 1. Bailey's basic model of washback

Based on the three models it can be concluded that they are similar in a way that each proposes the core participants which are typically influenced by the administering of test. Those are teachers and students. All of the models also discuss that factors influenced by test form a type of domino effect, for example when participants are influenced by test then, in turn, the influenced participants will influence the process of

teaching and learning and so on. To develop focus on the research relating to washback, each factor along with its derivation can be chosen.

It can be derived from all of the models that students are typical participants which can be influenced by testing. According to Watanabe (2006), washback to the learners depends on students' perception on the level of stakess a test possesses and thus the process of this type of washback seems to be mediated by some psychological factors. Therefore, theories of motivation can be used to understand the process of washback being generated to students.

c.   Motivation

Motivation has long been recognized important for supporting the process of students' learning. It is summarized by Lai (2011) that motivation refers to the reasons that become the basis for behavior. Further, motivation can be broadly defined as the attribute that drives someone to do or not to do something. In language learning, motivation helps increasing students' determination and interest (Chiligaryan & Gorbatenko, 2015). Therefore, it is safe to assume that motivation is one of key factors in L2 learning.

According to Thaidan (2015) language testing is thought to have powerful effect on teachers' alignment of the curriculum items to enhance learning process in terms of feedback and motivation. Therefore, there is a strong link between washback and motivation. In line with this, Watanabe (2006) proposes three theories of motivation which can be useful in understanding washback phenomenon. The three motivational theories are attribution theory of motivation, flow, and functional autonomy of motives. Follow is the description of each theory.

c.1. Attribution theory of motivation

The core of the theory puts emphasize on the attributions to which people associate their perception of their success or failure. The attributions may be internal and external. Internal is when the attributions arise from inside and external is when they are generated from outside. The internal attributions cover ability and effort. Meanwhile the external ones refers to luck and perceived difficulty of the tasks.

Further, the natures of internal attributions are unstable and controllable. This makes the attitude of attributing success or failure to internal, unstable and controllable typically lead students to future success. On the other hand, external attributions are stable and uncontrollable. The act of referencing success and failure to external, stable and uncontrollable attributions opens the way to students' future failure. Based on this, it is proposed that the presence of external attribution should be re-attributed to the internal ones by conducting training to help students to reverse the external attributions into internal ones.

c.2. Flow

The motivation theory of flow is based on the notion of perceived difficulty of a task. Based on empirical study, it is found that appropriately challenging level of difficulty, that is not too difficult or not too easy, ignites students' engagement in the given task. This engagement creates flow, or highly motivated state. Based on this theory, students

should be given challenging task to avoid boredom because of the easiness of the task, or to avoid anxiety because of the difficulty of the task.

c.3. Functional autonomy of motives

Functional autonomy of motives proposes that a means may become an end. Meaning, the process of doing something may ignite habitual which is hard to break. Relating to language assessment, the process of preparing test may help rising students' interest in learning English. That is to say, instrumental motivation arising from practical goals in learning language may become integrative motivations involving the interest in the people and the culture of the language being learnt. It is predicted that students who start learning language as instrument of passing test will eventually develop interest in the language.

Methodology

To gain understanding about the investigated phenomenon, the research employed survey as its method. The instrument to gather data in this survey was in form of questioner. The questioner was developed based on three motivational theories which are thought to be potential in understanding washback to learners proposed by Watanabe (2006). The questioner which consisted of eight (8) questions used Likert-scale comprising 5 choices (strongly disagree, disagree, quite disagree, agree, strongly agree).

The questioners were distributed to 200 students of the first semester of a private university in Bandung. As many as 170 students filled and returned the questioners. The data gathered from the questioner were labeled and calculated using SPSS 17.

Result & Discussion

The study was aimed at confirming that low-stakes test did not generate washback effect. The area investigated was washback effect to learners' motivation. The result of the study is presented based on the three motivational theories previously discussed. Therefore, the result will be presented and discussed based on each theory.

a.   Attribution theory of motivation

This part provides information on the result and discussion related to attribution theory of motivation. As many as six questions are aimed to investigate the presence of washback effect to learners' attributive motivation.

Belajar sungguh-sungguh pun saya tidak akan bisa mengerjakan soal ujian masuk Bahasa Inggris.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STS	83	48.8	48.8	48.8
	TS	50	29.4	29.4	78.2
	KS	34	20.0	20.0	98.2
	S	2	1.2	1.2	99.4
	SS	1	.6	.6	100.0
	Total	170	100.0	100.0	

Table 1: The percentage of students' answers for the 1st question

The table shows the data of the percentage of students' answer for the 1st question. It was found out that the majority of the students (98.2%) were in the spectrum of disagree. This means most of the students did not attribute their success or failure to external, stable and uncontrollable causes.

Belajar sungguh-sungguh pun saya tidak akan bisa mengerjakan soal UTS Bahasa Inggris.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STS	71	41.8	41.8	41.8
	TS	64	37.6	37.6	79.4
	KS	32	18.8	18.8	98.2
	S	2	1.2	1.2	99.4
	SS	1	.6	.6	100.0
	Total	170	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: The percentage of students' answers for the 2nd question

The second question was related to the administration of middle test. Again, the result was that the majority of students (98.2%) were in the spectrum of disagree, meaning most of the students did not attribute their success or failure to external, stable and uncontrollable causes.

Belajar sungguh-sungguh pun nanti saya tidak akan bisa mengerjakan soal-soal ujian akhir Bahasa Inggris.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STS	61	35.9	35.9	35.9
	TS	67	39.4	39.4	75.3
	KS	40	23.5	23.5	98.8
	S	2	1.2	1.2	100.0
	Total	170	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: The percentage of students' answers for the 3rd question

The third question in this part asked whether students thought they could do well in the up coming final test or not. The data mentioned in the table shows that majority of students (98.8%) did not attribute their future success or failure in the final test to external attributions.

Saya kurang belajar dalam menghadapi ujian masuk Bahasa Inggris sehingga saya kurang bisa mengerjakan soal-soal ujian tersebut.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STS	8	4.7	4.7	4.7
	TS	23	13.5	13.5	18.2
	KS	51	30.0	30.0	48.2
	S	83	48.8	48.8	97.1
	SS	5	2.9	2.9	100.0
	Total	170	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: The percentage of students' answers for the 4th question

The result from the fourth question, however, shows a more balance number of students who attributed their failure or success to both external (48.2%) and internal causes (51.8%).

Saya kurang belajar dalam menghadapi UTS Bahasa Inggris sehingga saya kurang bisa mengerjakan soal-soal ujian tersebut.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	2	1.2	1.2	1.2
	STS	11	6.5	6.5	7.6
	TS	25	14.7	14.7	22.4
	KS	49	28.8	28.8	51.2
	S	73	42.9	42.9	94.1
	SS	10	5.9	5.9	100.0
	Total	170	100.0	100.0	

Table 5: The percentage of students' answers for the 5th question

The similar question as the fourth question yet for the test administered in the middle of the course also shows that students' answers were almost equally divided into who attributed their failure or success to external (51, 2%) and internal factors (48,8%).

Jika belajar sungguh-sungguh, saya yakin akan mendapatkan nilai yang bagus di ujian akhir Bahasa Inggris.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STS	3	1.8	1.8	1.8
	TS	1	.6	.6	2.4
	KS	15	8.8	8.8	11.2
	S	62	36.5	36.5	47.6
	SS	89	52.4	52.4	100.0
	Total	170	100.0	100.0	

Table 6: The percentage of students' answers for the 6th question

The result from the last question on students' perception of their future success or failure shows that the majority of students made attribution of success and failure to internal causes (88, 9%).

From the data displayed above, it can be concluded that EPT which was administered in the beginning, middle and end of English course at the university somehow created washback to students' external and internal motivation. For the first to the third questions aimed at investigating students' attribution of their success or failure,

it was found out that the majority of students attributed their success or failure to internal causes. Therefore, the awareness that internal factors contributing to students' success and failure may be exploited to help students pass the final EPT administered at the end of the course. This in line with what is stated by Watanabe (2006) that tests can be used as means of motivating students to gain future success when tests creates a sense of controllability and internality. However, the data that shows how some students attributed their success or failure to external causes cannot be neglected. This is because some results, especially from the fourth and fifth questions, show strong, even though not a major tendency that students attributed their perceived success or failure to external factors. Related to this, Watanabe (2006) suggests that students are to be helped to re-attribute success or failure from external to internal factors by making the assessment process interactive.

b. Flow

This part presents the result and discussion of the study related to motivation theory of flow. This part comprises data from two questions.

Soal-soal ujian masuk dan UTS Bahasa Inggris sangat mudah dikerjakan.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STS	9	5.3	5.3	5.3
	TS	24	14.1	14.1	19.4
	KS	102	60.0	60.0	79.4
	S	31	18.2	18.2	97.6
	SS	4	2.4	2.4	100.0
	Total	170	100.0	100.0	

Table 7: The percentage of students' answers for the 7th question

The result from the question shows that majority of students (60%) perceived the test administered in the beginning and the middle of the course neither difficult nor easy.

Saya tertantang mengerjakan soal-soal ujian masuk dan UTS Bahasa Inggris.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	1	.6	.6	.6
	STS	4	2.4	2.4	2.9
	TS	10	5.9	5.9	8.8
	KS	40	23.5	23.5	32.4
	S	100	58.8	58.8	91.2
	SS	15	8.8	8.8	100.0
	Total	170	100.0	100.0	

Table 8: The percentage of students' answers for the 8th question

The result shows that majority of students are in the spectrum of agreement (67.6%) that the EPT administered in the beginning and the middle of the course was challenging.

From the result of the two questions it can be concluded that most students found that the questions of the test are neither difficult nor easy and therefore the questions were challenging enough to make students engage in the test. This means that the difficulty level of the test generated washback effect to students' motivation. This washback effect is a type of positive one as it creates agency in students in a way that each test administered to them is something they can conquer, yet requires some efforts in the process of doing it. This is in line with the idea that tests may become a means of generating motivation if they are not too difficult or too easy (Watanabe, 2006).

c. Functional autonomy of motives
This part presents result and discussion from the questions related to functional autonomy of motives.

Tingkat kesulitan soal ujian masuk dan UTS Bahasa Inggris membuat saya tertantang untuk semakin mendalami Bahasa Inggris.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	1	.6	.6	.6
	STS	4	2.4	2.4	2.9
	TS	9	5.3	5.3	8.2
	KS	32	18.8	18.8	27.1
	S	110	64.7	64.7	91.8
	SS	14	8.2	8.2	100.0

Tingkat kesulitan soal ujian masuk dan UTS Bahasa Inggris membuat saya tertantang untuk semakin mendalami Bahasa Inggris.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	1	.6	.6	.6
	STS	4	2.4	2.4	2.9
	TS	9	5.3	5.3	8.2
	KS	32	18.8	18.8	27.1
	S	110	64.7	64.7	91.8
	SS	14	8.2	8.2	100.0
	Total	170	100.0	100.0	

Table 9: The percentage of students' answers for the 9th question

The table shows that as much as 72, 9% of the students are in the spectrum of agreement to the question. This means that tests, especially the difficulty level of the tests, which were administered to them twice in the beginning and middle of the course influenced students' motivation in learning English

Setelah menghadapi ujian masuk dan UTS Bahasa Inggris saya semakin tertarik belajar Bahasa Inggris.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	TS	10	5.9	5.9	5.9
	KS	32	18.8	18.8	24.7
	S	109	64.1	64.1	88.8
	SS	19	11.2	11.2	100.0
	Total	170	100.0	100.0	

Table 10: The percentage of students' answers for the 10th question

The result from the last question confirms that majority of students (75,3%) are in the spectrum of agreement that indeed the EPT generated their motivation in learning English.

From both of the results it can be concluded that low-stakes test such as EPT may generate washback effect to learners, especially which relates to motivation. The evidence is that in both of the results there is a strong tendency that students perceived test as motivation trigger in learning English even though the level of agreement is not uniform (varied between strongly agree and agree). This result is in line with what Watanabe (2006) that students who start to learn foreign language as a means of passing test will eventually become interested in it.

From both the result and discussion it can be seen that students' motivation related to test is presence in the investigated context. However, to gain more thorough picture of washback effect on students' motivation dimension based on each type of motivational theories used in this study, further studies are needed.

To sum up, based on the result and discussion which are categorized based on three types of motivational theories proposed by Watanabe (2006) it can be conclude that the presence of washback effect to learners' motivation from low-stakes test is evident in all the types of motivation theories used in the study. However, The washback effect is clearly seen in the functional autonomy of motives and motivation theory of flow. Even though washback effect is rather unclear when using attribution theory of motivation, the theory is still useful to understand types of motivation students possess when test is administered to them. The awareness of the type of students' motivation may help teachers aid the process of reattribution.

However, as the study suffers limitation, further study on how washback effect on students' motivation may differ between elementary and intermediate students. Further investigation is also needed to gain knowledge whether generating motivation from test may affect students' performance in learning English.

Conclusion

Washback effect is a complex phenomenon in teaching and learning, especially how assessment influences teachers, students and the process of teaching and learning. Its complexity leads to various approaches to understand its nature. One approach to understand washback phenomenon is from students' perspective. As students' perspective on learning is mediated by psychological factors, motivation theory can be used to understand washback effect on students.

Using motivation theories, it can be confirm that to certain context low-stakes test may generate washback especially to students. Therefore it is not necessary that only high-stakes test which result in washback. This may imply that the focus on high-stakes test in understanding washback should be adjusted so that there is a balance focus between high-stakes test and low-stakes test in understanding washback. The adjustment of the focus leads to a change in perspective viewing the seriousness of test effect. The view that only washback effect from high-stakes test should be taken seriously is changed to washback effect from any type of test should be taken seriously as it may foster or hinder students' motivation in learning.

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