

Doctor of Education Dissertation

Title:

AN EXPLORATION INTO WHAT PROMOTES OR HINDERS BENEFICIAL
ENGLISH TEST WASHBACK
ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Abstract

Ethical English language testing requires an ongoing effort to improve the quality of English test item design. It also requires the identification of what factors might encourage or obstruct positive washback and impact. The advantages and disadvantages of summative high-stakes English tests compared to feasible alternative forms of assessment should also be considered. For instance, an evaluative review of this research suggests the greater appropriateness of multiple medium-stakes formative English assessments over high-stakes summative English tests for students at the case study school. This case study explores the washback phenomenon and related impact phenomenon at one CMI (Chinese Medium of Instruction) secondary school in Hong Kong in order to find out what promotes or hinders beneficial English test washback and impact on teaching and learning at this school and includes a comparison between a new and a long established high-stakes English test. Another focus of this research is the lower academic performance and lower English language proficiency levels of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. A total of 256 student participants completed questionnaires; 147 student participants took part in group interviews; and 7 teacher participants took part in individual interviews. A total of 23 lesson observations occurred as well as one English SBA (School-based Assessment) assessing session and one group tutorial. Key findings include a crucial need for English teachers who prepare students for high-stakes English tests to be aware of what pedagogical practices will maximise their students' chances of success in what can be a very stressful and even traumatic experience. Some examples of detrimental washback and impact were identified including some instances of narrowing of the curriculum and some instances of an increased focus on lower order cognitive skills such as rote learning and memorisation. Examples of beneficial washback and impact were identified including some instances of a wide variety of English learning experiences being encouraged and much enhanced both by English teachers who knew how to scaffold their students' use of lower and higher order cognitive skills in ways that encouraged a creative use of English and English SBA (School-based Assessment). Finally, English SBA (School-based Assessment) was found to be a much sharper tool and to have a more immediate ability to enhance the quality of English teaching and the learning experiences of students by more actively engaging students in the learning process than high-stakes English tests.

Keywords: CMI; EFL; high-stakes tests; impact; measurement-driven instruction; washback

CERTIFICATION OF DISSERTATION

I certify that the work contained in this dissertation is entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

Signature of Candidate	Date
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ENDORSEMENT

Signature of Supervisor/s	Date
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Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Certification of Dissertation	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables	vii
List of Figures	viii
Acronyms	xii
1. FOCUS OF THE STUDY	1
1.1 Research questions	6
1.2 Research objectives	8
1.3 Outcomes	10
1.4 Significance of the study	10
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	15
2.1 Washback: the concept and context	16
2.2 Motivation: the concept and context	18
2.3 The working definitions of washback and impact used in this study	21
2.4 Test items and tasks defined	23
2.5 High-stakes examinations and washback	25
2.6 Washback from English examinations in Chinese-speaking Asia	27
2.7 Washback and Impact from High-stakes Secondary School English Examinations in Hong Kong and Mainland China	29
2.8 Interplay with other factors	33
2.9 Conclusion	36

3.	METHODOLOGY	37
3.1	Data Collection Instruments	40
3.2	Data from English Lesson Observations	42
3.3	Data from Semi-structured Teacher Interviews	46
3.4	Data from Semi-structured Student Interviews	47
3.5	Data from Student Questionnaire	48
3.6	Research Reliability and Validity	50
4.	RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: English Lesson Observations	55
4.1	Washback on Secondary 5 Classroom Pedagogical Practices	57
4.2	Washback on Secondary 6 Classroom Pedagogical Practices	85
5.	RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: Interviews with English Teachers	97
5.1	Washback on Secondary 5 English Teachers	97
5.2	Washback on Secondary 6 English Teachers	117
6.	RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: Interviews with English Students	124
6.1	Washback on English Students (from Qualitative Data)	124
6.2	Washback on English Students (Themes from Qualitative Data)	128
6.3	Impact of Other Identifiable Factors (Themes from Qualitative Data)	166
7.	RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: Survey of English Students	220
7.1	Washback on English Students (from Quantitative Data)	220
7.2	Washback on English Students (Inferences from Quantitative Data)	222
7.3	Impact of Other Identifiable Factors (Inferences from Quantitative Data)	247
7.4	Correlations	277

8.	CONCLUSIONS	285
8.1	The Overall Influence of High-stakes English Testing on Chinese Medium of Instruction (CMI) Secondary School English Teachers	290
8.2	The Overall Influence of High-stakes English Testing on Chinese Medium of Instruction (CMI) Secondary School English Students	295
8.3	The Factors that Intervene to Promote Beneficial Washback	299
8.4	The Factors that Intervene to Hinder Beneficial Washback	300
8.5	The Types of English Testing Items that Tend to Promote Beneficial Washback	303
8.6	The Types of English Testing Items that Hinder Beneficial Washback by Tending to Promote Detrimental Washback on Teaching and Learning	303
8.7	The Interplay of Washback on Teaching and Learning from Some Types of English Testing Items with Other Identifiable Factors	304
8.8	Limitations	304
8.9	Recommendations	306
8.10	Conclusion	307
9.	REFERENCES	310
10.	APPENDICES	321
10.1	Timelines	321
10.2	Lesson observation guide	322
10.3	Semi-structured student interview guide	323
10.4	Semi-structured teacher interview guide	324
10.5	Questionnaire (English version)	325
10.6	Questionnaire (Chinese version)	331
10.7	Further information about the examinations	338

List of Tables

TABLES in LITERATURE REVIEW

Table 2.1	The main scope of this study's washback explorations	24
Table 2.2	An Overview of the Mainly Negative High-stakes English Test Washback Experienced at Senior Secondary School Level from Two Washback Related Studies Conducted in China	31
Table 2.3	An Overview of the Impact of SBA (School-based Assessment) at Senior Secondary School Level from Two Studies Conducted in Hong Kong	32

TABLES in METHODOLOGY

Table 3.1	An Overview of Data Collection Instruments	41
Table 3.2	English Lesson Observations Data	45
Table 3.3	Semi-structured Teacher Interviews Data Collection Summary	46
Table 3.4	Semi-structured Student Interviews Data Collection Summary	48
Table 3.5	Student Questionnaire Data Collection Summary	50
Table 3.6	Enhancing the Reliability and Validity of the Research	52

TABLE in RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: Interviews with English Teachers

Table 5.1	Semi-structured teacher interview guide's purpose	98
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TABLE in RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: Interviews with English Students

Table 6.1	Semi-structured student interview guide's purpose	127
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TABLES in RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: Survey of English Students

Table 7.1	Correlations between Secondary 5 repeater students perceiving a need to use English in their future work life (questionnaire item 8), and perceiving familiarity with the <u>format</u> of their final end of school English examination (questionnaire item 12), or also perceiving familiarity with the <u>content</u> of their final end of school English examination" (questionnaire item 13).	281
Table 7.2	Regular Secondary 5 students Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between Questionnaire Items 23-1 to 23-15	282
Table 7.3	Secondary 5 repeater students Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between Questionnaire Items 23-1 to 23-15	283
Table 7.4	Secondary 6 students Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between Questionnaire Items 23-1 to 23-15	284

List of Figures

FIGURES in FOCUS OF THE STUDY

Figure 1.1	Age. Student responses to “How old were you at your last birthday?” (questionnaire item 3).	3
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FIGURES in LITERATURE REVIEW

Figure 2.1	An overview of the multi-lensed theoretical framework that underpins this research	15
Figure 2.2	Conceptual framework of the exploration into what promotes or hinders beneficial washback & impact on teaching and learning	20

FIGURES in RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: English Lesson Observations

Figure 4.1	The English Language Proficiency Levels Achieved by Elm Class	63
Figure 4.2	The English Language Proficiency Levels Achieved by Maple Class	64
Figure 4.3	The English Language Proficiency Levels Achieved by Palm Class	70
Figure 4.4	The English Language Proficiency Levels Achieved by Cedar Class	76
Figure 4.5	The English Language Proficiency Levels Achieved by Pine Class	81
Figure 4.6	The English Language Proficiency Levels Achieved by Oak Class	83
Figure 4.7	The English Language Proficiency Levels Achieved by Poplar & Willow Class	90

FIGURES in RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: Interviews with English Students

Figure 6.1	Comparative summary of the themes from Secondary 5 and Secondary 6 English student responses to semi-structured group interview prompt 1	149
Figure 6.2	Comparative summary of the themes from Secondary 5 and Secondary 6 English student responses to semi-structured group interview prompt 2	165
Figure 6.3	Comparative summary of the themes from Secondary 5 and Secondary 6 English student responses to semi-structured group interview prompt 3	175
Figure 6.4	Comparative summary of the themes from Secondary 5 and Secondary 6 English student responses to semi-structured group interview prompt 4	191

Figure 6.5	Comparative summary of the themes from Secondary 5 and Secondary 6 English student responses to semi-structured group interview prompt 5	205
Figure 6.6	Comparative summary of the themes from Secondary 5 and Secondary 6 English student responses to semi-structured group interview prompt 6	217
FIGURES in RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: Survey of English Students		
Figure 7.1	Familiarity with <u>format</u> of English examination. Student responses to “You are familiar with the <u>format</u> of your final end of school English examination” (questionnaire item 12).	223
Figure 7.2	Familiarity with <u>content</u> of English examination. Student responses to “You are familiar with the <u>content</u> of your final end of school English examination” (questionnaire item 13).	227
Figure 7.3	Narrowing of curriculum content caused by preparing for the English examination. Student responses to “You only study what content you think will be tested in your final end of school English examination” (questionnaire item 14).	230
Figure 7.4	English examination’s effect on how English is studied. Student responses to “How you study English has been affected by your final end of school English examination” (questionnaire item 15).	232
Figure 7.5	English language proficiency improved while preparing for English examination. Student responses to “Preparing for your final end of school English examinations has helped you to improve your level of English language proficiency” (questionnaire item 16).	235
Figure 7.6	English examination preparation is main motivation for learning English. Student responses to “Now, you are mainly learning English in order to prepare for your final end of school English examinations” (questionnaire item 18).	238
Figure 7.7	English examination preparation is an important motivator for learning English. Student responses to “In regards to your own English learning experiences, how important do you think the following are for you to be a successful English learner? An important English examination to prepare for” (questionnaire item 23-9).	240

Figure 7.8	English SBA (School-based Assessment) is an important motivator for learning English. Student responses to “In regards to your own English learning experiences, how important do you think the following are for you to be a successful English learner? School-based English assessments” (questionnaire item 23 10).	242
Figure 7.9	English SBA (School-based Assessment) helps improve English. Student responses to “In your opinion, preparing for and doing English school-based assessments helps you improve your English” (questionnaire item 17).	245
Figure 7.10	Gender. Student responses to “What is your gender?” (questionnaire item 1).	247
Figure 7.11	Age when regular English lessons commenced. “Student responses to “How old were you when you first began regular English lessons in a school?” (questionnaire item 2).	248
Figure 7.12	<u>Linguistic environment:</u> Use of English between students and teachers. Student responses to “You speak English with teachers outside of class at school” (questionnaire item 5).	250
Figure 7.13	<u>Linguistic environment:</u> Use of English between students. Student responses to “You speak English with other students outside of class at school” (questionnaire item 6).	252
Figure 7.14	<u>Linguistic environment:</u> Use of English by students in daily life outside of school hours. Student responses to “You currently use English in your daily life outside of school hours” (questionnaire item 7).	254
Figure 7.15	<u>Extrinsic motivation to learn English:</u> Expect to use English in future work life. Student responses to “In your opinion, you will need to use English in the future in your work life after school” (questionnaire item 8).	257
Figure 7.16	<u>Extrinsic motivation to learn English:</u> Expect to use English in daily life after graduating from high school. Student responses to “You expect to use English in your daily life after graduating from high school” (questionnaire item 9).	259
Figure 7.17	<u>Extrinsic motivation to learn English:</u> Plan to study at an English medium university or college in the future. Student responses to “You plan to study at an English medium university or college in the future” (questionnaire item 10).	262
Figure 7.18	<u>Motivation to learn English:</u> Enjoy learning English at school. Student responses to “You enjoy learning English at school” (questionnaire item 11).	264

Figure 7.19	<u>English proficiency</u> : Self-assessment of English ability. Student responses to questionnaire items 19, 20, 21 and 22.	266
Figure 7.20	<u>English learning experiences</u> : Importance of several factors for successful English learning. Student responses to “In regards to your own English learning experiences, how important do you think the following are for you to be a successful English learner?” (questionnaire items 23-1 to 23-15).	268
Figure 7.21	<u>English learning experiences</u> : Importance of several factors for successful English learning. Student responses to “In regards to your own English learning experiences, how important do you think the following are for you to be a successful English learner?” (questionnaire items 23-1 to 23-15).....	273
 FIGURE in CONCLUSIONS		
Figure 8.1	Beneficial washback & impact contextualised as one of many motivational reasons why students learn (or do not learn) English well	286

Acronyms

AS-level Hong Kong Advanced Supplementary Level Examination

CE Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination

CLT Communicative Language Teaching

CMI Chinese Medium of Instruction

EDB Hong Kong Education Bureau, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

EFL English as a Foreign Language

ELT English Language Teaching

EMI English Medium of Instruction

EQ Emotional Intelligence

ETS Educational Testing Service

HKALE Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (AS-level) Advanced Supplementary Level Use of English Examination

HKCEE Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination English Language Examination

HKDSE Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education English Language Examination

HKEAA Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority

HREC Human Research Ethics Committee

IELTS International English Language Testing System

LET Local English Teacher (Usually a Hong Kong Chinese English Teacher who is a native Cantonese-speaking teacher of English)

MOI Medium of Instruction

NET Native-speaking English Teacher (employed by the school through EDB NET Scheme)

NMET National Matriculation English Test (China)

NVivo 9 Software that helps researchers manage, analyze and report on unstructured data like interviews, websites, images, videos and social media posts

P1/2/3/4/5/6 Primary 1/2/3/4/5/6

PASW Statistics SPSS PASW Statistics 18 (formerly SPSS Statistics) is an advanced statistical analysis software

S1/2/3/4/5/6/7 Secondary 1/2/3/4/5/6/7

SBA (School-based Assessment) (included in HKDSE examination results after HKEAA moderation)

TOEFL Test of English as an International Language (a trademark of ETS)

USQ University of Southern Queensland (Australia)

Synonyms

The words *examination*; *exam* and *test* are used interchangeably and are intended to convey exactly the same meaning as each other.

The terms *positive washback* and *beneficial washback* are used interchangeably and are intended to convey exactly the same meaning as each other.

The terms *negative washback* and *detrimental washback* are used interchangeable and are intended to convey exactly the same meaning as each other.

The HKALE is sometimes also referred to as the *old* examination, exam or test.

The HKCEE is sometimes also referred to as the *old certificate* examination, exam or test

The HKDSE is sometimes also referred to as the *new* examination, exam or test.