



## WASHBACK ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTION AND TEACHERS' TEACHING MATERIAL OF ENGLISH NATIONAL EXAMINATION 2017

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### Abstract

*This final project is intended to investigate the washback of the English national examination based on the students' perception and teachers' teaching material. The research used descriptive qualitative methods as its research methodology. The study shows that the national examination brings positive and negative effects to both students and teachers. For the students, the national examination triggers them to study harder than usual. Nevertheless, the national examination still makes the students anxious due to its usefulness as the consideration of their next school level entrance, which, consequently, makes them give more attention only to the subjects tested in the national examination. Furthermore, for the teachers, the national examination makes them work hard to supply the students with various media, methods, and books in the teaching-learning process in order to make the students getting ready to face the national examination. Nonetheless, the national examination that only tested the reading and writing skills makes the teachers do not teach the English skills material equally. In conclusion, the washback of the English national examination in SMP N 12 Semarang shows the indication of both positive and negative washback effects of the national examination.*

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## INTRODUCTION

National exam is a national test held by the government which designed to examine students' performance or competence (Bharati,

2007). However, the national examination has always been a hot topic every year. The implementation of the national examination that started firstly in 1950 until now has changed several times, from its format until its function for the students. However, this year, in 2017, the idea of the national examination moratorium was appeared by considering some harmful effects brought with it. One of the effects is the school citizens that put the national examination into a very important test which, as a result, makes the school gives a special treatment to the national examination subjects.

However, there are several reasons why students and teachers put the national examination as an important test. It happens due to the fact that even though nowadays the national examination is no longer used as the students' graduation determiner, it is still used as the students' determiner for continuing to the next school level. Therefore, the important role of the national examination for Indonesian students makes it categorized as Indonesian high-stakes test. According to Madaus (1988) in Pizarro (2010), high stake test is a test which affects the test-takers and the other people concerned significantly. Johnson et al. (2008) in Polesel, Duffer, & Turnbull (2012) define high stakes tests in the United States as

a test that affects the students' success, the teacher accountability, and the schools' reputation or the schools' funding. Therefore, it can be concluded that a high stake test is a test which has significant consequences for the success of the students.

However, the consequences of the national examination can be categorized into positive and negative consequences, just like what Tayeb et al. (2014) say about the high stake test. According to them, high-stakes test is a test that has serious implications directly and significantly to the micro and macro stakeholders which result is seen both positively and negatively. It can be said that a high stake test can bring effects, both positive and negative result, to the schools' citizen. Moreover, the positive and negative effects of a test are, however, widely known as washback.

Washback, or also known as backwash, is the testing on teaching and learning effect (Hughes, 1989, p. 1). In the next study, Green (2013) defines washback as test effect of a test preparation on the teaching and learning. According to Brown (2004), washback refers to the test effects on the instructions of the students test preparation. Furthermore, Bachman and Palmer (1996) define washback as the impact aspects that particularly attract both researchers of language testing and practitioners. Moreover, Shohamy, as cited in Bailey (1999) summarizes four key definitions that are useful in understanding the washback concept:

1. Washback effect refers to the impact that tests have on teaching and learning;
2. Measurement driven instruction refers to the notion that tests should drive learning;
3. Curriculum alignment focuses on the connection between testing and the teaching syllabus; and
4. Systemic validity implies the integration of tests into the educational system and the need to demonstrate that the introduction of test can improve learning. Tests can also have effects beyond the classroom. The wider effects of tests on the community as a whole, including the school, are referred to as test impact.

In conclusion, based on the definitions above, it can be concluded that washback is an effect of testing on teaching and learning process in the classroom in order to prepare the test itself.

Moreover, as an effect of tests, washback certainly has two sides, whether it is positive or negative, depending on whether it has a beneficial or harmful impact on educational practices. It is in line with the statement from Wall and Alderson (1993) that defines washback as a test that

can be powerful determiners of things happen in the classroom, both positively and negatively. However, Messick (1996) define washback as a serious influence of a test to the language teachers and learners for doing things they will not crucially otherwise do which promote or inhibit language learning. Therefore, from the saying, it can be concluded that washback as test effect can be powerful determiners that influence what teachers and learners do both positively and negatively.

Furthermore, according to Pearson (1988) in Cheng (2004), the washback effect of a test will bring a negative effect if it is unable to reflect the learning principles and course objectives to which the test supposedly relates; and it will bring a positive effect if the effects are advantageous and encourage the whole range of desired changes. Alderson and Wall (1993), on the other hand, stress that the quality of the washback effect might be independent of the quality of a test. Any test, a good one or a bad one, may bring beneficial or detrimental washback effects result.

However, a few years ago, in 2007, Sukyadi made a study about washback of the national examination in Indonesian content. During this year, the national examination was still used as students' graduation determiner. Therefore, when the students could not pass the exam, they would be stated not graduate from the school. Furthermore, the study showed that the washback effect brought positive and negative washback to the school's citizens. This fact, as a result, brought much anxiety to the students by thinking how to be able to graduate from the school. The pressure that the students get, in the end, made students did many things to be able to graduate from the school whether in a positive way or in a negative way.

Nevertheless, nowadays, the national examination is no longer used as graduation determiner. Started in 2016, the students' consideration for being stated graduate from a school is determined by their behavior in the school and their score in the school report card. It is no longer used the score of the National Examination for the graduation determiner.

The fact is that the national examination is no longer used as graduation determiner. Therefore, it built a question for the researcher. If the national examination is not used as graduation determiner anymore, does it still impact the students as much as it did years ago?

The question appeared motivates the researcher to conduct a research about washback of the English National Examination with Junior High School students as her subject. The study is intended to find the washback of the English national examination for the students' perception and teachers teaching material of SMP N 12 Semarang, the school that the researcher chose as her study place.

## **METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH**

In this study, the researcher uses a descriptive qualitative method as her research methodology. In a qualitative method, it utilizes certain methodologies and procedures to generate qualitative data in the forms of words, either spoken or written.

Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). According to Glass & Hopkins (1984) as cited by Trisanti (2016) descriptive research is a research method that involves collecting data that describe events and then organizes, tabulates, depicts, and describe the data collection. Furthermore, according to Arikunto (2010), the appropriate method for qualitative research is a mix of various data resources and method (multi method of data collection). For that reason, in her study, the writer did some data collection methods such as observation, interview, questionnaire, and also documentation for having a complete data collection.

The research was arranged in academic year 2016/2017. Firstly the researcher observed the school's area. She looked in detail about the school's surroundings that might affect students' pleasant of studying there. After did the observation, the writer interviewed the random ninth grade

students of the school from class A until class H (two students from each class) and also the English teachers who teach ninth grade. Then, to obtain more in-depth information, the writer gave a questionnaire to the same students and teachers who had been interviewed before. Furthermore, during the data collecting methods, the researcher also documented the book that the teachers used as their teaching material to support their teaching before and after the national examination preparation.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Washback of the English National Examination based on the Students' Perception**

According to the data collected from the interview and the questionnaire that is given to the students, it shows that based on the students' perception, the washback of the English national examination happens in SMP N 12 Semarang are both positive and negative washback.

According to Pan (2009), positive washback happens when a test can motivate students to work harder to have a sense of accomplishment and enhance learning. Moreover, in this research, the positive washback of the national examination is indicated by the students' statements that the national examination makes them study harder than they usually do. They admit that in the class, they pay their full attention to the teachers; which they do not usually do when they were in the eight and seven grades. In addition, in their house, they study by doing the national examination exercises almost every day. In short, from all of the students participate in this study almost all of them increase their time to study. They also do it on their own, without any command from their parents. They do it because they realize and conscious that they indeed need to study to prepare themselves in facing the national examination. It is also in line with Cheng, Watanabe, and Curtis (2004) statement that says positive washback means the positive attitude of both teachers and students towards tests/examination that make them work willingly and collaboratively towards its objectives.

Furthermore, from the interview held by the researcher, it can be concluded that the students are no longer afraid of the national examination. It is proven by the students who do not want the national examination to be deleted. They, instead, want it to be implemented because, according to them, it can trigger their motivation to study and, the most important one, it is used as their ticket to enter the next school level. If there is not any national examination, they do not know what kind of test they have to do. Moreover, the data from the questionnaire shows that all of the students want the national examination to be held again in the next year. They agree with it because they believe that the national examination can be used as a benchmark for the Indonesian education level and they are also sure that the national examination is able to not only help the students boost their English skill improvement but also measure their English skills as well.

Nevertheless, the national examination is not only brought positive washback but also the negative one. Even though it does not scare the students a lot, it still, however, stresses them out. It is because the result of the national examination which uses as their determiner to continue the next school level makes them still considers the national examination as a very important event. Even though the stress level they get by the national examination is not that much, it still has many reasons to make them study hard in preparing themselves to face it. As mentioned before, almost every day the students study for the national examination. Unfortunately, based on the students' admission, they study it by using exercise books; which consists of multiple choice items. According to Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996), although teachers may choose to follow the format of a test in their test preparation classes, they may have no solid evidence that this will help their students improve their scores. It is just that this seems an obvious way to approach the short-

term goal of passing the test. This study method definitely unable to develop students' knowledge because they study based on questions, not based on the material.

Moreover, the national examination makes the students use most of their study time only to study subjects tested in the national examination. They do not give much attention to the other subjects as much as they give to the national examination subjects. Mostly, the students say that they study in those subjects only near the school examination implementation.

### **Washback of the English the National Examination based on the Teachers' Teaching Material**

For the positive washback, based on the data collected, the national examination motivates the teachers to equip the students with the best material that advantageous for them to be ready to face the national examination. They use various media, methods, and books to provide best services for the students. Due to the long experiences in teaching the ninth grade, the teachers also do not find any difficulties in teaching students who will face the national examination. Furthermore, the teachers also do not feel under pressure or stressful because of the responsibility which given to them to teach students who will face the national examination. According to them, the joy of study is important above all. It makes them try their best to make their students enjoy their study, especially in studying English.

However, not only brings positive washback, the national examination also brings negative washback to the teachers. According to Alderson and Wall (1993), the results of negative washback can be seen in three areas, they are the content of teaching, the methodology, and the assessing of the students. Moreover, In the content of teaching as the washback of teachers' teaching material, the negative washback is showed when the teachers do not teach the whole textbook since they realize that some skills; namely speaking and listening, are not assessed due to the effectiveness of using the limited class time to practice the reading and writing skills. It is, however, happens in SMPN 12 Semarang. According to the teachers, they do not teach all of the English skills equally because the skills which are tested in the national examination are only reading and writing skills. It makes the teachers give more attention to the skills tested in the national examination, and give less attention to the listening and speaking skills. Moreover, Pan (2009) stated that it will be a negative washback when the tests encourage teachers to narrow the curriculum and lose instructional time and lead to "teaching to the test". The English teachers, furthermore, admit that they mostly teach following the table of specification (Standar Kompetensi Lulusan). They indeed teach based on the Standard Competence (Kompetensi Dasar) in the class but emphasize more to the material that is included in the table of specification. They also sometimes use the previous national examination questions as the students' exercise if they find the suitable for the material they are teaching.

Furthermore, the national examination raises a discrepancy between the national examination subjects and the non- national examination subjects, which leads to the emergence of jealousy between the teachers. According to Teacher 1, the national examination makes the non-national examination teachers feel jealous due to the different treatment which is given to the national examination subjects and non- national examination subjects. It is also because the students are also treated the national examination subjects differently than the non-national examination subjects. Therefore, it is the reason why the non- national examination teachers getting jealous with teachers of the national examination subjects. In addition, the national examination makes the younger English teachers do not want to teach ninth grade students because they are afraid of the weight given to the ninth grade teachers. It makes Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 have to teach ninth grade again and again. Furthermore, due to the special treatment given for the national examination that make the school hold a focus class of the national examination subjects after the implementation of the school examination, the ninth grade teachers who also teach seven and eight

graders have to leave their 7 and 8 classes to teach in the national examination focus class since it is held at the same time.

However, from the questionnaire and interview given to the teachers after the implementation of the English national examination, the overall English national examination also brings positive and negative washback. As mentioned above, the English national examination makes the teachers and students try their best to prepare the English national examination. The teachers work hard by providing and delivering the materials to the students. The students, on the other hand, try their best to study and be prepared well to face the English national examination. Nevertheless, on the day of the English national examination implementation, it is, ungratefully, not like what they expected due to the unsatisfying result of the students' national examination English score. According to the teachers, the English national examination questions are way too difficult for the students. In their opinion, the questions difficulty level is too hard for the students which make their English score unsatisfying. The teachers, however, are not quite sure with their opinion because the teachers do not know how the questions really are. It happens because due to the national examination which held via computer, the teachers are unable to access the website to see the questions since they had no account to do it. However, according to the teachers, they had already tried to access it by using the students' account, but they still could not do it because it was automatically closed right after the English national examination time was up. Moreover, the government also have not uploaded the questions so the teachers cannot see and analyze what makes their students have an unsatisfying score in English.

#### **Washback Type Happens in SMP N 12 Semarang**

From both students' perception and teachers' teaching material, it can be concluded that washback type happens in Senior High School 12 Semarang is both positive and negative washback.

For the positive washback, according to data collected, the national examination makes the teachers try their best to prepare their students to face the national examination. They use various media, methods, and books to provide best services for the students. Due to the long experiences in teaching the ninth grade, the teachers also do not find any difficulties in teaching students who will face the national examination. Furthermore, the teachers also do not feel under pressure or stressful because of the responsibility which given to them to teach students who will face the national examination. According to them, the joy of study is important above all. It makes them try their best to make their students enjoy their study, especially in studying English.

Moreover, for the students, the national examination makes them study harder than they usually do. From all of the students participate in this study; almost all of them increase their time to study. They also do it on their own, without any command from their parents. They do it because they realize and conscious that they need to study to prepare themselves in facing the national examination. In short, the students are no longer afraid of the national examination. It is proven by the data that shows all of the students who want national examination to be held again in the next year.

For the negative washback happens in State Junior High 12 Semarang. According to the teachers, they do not teach all of English skills equally because the skills tested in the national examination are only reading and writing skills. It makes the teachers giving more attention to the skills tested in NE, which are only reading and writing skills. They, however, do not give specific attention to the listening and speaking skills because they are not used in the English national examination. The teachers, furthermore, admit that they mostly teach based on the table of specification. They do not give much attention to the materials that will not appear in the table of specification.

For the students, however, the national examination still stresses them out. It was because the result of the national examination which uses as their determiner to continue to the next school level made them still considering the national examination as a very important test. Even though the stress level they got by the national examination is not that much, it still gives many reasons to make them study hard in preparing themselves to face it. Moreover, with the national examination, they use most of their study time only to study subjects tested in the national examination. They do not give much attention to the other subjects as much as they give to the national examination subjects. Mostly, the students say that they study in those subjects only near the school examination implementation.

However, this year's English national examination in SMP N 12 Semarang brings negative washback. After the English national examination implementation, the score shows decreasing average score result than last year's English national examination. It is, however, not only happened in SMP N 12 Semarang but also in almost every school in Indonesia. According to the teachers' assumption, it happens because the questions' difficulty levels are too high for the students. The teachers, however, cannot prove whether it is right or wrong because based on the computer-based national examination test type, people who are able to access the site are only those who have an account to do it. In this case, only the students who are able to access the site. Even though the teachers indeed want to log into the site and check the questions, they have no account to do it. According to the teachers, they have been trying to access the site by using the students' account. Nevertheless, after the time of the national examination is up, automatically, the site closes itself and no one able to access it anymore. From the teachers' admission, the government, however, has not uploaded the English national examination questions on the internet. It makes the teachers have no access at all to look and check the questions. Furthermore, the teachers' states that they also assume that because it is the first time their students do the English national examination on the computer, it may affect their concentration on doing the exam because it is a well-known secret that there are several English National examination texts which sometimes written in a long story. It might bore the students and makes their eyes tired for always looking at the screen on and on. In conclusion, their eye tiredness might affect their concentration and brought the worst result for the students' scores.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the washback analysis result of the English national examination in SMP N 12 Semarang in the academic year 2017, the conclusions could be drawn as follows.

This study explored washback from the National examination through the perception of students and the teaching material of the teachers. Therefore, the findings reveal the result of both positive and negative washback effects of the English national examination.

The positive washback of students' perception is indicated by the students that improve their study intensity and pay more attention to the teachers in the class. According to Pan (2009), positive washback happens when the test motivates the students to work harder to have a sense of accomplishment and thus enhance learning. Based on the data collected, it shows the students' admission that their motivation to study is increased significantly during the national examination preparation.

The indication of students' study improvement can be seen by the increment of the study time they spent in their house and their attentiveness during the English class due to their realization of the importance of the study for their own benefits.

However, the positive washback comes together with the negative one. According to the data collected, the result shows that in spite of the fact that the national examination is no longer used as

graduation determiner, the students still consider it as an important test that, as a result, brings anxiety to the students. Even though their anxiety is not too exaggerated, it still exists as a result of the national examination's score that used as the students' determiner to enter the next school level. It, however, becomes the best motives for the students to give most of their attention to study the national examination subject harder and, consequently, impact their study time for the other subjects. According to Brown (2004) (Brown, 2004) the students' treatment of the national examination and non-national examination subjects can be classified as a „test-driven learning“, which indicates the students' positive attitude toward learning to the test that determine their lives and, on the other hand, makes them giving little attention to the subject which does not directly contribute to pass the exam. In short, the anxiety of being unable to enter the school they targeted triggers their study motivation for the national examination subject and, on the other hand, makes them less concerned with the subjects which are not tested in the national examination since they have no influence for their entrance to the Senior High School.

Furthermore, the washback of the English national examination from the teachers' perspective on SMP N 12 Semarang is also both positive and negative. The positive washback indicates by the teachers' effort to equip the students with the best material and, in addition, illuminate the material that can help the students understand and be ready to face the national examination. Moreover, the teachers' effort to support students' readiness in facing the national examination is shown by the use of various media, methods, and books in the both regular and extra English classes. Besides, due to the long experiences in teaching the ninth grade, the teachers do not find any difficulties or feel under pressure of the responsibility of teaching students who will face the national examination. According to them, the joy of study is important above all. As the result, in teaching the students, they provide the best methods to make their students enjoy the study, especially in studying English.

However, not only positive washback, the negative washback is also found in the school. According to Alderson and Wall (1993), the results of negative washback can be seen in 3 areas, the content of teaching, the methodology, and the way in assessing the students. According to them, the indication of negative washback of the teaching content is, when the teachers do not teach the whole book because some skills are not more useful to spend the limited time they have. However, the negative washback on the content of teaching in SMP N 12 Semarang is indicated by the teachers who do not teach all of the English skills equally. It happens as a result of national examination which only tests reading and writing skills which, therefore, makes the teachers give less attention to the speaking and listening skills in order to help the students for being ready to face national examination.

Moreover, Pan (2009) said that if the tests encourage teachers to narrow the curriculum and lose instructional time and lead to “teaching to the test”, it is the result of negative washback. On the case of washback of the national examination in SMPN 12 Semarang, the teachers teach based on the Standard of Competence (Standard Kompetensi/SK) and Basic Competence (Kompetensi Dasar/KD) for the ninth grade students. Nevertheless, if the material is mentioned in the table of specification (Standar Kompetensi Lulusan/SKL), the teachers would emphasize more and illuminate the materials so the students can be easily understood them. Furthermore, the teachers also used the previous national examination questions as students' exercises if the texts were suitable to the material they taught.



Furthermore, the national examination raises a discrepancy between the national examination subjects and the non-national examination subjects, which leads to the emergence of jealousy between the teachers. According to Teacher 1, NE makes the non-national examination teachers envy because the national examination subjects which are treated differently compared with the non-national examination subjects.

In addition, due to the focus class of the national examination subjects which the school held after the school examination, it makes the ninth grade teachers who also teach 7 and 8 graders have to leave their 7 and 8 classes to be able to teach the national examination focus class since it is held at the same time. In short, it makes the seven and eight graders neglected by the teachers. Furthermore, this year's English national examination implementation in SMP N 12 Semarang brings both positive and negative washback. As mentioned before, the national examination motivates both teachers and students to do their best in preparing the national examination. However, after the national examination implemented, the result makes both teachers and students disappointed. According to the data collected by the researcher after the national examination, the national examination results show the decreasing average score of English than the last year's English national examination average score. It, however, is not only happened in SMP N 12 Semarang, but also in almost every school in Indonesia. According to the teachers' assumption, it happens because the questions' difficulty levels are too high for the students. The teachers, however, are not quite sure with their assumption because until the national examination result announced, the government has not uploaded the questions so the teachers cannot check how exactly the questions were.

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