

Washback Effects of English Reading Test in UTBK: Students' Insights

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Abstract: *Ujian Tulis Berbasis Komputer* (UTBK) is a high-stakes test for students. They strive to pass the test and be accepted in their targeted institution. As one of the subjects involved in UTBK, the English test surely has influenced English teaching & learning in 12th-grade classrooms. This impact is known as the washback effect. While most studies investigate the washback effect on a test as a whole subject, little is known about the effect on the particular part of the test. Thus, this case study explores the washback effect of the English reading test in UTBK on the students' perceptions, learning motivation, learning strategies, and learning content. The data were collected through online questionnaires distributed to six participants from different senior high schools. The deductive analysis found that the test has positive and negative effects seen from the students' insights. UTBK can avoid cheating and integrate students' English competence, but they are uncertain that it can improve their communicative competence. This study might enrich educational studies in English language teaching in general and language assessment in particular

INTRODUCTION

Many researchers have long recognized that high-stakes tests have washback effects on the teaching and learning process in the classroom (Kuang, 2020), and so does with *Ujian Tulis Berbasis Komputer* (UTBK), a national-scale state university entrance examination in Indonesia. Students strive to pass the test and be accepted in their targeted institution. As one of the high-stake tests, UTBK includes an English test. It surely influenced not only the feelings and attitudes (Pizarro, 2009) but also the learners' learning and strategic behaviors (Babaii & Damankesh, 2015), as well as the course content, teaching materials, and teaching activities (Kuang, 2020).

Previous studies regarding the washback effects of the high-stake tests mainly focus on the positive and negative washback on students' learning (Safitri, 2018; Dong et al., 2021) and teachers' teaching (Salehi & Yunus, 2012; and Ali & Hamid, 2020), or both (Wang, Yan, &

Liu, 2014). Some studies have been conducted regarding the washback effect on the more specific variables such as the future teachers' language proficiencies and their performances (Yildirim, 2010), curricular planning and instruction techniques (Ramezaney, 2014), students' achievement in reading comprehension (Khanshan, 2018), teaching pedagogy and students' learning behavior (Bailey, 2018), students' learning strategies (Thanh, 2020), and students' motivation and autonomy (Sadeghi, Ballidag, & Mede, 2021).

While most studies investigate the washback effects on the English test as a whole subject, little is known about the washback effects on the particular part of the test. Jianrattanapong (2011) investigated the positive washback effects of Thai university entrance examinations supporting hints to overcome some shortcomings in writing assessment and encouraged the practices and classroom activities that enable graduates to have more competence in English communication, particularly in writing skills. In comparison, Khanshan (2018) explored the washback effect of the entrance examination in an Iranian master course on the teachers' selection of reading texts in the classroom concerning the difficulty level and their effectiveness. However, no studies have investigated the influence of the high-stake test, particularly English reading comprehension, on the students' insights in an Indonesian context. Thus, the present study explores the washback effect of the English reading test in UTBK on the students' perceptions, learning motivation, learning strategies, and learning content. Realizing that UTBK is one of Indonesia's main state university entrance systems, this study provides essential findings for students, teachers, and stakeholders dealing with English section tests from which they can learn and reflect for daily practice purposes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

UTBK as the University Entrance Examination

UTBK is the state university entrance examination in Indonesia which is computer-based. It addresses third-grader senior high school students who want to continue their studies in higher education. According to Nizam as Plt. Director-General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology, the test is based on academic achievement, rank, and study program. The Head of *Lembaga Tes Masuk Perguruan Tinggi (LTMP)*, the national committee of the national university entrance test, Mochammad Ashari, added that the assessment rate is also concerned with two aspects: students' self-index and school index. Students' self-indexes, such as students' achievement and students' score reports, both these points will be combined and

scored by the committee. Then, in the school index, the committees do the school mapping. Therefore, the test result in UTBK is averaged with the school mapping and concern on the school track record in the last three years. As a result, the committees know the student with the highest score.

In addition, while students do the test, the assessment of UTBK employs Item Response Theory (IRT). IRT is a tool to validate the test instrument and is more advanced than traditional methods from a classical test theory (CTT) point of view (Carlson, 2021; de Ayala, 2013). UTBK provides multiple-choice questions on the computer screen. Those options are designed as distractors and possibly cause misconceptions if the students choose the wrong answer (Smith *et al.*, 2020). IRT is a unique approach to identifying the relationship between students' latent ability and the potential to choose certain answers (Kim *et al.*, 2021). The rapid increase of study makes educational research conduct IRT to validate test instruments in classical tests and some programming in study fields even at the university level (Santos *et al.*, 2020). LTMPT implements IRT in the process of UTBK scoring. Then, stages of IRT implemented by LTMPT are briefly explained as follows: (1) All correct answers get 1 point, and blank answers get 0 points. (2) Each correct answer will be analyzed at the difficulty level with another question using the IRT approach. (3) After getting the characteristics of each question, the next step is scoring. The more difficult a question, the score will be higher other questions (Alfari, 2021).

English is a subject included in the UTBK. The chief executive of the 2022 LTMPT, Prof. Budi Prasetyo Widyobroto, explained that English is necessary to be included in the test because rectors assume that the ability of English is needed in higher education. The goal of adding English as one of the materials in that test is to prepare the students in class-oriented on a global level (Zubaidah, 2021). Both materials of social humanities, science, and technology contain an English session test. These tested materials are similar to the lessons that are taught in school. This material differs from the TOEFL test because the TOEFL test involves a listening session, whereas UTBK 2022 doesn't contain a listening session. The English material is divided into several points: speed reading, topic and main idea, communicative purposes, implied or inferred information, detail information, transition question, vocabulary, reference, restatement, determining specific information, and summary of the text (Republika, 2022).

Washback Effects

Some scholars (Bailey, 1996; and Bachman & Palmer, 2010) define washback, also referred to as backwash, as the influence of testing or assessment on the teaching and learning process in an educational system. It occurs when teachers and learners do things they would not necessarily do if there was no test (Alderson & Wall, 1993). Although teaching comes before the test, English language teaching is often influenced by the tests conducted before the teaching process (Cheng, 1997).

Washback can affect not only the learner but also the program and the education system (Sadeghi *et al.*, 2021), as well as other factors such as the teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and training (Watanabe, 1996). Systematically, Hughes (2003) proposed three elements of the teaching and learning process impacted by the washback: participants, process, and product. Participants refer to the language teachers, students, parents, and other parties. Process refers to the participants' behavior, such as their motivation, belief, perception, learning strategies, activities, etc. Product refers to the language knowledge and skills acquired by the students, including the teaching materials, teaching method, and other components of the teaching and learning process, which eventually will affect the learning product.

The washback effects could be positive, neutral, or negative (Dorobat, 2007). Positive washback is the beneficial effect of tests, assessments, or examinations in teaching, learning, and educational practice (Wall & Alderson, 1992; Hughes, 2003). When a test has a good result that encourages teaching and learning practices, the test has a positive washback effect. Neutral washback means that the test does not affect educational practice. Contrary to the positive one, negative washback means that the test does not have beneficial effects; in other words, have a negative influence on educational practice (Cheng & Curtis, 2004).

METHODS

Research Design

The present study investigates the washback effect of the English reading test in UTBK on students' learning. Thus, a mixed method design was employed in this study by using both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. This mixed method was utilized to collect more comprehensive information on the washback effect from the students' insights.

Participants

The participants of this study were six students who had graduated from senior high schools in Central Java and had already taken UTBK. The participants were three male and three female students representing public or private schools in Indonesia. Four students were eighteen years old, and the others were seventeen. They were invited to participate in this study, and all agreed to participate.

Instruments

The researchers adapted a washback effect questionnaire from the study by Wang, Yan, & Liu (2014). For effective communication, the questionnaire was written in Bahasa Indonesia since the participants of this study were fresh graduates of senior high schools. The questionnaire consisted of Likert-type and multiple-choice questions with 13 items. The participants may confirm their perceptions by choosing five possible answers, namely (A) totally, (B) to a great extent, (C) to an average extent, (D) to some extent, and (E) totally not. The questionnaire inquired about the students' perceptions of the English reading test in UTBK, their learning motivation, strategies, and content. Completion of the questionnaire took 10 to 15 minutes.

Procedures

This case study took the form of a survey, which attempted to examine the washback effects of the English reading test in UTBK. The data were collected using the questionnaire based on the students' points of view regarding their personal experiences in UTBK. The questionnaire form was administered online to six students from different schools. To gain the trustworthiness of the study, the researchers also interviewed the participants to cross-check the data.

Data analysis

The results obtained from the questionnaire are presented in terms of frequency. Quantitatively, the data was calculated automatically to determine each category's percentage. Then, the data were analyzed deductively into several aspects: the students' perceptions of UTBK, their learning motivation and strategies in facing UTBK, and their learning content.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Six students from private and public schools at the senior secondary level in Indonesia answered the questionnaire through a google form link distributed after completing UTBK from different locations in Indonesia. The data were then calculated and analyzed based on students' perceptions, learning motivation, learning strategies, and learning content.

Students' Perceptions of UTBK

The survey results related to the students' perceptions of UTBK are presented in the following table.

Table 1. Students' perceptions of UTBK

Questions	A	B	C	D	E
Q1	0%	50%	0%	50%	0%
Q2	16.7%	50%	0%	33.3%	0%
Q3	16.7%	16.7%	0%	66.7%	0%
Q4	33.3%	16.7%	16.7%	16.7%	16.7%
Q5	66.7%	16.7%	16.7%	0%	0%

Questions 1-5 related to students' perceptions of UTBK 2022. In Table 1, the score showed that 50% of the students agree that they understand the implementation of UTBK 2022, starting from the content, format, and rating scale. However, the rests confirm that they do not understand the implementation of UTBK 2022. From the second question in the table, we can also see that 50% of participants, to a great extent, agree that UTBK can stop cheating behavior on exams, 33.3% of students consider choosing to some extent UTBK can stop cheating behavior on exams, and a student thinks that he totally agrees. Students' perception of what extent UTBK objectively and actually reflect their integrated English competence mostly answers to some extent. Two other students answered with different perceptions that UTBK is to a great extent and totally agree objectively and actually reflects their integrated English competence. For question number 4, as is shown in the Table 1, 33.3% of students chose totally agree, 16.7% of students chose to a great extent, 16.7% of participants chose to an average extent, and the last 16.7% of participants chose totally not. It is indicated that UTBK is not

really encouraging the participants to improve their English communicative competence. In addition, 66.7% of the participants greatly support the implementation of UTBK 2022.

The questionnaire results correspond to the previous study by Damankesh & Babaii (2015) that tests tend to build students' perceptions, one of which deals with students' mental and linguistic abilities. It is confirmed that they perceive UTBK as an effective way to avoid cheating behavior and integrate students' linguistic knowledge. It can be explained that language learning and teaching is affected by assessment factors, such as test, and other factors, such as social-psychological and economy (Ali & Hamid, 2020). On the other hand, it doesn't eventually improve students' communicative competence. It is because students tend to focus on memorizing vocabulary, sentence structures, as well as strategies to answer questions rather than improving their communicative competence (Bailey, 2018). Further, this study also suggested the need to involve a test of communicative ability in the framework of the entrance examination process. Moreover, Yildirim (2010) also reported that high schools tend to overemphasize reading, grammar, and vocabulary. Meanwhile, speaking, listening, and writing skills get little attention. It turns out to be a consideration for EFL educators and stakeholders.

Students' Learning Motivation

The sixth of the questionnaire is related to the students' learning motivation. The question is, "To what extent does UTBK stimulate my interest and enthusiasm in learning English?". The results of the questionnaire are shown in the Table 2 below.

Table 2. Students' learning motivation

Question	A	B	C	D	E
Q6	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	0%	0%

Question number 6 concerns learners' motivation to learn English to prepare to face UTBK. On a scale of 33.3%, the two students agree that TBK stimulates their interest and enthusiasm for learning English. The other two students with the same percentage think that English, to a great extent, stimulates their interest and enthusiasm for learning English. The last 33.3% of students tend to choose an average extent for English to stimulate their interest and enthusiasm for learning English. There was no clear dominant effect of UTBK on students' motivation. A previous study explored that there was no washback of English text on students'

motivation (Sadeghi et al., 2021). Meanwhile, Dong et al. (2021) reported that English tests had more intense effects on English learning motivation, especially among male students. This learning motivation improved especially for students with low and medium English proficiency levels, while students with higher level of proficiency performed fewer effects.

Students' Learning Strategy

Based on the question lists, students' learning strategy to enhance their reading competence to do the UTBK is shown in the Table 3 below.

Table 3. Students' learning strategy

Questions	A	B	C	D	E
Q7	50%	16.7%	33.3%	0%	0%
Q8	16.7%	33.3%	16.7%	33.3%	0%
Q9	33.3%	50%	16.7%	0%	0%
Q10	33.3%	50%	16.7%	0%	0%
Q11	33.3%	50%	16.7%	0%	0%

From the data collected by answering the questionnaire, 50% of students confirm that they totally emphasize reading comprehension skills in the reading section at UTBK. The other 16.7% of students claim they are merely too a great extent to emphasize reading comprehension skills. The fitter of 33.3% of students chooses to an average extent on their developing reading comprehension at UTBK. The belief that the most effective way of improving reading competence is mostly the activity of reading journals or newspapers also increases through media such as novels, films, and song lyrics. In the new passage, they set the strategy to focus on understanding the discourse text comprehension. Then, before reading in detail, 50% of students first skim the whole passage to identify the theme and the author's purpose as their strategy in UTBK reading comprehension. In the other strategy to understand the meaning of the text, half of the participants set a strategy to learn systematically, from interpreting each vocabulary to connecting it with other sentences.

In line with Damankesh & Babaii (2015), English tests influence students' test-taking and test-preparation strategy use. It is revealed from this study that students employed various strategies before taking the test and during the test. The students also used different learning

media to help them. Their understanding of the test coverage also influenced their strategy; thus, they can take the most effective learning strategy. Their strategy was also influenced by their learning autonomy and English proficiency levels (Sadeghi et al., 2021), as reflected in the students' strategy in interpreting vocabulary and implementing the use of the vocabulary.

Students' Learning Content

Two questions are provided on the questionnaire to explore students' learning content to face UTBK 2022. Hence, the result is drawn in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Students' learning content

Questions	A	B	C	D	E
Q12	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Q13	0%	0%	83.3%	16.7%	0%

In recent decades, learning activity in the classroom has been emphasized more on the student-centered approach. Therefore, students can broadly freely choose the material to support their learning. The question that researchers used to analyze the students' learning content was written as "Except for the textbooks, the materials that I frequently use are". Then, 100% of the participants choose the same answer that video and audio materials (movies, music, and news report) are their options to enrich their knowledge. Five other students' learning content came from the internet as a source of information, and one student chose the English course. Some students learn autonomously using internet-based sources, while others choose English courses to help them learn for the test. It cannot be denied that nowadays, the internet has provided many learning sources for any field of study. The use of those learning sources was then determined by the students' knowledge level and autonomy. Thus, the various learning contents used by the students are closely related to their English proficiency levels (Dong et al., 2021) and their learning strategies (Sadeghi et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

The UTBK 2022 is applied in many state universities in Indonesia for the students' requirement to pass the test and be accepted in their targeted institution. The test also includes English as one of the tests between two other tests in UTBK. The result of the study emerges in four categories of washback effects of the English reading test in UTBK from students'

insights, including students' perception of UTBK, learning motivation, learning strategy, and students' learning content.

First, based on the five questions, the student's perception of UTBK 2022 can conclude that half of the participants agree that they understand the implementation of UTBK 2022. Half of the students believe to a great extent, that UTBK can stop the cheating habit. Most students confirm that UTBK objectively and actually reflects my integrated English competence. In range, the participants are not sure that UTBK can improve their English communication skills.

But, the very high support of the participants for the implementation of UTBK 2022. Second, there is no negative answer about the extent to which UTBK can stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm for learning English. Third, there are five strategies to answer the difficulty of doing the UTBK examination: emphasizing reading comprehension skills, increasing reading materials such as journals or newspapers and increasing vocabulary through media that I like such as novels, films, or song lyrics, understanding of the discourse text comprehension when they find a new passage, skim the whole passage first to identify the theme and the author's purpose, and to enhance their ability to understand English text they do the systematically learning. Fourth, to enrich students learning content, they mostly choose video and audio materials (movies, music, and news report) and the internet while learning English.

LIMITATIONS AND STUDY FORWARD

This study might enrich educational studies in English language teaching in general and language assessment in particular. Nevertheless, this research had a limited number of participants. Thus, other researchers interested in the same topic can likely involve more participants and employ different methods to enrich the data findings. In addition, it can invite teachers as participants to analyze the washback effect of UTBK from teachers' perceptions to make the research findings more robust.

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