Abstract: In educational research, tests have been considered one of the dominant determiners of what happens in classrooms that can influence teaching and learning activities - English proficiency tests in particular. In this paper, the influences have been classified directly and indirectly, either positively or negatively, or both. Therefore, the positive or negative influences of tests are related to washback. This study investigated how The Vietnam Six-levels of Foreign Language Proficiency Framework and its English proficiency tests affect institutional policies and teaching of English as foreign language for non-English major students at National University of Arts Education in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Keywords: washback, framework, institutional policies and language teaching.

1. Introduction

Today, English has become a global language that offers the chances to integrate into all the professions and thus the importance of English has flashed an increasing concentration in the development of English language teaching in numerous countries (Khamkhien, 2010: 757). In Vietnam, English has been instructed nationwide as a compulsory subject at both lower, upper secondary level and tertiary level; and as an elective at primary level since 1982 to present. Notwithstanding its impact, English language teaching and learning for non-major learners in Vietnam are contrary to
all expectations as the language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing have not been appreciated. Furthermore, most of the teachers have still taught English with traditional techniques, as teacher-centered or the grammar-translation method for many years. Conversely, for fulfilling the needs of a modern society in the globalization epoch, Vietnamese Prime Minister issued Decision № 1400/QĐ-Ttg of September 30, 2008, approving the scheme “Foreign Language Teaching and Learning in the national education system during 2008 – 2020”. The scheme aims at implementing an educational innovation and evaluation of foreign language teaching and learning at all levels in the national education system. Through this, The Vietnam Six-levels of Foreign Language Proficiency Framework (KNLNNVN for short) is issued. This framework consists of six levels that are compatible with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR for short) and other common international language proficiency levels and used as reference when writing curriculums and teaching plans. Among these, with undergraduate institutions that are not specialized in foreign languages, the new language-training program must require a language proficiency of KNLNNVN level 3 upon graduation. Based on this framework, English Proficiency Test from level 2 to level 5 (EPT.2 and EPT.3-5 for short) is conducted and issued. EPT.2 is compatible with A2 of CEFR and EPT.3-5 is compatible with B1, B2 and C1 of CEFR. It thus became a very high-stakes test with serious consequences for non-English major students. Teachers and students began to learn towards KNLNNVN and EPT and its preparation courses have appeared in the Vietnamese market. University of Arts Education’s (NUAE) teachers of English are the core trainers in these. KNLNNVN and EPT appear to strongly affect NUAE teachers of English, and hence it was stated that all policies of teaching English as Foreign Language (EFL) would change that lead to the change of the teaching EFL practices. Moreover, NUAE is Undergraduate institution that is not specialized in foreign languages, thus the Rector decided to apply for English proficiency of KNLNNVN level 2 (A2) upon graduation from 2016 to 2019.

On the basic of the background of the Vietnam educational innovation context, particularly the context at NUAE, the paper concentrated on an investigation of the washback existence of KNLNNVN and EPT.2 on institutional policies and the teaching of EFL for non-English major students at NUAE.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The definition of “Washback” and “Framework” in this study

In applied linguistics, the term “washback” is clarified to be the influence or impact of tests on curriculum/ syllabus design, language teaching and language
testing (Morrow, 1986; Pearson, 1988; Hughes, 1989; Messick, 1996; Alderson and Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Bailey, 1999; and others).

In the educational evaluation literature, Fitz-Gibbon (1996) defined impact as any effect of the service [or of an event or initiative] on an individual or group. This definition accepts that the impact can be positive or negative and may be intended or accidental. When holding this definition, measuring impact is about identifying and evaluating change (Streatfield and Markless, 2009: 134).

Regarding this, Messick (1989) expanded the concept of consequential validity, changing the previous notions about score interpretation and test use. The concept of washback in test validity research is primarily associated with Messick’s concept of consequential validity. Therefore, washback is defined as an “instance of the consequential aspect of construct validity and a focal point of validity research” (Messick, 1996), which covers components of test use, the impact of testing on test-takers and educators, the interpretation of results by decision-makers, and any possible misuses, abuses, and unintentional effects of tests. The influences of tests on teachers, students, institutions, and society are accordingly considered one type of validity evidence. Many other researchers have also emphasized the meaning of justifying test use and exploring its consequences (Cronbach, 1988; Shohamy, 2000).

Council of Europe (2001) (CoE for short) defined the term “general competences” are those not specific to language, but which are called upon for actions of all kinds, including language activities. Accordingly, the term “competences” are referred to the sum of knowledge, skills and characteristics that allow a person to perform actions (Dante G. et al., 2014: 833) and the “framework” has been used to define levels of proficiency that allow learners’ progress to be measured at each stage of learning and on a life-long basis (CoE, 2001: 9). Furthermore, the Framework provides a common basis for developing language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. (CoE, 2001).

To sum up, “washback” and washback of framework phenomenon also plays a key role in the process of educational innovation and evaluation in language teaching and learning. Therefore, the term “washback” was defined by Messick (1996) and “framework” of CoE (2001) that will be used in this study to describe the influences of tests and “framework” on teachers, students, institutions, and society because of its consequential validity.

2.2 Washback Models and some empirical studies on language teaching

The field of washback has been investigated by many researchers around the world. Among these, the washback model of Alderson and Wall (1993) is
considered a classic and landmark study. Alderson and Wall (1993: 120-121) developed the fifteen hypotheses (WHs for short) that combine different possible aspects of washback, including the effect on what to teach/learn, how to teach/learn, the rate and sequence of teaching/learning, the degree and depth of teaching/learning and the attitudes to content, method, etc. of teaching/learning. Alderson and Hamp-Lyons model (1996: 296) reviewed and corrected WHs of Alderson and Wall (1993) that “tests will have different amounts and types of washback on some teachers and some learners than other teachers and learners”.

Regarding this, Hughes’s model (1993) differentiates between participants; processes and products in the context of teaching and learning that discover those parts may be affected by tests. A few years later, based on Hughes’s model (1993), Bailey (1996) conducted her model (Figure 1). Her model is innovative in that it is grounded in empirical research evidence from educational revolution taking place in the Hong Kong context Bailey’s model (1996) describes the participants (include students, teachers, materials writers, curriculum designers, and researchers) and products (learning, teaching, new materials and curricula, research results). However, she does not clarify the process that means her model did not describe why the participants did what they did. She stated that a test first directly influences the awareness and behaviors of the participants towards their tasks, and these awareness and behaviors consecutively influence what processes the participants will attain their own expected products. Lastly, the term “washback” means not only the consequences of testing on three parts (participants, processes and products) but also their response toward the test. It highlights the perceptions and attitudes participants and how three parts affect what they do (Bailey, 1999:10). Therefore, three parts are the research central of this study.

Figure 1. Bailey’s washback model (1996)
Accordingly, Nguyen (1997) was adapted from the previous research in the field of washback, among which the study of Wall and Alderson (1993) was the point of departure and the foundation for her study. Nguyen (1997) conducted a research in Vietnam concerning washback effects of the international English language testing system (IELTS) at Foreign Languages College (FLC), Vietnam National University in Hanoi (VNU). Nguyen (1997) designed two models of washback on the teacher-level and student-level (Figure 2). Her study explored how an external standardized test of English language – represented by IELTS that affects the institutional curriculum, the teaching and learning of EFL for English major students at FLC, VNU.

![Figure 2. Nguyen’s model of washback on the teacher-level (1997)](image)

Drawing on washback models and some empirical studies on language teaching of Alderson and Wall (1993), Alderson and Hamp-Lyon (1996) and Nguyen (1997), my study will be designed to investigate “Washback of The Vietnam Six-levels of Foreign Language Proficiency Framework on Teaching and Learning English as Foreign Language for non-English major students at National University of Arts Education”. However, due to the scope and length of this paper, I therefore focus on discovering “the washback existence of institutional policies and EFL teaching at NUAE”.

3. Methodology and data

This study collected data of three kinds: (1) documents analysis, (2) semi-structured interview and (3) classroom observations (videotapes). However, the data from (1) and (2) is considered backdrop to the discussion (3) because of the extent of the data and space limitation.

3.1 A description of subjects of the work at NUAE (participants, ages, mixed-big sized class, institutional policies and language competence of study)
The subjects of the project were Rector, leaders of Training Department and Foreign Language Center, 12/13 teachers of English of NUAE. NUAE is Undergraduate institution that is not specialized in foreign languages; the new language-training program must require a language proficiency of KNLNNVN level 3 upon graduation. However, because of limitation of training time and English in mixed-big sized classes (from 55 to over 65 students) in a large room which is 105 square meters in area, no microphone, and thus, some students could not listen to all lessons clearly. Students were from 18 to 22 years of age. They were from different Northern areas of Vietnam. Although, they had 3 years of learning English at high schools, their English proficiency was at beginner level (A0), the Rector of NUAE decided to apply for English proficiency of KNLNNVN level 2 (A2) upon graduation. As a result, EPT.2 (A2) of KNLNNVN will be used for University graduation.

3.2 Conducting the document analysis

The researcher collected all institutional policy documents on innovating curriculum, methods of assessment the official course documents, and supplementary materials according to KNLNNVN and EPT.2 for getting the data because such artifacts of everyday experience can provide information about what has been encouraged or discouraged; about what has happened or will happen.. etc. Therefore, such documents are particular useful for educational research. For getting the exact information, thick descriptions were transcribed into written form and would be assessed in short, and translated precisely.

3.3 Conducting the observations

After receiving the permission of all participants, four classes were chosen for videotaping, and then the videotapes were transcribed into written form. The lesson videotaping happened from October to December 2016 and March 2018. 20 English lessons were observed. 55 minutes of every observation was the length of each lesson period. Furthermore, when observing, the researcher carried out at least fifteen minutes of some individual interviews for triangulation. Among these, the researcher recorded the attitudes of the teachers and students and the discussion between the participants when taking tasks were allocated in order to discover what teachers used and taught, and how students responded. The researcher also discovered how EPT.2 influences teachers and students. For getting the exact information, thick descriptions and the responds of teachers and students in a natural manner, teachers and students were explained about the observation. These descriptive data would be assessed and treated according to their common outcomes.
3.4 Conducting the interviews

After observations, the interviews were held because the participants had a few experiences of teaching and learning English by that time. The open-ended questions were designed to attain the best feasible quality of responses from the members because the open-ended questions were used to add the depth of the data via participants’ individual experience. Moreover, these open-ended questions were applied in both individual interviews and focus group. This combination helped to focus on getting the specific information that would be comparable across the group of participants. I carried out at least five 1-hour informal individual interviews and focus groups with 13 participants in separate classrooms. After receiving the permission of all participants, all formal individual interviews were audiotaped and transcribed in short, and translated precisely.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Results of Document Analysis

As stated in the methodology, document analysis involved institutional policies of KNLNNVN on curriculum, the official course documents, methods of assessment and supplementary materials used by teachers. Relevant details of the analyses are given below.

4.1.1. Curriculum and methods of assessment

(a) Teaching contents and methods of assessment have been changed according to institutional policies of KNLNNVN. Table 4.1.1 illustrates the changes in teaching contents and methods of assessment

Table 4.1.1 The changes in English teaching contents and methods of assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Teaching hours of semester 1</th>
<th>Teaching hours of semester 2</th>
<th>Teaching Contents of semester 1</th>
<th>Teaching Contents of semester 2</th>
<th>Formative assessment</th>
<th>Summative assessment (achieve-ment test)</th>
<th>Learning outcomes of University graduation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>peri- 80 ods</td>
<td>peri- 55 ods</td>
<td>From Unit 1 to Unit 14 of Lifeline textbook (Elementary)</td>
<td>From Unit 1 to Unit 6 of Lifeline textbook (Pre-intermediate)</td>
<td>Questions and Answers or Writing Test (Grammar or Reading exercise)</td>
<td>Writing Test (Grammar and Reading exercise)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(b) In 2017, some more authentic materials are included as the official documents (see in 4.3).

(c) Teachers of English are encouraged to use texts taken from journals, books and news for listening/speaking/reading and writing skills. The practices are designed by teachers were short answer questions, gap-filling/identifications sentences/paragraphs, etc. that are identical to EPT.2 of KNLNNVN or practice tests at A1 and A2 level.

The analysis of the official course documents indicated the official course documents were set before 2013 for semester 1 and 2 were not EPT.2 of KNLNNVN or practice tests at A1 and A2 level. This shows that the impact of those on the teaching before 2013. Since 2014, a new trend has been seen: teachers of English have been encouraged to use a variety of authentic materials besides the official course documents. Thus, caution must be taken when interpreting the official course documents. This is also an issue that was mentioned in the interview with leaders and teachers.

4.1.2. Supplementary materials used by teachers

Results of the analysis of the supplementary materials practiced by teachers of English and students indicated they used various authentic materials (See Appendix I) – including commercial publications, journals, books and news for listening/speaking/reading and writing skills. They covered most CEFR materials that were available in Vietnam. Teachers and students did not use other kinds of materials (This is dealt with in the results of the interview). The effects of Cambridge ESOL (ESOL for short) tests were seen in the official course documents, but these materials were chosen after 2013. Teachers of English tended to use materials from CEFR and ESOL sources to prepare students for semester examinations and EPT.2 examination. The analysis designates that other kinds of materials have no any influences on teachers and students. It must thus be deduced that EPT.2 and ESOL examinations have an impact on the choice of materials for teachers of English and students.

Leaders claimed that the formative assessment and semester examinations of English are similar to EPT.2 and ESOL tests (apart from the sub-writing of | 2017 | peri-80 ods | peri-55 ods | Four skills and grammar/vocabulary of KNLNNVN level 1 (A1) | Four skills and grammar/vocabulary of KNLNNVN level 2 (A2) | Speaking Test/Reading Test/Listening Test or Writing Test | Writing Test (Objective test and Writing test) | EPT.2 of KNLNNVN level 2 ((A2) |
semester examinations). However, because of time limitation and mixed-big size class, one of four sub-tests (listening/speaking/reading/writing) is applied for both formative assessment and semester examinations at NUAE. The analysis indicated that a part of the semester examination focused on testing the mastery of grammar structures and vocabulary and that type of English test had stayed unchanged. There have been changes in the nature of the examination and the changes in question look undifferentiated to EPT.2 and ESOL item types and content (see Table 4.1.1). Hence, the interpretation must be that the semester examinations were shaped on the EPT.2 and ESOL examinations in the four sub-tests (listening/speaking/reading/writing) as far as item types and content are concerned. However, there are some adjustment in terms of length of time for different sub-tests and the level of difficulty of each test for different semester levels. This results in the number of questions for each sub-test being different. The scores of the examination still followed the traditional Vietnamese scale as a 10-point scale with point 1 = lowest and point 10 = highest. The differences in the score can be explained by recalling that the semester examinations are achievement tests whilst EPT.2 and ESOL tests are proficiency tests. Nonetheless, it must be deduced that the semester examinations are EPT.2 and ESOL-type tests.

4.2. Results of Interviews

Informal conversational interviews were conducted with 12/13 teachers of English after four-classroom observations and in groups at the office during tea break. Semi-structured interviews were held with the Rector, leaders of Training Department and Foreign Language Center of NUAE. Relevant results are presented below.

100% teachers of English had already obtained M.A. degrees. One of them got C1 and four other teachers had obtained M.A. degrees at universities in either Australia or the USA. However, all teachers experienced over 7 years of teaching EFL and thus they could understand the changes on the national and institutional policies on EFL teaching and learning between 2013 and 2014. 100% of teachers often collected materials of CEFR, EPT.2 and ESOL-type to use in class. They also asserted that there were many practice tests for EPT.2 and ESOL examinations. They reported that they had been using them because materials for ESOL tests were included in the office course documents and therefore they did not design task for students. They also expressed that they wanted their students to be familiar with numerous text contents and types of the principle of the EPT.2 and ESOL tests. This helps the indication that there is interaction between teaching and learning and that this is interaction is related to the washback of KNLNNVN and EPT. From these comments, they may be inferred that there had been many more materials
on the market that were designed to prepare for EPT.2 and ESOL examinations. It could also be said that teachers reacted differently to the needs of the test and self-designing tasks were also a problem for inexperienced teachers.

The selection of supplementary materials is an indicator of KNLNNVN and EPT washback on the use of materials. Some of teachers did not think that they taught to the tests, they claimed that they taught to expand student’s English. Thus, teachers described that reveal the trend to advocate the EPT.2 and ESOL tests. In addition, nearly 70% of teachers said that they change their teaching methods to demand the changes of formative assessment and semester exams.

According to the Rector of NUAE, the number of students admitted to NUAE was increasing to meet the demands of society, and society demanded a high quality of training outcomes, particularly English proficiency of students. That was why the assessment of EFL learning outcomes at NUAE must be innovated to meet the necessities of society. The Rector asserted that he wanted to maintain the institutional policies of KNLNNVN on English teaching next years because of its useful. Head of Training department and two Vice Directors of Foreign Language Center asserted that the semester exams of English were shaped on EPT.2 and ESOL tests and that they were EPT.2-type, except for writing sub-test and the score scheme. Furthermore, teachers of English were acquainted with EPT.2 and ESOL tests and they understood that the semester exams of EFL were shaped on EPT.2 and ESOL tests. They believed that their tests were standardized because their tests were designed on EPT.2 and ESOL tests. Therefore, the semester exams of EFL positively influenced curriculum designers, the EFL teaching and learning at NUAE. Their answers illustrated that the tests in use are evidence of EPT.2 of KNLNNVN washback.

In short, the responses of teachers and leaders revealed that there were EPT.2 and KNLNNVN washback on what teachers used and on semester exams or in other words, teaching contents. Teachers agreed that formative assessment and semester exams corresponded to one of EPT.2 sub-tests. Nonetheless, few teachers supported that there was evidence of content washback on what they used. Accordingly, KNLNNVN and EPT.2 have various types of washback on some teachers and learners than on other teachers and learners. This is relevant to result of Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) and Nguyen (1997).

4.3. Results of observations

Because investigations of KNLNNVN and EPT.2’s influences on EFL teaching at NUAE, I observed two teachers to see whether washback existed in their classrooms. I observed two classes of English A2 in semester 2. Two teachers
and their students agreed to be videotaped. Two teachers were both female, with ten years of experience. Two teachers and their students used materials from CEFR type. Textbooks were English File third edition A2 (Oxford, 2012). The supplementary materials are Cambridge Key English Test 1, 2 (CUP, 2003) and English Grammar in Use (Murphy, 2011). Two teachers focused on four skills, grammar and vocabulary. Students worked in pair or group-work and made presentations and then two teachers corrected their errors. Because of time limitation, not all students could have a chance to speak English.

In short, the result of observations corresponded to the responses of teachers and leaders. Two teachers used a variety of materials from CEFR type. These materials are in line with the EPT.2 of KNLNNVN’s approach. The methodology of two teachers was communicative approach. It was hard to define whether the EFL teaching methodology was influenced by EPT.2 of KNLNNVN’s approach or by the methodology of the used materials. However, this is an indication of EPT.2 of KNLNNVN’s existence on EFL teaching.

To sum up, KNLNNVN and EPT.2 have been considered one of the dominant determiners of what happens in classrooms that influence EFL teaching activities at NUAE. The influences have been classified directly and indirectly, either positively or negatively. The curriculum, the official course documents, methods of assessment, methods of teaching and supplementary materials are innovated by the positive influences of tests. However, some inexperienced teachers did not design the tasks for students but relied on the available materials in the market that were related to negative washback.

5. Conclusions and Suggestions

The insights from the findings show that KNLNNVN (framework) and EPT.2 influence both positively and negatively the institutional policies on curriculum, the assessment of EFL learning outcomes and the teaching of EFL for non-English major students at NUAE. Accordingly, the findings suggest that Ministry of Education and Training should issue a set of pre-constructed English tests of KNLNNVN that is modeled on EPT or ESOL tests and then all schools would draw from this set to design their own version. In addition, teachers should be trained in educational evaluation and measurement that help them to design tasks or tests for their own students. This should help Vietnamese policy-makers, educators, and test writers, test users, teachers of English to prepare favorable conditions for enhancing the beneficial washback of KNLNNVN and EPT.2. The findings of KNLNNVN (framework) have contributed to the knowledge of the nature of washback and opened a new view to identify their different levels of washback effects.
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TÁC ĐỘNG CỦA KHUNG NĂNG LỰC NGOẠI NGỮ VIỆT NAM ĐẾN CÁC QUY ĐỊNH VÀ HOẠT ĐỘNG GIẢNG DẠY TIẾNG ANH CHO SINH VIÊN KHÔNG CHUYÊN NGỮ TRƯỞNG ĐẠI HỌC SƯ PHẠM NGHỆ THUẬT TRUNG ƯƠNG

Đinh Thị Phượng Hoa

Tóm tắt: Trong nghiên cứu giáo dục thì các đề thi nói chung và các đề thi tiếng Anh nói riêng được xem như một trong những nhân tố ảnh hưởng đến những hoạt động dạy và học sẽ xảy ra trong lớp học. Trong bài viết này, các ảnh hưởng của các loại đề thi được phân tích xem xét cả mặt tiêu cực/tích cực và trực tiếp/giản tiếp. Do đó, các ảnh hưởng tích cực hoặc tiêu cực của các đề thi được gọi là tác động của đề thi.

Bài viết cũng nghiên cứu xem xét Khung năng lực ngoại ngữ Việt Nam và định dạng đề thi tiếng Anh có ảnh hưởng như thế nào đến các quy định và hoạt động giảng dạy tiếng Anh cho sinh viên không chuyên ngụ tại Trường Đại học Sư phạm Nghệ thuật Trung ương.

Từ khóa: tác động, KNLNNVN, năng lực, các quy định và dạy học ngoại ngữ

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