

The Washback of Continuous Assessment Methods on Teaching Practices in Higher Education Context: The Case of EFL Teachers at the Department of English Language at M'sila University

أثر استخدام أساليب التقويم المستمر على طرق التدريس في التعليم العالي: دراسة ميدانية بقسم اللغة الانجليزية بجامعة المسيلة

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Abstract

Integrating the LMD system in the Algerian higher education has brought a drastic shift from traditional assessment methods to amended alternatives. Among the renovations is the integration of continuous assessment (CA) along with the main examination system to determine students' success in the different modules. CA would definitely have a washback on both teaching and learning practices. In this respect, this study attempts, particularly, to explore the washback of CA on EFL teaching practices. This descriptive study makes use of an online questionnaire that was administered on a sample of 35 EFL teachers at the department of English at M'sila University. The findings revealed significant feedback about the usefulness of CA. It was also found that it has a possible negative washback on teaching methods. Accordingly, this study sheds light on the negative washback of CA and the necessity of addressing it to enhance the quality of university teaching practices.

Keywords: Teaching English as a foreign language, continuous assessment, LMD system, higher education.

ملخص البحث:

أدى دمج نظام LMD في التعليم العالي إلى تحول جذري في طرق التقويم التقليدية. من بين التجديدات المقترحة ما يسمى "التقويم المستمر" الذي يرافق نظام الامتحانات الرئيسي لتحديد نجاح الطلاب في الوحدات المختلفة. نظرًا لكونه أسلوبًا للتقييم، فإن التقويم المستمر سيكون له بالتأكيد تأثير على ممارسات التعليم والتعلم. في هذا الصدد، تحاول هذه الدراسة تسليط الضوء على أثر طرق التقويم المستمر على ممارسات تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بشكل خاص. تستخدم هذه الدراسة الوصفية الاستبيان كأداة أساسية لجمع البيانات. تم استخدام استبيان عبر الإنترنت وإدارته على عينة من 35 استاذًا جامعيًا من قسم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بجامعة المسيلة. كشفت نتائج هذه الدراسة عن أن لطرق التقويم المستمر انعكاس سلبي على أساليب التدريس. تساهم نتائج هذه الدراسة في لفت الانتباه نحو النتائج السلبية لأساليب التقويم المستخدمة في نظام LMD وضرورة معالجتها لتحسين جودة الممارسات التدريسية بالجامعة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تدريس اللغة الانجليزية لغة اجنبية، التقويم المستمر، نظام LMD، التعليم العالي، الجامعة

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1. INTRODUCTION

The demanding nature of teaching in Higher Education (HE) is undeniable. HE teachers are not only responsible for setting learning objectives, developing course content, and selecting teaching methods, but they must also design and implement effective assessment practices. Assessment is a critical component of teaching and learning, as it provides teachers and stakeholders with valuable information about student progress. This information can be used to reflect on the current teaching practices and to evaluate the effectiveness of the overall educational plans and policies.

The impact of assessment tools on teaching and learning has been the subject of much research revealing that it is very important to understand the potential impact of tests on the educational process as a whole. Biggs (1995) confirms that testing controls not only the curriculum but also teaching methods and students' learning strategies depending on the nature of the impact assessment can cause. This is due to that fact that the impact assessment tools, which is often referred to as "backwash" or "washback", can be either negative or positive. Negative washback occurs when tests negatively impact the curriculum, the teaching methods and the learning, while positive washback occurs when tests encourage good teaching and learning practices (Tylor, 2005). Thus, it is important to be cautious when designing and using tests, in order to minimize the negative impact of washback and maximize the positive impact.

Particularly, the washback of assessment on teaching can encompass all aspects of teaching practice. For instance; teachers may adapt their teaching materials and methods to meet the objectives of the assessment, such as having, as a main purpose, preparing students to succeed in an exam (Bokiev & Abd Samad, 2021), They may also allocate more time to teaching the content that is likely to be assessed (Umashankar, 2017). Additionally, tests have a significant influence on teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards teaching and testing (Kiany Albakhshi & Akbari, 2010). For example, teachers may become more focused on test preparation and less focused on the overall learning goals of the course. In her review on washback, Spratt (2005) highlights the impact of assessment on the selection of language lessons content, materials, and teaching methods. She also noted that assessment can have a significant impact on teachers' attitudes, such as their motivation to teach and their beliefs about the purpose of assessment

Furthermore, in environments where practices of assessment focus on summative tests that have a high visibility in the society and a crucial impact on students' success, teachers are likely obliged to teach to the final tests, and students study to perform well on tests rather than learning the material in depth (Center for education Research and innovation, 2008). Accordingly, teachers and students are both incentivized to focus on achieving test-related goals, even if this means neglecting learning goals. On the same vein, Madaus (1988) confirms that 'It is testing, not the "official" stated curriculum, that is increasingly determining what is taught, how it is taught, what is learned, and how it is

learned.' (as cited in Spratt, 2005, p.5). Similarly, Ahmed and Rao (2012) established the remarkable washback of examination systems on teaching methodology and curriculum pointing to the negative washback of test driven objectives.

Among the practices of assessment in HE is the so called Continuous Assessment (CA) being a new practice introduced to Algerian HE system with the adoption of the LMD system to the Algerian university in the academic year 2003-2004. Constituting 50% of the university student' score that determines his/her success in the different modules in each semester, CA is a major component of the main examination system. Accordingly, and in light of the aforementioned facts about washback effects, CA practices would definitely have a washback impact on teaching in HE.

In this respect, this study is conducted to investigate whether CA can have a washback on HE teaching in the Algerian context. Precisely, it explores EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of CA and whether it has any kind of impact on their teaching practices, including; their content selection, teaching methods and materials use. Furthermore, this study explores CA washback on shaping teachers' attitudes towards assessment practices. Specifically, this study is set to ask a main question:

- What is the washback effect of teaching practices in the Algerian HE system?

Along with the main question a number of sub-questions are asked to guide this investigation; including:

- What are EFL teachers' perceptions about the use and purpose of CA?
- What are EFL teachers' practices of CA?
- What is the washback of CA on EFL teachers' teaching practices?
- What is the washback of CA on EFL teachers' attitudes?

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 The washback Effect

The washback effect is generally used to refer to any kind of impact a test can backwardly have on teaching and learning practices. However, a distinction is made between washback and impact. Many language testers consider test *washback* as a dimension of test *impact* (Tsayari & Cheng, 2017). According to Tsayari and Cheng (2017), *Washback* is commonly related to the effect of examination on learning and teaching within classroom walls, while, *Impact* refers to the effects that examination can have within the classroom and outside encompassing the school, the educational system, or the society as a whole in addition to individuals, policies, and practices. That is, test impact can be observed on micro and macro dimensions. Bachman and Palmer (1996) clarify that the micro impact of test covers those who are directly affected by the test procedures and results including; the stakeholders, learners, teachers and school administrators. Meanwhile, the Macro level impact covers the broader society in which the educational system operates.

On the washback of testing and assessment on teaching practices, Taylor (2005) states that teaching methods and contents are influenced by teachers’ plans to increase degree of test success among their learners. Likewise, Alderson and Wall (1993) assert:

“Why the teachers do what they do, what they understand about underlying principles of the text book and examination, and what they believe to be effective means of teaching and learning... The washback hypothesis seems to assume that teachers and learners do things they would not necessarily otherwise do because of the test...Studies of washback need to relate teachers’ attitude to an understanding of exams to observations of classrooms in order to understand why teachers teach the way they do” (as cited in Ahmed & Rao, 2012, p174)

Accordingly, teachers and learners practices are dictated by test success objectives. In light of this, the washback effect would definitely lead to selective study habits among students who have little motivation to study what will not be part of the exam questions (Ahmed& Rao, 2012), thus, teaching practices will respond to these new learner needs by devoting class activities and contents to preparation for the exam.

Wash back per se is a neutral aspect; yet it can operate positively or negatively in different situations and contexts. According to Spratt (2005) the type and extent of washback on teaching practices can vary from “context to context and teacher to teacher” (p.17). Levels of washback range from no reported washback to considerable washback (Spratt, 2005). Both positive and negative washback have a number of traits. Pan (2009) summarized positive and negative washback consequences as indicated in table 1 below.

Table1.
Positive Vs Negative Washback

Positive washback	Negative washback
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tests induce teachers to cover their subjects more thoroughly, making them complete their syllabi within the prescribed time limits. • Tests motivate students to work harder to have a sense of accomplishment and thus enhance learning. • Good tests can be utilized and designed as beneficial teaching-learning activities so as to encourage positive teaching-learning processes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tests encourage teachers to narrow the curriculum and lose instructional time, leading to “teaching to the test.” • Tests bring anxiety both to teachers and students and distort their performance. • Students may not be able to learn real-life knowledge, but instead learn discrete points of knowledge that are tested. • Cramming will lead students to have a negative washback toward tests and accordingly alter their

learning motivation.

On the same vein, many researchers discussed the possible positive or negative influence of washback and factors leading to its creation. According to Bailey (1996), beneficial washback can be fostered when examination objectives are clearly articulated to meet the educational objectives, and are based on sound theoretical principles. More factors that affect the quality of washback include teacher-related factors, resources, the school and the type of the exam (Spratt, 2005). Another thorough classification of factors suggested by Umashankar (2017) includes test related factors (methods and contents of the test, purpose and mode of assessment), teachers-related factors (teachers' attitudes and beliefs about the best methods of testing), and learners-related factors (their perceptions and attitudes), school and classroom related factors (class size, classroom setting and school context where the test was designed and administered), context-related factors (educational system, educational policies, geographical and political factors, the society and media) resources and materials factors (textbook, test support materials).

3.2 Continuous Assessment in the LMD system

In response to globalized endeavours to improve the quality of HE, new reforms have been implemented by the Algerian Ministry of HE at large scales. As a result, the old classic system was replaced by the LMD (Licence-Master-Doctorate) system, as a new organizational framework for university training. In this respect, and as far as assessment in HE is concerned, the new novelties brought by this system are a sum of summative and formative assessment practices that are organized in a way to determine student success in different learning units. However, the formative assessment holds a special share of interest compared to summative assessment as it forms a major part in the students' final scores for each module at the end of each semester (Rabehi, 2011).

Also known like "TD mark" among students, and CA among teachers, this formative type of assessment is actually an alternative assessment practice. According to Decree number 712 of November 3rd, 2011, guiding the rules governing learning activity in the LMD system, exactly in *chapter III: Evaluation et Controle des Connaissances*, articles 20 and 21, the activities involved in the TD (Travaux Dirigés) include; project works and presentations, course work tasks, personal work, in addition to written quizzes or tests. Besides these tasks students have to sit for a final exam. The purpose of such assessment modes is to utilize formal and alternative assessment, and formative and summative assessment to ensure a comprehensive view of "students' educational abilities, motivation, strategies use, problem solving abilities, capacity to deal with real life situations, and performances in the educational environment" (Bouchama-Sari Ahmed, 2018, p. 257).

To conclude, all the aforementioned triangulation of assessment measure are in the core of the LMD system goals directed to alter the traditional rigid, summative and mainly formal testing modes used in classical system (Rabehi, 2011; Hanifi, 2018;

Bouchama-Sari Ahmed, 2018) and to ensure students success in the different learning units.

Teachers at the department of English at M’sila University, like all teachers all over Algerian universities, are officially implementing CA as part of their evaluation of students’ progress in each semester. Practices vary depending on teachers’ preference selecting over a number of alternatives such as; presentations, projects, homework and written quizzes. The choice of a given alternative over the others is defined by a number of factors that involve, according to Bouchama-Sari Ahmed (2018); teaching resources, classroom logistics, class size and the availability of ICTs. It is worth mentioning that 20% of the total TD mark is officially assigned for attendance and participation.

4. Methodology

Since this study is relatively a small scale pilot study intended to explore potential washback of CA on teaching practices in the Algerian HE context, the research method that addresses this study’s objective is the descriptive method. The settings and participants as well data collection tools are selected in terms on the study objectives.

4.1 The Setting

This study was conveniently carried in the English language department at M’sila University as a representative of the Algerian HE institutions. The data were collected during the first semester of the academic year 2021/2022.

4.2 Participants

EFL teachers who participated in this study are selected by means of non-random convenience sampling technique. These participants are teaching English at the English language and letters department at M’sila University. Both full and part time teachers participated in this study. The participants were 21 Females and 14 Males. They have varied teaching experiences that range from 01 years to more than 10 years. They also have different educational levels including master holders, doctoral students, magister, and PhD holders. Table 2 is a summary of participant’s biographical information.

Table 2.
Sample Description

Gender	Males	14
	Females	21
Teaching experience	1-3years	11
	4-6 years	10
	7-9 years	8
	More than 10	6
Levels	Master	8
	Magister	16

	Doctoral candidate	5
	PhD	6

4.3 Instruments

The main data collection instrument is an online semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to obtain data on teachers' perceptions, practices, attitudes towards AC and possible washback effect of CA on teaching practices. Accordingly, the questionnaire is divided into five main sections; biographical information, perceptions about the use and purpose of CA, practices of CA, washback of CA on teaching practices and attitudes towards CA. The semi structured questionnaire includes a total of 36 items. The sections and the number of items are summarized in table 3.

Table 3.
Teachers' questionnaire sections

Section	Scope	Number of items
Section 01	Biographical information	3 items
Section 02	Perceptions about nature and use of CA	13 items
Section 03	Practice of CA	8 items
Section 04	Washback of CA on teaching practices	12 items
Total		36 items

In the first section, teachers were asked to specify their gender, HE level, teaching experience and the levels they actually hold. All items second section of the questionnaire were five-point Likert scale which invited teachers to express the extent of their agreement on the use and purpose of CA as a practice of the LMD system. The third section items investigate teachers' use of CA and their preferences with regard to this use. It includes six five-point Likert scale items in addition to two multiple choice items targeting the frequency of use of CA in general and the types of assessment methods used by teachers. The washback of CA practices on teachers teaching practices is explored by means of eleven items distributed on three sub-sections; content selection and organization (five items); teaching methods (three items) and materials selection and use (three items). The last item is devoted to examine the washback of CA on teachers' attitudes.

The face and content validity of the questionnaire was examined through experts' opinions, thus it was sent to a number of 10 teachers specialized in assessment and working in other departments. All teachers reached a 98% of agreed on face and content validity. All items were announced as measuring what they are intended to measure, that is, they all investigate their sections intended objectives, except for three items from the second, the third and the fourth sections that were modified and replaced in light of the experts recommendations.

Reliability was examined by means of Chronbach's alpha. The value of the reliability coefficient (Alpha= 0.78) revealed a strong internal consistency between questionnaire items and thus a good level of reliability. The reliability coefficient was measured for the four sections. The values of Alpha; section2 alpha=0,77; section 3 Alpha=0,80, section 4 alpha = 0,69, section 5 alpha=0,85 all revealed high reliability of the questionnaire sections.

5. Data Analysis

The data collected were subjected to quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative analysis was carried by means of the items arithmetic mean values and intervals. While qualitative data were thematically analysed and classified. The items means values were compared to the levels intervals specified as follows:

Table 4

Items mean values intervals

Mean interval	Level
[1 - 2.33[weak (weak disagreement, rare practice)
[2.33 - 3.66[Average (average agreement, average practice)
[3.66-4.99[High (strong agreement, strong practice)

Thus, the items calculated means were compared to the specified levels of intervals to identify the level of agreement on each item or level of practice.

Findings from the second section targeting teachers' perceptions about CA nature and use are summarized in table 5.

Table 5.

Teachers' perceptions about the nature and use of CA

	Mean	Order
1. CE is a form of formative assessment	4,50	1
2. CE is a form of summative assessment	2,67	10
3. CE is a form of Alternative assessment	3,17	9
4. CE is just a means to enable students gain extra marks	3,51	7
5. One activity/task is enough to inform CA	2,00	12
6. The quizzes and activities of CE meet the objectives of the course	3,53	6
7. The purpose of the CA tests is to contribute to the promotion of teaching practices	2,42	11
8. CA Keeps students 'attention with their courses	1,36	13
9. CA gives more validity to students' success	4,17	2
10. CA enhances students' motivation to study	4,12	3
11. CA increases pass rates among students	3,67	4

12. Students are more concerned with the CA scores not the outcomes	4,00	5
13. CA is simply a task imposed by the administration	3,22	8

Most teachers perceive CA as a form of formative assessment since the first item (item1) in this section received the highest agreement level with a mean value of ($\bar{X}=4.5$). Remarkably, the second item (item2) received average level of agreement revealing that not all teachers perceive CA as a form of summative assessment. Similarly, item3 received average level of agreement revealing average perceptions about the fact that CA is a form of alternative assessment. Items 9, 10 and 11 are devoted to the perceptions about the importance of CA. These items received high agreement levels with high mean values, indicating good levels of perception among teachers about the role of CA in giving validity to students' success, enhance their motivation to learn and increase rates of success among them. However, item 7, about the role of CA in promoting teaching practices received average level of perception. Item 12 reveals that students' main focus and concern are on getting good marks in the CA. Items 4, 6 mean values ($\bar{X}=4$; $\bar{X}= 3,51$; $\bar{X}=3,53$ and $\bar{X}=2,42$) belong to the average level interval. This reveals that teachers hold mediocre perceptions about the possible fact that CA is just a means to gain extra marks and that quizzes and tasks meet the objectives of the course. Items 5 and 8 weak levels of agreement reveal that teachers do not perceive that one task is enough for CA and that the CA activities serve to keep students in line with their courses.

In the third section of the questionnaire targeting current practices of CA among the participants, it was found that all of the teachers (100%) use CA in their teaching (item14). As for the activities types they use in their CA practices, that was targeted by the second item of this section (item15), it was found that all of them vary in the activities that included quizzes, research projects, class presentations, homework, attendance and participation. Some teachers focus on preparation before sessions to evaluate their students work. Others indicated that they use brainstorming at the start of each session as an evaluation technique besides the use of oral questions during sessions

Further, teachers were asked about the frequency and the practice of their CA. Table 6 is a summary of their responses.

Table 6.
Practice of CA among participants

	Mean	Order
16. I start CA process earlier before official exams	3,22	5
17. I periodically evaluate my students progress through the semester	3,48	3
18. I prepare CA tasks when exams are near	2,97	6
19. I set my CA quiz with the official exam	3,68	1

20. I set my CA after the official exam	3,38	4
22. I use a pre-set grid of evaluation provided by the department	3,46	2

From table 6, the values of the mean ranging from $\bar{X}=2,97$ (item 18) to a high value of $\bar{X}=3,64$ (item 20) that items 16, 17, 18, and 20 received average levels of frequency. This finding reveals important information about the use of CA among EFL teachers. According to the data on table 6, the practice of starting CA earlier before exams is a rare practice. This is confirmed by responses to item 19 which received a high level of frequency of use indicating that most teachers set the quiz with the official exam as one of the activities on the exam sheet. It is also confirmed by the average frequent practice of conducting CA tasks when exams are near (item18) and conducting them after exams (item20) and periodical evaluation of students' progress through the semester (item17). As to the of use of the pre-set grid (item22), with an average mean value ($\bar{X}=3,46$) belonging to average level of use, not all teachers used it as a constant practice. Examining the frequencies, it was found that 16,7% never used a grid, 25% rarely use it, 25% sometimes and often use it, while only 8,3 participants always used it. This finding reveals that teachers have varied practices of CA that is not precisely consistent with standard CA practice.

The fourth section of the questionnaire targeted the impact of CA implementation on teaching practices. The first items of this section seek to explore the washback of CA on content selection and organization. Table 7 is a summary of data from this section

Table7.

The washback of CA on content selection and organization

Items	Mean	Order
23. I use CA tasks as part of my sessions contents	4,25	2
24. I organize the contents of my sessions according to the CA requirements	4,01	4
25. I select only contents that I can ask questions about in the quiz	3,17	5
26. I reduce number of sessions for the sake of CA	4,09	3
27. Students only focus with contents I highlight as involved in the quiz	4,29	1

Examination of the mean values in table 7, reveals that CA activities constitute a good part of the contents (item23), with a mean value ($\bar{X}=4.25$) which belong to the high level of agreement. Similarly, the organization of content is influenced by the CA requirements (item24). Teachers strongly confirmed that the numbers of allotted sessions (item 26) as well as students focus on the contents (item 27) are influenced and determined by the CA tasks and activities. On average level of agreement, most teachers confirmed that the selected content during session is the one that will be the subject of the CA quiz. The finding from table 7 confirms the existent washback of CA on content selection and organization.

The second set of items in this section target the impact of CA on teaching methods. Table 8 summarizes the data from these items.

Table 8.
The impact of CA on teaching methods

Items	Mean	Order
28. Classroom discussions I generate in class are for the purpose of CE of student	3,79	2
29. my course tasks and activities are preparation for the quiz and exam	4,52	1
30. I vary the activities and assignments in my class to use them to generate the TD mark	3,03	3

From the mean value ($\bar{X}=3,03$) of item 30, on an average level, teachers vary their activities they use in CA grading (TD mark). Moreover, the majority of teachers strongly agree on the fact that classroom discussions generated in class are for the purpose of CA of students (item28). Similarly, teachers confirmed that the contents of lectures are for the sake of CA objectives. This finding definitely confirms the washback on teaching methods.

Items 31, 32, 33 served to explore the washback of CA on teachers' material selection and use. From table 9 below, the means values of items 31 and 33 ($\bar{X}=3,93$ and $\bar{X}=4,02$) reveal high level of agreement among teachers on the fact that the selection of materials and their use are determined by the objective of the CA tasks used to generate the TD mark. Average agreement was on the use of class presentations for the sake of CA scores, thus confirming the impact of CA on materials use.

Table 9.
Impact of CA on teachers' Materials use

	Mean	Order
31. I select my teaching materials that are consistent with CA activities	3,93	2
32. I only use students' class presentations for the sake of the CA	3,12	3
33. Tasks and handouts I use as practice in my sessions are kept for CA	4,02	1

As a final consolidation to the previous items targeting the existence of possible washback effect, the final section three items directly ask teachers about the possible effect CA has on their teaching practices and its direction (negatively or positively). It is found that 70% of the participants think that CA affects their teaching. When asked about the direction of this impact, as indicated on table 10, half of the participants (50%)

revealed that the impact took both negative and positive sides. Only 20% of them indicated that the impact was purely negative, while 30% think it is a positive impact.

Table10.

Teachers’ perceptions about the impact of CA on teaching practices

Negative impact	Positive	Bit of both
20%	30%	50%

The participants who indicated that CA practices may have a positive impact provided only two justifications. First, CA motivates students to participate and engage in active learning and interact with different learning activities. Second, it can also provide information about their progress that cannot be revealed through paper pen exam. As for teachers who claimed that CA has a negative impact, they provided a number of explanations;

- Administering CA is tiring and time consuming
- As they constitute 50% of student results, teachers focus is on the evaluation objectives rather than teaching objectives
- Students focus is on the scores they can get not the knowledge they acquire.
- It kills creativity as most of students will focus on ways of completing the compulsory tasks

6. Findings Discussion

Findings from the questionnaire divulged significant information about the washback effect of CA use and about the relevant perceptions and practices of CA among EFL teachers at the department of English language and letters at M’sila University.

First section findings targeting teachers’ perceptions about the nature, the use and the purposes of CA revealed that all participants think CA is a form of formative assessment, which is a true common information among teachers. Yet, many of them showed misperception and neutrality about whether it can be a summative assessment (Mean=2.67) or an alternative (Mean=3,17). CA in nature is a comprehensible process that encompasses the two forms of assessment; formative and summative assessment through the use of alternative forms of assessment, such as; projects, portfolio and role play, to enable teachers to gain a broader view on students’ learning progress (Benettayeb-Ouahiani, 2016; Bouchama-Sari Ahmed, 2018; Obi& Obineli, 2019; Vahed, Walters & Ross, 2021) and also to serve learners to apply the acquired knowledge in authentic context (Vahed at al., 2021).

With the few teachers possessing accurate perceptions about the nature of CA, it can be said that teachers lack of appropriate assessment literacy. This is confirmed by responses to items 4 and 5 related to CA use where most participants were confused about the number and types of activities used in CA practice. However, the participants

showed clear perceptions about the purposes of CA and its importance. This finding confirms the fact that assessment literacy does not only imply understanding why assessments are important, but also implies the possession of needed skills to use them appropriately and effectively. According to Coombe, Vafadar & Mohebbi (2020), language assessment literacy involves the knowledge and competences of using assessment methods, and applying many evaluation tools in the appropriate time and way.

For most teachers, the activities used for CA vary from homework assignments, class presentations to simple class behaviour observations. This can be explained by the intervention of the department and faculty in clarifying this carried practice through the official standardized TD mark scoring grids distributed in each semester that address the official executive Decree N° 712 released on November 3rd, 2011, about the rules governing learning activity in the LMD system. Compared to findings from the perceptions about the nature and purpose of CA section, these practices do not necessarily reflect teachers' awareness about this use as they were found to lack clear perceptions about the nature and use of CA.

Moreover, the data obtained from item8 in the second section, discloses the fact that not all teachers constantly use a pre-set evaluation grid and sometimes assign a global score based on a global observation of students performance during sessions or just one quiz administered while or after official exams. Obviously, both practices are wrong practices if compared to the official texts specifying the standards of CA practice. The findings related to teachers' practices reveal that teachers have varied preferences of CA use that is not precisely consistent with standard CA practice, for instance, only 25% of the participants start their CA process earlier before exams period, and for the majority of participants, they rarely use periodical evaluation of students' progress during the semester. This finding confirms teachers' unawareness of the continuous formative nature of CA. The latter entails that it is a systematic continuous and regular recording of students' performance in the deferent tasks and activities (Obi& Obineli, 2019) that starts earlier with the beginning of the course.

Even though CA is used to evaluate students' progress throughout a course, some teachers (25%) administer CA quizzes with the official exam, and 50% administer them after the exam. This suggests that CA is viewed as a one-time summative assessment that is administered to students at the end of each term or semester. This contradicts the standard practices of CA, which is an ongoing process that is conducted at the beginning, during, and at the end of the teaching-learning process through the use of various assessment tools and procedures (Forsido, 2019). The regular assessment practice applied in CA allows teachers to gain updated cumulative judgments about their learners' progress (Obi & Obineli, 2019; Hernandez, 2012).

From the examination of the impact of CA, it is found that that it can have a negative washback on content selection and organization. For instance, it is found that CA activities constitute a good part of the contents. It is also found that the course contents are organized according to the CA activities requirements. When it comes to

content selection, most teachers confirmed that they are selected in in terms of CA tasks requirements. Additionally, the majority of teachers reduce size of sessions' content for the sake of CA. According to Barnes (2016), negative washback on course content is manifested in teachers focus on teaching contents that are included in tests as an attempt to train students to get a good mark in a test rather than acquire knowledge. According to Pan (2009), assessment impact can lead teachers to reduce the curriculum and reduce instructional time.

The findings of this study also suggested that there can be a possible negative washback on teaching methods since it is indicated by teachers that their generated classroom discussions, the varied types of activities and assignments and the use of students' class presentations are all methods selected for the purpose of generating CA grades. Consequently, teachers are in one way or another teaching to the purpose of the test. According to Larssona and Olin-Scheller (2020), negative washback happens that train students to succeed in a test, rather than on teaching strategies that promote learning.

These findings are consistent with those reviewed by Spratt (2005), who concluded that the washback effect can be seen in class activities, class interactions, and the use of practice and explanation. Rahman (2014) similarly suggested that if tests are very important in determining students' success in a subject, it is then a natural tendency for teachers to tailor their classroom activities to the demands of the test. This is in line with the findings of this study, as CA grades are very important to students' success in the module, constituting 50% of their final scores. Therefore, it is expected that teachers' methods and strategies would be tailored to serve CA grading.

Material selection, being an integral part of teaching practices, is also affected by the CA. Most of the teachers (75%) confirmed that materials selection is related to the requirements of the CA activities, including the use of hand outs and printable tasks. This again reveals negative washback of CA on material selection and use. Research has continuously highlighted that washback on teaching materials is of a high degree (Kuang, 2020). Kuang (2020) illustrates this by stating that when a test is established as important, textbooks, as teaching materials, tend to be designed specifically to train students to pass the test.

The aforementioned findings were confirmed by teachers responses to the last section items that significantly unveiled the possible the negative washback of CA on teaching practices and attitudes from the view point of teachers(20% negative impact, and 50% bit of both). The responses to the open ended item, asking them for explanations to their responses, confirms the negative washback on their attitudes since most of them think it is tiring and time consuming and so demanding that it directs their teaching practices away from their teaching objectives. For most of them their focus is on achieving evaluation objectives rather than learning objectives. Besides, and since students focus is on the assessment scores, teachers feel obliged to select content and teaching strategies that are consistent with exam requirement.

The teachers also referred to negative washback on their learners, stating that it kills creativity. They argued that most students will only focus on ways to complete the compulsory tasks and succeed in the module, rather than on developing their creative skills. This is consistent with the findings of Spratt (2005), who found that negative washback can influence teachers' choice of materials, teaching content, teaching methods, and their attitudes towards students.

However, for 30% of the teachers CA has a positive impact on teaching and learning. According to them it is a motivating force for students to stay focused on the course contents and work. According to Brown (2003), CA serves in assessing students' competences and skills and motivates them to keep developing those competences. It also constitutes a source of information about students' levels of progress that cannot be revealed through paper pen semestrial exams. This is explained by the fact that CA provides a comprehensive image about the student performance because it makes use of a triangulation of varied assessment strategies and tools (Vahed at al., 2021). Moreover, CA assists teachers in their endeavors to adapting their teaching methods to their students' needs through providing them with constant source of feedback about students' weaknesses and strengths (Asale, 2017).

7. CONCLUSION

Since CA, as commonly held among teachers and students, is accorded significant value in determining students' success in a module, there is a possible risk that teachers, without being fully aware of the degree of influence that their assessment activity could bring to their teaching, start teaching to the test. Based on the results of this study, this may be the case among EFL teachers at the English language department at M'sila University being a sample of University teachers in the Algerian context. Teachers were found to be more likely to teach content that is easier to measure and assess, even if it is not aligned with the course objectives. They also tended to use teaching methods and strategies as well as teaching materials that would help them generate the TD marks.

Although the results of this study have been interpreted as negative washback, it is important to note that CA can also have positive washback effects as evidenced by the some teaching practices that were reported by the teachers. However, it is also important to highlight that the potential negative washback on teachers' practices and attitudes may be attributed to misperceptions about CA and current practices that are not consistent with the standard use of CA. These misperceptions and practices may be explained by a lack of assessment literacy among teachers.

To conclude, negative washback, like any problem, does not necessarily have negative effects if immediately detected and addressed. This study served to identify possible negative washback of CA practices in the selected context, paving the way to other attempts to uncover more of it in other departments. Teachers can effectively, respond to such a problem by being constantly aware of their practices and profession ally reflect on them. They can also work to manage CA practices that are consistent with

the standards to avoid negative reflections. Additionally, teachers need to develop their assessment literacy that would serve as means to cope with all assessment challenges they face in their career. As for institutions they need to make sure they are working with teachers to achieve a common mission which is to enable students to grasp the course objectives and to reach the required language levels. They need to ensure that students are not slaves to TD marks. To achieve this mission, evaluation approaches, and, specifically, CA weight in students' success, should be reconsidered to improve teaching and learning processes.

8. References

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