

The Washback of the Final Test on Students' Learning Behavior

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Abstract: The research is aimed to describe the students' learning perception and behaviour in facing the final test of structure subject (UAS). An in-depth analysis was employed to the data collected from the questionnaires, observation and interviews. In this case, 83 students took a part to fill in the questionnaires and 10 students were interviewed to confirm the findings from the questionnaire. Questionnaire result shows that the students have different perceptions on the UAS. Although UAS is difficult, they mostly said that it is of great importance for their English language skills improvement and for English Education Department quality. Observation result shows that the majority of respondents, both those preparing for the final test inside and outside campus area, set up extra time for learning structure, replaced the textbooks with worksheets or TOEFL, drilled exercises through online, did consultation with lecturers, joined informal education, joined English coaching clinic, and learnt collaboratively did religious activities, got stressed, and prepared small notes for cheating. Interview results show that the majority of students invited English teachers to teach at home, created a structure group in WhatsApp application, took notes on some small blank papers for cheating, got stressed and did religious activities such as praying and fasting. These learning behaviors were due to the fact that the students were worried about not being able to take the next structure subjects.

1 INTRODUCTION

The subject of Structure has been taught in English Education Department of UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung from the second to the fourth semesters for Structure I, II, and III (UIN Sunan Gunung Djati, 2015). To see the students' ability in mastering the subject, say Structure I, and to take the Structure II in the next semester, the students require to join the final test conducted at the end of the semester. The implementation of the structure final test could potentially affect positively or negatively the students' learning behaviours.

With regard to the effect or commonly known as washback (Alderson and Wall, 1993; Bachman, 2004; Brown, 2004; Cheng, 2005; Green, 2007; and McNamara, 2000), the phenomenon of how test affect the learning behaviour has been studied by several previous researchers. For example, Alderson and Wall (1993) used English National Examination in Sri Lanka; Manjares and Alvarez (2005) used English National Examination in Columbia; Qi (2005) used the National Matriculation English Test in China, Hui-Fen (2009) used University Entrance test in Japan; and Tsagari (2009) used First Certificate in

English in Greek. In Indonesian context, Sukyadi and Mardiani (2011) used English National Examination. Considering the use of high-stakes tests by the previous researchers aforementioned, the result shows that any kinds of high-stakes tests produce washback.

One thing different between the present study and those of previous ones is the uniqueness of high-takes test. Structure Subject is considered high-stakes test as the students failed the Structure I would not be allowed to take Structure II or those failed Structure III would not be allowed to take Syntax Subject (UIN Sunan Gunung Djati, 2015). Therefore, this study is aimed at revealing the learning behaviours that are influenced by washback effect of Structure Final Test to see the changes happening in the classroom or outside classroom.

2 METHODS

This study employed a qualitative method, using a case site context combined with several data collection techniques consisting of observation, questionnaire, and interview.

Observation was used to discover further details of the impact of Structure Final Test both inside campus and outside campus area. This “refers to the data observed by a researcher who directly observes study’s research participant” (Anastas, 2005). This presents a more accurate picture of reality although it is “a time-consuming process to capture the required behaviour” (Cohen, et al. 2007). This was conducted amounting to seven sessions whose share was four times inside campus observations and three times outside campus observations.

As the study involved 83 respondents, a questionnaire tends to be suited to involving a large number of subjects. Thus, the close-ended questionnaire in the form of Yes/No option was employed to reveal the respondents’ experiences in facing the final test of structure. As the form of questionnaire was close-ended item, the open-ended items were covered through interviews to clarify or confirm the answers to the questionnaire. For example, the questionnaire asked “Is the final test structure important?” the answer could be chosen was Yes or No. To clarify their answers, the interview was addressed to 10 selected respondents. The respondents’ selection was based on the unique activities performed by them in dealing with the final test of structure, such as doing consultation, doing religious activities, getting stressed, learning collaboratively, joining informal education, drilling through online, setting up extra time, and preparing small notes for cheating.

3 FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The study revealed two data findings including the respondents’ perception toward the final test of structure and their learning behaviours affected by the final test of structure.

3.1 Respondents’ Perception of the Final Test of Structure

The finding on the respondents’ perception was gained through questionnaire and interview. There were three questions addressed to see how they perceived the final test of structure. The first question was designed to ask to all respondents having ever joined the Structure I subject about their preference of the Structure subject. The answers varied each other. But the majority of them said that they liked the Structure subject. 10 respondents answering ‘like’ to the subject were then interviewed for revealing the reasons. Seven of them said that the Structure subject

was interesting and easy to be studied, understood, and practiced. The rests said that because it is the most challenging subject. They then added the statement that all students must pass this challenging subject to join the next same subject in different levels.

The second question referred to the respondents’ perception on the final test of structure. The majority of the respondents said that the final test of structure was hardly easy to be passed. Their answers were then clarified through interview. The clarification was about their perception of the reason behind stating ‘difficult’ to the final test of structure administration. Having analysed their answers to interview session, their answers can be figured out that there are two factors affecting their perception: 1) There was a discrepancy between the item forms of exercise and item forms of final test; and 2) There was anxiety of not being able to pass the final test.

The third item of questionnaire asking whether or not the final test of structure is important. Most of them chose ‘yes’ to express that the final test is important to do. 10 of 83 respondents, covering five respondents chose ‘yes/important’ and five chose ‘no/not important,’ were then interviewed. There are two categories of perception, positive and negative as it can be seen in the following tables.

Table 1: Respondents’ Positive Perception on Final Test of Structure.

Category	Number of Respondents
Department Standard	2
Students’ Proficiency	2
Study Seriousness	1

Table 1 shows the data from respondents’ interviews, which stated positive perceptions of the final test of structure administration. Two respondents perceived the final test of structure as important for English Education Department standard. This makes people to consider that the students graduating from the Department have a good quality in teaching English. Two respondents stated that the final test of structure served to examine the students’ grammar proficiency. Another positive point in their perception is that the final test of structure compels the students to study more seriously to improve their English skill. A more interesting finding is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Respondents' Negative Perception on Final Test of Structure.

Category	Number of Respondents
Futility	3
Awkward Policy	2

It is shown in Table 2 that there are three respondents who raised objections about the futility of the final test of structure that the length of the students' studying for a semester is only determined in 90 minutes of the final test of structure administration. Two respondents stated their objections that the policy of Department in deciding the prerequisites of structure subject II and III is awkward. It is not wise to force the students to pass the Structure I before joining Structure II.

3.2 Learning Behaviours Affected by the Final Test of Structure

The finding on the respondents' learning behaviours was collected from observation, questionnaire, and interview. The observation was conducted a month prior to testing the students. Meanwhile, the questionnaire and interview were administered two weeks after testing the students. Data obtained from observation, questionnaire, and interview verified the presence of the washback of the final test of structure on students' learning behaviours. Let us consider the following table.

Table 4: Washback of the Final Test of Structure in Campus Area and Outside Campus Area

No	Inside Campus	Outside Campus
1	Setting up extra time in the classroom	Setting up extra time at home
2	Altering textbooks with worksheets	Being involved in informal education
3	Taking online drills	Inviting English teachers to teach at home
4	Doing consultation	Building a group in WhatsApp
5	Building Collaborative Work	Joining English coaching clinic
6	Preparing small notes for cheating	Doing religious activities
7	-	Getting stressed

Table 4 shows that having observed and interviewed the respondents, the learning behaviours affected by the UAS was divided in two areas: inside campus area and outside campus area.

3.2.1 Learning Behaviours Inside Campus Area

In campus area, the respondents did some activities as follows:

3.2.1.1 Setting Up Extra Time

The first activity done by the respondent prior to joining the UAS was setting up the extra time, two weeks' approach to UAS, in their learning by making a schedule for discussing one or two topics of structure. The time schedule was twice a week (Tuesday and Friday) every evening. Sometimes, they asked the senior students to present a topic relating to the topic they are going to discuss. From the sample of seven session observations, it was found that the main activity in the classroom discussion they scheduled was practicing to establishing sentences based on the topic being discussed. This coincides with the statement by Pizaro (2009) that allocating time to the skills needed in the test is the washback of the test.

3.2.1.2 Altering the Textbooks with Worksheets

The second activity was altering the learning materials of which they usually use class textbooks with worksheet identical to exercises given in the textbooks. Even, it was found that some of them replace the textbooks with TOEFL exercises. It is generally assumed that a test may influence what and how a learner learns (Cheng, 2005).

3.2.1.3 Taking Online Drills

The third activity was taking structure drill section through websites. When observing the students inside campus area, such as in the faculty building, canteen, and corridor, they enjoyed free Wi-Fi served by the university. They were interviewed to find out what sites they were opening. Most of them said that they were trying out the grammatical skill through grammar online services. Drilling is a common phenomenon of washback effect of a test. The strategy is not only employed by students but it is used by teachers as well. They may apply the strategy for weaker students (Ferman, 2004).

3.2.1.4 Doing Consultation

The fourth activity was doing consultation with the senior students and lecturers. Taylor (1990) stated that consultation is informal discussion with teachers and friends as an important preparation. Some respondents realized that consulting the topics with the senior students was of great attempts to improve their grammatical proficiency. In addition, they also said that the senior students sometimes recommended that they do more exercises in the final test of structure format to increase the grammatical proficiency.

3.2.1.5 Building Collaborative work

The fifth activity was learning collaboratively with some classmates. Those who did not join the classroom discussion scheduled twice a week as mentioned in point 1 learnt in pairs or in group to discuss the topics of structure. This shows that the students will do whatever behaviors they feel most expedient to help them to prepare the test (Alderson and Wall, 1993).

3.2.1.6 Preparing Small Notes

The last activity done inside campus area was preparing small notes in the small size paper for cheating at the time of the final test of structure. These notes were prepared by some students who were lazy to learn and practice. Rather than preparing small notes, Ferman (2004) identified the use of a clue card for preparation for the test. However, the strategy is basically the same; they use notes in order for memorization to facilitate.

3.2.2 Learning Behaviours Outside Campus Area

Those activities done inside campus area were similar to those of done outside campus area as follows:

3.2.2.1 Setting up Extra Time

The first activity done outside campus area was almost the same as that of being done inside campus area in terms of setting up extra time in their learning. The difference was time set was arranged in their own boarding house by making a tight learning schedule started from morning to evening. In one session of interview, they said that they focused on learning the structure subject by balancing theories and exercises. It is particular trues that a test may lead students to set up extra time for learning. The amount of time spent weekly for preparation of the test and extra time, which is reflected in the time spent weekly for

learning and accelerated pace of learning during period of time immediately preceding the test (Ferman, 2004).

3.2.2.2 Being Involved in Informal Education

The second activity was being involved in informal education such as English courses. Observation data showed that the respondents were registered in some English courses near to campus area. They were then interviewed to clarify the reasons they took the English courses. They said that the demand to be able to pass the structure subject has made us think hard and we take the course to fulfil such demand.

3.2.2.3 Inviting English Teachers

The third activity was inviting the English teacher to teach Grammar. Some students realized that they paid some English teachers to teach English grammar at their own home or boarding house. This was done due to the fact that they want to pass the final test of structure. Inviting English teachers as tutor to compensate students' lack of knowledge in testing materials is considered a common phenomenon. Ferman (2004), for example, identifies the employment of tutor as a way to help students prepare for the test.

3.2.2.4 Building a Group

The fourth activity was building a group named Structure Group in WhatsApp. In one session of interview with 10 respondents, they all show the same sound that they created a group discussing the structure. This is a problem-based learning group. Everyone could post a problem and discussed by all members of the group to find the solution.

3.2.2.5 Joining Coaching Clinic

The fifth activity was being active participants in English coaching clinic established by the student association of English Education department (SAEED). Another sample of seven observation sessions found that the second semester students mostly participated in the SAEED activities. One of which was to help the juniors increase their English language skills.

3.2.2.6 Doing Religious Activities

The sixth activity was doing religious activities such as praying and fasting (Saehu, 2012). This is an interesting finding gained from an interview session showing that many respondents prayed for their

success in dealing with the final test of structure. The activity seems to be typical of students of Religion institution, in which all respondent learns in Islamic university.

3.2.2.7 Getting Stressed

The last thing happened outside campus area was getting stressed of not being able to pass the final test of structure. The questionnaire and interview data showed that the respondents complained that the final test of structure had made them stressful. However, some of them did not consider it as a nuisance, even motivates them to learn seriously and diligently. The phenomenon is parallel to the research findings from Sukyadi and Mardiani (2011) that a test may influence, one of which, is students' feeling. In this case, feeling stressful and worried about the test is common phenomenon. Further, Spratt (2005) states "that exams impact on feelings and attitudes seems clear but how these in turn impact on teaching and learning is much less clear."

4 CONCLUSIONS

The students involved in this study show their perceptions on the final test of structure differently. Some of them said that the UAS is difficult, while the others it is not. Although it is explicitly stated difficult, most of them perceived it important for their English proficiency improvement and English Education Department quality. However, those cons said that the UAS is not important, as it is futile and irrational about the length of the students' studying a structure subject for a semester is only determined to pass or not in one and half hours of the final test of structure administration. The learning behaviours affected by the washback of the UAS are time arrangement, textbooks replacement, online drilling, consultation with lecturers, coaching clinic with senior students, informal education involvement, notes preparation for cheating, religious activities, and stressful condition.

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