
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Washback Effect of Low-Stakes Tests on English Instructors' Teaching Strategies

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| ABSTRACT

This study explores the washback effect of low-stakes quizzes on English instructors' teaching strategies within a preparatory program at a foundation university in Turkey. While the majority of washback literature focuses on high-stakes assessments, this study shifts attention to the relatively underexplored domain of low-stakes testing. A mixed-methods research design was employed. Quantitative data were collected via a Likert-scale questionnaire administered to 15 English instructors, focusing on four domains: activity/time arrangement, teaching methods, materials used, and content covered. Additionally, semi-structured interviews with five participants provided qualitative insights into instructors' perceptions of institutional pressure and instructional autonomy. Both instruments were adapted from previous validated studies to ensure reliability and contextual relevance. Findings indicate that even low-stakes quizzes can significantly influence instructors' time management, teaching methods, and material selection. The results also suggest that institutional pressure and quiz structure shape teaching priorities in ways that extend beyond simple content alignment. Implications are discussed in light of teacher agency, curriculum design, and test development.

| KEYWORDS

Washback Effect, Low-Stakes Test, English Instructors, Teaching Strategies

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The concept of washback, the influence that testing exerts on teaching and learning, has become a central concern in language education research. Alderson and Wall (1993) describe washback as the phenomenon where teachers and learners "do things they would not necessarily otherwise do because of the test," emphasizing how assessments can shape classroom behaviours and instructional decisions. Although the term is widely used in applied linguistics, it often lacks a precise operational definition, even as tests are recognized as "powerful determiners of what happens in classrooms." In recent decades, researchers have begun to look beyond high-stakes, standardized exams to explore whether more routine, classroom-based assessments, such as quizzes, can also produce significant washback effects.

Testing and assessment play a fundamental role in shaping language instruction. As Cheng (2000) notes, policymakers frequently use tests to "manipulate educational systems, to control curricula, and to impose new textbooks and new teaching methods." Rather than simply measuring learning outcomes, tests have become tools through which institutional expectations are implemented. According to Cumming (2009), language assessment itself has become a major policy issue in educational programs, driven by curricular reforms that define student outcomes in terms of measurable standards such as competencies or benchmarks. This institutional approach to assessment is not limited to national-level testing but can also be observed in the internal assessment practices of universities, including preparatory programs. These broader trends have led to an increased integration of assessment into everyday teaching practice, making it difficult to separate pedagogical choices from institutional pressures.

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Traditionally, low-stakes tests, such as quizzes, have been seen as non-threatening and largely inconsequential. Cole and Osterlind (2008) define a low-stakes exam as “any exam that has no meaningful consequence to the test taker.” However, even though these assessments are designed to support learning rather than evaluate it, their widespread and standardized use in higher education raises important questions. In many university preparatory programs in Turkey, quizzes are used not only to track student progress but also to gauge instructional success. Despite their supportive intentions, quizzes in such settings often carry implicit evaluative functions, not for the student, but for the instructor, ultimately affecting how courses are taught. Over time, these seemingly benign assessments can exert pressure on instructors to teach to the test, prioritize short-term retention, and align their instruction with quiz formats, thereby narrowing the scope of classroom learning and limiting teacher autonomy.

This study holds significance as it aims to provide an understanding of how such policies impact university-level English language teaching. When teaching becomes closely tied to quiz performance, instructors may feel forced to prioritize memorization and short-term outcomes over the broader development of communicative skills. For instance, instructors may minimize communicative tasks in favour of grammar-focused drills, which are like the quiz content itself, thus limiting skill integration. By exploring the washback effect of low-stakes quizzes, this points to the subtle ways assessment expectations may shape teaching practices. The findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how classroom-based testing impacts instructional choices and provide valuable information for institutions seeking to implement more balanced and pedagogically sound assessment practices.

This research specifically investigated how standardized, low-stakes quizzes influence English instructors' teaching strategies, material choices, and content prioritization within the preparatory program of a foundation university in Turkey. It also examined instructors' perceptions of institutional expectations and what such perceptions necessitate for their professional autonomy. A mixed-methods design was employed, incorporating quantitative data from 15 instructors and qualitative insights from five in-depth interviews. As a result, the study reveals that even low-stakes testing, when institutionalized and routinized, can create measurable washback in higher education language classrooms. By using adapted questionnaires and interview protocols, the study captures both measurable and experiential dimensions of washback, offering a detailed look at how institutionalized quizzes affect teaching strategies in the classroom.

2. Literature Review

For a long time, assessment in language education has been seen not only as a means of measuring learner proficiency but also as a key force influencing what happens in the classroom. Tests have an impact that goes beyond evaluation; they have a direct impact on how teachers plan lessons, what content they prioritize, and how students participate in their education. This backward influence from tests to teaching is commonly referred to as washback (Alderson & Wall, 1993). Pearson (1988) emphasizes that public examinations can shape the attitudes, behaviours, and motivations of not only teachers and learners but also parents, highlighting the powerful, system-wide reach of assessment practices.

As educational systems have implemented curriculum rules that specify language learning outcomes through clear standards like benchmarks and competencies, this effect has grown even more during the last twenty years. These frameworks aim to make student progress more transparent and accountable, encouraging instruction that aligns with clearly defined goals (Cumming, 2009). Within this context, assessment is no longer a separate, final step but an integral part of the curriculum, guiding both teaching and learning in specific directions. These developments have been especially evident in high-stakes testing contexts, where assessments have consequences for student promotion, certification, or institutional accountability.

High-stakes tests are commonly defined as assessments that carry significant academic or institutional consequences for students. As Cole and Osterlind (2008) explain, a high-stakes test is one that involves “at least some academic or other meaningful consequence to the student.” In such contexts, testing often implements a powerful influence on instruction. A wide range of international research shows that high-stakes testing can alter not only what teachers teach but also how students engage with learning. For instance, in Bangladesh, Rahman et al. (2021) found that the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) English exam produced strong negative washback by encouraging teachers to focus on grammar and reading comprehension while neglecting communicative skills such as speaking and listening. Teachers reported feeling compelled to align their lessons with the test format due to institutional expectations and parental demands, often relying heavily on beneficial materials rather than curriculum-based instruction.

Similarly, Thanh (2020) investigated the English National Exam in Vietnam and found that the stakes attached to the exam caused both teachers and students to prioritize test-taking strategies instead of the language. Practice exams and drills took centre stage in the classroom, but productive skills like speaking and writing were neglected. In the context of Hong Kong, Chak (2024) reported that high-stakes testing not only influenced teachers' classroom practices but also significantly shaped students'

learning strategies. Many students adopted surface-level approaches, such as rote memorization and avoidance of tasks not directly tested in exams, indicating how assessment pressures influenced learner autonomy.

These results are consistent with previous research by Cheng (1997), who showed that teachers in Hong Kong systematically matched their classroom content and assessment methods with the public exam syllabus, often at the expense of communicative language teaching. Collectively, these studies show that high-stakes exams can deeply shape classroom practices, curriculum scope, and learner behaviour across varied educational systems. While these studies offer rich insight into high-stakes contexts, far less is known about the pedagogical effects of frequent, low-stakes assessments that operate without the same formal consequences.

Beverson (2023) defines low-stakes tests as assessments that carry minimal consequences for students' final grades but are administered frequently throughout a course to support learning and self-regulation. Even though they appear to be harmless, these tests have the power to cause quantifiable changes in instruction. Tajeddin and Dabbagh (2015), for instance, found that low-stakes pragmatic assessment tasks led teachers to prioritize the linguistic features being assessed, such as appropriateness and politeness strategies, even in the absence of high-pressure grading. This suggests that regular, formative testing may still prompt a degree of teaching to the test.

However, research on the washback effect of low-stakes quizzes remains relatively insufficient, especially when compared to the volume of literature on high-stakes contexts. Most existing studies focus on large-scale placement or exit exams, leaving a noticeable gap regarding how frequent, internal low-stakes quizzes, particularly those used for progress tracking, shape day-to-day instructional choices. This gap is especially relevant in institutional systems where such quizzes are systematically implemented. Given this, more attention is needed to explore the nuanced pedagogical consequences of low-stakes assessments. This pattern appears to repeat itself in the Turkish context as well, where both high- and low-stakes evaluations are central to university preparatory programs; however, the specific pedagogical effects of frequently administered low-stakes quizzes remain largely underexplored.

While existing research highlights how both high- and low-stakes assessments can influence instruction, these effects become especially meaningful when viewed through the lens of institutional practices. In many universities in Turkey, preparatory programs rely heavily on low-stakes quizzes as tools for tracking student progress throughout the academic year.

Although these assessments are not officially tied to high-stakes outcomes like certification or advancement, their frequent use sets up a pattern of continuous measurement. In some institutions, student success on these quizzes is closely monitored, and instructors may feel a growing sense of responsibility to ensure positive results. As a result, teaching can become subtly aligned with quiz content, pacing, and format, leading instructors to adapt their strategies in ways that prioritize performance on these low-stakes tasks, even if they were never designed to have such an impact.

To understand the ways in which institutional use of low-stakes quizzes shapes classroom interaction, it is essential to use research instruments capable of capturing both overt and covert forms of washback. While much of the existing literature focuses on high-stakes contexts, the instruments developed in these studies remain highly relevant for exploring how frequent assessments influence classroom-level teaching. For example, Tayeb et al. (2014) designed interview questions to examine how a national English examination affected curriculum delivery and instructional behaviour, offering a valuable framework for eliciting teachers' reflective insights. Also, Soomro and Shah (2016) created a detailed questionnaire to measure changes across four instructional domains—activity/time arrangement, teaching methods, materials used, and content covered—based on teachers' perceptions of exam-driven classroom shifts.

Though both tools were originally developed for high-stakes environments, their comprehensive scope makes them well-suited to identifying comparable patterns in settings where frequent, low-stakes testing plays a central role in institutional monitoring and instructional planning. This study adapts both instruments to examine the washback effect of low-stakes quizzes in a Turkish university preparatory program, where such assessments are regularly used to guide instruction.

Although previous research had thoroughly examined the washback effects of high-stakes assessments, there was growing recognition that even low-stakes tests could influence instructional practices, especially in institutional settings where they were administered frequently and used to monitor student progress. Studies such as those by Tajeddin and Dabbagh (2015) demonstrated that low-stakes tests affected teaching focus, while other researchers showed how frequent assessment led to shifts in pacing, content, and classroom priorities.

However, the majority of these studies focused on either national exams or generalized classroom testing without specifically addressing how institutionalized low-stakes quizzes affected English language instruction in preparatory school contexts. Despite the widespread use of quizzes in Turkish foundation universities, little research had explored their pedagogical impact on instructors. This study aimed to fill that gap by examining how regular, low-stakes quizzes influenced teaching strategies, material selection, and classroom autonomy in a university prep program. In doing so, it contributed to a more nuanced understanding of the washback effect in low-pressure, yet instructionally significant, assessment environments.

3. Methodology

Although low-stakes assessments are primarily designed to provide formative feedback and reduce learner anxiety, they can still influence classroom practices in significant ways, particularly when implemented frequently and embedded within institutional expectations. In the context of English preparatory programs at foundation universities in Turkey, quizzes are commonly used to track student progress and guide academic decisions.

As a result, instructors may experience indirect pressure to tailor their teaching strategies, materials, and lesson content in alignment with quiz formats and outcomes. While these quizzes are not considered high-stakes in the traditional sense, their institutional function may still lead to a notable washback effect, potentially narrowing the curriculum or limiting instructional autonomy. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the extent to which frequent low-stakes testing affects English instructors' pedagogical decisions in this setting.

In line with this purpose, the study addressed the following research questions :

- 1. What is the overall washback effect of regularly administered quizzes on English instructors in terms of their teaching strategies in a foundation university prep school?**
- 2. How do English instructors perceive the impact of these quizzes on their teaching practices?**

To explore the first research question, a questionnaire was administered to 15 English instructors working in the preparatory program of a foundation university in Turkey. The questionnaire was adapted from Soomro and Shah (2016), whose original instrument was designed to measure exam-driven instructional shifts across four domains: time/lesson arrangement, teaching strategies, materials used, and content covered. The tool was modified to suit the low-stakes testing environment of the current study while maintaining its original structural integrity. Descriptive statistical analysis, including mean scores, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, was conducted using SPSS software to identify patterns and trends in instructional behaviour related to quiz implementation.

To address the second research question, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five instructors selected from the questionnaire participants using purposive sampling. The selection aimed to reflect a range of experiences and reported impacts in response to quiz washback. The interview questions were adapted from Tayeb et al. (2014), originally developed to examine how high-stakes English assessments influenced curriculum delivery and pedagogical decisions. For the current study, the questions were revised to focus specifically on the influence of low-stakes quizzes in institutional contexts. Interview transcripts were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns in perceived washback. MAXQDA software was used to assist in organizing and refining the coding process.

Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout the data collection and analysis processes.

4. Participants

The participant group consisted of 15 English instructors currently teaching in the preparatory program of a foundation university in Turkey. Out of a total of 20 instructors in the program, 15 were actively engaged in classroom teaching, while the remaining five held administrative roles and were therefore excluded from the study. Given this, all eligible instructors were included, reflecting a complete sample of the teaching population. All participants had a minimum of two years of teaching experience. The sample comprised 10 female and 5 male instructors, with an age range of 25 to 40 years. Following the questionnaire phase, five instructors were selected for follow-up interviews using purposive sampling. Selection was based on participants' availability and willingness to take part in the second phase. The qualitative data aimed to gain a more nuanced understanding of how instructors perceived the washback effect of low-stakes quizzes on their teaching practices.

5. Instrumentation

Two research instruments were used in this study. The first was a questionnaire adapted from Soomro and Shah (2016), originally developed to investigate the washback of a high school exit examination. For the present study, the instrument was revised to reflect the context of low-stakes, institutional quizzes used in a university preparatory program. Minor modifications were made to the item phrasing and focus to ensure contextual relevance. The adapted questionnaire consisted of four domains: activity/time arrangement, teaching methods, materials used in the classroom, and the content covered. Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree). The instrument was selected due to its comprehensive design and prior validation in washback research.

The second instrument was a semi-structured interview adapted from Tayeb et al. (2014), which originally examined washback in a high-stakes exam context. For this study, only the components relevant to teacher perspectives were retained. The adapted interview protocol included nine questions addressing pedagogical dimensions such as lesson planning, instructional autonomy, and alignment between teaching and assessment. Both instruments were chosen for their capacity to elicit both measurable and interpretive insights into how assessment shapes classroom instruction.

6. Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected from the questionnaires were analysed using SPSS Statistics. Each survey item was examined individually and grouped under four domains: activity/time arrangement, teaching methods, materials used in the classroom, and content covered. Descriptive statistics were calculated to identify patterns in instructor responses. Skewness and kurtosis values were also assessed to examine the distribution characteristics of the data and confirm the appropriateness of descriptive interpretations. Given the small sample size and the exploratory nature of the study, inferential statistics were not used. The qualitative data obtained from the follow-up interviews were transcribed and analysed using MAXQDA software. A deductive thematic coding approach was employed, guided by the pedagogical dimensions reflected in the interview questions. Recurring themes were identified, categorized, and refined through iterative review. This process enabled a deeper understanding of instructors' perceptions of quiz-related washback and allowed for triangulation of the qualitative findings with the patterns observed in the quantitative data.

7. Results

7.1 Quantitative Results

The questionnaire responses were analysed using descriptive statistics in SPSS. The results were organized into four core domains: activity/time arrangement, teaching methods, materials used, and content covered. Each domain consisted of four items rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Agree to 5 = Strongly Disagree). Lower means indicate stronger agreement with the item statements.

1) Activity/Time Arrangement (Q1-Q3)

Item	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Q1	2.40	1.298	0.705	-0.637
Q2	2.07	1.100	0.595	-0.916
Q3	1.67	1.175	1.366	0.136

The mean values ranged from 1.67 to 2.40, showing that instructors generally agreed that quizzes influence classroom planning. Q3 showed the strongest agreement ($M = 1.67$), indicating that grammar is prioritized over communication skills due to its prominence in quizzes. Skewness values were positive (ranging from 0.595 to 1.366), showing that most responses leaned toward agreement. Kurtosis ranged from -0.916 to 0.136, indicating distributions that were generally light tailed, except for Q3 which approached a normal shape. Overall, responses in this domain were moderately skewed and relatively varied.

2) Teaching Methods (Q4-Q10)

Item	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Q4	2.00	1.069	1.619	3.635
Q5	02.07	1.222	1.208	1.013
Q6	02.07	1.222	1.208	1.013
Q7	2.93	1.387	0.321	-1.125
Q8	1.87	1.187	1.474	2.086
Q9	2.40	0.910	1.652	4.280
Q10	1.60	0.910	1.626	2.359

Mean scores showed a strong tendency toward agreement, especially for Q10 (M = 1.60) and Q8 (M = 1.87), suggesting instructors frequently tailor teaching strategies to quiz demands. Q7 was the only item in this group with a neutral tendency (M = 2.93). Skewness values ranged from 0.321 to 1.652, indicating a strong tilt toward agreement. Kurtosis values varied widely, with Q4 and Q9 showing high peakiness (3.635 and 4.280), meaning that many instructors gave similar responses. This domain had the most concentrated agreement overall, with noticeable consistency in quiz-driven teaching behaviours.

3) Materials Used in the Classroom (Q11- Q14)

Item	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Q11	2.20	1.320	0.653	-0.567
Q12	2.53	1.187	-0.091	-1.499
Q13	2.20	1.320	0.868	-0.306
Q14	2.00	0.926	0.623	-0.179

This domain showed means between 2.00 and 2.53, reflecting agreement that instructors use additional or adapted materials in response to quiz content. Q14 (M = 2.00) indicated stronger agreement in adjusting content sequencing. Skewness values ranged from 0.623 to 0.868, indicating consistent right-skewed patterns (agreement). Kurtosis values ranged from -0.567 to -0.179, suggesting flatter distributions with more spread in responses. Instructors seemed generally aligned but not rigidly unanimous about their use of quiz-related materials.

4) Content Covered (Q15-Q16)

Item	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Q15	2.33	1.234	0.693	-1.016
Q16	1.93	1.223	1.118	0.173

Mean scores indicated a general agreement, especially in Q16 (M = 1.93), suggesting that instructors still cover all textbook content, even if not tested. Skewness values were 0.693 (Q15) and 1.118 (Q16), again showing a rightward lean toward agreement. Kurtosis was -1.016 and 0.173, indicating moderate variability in opinions. This domain showed that while instructors are guided by quiz expectations, they still maintain a degree of curricular completeness.

Overall, the quantitative findings reveal a consistent washback effect of low-stakes quizzes on instructors' teaching strategies, classroom materials, and content decisions. Instructors largely agreed that their time allocation, teaching methods, and material selection were shaped by the demands of frequent quizzes. The strongest agreement appeared in areas related to grammar-focused instruction and the use of quiz-aligned teaching techniques. These findings indicate that even formative assessments like quizzes can exert considerable influence on instructional planning and classroom priorities in preparatory language programs.

7.2 Qualitative Results

To complement the quantitative findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five English instructors. The interview data were first reviewed manually and then analyzed using MAXQDA to facilitate systematic thematic coding. Codes were initially generated based on recurring themes in participants' responses and later organized into five main categories, each with related sub-codes. The frequency of themes was tracked both across coded documents and individual response sections, revealing overlapping concerns and recurring perceptions about the influence of low-stakes quizzes.

1) Teaching Practices

This theme emerged most frequently in both coded documents and sections. The most dominant sub-code was "Reduced use of communicative methods" (n=8), indicating that instructors often replaced interactive strategies with test-focused ones. Many participants stated that they structured lessons around quiz expectations (n=6), emphasizing teaching aligned with quiz format. Additionally, some instructors reported experiencing limited freedom in planning (n=3), a reliance on test strategies (n=2), and repetitive instruction due to the quiz cycle (n=2). Overall, teaching was shaped more by assessment form than by communicative or learner-centred approaches.

2) Assessment Practices

This domain captured concerns about how assessment expectations affect content delivery. Instructors consistently noted that assessment was aligned with quiz expectations (n=5), and many acknowledged that quizzes did not always match students' proficiency levels (n=5). There were also concerns over neglecting speaking and interaction skills (n=4) and a pattern of using worksheets tailored to quiz format (n=1). These findings highlight a disconnect between comprehensive language instruction and the narrow focus imposed by assessment formats.

3) Student Behaviour and Emotions

Participants commonly discussed how students adapted their behaviour in response to frequent quizzes. The most frequently mentioned issue was increased anxiety before assessments (n=6). Several instructors also mentioned that students showed reduced engagement in classroom activities (n=4) and often asked about quiz format constantly (n=1), indicating a shift in focus from learning to test performance. Other concerns included students memorizing and forgetting content (n=1) and a general tendency toward grade-driven learning behaviour (n=5).

4) Student Motivation

This theme covered instructors' observations on how quizzes affected students' drive to learn. The codes revealed a pattern of short-term motivation only (n=5) and a tendency for students to be motivated by scores rather than skills (n=4). In some cases, this contributed to a loss of interest in learning English (n=4). Instructors noted that students often focused on "surviving the quiz" rather than improving their language abilities (n=3), reflecting a performance-oriented mindset rather than a growth mindset.

5) Institutional Expectations and Pressure

Instructors expressed significant concern over pressure from institutional expectations (n=6). This pressure was reported to limit creativity (n=2), redefine teaching as performance for results (n=1), and reinforce alignment with institutional goals, even when these goals conflicted with pedagogical principles. Although this category had fewer total sub-codes than others, it carried strong emotional weight in the interviews, pointing to an external layer of stress shaping instructors' practices.

8. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that, contrary to their intended formative and low-pressure function, institutionalized low-stakes quizzes generate a notable washback effect on English instructors' pedagogical choices within a university preparatory setting. Although these assessments do not carry high-stakes consequences, their frequent administration and close alignment with institutional practices significantly influenced how instructors planned, paced, and delivered instruction.

Quantitative results showed that instructors overwhelmingly agreed on the influence of quiz schedules across multiple teaching domains. Instructional adjustments were especially apparent in time management, grammar-focused methods, and the prioritization of materials closely aligned with quiz formats. These patterns suggest that even low-stakes assessments can lead to a narrowing of instructional goals and a reduction in communicative language teaching when frequent testing becomes the dominant organizing principle in the classroom. This finding echoes earlier studies in high-stakes contexts (e.g., Soomro & Shah, 2016; Tayeb et al., 2014), reinforcing the idea that the frequency and format of assessments, not just their stakes, can trigger substantial pedagogical shifts.

Qualitative data further enriched these findings, revealing five thematic areas: Teaching Practices, Assessment Practices, Student Behaviour and Emotions, Student Motivation, and Institutional Expectations. Instructors consistently described a shift toward performance-oriented teaching, reduced flexibility in lesson design, and growing emphasis on quiz predictability. They also observed changes in student behaviour, noting increased test anxiety, surface-level motivation, and a decline in intrinsic engagement. These dynamics are typically associated with high-stakes contexts (Kılıçkaya, 2016; Rahman et al., 2021; Thanh,

2020), but their emergence here indicates that institutional framing and teacher accountability norms can replicate similar pressures even in lower-stakes environments.

A particularly significant insight from this study is that washback is not exclusively driven by the formal consequences of a test. Instead, it can arise from institutional expectations, implicit accountability structures, and the routine nature of assessment practices. Instructors reported feeling compelled to “teach to the test” in response to student demands, departmental expectations, and the visibility of class performance data, rather than formal mandates. This suggests that systemic pressures and cultural norms can shape instructional behaviour as strongly as the assessment stakes themselves.

These findings contribute to a broader understanding of assessment-driven instruction by emphasizing the role of institutional context in shaping classroom practices. When quizzes are used not only as formative tools but also as informal measures of teaching effectiveness, they can exert a disproportionate influence on instruction. This study adds to the growing recognition that frequent, low-stakes assessments must be designed and implemented with awareness of their broader pedagogical impact. While the study offers important insights, it is limited by its single-institution scope and small sample size. Although the mixed-methods approach enabled triangulation and depth, the findings may not be generalizable across different educational contexts. Future research could expand on this work by including a more diverse range of institutions, incorporating student perspectives, or employing longitudinal designs to examine the evolving nature of washback over time.

9. Conclusion

This study explored the washback effects of low-stakes quizzes on English language instructors working in the preparatory program of a foundation university in Turkey. The results revealed that even without formal consequences, frequent and routine quizzes significantly influenced how instructors structured their teaching, selected materials, and approached classroom management. Both quantitative and qualitative data confirmed that instructors made deliberate adjustments in response to institutionalized assessment patterns, often reducing emphasis on communicative strategies in favour of test-aligned instruction.

These findings challenge the assumption that only high-stakes tests produce strong washback effects. Instead, the study highlights how institutional framing, implicit expectations, and the routinization of assessment can generate similar pressures in low-stakes contexts. Washback, therefore, should be understood not just as a consequence of exam stakes, but as a reflection of how assessments are perceived, implemented, and monitored within an educational system.

By drawing attention to the instructional consequences of seemingly benign testing practices, this study encourages institutions to critically reflect on the role of routine quizzes in shaping pedagogy. Assessment design, frequency, and framing must be aligned with instructional goals that support deeper learning, communicative competence, and teacher autonomy. Future studies could broaden this inquiry by including student experiences, exploring alternative forms of formative assessment, or comparing assessment cultures across different institutional settings.

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