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The Impact of Assessment on Teaching and Learning

Creating positive washback

What is this paper about?

Tests and other forms of assessment play a significant role in shaping classroom practices. They influence how teachers and students approach teaching and learning, their engagement with the subject and materials, and their broader perspectives on education. But how strong is the connection between assessment and teaching? Are teachers restricted to teaching language based on how language exams are designed? Can policy makers improve teaching practices by changing how languages are assessed? This paper argues that the relationship between assessment and teaching is more nuanced and complex than it might initially appear.

So, what should happen next?

There are two major implications which reflect two sides of the same coin.

- When educational leaders or policy makers aim to improve teaching practices, they should consider more than just the assessment aspect of a programme. There is a wide range of factors that influence teachers' behaviours in the classroom.
- If teachers find that the priorities of an exam do not align with their students' actual language learning needs, they should not feel constrained by the design of the exam. Teachers can find ways to prepare their students for the exam while also addressing their broader language learning needs.

Key takeaways

Teachers

Be clear

1 Be clear and explicit about the specific skills and knowledge required to pass the exam.

Identify language and skills

2 Identify language and skills that are important for your students but not directly assessed in the exam, and incorporate these into your lessons and into your formative assessments.

Policymakers and educational institutions

Invest in assessment literacy

3 Invest in assessment literacy training, so that teachers and administrators can make informed decisions about assessment practices and relevant teaching approaches.

Align with educational goals

4 Align school curricula, assessment formats, learning materials, and professional development with the educational goals of the programme.

Create effective teacher training

5 Ensure that teacher training and ongoing professional development emphasize effective language learning principles, helping educators focus on meaningful communication and skill development rather than just test preparation.

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Introduction

Tests and other forms of assessment play a crucial role in language learning. Not only do they measure students' proficiency and track progress, but they also shape the tasks teachers choose and the pedagogical strategies they employ.

This relationship between assessment and teaching, known as **washback**, is more than a simple cause-and-effect dynamic. It involves multiple factors, including the attitudes, beliefs, motivations, and actions of key stakeholders—policymakers, test developers, teachers, and students—as well as the broader cultural and educational context in which learning occurs.

While washback is often viewed negatively, this paper will explore the positive impact that assessments can have on teaching practices. It aims to provide guidance for teachers, educational institutions, and policymakers on using assessment effectively to support learning in the English language teaching (ELT) classroom.

Clarification of terminology

This paper distinguishes between 'tests' and 'assessment'. The term 'tests' refers to formal, standardized evaluations (for example, national exams) and is synonymous with 'testing', 'summative assessment', and 'assessment of learning'. In contrast, 'assessment' encompasses both formal assessments (for example, tests) and informal assessments (for example, self- and **peer assessment**), with the latter often referred to as '**formative assessment**' or 'assessment for learning'.

¶ Sections

1 *Washback*
The first section will explore research on how testing and formative assessment shape classroom practices. It will highlight why teachers, educational leaders, and policymakers must consider washback to promote effective teaching and learning.

2 *The nature of washback*
The second section will examine the nature of washback, discussing conditions that lead to both positive and negative outcomes. It will also consider other factors that influence its impact on students, teachers, and classroom dynamics.

3 *Practical guidance for teachers*
The third section will offer practical guidance on how teachers can implement productive assessment practices. It will emphasize the importance of assessment literacy and constructive feedback as key strategies to keep students engaged and motivated.
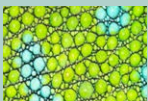
4 *Suggestions for policymakers and educational institutions*
The fourth section will provide policy recommendations to help schools and educational leaders foster positive washback. It will explore how aligning curricula, assessments, and professional development with broader learning goals can support teachers and students.

5 *Washback in the digital era*
The fifth section will address the potential of emerging technologies to promote positive washback in language learning. It will also highlight the ethical considerations needed to ensure technology is used responsibly and effectively by teachers and students.

Conclusions

While well-designed tests can foster positive washback, meaningful educational reform must go beyond assessment design. The teacher's role is central in shaping how tests impact learning, making it essential to provide policy support that enables effective instructional choices. To provide students with meaningful learning opportunities, a shift towards continuous assessment is necessary, along with policies that account for the real needs of learners.
A deeper understanding of these factors is essential to addressing the complex dynamics of washback in education.

Appendices, Glossary, References and Resources

Key terms in bold are explained in the Glossary, which, along with the Appendices, Further reading, Resources and references, can be found at the end of this paper.

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1

Washback

The idea that tests and assessments play a major role in shaping classroom practices is not new. First discussed in the 1950s, washback was long viewed as a negative 'side effect' of testing, hindering rather than supporting students' learning. The common assumption—still present in some contexts today—was that teachers would **teach to the test**, focusing only on what would appear in exams and neglecting other language skills. From this perspective, tests were viewed as tools that narrow the curriculum and limit students' learning experiences.[1] ELT scholars began to explore both positive and negative aspects of washback.

Definitions of washback have varied depending on how researchers interpret its role, but all share one key assumption: when tests are part of the teaching and learning system, both teachers and students adjust their behaviour to meet the test's demands.

Impact of tests (assessment of learning)

Over the past 30 years, empirical research has provided key insights into the relationship between testing and teaching.

First, tests and test reforms influence the content and materials used in lessons. When specific language skills, tasks, or competencies are included in the test, these elements often become central to curricula. By the same token, changes in tests lead to an increased demand for exam-preparation materials that reflect the new format and content.[2]

Second, while teachers may express a generally positive attitude towards certain tests or updates, there is insufficient evidence that this always leads to changes in teaching methods. Different teachers will teach the same test using different approaches, just as they may use similar approaches for different tests. Therefore, methodological choices often depend more on teachers' beliefs, initial training, and ongoing professional development than on the tests themselves.[3]

Third, high-stakes exams tend to exert a stronger washback effect than low-stakes assessments. In contexts where students' future academic or professional careers depend heavily on high-stakes exams, washback is expected when test changes are introduced. In such contexts, exams serve as cut-off points for university admissions or job selection, and test reform is often seen as a tool for driving broader educational reform.[4]

Fourth, students respond to tests in different ways,[5] influenced by factors such as prior knowledge, testing experience, motivation, and emotional management. Some students thrive under the structure of standardized testing, while others feel constrained. Stress can significantly affect performance and engagement with class materials, while exam results, whether positive or negative, can impact confidence, interest in the subject, and willingness to continue learning.[6]

Now that we have explored how assessment of learning may impact classroom practices, we turn our attention to what research reveals about assessment for learning.

Impact of assessments (assessment for learning)

The aim of formative assessment is to help teachers and students interpret performance, identifying strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning processes. This allows for adjustments to instruction and learning approaches to improve outcomes.[7]

Formative assessment can take many forms. For example, a secondary school teacher starting a new B1-level course might want to find out what his or her learners already know and can do. To do this, the teacher could design a **diagnostic test** focusing on A2 level, while also including some B1-level language and sub-skills. Based on the results, the teacher can create a more effective course plan.

At different points during the course—at the end of each unit or term, for example—the teacher could assign **self-assessment** tasks to help students identify the concepts, language, and sub-skills they have mastered and highlight areas needing improvement. These might include checklists covering content and skills from the unit or term (for example, *I can talk about what I did last weekend using the past tense*) or open-ended reflection questions (for example, *Which skills do you feel most confident with? Which would you like to improve? Why?*). These activities encourage active learning and help students take responsibility for their progress.

Similarly, after completing a productive task, the teacher could organize a peer-assessment activity. If students have written a text, for instance,

> The relationship between teaching, learning and assessment is complex, dynamic and nuanced, requiring appropriate understanding on the part of all stakeholders – policymakers, teachers, and learners.
>
> Lynda Taylor

> Tests determine what I teach my students because I want them to pass.
>
> Amisu Olanipa,
> Head of Department, Nigeria

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they could swap and evaluate each other's work using a checklist or guiding questions. The checklist could focus not only on grammar and vocabulary, but also on the quality of information—whether ideas were supported with facts or examples, whether the content was appropriate for the target audience, and whether the text was structured logically.

To encourage reflection on their learning, teachers could ask students to evaluate their own written texts, as well as their self- and peer-assessments, through portfolios or learning journals. At different points in the course, students can showcase their portfolios, compare ideas, and receive further feedback from their peers and teacher.

In recent years, portfolios have become a widely-used tool in language teaching for assessing and tracking students' progress. For example, the CEFR-based European Language Portfolio is used across Europe, while Canada employs the Portfolio-Based Language Assessment, and LinguaFolio and the Global Language Portfolio are common in the United States. Advocates argue that portfolio-based assessment offers a more meaningful way to measure progress, providing a fuller picture of each student's development beyond simple grades.

observation

feedback loop

evaluation
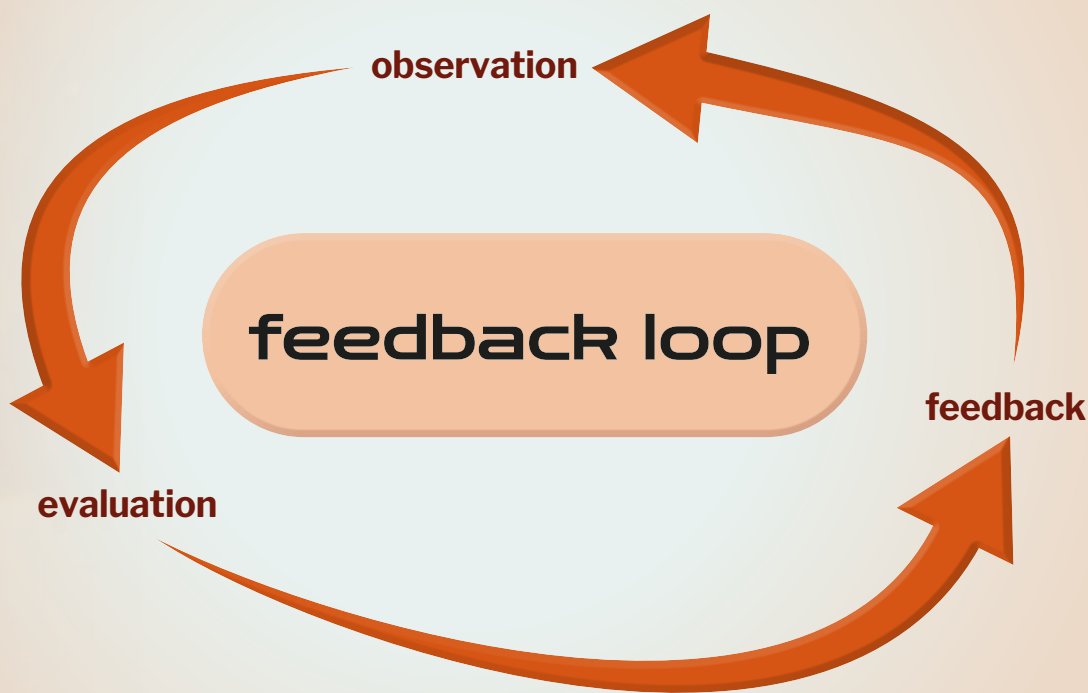
feedback

Formative assessment, when integrated continuously, creates a **feedback loop**—a virtuous cycle of observation, evaluation, feedback, and learning—where feedback directly informs teaching practices.[8] In this sense, assessments can be viewed as tools for learning rather than simply measuring performance or preparing students to 'pass' a test. By engaging with continuous feedback, students take a more active role in their learning, gaining increased motivation as they become more aware of their progress and more capable of addressing future challenges.

Why washback matters

So far, we have explored how tests and assessments directly influence teaching and learning practices—how teachers select materials, prepare, and teach their classes, as well as how students engage with their learning.

Recognizing the power of washback allows teachers to design more meaningful exam-preparation lessons, helping students develop not only test-taking strategies but also real-world language skills.

Tests and assessments also have the potential to shape teacher development and professional autonomy. Exam preparation provides opportunities for teachers to deepen their understanding of test constructs, exercise professional judgement, and experiment with different teaching methods to meet students' needs. For example, teachers could use task-based learning to simulate real-world exam tasks, such as writing reports or participating in discussions. Alternatively, they could apply flipped classroom techniques, where students review test-related materials at home and spend class time practising and applying skills.

Washback also matters because it influences educational reform and decision-making. When policymakers understand the implications of washback, they are more likely to design test reforms that lead to positive educational outcomes. For this reason, the next sections will provide suggestions for policymakers on how to support schools and teachers in promoting positive washback.

> I don't think that tests should be the be-all and end-all for students, but we tend to teach as if they are. Students get bored with this. We need something more engaging which could better prepare them for multiple roles in the future.
>
> Virginia Espino,
> English practitioner, Spain

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What do I need to know?

In this section, we explored the evolution of washback—from its early perception as a negative side effect of testing to a more nuanced understanding that acknowledges its potential benefits. While tests undeniably influence educational practices, their ultimate impact—positive or negative—cannot always be predicted with certainty. We also highlighted the importance of formative assessment as an ongoing tool for skill development and a valuable resource for teachers to refine their instructional practices. Lastly, we explored why washback matters, laying the groundwork for the next sections of this paper.

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2 The nature of washback

In an ideal educational setting, tests and assessments align with broader educational goals. In the case of ELT, this means fostering communicative **competence**. When this alignment occurs, it can lead to more effective teaching practices, improving students' overall language proficiency beyond just test performance.[9]

A study by Green (2007) on the IELTS exam highlights this effect. When teachers used the test as a benchmark for language learning, they included more writing and speaking exercises that aligned with the exam's emphasis on communicative competence.[10] This approach resulted in a broader, more well-rounded method, positively impacting classroom instruction. Let us now explore further examples of how tests can foster positive change.

> Tests change my students' goals—they feel more involved and motivated and I find that their skills, knowledge and confidence increase significantly.
>
> Paola Carrozzo,
> EFL teacher, Italy

Positive washback

As discussed in section 1, tests shape the teaching content and materials, influencing both lesson planning and curriculum development. When assessments prioritize real-world language use or integrated skills, they can generate positive washback. Such outcomes may create a 'makeshift framework' that supports targeted language development, helps teachers maintain a clear instructional focus, and ensures that lessons align with both curriculum objectives and broader learning goals.

While assessments may not immediately transform teaching methods, the need to cover a range of skills and tasks in the test can motivate teachers to explore diverse strategies. For example, if an exam includes a role play in the speaking section, teachers are more likely to include more role-play scenarios in their lessons—provided they feel confident or have received relevant training.

Another positive impact of testing is its ability to boost student motivation. Tests provide tangible goals, especially in contexts where exam success is linked to social and professional opportunities. Anticipating an assessment may motivate students to engage more deeply with their learning, reinforce knowledge, and adopt a more committed approach to studying.

Certain test formats also promote the development of essential learning strategies. Tests that require students to take notes, paraphrase, or summarize information help build valuable skills that extend beyond the exam, such as into higher education or the workplace.

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Negative washback

On the flip side, exam-focused lessons can lead to an over-emphasis on specific exam skills, often at the expense of broader language learning. As a result, teachers may teach to the test, concentrating mainly on exam strategies, tasks, and language that is more likely to appear in the exam. For instance, teachers might focus on time management, essay writing, or commonly tested collocations, leaving little room for meaningful discussions, collaborative activities, or creative language use.

Another factor contributing to negative washback is **test misappropriation**, which occurs when a test is not suitable for students' needs. For example, designing a course syllabus around a grammar-focused proficiency exam for students entering customer service or international business may fail to provide them with the conversational skills necessary for success in these fields.

Excessive emphasis on exam preparation can also lead to **surface learning**, particularly when teachers are preparing students for poorly designed tests or tests that are misaligned with broader language learning objectives. Such tests often focus on the lower levels of Bloom's Taxonomy—namely 'knowledge' and 'comprehension'—which encourages **rote memorization** rather than **active learning**, critical thinking, and deeper engagement with the materials. As a result, students may forget much of what they have learned once the test is over.

For example, teachers may focus on gap fills that target grammar and vocabulary or highly structured speaking tasks that align with exam criteria, instead of encouraging higher-order thinking skills like application, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis—skills that lead to **deep learning** and overall language development (see Figure 1). However, it's important to note that in some cases, teachers managing larger classes might rely on rote memorization as a practical solution.

> Unfortunately, students focus more on the marks they get than on acquiring knowledge and skills for the future.
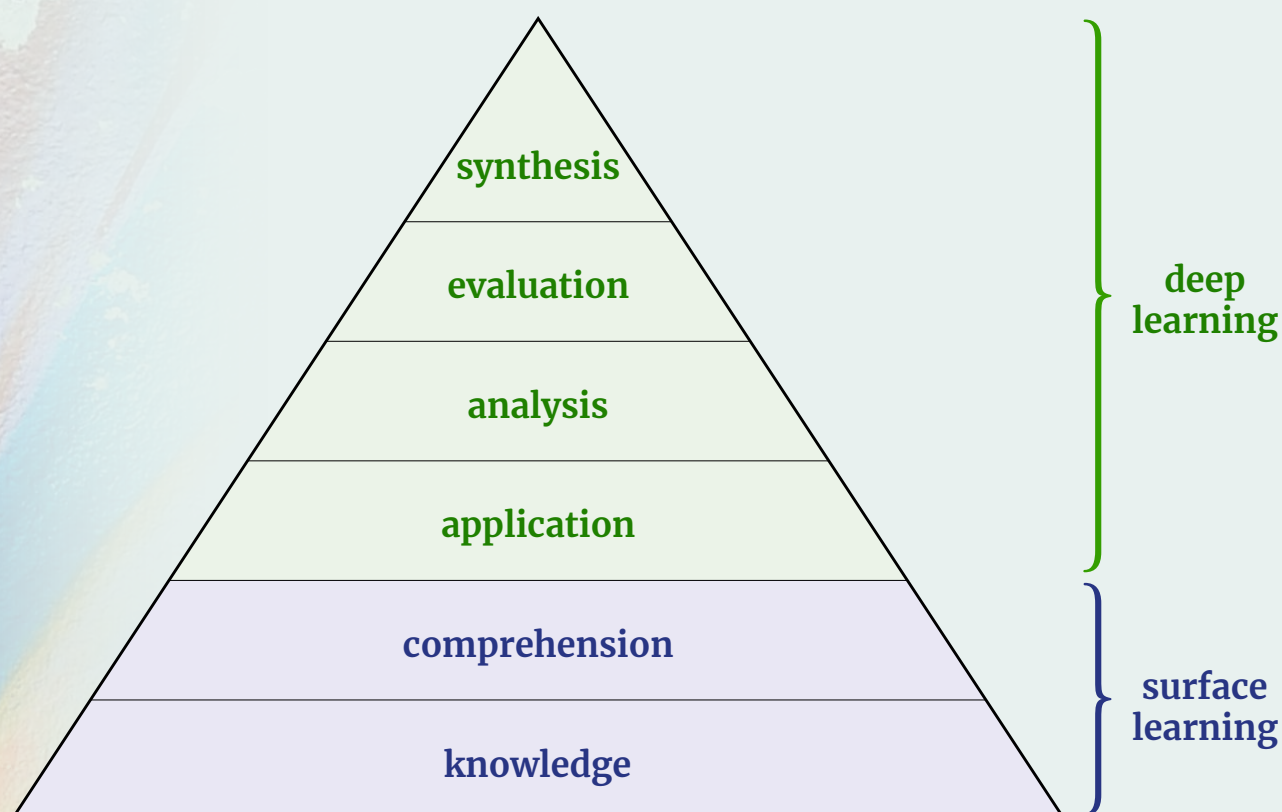>
> Khamis Olapade,
> Teacher, Nigeria

Figure 1. Bloom's Taxonomy

synthesis
evaluation
analysis
application
comprehension
knowledge

deep learning

surface learning

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Tests can bring about positive and negative change. However, some questions still remain: is it always possible to predict the nature of washback? In other words, does test reform always lead to either positive or negative washback? And are there any other factors that influence the quality of washback? Let us explore these questions.

Factors impacting classroom practices

While it might seem that a well-designed test automatically brings positive changes to the classroom, and a poorly designed one causes negative washback, research suggests this correlation is not always straightforward. The impact of washback on teaching and learning does not solely depend on the quality of the test. A well-designed test may result in unintended negative washback, whereas a less effective test may unexpectedly lead to positive washback.[11]

For instance, a well-designed test might lead teachers to focus too much on test-taking strategies, rather than fostering authentic communication. Conversely, a less effective test might encourage teachers to concentrate on foundational grammar skills, which could actually help students improve their language accuracy, creating positive washback.

It is also important to consider what it means for a test to be 'misaligned'. A well-designed test can still be misused or applied inappropriately. For example, a group of proficient upper-secondary students might be placed in an exam preparation course despite having no intention of taking the IELTS. While the test is well-designed, the context is not appropriate—a general English course would better suit their needs. In such cases, students may disengage from the material and lessons because the lessons do not align with their goals, such as developing communication skills for real-world situations.

What else does washback depend on?

The quality of washback depends not only on the test itself, but also on several other factors, including:

Teachers

Teachers play a critical role in shaping classroom practices. Their methods are influenced by their experience, initial and ongoing training, personal beliefs, and the broader cultural and social context in which they teach. For example, a teacher who values technology may incorporate language learning apps or online collaboration platforms, while another might prefer more traditional approaches, focusing on textbooks and face-to-face interactions.

Logistical factors

Classroom logistics, such as class sizes, access to teaching resources, and availability of technology, also impact teaching practices. Large classes can make individual feedback challenging, whereas smaller classes allow for more personalized instruction. Availability of teaching resources, such as textbooks, worksheets, or online platforms, can directly impact lesson quality. Similarly, access to technological tools, like interactive whiteboards and student devices, may enable more innovative teaching methods, while their absence could hinder modern pedagogical approaches.

Syllabus and pedagogical traditions

The syllabus and pedagogical traditions shape how teachers structure their lessons. A language syllabus in one country may prioritize grammar and reading comprehension to meet exam-oriented goals, while another may focus more on oral communication and critical thinking for a holistic approach. Local teaching traditions influence expectations. In teacher-centred cultures, teachers may be expected to deliver comprehensive lectures and offer explicit instructions, while in constructivist traditions, teachers are expected to facilitate collaborative activities and self-directed learning.

Students

Students' needs, learning preferences, and proficiency levels also affect teaching practices. For example, students who learn best through active participation may benefit from group discussions and role-plays, while those who prefer structured learning may do better with step-by-step problem-solving tasks. Prior assessment experiences also play a role. Students familiar with multiple-choice tests may excel in structured assessments but struggle with open-ended tasks or discussions. Additionally, societal expectations, such as the pressure to meet academic standards, may lead teachers to focus on exam-specific content rather than fostering creativity or critical thinking.

Cultural and social contexts

The broader cultural and social context influences students' attitudes to language learning and their motivations for learning a particular language. In some countries, learning English is seen as essential for career advancement, especially in fields like technology or business. In other contexts, language study may be driven by its association with prestige, cultural sophistication, or access to elite educational institutions.

> Tests meet students' needs because they are the means to better understanding their learning situation.
>
> Lucy McAuliffe,
> Academia Manhattan, Spain

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What do I need to know?

This section discussed how testing can produce both positive and negative washback in the classroom. Ideally, well-aligned tests encourage a wide range of teaching practices and help foster students' language proficiency. Conversely, poorly designed tests can lead to negative washback, narrowing the curriculum's focus and promoting surface learning rather than deeper engagement. However, even well-designed tests can result in negative washback when used in the wrong situations. We also identified several factors beyond the test itself that influence classroom practices, from teachers' beliefs and training to logistical constraints, syllabus design, student needs, and the broader cultural context.

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Practical guidance for teachers

Teachers play a central role in fostering positive washback in the classroom. This can be particularly challenging when preparing students for a test that does not fully align with their needs or the teacher's pedagogical beliefs. However, even when the test appears to conflict with broader learning goals, teachers can use strategies to ensure lessons remain meaningful and effective. Here are some examples.

Developing assessment literacy

> While preparing students for tests is important, it should not come at the expense of broader language development. The goal is to integrate test preparation with meaningful, real-world language use.
>
> Riccardo Chiappini

Teacher training and ongoing professional development are essential for building confidence in using tests and creating opportunities for effective formative assessment.[12] Teachers need a thorough understanding of the test's nature and intended purpose. While this might seem obvious, many teachers tend to focus too much on test content (for example, grammar and vocabulary), and overlook other important factors. These include the micro-skills being tested (for example, reading for detail or listening for purpose), and the types of thinking required for success (for example, rule application, text analysis, or evaluation).

The first step is to review all information from exam boards or ministries of education, including handbooks, sample tests, and past papers. By analysing these materials, teachers can better understand the demands of each task or section, as well as the competencies required to complete them successfully. This analysis helps teachers grasp the test's construct, its strengths, and its weaknesses. Weaknesses may include flaws in poorly designed tests or challenges posed by well-designed tests that may not fully address students' immediate needs. With this understanding, teachers can adapt their instruction not only to meet test requirements, but also to develop students' broader language skills for real-world use.

For a sample checklist on test analysis and promoting strategies for positive washback, see Appendix 1.

Finally, teachers should engage in **peer learning** and professional development. Sharing strategies with colleagues allows teachers to expand their repertoire of techniques, gain new insights into how to scaffold

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complex skills, and guide students through challenging exam formats. This, in turn, can lead to more innovative and effective teaching outcomes.[13] Standardization sessions, organized by schools, are essential for ensuring consistency and fairness in assessment practices. These sessions help teachers align their grading with established criteria, providing greater reliability in evaluation.

Responsible exam boards and publishers often provide face-to-face or online training sessions to help teachers make the most of their materials. These sessions provide valuable insights into how exams are developed, how to interpret test scores effectively, and how to integrate innovative teaching techniques that balance test preparation with broader language and learning objectives.

Providing continuous feedback

As discussed earlier, formative assessment plays a crucial role in supporting learning.

Practical self-assessment tools—such as self-reflection worksheets, learning journals, and portfolios—can help students monitor their progress and set realistic goals. For example, students might record a response to a typical speaking question using a recording app. Instead of prompting students to give a 'standard' answer, teachers could provide a checklist to help them prepare. The checklist might encourage students to include supporting arguments, tailor their language and tone to a specific audience, and structure their responses clearly. After recording their answer, students could play it back and evaluate their performance using the checklist, considering factors such as clarity, coherence, and relevance.
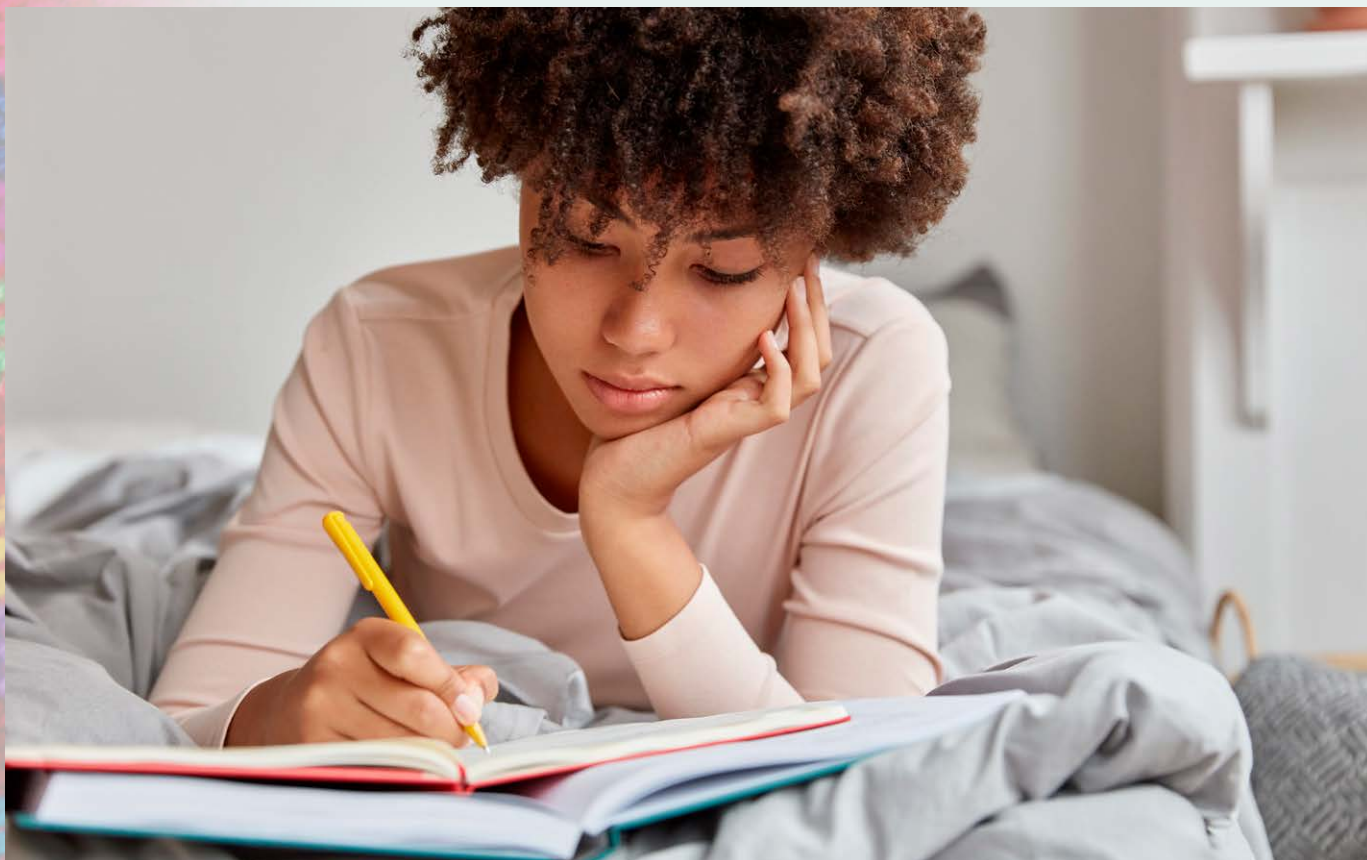
Peer-assessment activities are also very valuable. These allow students to exchange feedback, helping them identify strengths and weaknesses in their peers' work while applying these insights to their own language use. For instance, students could exchange recordings and use a checklist to give feedback.

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Aligning language education with formative assessment fosters a learner-centred environment that benefits both teachers and students.[14]

For a quick reference on best practices for continuous feedback, see Appendix 2. Sample self-assessment and peer-assessment checklists are provided in Appendices 3 and 4.

Balancing test preparation with broader language objectives

Poorly designed tests tend to promote surface learning, rarely requiring students to apply knowledge to real-world situations. However, this does not mean that exam-preparation classes cannot foster deeper learning.

Instead of focusing solely on tasks designed to elicit correct answers, teachers can incorporate activities that promote reasoning and problem-solving. For example, students might analyse the tone in recorded or written texts, create social media posts to promote a local landmark, or develop **multimodal** tasks such as storyboarding a short film exploring social issues.

Even when working with tests that rely on multiple-choice questions and gap fills, there are still opportunities for deeper learning. After completing a task, teachers could focus students' attention on the grammatical structures or vocabulary in the questions, highlighting how these may apply to real-life communication. Or, students could use the test's topic as a springboard for further research, offering opportunities for extensive reading, active listening, and greater language exposure.

Teachers can also promote critical thinking by having students explain why certain options are correct or incorrect, turn the wrong options into correct ones, or create their own questions based on the test material.

When practising writing, teachers could prompt students to reflect on other elements such as layout and formality, considering if they are suitable for the communicative situation. This can be done through genre analysis (where students analyse a model text then write another in the same genre (pre-writing), process writing (where they discover the genre as they write

(while drafting), or self- and peer-assessment (where they write a text first and then compare it with the model text (post-writing).

For examples of scenarios in which teachers can balance test preparation with broader skills, see Appendix 5.

Making the most of test-taking skills

In exam preparation courses, students need to learn test-taking strategies such as managing time effectively, approaching different types of questions, and making educated guesses. Strategies like these are important for passing a test, but teachers should be careful not to let them overshadow broader learning.

Many test-taking strategies promote **transferable skills** with real-world applications. For example:

- **skimming** and **scanning**—quickly navigating emails, instructions or any other documents.
- paraphrasing and summarizing—communicating ideas effectively in academic and professional settings.
- predicting and **inferencing**—filling gaps in conversations, or interpreting incomplete or indirect information.
- eliminating incorrect options—evaluating choices and making informed decisions.
- study habits—learning from mistakes and setting realistic goals.
- time management—meeting deadlines and prioritizing tasks.
- self-monitoring—reflecting on performance and making improvements.

Teaching these strategies will not only help students prepare for exams but will also equip them with skills for lifelong learning and communication.

See Appendix 6 for a succinct guide on assessment literacy development.

> The tests I use help students by assessing their language skills, guiding instruction and building test-taking strategies. Overall, these tests support both classroom learning and future success.
>
> Marija, Professor, Poland

predicting

problem-solving

inferring

critical thinking

transferable skills

creativity

study habits

self-monitoring

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What do I need to know?

In this section, we have seen how assessment literacy helps teachers understand test demands and incorporate formative assessment effectively into their lessons. By studying the test construct, teachers can tailor instruction to address both test requirements and broader language skills, preparing students for real-world language use. Ongoing constructive feedback, reasoning, and problem-solving activities boost students' motivation and autonomy, even in less-than-ideal testing contexts. Ultimately, by making the most of test materials, teachers can support students by developing both test readiness and lifelong language skills, encouraging a more positive perception of exams in their overall learning journey.

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Suggestions for policymakers and educational institutions

Creating and selecting tests that positively impact teaching requires careful observation, planning, collaboration, and a broad understanding of the educational system where assessments take place. This section offers suggestions for how policymakers and educational institutions can support schools and teachers in fostering positive washback.

Aligning the school curriculum with broader educational goals

Given the demands of the modern workforce, educational institutions must adopt a more holistic approach to learning. Employers today look for candidates with strong communication skills, critical thinking, teamwork, creativity, and the ability to learn autonomously. There is growing recognition of the importance of these global skills. While progress is being made in many schools, they are still insufficiently emphasized in curricula. To bridge this gap, school curricula should focus more on social, cognitive, and practical skills, ensuring better alignment with real-world requirements. This can include promoting creativity through activities like art, design, and coding projects, where students create original content or solve unique problems. By doing so, policymakers and educational leaders can support teaching practices that go beyond rote learning, in environments where class sizes are manageable, and prepare students for life beyond the classroom.

Aligning the school curriculum with international standards

School curricula should provide clear, measurable objectives to guide classroom practices. These objectives could align with international standards that set clear benchmarks for different levels of language proficiency, such as the CEFR[15] (see the *Further reading and resources*

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section) or the Canadian Language Benchmarks. By establishing clear targets, policymakers can help teachers understand what they should aim for in their lessons, making it easier for them to select or even design tests and assessments that support both test preparation and broader language development.

Aligning assessment with broader educational goals

While teachers play a central role in student learning, aligning tests with broader educational goals can make a significant difference. In recent years, there has been a shift from testing isolated skills to using tasks that combine multiple skills. For example, a reading passage might serve as the basis for a related writing task. These **performance-based tests** focus on practical skills in real-life contexts. They assess the ability of candidates to complete tasks often associated with academic or professional requirements.[16] For example, an English proficiency test for university applicants may require an academic essay, while one for medical practitioners seeking employment in an English-speaking country might include role-playing a doctor and patient.

Performance-based assessments are valuable in educational programmes because they closely mirror real-life situations[17] and directly connect to teaching goals. Aligning the curriculum with performance-based tests could therefore be a way to integrate these real-world competencies into the educational process. When curricula are designed to develop the skills in performance-based assessments, students benefit from a more cohesive learning experience where classroom activities and assessments reinforce one another.

However, integrated tasks make the assessment process more complex, as real-world skills remain difficult to assess accurately. Language testing also presents an inherent conflict: balancing **task authenticity** with **test reliability**. Increasing authenticity makes exam tasks more reflective of real-life use but may reduce reliability due to variability in performance and scoring. On the other hand, focusing on reliability by standardizing tasks and scoring may limit task authenticity. Test developers must carefully manage this tension to achieve a balance.[18]

That said, these issues are often beyond the control of policymakers. Often, school-leaving assessments have fixed task formats, leaving teachers with little choice but to work within the existing test structures and task types available.

Investing in continuing professional development (CPD)

For assessments to have a positive impact on classroom practices, teachers must develop strong assessment literacy—an area of professional competence that is crucial for effective teaching. Workshops, seminars, and online training sessions can help teachers stay informed about the latest assessment strategies and best practices.

Policymakers and school leaders should invest in CPD programmes that help teachers integrate assessment into their everyday teaching. These programmes could take different forms, including financial support for training, subsidies for conference attendance, and incentives for active participation. Additionally, providing dedicated time for CPD activities within school schedules or incorporating CPD into teachers' contracts can further facilitate their professional growth.

To ensure that CPD programmes are effective, feedback should be collected from participants to evaluate their relevance and impact. Additionally,

> For a complete reform in assessment practices, all stakeholders need to be on board. A more competency-based assessment system can be created as long as students, parents, teachers, institutional leaders, and creators of national curricula and exams agree on the main goal of education.
>
> Jo Szoke

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monitoring changes in classroom practices and students' progress can help assess their long-term benefits. Expanding support for CPD enables policymakers and educational administrators to help teachers develop their assessment literacy and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

Encouraging the use of continuous assessment

A key strategy for promoting positive washback is encouraging the use of continuous assessment. Rather than relying solely on one high-stakes exam at the end of a course, policymakers should foster a culture where ongoing assessment is seen as an integral part of the learning process—not just a tool for measuring progress.

Educational leaders can create a collaborative environment where teachers share strategies and resources for continuous assessment through regular meetings, peer observations, or team teaching. To support this, school policies should integrate continuous assessment into curricula, ensuring that assessment strategies align with both learning objectives and teaching practices.

Towards a more complete view of educational change

Promoting positive washback requires an integrated approach that brings together different elements of the educational system, from test design and policy-making to teaching practices and societal needs.

The role of test design

Responsible exam boards play a significant role in promoting positive washback through careful test design. One effective strategy is **localization**—adapting test content to align with the cultural backgrounds and real-life experiences of candidates. For example, a test for lower-secondary students might include a reading text about local festivals or travel destinations, followed by a writing task where students recommend a place to visit.

Localization also ensures that assessed language skills meet regional needs. In some regions, tests may focus on English for professional settings (for example, business English), while in others, the emphasis may be on academic English. By aligning test content with students' environments and needs, assessments become more relevant, engaging, and motivating.

Educational policies

Educational policies—whether at the national or local level—establish the framework for assessments and curricula. Policies that prioritize professional development and align curricula with assessments and broader educational goals can have a lasting impact on individuals' learning experiences. By supporting initiatives that encourage positive washback, policymakers can help ensure that education systems equip students with the skills they need for both academic and professional success.

> I use alternative assessments like observations, peer/self-assessments, projects and games. These methods reduce test anxiety, boost engagement and build confidence for students while giving me real-time insights to tailor lessons effectively. They make learning more dynamic and meaningful.
>
> Seyedrouzbeh Banihashemi, English teacher, Thailand

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The role of teachers

Teachers are central to the success of any reform. However, policymakers and educational leaders need to consider how familiar teachers are with new curricula or assessment formats. If teachers do not fully understand the reforms, they may struggle to implement them effectively or resist change. Therefore, it is essential to involve teachers in the reform process. When teachers understand the rationale behind changes and feel included in decision-making, they are more likely to embrace new policies and implement them successfully.

A more balanced approach

Traditionally, summative assessments (which measure final outcomes) and formative assessments (which track progress throughout learning) have been viewed as separate. However, a more balanced approach—where informal classroom assessments and formal large-scale tests work together—can provide a fuller picture of students' learning and better support their ongoing learning journey.

Moreover, the concept of 'test consequences', both intended and unintended, is an important consideration in validity theory for any assessment policy and practice.[19] By focusing on positive washback and minimizing negative effects, policymakers and educational institutions can ensure that assessments support not only academic achievement but also broader learning goals. Systems should be in place to track how tests affect different stakeholders, especially teachers, to ensure that assessments are contributing positively to the educational experience.

Promoting positive washback requires careful attention to test design, policies that align assessments with broader educational goals, and empowering teachers with the resources and support they need. By fostering collaboration among policymakers, educational institutions, teachers, and test developers, it is possible to create an educational system where assessments genuinely support students' learning and development. When these elements work together, they create an effective teaching and learning environment—one that prepares students for success in both academic and real-world contexts.

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What do I need to know?

This section has outlined that promoting positive washback requires a holistic and comprehensive approach. Policymakers and educational leaders must work together to align assessments with educational goals, support teaching practices, and foster continuous learning. By providing professional development opportunities, involving teachers in the reform process, and ensuring that assessments reflect real-world skills, policymakers can create an environment where assessments have a positive impact on both teaching and learning. Collaboration among all stakeholders is essential for ensuring that educational reforms are practical, relevant, and widely supported.

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5 Washback in the digital era

Technological advancements are reshaping the way educational institutions approach testing and assessment. Traditional paper-based tests are increasingly being replaced by innovative digital tools, creating new opportunities for positive washback on teaching and learning . However, these changes also present challenges that may hinder this process. The way teachers and students respond to these advancements will profoundly influence both classroom dynamics and learning outcomes.

The positive impact of technology on testing and assessment

One major benefit of technology in testing is the increased availability of online practice tests and resources, which are becoming more interactive and multimodal.

To offer flexible options for validating proficiency for academic or professional purposes, some language learning apps are expanding into testing, such as the Duolingo English Test. This test is fully automated, both machine-delivered and machine-scored. It gained widespread adoption during the COVID-19 pandemic, when social restrictions limited access to face-to-face exams, and remains a popular option for college admissions alongside more established English proficiency tests. Another language learning platform bridging the gap between language learning and testing is Babbel, which launched the Babbel English Test for work and self-assessment.

Another important development is **adaptive testing**. An adaptive test adjusts its questions in real time based on the candidate's level of proficiency, meaning that each candidate answers a unique set of questions. These tests positively impact assessment by saving time—candidates taking a multi-level exam only answer questions that match their level, while still providing a reliable assessment. However, the development of adaptive tests can be costly, as they require a large set of questions to ensure accuracy and reliability.

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The role of automated scoring systems

Automated scoring systems also contribute to positive washback by providing immediate or near-real-time feedback on student performance. This feedback not only helps students understand what they got wrong but also why and how to improve. For teachers, automated scoring reduces the burden of marking, allowing more time for other activities. However, these systems must be able to recognize various correct answers, including regional spelling and pronunciation variations, to avoid penalizing students for differences that do not affect their understanding.

In formative assessment, **e-portfolios** are another valuable tool. E-portfolios are digital collections of student work, such as written texts, presentations, and videos, which students produce or upload to digital platforms.

For a recommended procedure for setting up an e-portfolio, see Appendix 7.

The value of e-portfolios in assessment

E-portfolios are widely used to track student progress, but they can also support teacher training. New teachers, for example, benefit from:

- personal support (mentors offering guidance).
- professional support (courses and training programmes).
- social support (peer learning and collaboration).

The expanding role of technology in assessment

Another key area where technology positively influences washback is **language analytics**, a rapidly expanding field in AI. Language analytics focuses on interpreting and extracting meaningful information from text data. When students use AI-powered assessments, they produce text data that can provide teachers with detailed insights into student performance over time. These insights help track progress, identify patterns of errors, and ultimately allow teachers to tailor their teaching to meet student needs.

Technology is also making assessments more inclusive. **Accommodated tests**, for example, enable students with specific cognitive or physical needs to fully participate in assessments, promoting more fairness and equality in education. Students with visual impairments can use screen readers to complete online exams, while students with dyslexia can take tests that adjust the font size and colour or provide additional time, and so on.

Remote proctoring and increased accessibility

Remote proctoring, another technological development, allows exams to be supervised online, enabling students to complete assessments from any location under controlled conditions. Using specialized software to monitor candidate activity (often including webcam surveillance), remote proctoring ensures compliance with exam rules. This technology improves accessibility for students who cannot physically sit for exams, and provides a cost-effective solution for institutions that would otherwise require physical test centres. However, concerns about the potential for cheating with remote proctoring still remain.

Identity verification

1. Sit directly in front of your webcam.

2. Ensure your face is clearly visible.

3. Stay directly in front of your webcam when you are taking your test.

TAKE PHOTO
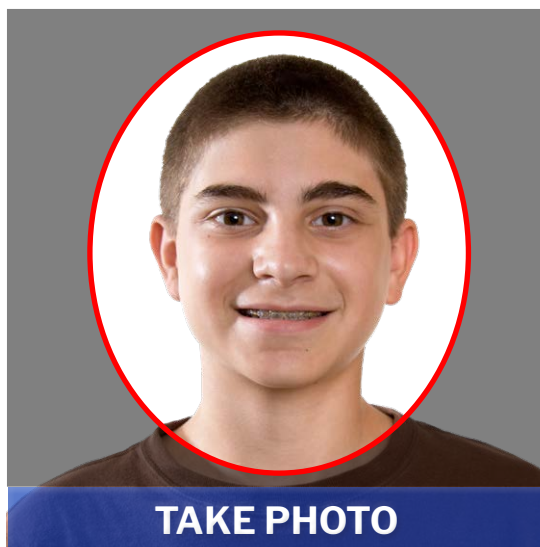
The future of positive washback with technology

As technology continues to advance, its potential to promote positive washback through assessments is expected to grow. In the future, innovations like AI, machine learning, and virtual reality will likely play a larger role in testing, formative assessments, and teaching.

One exciting development is the increased use of AI-powered assessments that evaluate more complex skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration. For example:

- Cognii is designed to analyse open-ended responses and assess students' reasoning and understanding. According to its developers, Cognii's virtual tutor helps students build critical-thinking skills by providing real-time feedback, identifying areas for improvement beyond basic right-or-wrong answers.
- Turnitin Revision Assistant, originally known for detecting plagiarism, now provides feedback on writing style, coherence, and creativity. It analyses vocabulary usage, sentence variation, and discourse, helping students to refine their writing and approach creativity in new ways.
- The Group Interaction Annotation Tool (GIAnT), available through GitHub, is another promising innovation. GIAnT can be used to assess group interactions in real-time, analysing both verbal and non-verbal cues such as turn-taking and tone. This tool has the potential to help teachers and students evaluate teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills.

Game-based assessments

Another type of assessment showing potential for measuring complex skills is **game-based assessment** (GBA). Supporters believe that GBA encourages students to take risks, engage with content more deeply, and stay motivated. This, in turn, can influence teaching by fostering an environment of creativity and exploration. One example is *SimCityEDU: Pollution Challenge!*, released in 2013 by GlassLab. In this game, players assume the role of a virtual mayor, balancing economic growth with environmental protection. Aligned with US educational frameworks, including the Framework for 21st Century Learning, Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), and Common Core State Standards in Mathematics (CCSSM), it serves as a formative assessment for lower-secondary students, focusing on problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. Another example is *Crisis in Space*, which won the innovation prize at the 2020 e-Assessment Awards. Developed by ACTNext, this collaborative game requires two players to solve problems on board a space station, with one acting as the astronaut, and the other as mission control. It will be exciting to see how GBAs evolve and impact education in the future.

Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) in assessment

Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are two other technology types worth watching. These immersive technologies can create realistic testing environments where candidates can demonstrate their skills in a more hands-on way. For example, a student might engage in a virtual conversation with AI avatars, or complete simulated tasks in realistic, interactive settings. Unlike paper-based tests, these assessments require students to apply their language skills in dynamic, real-world situations, prompting teachers to design lessons that prepare students for immersive tasks and shifting the focus towards practical language use.

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Ethical considerations

While new technologies offer enormous potential to improve education, they also raise important ethical concerns. Issues such as the **digital divide**, originality, over-reliance on AI, and data privacy must be addressed to ensure fair and inclusive implementation. Policymakers, test designers, and educators must work together to mitigate these risks.

Digital divide

Not all students have equal access to the resources needed to engage in digital assessments. This inequality can lead to negative washback, as teachers in under-resourced contexts may struggle to fully leverage the potential of technology-based assessments.

Originality

Although **generative AI (GenAI)** offers benefits in education, its increasing use by students for 'academic shortcuts' raises concerns. Over-reliance on GenAI may hinder the development of essential skills like creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving, ultimately affecting students' longterm academic and professional success (skill degradation).

A recent concept, **ungrading**, challenges traditional assessment methods by removing numerical or letter grades and focusing instead on holistic feedback, self-assessment, and reflection.[20] Supporters believe ungrading could address originality concerns—without the pressure of grades, students would feel less of a need to cheat with AI tools.[21] Although radical, ungrading presents another route to a more learning-centred approach to assessment.

Teachers' over-reliance

Just as with traditional tests, AI-driven tests that rely heavily on multiple-choice, gap-fill, or matching formats can lead teachers to teach to the test, focusing only on what is tested instead of fostering comprehensive learning. Teachers unfamiliar with the limitations of AI may also adjust their instruction to align with AI-driven expectations, effectively 'teaching to the AI' instead of promoting authentic, well-rounded learning. To avoid this, it's crucial to balance AI-driven assessments with other methods that support broader educational goals.

Data privacy and protection

Another ethical issue is **data privacy and protection**. When student data is collected and analysed by AI systems, concerns arise about surveillance, algorithm transparency, and potential biases. Teachers using AI chatbots or other third-party platforms to assess student work must ensure that they are not exposing personal data without proper consent. For this reason, always checking school policy before uploading student-generated content to third-party tools is essential for protecting privacy.

Ultimately, the future of assessment seems to be moving towards a continued focus on lifelong learning, reflecting the changing demands of the workplace and society. In this context, technology has the potential to promote positive washback, working alongside educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders to help them use tests as tools for growth rather than as mere measures of success at a single point in time.

> Other than formal assessment, I use alternative methods like class discussions, group projects, presentations, peer reviews, reflective journals and quizzes. The benefits for my students are that there is less pressure and more engagement. The benefit for me is that I have better insight into my students' needs and I can adapt my teaching accordingly.
>
> Agnieszka Tyszkiewicz-Zora,
> Senior lecturer, Poland

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What do I need to know?

In this section, we have seen that technology offers significant opportunities to promote positive washback. From online resources and adaptive testing, to automated scoring and game-based assessments, these advancements can encourage more effective teaching practices and deeper learning experiences in the classroom. Looking ahead, the integration of technology promises to create assessments that are more practical and aligned with real-world skills. However, ethical considerations must be taken into account to ensure all students have an equal opportunity to succeed and grow. By embracing these changes while maintaining fair practices, all stakeholders can use technology to create a more dynamic, inclusive, and positive learning environment.

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Conclusions

Washback from assessments can be a positive force to improve learning in the classroom, as long as certain factors are taken into account. The teacher's role remains central in mediating washback from testing, and it is crucial to empower teachers with supportive policies to make effective instructional choices. Students should be provided with valuable opportunities for meaningful learning and a systemic shift towards continuous assessment is required, along with policies that factor in the real needs of all learners. A deeper understanding of all these factors is key to effectively addressing the intricate dynamics of washback in educational settings.

Key takeaways

Teachers

1   Be clear
Be clear and explicit about the specific skills and knowledge required to pass the exam.

2   Identify language and skills
Identify language and skills that are important for your students but not directly assessed in the exam, and incorporate these into your lessons and into your formative assessments.

Policymakers and educational institutions

3   Invest in assessment literacy
Invest in assessment literacy training, so that teachers and administrators can make informed decisions about assessment practices and relevant teaching approaches.

4   Align with educational goals
Align school curricula, assessment formats, learning materials, and professional development with the educational goals of the programme.

5   Create effective teacher training
Ensure that teacher training and ongoing professional development emphasize effective language learning principles, helping educators focus on meaningful communication and skill development rather than just test preparation.

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Appendix 1

Sample checklists for test analysis

These questions can be used to help evaluate the effectiveness of a test.

Skills and content

- What main skills and sub-skills are tested?
- Do the tasks reflect real-world communication? (How do they encourage authentic language use?)
- Does the test include a variety of question types?
- Is there a good balance between receptive and productive skills?

Cultural and practical considerations

- Are the test items culturally appropriate for students?
- Is the timing realistic for students to complete the test comfortably?
- Are the scoring criteria clear and aligned with learning objectives?

These questions can be used to help improve lessons based on test needs.

Teaching methods and test adaptation

- Does the test format allow for creative teaching methods?
- Can the test content be extended to include broader, higher-order thinking skills?
- If there are repetitive task types, can they be replaced with different ones?
- What types of formative assessments could help monitor progress towards test readiness?

Appendix 2

Continuous feedback best practices—quick guide for teachers

1. **Set clear learning goals**

   Clearly define lesson and task objectives so students know what to expect (for example, *Today, we will learn how to describe places* or *By the end of this class, you will be able to describe a place, saying what you can see, hear, or feel*).

   Use 'can-do' statements to help students understand and self-assess their progress (for example, *I can describe a place using adjectives and prepositions of place*).

2. **Encourage goal-setting**

   Guide students to set achievable short- and long-term goals based on feedback and performance (for example, *This week, I want to use five new words in a conversation*).

   Revisit these goals regularly to keep students motivated.

3. **Provide timely, specific feedback**

   Give feedback soon after tasks, focusing on specific strengths and areas for improvement. Avoid vague phrases (for example, *Good job*) and instead highlight what was done well and what needs more work (for example, *You used good linking words in your description. Next time, focus on improving your spelling*).

4. **Monitor progress regularly**

   Use formative tools like learning journals, portfolios, or progress charts where students can track their own development (for example, mark milestones on a chart, such as *I learned ten new words* or *I completed three speaking tasks without notes*).

5. **Involve parents**

   Share formative assessment results with parents or guardians in simple terms so they can support learning at home (for example, send home progress reports highlighting strengths and offering practical suggestions like *Practise reading aloud for five minutes a day*).

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Appendix 3

Sample self-assessment checklist—speaking task

Example procedure

Age:

12+

Level:

High-beginner/A2+

Objective:

To encourage students to reflect on their oral performance and identify areas for improvement.

Procedure:

1   Students record a short monologue (individually) or conversation (in pairs), using a voice recording application on a mobile device.
2   They listen to the recording and use the checklist to evaluate their own performance.

Variation—Peer assessment:

1   Students record the monologue or conversation.
2   They swap recordings with a partner or another pair, listen to the recording, and use the checklist to evaluate their partner's/partners' performance. (Rephrase the rubric and criteria in the checklist as necessary.)

Checklist:

Criteria	Rating (1–5)	Comments
I said all the important things I wanted to say.		
I gave examples to explain my ideas.		
My speech was clear and logically organized.		
My grammar and vocabulary were accurate.		
My pronunciation was easy to understand.		

Reflection questions

1. What did you do well?
2. What would you like to do better next time? How are you going to prepare to do this?

Appendix 4

Sample peer-assessment checklist—writing task

Example procedure

Age:

10+

Level:

High-beginner/A2+

Objective:

To help students provide constructive feedback on their peers' written work.

Procedure:

1. Students write a short text (for example, a story) individually or in pairs.
2. They swap texts with a partner or another pair, read the text, and use the checklist to evaluate it.

Variation—Self-assessment:

1. Students write their text.
2. They read it and use the checklist to evaluate their own work.
   (Rephrase the rubric and criteria as necessary.)

Checklist:

Criteria	Yes / No	Comments
The story has a clear beginning, middle, and end.		
The characters are interesting and have a clear role.		
The grammar and spelling are correct.		

Reflection questions

1. What did your partner(s) do well?
2. What should they do better next time? How can they prepare to do this?
3. Share your feedback with your partner(s).

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Appendix 5

Balancing test preparation with broader language objectives— sample scenarios

1. **Bridging test requirements with real-world skills**

   Scenario: A listening section of the test focuses only on multiple-choice answers.

   Activity: Play the audio again and ask students to summarize it orally.

   Teacher notes: Highlight useful summarizing phrases (for example, *The main idea is …*) and give feedback on clarity and fluency.

2. **Engaging students in broader learning**

   Scenario: A test focuses heavily on isolated grammar rules.

   Activity: After a gap-fill exercise, ask students to write a short paragraph using the same grammar in context.

   Teacher notes: Encourage creativity (for example, *Write about your favourite holiday using at least three past tense structures*).

3. **Encouraging critical thinking**

   Scenario: Students prepare for a multiple-choice vocabulary test.

   Activity: After completing the test, discuss why each incorrect option is wrong.

   Teacher notes: Guide students to use context clues to determine meaning and suggest rephrasing sentences with the correct word or synonym.

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Appendix 6

Assessment literacy best practices—quick guide for teachers

Build assessment literacy

- Study test constructs (for example, use handbooks, sample tests, and past papers).
- Attend professional development workshops focused on assessment strategies and innovative teaching methods.
- Collaborate with peers through observation and discussion to share best practices.

Use formative assessments

- Identify strengths and weaknesses through diagnostic tests.
- Provide ongoing feedback using self- and peer-assessment activities.
- Encourage students to track progress in journals and e-portfolios.

Balance test preparation with broader objectives

- Combine exam tasks with real-world tasks (for example, use exam topics to write blog posts or hold debates).
- Incorporate higher-order thinking activities (for example, analysing or critiquing test questions).

Promote student autonomy

- Help students set realistic goals and evaluate their own progress with structured checklists.
- Emphasize transferable skills, including critical thinking and problem-solving.

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Appendix 7

Sample procedure for implementing an e-portfolio—example for primary EFL learners

Step 1: Identify objectives

Clearly outline what students are expected to achieve using the e-portfolio, such as demonstrating progress in vocabulary, grammar, speaking, or writing.

Example: *Students will document their learning journey by uploading weekly tasks that highlight their writing skills.*

Step 2: Choose the right platform

Select a user-friendly platform that is suitable for young learners, such as Seesaw, Google Slides and Docs, or ClassDojo Portfolios. Ensure that the platform complies with GDPR regulations (or equivalent data protection laws in your country).

Step 3: Design the e-portfolio

Organize the portfolio into clear sections to help students organize their content:

Personal information: Include an 'About me' section where students write a short introduction in English, including hobbies, family members, etc.

Work samples: Create categories aligned with portfolio objectives, such as 'My vocabulary list', 'My projects', 'My blog posts'.

Reflections: Incorporate a 'My reflections' section with prompts to guide self-assessment (for example, *This week I learned …* ; *I found … difficult because …* ; *My favourite activity this month was …* ; etc.).

Step 4: Introduce the e-portfolio to students and parents

Explain what an e-portfolio is, why it is useful, and how it works.

Demonstrate how to upload files and reflections. Young learners may prefer sharing reflections orally, so show them how to record and upload audio files. Provide sentence prompts to support reflections (for example, *Today I learned about …* ; *I feel … about my progress because …*).

Organize a workshop for parents—either online or in-person—to explain how to access the platform and support their children. (Ensure they know who to contact for troubleshooting before the programme starts.)

Step 5: Provide guidance and scaffolding

Offer ongoing guidance to ensure students understand how to use the platform effectively.

Organize regular workshops with parents to reinforce their involvement in the process.

Step 6: Monitor progress and provide feedback

Regularly review students' portfolios and celebrate achievements. Leave personalized comments (for example, *Great job describing your weekend!*, *Can you add one more sentence?*, etc.) or use visual icons (for example, 'clapping', 'stars', etc.).

Share updates with parents, encouraging them to leave positive comments or icons on their child's portfolio.

Step 7: Reflect and adapt

At the end of each term, gather feedback from students and parents to evaluate what is working well and what needs improvement. Make changes as necessary to enhance the programme's effectiveness.

Glossary

accommodated tests
Tests that have adjustments to make them more accessible to candidates who have physical or cognitive restrictions.

active learning
Methods that require students to engage actively with materials through thinking, discussing, and creating.

adaptive testing
A computer-based testing method where the difficulty, level, and order of questions change based on a candidate's performance.

automated scoring systems
Tools that evaluate test items or tasks and assign scores automatically without human involvement.

competence vs competency
Competence is the ability to perform tasks successfully and efficiently. Competency refers to the specific skills, behaviours, or knowledge required to achieve that success.

data privacy and protection
Ethical guidelines for collecting, storing, and using personal data, ensuring responsible handling of information in digital systems.

deep learning
Understanding complex elements of a subject, such as recognizing cultural nuances or adapting language for specific audiences and purposes.

diagnostic test
An assessment conducted at the beginning of a course to identify students' needs, guiding lesson planning and personalized learning strategies.

digital divide
The gap between those who have access to technology and the internet for learning and those who do not, influenced by resources and digital skills.

e-portfolio
A digital tool for collecting, organizing, and storing students' work and reflections over time.

feedback loop
A process in which teachers collect and act on student performance data to enhance teaching effectiveness.

formative assessment
Ongoing assessments that monitor student progress, provide feedback, and guide instruction.

game-based assessment (GBA)
An evaluation method that uses game elements like challenges, levels, and points to assess skills and knowledge.

generative AI (GenAI)
Artificial intelligence that can generate content such as text, images, video, and audio based on input data.

inferencing
The process of deducing or predicting meaning based on context and prior knowledge.

language analytics
AI-driven analysis of text data to assess aspects like coherence, cohesion, language use, and common errors.

localization
Adapting exams to suit specific geographical or cultural groups of test takers.

multimodal
Refers to delivering tests in various formats such as paper-based, online, or through remote proctoring.

peer assessment
Activities where students evaluate and provide feedback on each other's work.

peer learning
Learning through collaboration with peers, involving mutual observations and feedback.

performance-based tests
Assessments requiring students to demonstrate knowledge through practical tasks such as projects, simulations, or role-plays. These can be used as formative or summative assessment and are increasingly used to evaluate higher-order thinking skills.

remote proctoring
An online system using cameras and microphones to monitor candidates taking exams online from remote locations, ensuring integrity and fairness.

rote memorization
Learning through repetition to memorize information, often without understanding it deeply.

scanning
A reading technique used to find specific information quickly within a text.

self-assessment
Activities through which students reflect and evaluate their own performance and learning process.

skimming
A reading technique used to understand the main idea in a text without reading every word (also known as *expeditious reading*).

surface learning
Focusing on the main points of a subject without delving into details or deeper understanding.

task authenticity
The extent to which a task reflects real-life linguistic and cognitive methods.

teach to the test
Teaching aimed primarily at improving test performance, often at the expense of broader learning objectives.

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test misappropriation
When students are prepared for a test that does not align with their immediate or long-term needs.

test reliability
The consistency of a test in producing similar results when administered under the same conditions or repeated with the same individual or group.

transferable skills
Abilities that are applicable across different contexts, such as using skimming and scanning skills for both exams and real-world tasks like analysing emails or documents.

ungrading
An assessment approach where students receive feedback on their work without being assigned grades.

washback
The influence that testing and assessment practices have on teaching and learning behaviours. Washback can be negative or positive.

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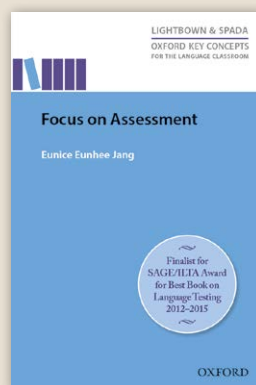
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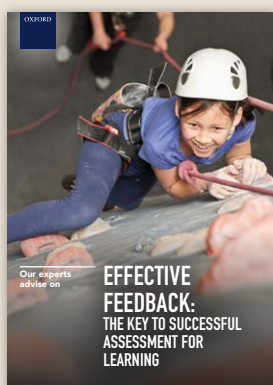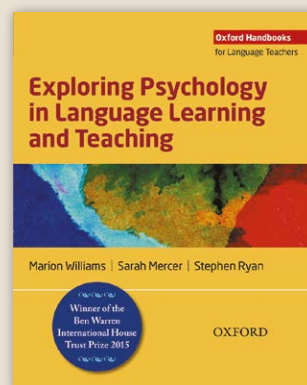
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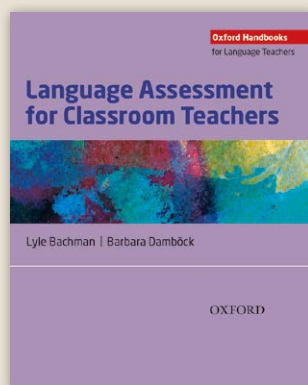
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2 The nature of washback

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3 Practical guidance for teachers

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4 Suggestions for policymakers and educational institutions

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